

# Nuggets from School Counsellor

Parent Link

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# **What are the common challenges experienced by teenage girls?**





# AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

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## **American Psychological Association Survey Shows Teen Stress Rivals That of Adults**

*Stress in America™ survey finds similar patterns of unhealthy behavior in teens and adults, especially during school year*

WASHINGTON—American teens report experiences with stress that follow a similar pattern as adults, according to a new survey released today by the American Psychological Association (APA). In fact, during the school year, teens say their stress level is higher than levels reported by adults in the past month. For teens and adults alike, stress has an impact on healthy behaviors like exercising, sleeping well and eating healthy foods.

Findings from Stress in America™: Are Teens Adopting Adults' Stress Habits?, which was conducted online by Harris Interactive Inc., (on behalf of APA) among 1,950 adults and 1,018 teens in the U.S. in August 2013, suggest that unhealthy behaviors associated with stress may begin manifesting early in people's lives.

Teens report that their stress level during the school year far exceeds what they believe to be healthy (5.8 versus 3.9 on a 10-point scale) and tops adults' average reported stress levels (5.8 for teens versus 5.1 for adults). Even during the summer — between Aug. 3 and Aug. 31, 2013, when interviewing took place — teens reported their stress during the past month at levels higher than what they believe is healthy (4.6 versus 3.9 on a 10-point scale). Many teens also report feeling overwhelmed (31 percent) and depressed or sad (30 percent) as a result of stress. More than one-third of teens report fatigue or feeling tired (36 percent) and nearly one-quarter of teens (23 percent) report skipping a meal due to stress.



## Examining sources of stress:

sources of stress	total	
	1.00 all	%
	N	
School	1,065	55%
Money	451	23%
Personal relationships	455	23%
Peer Pressure	460	24%
Parents	539	28%
Alcohol or drugs	83	4%
Loneliness	452	23%
Work	307	16%
Others, Please specify 1	289	15%
Others, Please specify 2	169	9%
did not indicate any stressor	59	3%
Total	1,941	100%

The largest proportion of respondents reported that school was a source of stress (55%). Parents (28%), peer pressure (24%), personal relationships (23%), loneliness (23%) and money (23%) were also highly reported sources of stress.

Other responses to sources of stress are school related (study, teachers, homework) at 66% of other responses, and friendship problems (5% or other responses).

Only 3% indicated no stressor.

The Singapore Youth Resilience Survey was conducted in 5 local secondary schools (1,941 students) from early 2010 to mid 2011. Survey found links between the resilience, stress factors, emotions at home, willingness to try at-risk behaviors and social skills.



# Common Teen Concerns

## Common Worries

- Getting along with parents at home; how well their parents get along
- Not fitting in or getting along with peers; loss of friendship
- Getting good grades, CCA performance
- How they look
- Meaning of life

## Common Challenges

- Maintaining energy & mental space
- Overcoming unhelpful thinking patterns & inner critic; being self-soothing
- Learning to be discerning in speech and behaviour
- Managing negative feedback & conflict

## Highest need: Love and belonging:

- Yearn for unconditional love & acceptance from family; a harmonious home
- Want to be included/ cared for by peers

**How can we  
connect/ communicate/ support  
our teenage daughters?**



**Where  
attention,  
assumptions &  
interventions  
usually are**

**Behaviour  
Coping  
Feelings  
Feelings about feelings  
Perceptions  
Expectations  
Yearnings  
Self**

**Less visible  
or  
understood;  
demands  
empathy for  
suitable  
response**



Suppose the iceberg is a teenager:

- We usually respond quickly to the behaviour and visible coping (i.e., above the water line). For example, crying in plain sight, shouting, not acting on tasks, etc.
- Depending on our choice of response, we are sometimes effective or helpful in the eyes of the teens.
- When our response is not perceived as helpful and the relationship is strained by our response, it is because of the elements below the water line – they are less visible, less understood.
- The teenager is then less likely to be receptive to well-meaning attempts to help. – “There's no point in talking to you: you don't understand me.” She then continues to suffer from increasing stress.
- The portion below the water line demands empathy/ high dose of understanding from us, in order to respond relevantly and effectively, while preserving our relationship with teens.



