



RECOGNIZING SUBSTANCE ABUSE AS A FIRST SIGN OF STRESS AND TRAUMA IN TEENS AND YOUNG ADULTS

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What is Stress?

- Stress is the emotional and physical strain caused by our response to some stimuli from the outside world.
- Common stress reactions include tension, irritability, inability to concentrate.
- Physical symptoms can include headache and a fast heartbeat.

Source: eWebMD



Good and Bad Stress

- **Eustress**
This is a positive form of stress, which prepares your mind and body for the imminent challenges that it has perceived. Eustress is a natural physical reaction by your body which increases blood flow to your muscles, resulting in a higher heart rate.
- **Distress**
A negative form of stress. This occurs when the mind and body is unable to cope with changes, and usually occurs when there are deviations from the norm.
- **Hyper-stress**
This is another form of negative stress that occurs when the individual is unable to cope with the workload.
- **Hypo-stress**
Lastly, hypo-stress occurs when a person has nothing to do with his time and feels constantly bored and unmotivated.

Short-Term Physical Signs

- Making your heartbeat and breath faster
- Making you sweat more
- Leaving you with cold hands, feet, or skin
- Making you feel sick to your stomach or giving you 'butterflies'
- Tightening your muscles or making you feel tense
- Leaving your mouth dry
- Making you have to go to the bathroom frequently
- Increasing muscle spasms, headaches, fatigue, and shortness of breath



Short-Term Psychological Signs

- Interfering with your judgment and causing you to make bad decisions
Making you see difficult situations as threatening
 - Reducing your enjoyment and making you feel bad
Making it difficult for you to concentrate or to deal with distraction
- 



Long-Term Physical Signs

- Changing your appetite (making you eat either less or more)
 - Changing your sleep habits (either causing you to sleep too much or not letting you sleep enough)
 - Encouraging 'nervous' behavior such as twitching, fiddling, talking too much, nail biting, teeth grinding, pacing, and other repetitive habits
 - Causing you to catch colds or the flu more often and causing other illnesses such as asthma, headaches, stomach problems, skin problems, and other aches and pains
 - Affecting your sex life and performance
 - Making you feel constantly tired and worn out
- 



Long-Term Psychological Signs

- Worrying and feeling anxious (which can sometimes lead to anxiety disorder and panic attacks)
 - Feeling out of control, overwhelmed, confused, and/or unable to make decisions
 - Experiencing mood changes such as depression, frustration, anger, helplessness, irritability, defensiveness, irrationality, overreaction, or impatience and restlessness
 - Increasing dependence on food, cigarettes, alcohol, or drugs
- Neglecting important things in life such as work, school, and even personal appearance
- Developing irrational fears of things



Internal Causes of Stress

- **Frustrations**
 - **Conflicts**
 - **Pressures**
- 



External Causes of Stress

- relationship difficulties
 - divorce
 - serious illness in the family
 - caring for dependants
 - bereavement
 - debts
- 



Effects of Stress on Health

- Depression
 - Anxiety
 - Suicide
 - Heart Disease
 - Cancer
- 



Teens and Stress

- Alienation
 - Body Dysmorphic conditions
 - Education outlook
 - Stress of living at home, but yet feeling old enough to be on your own
 - Dysfunctional families - teens from divorced families, alcoholic, or abusive families
 - Blended families
 - Parentification
- 



Young Adults and Stress

- Competition
 - Job Market
 - Relationships
 - Assuming Responsibility
 - Sexual intimacy
- 



What is Trauma?

- The unique individual experience of an event or enduring conditions wherein the individual's ability to integrate his/her emotional experience is overwhelmed, or the individual experiences (subjectively) a threat to life, bodily integrity, or sanity. (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995, p. 60)



Signs of Trauma

- Guilt and self-doubt
- Anxiety
- Mood swings
- Feeling disconnected or numb
- Distressing memories about the event
- Insomnia or nightmares, possibly night terrors
- Withdrawing from others
- Loss of appetite
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feeling sad or hopeless

What is Substance Abuse?

- The excessive use of a substance, especially alcohol or a drug leading to negative behaviors such as:
- Getting high on drugs or getting intoxicated (drunk) on a regular basis
- Lying, especially about how much they are using or drinking
- Avoiding friends and family members
- Giving up activities they used to enjoy such as sports or spending time with non-using friends
- Talking a lot about using drugs or alcohol
- believing they need to use or drink to have fun

Substance Abuse and PTSD

- Emerging research has documented a strong association between PTSD and substance abuse. In some cases, substance use begins after the exposure to trauma and the development of PTSD, thus making PTSD a risk factor for drug abuse.
- Early intervention to help children and adolescents who have suffered trauma from violence or a disaster is critical. Children who witness or are exposed to a traumatic event and are clinically diagnosed with PTSD have a greater likelihood for developing later drug and/or alcohol use disorders.
- Among individuals with substance use disorders, 30 to 60 percent meet the criteria for comorbid PTSD.
- Patients with substance use disorders tend to suffer from more severe PTSD symptoms than do PTSD patients without substance use disorders.



What is Chemical Dependence?

- Chemic dependence is also used to describe the compulsive use of chemicals (drugs or alcohol) and the inability to stop using them despite all the problems caused by their use.

Substances frequently abused include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Alcohol
 - Marijuana
 - Hallucinogens
 - Cocaine
 - Amphetamines
 - Opiates
- 



Stress and Sexual Behavior in Teens and Young Adults

- Increase in sexual behavior
 - Pregnancy
 - STIs or STDs
 - HIV/AIDS
 - Chemical Dependence
- 



Stressors Exacerbated by Substance Abuse

- Pressure at work
 - Pressure with debts
 - Pressure with relationships
 - Pressure from family
 - Pressure from the law
- 



Other Behavioral Manifestations of Stress and Trauma

- **Mood Instability:** Appearing moody, irritable, throwing tantrums, screaming, yelling, changing moods...
- **Unexplained Outbursts of Temper:** Sudden, unprovoked aggression. Tantrums. Sudden bouts of rage, screaming, throwing things or destroying property.
- **Depression:** Apparently sad. Crying. Loss of interest in activities, things, people.
- **Nightmares:** Waking suddenly in the middle of the night and looking startled, terrified, confused or agitated.
- **Sleep Disturbances:** Difficulty falling asleep. Early morning awakening. Frequent waking. Sleepless nights.



Educating Youth about Stress and Trauma

Websites just for teens

- youthNOISE-excellent website with much information, opportunities for action, a place to talk, and much, much more

Get involved in helping

- Youth Service America
 - SERVENet
 - Do Something
 - High School for Heroes-fundraising effort to support children of victims of attacks
 - Coping with the Tragedy: Resources to Use if You're Looking for a Way to Help University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension-4H- includes lots of ways kids can get involved in helping
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Educating Parents about Stress and Trauma

- The Character of a Nation is Tested Karen Pace, Michigan State University Extension
- Talking to Children about Terrorism (general guidelines) Judith Myers-Walls, Purdue University Extension
- Talking to Children about Terrorism: By the Numbers (age appropriate responses) Judith Myers-Walls, Purdue University Extension
- Family Communication in Times of Stress Ron Pitzer, University of Minnesota Extension

Resources for Youth Experiencing Stress and Trauma

- Coping with Traumatic Events: Terrorist Attacks in the United States-Special Comments for Children and Youth *Bruce Berry, ChildTrauma Academy*
- Recognizing Stress in Children *Karen DeBord, North Carolina State University Extension*
- Helping Children and Adolescents Cope with Violence and Disasters *National Institutes of Mental Health*