

**Managing School Stress and Anxiety:
A Panel Discussion about Challenges, Stress Management, and Family Resources**

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Dealing with Stress	
Positive	Negative
Tolerable stress that is a motivator, sharpens your mental focus and boosts the drive to succeed and is energizing	Toxic stress – intense, protracted stress that causes the hormone cortisol to flood the brain and can cause a breakdown in functioning

Dealing with Negative, Harmful Stress
Signs of stress that may be a cause for concern or potential warning signs that could indicate depression or anxiety:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in appetite, significant weight gain or loss, change in eating habits • Withdrawal from friends or activities, isolation, decreased pleasure in activities, reckless behavior • Change in mood – unexplained crying spells, Irritability, impatience, moodiness, emotional outbursts, lashing out • Sleep problems-stress puts the mind on overdrive, fatigue, loss of energy • Attempts to get out of going to school or difficulty getting there • Health issues, digestive problems, stomach aches, lack of attention to appearance or hygiene • Excessive worry and negative thoughts, ruminating-what if I don't get into x college? What if I don't make x team? Negative self-perception • Difficulty thinking clearly – difficulty concentrating or making decisions • Cutting or other self-harming behaviors (may be hard to detect)

What can parents do to help?

- Examine your own hopes and aspirations for your child and how you convey them, are you ever disappointed when your child isn't working hard enough or getting the grades you think they are capable of? How do you communicate about this and is it productive and fair?
- Anxiety is catching, look at your own responses to stress and ask yourself how you are affecting your child
- Start paying attention to your own relationship to anxiety, stress, and uncertainty; research clearly shows that how parents model stress management significantly impacts how their kids see the world
- The goal is not to make sure everything goes perfectly at all times, or to think that stress can be avoided, the goal is to have problem solving skills, resilience, adaptability – flexible thinking
- Flexibility is key, knowing when to push harder and when to be satisfied with a less than perfect result – acknowledge that this IS a time of uncertainty but you have confidence in his/her ability to problem solve along the way
- Don't necessarily give advice about how you would handle things, back off the lectures, let him/her know you are there to support them – this empowers teens and doesn't make them feel defensive or blamed, teens need to know that they aren't expected to get it all right, they can't know everything or do it all perfectly – if you give the message that coping skills, resilience, adaptability are what is important it will lead to better performance and decreased stress
- Keep the lines of communication open, if you do want to help - ask how you can help instead of offering unsolicited advice
- Carve out some time to just be, a time when there are no expectations and you can just enjoy being together; do something simple, go for a walk, laugh
- Understand what you can and can't control and help your kids do the same
- Encourage them to value things other than performance and achievement – relationships, doing things you love
- Try to approach your kids with open ended interest not worry
- Remember criticism is the enemy and will backfire in terms of helping stress or performance
- De-stigmatize asking for help, the pressures and expectations are real but there are resources available and it is far better to ask for help than get to a crisis point
- Manage your own stress so it doesn't spill over
- You don't have control over where your kid goes to college but you do have some control over your relationship, a good relationship and open communication will help build self esteem and resilience

Resources:

Ackerman Institute for the Family
212-879-4900

Institute for Contemporary Psychotherapy
212-333-3444

William Alanson White Institute
212-873-0725

Post Graduate Center for Mental Health
212-576-4104

Notes/Questions: