

STRESS AND THE IMPACT ON ADOLESCENTS MENTAL HEALTH

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There is Always a Reason

In working with children if we proceed on the premise that there is always a reason why behaviors and choices have a cause then it is up to us to find out what is the cause of the behaviors.

Children / adolescences who are struggling with unhealthy or problematic behaviors are not problem kids.

Their behavior are REPRESENTATIVE of something going on inside of them that that they are struggling with or has negatively impacted them.

- ▣ Behavior is not just behavior.
 - Behavior is evidence
 - Behavior has a source
 - Behaviors are often external indicators of the internal functioning of the thoughts and beliefs that proceed them.
 - Even when an adolescent says “IDK” to the question “why did you do that?”

A Life of Stress

When we see behaviors it is easy to just see the things that adolescents do.

- ADHD
- Anger issues
- Gets in fights
- Argues
- Cutting
- Bullying others
- Stealing
- Diagnoses
Oppositional Defiant
Disorder (ODD)

Stressors:

- ▣ Parents divorced
- ▣ Dad in another relationship
- ▣ Lives with Mom
- ▣ Moms last two boyfriends were physically aggressive. Present boyfriend is “nice”
- ▣ Responsible for 3 younger siblings every day after school
 - 11 yr old bother with autism
 - 4 yr old sister
 - 3 yr old brother

STRESS IS A FUNCTION OF THE DEMANDS PLACED ON US AND OUR ABILITY TO MEET THEM.

These demands often come from outside sources however, they can also come from within. Often related to what we think we should be doing verses what we are able to do.

SOURCES OF STRESS BY AGE

Questions asked parents appear in red;
questions asked children appear in blue.

	Total N=235	Parents		Total 1,206	Youth	
		8-12 101	13-17 134		8-12 536	13-17 670
Managing school pressures/ responsibilities/ homework/ grades/Doing well in school	34%	31%	36%	44%	44%	43%
Relationships with siblings/ Getting along with my brother(s) or sister(s)	17%	17%	16%	8%	14%	2%
Relationships with peers/ Getting along with my friends	20%	20%	20%	16%	22%	11%
Your family's financial difficulties/ My family having enough money	18%	20%	17%	30%	28%	31%
His/her physical appearance/weight/ The way I look/my weight	17%	17%	17%	22%	17%	26%
Your relationship with your spouse/partner/ My parent(s)/guardian or other family members arguing or fighting more	12%	16%	9%	10%	14%	7%
Pressure managing extracurricular commitments (e.g. sports, hobbies)/Managing activities such as sports, music, clubs, etc.	12%	12%	12%	10%	7%	12%
Peer pressure to engage in risky behaviors (e.g., smoking, drinking, drugs, sex, etc.)/Pressure from friends who want me to try smoking, drinking, drugs, sex, etc.	6%	1%	10%	2%	-	3%
Getting into a good college/determining future/Getting into a good college/Deciding what to do after high school	3%	1%	5%	17%	5%	29%
Non-financial pressures on family members (e.g., health, job frustrations, getting along with extended family, etc.)	3%	3%	4%	N/A	N/A	N/A
Getting along with my boyfriend or girlfriend	N/A	N/A	N/A	3%	1%	4%
My parent(s)/guardian losing their jobs	N/A	N/A	N/A	6%	7%	6%
Other	8%	10%	6%	10%	12%	8%

How kids experience stress

Positive stress response - is considered as a normal part of healthy development, for example, going to school camp or starting at a new school. When experienced in a supportive environment, it can provide important opportunities to learn and practice healthy responses to life changes.

Tolerable stress response - **activates the body's alert systems to a greater** degree as a result of more severe, longer-lasting stressors, for example, parental divorce, illness or injury, or bullying at school.

Toxic stress response - can occur when a child experiences strong and/or prolonged multiples stressful events without adequate adult support, for example, physical or emotional abuse, chronic neglect, parental mental illness, or exposure to violence. It can disrupt early brain development and lead to many health problems.

Stress from external and internal sources

- ▣ **Stress in schools -**
 - pressure to perform at school,
 - within the peer group.
 - fear of failure, worrying about fitting in,
 - self-identity, and bullying.
- ▣ **Stress in the family -**
 - parental separation, remarriage (blended family),
 - financial problems, poverty, parental stress,
 - coping with parents who have a mental illness
 - and, commonly, unreasonably high family expectations being placed on children.
- ▣ **Media stress and environmental dangers -**
 - worried about things they hear / see on the news or
 - generalized fear of strangers and street violence.

