

A Guide to understanding and coping with common mental health issues.

Issues covered in this guide include:

- Warning Signs of a Mental Health Crisis
- Coping With Anxiety
- Coping With Depression
- Coping With Stress
- Coping With Bullying & Cyber-bullying
- Active Listening and how it can help

Help And Assistance

If you are concerned about yourself, friends or family get immediate support and information 24/7 by FreeTexting **HELP** to **50015**. Texting 50015 is free of charge from any network and you can text this number even if you have no credit.

For information on Emergency Contacts, National Helplines, Local Support Groups and your nearest Places of Safety visit www.ineedhelp.ie

Always call 999 if someone is seriously ill or injured, and their life is at risk.

Gardaí / Ambulance / Fire call 999 or 112

Youth Suicide Prevention Ireland

Registered Charity 20070670

83A New Street, Killarney, County Kerry V93 FR59

☎ 1800 828 888 ✉ admin@yspi.ie

🌐 www.yspi.ie 🌐 www.ineedhelp.ie

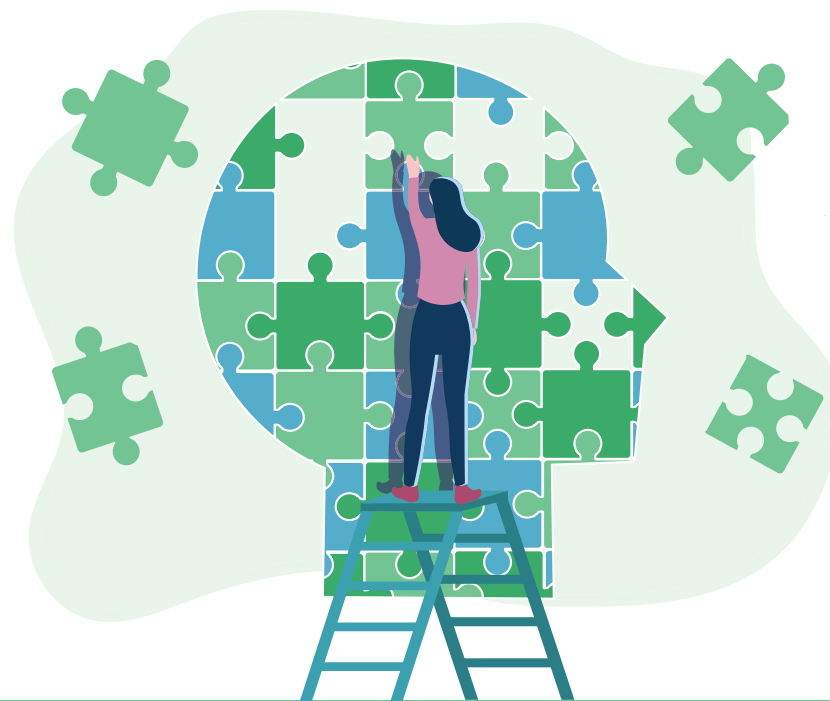
🌐 schools.yspi.ie 🌐 www.youthcrisiscounselling.ie

YSPI Youth
Suicide
Prevention
Ireland

YSPI Youth
Suicide
Prevention
Ireland

3

Coping *with* STRESS



COPING WITH DEPRESSION, ANXIETY AND STRESS
Short guides to coping with common mental health issues

Coping *with* STRESS

First Publication March 2022

Written by Dr Hannah Farnsworth

Published by Youth Suicide Prevention Ireland Publications Limited

This document is copyrighted to the authors and licensed to Youth Suicide Prevention Ireland Publications Limited on an exclusive basis. The Four Steps to Help Programme is republished by kind permission of Alan McKelvie and Anthony Philpott. Four Steps to Help Programme Copyright © Alan McKelvie and Anthony Philpott 2010 – 2022. All rights reserved. E&OE. Written by Dr Hannah Farnsworth, a retired Medical Practitioner (GMC 7072713).

