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Nadia Lutsan, Anna Struk

A practical guide on how to support teenagers in a crisis situation

Recommendations for teachers and parents

A teenager experiencing anxiety

Signs of constant anxiety in a teenager: difficulty falling asleep due to tormenting thoughts and fears, waking up at night, lack of appetite, irritability, impatience, argumentativeness, aggression, tearfulness, apathy, isolation, deterioration in academic performance, expression of homesickness.

Suggestions for teachers:

- Legitimization of feelings and emotions. Tell children and teenagers that their emotions (anger, anxiety, helplessness, etc.) are normal and that others feel them too – «Everything you are feeling right now is normal» (feeling angry, depressed)
- Creating opportunities to make new friends, improving communication, and keeping hope alive. «When this is over, I will...»

Suggestions for parents:

- «Sensory walks»: Concentrate on what the child sees (forest, river), on sounds (birds singing), for scents (of flowers), to the touch (tree bark).
- Keeping hope alive. “When this is over, we will...”

Remember: you should never ignore changes in your child’s behavior. It is in moments like these that he needs your help and support.

A teenager experiencing stress

Most teenagers experience more stress when they perceive a situation as dangerous, complex, or painful and do not have the resources to cope. Some sources of stress for teenagers include: Demands and frustrations of school, Negative thoughts or feelings about themselves, Changes in their bodies, problems with friends and peers at school, Unsafe living environment/neighborhood, Parental separation or divorce, Chronic illness or severe problems in the family, Death of a loved one, Moving or changing school, Taking too many actions or having too high expectations, Family financial problems.

The parent's reaction to a stressful situation is significant for the child. The more confident parents behave, the safer children feel. Ultimately, the child develops their behavioral model by observing substantial adults. Remember: taking care of more than just your baby is essential. It would be best if you took good care of yourself. You are the child's primary source of help and support.

Tips for adults to contact a teenager under stress:

- Speak and listen;
- Let the emotions be;
- Engage teenagers in helping others;
- Praise and highlight your child's achievements;
- Hug;
- Pay attention to changes in your child's behavior;
- Encourage your child to communicate with peers;
- Read out loud;
- Watch your favorite movies together;
- Plan for the future.

A child behaving unusually

The child behaves as if they had no feelings (happy or sad).

What's happening to him/ her?

The child is probably suffering. During a solid, nervous shock, especially when encountering an experience the child cannot withstand, the child may «hang» in reactions, sometimes not feeling their body. A child in a problematic situation may hide their feelings. He/ She needs your support!

How can I help?

Create an atmosphere of love and acceptance so your child literally «warms up» in it. You are spending time together. Sit with your baby, hug him, and hug him more often. If you can, put his/ her feelings into words. Let her know it's okay to be sad, angry, or worried. "You don't seem to want anything. It would be best if you were sad. It's normal!"

Explain to your child what happened. Could you share your feelings with your child? Try to do something pleasant with your son or daughter – read a book, sing, or play together. Simple ways to return to reality are playing with a designer, sculpting, or drawing with footprints and handprints.

The baby cries very often.

What's happening to her/him?

As a result of the disaster, many changes have occurred in your family's life. And it's natural for a child to be sad. When she cries, her body releases substances that help calm her down. Children are susceptible to the emotional state of their parents. If you feel unfortunate yourself, seek help. Your child's well-being depends on you.

The child begins to behave carelessly and does something potentially dangerous.

What's happening to her/him?

It may seem strange, but children often act dangerously or recklessly when they don't feel safe. It's a child's way of saying, «I need you. Prove that I am dear to you – protect me!"

How to help?

Make your child feel safe as much as possible. Approach her calmly and, if necessary, take her in your arms.

Let your child know that what he is doing is dangerous and that he is dear to you. And that you don't want anything wrong to happen to him. Please don't shout at the child!

Dangerous behavior may be a manifestation of self-harm. Why? Fear always increases aggression, but children often spread it to themselves.

Play games that trigger aggression. Tell your child about more positive ways to get attention.

The child is afraid of something he was not scared of before

What's happening to her/him?

Many things can remind a child of traumatic experience and scare them (sounds of firecrackers, ambulances, people screaming, terrified facial expressions). It's not your fault – it's an experience.

