

Academic Pressure: Tips on Coping with School Stress

1. Take time for self-care.

You have to start with the basics, like sleep. “You have to give your organism the means to cope with stress, and that includes healthy food, non-harmful substances, sleep (dramatically more than most kids think they need), down time... Building into your day right-brain activity that lets you digest what you’ve been going through and process it. Those are some basic and almost biological needs we have.”

Taking time to pause from the relentless pace of everyday life and enjoy creative activities that keep you from dwelling on or stressing over school pressures can go far in decreasing your stress levels.

2. Learn to change your thinking.

“You cannot get stressed out unless you believe your thoughts,” says Stiffelman. “All stress is precipitated by stressful thinking.”

When you start stressing about not finishing your project on time, your mind builds a case for why what you believe is going to happen *will* happen — and this can be paralyzing. So, when combating negative thinking patterns, come up with specific examples to counter the stressful thoughts. Think instead of concrete ways that you can create the time to work on a project, and how your previous line of thinking isn’t accurate.

3. Take assignments one baby step at a time.

Chunk your work down into manageable, bite-sized portions that feel less overwhelming than looking at the big picture. If you have an essay to write that’s making you feel anxious, list the individual steps that lead to the destination of the essay being finished (finding sources, creating an outline, writing an intro), and the task will begin to feel less daunting.

4. Lower your goals.

No, we’re not talking about being a slacker. Following the truism “Lower your goals, you’ll achieve more,” can help to relieve stress *and* boost academic success.

Instead of setting your goal to be getting the highest grade in the class, set a goal to feel satisfied with your performance.

5. Stay balanced during exam periods.

The importance of taking breaks and working in time to relax during your busiest and most stressful periods can't be overestimated. No matter how hard you push yourself, nobody can maintain constant focus, and you will burn yourself out if you try. Take frequent, short breaks for fun activities so that you'll be able to go back to your writing or studying refreshed.

Do something that, even for 15 minutes, brings you back to yourself. What did you love to do when you were six years old? Do a little bit of that when you're in prep mode to counterbalance the stress — no brain can work for 24 hours.

6. Get outside and get moving.

Getting outside, exercising, or participating in some other kind of physical activity can be a great distraction from stressful thoughts and tasks. Tiring yourself out physically can also help you to sleep better, and as we'll discuss in greater detail below, quality sleep is a valuable thing.

For some people, exercise feels good on a physical level, whether from endorphins or from the satisfaction of meeting a tough physical challenge. Others may find that physical activity helps ease the tension and other physical symptoms that can occur when they're stressed.

You don't have to run a marathon or join a competitive sport to reap the benefits of physical activity. Taking a walk in the park, playing fetch with your dog, or even scrubbing the bathroom tile can be helpful as well. The best physical activity is one that you enjoy, that helps you feel better, and that you'll be motivated to do consistently.

7. Check out meditative activities.

While some people feel that they get a lot from formal meditation practices, not everyone is interested in or enjoys pursuing that kind of practice. However, there are many activities that have a meditative quality that can help to ease your mind.

Coloring has become particularly popular as a meditative stress-relief activity. Art supply stores and bookstores now stock plenty of coloring books oriented toward teens and adults, which are far more detailed and interesting than those you might have used as a child.

Other forms of art and craft, from drawing to cross-stitch embroidery to woodworking to playing a musical instrument, can have similar effects. You don't have to be an immensely talented artist to benefit, both in terms of meditative concentration and in terms of simply doing something you enjoy and expressing yourself.

Many other activities can have a meditative quality. Some people find that spending time in nature fills this need. Others find a sense of peace in everything from writing to gardening to religious observations. The range of possibilities is broad, and ultimately, only you can say what feels right for you.

What if I feel overwhelmed by stress?

Practicing better stress management is a good idea for everyone, but it's easy to neglect this form of self-care until it reaches a point where you're overwhelmed. If the negative effects of your stress level are seriously impacting your life, and you're not sure where to start in addressing the problem, there are a few things that you can try that may help.

One strategy is to drop one of your existing activities, leaving you with more time and more flexibility in balancing your other obligations. It's better for you to be involved in fewer activities in higher-quality ways than to spread yourself too thin and burden yourself with an excessive amount of stress.

Talking to people you trust can also help. Your friends are likely going through similar issues, and will be able to relate. Your parents, who know you well, may have advice that's particularly targeted to your needs. Your school counselor is trained to assist high school students with issues like these and can help you access resources at your school and in your community.

Finally, if you're feeling seriously worried about your stress level, talking to a counselor, therapist, or other professional can really help. A professional's education and experience allows them to provide you with specific tools, techniques, and insightful suggestions for how you can better manage your stress and look after your own well-being.

Always remember, we are here for you.

With love,

The Counseling Team

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Counseling Resources: <https://dhhs counseling.wixsite.com/mysite>

Available on the counseling website > high school 101 page > under additional support

