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Stress Awareness: Managing End of School Year Stress in Teens
Tips for managing teen stress during testing season

SPRINGFIELD, OH (April 20, 2021) – April is National Stress Awareness Month, and Mental Health Recovery Board of Clark, Greene & Madison Counties (MHRB) is sharing tips on how to manage a particularly stressful time of year for parents and teens: End-of-year testing season. Standardized testing is set to resume in schools across the nation after a temporary pause due to the coronavirus, according to an announcement from the U.S. Education Department last month.

This year’s test scores are intended to serve a remedial purpose rather than a punitive one, such as identifying gaps in learning or schools that need additional funding. But that doesn’t change the fact that standardized testing is stressful for students on top of an already stressful year, according to Dr. Greta Mayer, CEO of MHRB.

“It is well documented that students of every age are aware of why testing is important – because school funding or college admissions rely on it, for example – and that leads to pressure to perform well,” said Dr. Mayer. “While stress is a normal and healthy experience that helps us grow and can improve performance, persistent or chronic stress is a serious matter. Constantly having to adapt to a changing environment during COVID-19 – can not only significantly impact a student’s mental and physical health, but it can also cause a ‘tornado’ effect of impacting test performance and creating additional stress.”

To stop the downward spiral, Dr. Mayer recommends parents and teens learn to recognize the signs of stress and identify healthy ways to cope. In teenagers, signs of stress can often be misconstrued as teenage rebellion. Dr. Mayer encouraged parents to consider stress as a cause, first and let their teens know what you observe and that you are willing to help them address it.

“Teenagers are still developing the tools and words to express themselves clearly. When they’re stressed and can’t express that directly, it may show up as irritability or anger, sudden changes in behavior, trouble sleeping, neglecting responsibilities, a change in appetite, and/or getting sick more frequently,” said Dr. Mayer. “As parents, experiencing that behavior can be frustrating, but it is a problem and one that can be addressed.”

Dr. Mayer suggested the following tips to help teens cope with a stressful testing season:

- Prioritize getting enough rest. Teens need 8-10 hours of sleep each night and should avoid keeping digital devices like phones or tablets in the bedroom.

- Exercise regularly. Physical activity is an essential stress reliever for people of all ages, and can alleviate some of the physical symptoms of stress.
- Talk – or write – about it. Telling a trusted adult or friend about a stressful situation can help put things in perspective and find solutions. Similarly, expressing feelings in writing has been shown to alleviate symptoms of anxiety and depression.
- Learn mindfulness or stress-busting breathing exercises. Having a tool ready to use in stressful situations – like in the middle of a test – can help address stress before it becomes overwhelming.

Parents can set the example for their children by modeling healthy coping behavior, combatting negative thinking, and letting teens take the lead on solving their own problems.

“The most important thing a parent can do to boost their teen’s self-confidence and promote resilient mental health is to let them do their own low-stakes problem solving. But parents also need to lead by example – such as knowing when a situation is too much to solve on your own and when you need outside help,” said Dr. Mayer. “As a parent, remember to give yourself a break and to reach out to supportive adults when you need a hand. It’s not up to you to fix your teen’s problems.”

For more information about mental health and substance use resources in Clark, Greene and Madison counties, please visit the MHRB website at www.mhrb.org.

ABOUT MHRB

Mental Health Recovery Board of Clark, Greene & Madison Counties (MHRB) assists partners, stakeholders, residents, and anyone at risk of mental health or substance use concerns in our three-county area, providing pathways to mental health and addiction services. In collaboration with more than 20 care providers, the board advocates for the mental health needs and facilitates delivery of quality care for all ages, regardless of income or ability to pay.

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