

## End-of-School-Year Stress

As the end of the school year approaches, it is not uncommon to see a range of emotions among kids and teens. While many students are feeling the anticipation and excitement that summer brings, for some students the last few weeks of school can bring up feelings of fear, uncertainty, and increases in stress and anxiety. Increases in stress and anxiety can result for a variety of reasons. This can include the anticipation of a new routine, loss of predictability, saying goodbye to teachers and friends, concern over the loss of social connections that school offers, worry about end-of-year exams, concerns over the upcoming transitions to new schools or grade levels, and the expectations that come with graduation and taking on more adult responsibilities.



As caring adults, we can offer support, guidance, and resources to better equip students to cope with and manage upcoming changes, transitions, and stress that can come with the end of the school year. It should be noted that stress can manifest in a variety of emotions and behaviors. For example, youth may become irritable, impatient, angry, or begin acting out when they are feeling stressed. Others may become anxious, scared, withdrawn, or complain of physical symptoms like headaches or stomachaches.

A key factor in helping our youth manage stress is open communication. Adults can help youth communicate what they are feeling by offering a safe space to share what's on their minds. If you are worried about a student who is struggling, check in with them. Ask, "Can you help me understand how you are feeling?" or "What might be helpful to you right now?" Understanding what a young person is feeling and experiencing through their eyes allows adults to show greater empathy and validate their concerns. When adults can acknowledge a young person's feelings, they may feel better just knowing that there is someone else who understands how they feel. Additionally, by finding out what is causing youth distress, adults are more capable of helping them find ways to cope.

While teachers and caring adults within the environment of school can play a supportive role, parents and guardians also play a significant role. Below are ways that parents/guardians can help kids manage end-of-school-year stress.

- 1.) Pay attention to your own stress levels and model good stress-management behaviors.
- 2.) Talk to your child/teen about stress and identify a list of positive ways to cope. This might include mindful exercises, listening to music, journaling, going for a walk, spending time with friends or making time for relaxation and participating in enjoyable activities.
- 3.) If your child/teen is overwhelmed with end-of-year deadlines and exams, help them engage in time management activities. For example, help teens create an end-of-year checklist and cross off each task as it is completed or help them to break larger projects into smaller, more manageable tasks.

- 4.) Get back to the basics: balanced nutrition, good sleep habits, exercise, and regular periods of downtime and unstructured activities are essential for helping kids thrive during times of transition and stress.
- 5.) Help youth engage in activities that provide meaningful closure at the end of the school year. This can help make transitions and change a little more tolerable. (i.e., goodbye note cards from students to teachers and end-of-year celebrations).
- 6.) Look back and reflect: highlight and honor your child or teen's strengths and accomplishments during the past year.
- 7.) Talk it out: help youth process any fears or concerns that they have as they transition into summer and prepare for new experiences. Remind them that you will be there along the way to offer support.

Every student is going to have different feelings about the end of the school year. Being mindful that some students may be experiencing anxiety and discomfort as the days dwindle down to the last day of school allows us to be more aware of students who may be in need of extra support and/or resources.

References: Childmind Institute; Edutopia; Family Education; National Education Association; Partnership to End Addiction