



# **TRADITIONAL LIFESTYLE AND ADOLESCENTS**

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## EMPATHY WITH ADOLESCENTS: COPING UP WITH STRESS AND STORM (A REVIEW)

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### ABSTRACT

Adolescence is one of the most vital stages in completion of the journey of human life. It is the period of transition from childhood to adulthood and plays a decisive role in the formation of pro-social or anti-social adult (Byrne, Davenport & Mazanov, 2007). All of us undergo this stage which poses many exciting challenges. Simultaneously, it demands adjustment on many fronts. It is a period of growth spurt of rapid physiological and psychological changes demanding for new social roles to take place. Owing to these changes, adolescents often face a number of crises and dilemmas. It is the stage which characterises the movement of the child from dependency to autonomy. It demands significant adjustment to the physical and social adaptations. It is estimated that 8-10 percent of adolescents have an anxiety disorder. In fact it is the stage of stress, strain and storm which brings many ambiguities in life. The teenage stress causing factors include school (55%), family (15%), social life (9%), time (8%), romantic relationships (9%) and sports (4%). Another potential cause of storm and stress is the intellectual, physical, and emotional gap between adolescents and adults in their environment.

During this phase, one is really confused about where he or she stands. The resulting role confusion causes many conflicts. Owing to these conflicts, delinquency rates soar, suicides become increasingly prevalent and drug and alcohol addiction gear up. Understanding the causes of stress can help teens see that there isn't anything wrong with them and motivate them to seek help to lower their stress levels.

**Keywords:** stress, storm, adolescence, anxiety, disorder, stress management, strategies

### INTRODUCTION

Majority of the adolescent undergo stress either due to internal or external sources and it hampers the major functioning of the body. Multiple problems are faced by most of the youngsters in their life. Every individual has to cope with different kinds of pressure laid down by the society and family. On the verge of coping up with these pressures, an individual himself unconsciously frames a net and is caught in the same.

Parent's expectation, sibling's rivalry, status issues and financial issues are the causative factors for stress. Some genuine and some are self-created issues are confronted by most of the youngsters. Youngsters need to reduce their level of expectations from being unreasonable. Most of the students are pseudo they keep their own self in a rose world and when they are confronted with the actual situation, they are unable to handle and thus it throws them to a stressful situation.

Bernstein *et. al.* (2008) viewed stress as a negative emotional, cognitive, behavioral and physiological process that occurs as a person tries to adjust to or deal with stressors. Stress is a necessary and inescapable concomitant of



our life – necessary because without it we would be listless and apathetic creatures and inescapable because it is agreeable for producing anxiety. In other words, stress is defined as both biological and psychological feeling of tension. It occurs as a consequence of failure of an organism – human or animal – to respond appropriately to emotional or physical threats, whether actual or imagined. Stress consists of any event in which environmental demands, internal demands or both tax or exceed the adaptive resources of the individual, social system or tissue system. A person's response towards stress depends on whether an event is appraised as a challenge or a threat (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984).

Stress is a state of mental or emotional strain or tension that occurs from unfavourable or demanding circumstances of life. It is a body's method of responding to emulation. Stress can be both good and bad, as it is the stress that provides the means to express inner talents; it can also cause exhaustion and illness. In other words, stress is a normal reaction the body has when changes occur. Stress is a state of mental or emotional pressure or tension that occurs from unfavourable or demanding circumstances of life. It is a body's method of responding to stimulation. Stress can be both good and bad. Stress is how the body show a quick action to a situation. Stress can manifest itself in different ways, emotional, physical, behavioural and cognitive symptoms.

According to G. S. Hall (1904), adolescence is a period of heightened "storm and stress". Three key aspects of this view examined: conflict with parents, mood disruptions and risk behaviour. It brings many ambiguities in life. Adolescence is stage of stress and strain, adolescents experiences more stress because of physical appearance, sloppy class mates, failing in exams, disagreement with parents and teachers etc. Adults fail to recognize the volume of stress, young children are revealed to. This stress among young adults causes depression, increased muscle tension, high blood pressure, sleep disturbances, frustration, hopelessness, helplessness, anxiety etc. which results in poor mental health.