This publication may not be copied, reproduced or changed in any way without the express written consent of the publishers. You must obtain written permission before editing or changing this document. Selling without prior written consent is prohibited. In all cases this notice must remain intact. This work cannot be retailed or resold without the publisher's written consent. Published by Youth Suicide Prevention Ireland Publications Limited.

All information herein is provided as an information resource about suicide prevention and research activities only. It is not the intention of Youth Suicide Prevention Ireland Publications Limited to provide specific treatment or care advice. Youth Suicide Prevention Ireland Publications Limited does not provide certification or accreditation for any counselling organisation, individual practitioners or treatment or care models that users may find out about through our information or publications or other materials provided by or through us. Youth Suicide Prevention Ireland Publications Limited does not endorse or recommend any of the service providers, agencies or organisations listed on any leaflet or publication provided by us or any other organisation. In no event shall liability exist to any user (or any third party who obtains access to the information) under any law for any loss or damage (including but not limited to direct, indirect, economic and consequential damage) in respect of any matter whatsoever related to any information in any website or leaflet or publication nor for the use of the information nor for actions taken or not taken as a result of information contained in this or any other websites leaflets or publications (including, without limitation, loss or damage caused by negligence). The material contained in this leaflet is provided for general information purposes only and does not constitute care, treatment or other professional advice. Due to the general nature of the information provided in the leaflet, should you require specific help, you should seek the assistance of an appropriately trained professional person. While every care has been taken in the preparation of the information contained in this leaflet, due to the nature of the information and the processes of publication, the information may not be complete, correct or up to date. Information contained in this leaflet which has been provided by recognised third parties is provided in good faith and no liability shall exist for any errors or omissions contained.

Stress is a normal part of life. It can affect people of all ages, including teenagers, and often it won't last for long. However, sometimes stress can last for a long time, and in this case it may start to affect how well you feel physically and mentally.

Luckily, there are plenty of strategies that can help you to both cope with the symptoms of stress, and manage it so that you feel less stressed.

What is Stress?

Stress is a natural response to certain scenarios. In some cases, stress can give you some motivation to get on with a task, such as revising for an exam or doing more training before a sports' event. This short-term stress can be positive as it drives you to do the best you can.

However, sometimes you might feel disproportionately stressed about something that shouldn't cause you too much stress, such as speaking in front of an audience. Public speaking can be nerve-wracking, and if it doesn't go well you may feel frustrated or embarrassed. However, objectively nothing terrible will happen when you give a speech. Everyday events shouldn't cause you to feel so stressed that your mental health starts to suffer.

If stress lasts for a long time, or you feel stressed about small things, this emotion is no longer healthy. People who have chronic or severe stress may start to notice worrying physical or emotional symptoms, and so it is important to manage this.



How Do I Recognise Stress?

Everyone experiences stress differently, but it commonly makes you feel like you are under pressure, anxious, overwhelmed or exhausted.

There are many causes of stress. If you are going through any of the following, then it is natural that you might be feeling stressed or anxious.

- Problems at home such as your parents separating, or difficulties with your siblings
- Increased pressure to perform well at school, college, university, or in your job
- Worrying about money, or living in poverty due to financial difficulties
- Being bullied at school
- Having friendship problems or finding it hard to fit in socially
- Moving to a new school
- Having a physical illness
- Feeling under pressure from friends to try alcohol, use drugs, date or have sex.



Stress can be caused by a very wide range of events or situations. If you feel stressed but none of the above factors are relevant, this does not mean that it can't be stress related. Some people are more susceptible to stress, so an event that wouldn't worry one person can cause an extreme stress response in another.

Mental Symptoms of Stress

The most common mental symptoms of stress include:

- Excessive or frequent worrying
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feeling indecisive or unable to make a decision
- Being more irritable than usual
- Being more forgetful.



Physical Symptoms of Stress

When you are stressed, you may notice physical symptoms including:

- Headaches
- Feeling dizzy
- Noticing that your muscles feel tense or tight
- Feeling your heart racing or beating faster than usual
- Getting stomach aches or feeling sick
- Your GP may tell you that your blood pressure is higher than usual.



