

stress reduction



PARENTING TECHNIQUES—AGES 14-18

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how does proactive parenting reduce stress?

RAISING CHILDREN IS STRESSFUL FOR EVERY PARENT, NOT ONLY PARENTS WITH PSYCHIATRIC DISABILITIES. To be a good parent, you need to be continually attentive to the changing needs and wants of your child. This can be difficult

especially when you are trying to manage your household, engage in a relationship with your partner and possibly hold down a job at the same time. As a parent with a psychiatric disability, you may feel even more stress because, in addition to bringing up your kids and dealing with household challenges, you need to work at managing your symptoms.

One way to reduce this stress is to proactively parent. Proactive parenting involves actively taking charge of caring for your children by creating routines for them and organizing your time. For example, you may be feeling overwhelmed by the demands of your children, household, partner and job. A proactive approach to this problem is, for example, to create a written daily schedule for yourself and for your child/children. This schedule can break down all of the tasks that you need to do in a manageable way and it can help you see what your children need over the course of the day. This kind of planning can make you a better parent, and will help to reduce your stress.

On the following pages, we will examine some of the areas of concern to parents of children ages 14 to 18 and we will provide some tips for how to deal with stressful situations that may occur when parenting an adolescent. Some of these tips will be directly related to reducing your stress while others may be more general.



routines and creating family time with your teenager

When your child was very young, you may have tried to have him follow a sleeping and/or a feeding schedule. At the very least, your doctor may have recommended creating routines around bedtime and mealtime. This is because following a schedule or routine helps both you and your child. Knowing what to expect and planning for it lowers the stress that your child may go through during times of the day that involve transition. If your child is experiencing less stress, so will you.

While adolescents do not need to follow the same sorts of elaborate mealtime and bedtime routines that younger children do, it is important that your teenager have a basic routine to be able to manage his activities and school work. Most experts agree that teenag-

ers need about 9 hours of sleep a night, though often they don't get it.¹ The more you can do to help your teenager organize the tasks that he has to accomplish in order to get sufficient sleep, the less stress you and your child will experience.

Remember to schedule family time, for example, doing fun activities together on the weekends or having a weekly family meeting. (A family meeting is an opportunity for families to get together to discuss issues that pertain to the family.²) At this age it is perfectly normal for your child to want to spend a great deal of time with friends rather than family.³ But it is also important to have some family time. Parents should try to be available when their teen expresses interest in being together as a family and use this opportunity to communicate with him about his concerns.⁴



household responsibilities

As your children get older, they can participate more fully in taking care of the family home. It is important to have your teenager do different kinds of household chores because it not only helps you in a very real way but, it contributes to his feeling like a part of the family, increases his feelings of competency and self-worth, and allows him to grow into a responsible adult.⁵ All of this translates into less stress for you.

Examples of chores that a teenager can do are:

- **Cleaning his bedroom**
- **Cleaning the bathrooms**
- **Taking out the garbage**
- **Making meals**
- **Doing the dishes**
- **Vacuuming**

For further information, please see Child Development Ages 14 to 18 Module: Money Management.



how do i communicate with my teenager?

Communicating with your teenager involves finding a balance between talking and listening. The teenage years are a time of tremendous emotional growth and quite a bit of confusion. Your teenager will appreciate a sounding board with whom he can share his new ideas and someone to help him cope with his new experiences. Listening to your child at this stage, instead of telling him what to do or lecturing him, will contribute to a positive relationship and ultimately, less stress for you.⁶

“Listen when we need to talk to you, even if it’s something you don’t want to hear.”
(Aileen, California)⁷

Tips for Communicating With Your Teenager:⁸

Engage in Active Listening—Active listening means, first, that you need to give your child your full attention (do not answer your phone or do other tasks while listening to him). Concentrate fully on what your child is saying and, if possible, reflect his concerns back to him. Do not interject your opinion unless your child asks for it, and don’t change the subject.

Be Empathetic—Try to put yourself in your child’s shoes in order to understand how she is really feeling. One way to do this is to think about the feelings behind her words, and acknowledge those feelings. You might say, “You must be feeling really scared right now” instead of “I understand how you feel.”

Give her space, but do not give up—If your teenager does not seem to want to communicate with you, don’t force it. But try again a little later. Listen, and communicate with her about the things that she is interested in.