Adolescents lacking communication skills and EQ find it difficult to recognize and verbalize stress

- ❑ Irritability or moodiness
- ❑ Withdrawing from activities that used to give them pleasure
- ❑ Clinging; being unwilling to let parents out of sight
- ❑ Crying
- ❑ Aggressive behavior
- ❑ Regression to earlier behaviors (in younger children)
- ❑ School refusal
- ❑ Unwillingness to participate in family or school activities



**“EVERYTHING
IMPORTANT ABOUT LIFE
AS A HUMAN BEING YOU
LEARN IN CONTEXT OF
RELATIONSHIPS”**

- Dr. Bruce Perry, MD, Ph,D

Stress and the Brain Development

“Early in life many of these connections in the Brain (synapses') develop base on genetics but also based on experiences that occur. Then through childhood the changes in the brain that occur, occur in an interaction between genetics and the experiences that kids have. “

Dr. Daniel J Siegal, MD

RELATIONSHIPS & TRUST IN DEVELOPMENT

“We need somebody we can trust, that we can hold on to. Someone who walks hand in hand with us through the whole deal.”

Trauma, Brain and Relationships: Helping Children heal. -Bruce Perry MD, Ph.D

The first relationships

“If the brain stem for whatever reason has experienced some insult during development, it could be alcohol exposure in-utero, it could be cigarette smoking, it could be pre-natal exposure to drugs, it could be significant distress in the caregiver, for whatever reason, if the brain stem is poorly organized and over reactive/dyssynchronous when the baby is born very often they will have a ‘state regulation problem’ where in they are hard to soothe, you cannot quiet them down very well.”

Bruce Perry MD, Ph.D

Brain development and relationship

“ The most pivotal experience in a child’s life is that a care giver and an child has a falling in love. This is essential to developing the capacity to care, to love, to have empathy for other human beings, and to have moral conscious.”

-Constance Lillas, Ph.D.

“What our bodies want for best development is relationship. Every Neuron in our brains develops most optimally through a loving relationship.”

~Marti Glenn, Ph.D

“Relationships are at the absolute heart of human existence. We are Neuro-biologically designed to be in relationships, to respond to other people and to reach out and seek relationships with others”

Bruce Perry MD, Ph.D.

Domestic Factors

Positive Influencers

- Love / Acceptance expressed
- Communication in family
- Mutual Respect for each other
- Understanding given to each other
- Members of the family “heard”
- Validation

A House Divided

Divorce/ parents split

- Two Family homes
- Balancing Parents/ issues
- Loss of security/ stability
- Self imposed sense of responsibility for the failure of the parents relationship
- Simple/ complex split of time between spent with each parent
- Domestic violence/ Abuse

Identifying signs of stress in your children and teens

1. Bedwetting
2. Certain Keywords
3. Physical Symptoms
4. Aggression
5. Tics
6. Interrupted Sleep

Watch for negative changes in behavior

Understand that “feeling sick” may be caused by stress

Be aware of how your child or teen interacts with others

Listen and translate

How Some Teens Cope

- _____ Social Media
- _____ Video Games
- _____ Smoking
- _____ Alcohol/Drugs
- _____ Increased or excessive
Sexual Behaviors
- _____ Gambling
- _____ Cutting – Self
- _____ Bullying-others

Chronic Stress Can Damage Brain Structure and Connectivity

Neuroscientists at the University of California, Berkeley, found that chronic stress triggers long-term changes in brain structure and function.

Their findings

- Adolescents who are exposed to chronic stress early in life are prone to
 - Anxiety
 - Mood disorders
 - learning difficulties
- Stress-related illnesses, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) trigger changes in brain structure



Chronic Stress & Cortisol

The 'stress hormone' cortisol is believed to create a vicious cycle in the brain so as to be in a constant state of fight-or-flight.

Chronic stress has the ability to flip a switch in stem cells that

- inhibits connections which would improve learning and memory
- but creates anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Anxiety in the Classroom

ANXIETY SEEN IN KIDS (BEING SCARED)

- ▣ Separation Anxiety
 - Hard time with school bus drop offs/though out the day)
- ▣ Social Anxiety
 - Excessively self conscious participating w/ peers
- ▣ Selective Mutism
 - Difficulty speaking in certain situations – in school, in front of others. Public speaking
- ▣ Generalized Anxiety
 - Worrying about many things
- ▣ Obsessive-Compulsive (OCD)
 - Mind is filled with unwanted stressful thoughts
 - Perform ritual behaviors to alleviate Anxiety/stress
- ▣ Specific Phobias

INDICATORS OF STRESS/ ANXIETY

- ▣ Inattention & Restlessness
 - Difficulty with focus/ anxious thoughts. (Not always ADHD)
- ▣ Attendance problems
 - Bullying/ school personal problems/ Anxiety
- ▣ Disruptive Behavior
 - Distracting anxiety thoughts via behaviors
 - Aggressive – feeling of control & not sure what to do
- ▣ Trouble Answering Questions in Class/Subjects
 - May be attentive & know the answer
 - If called on they freeze

Anxiety in the Classroom...

