Stress and Resilience in Adolescence: Building Healthy Minds for Life’s Transitions

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The Stressed Years of Their Lives
Helping Your Kid Survive and Thrive During Their College Years
B. Janet Hibbs, Ph.D. & Anthony Rostain, M.D.
Introduction
- STRESS & ANXIETY AMONG YOUTH
- DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS OF ADOLESCENCE
- SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL READINESS
- COPING TO MANAGE RISKS
- EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING
- FAMILY ISSUES
- OVERCOMING MINDSET BARRIERS
- SAFETY NETS FOR STUDENTS
Fault Lines in the World of Today’s Youth

Mental Health of Gen Z

Least likely to say their mental health is excellent or very good

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gen Z</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millennials</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen Xers</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boomers</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older Adults</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% reporting excellent or very good mental health

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Fault Lines in the World of Today’s Youth

Anxiety and depression top list of problems teens see among their peers

% of teens saying each of the following is a ____ among people their age in the community where they live

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Major problem</th>
<th>Minor problem</th>
<th>Not a problem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety and depression</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug addiction</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking alcohol</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teen pregnancy</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gangs</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey of U.S. teen ages 13-17 conducted Sept. 17 – Nov. 25, 2018

PEW RESEARCH CENTER STUDY
Sources of Anxiety for Gen Z

- Historical events since turn of the century
  - 9/11 – Afghan and Iraq wars
  - Economic recession of 2008
  - School shootings
- “Globalization” - economic uncertainty & competition
- 24/7 news cycle – continuous media exposure
- Internet and its influences on identity development
- Growing concerns about global warming
- Institutional stresses: schools, colleges, universities
Anxiety in Modern Life

A civic culture whose prominent affect is FEAR

Creates widespread cognitive distortions and promotes excessive anxiety in everyone
The Stress Response

The diagram illustrates the relationship between demands and ability, highlighting the stress response. At the optimum point, individuals are effective and creative. As demands increase, ability decreases, leading to various states such as overstimulated, frustrated, bored, overworked, and burned out. The graph shows the transition from effective and creative to overstimulated, frustrated, and eventually burned out as demands rise.
Stress and Anxiety

**The Anxiety Cycle**

1. **Stress**
2. Body automatically responds with physical symptoms
3. Misinterpretation of the body’s response as something dangerous and significant—increase in worry & rumination
4. Body floods with stress hormones and we enter fight or flight mode (panic may occur)
5. Relief (within 10-15 minutes)
6. As we reflect on what just happened, we become afraid about it happening again. We attempt to control any factors that led to the panic in order to stay safe (*Reinforces the fear*)
Dysfunctional Thinking

Thoughts
I am not good enough
People will judge me

Behaviour
Drink too much, avoid interaction, eat too much, or avoid going stay home

Physical Sensation
Tight chest, headache, tired, mind numb

Feelings
Anxious, upset, depressed, lonely

Thinking Error Cycle
Resiliency:

- “The ability to recover strength, spirits, good humor, etc. quickly; buoyancy”
- Reduces the impact of adverse effects of disappointments, setbacks and the curveballs life throws
- Resiliency is not only an individual feature - it is embedded in the contexts of our families, communities and social contexts
Social Emotional Readiness

• Conscientiousness
• Self Management
• Interpersonal Skills
• Self-control
• “Grit”
• Risk Management
• Self-acceptance
• Open mindset/Help-seeking
1) **Conscientiousness** = Owning one’s actions

- Saying what you mean – doing what you say – owning up to your mistakes
- Vignette - Alan
2) **Self Management** = Ability to take care of day-to-day activities on one’s own

- Waking up on time – preparing for the day – remembering tasks and following through on them – developing a routine – making adjustments as needed – falling asleep at a reasonable time
3) **Interpersonal Skills** = Making & keeping friends - getting along with others – handling conflicts appropriately

- Social skills inventory: friendship circle (clique), social strengths vs vulnerabilities, level of trust and intimacy, ability to handle disagreements, romantic involvements, etc.
- Internet/social media: usage, profile, problems
4) **Self-control** = Ability to set limits and resist urges/desires

- Marshmallow test
We value self-control
Self Control Results From the Interaction of Two Processes

