

## **Coping with Stress, Anxiety and the Middle School Child**

Many middle school students juggle social networking, social media, raging hormones, trying to fit in, trying to figure out who they are, trying to meet their parents'/ guardians' and teachers' expectations at home and school as well as trying to keep up academically and socially with their peers. Is it any wonder that at some point they cope with stress and anxiety?

Below are effective work-study strategies that middle school students are being taught, should employ, and transfer on to high school to continue to be productive as scholars.

- Make "STAR" appointments by emailing teachers to get additional help with course work.
- Ask to redo assignments for a higher grade if possible.
- Get a Study Buddy in every class that they can Face Time should they become ill and have notes scanned to them at home if feasible. They can also study together through this medium.
- Read over their notes and handouts every night from the beginning of the quarter to the current day making questions in the margin to ask the teacher if there is something they do not understand. They should then email the question to the teacher so the teacher may answer it in class the next day. It is a great way for the teacher to transition into the day's lesson and it lets the teacher know which students are paying attention.
- Spend time organizing their binder nightly.
- Use their agenda/planner book daily and check off their homework as they do it.
- Have an area in their binder dedicated to work that is to be turned in for a grade.
- Have a dedicated area to do their homework and know whether it is a "distraction free zone" or whether they need a little background noise to work best.

Further, here are some questions you may want to consider when figuring out whether your middle schooler is scheduled just right or over scheduled:

- Does my student seem to have little down time? If so, increase the downtime.
- Is my student irritable from not having time to process their emotions, sort out their feelings regarding their day due to rushing from one activity to the next leading to emotional outbursts and/or temper tantrums? If so, slow down the pace of their daily activities.
- Does my student complain about most activities that he/she used to like and find fun but no longer finds appealing? Review which activities they still consider meaningful, fun and appealing and consider letting the others go.

- Have family mealtimes dwindled down significantly so that there is obvious bonding and conversational time being missed during the week? Try to incorporate more family face-to-face mealtimes during the week.
- Does my student have difficulty sleeping/challenges winding down at night, nightmares, bedwetting or has difficulty waking because they have challenges thinking about their “to do” list for the day or from being so tired from the previous day’s activities? If so, consider the activity load again.
- Does my student have free time to spend with his or her best friend or free time to be at family gatherings and events? Build in free time for your student. It is invaluable.
- Is my student’s grades suffering and homework not getting done or on the other hand, is my student using every bit of time they have to get their work done during lunch, STAR, the ride to and from school and to and from their activities leaving no time to socialize?
- Is my student clingy with me as the parent/guardian and looking to me for instruction regarding how to use time or what to do next? Having more free time should allow your student an opportunity to learn how to be more creative and explore how to have fun without a planned activity.
- Does my student engage in self-injurious behaviour such as purposefully cutting themselves or make casual comments of despair or hopelessness? This behavior needs to be taken seriously and professional help needs to be sought immediately. If in immediate danger call 911. The Crisis Center is also available to help 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. (240-777-4000)
- Is my student experiencing more subtle signs of school stress and/or anxiety such as stomach aches, headaches, or school avoidance? Having the student work with school counsellor is helpful.
- Finally, Westland Middle School Counseling Department is working with a wonderful licenced therapy dog named “Moose” who comes to visit on Fridays. Parents/Guardians may contact their student’s counselor, if they feel their child is overly anxious, to schedule a lunch time visit with “Moose”.

Clearly, middle school is a challenging time for students to really begin to stretch their wings, negotiate boundaries, try new skills and learn about themselves. They still need the right strategies and a balanced schedule to manage stress and anxiety.

References:

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