



# Stress in children and teens

Children and teens experience stress just like the rest of us. In preschoolers, separation from parents can cause anxiety. As kids get older, academic and social pressures (especially from trying to fit in) create stress. Some stress can be positive because it provides energy to tackle a big test, presentation or sports event. However, too much stress can result in emotional and physical signs and symptoms that need to be addressed with a supportive approach.

## Sources of stress

Children and teens may experience stress due to:

- School issues including performance, fear of failure, worrying about fitting in, self-identity and bullying
- Family issues including parental separation, divorce, remarriage, financial problems, substance abuse, chronic illness or mental illness
- Physical issues including changes in their bodies, sports performance or injuries, other physical activity-related stress
- Media issues including traumatic events, fear of strangers and violence
- Negative thoughts and feelings about themselves
- Taking on too many activities or having too high expectations

## Symptoms of stress

The effects of stress can be both physical and emotional. If you think your child may be experiencing too much stress, here are signs to look for.

In children:

- Irritability or moodiness
- Withdrawing from activities that used to give them pleasure
- Routinely expressing worries
- Complaining more than usual about school
- Crying
- Displaying surprising fearful reactions
- Clinging to a parent or teacher
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Eating too much or too little

In teens:

- Significantly avoiding parents
- Abandoning long-term friendships for a new set of peers
- Expressing excessive hostility toward family members

## Helping kids and teens cope with stress

It is important for parents to teach kids to recognize and express their emotions, and to use healthy ways to cope with the stress they experience. Parents can:

- Listen carefully and encourage children to talk about feelings and worries
- Provide a safe and nurturing family environment
- Encourage physical activity and healthy eating habits
- Use positive encouragement and rewards
- Show active interest in children's school progress, activities and hobbies
- Talk to kids about how to anticipate and prepare for potentially stressful situations
- Provide reassurance that it is okay to feel angry, scared, lonely, or anxious and that other people share those feelings

Help is available. For additional information, visit [MagellanHealth.com/MYMH](https://www.MagellanHealth.com/MYMH)

Source: American Psychological Association

*This document is for your information only. It is not meant to give medical advice. It should not be used to replace a visit with a provider. Magellan Health does not endorse other resources that may be mentioned here.*

EAP-TIP-EE-MYMH-0009 (5/18) ©2018 Magellan Health, Inc.

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