Communicate that you believe in her—It is normal for adolescents to have many insecurities. Your teenager will benefit from knowing that you believe in her and in what she can accomplish.



mental health of your teenager

As a parent with a psychiatric disability, you may be concerned that your child may also show signs of a psychiatric disability. While your child may have a greater susceptibility to developing a psychiatric disability because of his genetic inheritance, remember that genetics are only one factor.⁹ Keeping your child's environment emotionally healthy and working at building his self-esteem will reduce his stress, and make it less likely that a genetic vulnerability (if he has one) will develop into a psychiatric disability.¹⁰ Thus, keeping your teen's environment emotionally healthy will help lower your stress level as well.

How do you provide an emotionally healthy environment for your teenager and build his self-esteem?

Teaching your child good coping skills is very important to keeping him safe and mentally healthy. Good coping skills can help prevent your child from turning to behaviors that may cause her harm, like self-injury or eating disorders.¹¹ They can help to improve her self esteem, which may keep depression or other psychiatric disabilities from developing. Good coping skills include:¹²

- **Setting goals and aiming for manageable accomplishments**
- **Trying to see mistakes as learning opportunities**
- **Recognizing what you can change and what you can't -- if something about yourself makes you unhappy, either work on changing it (if it can be changed) or accept yourself the way you are.**
- **Finding the positive in any situation**
- **Contributing to society—knowing that you are making a difference in someone else's life helps increase your own self-esteem.**
- **Exercising and eating a balanced diet**
- **Doing relaxation and breathing exercises to decrease stress**



peer pressure

All children, no matter how old they are, are affected by their peers. But as children become teenagers, changes occur. As teenagers, even though they are growing more independent, they also do not want to appear different from their peers—they want to fit in.¹³ This may lead your teen into situations where he feels pressured to do something that he is not sure that he wants to do. Obviously, this kind of situation creates stress in your household. The more positive influences you can promote between your child and his peers, the less stress you and your teen will experience.

Peer Influence Can be Positive¹⁴

- Peers can set good examples for each other—for example, doing well in school, aspiring to go to college, playing a sport or playing an instrument.
- Peers can offer feedback and advice.
- Peers can help each other try out their socialization skills.
- Peers can be encouraging and help each other get involved in new activities.

What can you do to help your teenager when peer influence is not healthy?¹⁵

- Help your teen to come up with other activities that she enjoys—for instance, instead of allowing her to go to a big party where she thinks there will be drinking, encourage her to invite small group of friends over to watch a movie.
- Help your child to role-play being assertive.
- Suggest to your teenager that true friends don't put pressure on each other and to not be afraid to lose a destructive friendship.
- Encourage your teen to stand up for what he believes in and to trust his instincts.