A teenager has trouble sleeping – sleep is interrupted, he has nightmares, and the teenager is afraid to sleep alone


What's happening to her/him?

In the first months, after severe stress, nightmares are regular. During sleep, the brain intensively processes information about events that have occurred. However, a subsequent consultation with a psychologist

will be necessary if the nightmare repeats itself many times or is too probable.

Interrupted sleep is more often caused by anxiety, unfinished business, or muscle spasms that make it difficult to relax. It's okay to let your teen sleep with you, but explain that this is a one-time thing and ask to talk about the dream that keeps recurring, but without details (only if the teen wants it). Explain how the brain works. Talk about how you were afraid and felt helpless, too, and that's okay.

Create a bedtime routine that works under all circumstances, and make it clear that you should follow it daily. Then, the teenager will know precisely what to expect. Please hug him/her and tell him/her you're not going anywhere. Key phrase: «I am with you; I am close.»



A child/teen experienced continuous uncertainty and continuous adaptation

Often, in recommendations on how to withstand constant stress and tension, we hear, “You have to rely on ordinary things, rituals, everyday life.» That is, what was stable and what we could influence. But with constant shelling and emergency power outages, we can no longer rely on even what seemed stable. How do we minimize the damage to the psyche in this case?

In fact, without satisfying a basic need, we cannot solve a problem, so we have to look for another way. Of course, we can endure for some time (thanks to willpower and humility). But generally speaking, you can't make things happen without getting something in return, so I would keep looking.

We are used to sticking to specific contexts and solutions. It is important that we understand the needs behind these decisions and what they give us.

Consider, for example, a mental process that suggests that by drawing on something good from the past, we gain some mental stability. When something from the past stops working, we have to start looking for something else to update and use. For example, go to your

parents and ask your mother to cook something that you used to eat but have stopped eating now. This means **restoring other rituals from the past**.

The ritual also gives us **a sense of stability and predictability**. If we can't predict something like a hot shower now, we can think of something else to expect. Then, we create a context for that predictability in a different place and way.

It is also essential for us **to preserve light and heat because currently, due to a power failure**, we do not have enough of them. If we can no longer perceive light in the usual way as before, we must look for other options. To do this, you can find bright flashlights and place them above you. This way, you will be in the place of this light when it is dark around you. You can also hang a New Year's garland on the window. All this will create the impression that there is no light and calm you down.

It's the same with heat. We understand it is cold at home and therefore it is necessary to wear more than two layers.

Signs of mental balance	Signs of mental imbalance
adequate perception of reality	distorted perception of reality
ability to acquire knowledge, logical thinking,	deterioration of memory, attention, other intellectual abilities
ability to analyze problems and make balanced decisions,	chaotic, categorical thinking
purposefulness, activity, independence,	indecision, dependence on someone else's opinion
ability to follow social norms and rules,	tendency to break rules, moral norms and laws
developed sense of responsibility for yourself (your life and health	avoiding responsibility, developing bad habits
critical thinking,	increased suggestibility
ability to adequately assess oneself, high self-esteem,	low self-esteem, loss of faith in yourself and your abilities
naturalness of behavior, politeness, politeness	demonstrativeness, rudeness, arrogance
capacity for compassion, kindness,	emotional callousness, hostility, aggressiveness
the ability to forgive and forget insults,	malice
self-control,	impulsivity, various phobias
optimism	anxiety, despair
Signs of social well-being	Signs of social dysfunction
easy to establish relationships, feel good even in unfamiliar company	excessive shyness
the ability to make friends, taking care of friendly relations in the family	lack of close friends, unhealthy relationships in the family, at school, with peers
developed communication skills, ability to listen and speak, avoid misunderstandings	feeling of loneliness and misunderstanding
kindness in communication, showing tolerance and respect for the interlocutor	hostility, malice
ability to give and receive help, ability to work in a team;	inability to give and ask for help
in the event of a conflict, taking care of the interests of all parties, proposing mutually beneficial solutions or compromise	frequent conflicts and misunderstandings
ability to motivate and persuade others, to be a leader and to lead	Passivity, isolation

Psychotherapeutic techniques and exercises helpful in relieving stress in a teenager:

- Drawing and sculpture – Fear can be drawn on paper or molded from plasticine. First, create a scary image and then transform it into something funny or beautiful. It is advisable to turn on some light music.
- Game «Semolina will always help» – If anxiety still exists, semolina will become a real anti-stress. You can pour it into any container and give it to your child; just run it through your fingers and watch it flow (no longer than 30 minutes). Explain to the child that everything is fine now, that there is a clear sky outside and only cars are driving, not military equipment, and then reassure her that everything will be fine in the future.
- Dialogue – This should be permanent if we are talking about teenagers. Here, it is worth putting aside the «top-down» view and starting to speak on an equal footing. Let him/her ask questions, and you will answer honestly, looking him/her in the eye. Additionally, ask for his/her suggestions. And, of course, show that you have everything under control and know what to do in all circumstances. In stressful situations, even adults, especially those who have just started their journey into adulthood, want to feel protected. In addition, you can offer something to distract your attention – movies, series, and listening to music will be suitable.
- The «line club» technique – You need a clean sheet of paper and a pen or regular pencil for this technique. Task: recalling an unpleasant, stressful situation that causes you negative emotions, start drawing a pen/pencil on a piece of paper, creating chaotic lines. Continue drawing lines until you feel emotional relief (this may

take a few minutes to half an hour). As a result, your paper will create a tangle of lines into which the energy of your negative emotions will transfer. In this way, your feelings and experiences will transfer from the internal world to the external world, i.e., onto a piece of paper. After completing the task with the letter on which the tangled lines are depicted, you can do whatever you want (leave it as it is, throw it away, burn it, crush it, or transform it). Your imagination has no limits.

- «My mood» technique – This technique can be performed independently or after the «Line Club» technique. You will need a clean sheet of paper and selected art materials (crayons, markers, chalk, or paint). Task: show your mood (emotions and feelings) through the colors and lines you associate it with. Give the resulting image a name. The implementation time ranges from a few minutes to an hour. Once you have completed the image task, you can do the same at your discretion, as described in method 1.
- Restoring a sense of control: Give your hands something to crush (plasticine, clay); Play around with the builder; We sculpt an animal that does not exist in nature; We sculpt a mask and a grimace; Let your child have someone to care for.
- «Fortunately – Unfortunately» game – This excellent exercise gives you the idea that there is always a way out of a difficult situation. They take turns playing. A teenager and his friends are put in a difficult situation. For example: «The war has started in Ukraine.» Another continues: “But luckily, my whole family is safe.” Another one: «But unfortunately, my friends in another city are forced to spend the night in a bomb shelter for three days in a row.» And repeatedly: «But fortunately, Ukrainians were united like never before during independence.» This means that all participants will

continue and end the situation. Children need to understand that every situation is highly complex.

- Make a «Dream Catcher» with sticks and colored threads, similar to a spider web. Hang it near where the baby sleeps to «catch» bad dreams and prevent them from reaching the baby. We look for ways to overcome fears – we sculpt, draw, and glue a guardian angel.
- If a child misses home, if he/she has to leave it without his/her favorite toys or things, let him/her express sadness and cry: «It's really sad that you lost...» If possible, try to find something in return and comfort him/her.
- Exercise «Umbrella» – The goal is to stabilize the psycho-emotional state of the child and reduce anxiety. Pencils, felt-tip pens or gouache, and a sheet of paper are suitable for work. The work takes place in 4 stages: 1 stage – Ask the children to draw an umbrella on top or in the center of the sheet, which could protect against any external troubles. Let the children color it the way they like the most. 2 stage – Ask the children to depict a figure of a boy or a girl (projection of themselves) under an umbrella so that the figure feels as protected as possible from the influence of the surrounding world. 3 stage – Let the children draw the boundaries of the protection of the umbrella. That is, they will allocate the space that she will close from external troubles (Children who have lived through a traumatic experience usually surround themselves with such boundaries as additional protection). 4th stage – Ask the

children to imagine that, in addition to protecting, the umbrella also has a magical feature: when it opens, various joys and pleasures pour out with it, which make the person under the umbrella happier and happier. Let the child draw in the protective space of the umbrella all the joys that come to his mind. After completing the technique, it is important to tell the children that these joys that they have drawn are the little saving things that directly help them get rid of sadness, fear, and bad mood. It is worth simply going to your umbrella at such moments and using one of the tips indicated by it.

What to do if a teenager does not want to talk about what bothers him?