INDICATORS OF ANXIETY/STRESS

- Frequent Trips to the Nurse
 - Anxiety manifests as physical complaints Symptoms
- Problems in certain subjects
 - Doubt their abilities
 - Notice they aren't as good in a subject as classmates- anxiety & learning disorder
- Not Turn in Homework
 - Anxious it isn't good enough
- Avoiding Socializing Group work
 - Giving presentations
 - Gym class, eating in Café or group work

INTERVENTIONS

- Help Student Manage Anxiety
- Don't Avoid things/ Anxiety
- Express positive/ realistic expectations
- Respect feelings/ face them
- Don't ask leading questions
- Avoid reinforcing fears
- Encourage Anxiety tolerance
- Keep Anticipatory period short
- Think things through with them
- Model Healthy ways to handle Anxiety

Depression

LACK OF CONTROL

Impactful decisions
without any input

Divorce -Changes in
family/ blended
family/ fracturing the
family system

Relocating

Adding additional
adolescence to the home

Death of a family member

HOPELESSNESS

The realization that they
have no say in their life.

Lack of opportunity to

- share feelings,
- opinions on issue that matter to them
- their insight on issues

Stress & depression solutions

INCLUSION TO CHANGE

- Share upcoming possible changes
- Talk about impact on all family members.
- Parents share their thoughts about upcoming decisions, allow feedback
- Walk through the process with the adolescent assisting them to process the process of the change

HELPFULNESS

- Ask adolescent for their feelings
- Allow them to share idea, input and insight on family issues
- Seek out their feelings, concerns and thoughts.
- Allow them to share feeling that are intense or in opposition to the situation

Treatment by Professionals

CHALLENGES OF TREATMENT

- Problems accessing MH Care
 - Shortages of providers
 - Vicinity/location/ distance
- ▣ Telemedicine
 - Phone/Video conferencing
 - To connect over distance
- ▣ Pediatrician/Family/ PCP
 - 1-3 report having enough training to diagnose and treat children and their families MHD
- ▣ Therapy – counseling
 - Play therapy/ Art therapy
 - Talk therapy
 - Family counseling

OPTIONS FOR TREATMENT

- ▣ Psychological testing
- ▣ Psychiatrist – medication management if needed
- ▣ Case worker (CSS)
 - In home
 - In school
- Therapy- counseling
 - Play therapy/ Art Therapy
 - Talk therapy
 - Family Counseling
- ▣ School Based Care/Clinicians
 - School based mental health services can provide screening treatment and medication monitoring.

HOW CAN SCHOOLS HELP A STUDENT COPE WITH STRESS

- ▣ help students learn more about their emotions by incorporating emotional learning into the curriculum at all levels of school
- ▣ teach students how to recognize their personal signs and symptoms of stress and develop positive ways to cope with stress (eg through healthy eating or exercise)
- ▣ create supportive, positive and safe classroom environments
- ▣ communicate more frequently with **student's parents and caregivers** (eg information-sharing at parent/teacher evenings)
- ▣ ensure that students get the individual support they need with learning and achieving their academic goals
- ▣ allow time for students during school hours to receive adequate exercise and have play/relaxation time
- ▣ implement anti-bullying practices and policies
- ▣ encourage students to be creative and express themselves (eg through art, sport and music)
- ▣ provide counseling and actively promote the importance of children speaking up and accessing support when stressed or worried
- ▣ develop and implement mentoring support programs in school (eg Peer Skills).

Helps in the Home

- regularly spend calm and relaxing time with their children
- listen to their children and encourage them to talk about their feelings and worries
- provide a safe and nurturing family environment
- encourage physical activity and healthy eating habits
- use positive encouragement and rewards instead of punitive measures
- avoid being critical and negative towards their children
- show active interest in their children's activities and hobbies and participate when possible
- demonstrate active interest in their children's school progress and support them with their learning and homework
- monitor their children's access to media and ensure they are aware of safe online practices
- support their children if they are exposed to bullying
- manage their own stress and be a positive role model
- avoid over-scheduling children and allow them free time to play, read, listen to music or just 'veg-out'
- help build children's sense of self-worth by recognizing their achievements and avoid placing unrealistic expectations on them
- **seek professional help if signs of stress do not decrease**

MINDFULNESS – FOCUS IN THE MOMENT

Reduction of Anxiety and Stress
Use the senses to focus/ ground the
adolescent “in the moment”

OPPOSITE ACTION

In order to change the emotion we
change the behavior

SHORT STORY OF IMPACT

My Eight Grade Science Teacher

FOR QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS CONTACT INFORMATION

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