



STUDENTS EXPERIENCING STRESS

Teachers are an important part of establishing and maintaining healthy environments for students to learn and grow. They also play an important role in guiding students suffering from excessive stress to professionals in the building who can be of assistance. Avoiding students who display signs of stress does not help them.

WHAT IS STRESS?

- Stress is the body's emotional, physical, or behavioral response to environmental change.
- Stress can be a short-term reaction in response to an upcoming event, such as speaking in front of the class. Stress can also result from ongoing experiences, such as coping with parents' divorce or adapting to different cultural or social expectations or values.
- Some amount of stress is beneficial and can motivate students to perform better.
- Too much stress can be harmful, even if it is associated with sowing the seeds for a positive event (e.g., academic/sports competition or going to college).

HOW MIGHT STRESS BE EXPRESSED BY STUDENTS IN SCHOOL?

Students of any age can show the responses to excessive stress listed below. However, some responses are more commonly seen at certain ages. What a teacher might perceive as a minimal stress or even a positive stress may not be viewed similarly by the student. Refrain from making judgments about how much stress the student "should" have.

Pre-K and kindergarten students may complain of stomach aches or headaches, experience incontinence, become clingier, or start habits like hair twirling or thumb-sucking.

Elementary students may cry easily, take frequent trips to the bathroom or school nurse, have difficulty staying in their seats, or become irritable. Some students may become angry, oppositional, or defiant and have disruptive outbursts. Others may laugh excessively.

Middle school students may express worry, show anxiety, or feel isolated or lonely. Some students may become angry, oppositional, or defiant, whereas others may laugh excessively.

High school students may isolate themselves, give up easily when frustrated, or react with strong emotions (e.g., anger, hostility). What is stressful to one person may not be equally stressful to another.

WHAT CAN TEACHERS DO?

DO	DON'T
Express concern and offer help. For example, "I notice you seem a bit stressed (or worried or distracted) lately. Is there something I can help you work through?"	Express displeasure or make judgments.
Offer ways for students to cope. A "peace area" in your room where students can quietly reflect or engage in calming activities can help. Young students may enjoy tactile activities (e.g., zen garden, calming jar, buddha board, blowing a pinwheel). Older students may respond well to writing in a journal or meditating.	Automatically send the student away (e.g., to the principal's office).
Speak to the student privately (but with the door open).	Address the behavior publicly.
Remind students you care about their academic and social success. For example, "I care about you and I know the great work you're capable of."	Ignore or avoid the student or the issue.
Confer with colleagues who also work closely with the student—this may reveal a fuller picture of the issue, and help determine if the behaviors are persistent.	Gossip about the student's behavior.

REFER STUDENTS TO FURTHER HELP IF NEEDED.

- Review your school policy for seeking student supports
- Contact school counselors, psychologist, social worker and other personnel

*This information is designed to help teachers respond to students who may need support. It is **not** intended to be used as a diagnostic tool or to replace the use of formal assessments employed by mental health professionals.*

LINKS TO RESOURCES:

Stress and Mindfulness

- KidsHealth and Stress (bit.ly/kids-health-stress)
- 5 Easy Ways To Reduce Student Stress In The Classroom (bit.ly/reduce-student-stress)
- Take the Time: Mindfulness for Kids (on.apa.org/take-the-time)

Peace Areas

- Peace Corner: Creating Safe Space for Reflection (bit.ly/peace-corner)
- Creating a Peace Place (bit.ly/creating-a-peace-place)

Child Development

- How kids experience stress (bit.ly/how-kids-experience-stress)
- Social and Emotional Development (bit.ly/social-emotional-development)

LOCAL RESOURCES: