

## Managing Stress

With the holiday season behind us, we enter the second half of the school year and begin thinking about the future. Many students are beginning to feel the pressure of applying for college, preparing for graduation. Adding that to the everyday pressures of adolescence, and students can easily become overwhelmed.

Fortunately, there are a few simple things parents can do to help manage stress more effectively. By modeling healthy stress management, parents also provide a powerful example for their children. Many of the stress management strategies applied by adults work equally well for young people. Here are a few ideas:

1. **Reflection.** It is helpful for families to routinely evaluate the level of stress in their lives. We often do not realize how much stress we are facing until symptoms emerge (e.g., fatigue, low motivation, irritability, and poor concentration). Reflection is the first step toward determining which activities are enhancing our mental wellness and which ones are impeding it.
2. **Time together.** Social contact is known to be a potent antidote to stress. We contribute greatly to the mental health of our students by making a point of connecting with them. These connections can be formed and maintained in ordinary ways such as eating meals together.
3. **Take time for yourself.** Planning ahead and setting priorities can help us avoid feeling pressured. Sometimes it may be necessary to let go of tasks or ask others for help. Remember that there is nothing wrong with scheduling time for relaxation and fun. Taking a class in meditation, finding time to take a nap or engaging in a healthy activity are all consistent with good self-care.
4. **Emotionally competent parenting.** Parents who manage their stress and emotions well tend to have children who do the same. When we are attuned to our own feelings and verbalize our approach to solving problems, we serve as models for effective coping. By encouraging students to talk about their feelings, adults can help develop their capacity to deal with stress.
5. **Applying “stress busters.”** Setting and completing an attainable goal, helping someone in need, eating right, and engaging in aerobic exercise have been all been shown to reduce stress.
6. **Seeking help.** In spite of our best efforts, life’s difficulties can sometimes overwhelm us. When this happens, we need to have the courage to request and receive help. If feelings of anxiety, sadness, frustration, and/or anger are causing stress in your life do not hesitate to contact a student support professional at school if you believe you and/or your child need assistance.