

How to Handle School Pressure

Objective

To identify coping strategies to lessen the pressure to do well in school.

You Should Know

Even for the most organized, motivated, and rested student, school pressure can sometimes pile up so much that it can be overwhelming. You might be juggling extracurricular activities along with a part-time job, as well as trying to keep up with your schoolwork and social and family life. You might be pressuring yourself, or you might have parents who push you hard. You might be dealing with teachers with high expectations - or a combination of all three!

Stress is not a bad thing, as it can motivate you to get going, but too much can result in negative consequences such as headaches, anxiety, depression, insomnia, substance abuse, or eating disorders. When you become overwhelmed, it can be hard to focus or set priorities, and then you might fall behind on your tasks and responsibilities.

But it is never too late to figure out how to handle academic pressure and stress—if you are able to learn strategies now, they can serve you for college or post-high school life, and into your adult working life too.

What to Do

In this worksheet, you will look at the things causing stress in your life and then review strategies for lowering your stress level related to school. Answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

What are the *main* sources of the school pressure or stress that you feel right now? Be specific. Be sure to identify *internal sources* (desire to achieve, excel, perfectionism, fear of failure) as well as *external sources* (pressure from parents, teachers, coaches, and so on).

What are two other sources of school pressure that you're experiencing right now?

What negative effects are you experiencing that are related to school pressure or stress?

Physical:

Emotional/Psychological:

Social:

Family:

Financial:

Other:

What are you currently doing to deal with those negative consequences?

Here are some ideas for how to manage school pressure and related stress.

- Listen to your worried thoughts but do not let them take control of you. They are just thoughts and they don't need to determine your actions all the time.
- Lower your own high expectations or demands to be perfect. This can be a setup for burnout. Aim for "good enough."
- If your parents or caretakers are particularly demanding, find a quiet time to talk openly with them about the stress you feel and how it is affecting you. Ask for help if you need to from a sibling, teacher, or guidance counselor.
- Make a to-do list and mark which items are HIGH, MEDIUM, or LOW priority. Don't sweat the low- or medium-priority items in the same way you do the high-priority ones.
- Organize your workspace, whether you work at a table or desk or on your bed. Clear away the clutter so that you can focus on your work when you need to.

- Review your schedule and consider cutting out certain activities or obligations.
- Tackle tasks one step at a time; practice not “fast-forwarding” or obsessing about all the things you *haven’t* done yet.
- Take good care of yourself! Eat healthy meals, exercise, take ample breaks, learn to meditate or do yoga.
- Limit your caffeine use—too much coffee, caffeinated sodas, or energy drinks can cause irritation and agitation.
- Take a bubble bath, light scented candles, try coloring or doing a craft.
- Schedule fun activities unrelated to schoolwork or grades.
- Get enough sleep! Scientists have shown that the brain is still developing during adolescence, and your body is going through hormonal changes. Sleep deprivation is a key cause of burnout and stress among high schooler kids.
- Take breaks from your phone or computer! Yes, this is a hard one, but the constant exposure to media of all kinds affects the nervous system. Some people install a “block” or “break” app for when they want to be forced offline. Set a curfew for texting or other messaging every night. Ask for help. Find a buddy to do this with, which makes it a lot easier.
- If you experience ongoing depression or anxiety, ask your guidance counselor for help in finding a therapist. You don’t have to figure it out alone!

Reflections on This Exercise

What is the first step you are willing to take to deal with the school pressure you are experiencing?

Name two other activities that you are willing to try in the next week or so to help you manage your school stress.

Who are two or three people you feel comfortable talking to about the school pressure you feel? Write down a date by which you will contact those people to discuss your concerns.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What could you do differently to make progress in this area?