### **Sources of Stress for Adolescents**

Adolescents may face multiple stressful challenges that may include parents who divorce, same sex parents, blended step and half-sibling families, dating violence, technology use to harass or threaten others, social isolation, and the impact of a failing economy. Teen stress is often difficult to recognize and parents and educators need to know the impact of stress on adolescents in order to provide the necessary support and open communication to help them deal with multiple issues.

Academic stress is a significant source of stress for many students (Hashim, 2003) and academic failure and low achievement are found to be associated with depression (Faubert, Forehand, Long, Burke, Faust, 1987; Kellam, Brown, Rubin, Ensminger, 1983; Hilsman, Garber, 1995; Kaslow, Rehm, Siegel, 1984). The sources of stress are called "Stressors". Stressors are demands made by the internal or external environment that upset balance, thus affecting physical and psychological well-being and requiring action to restore balance (Lazarus and Cohen, 1977; Lamb, Puskar, Sereika and Corcoran, 1998). However, they differ from the degree of severity and duration of stress; what is stressful for an individual may not be a stressor for another.

The causes of teen stress can be-academic stress, physical stress, social stress, stress due to family problems, financial stress, traumatic events, drastic changes in life, romantic relationships, poor self-esteem, unhealthy competition, poor time management etc. Recent studies have shown that many mental health problems in particular depression and anxiety are the main cause of disease among young people.

**Potential Roles for Adolescents**

- Individual pursuits (writing, music, reading, running)
- Working for own expenses
- Going to school/training programs
- Caregiver for siblings or elderly relatives
- Contributing to home: cooking, cleaning, repair
- Working for family expenses
- Participant in family recreation
- Peer group activities, both formal and informal
- Engagement in community activities
- Balancing independence, having respect
- Being grounded and supported
- Finding meaning and identity

**Common problems faced by the Adolescence**

1. Break up with boy/girl friend
2. Increased arguments with parents
3. Trouble with brother or sister
4. Increased arguments between parents
5. Change in parents' financial status
6. Serious health condition of a family member
7. Trouble with classmates
8. Trouble with parents

Since adolescence is the period on which the child need to be prepare to handle the challenges of life, so it is the duty of the parents, teachers and the health workers to early detect or recognize adolescent mental health problems and impart them with such knowledge that they understand how to react.

When adolescents are unable to handle or manage stress in a healthy manner they often make poor choices. Some of the negative ways that adolescents may cope with their stress is self-harm, substance abuse, suicidal thoughts, academic issues, friendship issues, and some of these ways may lead to depression, oppositional defiant disorder, or anxiety. If there are not the proper resources for students to learn how to cope in an effective way, these issues may follow them into their adult lives and may turn into other health problems later in life that may include alcoholism, addiction to drugs or tobacco, or other conduct disorders.

**Sources of stress for teens include:**

- School demands and frustrations
- Negative thoughts or feelings about themselves
- Changes in their bodies
- Problems with friends at school
- Unsafe living environment in neighborhood



- Separation or divorce of parents
- Severe problems of the family like chronic illness
- Death of a loved one
- Moving or changing schools
- Having too high expectations
- Family financial problems

#### Signs of stress among adolescents

- Increased complaints of headache, stomach ache, muscle pain and/or tiredness
- Shutting down and withdrawing from people and activities
- Increased anger or irritability
- Crying more often and appearing teary-eyed
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Chronic anxiety and nervousness
- Changes in sleeping and eating habits
- Difficulty concentrating
- Experimentation with drugs or alcohol

#### Stress Management

Stress management is the skill of adroitness that helps one to look forward, prevent, control and recover from the deterioration brought on by perceived threats and subsist deficiencies. These stress competency skills emphasis not only on deterioration, but on the assessment of threat and evolution of coping resources.

