

ASK the “Y” Guy



What stresses teens out the most?

Teenagers experience stress every day and can benefit from learning stress management skills. School demands and social relationships are UNLIKE anything we as parents have ever imagined. Technology, blurred boundaries, academic expectations, and the daily bombardment of hyper sexualized media are just some of the stressors facing teens today. Most teens do not have the skills needed to cope with teen anxiety and these stressors. Unchecked stress can lead to anxiety, depression, aggression, physical illness, and drug and/or alcohol use. The Partnership for a Drug Free America states that 73% of teenagers reported that school stress was the primary reason for drug use. Some sources of stress for teens might include:

- negative thoughts and feelings about themselves
- school demands and frustrations
- changes in their bodies
- problems with friends and/or peers at school
- unsafe living environment/neighborhood
- separation or divorce of parents
- chronic illness or severe problems in the family
- death of a loved one
- moving or changing schools
- taking on too many activities or having too high expectations
- family financial problems

(American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry)

When humans react to stress or danger a physiological response occurs in our minds and bodies to prepare us to respond to danger. This “fight, flight, or freeze” response includes faster heart and breathing rate, increased blood to muscles of arms and legs, cold or clammy hands and feet, upset stomach and/or a sense of dread.

Parents can help their teen in these ways:

- Monitor if stress is affecting their teen’s health, behavior, thoughts, or feelings
- Listen carefully to teens and watch for overloading
- Learn and model stress management skills
- Support involvement in sports and other pro-social activities

Teens can decrease stress with the following behaviors and techniques:

- Exercise and eat regularly
- Avoid excess caffeine intake which can increase feelings of anxiety and agitation
- Avoid illegal drugs, alcohol and tobacco
- Learn relaxation exercises (abdominal breathing and muscle relaxation techniques)
- Develop assertiveness training skills. For example, state feelings in polite firm and not overly aggressive or passive ways: (“I feel angry when you yell at me” “Please stop yelling.”)
- Rehearse and practice situations which cause stress. One example is taking a speech class if talking in front of a class makes you anxious
- Learn practical coping skills. For example, break a large task into smaller, more attainable tasks
- Decrease negative self talk: challenge negative thoughts about yourself with alternative neutral or positive thoughts. “My life will never get better” can be transformed into “My life will get better if I work at it and get some help”
- Learn to feel good about doing a competent or “good enough” job rather than demanding perfection from yourself and others
- Take a break from stressful situations. Activities like listening to music, talking to a friend, drawing, writing, or spending time with a pet can reduce stress
- Build a network of friends who help you cope in a positive way

By using these and other techniques, teenagers can begin to manage stress. If a teen talks about or shows signs of being overly stressed, a consultation with a child and adolescent psychiatrist or qualified mental health professional may be helpful.

Quick Fact: Teenagers need as much sleep as small children (about 10 hrs) while those over 65 need the least of all (about six hours). For the average adult aged 25-55, eight hours is considered optimal.

The Conference Council on Youth Ministries was at ROCK 2016 and explored the topic of stress with the youth that were present. Lots of people talked to the “Ask the CCYM ‘Y’ Guy,” and we had conversations with the youth as they flowed back and forth in front of our booth, asking them a few questions.

What are your top three stresses?

Mikayla Rath from CUMC said, “Depression, ADHD, graduating.” Faith Weber from Heggsville UMC said, “School (grades), friends (fighting), and family issues.”

Why is Stress so profound in youth?

Keberly McGuire from Union UMC told us, “We are trying to figure out where we are, everything [is] happening at once.” Alex Willar from Park School stated, “Everything [is made bigger] than it actually is.”

What is the first thing you think of when you hear the word “stress”?

Brandon Low from Hereford UMC Life Point was quick to say “The song

What do you want adults to know expectations run us further into the youths’ interests.”

We even managed to flag down a few adults

What do you worry about most with youth group? The Rev. Wanda Duckett from Mt. Zion

[the] authentic Jesus.” Michael Stewart from Christ the wrong direction as a [youth] group, losing out to Metropolitan District Superintendent, fears youth might,

We will be talking all of that feedback, as well as the help further CCYM’s research on youth stress.

We, the CCYM, gained a lot of information by the end of ROCK and participated and to the adults who are taking the time to talk about more information, contact Pam Bowen at pbowen@bwcumc.org.

– Written by Lydia Ditzenberger, president of the Ministry, and Michaela Creel, CCYM’s communications



blurted out, “Grey hair!” Ellie Harbin from ‘Stressed Out’ by 21 Pilots!”

about youth? Makayla mulled and said, “High ground.” Brandon said, “They should “speak to

to gather their thoughts.

inside and outside of the church? Or with your youth UMC in Baltimore is concerned that “they won’t meet

’ UMC in Baltimore is worried that they might be, “going in negativity.” The Rev. Cynthia Moore-Koikoi, the Baltimore-

“be getting bored and/or disenchanted with church.”

feedback from the post-it notes stuck to our “CCYM ‘Y’ Guy”, to

had tons of fun along the way. We are thankful to the youth who

stress with their youth. We invite you to become involved with CCYM. For

Baltimore-Washington Conference Council on Youth director.