

# STRESS BUSTERS THROUGH THE AGES AND STAGES

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# Objectives

- Discuss worries and concerns at different ages and the relationship with developmental stages
- Identify coping strategies
- Empower parents to help mitigate anxiety
- Identify when anxiety becomes a problem and what to do about it

# Safety today vs 100 years ago

- Less mortality and morbidity from vaccine preventable illnesses
- Less fire-related casualties due to enhanced safety features in homes, schools and offices
- Less transportation accidents
- More police presence and access to assistance
- Improved medical technology should we need it
  - Preventative measures
  - Screening
  - Hospital-based interventions

# So what's there to worry about...

## AGE APPROPRIATE CONCERNS

- Bodily harm
- Weather events
- School
- Friends
- Rejection
- Criticism

## MORE "ADULT" CONCERNS

- Terrorists
- Natural disasters
- **WAR**
- Cyber bullying
- School violence
- **FAILURE**

# What are “normal” worries and concerns?

- Almost all kids have worries and fears
  - Lifetime prevalence of anxiety among 13-18yo is 25.1%
  - Prevalence of severe disorder is 5.9% -- NIH
- Developmentally appropriate
- Brief in duration
- Low in intensity
- Not interfering with functioning
- Easily reassured



# Ages and stages – Erikson 1959

Stage	Psychosocial Crisis	Basic Virtue	Age
1	Trust vs. mistrust	Hope	Infancy ( 0 to 1 ½)
2	Autonomy vs. shame	Will	Early Childhood ( 1 ½ to 3)
3	Initiative vs. guilt	Purpose	Play Age ( 3 to 5)
4	Industry vs. inferiority	Competency	School Age ( 5 to 12)
5	Ego identity vs. Role Confusion	Fidelity	Adolescence (12 to 18)
6	Intimacy vs. isolation	Love	Young Adult ( 18 to 40)
7	Generativity vs. stagnation	Care	Adult hood( 40 to 65)
8	Ego integrity vs. despair	Wisdom	Maturity ( 65+)

# Toddlers and preschoolers

## Development

- Separate from parents
- Reality vs imagination
- Using all senses
- Active imagination
- Clear sense of caretakers
- Dependence
- Potty training - struggle with control

## Fears

- Separation
- Bad dreams
- The Dark
- Monsters
- Strangers
- Being alone
- Toilets/bathrooms

# Coping – young children

- Exposure
  - Coach and model staying calm
- Explain reality from pretend
  - Demonstrate how things work
- Be honest
  - Help them manage anticipation
- Manage your own fears, worries, and anxieties
- Read books and tell stories about other children who were afraid of similar things and overcame their fears
- Keep a regular schedule
- Use imagination to help protect





# Elementary school kids

## Development

- Protective of their body
- Lack of control
- Still dependent
- Things can hurt them
- Less protection
- Exposure to more
- Higher expectations and new skills

## Fears

- Bodily harm, shots
- Natural disasters
- Injury to parents
- Snakes, spiders, dogs
- Being home alone
- Scary news or TV shows
- Fear of failure and rejection

# Coping – school age child

- Don't try to talk your child out of being afraid
- Stay calm and confident
  - How you say it is as important as what you say
- Confront fears but gradually
  - Never completely avoid
- Practice coping responses together
  - Drawing, role-playing, relaxation techniques.
- Reward efforts -- big or small
- Monitor media exposure
  - Social media as well as news
  - Reduce exposure to violence through video games and movies

# Middle school kids

## Development

- Friendships become increasingly important
- Permanence of death and injury
- Greater expectations with school
- Activities becoming part of their identity
- Changing bodies

## Fears

- Social interactions – being different
- Fear of illness/death in loved ones or self
- Failure or disappointment of teacher/parent
- Not living up to expectation
- Fear of being different

# Coping – middle schoolers

- Seek balance
  - Friends, school, activities, down-time
- Physical activity
  - Daily and rigorous
- Nutrition
  - Start with a good breakfast, no meal skipping
- Sleep
  - Establish a good routine, stick with it even on the weekends
- Limit exposure to media
- Monitor social media
- TALK WITH YOUR KIDS
- Model effective stress reduction and balance



# Stress busters

- Deep breathing – color breathing
  - Breath in for count of 5 and out for count of 7
  - Imagine relaxing color
- Progressive muscle relaxation
  - Concentrate on each muscle group and hold for count of 10
- Yoga or meditation
- Worry box or worry time
- Drawing or illustrating worries
  - May turn over and illustrate solutions
- Mantras
- Visual imagery
  - Using all 5 senses



# Adolescents

## Development

- Fostering independence
- Immortal mindset
- Later melatonin release
- Strong emotions
- Close friendships
- Intense romantic/sexual feelings

## Fears

- Not being “good enough”
- Fear of death
- Difficulty falling asleep
- Catastrophizing
- Betrayal/hurt feelings
- Rejection

# What is Stress?

- “Stress is the uncomfortable feeling you get when you’re worried, scared, angry, frustrated or overwhelmed. It is caused by emotions but it also affects your mood and body”.

Teenager Post # 18875  
On the 2nd week of Xmas  
my teachers gave to me  
5 all-nighters  
4 hrs of crying  
3 mental breakdowns  
2 thoughts of dropout  
& a month of anxiety  
©teenagerposts.tumblr.com

# What Causes Stress?

- From parents. “Don’t disappoint me, clean up, hurry up, finish this, do your homework, etc.”
- From friends. “How’d you do on the test, try this, prove you’re not a loser, don’t hang out with them, don’t wear that.”
- From yourself. “I need to lose weight, wear the right clothes, get better grades....”





# And from...

- Watching parents argue
- Thinking about the future
- Being pressured to do something you know is bad
- Dealing with sexual feelings
- Worrying
- Feeling guilty



# As a result of stress

- 40% of teens report feeling irritable or angry; 36% nervous or anxious
- 30% teens say stress makes them feel overwhelmed, depressed or sad



# Teen stress level higher than adult

- 27% teens say they experience “extreme stress” during school years
- Teen’s average stress level was 5.8 out of 10 during the school year
- 59% state managing their time to balance activities is a significant stressor



# Media and Sleep

- Average teen consumes average of 7.5 hours of media per day possibly contributing to higher stress
- 1:3 teens says stress has kept him up at night in past month
- Average teen sleeps 7.4 hours on a school night as opposed to 9-10 recommended



# Stress Busters for Teens

1. Eat Healthy- taking care of yourself reduces stress
2. Sleep- body needs rest 9-10 hours of sleep
3. Exercise- just two hours of extra exercise each week can improve your school performance



<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/teen-angst.201411/top-10-stress-busters-teens>

# Stress Busters, cont.

4. “Me time”- take time to relax and have fun:

- Seeing a movie watching a show
- Reading a book
- Going shopping
- Hanging out with friends

5. Friend time- make time for friends even when busy



# Stress Busters, cont.

6. Find balance- don't take on more than you can accomplish at once
7. Go outside- research shows that being outside improves your mood
8. Take a breath- breathe from your chest rather than your abdomen
9. Find your sense of humor- helps relax
10. Get your Zen on- meditation!



# Worries and concerns are often very somatic

- May include:
  - Headaches
  - Stomach aches
  - Chest pain
- BEHAVIOR CHANGES WARRANT EVALUATION
  - Appetite change
  - Sleeping difficulty or nightmares
  - Clingy
  - Aggressive – increase in anger
  - Change in school work or grades
  - Distancing from, or change in, peer-group





# References

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