Coping refers to both behavioural and psychological efforts that people employ to master tolerate, reduce or minimize stressful events. Psychologists have developed a number of effective coping strategies that reduce stress levels, which in turn decrease the occurrence of psychosomatic symptoms. These strategies may be termed as stress management strategies. There are various strategies that trigger the relaxation response by bringing the body back into a healthier equilibrium in addition to shattering the stress sequence.

#### Stress Management Strategies

The steps which can help our teens deal with stress include – sleep, physical activity, healthy diet, support from parents, focus on positives, talk about it, do what makes you happy. To deal better with stress, teenagers and adolescents can incorporate the below mentioned activities in their daily life. These are breathing exercise, mindfulness, creative visualization, co-sharing, silent ball, freeze-dance. Teenagers should be encouraged to use stress management worksheets that can help.

To reduce the physical and psychological/mental disorder associated with stress, following techniques are very effective for both adolescents and adults – Deep Breathing, Meditation, Progressive Muscular Relaxation, Guided imagery, Peer Sharing and Positive Self Talk (NIH, National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health). These techniques can be used in any situations when a person experience stress such as during class, while studying, at a party, at work, or when trying to fall asleep.

**Strategies for coping with stress:**

- Talk about problems with others
- Take deep breaths
- Perform progressive muscle relaxation
- Set short term and achievable goals
- Break difficult tasks into smaller and manageable chunks
- Exercise and eat regular meals
- Get proper sleep
- Practice consistent and positive discipline
- Visualize and practice feared situations
- Focus on what is in your control and let go of what you cannot
- Lower unrealistic expectations
- Schedule breaks and enjoyable activities
- Accept yourself in your true form
- Identify your specific strengths to work on them
- Forget to bring perfection, both in yourself and in others

**Adolescents can reduce stress with the following behaviors and techniques:**

- Exercise and eat regularly
- Have a good sleep routine
- Avoid excess caffeine which can increase feelings of anxiety and agitation
- Avoid illegal drugs, alcohol and tobacco
- Learn abdominal breathing and muscle relaxation techniques
- Develop assertiveness training skills
- Rehearse and practice situations which cause stress
- Learn practical coping skills
- Decrease negative self-talk
- Focus on doing a competent job rather than demanding perfection
- Take a break from stressful situations
- Build a network of positive friends

**Implementation of Stress Management Strategies on Adolescents**

Since stress management strategies produce both physiological and psychological changes among adolescents, these also help them to cope with the stress easily. They also help to boost energy and focus, fight illness, and relieve the ill-effects (Christensen and Fatchett, 2002).



### How parents can help their child

- Be aware of your child's behaviors and emotions
- Build trust with your child
- Encourage the expression of feelings
- Teach and model good emotional responses
- Encourage them to tell you if they feel overwhelmed
- Encourage healthy and diverse friendships
- Develop physical activity and rest routine
- Supply good nutrition to the teens
- Teach your child to solve problems
- Make your child believe his or her ability to get through tough times
- Strengthen awareness among teens of anticipated family changes

Although these strategies can be implemented on all the adolescents yet teachers or psychological workers should:

- Identify individuals who are more vulnerable to stress
- Provide an increased access to the social support in the form of emotional support, advice, assistance and guidance
- Involve parents, peers and other caring adults
- Encourage involvement in extra-curricular activities such as music, drama, art and craft etc.
- Consult clinical resources for additional guidance

### Conclusion

As adolescence is the stage when young people have to face everyday challenges related to school, home, in the friend circle (peer group) and in the community, so they easily get depressed, irritated and aggressive which lead them to poor coping skills such as use of tobacco, alcohol and/ or addiction of drug. It is therefore very necessary for teachers to teach the students to manage their stress at the very initial stage as it is known that the earlier the adolescents learn to deal with his stress the better will be their psychological and physical health as an adult.

In this era of cut throat competition, running behind numbers is the new fad but sad reality of life. Every child is different hence it is important for the parents to make their children realize the importance of identification of their strengths and encourage them to pursue a career in the area of their ability. It is important to do what you love or love what you do. Effective time management and ensuring daily physical activities can become deterrent to stress and improve the span of attention and hence become productive with academics.

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