

HOW TO HELP YOUR MENTEE TO MANAGE STRESS AT DIFFERENT STAGES OF THEIR LIVES, INCLUDING EXAMS



Stress is our body's response and reaction when dealing with challenges (stressor); preparing us to both mentally and physically be able to perform in stressful situations. We react to stress in a variety of ways; some stress can help us to be motivated, focused and productive, however too much can have the opposite effect and result in illness.

As young people grow they need to develop the confidence to be able to deal with difficult situations with strategies that work for them. Helping a young person to identify their physical, emotional and mental signs of stress when they are 'stressed out' can assist them to begin to understand how they approach these situations and how they manage to come out stronger, with more coping strategies and skills.

Youth is a stressful time of life; changes are occurring in many areas such as school, transition to working life, family issues, puberty, peer relationships and peer pressure, just to list a few.

Having a mentor alongside as support, whilst coping with stress during this challenging period, can result in lifelong lessons for managing stress and staying healthy.

COMING TO AN EARLY END

- Notification to all involved parties that the match is coming to an end and the specified dates and activities
- Closure policy details provided, along with a contract signed by mentee and mentor
- Exit process for those matches that end early for whatever reason
- Transition process for mentees in order for them to remain and move ahead on their chosen path.

WHAT CAUSES STRESS?

The following list is not exhaustive and intends to provide a snapshot of some of the things that may cause stress in your mentee's life. We all respond differently to stress, so something that may be very stressful to you may not be to others.

- Exams
- Family issues (violence, relocation)

- Family break up
- Death of a friend or family member
- Peer pressure
- Conflict
- Relationship problems
- Abuse; emotional, physical, sexual
- Illness; of the mentee or a family member
- Puberty
- Sexuality
- Disability; of the mentee or a family member

It is important to realise that young persons stress factors may be caused by things that as adults we may consider insignificant. During adolescence self discovery occurs on a daily basis, as well as making important decisions that can either build or lower self esteem.

STRESS AND THE BODY

Our body responds to the stressor with the 'fight or flight' response; getting ready to stay and fight or run. During this process our body works more efficiently to ensure more blood is pumping through the body in order for the muscles to work harder and brain faster. The breath rate increases to get more oxygen to the body.

If stressful situations do not require the extreme 'fight or flight' response, then this energy and heightened awareness is not used and may make life more challenging. Symptoms of this can include:

- Difficulty sleeping or getting a restful sleep
- Build up of feelings of anxiety and frustration
- Concentration may be hard, especially on detailed tasks
- Lower self esteem or confidence
- Change in appetite
- Nausea, head aches
- Sore neck and back

Positive Stress: In certain situations stress can work in our favour; with positive stress, we feel more in control, are more able to tune in with the impact it is having on our body and mind and utilising this in order to be confident, positive and successful.

MANAGING STRESS

Gaining the ability to recognise and listen to signs the body is sending when stressed can help to manage it more effectively.

Discuss with your mentee some of the things that are happening to their body, their thoughts and feelings, and write them down. Share the understanding that you have about your body's stress signs.

Some other useful strategies for your mentee to consider include:

- Use positive self talk.
- Get help from the right people.
- Exercise and spend time outdoors.
- Eat a healthy diet.
- Use relaxation techniques.
- Take some time to 'chill out'.
- Listen to music.
- Keep a schedule and plan in advance.
- Don't take on extra activities.
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol and drugs.
- Drink lots of water.
- Get some sleep (8 hours a night).
- Use problem solving: identify the problem, brainstorm solutions, decide on a plan and follow up.

Negative stress: Stress over a period of time can have a negative impact on our body and mind. If overwhelming, our body struggles to cope and over a prolonged period illness can prevail. The inability to cope with high stress can lead to harmful behaviours such as use of alcohol and drugs, eating disorders or depression.

TIP

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- As a mentor be calm, listen and offer support and encouragement.
- Acknowledge the young person's feelings, whether that is of sadness, anger or worry.
- When appropriate share relevant examples of your experiences with stress.
- Your role may provide the ideal opportunity to help your mentee put their stressful situation into perspective.
- Help your mentee develop ideas for coping on exam day to reduce levels of stress, such as deciding on transport to and from the exam venue, a strategy for completing the exam (answering questions they feel more confident about first) and what to pack for the exam.



REFERENCES & FURTHER INFORMATION

- The Mental Health Foundation of NZ has a variety of resources on stress with children and young people. www.mentalhealth.org.nz/resourcefinder/index.php?c=listings...
- Skylight offers a specific resource for young people experiencing stress, regardless of the cause. www.skylight.org.nz/Young+people
- Youthline offers counselling, support and youth development services. www.youthline.co.nz/contact-us.html
- SPARX get help with depression and anxiety www.sparx.org.nz

TIP

TIPS FOR MANAGING STRESS DURING EXAMS

- Try and keep a regular study routine.
- Encourage a planned study schedule.
- Have a study space that is uncluttered, comfortable and quiet
- Schedule breaks and time out from study
- Study at the peak time of day
- Encourage having options for future aspirations
- Mind maps are a great way to visually capture chunks of information
- Put the time frame into perspective; exams have a time frame with a finish line
- Identify escalated stress due to high expectations placed upon them by others.