“Will power is trying hard not to do something that you really want to do”
Frog and Toad Together, A. Lobel, 1979
Self Control Results From the Interaction of Two Processes

Different developmental trajectories characterize the growth of sensation-seeking and impulse control during adolescence. Duckworth and Steinberg (2015) *Child Dev Perspectives*
4) **Self-control** = Ability to set limits and resist urges/desires

- Marshmallow test
- Graded, practical experiences in exercising autonomy
  - Self-limiting time spent on social media/internet
  - Maintaining healthy eating habits
  - Managing sleep-wake cycle
5) **“Grit”** = Ability to cope with frustration, disappointment and failure and to persist in the face of setbacks & obstacles

- Persistence toward goal attainment – motivation in the face of delayed gratification or hardships – key component of resilience – can be fostered via experiential learning
Recent studies of delayed gratification: “Grit” or persistence and stamina (Duckworth, et al, 2007)

**Key Question:** Why do some individuals achieve more than others of the same intelligence?

**Grit** – “perseverance and passion for long-term goals”

"sticking with things over the very long term until you master them."
“Grit”
“Perseverance is not a long race; it is many short races one after another.”

Walter Elliott
“Perseverance is not a long race; it is many short races one after another.”

Walter Elliott
Social Emotional Readiness

6) **Risk Management** = Ability to have fun without taking too many risks – acceptable versus dangerous experimentation
LAST TWO DECADES OF ALCOHOL, CIGARETTE, AND ILLICIT DRUG USE*

*Past 30 day use.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1994</th>
<th>2014</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th Graders</td>
<td>37.4%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th Graders</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8th Graders</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cigarettes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>12th Graders</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10th Graders</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>4.0%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Illicit drugs</td>
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The National Institute on Drug Abuse is a component of the National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NIDA supports most of the world’s research on the health aspects of drug abuse and addiction. Fact sheets on the health effects of drugs of abuse and information on NIDA research and other activities can be found at www.drugabuse.gov.
Perception of Marijuana Harm

**MARIJUANA: AS PERCEIVED HARM DROPS, USE GOES UP**

- **1993**: 35.6% using, 26.0% perceived harm
- **2003**: 34.9% using, 26.6% perceived harm
- **2013**: 36.4% using, 19.5% perceived harm

*Past-year use in 12th graders.

(see great risk in smoking marijuana occasionally)
Insidious Impact of Shiny Screens

“The complete dominance of the smartphone among teens has had a ripple effect across every area of iGen’ers’ lives from the social interactions to their mental health. They are the first generation for whom the Internet access has been constantly available, right there in their hands.”

-- Jean Twenge, iGen
Continuous Partial Attention  (Linda Stone, 1998)

- The (now common) state of having ongoing multiple simultaneous attentional pressures.

- “It is motivated by a desire to be a LIVE node on the network. Another way of saying this is that we want to connect and be connected.”

“There's no true "free time" when you carry a smartphone. Today's rarest commodity is the chance to be alone with your own thoughts.”
7) **Self-acceptance** = Ability to accept one’s faults, tolerate one’s mistakes and deal with problems without excessive guilt/shame

- Destructive perfectionism
- Myth of “infinite perfect-ability”
Learning From Mistakes Promotes Resilience
8) **Open mindset/Help-seeking** = Readiness to ask for help when things aren’t going well – overcoming “denial” that anything could be wrong – accepting the notion that self-help or “tincture of time” isn’t sufficient
SELF-COMPASSION
ON THE BENEFITS OF KINDNESS

I Don't Have To Feel Better Than Others To Feel Good About Myself

Learn How To See Self Esteem Through The Lens of Self-Love and Mindfulness and Cultivate The Courage To Be You
Executive Functioning

Definition

“The frontal cortex (and EFs) makes you do the harder thing when it’s the right thing to do” (p.45).

