

Workshop 1 – Tools to Deal with Stress and Anxiety

My child seems constantly anxious, is that normal?

How can I support my child in managing anxiety and stress?

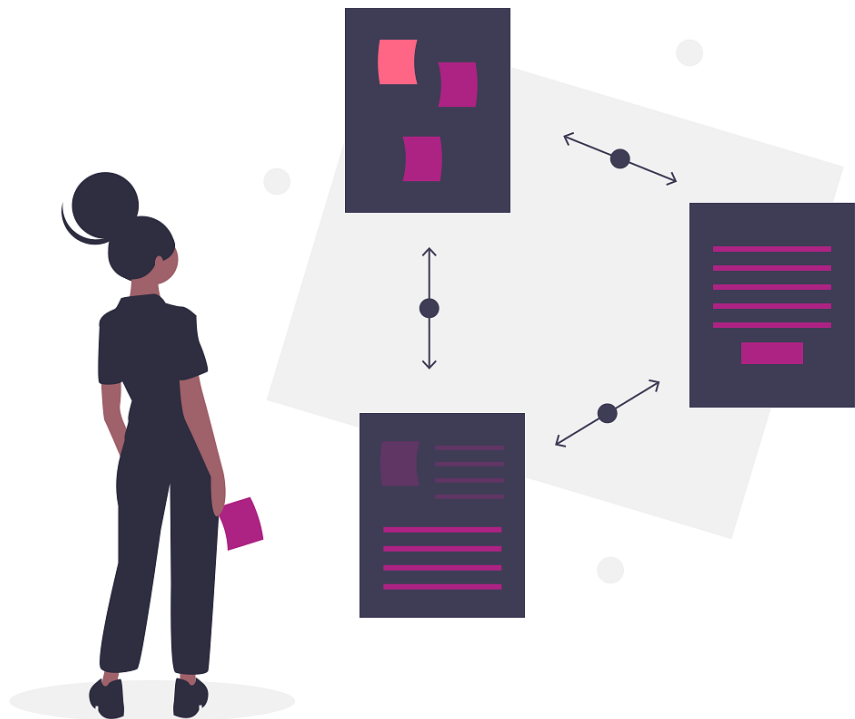
My children are too tough on themselves, how can I help them?

Stress and Anxiety

Stress, in adolescence or adulthood, is a normal physiological reaction in our body. Faced with danger, the body secretes adrenaline and stress hormones, allowing us to mobilize our resources in order to deal with it. However, this protective reaction, normally just an occasional occurrence, has become more and more present in our societies; it turns into anxiety, that is, permanent stress.

Statistics on anxiety in adolescence

According to the [BC Adolescent Health Survey](#) conducted in 2018, assessing the health of young adolescents in British Columbia, 86% of students surveyed reported experiencing some form of stress or anxiety in the past month. The study also shows that anxiety and depression are on the rise among young people, with 18% reporting living with an anxiety disorder, compared to 8% in 2013, and 15% reporting experiencing depression, compared to 10% in 2013.



Why are they stressed?

The most common stressors in adolescence are **school**

(pressure to succeed, not being able to integrate socially), **family** (conflicts with parents/guardians, conflicts between parents, conflicts with siblings), **romantic relationships** (pressure to please, abuse from a partner), and **relationships with friends** (pressure to blend in, fear of isolation), etc. Generally, interpersonal relationships – whether with family, friends, or romantic partners – can be a source of stress or anxiety for adolescents. Some stressors may be related to the pressure to fit in, or performance pressures (intellectual, sports, or social). However, other anxiety factors may be related to an unhealthy or abusive component of these relationships. For example, a situation where a young person suffers harassment from peers or is threatened by a potential romantic partner can have a significant impact on their mental well-being.

How to Help My Child

When you discuss this subject with your child:

It's important to know more about how stress is affecting them. You might ask:

- On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 represents no stress and 10 represents maximum stress, how stressed are you right now?
- How do you feel the stress physically? (Note symptoms such as sleep disturbance, headaches, stomach aches, and muscle tension.)



- How long have you been feeling this stress? How often does it appear?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 represents no control and 10 represents total control, how much do you feel in control of your stress?
- How much does stress affect your daily life?
- How do you try to cope with stress? (Listen and be mindful of signs of negative coping strategies such as avoiding tasks, alcohol consumption, isolation, etc.)

* If you're concerned about your child's health, ask a professional for help, or call the help lines mentioned in the Resources section.

When you discuss this subject with your child:

- Listen and try not to rush into a solution. Empathize with their feelings of stress and the perceived causes.
- Normalize the feelings of stress by explaining that:
 - Stress is part of life and can, for example, motivate us to improve ourselves and accomplish what we need to do during the day.
 - Periods of high stress in the short term are not always unhealthy.
- Pay attention to acute stress or panic attacks: they can be caused by something else, such as an anxiety disorder.

Perfectionism is closely linked to a high stress level. The self-esteem of young perfectionists is often dependent on their accomplishments, which makes them nervous about whether their efforts are adequate. Therefore, it's important to encourage them to engage in positive self-talk. You can encourage them to:

- stick to the facts
- congratulate themselves on every success, no matter how small
- show compassion for themselves
- congratulate themselves on having many fine attributes
- get into the habit of accepting congratulations and kind words
- avoid words such as "should," "should have," "need to," and "have to"
- set a goal that is achievable and that will help them feel good

Immediate stress management techniques:

- Mindful breathing (e.g., breathe in and breathe out 10 times);
- Focus on their environment (Identify 5 things they can see, 4 things they can touch, 3 things they can feel, 2 things they can hear, 1 thing they can taste);
- Focus on what they physically feel (e.g., feet on the ground, hands on the table, etc.);
- Play with an anti-stress ball.



Resources

Don't hesitate to contact your school staff: the school counsellor, the teacher, or the school principal. Your family doctor can also help you, as can the following resources:

- **Kids Help Phone** : to confide in somebody, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Anonymous and bilingual. Toll-free number: 1-800-668-6868. kidshelpphone.ca
- **Phobies-Zéro**, (in French), support and assistance group for people with anxiety, panic disorders, phobias, and agoraphobia: 514-276-3105 or toll-free 1-866-922-0002.

Books in English

- * The mindful teen: Powerful skills to help you handle stress one moment at a time, by Dzung Vo, Instant Help Book, 2015. [Available at BC Children's and Women's Hospital library](#)
- * The stress reduction workbook for teens, by Gina M. Biegel, Instant Help Book, 2009. [Available at BC Children's and Women's Hospital library](#)

Books in French

- * Les troubles anxieux expliqués aux parents, par Chantal Baron, Collection du CHU Sainte-Justine pour les parents, 2001.
- * Alex : Surmonter l'anxiété à l'adolescence, par Nathalie Parent, Éditions Midi trente, 2014 (pour les 12 ans et plus). [Disponible à la bibliothèque BC Children's and Women's Hospital](#)

Long-term stress prevention/management techniques:

- Try to recognize aspects of life that they may or may not control;
- Set up time management and active planning, including finding time to take care of themselves;
- Eat healthily (if possible);
- Exercise regularly;
- Spend time in nature;
- Practice an artistic activity (writing in a journal, drawing, taking pictures, or playing music);
- Participate in cultural activities;
- Put in place healthy sleep habits;
- Avoid consuming too much caffeine;
- Limit screen time, especially before going to bed;
- Spend time with friends and family.