

9 sure-fire ways to reduce stress (and remain calm)

By Dr Andrew Wicking

Getting stressed can happen easily. However, there are many things students can do to manage stress in a positive way. Resilient Youth Australia data from surveying nearly 400,000 students over recent years indicates that many of our young people are anxious and stressed, and that these levels shoot up by year 12.

These levels of anxiety are accompanied by sleep and concentration problems, memory difficulties and distractibility; not to mention a lessening of their joy of learning. The biggest barrier to most students doing well at school is not their attitude, intelligence or motivation - it is their level of anxiety.

Teach your child the following surefire ways to reduce stress in their lives:

1. **Don't think about the end result, focus on smaller steps**
Thinking about how future events will turn out can create a lot of anxiety. Will I pass

this test? Will they like me? Do I have enough friends? Try to tame your mind so that you stop thinking about questions you can't know the answer to. Instead practice narrowing your attention to what you can do right now and what you have control over.

2. **Exercise**
Being physically active lowers stress levels. Exercise increases blood flow to the smart parts of our brain where problems can get solved. When we sit or lie still for too long the more primitive parts of our brain kick in and our thoughts go around and around. Rhythmical movement is especially good for reducing stress. Dancing, surfing, drumming, roller-skating, table tennis, swimming, juggling, down ball, volleyball, boxing and gymnastics are all rhythmic movements.

3. **Write it out**
Get your worries out of your head. Write them down on a sheet of paper. Make a note or a voice memo on your phone.
4. **Know that everyone has worries**
All human beings worry at times so don't feel strange or odd or different. Just know that if you find yourself worrying at times you are just like everyone else.
5. **Talk to someone you trust**
Now that you know everyone gets stressed at times, tell someone you can rely on about feeling worried. Even if they don't have any suggestions for you, just telling someone you love and trust makes a difference and may assist you in taking positive steps towards working things out.
6. **Breathe deeply**
When you feel stressed, take a moment to breathe deeply. Put your hand on your belly and take a big breath. Then slowly breathe out as you count to yourself, "one thousand, two thousand, three thousand". Slowing down your breathing resets your body.
7. **Drink water**
Drinking water lowers the level of cortisol (a stress hormone) in your body.
8. **Stop mind juggling, start doing**
When people become stressed, they often freeze up and feel like they can't start anything. Start somewhere. Your first attempt doesn't have to be the perfect answer. Getting started builds momentum and confidence.
9. **Use a mood shift playlist**
Music is a powerful way to ramp down stress. Make a playlist of your best feel-good songs and play when you find the worries are creeping in.

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