

# tool kit for teen care

## Stress and Trauma



### What is meant by stress?

- Stress is what people feel when reacting to pressure or worry.
- All people will experience stress in their life at some time. This is a normal reaction.
- Stress includes physical reactions caused by the body producing increased amounts of the hormone adrenaline.

### What causes stress?

- Stress can be caused by outside pressures, such as school, friends, parents, or work.
- Stress can be caused by outside worries, such as bullies, living in a dangerous area, or terrorism.
- Stress can be caused by life changes, such as new school, new home, loss of a parent through divorce, moving away for a job, or death of a loved one.
- Stress can be caused by inside pressures, such as wanting to do well in school or on the job or wanting to be liked by others.

### What are some signs of stress?

- Frequent headaches, stomachaches, or chest pains.
- Trouble sleeping, tiredness, lack of energy.
- Feeling anxious, nervous, or depressed. (For more information on depression see the fact sheet, "Depression in Adolescents.") It is important to note that depression is a sign of stress. A person can be depressed for reasons other than being under stress.
- Forgetting important things.
- Not being able to concentrate.
- Getting sick more than usual.
- Not enjoying things the same as usual.
- Blaming others for what happens.

### Can stress be helpful?

- Stress symptoms can be warnings of dangers that can be avoided.
- Pressure to compete can make a person better at work, school, or sports.
- Pressure to meet deadlines can help a person finish projects and homework.

### What are some ways to deal with stress?

- Get enough sleep, eat healthy meals, and exercise regularly.
- Drink less caffeine (found in coffee, tea, caffeinated soft drinks).
- List possible causes of the stress—try to control what can be controlled.
- Identify priorities and decide what is most important.
- Learn ways to relax, such as meditation and yoga.
- Talk to others about feelings and concerns that cause stress.
- IMPORTANT: Taking drugs or using alcohol are not good ways to handle stress and usually will cause more problems.

### What is meant by trauma or traumatic events?

- Traumatic events can be personal, such as being physically attacked or raped.
- Traumatic events can be general, such as being present during a natural or human-caused disaster.
- Examples of general trauma include the terrorist attacks of 9/11/01, the Oklahoma City bombing, the California earthquake, and hurricanes Hugo and Andrew.





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### What is post traumatic stress disorder?

- Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a reaction to a traumatic, often life-threatening event.
- This disorder can occur anywhere from weeks to months after the traumatic event.
- Symptoms include: flashback memories of the event, nightmares or other sleep problems, scary thoughts, irritability, depression, and physical pains.
- People with PTSD usually need the help of a professional to diagnose the problem, identify the cause, and treat the symptoms.

### For More Information

We have provided information on the following organizations and web sites because they have information that may be of interest to our readers. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists does not necessarily endorse the views expressed or the facts presented by these organizations or on these web sites. Further, ACOG does not endorse any commercial products that may be advertised or available from these organizations or on these web sites.

**American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry**  
3615 Wisconsin Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20016-3007  
Telephone: (202) 966-7300  
Fax: (202) 966-2891  
[www.aacap.org](http://www.aacap.org)

**American Academy of Family Physicians**  
11400 Tomahawk Creek Parkway  
Leawood, KS 66211-2672  
[www.familydoctor.org/teens.html](http://www.familydoctor.org/teens.html)

**American Academy of Pediatrics**  
141 Northwest Point Boulevard  
Elk Grove Village, IL 60007-1098  
Telephone: (847) 434-4000  
Fax: (847) 434-8000  
[www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)

**American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists**  
409 12th Street SW  
PO Box 96920  
Washington, DC 20090-6290  
Telephone: (202) 863-2579  
Fax: (202) 484-3917  
[www.acog.org](http://www.acog.org)

**American Psychiatric Association**  
1400 K Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20005  
Telephone: 888-357-7924  
[www.psych.org/public\\_info](http://www.psych.org/public_info)

**National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder**  
Telephone: (802) 296-5132  
[www.ncptsd.org](http://www.ncptsd.org)

**National Institute for Mental Health**  
6001 Executive Boulevard  
Room 8184, MSC 9663  
Bethesda, MD 20892-9663  
Telephone: (301) 443-4513  
Fax: (301) 443-4279  
[www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)

**National Network for Child Care**  
[www.nncc.org](http://www.nncc.org)

**The Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Alliance**  
Telephone: 877-507-PTSD  
[www.ptsdalliance.org](http://www.ptsdalliance.org)