You are too sensitive. You should ignore them! Think positive! (dismissing & feeding solutions)

## *Unhelpful responses (shared by students)*

You worry for nothing.  
Everything's going to be OK!  
(dismissing & over-assurance)

What's there to be sad about?  
You don't know how lucky you are. You have everything! You can choose to be happy. (guilt-tripping; dismissing)



You feel stressed? Wait till  
you go into working world!  
(condescension)

## *Unhelpful responses (shared by students)*

You will never get into JC if you  
carry on like this! (loose warnings)

You are always on your phone!  
Shouldn't you be studying now?  
(minimising rest; nagging)

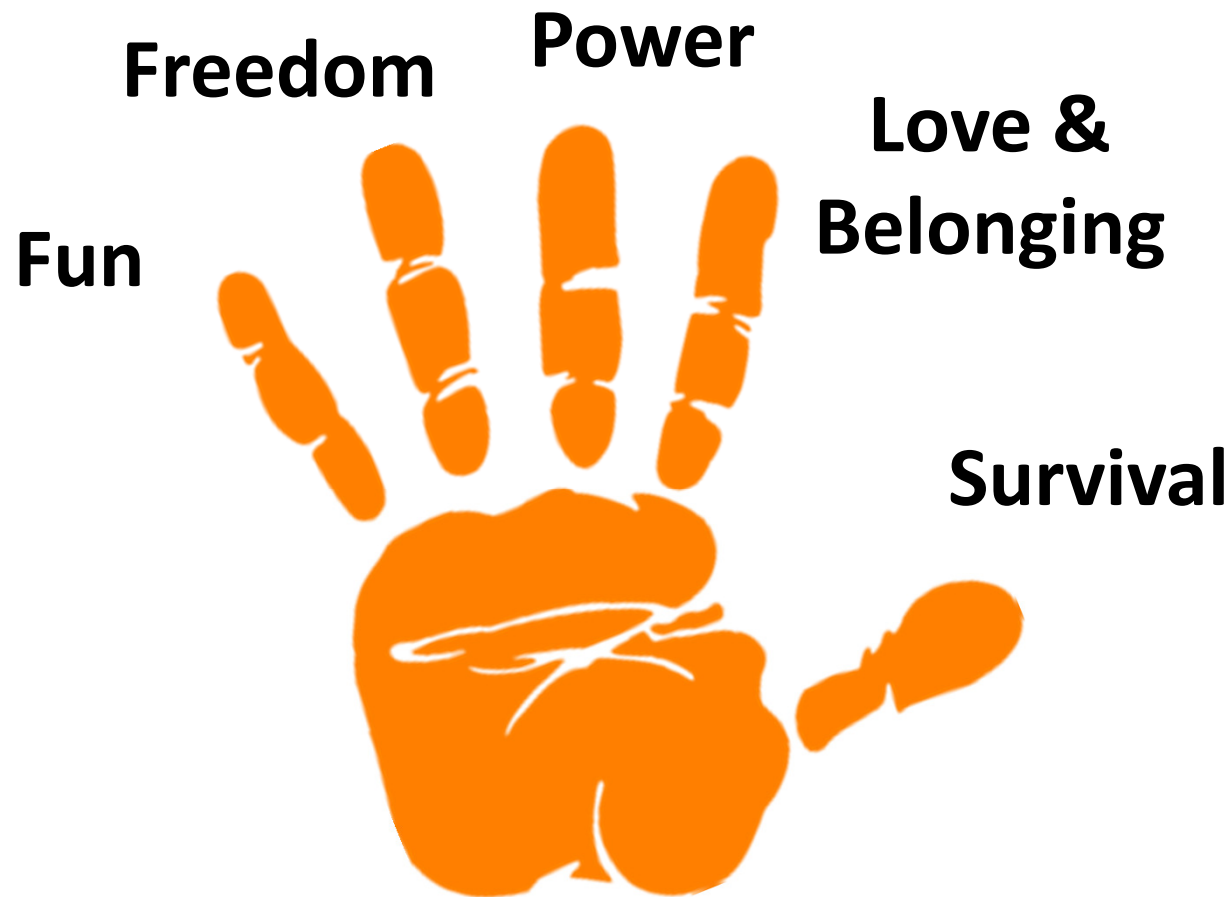
You are doing this deliberately  
right? You are just looking for  
attention.  
(accusing & dismissing)



**What happens when a child's emotions, thinking patterns & cherished beliefs are not sensitively and patiently addressed.**



# **Know her 5 basic needs/ yearnings** (the source of motivation for behaviour)



# **Know what she wants to talk about with you (but may be afraid to)**

- Family matters
- Controversial issues
- Emotional issues
- The future
- Personal interests
- Parents themselves



# Know connecting habits

## Connecting

Supporting  
Encouraging  
Listening  
Accepting  
Trusting  
Respecting

Negotiating differences

## Disconnecting

Criticising  
Blaming  
Complaining  
Nagging  
Threatening  
Punishing

Rewarding to control



Offer your teen psychological safety through the connecting habits.