Behavioural Symptoms of Stress

Stress can cause you to behave in a way that is out of character for you. You may notice if you or a friend:

- Start withdrawing from social activities such as clubs or parties
- Neglect responsibilities including chores or personal hygiene
- Are more bad tempered than usual, including being snappy, angry or aggressive
- Sleep more or less than usual
- Eat more or less than usual.

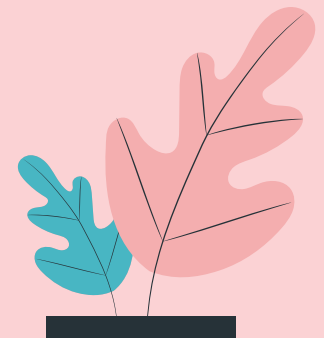


What Can I Do to Deal with Stress?

It is important not only to take steps to deal with stress when it occurs, but also to take preventative action to help you reduce the impact of future high-stress situations. If you can learn to manage stress, you can avoid becoming overwhelmed and build your resilience levels.

Prioritise Getting Enough Sleep

In your teenage years, you need 8 to 10 hours of sleep each night. Not getting enough sleep can leave you feeling irritable and make it more difficult to concentrate. Being tired can also make it far harder to deal with stressful situations. Furthermore, if you are struggling to concentrate at school because you are tired, you may start to fall behind, and this can make you feel even more stressed!



To get enough sleep, avoid looking at your phone before bed, as this can disrupt natural feelings of sleepiness. Make sure that your bedroom feels like a comfortable, safe space. Set a reasonable bedtime and try to wake up around the same time each day to get into a good sleep routine.

Be Social Media Aware

It can be very difficult to disconnect from tech and digital devices. Try to be aware of the amount of time you spend on your phone. If you are responding to texts while doing

your homework, this distraction can consume a significant amount of time and make it feel like your schoolwork is taking forever. Put your phone to one side when working, so that you can get tasks done efficiently.

To avoid becoming overwhelmed by social media, switch your phone off at night. If you have concerns about cyberbullying, harmful content or internet trolls, limit exposure and speak to a responsible adult if you need help.

Keep Active

Physical activity is a great way to reduce stress. Exercise improves your physical health, boosts your mood, increases energy levels and promotes better sleep. Exercise also stimulates the release of endorphins which make you feel good afterwards. You don't have to be a marathon runner; a brisk walk round the block, a bike ride or an online dance or yoga session are great, too. Doing two to three hours of exercise each week will really help you to start feeling better.

Talk to Someone

When you feel stressed, you might become withdrawn and start to feel isolated. However, sharing how you feel can help to lift the burden from your shoulders. Choose someone you trust, such as a close friend, a parent, teacher, health professional or a support organisation. Consider counselling if stress is starting to affect your quality of life.

Practice Breathing Exercises

Breathing exercises can offer immediate relief from acute stress. A simple exercise is to breathe in through your nose gently and slowly, and exhale through your mouth. Focus on repeating this slow, continual cycle for 3 to 5 minutes. You do not have to hold your breath, as this can feel especially difficult when you are stressed. These exercises can help you to feel calmer, and better able to deal with stressful situations.



Spend Time Outside

Getting outside is a proven stress-buster. A walk to the park, a stroll through the woods, a trip to the beach, or even just sitting in the garden can expose you to fresh air, sunshine or even rain. Being outside in nature has also been proven to lower blood pressure, which can become raised when you are stressed.

Try Meditating or Mindfulness

Regular meditation or mindfulness are great ways to reduce stress, improve your mood and help you focus. There are many apps that offer guided meditation or mindfulness sessions, so that you can sit quietly and listen while someone guides you through a gentle, quiet session of relaxation. Alternatively, you may prefer to join an in-person meditation class, or watch a guided video on YouTube.

Keep Doing the Activities You Love

When you feel stressed, it can be easy to give up on the things you love. You might feel like you don't have time to see friends when you have coursework hanging over you. But making sure you leave time for friends, family, art, music, laughing, playing with your pet, or going to clubs is vital. These activities are also likely to take your mind off the source of stress, and help you to feel less isolated, too.

