

Stress and Our Kids

While many of us are aware of the role stress plays in our lives and respond accordingly with varying degrees of success we may not think at all or enough about the way stress affects children. As the country grapples with a still unpredictable pandemic the return to school this fall has been a mixed bag at best although certainly not unexpected. Young people are grappling with virtual learning environments, hybrid models and in some cases socially distanced, in person academic sessions. These adjustments alone are enough to increase anxiety and elevate stress levels beyond the normal ranges.

The Partnership to End Addiction formerly the (Partnership for a Drug Free America and the Partnership for Drug Free Kids has resources available to assist parents and families. Here is a list from the Partnership highlighting 10 Ways parents can help support their kids to navigate stress as they meet obstacles related to school and other challenges:

- 1.** Act as a cheerleader and supporter for your teen – provide the necessary supplies and show an active interest in the content your child is learning, but allow the teachers to handle it if your kid fails to do the homework correctly or regularly.
- 2.** Recognize that children learn in different ways and have different work styles – some do homework all at once, while others need to take frequent breaks. Discuss with your child the working conditions that will lead to the best homework outcomes.
- 3.** Work with your child to develop a schedule that will allow time to complete homework, work on projects, and study for tests while still attending activities, getting adequate sleep and having play time.
- 4.** Don't underestimate the importance of non-academic achievements. Challenge Success emphasizes that kids – regardless of age — need playtime, downtime and family time each day. Research show this acts as a protective factor for long-term academic engagement and overall well-being.

5. Allow space and rejuvenation between activities. Encourage teens to unwind by listening to music, reading for pleasure and spending time with friends. Kids need time to reflect and dream, explore the world, develop interests, make friends and craft an identity.

6. Schedule high-quality family time multiple times a week to give kids the experience of unconditional love, acceptance and support. Eat meals together, walk, swap stories and practice family traditions.

7. As a family, discuss the characteristics of success that you value most (e.g., compassion, integrity, health). Remind kids that success is measured over a lifetime, not at the end of a semester.

8. Explain that there are many different paths to success. Talk about your own path, including your struggles and failures.

9. Examine the subtle messages you send your kids. If your first question after school is, “How’d you do on the test?” you may be implying that grades matter more than anything else. Instead, ask, “How was your day? Learn anything interesting? Did you get to spend time with friends?”

10. Help your teen find the right-fit college or post-secondary opportunity. Debunk the myth that only the most prestigious colleges will lead to success.

For additional tools and information visit the Partnerships’ web site <https://drugfree.org/>