# Go beyond the water line to connect



**Listen** without judging, comparing & prescribing

Be curious, give full attention

Observe for signs & symptoms of stress



**Understand** feelings, challenges & effort

Understand her language of love and apology

Understand her highest innate needs



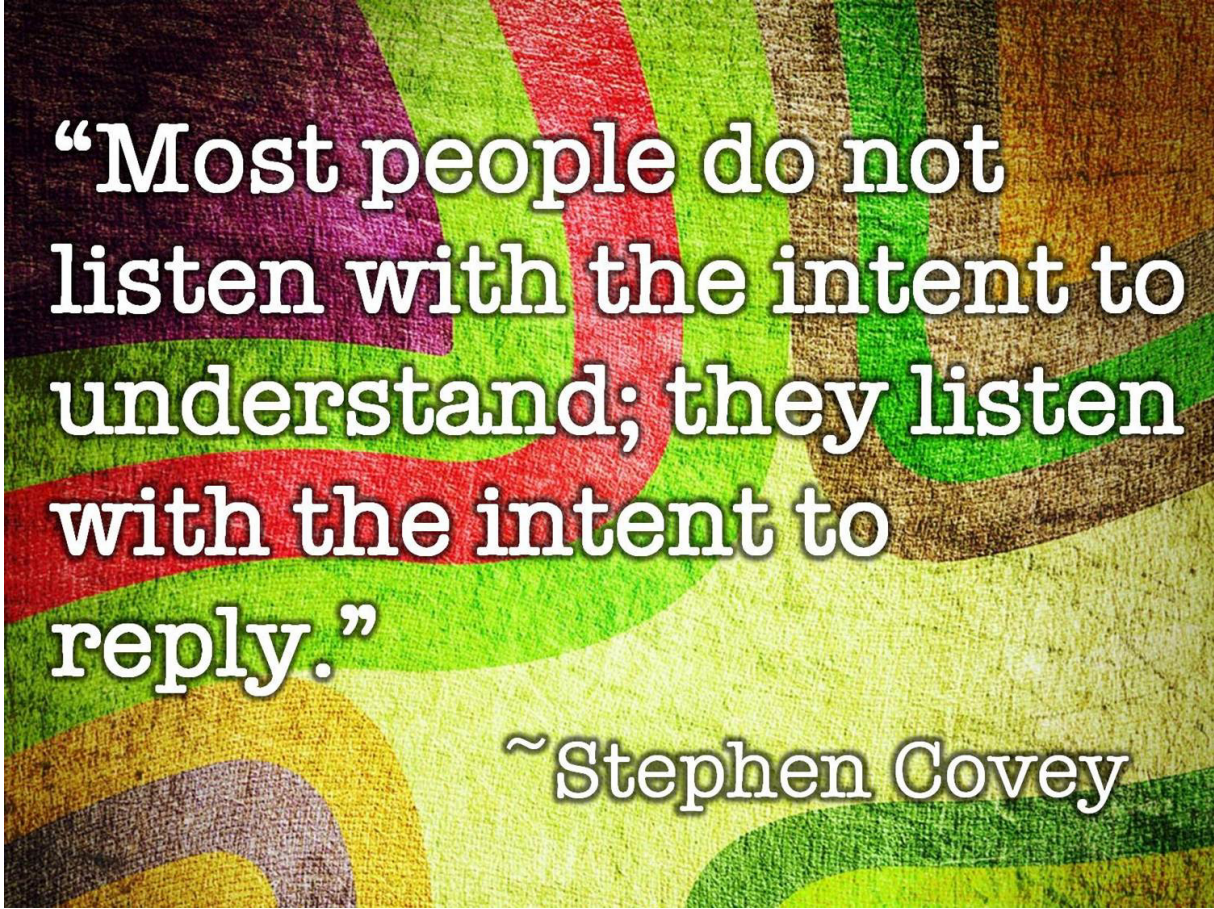
**Validate**, affirm, get feedback, apologise

Daily meals together, with light-hearted chat

Consistent tune from adults in the family

# Tip

1. Avoid “You” statements
  - You should/ you’d better/ why you never
2. Avoid universal statements
  - You always do it/ You never do it/ Everyone does it/ You are forever doing it
3. Express empathy
4. Express your feelings & concerns calmly
5. Communicate your needs, boundaries, consequences calmly
6. Negotiate if necessary, calmly.



“Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.”

~Stephen Covey

When family members can talk through hardships together and empathise with one another: the teenager gets greater relief from stress; becomes more receptive and resilient; problem-solves well; and is better equipped to form healthy, positive relationships. Enjoy one another as fellow human beings 😊