

# Stress and Anxiety

It is okay to feel anxious

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# It is normal and essential

- ▶ “Anxiety is a normal and healthy function, and much of the anxiety kids express is a sign that they are aware of their surroundings, mindful of growing responsibilities, and frightened because things are, in fact, a bit scary.” Says psychologist and author Dr. Lisa Damour. (KQED 2/2019 by Deborah Farmer Kris)
- ▶ Change and stress go hand-in-hand, even with positive change. Teens bodies are changing, brains transforming, workloads increasing, social relationships are evolving. Stress and anxiety are the face of how humans develop strength.
- ▶ “Adults can make a difference by reassuring them that, a great deal of the time, stress is operating as a friend and ally” (KQED 2/2019 by Deborah Farmer Kris)

# Stress, Emotion, and the Teenage Brain

- ▶ If you are raising an adolescent, they will have meltdowns. You can not prevent that. It is okay. Likely it may be hard to remember that when they are sobbing on the floor.
- ▶ The adolescent brain is awkward and vulnerable to emotion. This is due to extraordinary brain development. Development of the emotional brain begins in primitive regions, moving through more sophisticated regions, as it learns to regulate perspective and problem solving. A maturing child can out-reason an adult in one breath and move to a whole system meltdown in a short space of time.
- ▶ Give him/her space and time in the moment. Wait it out. Sit with them, or leave them alone for a while but check in and look at the problem together when the 'storm' passes. It will be easier to address the issue or it may completely evaporate with the expression they've been allowed and with knowing you are providing safety and security for them.

# Don't React, Respond

- ▶ Girls, especially, are particularly sensitive to words and facial expressions. How adults respond matters. If an adult becomes anxious in the face of her anxiety it exacerbates the situation.
- ▶ This can be a very difficult time for parents and kids. Don't try to solve the problems or remove the stressor. **AVOIDANCE FEEDS ANXIETY.**
- ▶ Don't underestimate their ability to deal with anxiety related to a situation. Their perception will change and they can recognize their own strength when reaching the outcome.
- ▶ Recognize and acknowledge that something “stinks” and assure them they can handle it. **EMPATHIZE** and listen in the moment. Avoid the urge to compare and teach until after the ‘crisis’ is over.

# Recover and Restore

- ▶ Exercise, music, sports, TV, and playing with pets all have the ability to calm the mind.
- ▶ Sleep. One of the factors that has been identified in the rise of anxiety is lack of adequate sleep. We become less resilient. Middle schoolers need 10 hours of sleep per night.
- ▶ Electronics can be a factor in remaining wakeful in the evening. Try to encourage leaving a cell phone in a main room rather than the bedroom. Video games are stimulating. Encourage an end time that is approximately 30-45 minutes before time to sleep.

# Bibliography

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- ▶ Apa.org. 2020. *Speaking Of Psychology: Anxiety And Teen Girls*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.apa.org/research/action/speaking-of-psychology/anxiety-teen-girls>> [Accessed 26 March 2020].
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