Some teenagers can be more reserved about their feelings. It is important to understand that this is normal. Here are some steps that can help:

- Stay available: Always emphasize that you are there to support them and are willing to listen when they choose to speak.
- Try other ways to communicate: Some teens can express their feelings through drawings, writing, or other creative methods.

Seek professional help: If your teen continues to refuse to talk and is showing serious signs of stress, consider seeing a psychologist.

Some signs may indicate serious stress and the need for professional help. Here's what you should pay attention to:

- Persistent anxiety and fear: If your teenager is constantly experiencing anxiety and fear and it is affecting their daily life.
- Changes in behavior and mood: A sudden change in behavior, appetite, or sleep can be a sign of stress.
- Self-destructive behavior: Look out for possible signs of self-destructive behavior, such as talking about the pointlessness of existence or self-harm.
- Social isolation: If a teenager is separating from family and friends, this can be a bad sign.
- Loss of interest in things: If a teenager loses interest in things that previously interested him, this may indicate problems.

If you notice any of these signs, it's important to see a psychologist for professional help right away.

To parents:

- Give your child enough attention, communicate regularly and spend time together.
- Help your child find hobbies and activities that will bring pleasure and joy.
- Create a cozy and calm atmosphere at home, where the child will feel safe.
- Encourage the child to share his thoughts and feelings, listen to him carefully.
- Help your child learn to make decisions and solve problems independently.
- Praise the child for his efforts and achievements and increase his self-esteem.
- Teach the child to appreciate and accept himself as he is, with all his features.
- Help your child build friendships with peers and develop social skills.
- Give the child enough time, but do not limit his freedom.

Words to say:

- I'm sorry.
- What happened is really terrible!
- Let me stay with you!
- I want to help you!
- If you need help, I'm ready to listen!
- I am near.

10 statements that children want to hear from their parents:

- I'm proud of you;
- I support you;
- I see and hear you;
- I love you;
- I trust you;
- You can;
- I believe in you;
- You are important;
- You are the best for me.

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(Recommendations for teachers and parents)

Four yellow rectangular bars of varying lengths and orientations on the bottom left.

PRESERVING
YOUTH MENTAL
WELLBEING
IN WARTIME
MIGRATION CRISIS

Suggestions for parents:



"Sensory walks"



Keep hope alive



Take care of children



The more confident parents are, the safer their children feel

Tips for adults to contact a teenager under stress:



Talking and listening



Let the emotions be



*Praise and highlight
your child's
achievements:*

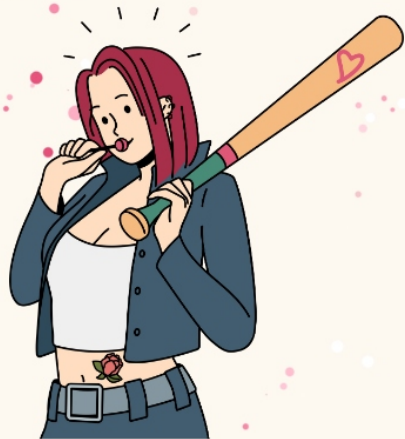


Engage teenagers in helping others

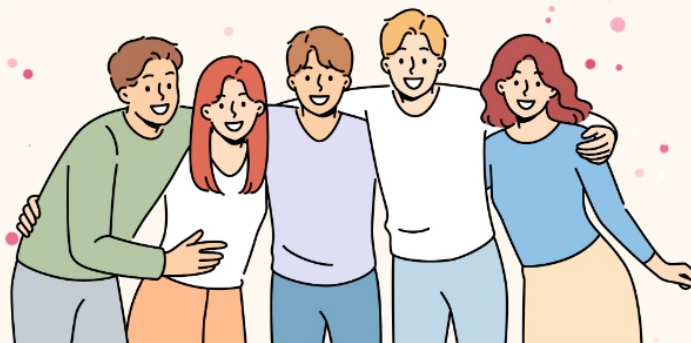


Hug

Tips for adults to contact a teenager under stress:



*Pay attention to changes
in your child's behavior*



*Encourage your child to
communicate with peers*



Read out loud



Watch your favorite movies together

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-You can do it!



-I believe in you!



-I'm right here!



You are important!



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Praise the child for his efforts and achievements, increase his self-esteem



Help your child learn to make decisions and solve problems independently



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