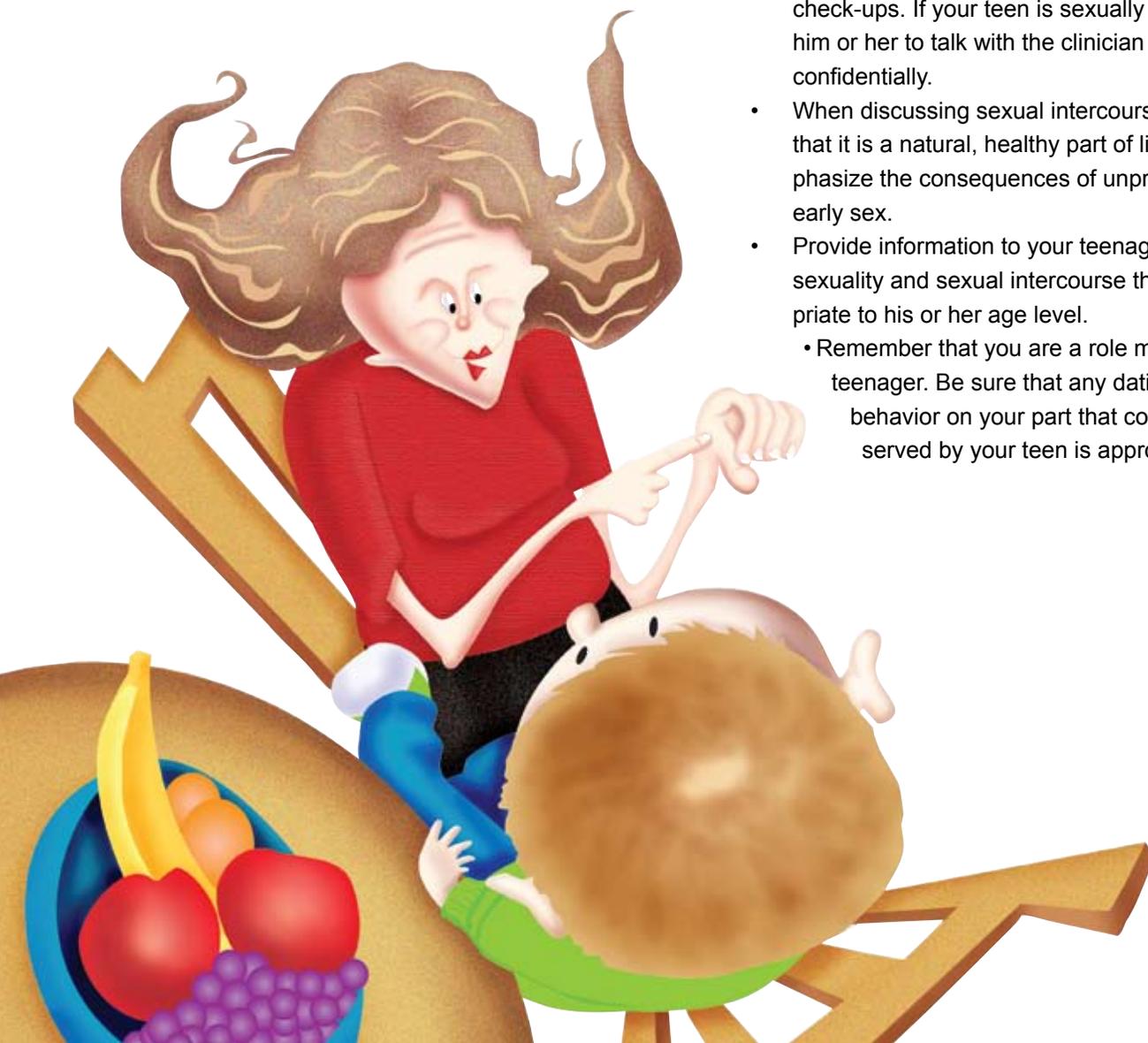
teen sexuality

During adolescence, hormones are raging and bodies are changing. As a result, sexual feelings begin to unfold. These feelings can sometimes be confusing and intense. This is often the time when a person comes to recognize their sexual orientation (heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual) and gender identity.¹⁶ Increasingly, this is a time of sexual exploration, and often, sexual intercourse. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 63% of seniors in high school have had sexual intercourse.¹⁷ With such a high percentage of teenagers being sexually active, it is imperative that parents talk with their

teenagers about sexual issues, such as contraception, sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy. This may be difficult for you (and for your teenager as well) but will ultimately lead to better communication between you. This will result in less stress for the family.

How do I encourage my teenager to approach her sexuality in a healthy way?¹⁸

- Start talking about sexuality and contraception at an early age. Do not wait until late adolescence to discuss it.
- Bring your teenager to a doctor for routine check-ups. If your teen is sexually active, allow him or her to talk with the clinician privately and confidentially.
- When discussing sexual intercourse, recognize that it is a natural, healthy part of life, but emphasize the consequences of unprotected and early sex.
- Provide information to your teenager about sexuality and sexual intercourse that is appropriate to his or her age level.
 - Remember that you are a role model for your teenager. Be sure that any dating or sexual behavior on your part that could be observed by your teen is appropriate.



conclusion



One of the best ways to decrease your stress is to proactively address parenting issues with your children. As a parent of a 14- to 18-year-old, creating family time and routines for activities and homework, make sure that your teen participates in household responsibilities, preparing nutritious meals and promoting exercise can be extremely helpful. During the teen years, privacy needs become paramount, peers have greater influence and sexuality is explored. Anything that you can do ahead of time to ease these significant transitions for your teenagers or help them through difficult situations will reduce stress and result in better emotional health for you and your family.

homework

1. What does proactive parenting mean to you?

2. What does an emotionally healthy home environment look like to you?

3. What are some ways you can keep your teenager safe?

5. What are some things you can do to increase and improve your communication with your teenager?

endnotes

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