Get Organised

When you feel stressed, you might feel like you are completely overwhelmed. Getting organised can help you feel more in control. Make sure you update a calendar, write down a list of important tasks, or stay on top of your homework. Leaving everything until the last minute, or forgetting to do something, can quickly make you feel even more stressed.



Practice Affirmations

Writing down positive affirmations can help you to develop a more positive attitude. Focus on your strengths, and write down positive statements about yourself. This could include “I always try my best” or “I am a good friend”. Repeat these statements every day, and you will start to develop a more positive attitude.

I have a friend who is stressed. What can I do to help them?

If reading about stress makes you wonder if your friend might be stressed, there are several ways that you can help them:

- Help your friend to recognise that they might be stressed
- See if they can identify what is causing them to feel stressed
- Actively listen to your friend when they talk
- Help them to get physically active
- Invite them to social events, even if they have previously declined an invitation.

If you are concerned about your friend, you do not have to help them on your own. Speak to them to see if they have thought about speaking to an adult about how they feel, such as a parent, teacher, counsellor or another professional.

I think my child is stressed, what are the signs?

It can sometimes be obvious when a child is stressed, but some signs are more subtle. Occasional irritability can be normal in the teenage years, but if your child's personality has significantly altered, or they appear anxious, withdrawn or overwhelmed, they could be experiencing stress.



Other signs of stress in children and teenagers include:

- Worsening of behaviour
- Change to sleep pattern
- Change to appetite
- Significant weight loss or weight gain
- Dramatic changes in academic performance
- Stomach aches or nausea
- Headaches
- Becoming socially isolated
- Giving up activities they used to love.



What should I do if my child is stressed?

The teenage years are when children often learn to manage stress. While some children seem to adapt quickly, others can become deeply affected by stressful situations.

Talking openly with your child about how they are feeling may help them to open up to you, especially if you approach the conversation in a supportive and non-judgmental manner. If your child can tell you what is causing them to feel stressed, you may be able to offer practical advice if they ask for it.



If your child doesn't want to talk to you, try not to be disheartened and don't give up. They may find it easier to talk to someone impartial such as a teacher, counsellor, or their doctor. They may be happy for you to help set this up.

Continue to encourage your child to keep seeing their friends, going to clubs, and completing their schoolwork on time if possible. If this is the first time your child has had to manage their own time, you may be able to help them with prioritising and keeping organised. Helping your child to eat well, get enough sleep and remain physically active may also help them to manage stressful situations.

Help and Assistance

If you are concerned about yourself, friends or family you should contact your GP or Out of Hours Service immediately.

You can also get immediate support and information 24/7 by

FreeText HELP to 50015

Texting 50015 is free of charge from any network and you can text this number even if you have no credit. This service is fully confidential and YSPI has no information on mobile numbers that use the FreeText service



For information on:

- Emergency Contacts
- National Helplines
- Local Support Groups
- Directions to your nearest GP or out of hours clinic
- Directions to your nearest safe place or refuge

 www.ineedhelp.ie

Always call 999 if someone is seriously ill or injured, and their life is at risk.

Gardaí / Ambulance / Fire call 999 or 112

About Youth Suicide Prevention Ireland

Youth Suicide Prevention Ireland was founded in 2007 as there were no national charities focusing specifically on the problems and issues of youth suicide and self-harm in Ireland. We now provide a range of services aimed at mental health awareness and suicide prevention amongst teenagers.



We run our “Four Steps to Help” Programme for schools and colleges around Ireland which provides Zoom workshops. We also have a video workshop presented by John Sharpson that any organisation can book through our website at schools.yspi.ie/video.php We provide a wide range of free information including our “Let’s Talk About Mental Health” magazine delivered to schools and organisations as well as the “Coping With” series of mental health guides.

We also operate a **24/7 FreeText Crisis Information Service** and fund a Youth Crisis Counselling Service.

Full details are available at www.yspi.ie

You can help us save more young lives by donating to our work or by joining a fundraising event.



To make a donation please visit

donations.yspi.ie



or to try a Skydive For Life by visiting

skydive.yspi.ie