EF usually emerges as a single factor ("how efficiently do you do what you set out to do"), but there are five semi-distinct domains that emerge in ratings of daily functioning:

- Self-management to time
- Self-organization and problem solving
- Self-restraint (inhibition)
- Self-motivation
- Emotional regulation

• EF skills should be demonstrated “in vivo” prior to end of senior year
• Gap year may be a good way to practice EF skills
• “Implementation intention strategies” are very helpful for achieving immediate and long term goals that can be elusive
• Weekly monitoring plan should be instituted at outset of transition to college to increase likelihood of success
• Beware the power of social media, online gaming, YouTube, etc.
Social emotional readiness combines with executive functioning to produce:

• Good feelings about yourself
• Insight into interpersonal situations
• Ability to realistically evaluate others
• Attentiveness and openness to experience
• Flexibility in problem solving
• Integration of thoughts, feelings and behaviors
Family Stress/Anxiety Cycle

- Stressful Event
- Child Senses Danger
- Parental Stress
- "polarization"
- "overprotection"
- Child Becomes Anxious
- Parent "Rescues" Child
Intensive Parenting Mistakes

- **Over-Preparation**
  - Taking too many AP classes and extra-curricular activities
  - Overemphasizing grades and test scores
  - Pushing kids to excel in every domain of life

- **Over-Parenting**
  - Helicopter, snow-plowing or “curling” parenting
  - Protecting, hovering, scaffolding to excess

- **Over-Investment**
  - “Wanting the best” = losing sight of one’s motivations
  - Child’s achievements = fulfillment of parents’ dreams and/or unfulfilled desires
Intensive Parenting Mistakes

Impact on Children

• Destructive Perfectionism
• Abject Fear of Failure – Risk Avoidance
• Self-Branding – emphasis on “externals”
• Anxiety and Depression
What Runs in the family?
Fighting Stigma

SUICIDE/ATTEMPT
SUBSTANCE ABUSE
AUTISM
EATING DISORDER
LEARNING CHALLENGES
PERSONALITY DISORDER

SCHIZOPHRENIA
BIPOLAR ILLNESS
DEPRESSION
ANXIETY
ADHD
PHOBIA
Challenging Mental Health Stigma

Message to parents:

1. Learn about mental health and illness by educating yourself and others.

2. See the individual not the illness - strive to listen, understand, and tell your own story to others. Get out of the shadow of shame.


4. Take action - spread the word, raise awareness, and make a difference.
Successful Transition

- Clarifying expectations
- Enhancing communication
- Forging alliances
- Thinking through the specific steps
- Learning advocacy skills
So, is Max Ready?
And he sailed off, through night and day, and in and out of weeks, and almost over a year...
*Where the Wild things are,* M. Sendak
Challenges Facing College Students

Developmental Skills

- Balancing independence & interdependence
- Self-awareness, identity formation
- Mastering new technologies
- Facing anxiety about the future
Challenges Facing College Students

Coping Skills

- Time management, organizational skills
- Decision-making, priority-setting, implementation
- Motivation, persistence
Overcoming Mindset Barriers
Chambliss & Takas, 2014

FEARS OF:

• Not Belonging (“social rejection”)
• Not Making It (“perfectionism”)
• Being Different (“mental health issues”)
• Disappointing Parents (“family pressures”)

Overcoming Mindset Barriers
Chambliss & Takas, 2014
Interaction with Friends Promotes Resilience

- Real-time friends protect against loneliness
  - Provide a buffer from “screen/virtual, always happy friends”
  - Promote Social bonding
- Most friendships begin within a group of 40 or fewer
- Dorms with shared hall bathrooms are more social than suites
- Making friends first year is trial and error
- Make new friends, but keep the old...
Table 1
Summary of findings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposed negative effects of personal computing technology use on mental health</th>
<th>Proposed positive effects of personal computing technology use on mental health</th>
<th>Existing technology-enabled interventions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fear of missing out</td>
<td>• Active engagement with peers</td>
<td>• Online support groups and message boards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hyper-connectivity with peers</td>
<td>• Expanded social networks</td>
<td>• Module-based web interventions (e.g., MoodGYM, Beating the Blues)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Peer comparison</td>
<td>• Venues for personal disclosures</td>
<td>• Skill-building apps (e.g., Headspace, Pacifica) for resilience, coping skills, mindfulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Decreased face-to-face social interactions</td>
<td>• Peers can serve as “gatekeepers”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Impairment of social skill development</td>
<td>• Access to mental health intervention programs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Decreased inhibition of anti-social behavior</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mental Health Trends on Campus

CLICC Trends (Check All That Apply): Percentage of Clients with Each Concern from 2013 to 2018

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Stress
- Family
- Academic performance
- Relationship problem (specific)
- Interpersonal functioning
- Self-esteem/confidence
- Sleep
- Trauma
- Adjustment to new environment
- Social isolation

Center for Collegiate Mental Health, 2018 Annual Report from 150 colleges surveyed
• College mental problems, (e.g. depression, anxiety, and eating disorders) are associated with lower GPA and higher probability of dropping out of college.

• Anxiety is the most common problem cited

• >80% of college students felt overwhelmed by all they had to do, and 45% felt things were hopeless.

• 1/3 of all college students report having felt so depressed that they had trouble functioning in the last 12 months.

• Minority students are less likely to seek treatment.

ACTIVE MINDS, 2016
• Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death among college students, claiming the lives of 1,100 students each year.

• 67% of college students tell a friend they are feeling suicidal before telling anyone else.

• More than half of college students have had suicidal thoughts and 1 in 10 students seriously consider attempting suicide.

• Half of the students who have suicidal thoughts never seek counseling or treatment.

• 80–90% of college students who die by suicide were not receiving help from their college counseling centers.

ACTIVE MINDS, 2016
Reasons Cited for Not Getting Help

- “My problems are not serious enough to warrant assistance.” (66%)
- “I don’t have enough time.” (27 %)
- “I prefer to manage my problems on my own.” (18%)
- “I’d rather seek help from my family or friends.” (16%)
- “There are pragmatic barriers to getting treatment.” (16%)

Survey of students at elevated risk for suicide, *Journal of Am College Health*, 2013
Beyond Individual Resilience: Peer, Campus and Familial Contexts

- Peer Group (Who You Turn to First)
- College Campus Culture (Support and Goodness of Fit)
- Parental and Extended Familial Context (Are Important!)
Families Are Important
Families Are Important

- Family connectedness and support are protective against depression and suicidal ideation & behavior among all college-aged youth:
  - General population surveys
  - Youth with history of sexual abuse
  - Sexual and gender minority youth

- Higher family functioning is protective against onset of substance use disorders

- Presence of supportive siblings has a protective impact and may compensate for lack of parental support
Tips for Parents to Promote Resilience

• Listen, don’t lecture, don’t judge or be dismissive
• Be tolerant and forgiving of others’ shortcomings as well as your own
• Resist the urge to overprotect
• Remain engaged
• Support your student’s decision to get help when needed
• Take care of yourself, too
• Remain hopeful, remembering that life is curvy, not linear
• College student support and mental health services play a critical role in building functional safety nets for students with learning difficulties and mental health challenges

• Policies that promote *communication* among key stakeholders offer the best chances for success

• Parent/family involvement early in the conversation is vital

• Parents/families need to be educated about preventive efforts and about ways to be helpful when crises arise
THE CHALLENGE FOR ALL OF US - Changing the paradigm

• Promote health and wellbeing in youth and families and teach optimism and hope rather than fear and over-riding anxiety

• Introduce *Mental Health Education* – innovative K-12 curricula to promote resiliency in children and youth
THE CHALLENGE FOR ALL OF US - Changing the paradigm

• Assess each young person’s readiness for independence especially in the face of pre-existing mental health risk factors

• Create opportunities for dialogue and reflective discussions with parents and youth about the goals of education and the importance of becoming a well-rounded, healthy individual
One Definition of Resilience

“I’m going to graduate on time no matter how long it takes me”

Anonymous college student
Final Word

Do or do not. There is no try.
—Yoda
“This book is a hopeful and essential guide that promotes emotional health and mental fitness in young people. The authors address mental illness and offer models for prevention, treatment and recovery. A must-read for parents, educators and clinicians.”


**The Stressed Years**

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**About Authors**

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B. Janet Hibbs, LMFT, Ph.D. is a family psychologist, and AAMFT supervisor, who has held faculty positions for more than 15 years in graduate programs for psychologists and marital and family therapists. She is the author of Try to See It My Way: Being Fair in Love and Marriage.

[www.thestressedyears.com](http://www.thestressedyears.com)