



The Mind Hub

By



Topic: Understanding & Managing Study Stress in Children & Adolescents

As the school year progresses, many students experience increased stress related to their studies. Especially the students in the latter grades that are faced with the BAC exams this year or those that need to prepare for next year. While a certain amount of stress is normal, too much can negatively impact their mental and physical well-being. As parents, it's important to understand how study stress can affect your child and learn strategies to help them cope.

❖ **What is Study Stress?**

In order to start tackling the issue of study stress, first we need to define what it is. In simple terms, study stress is the pressure students feel as they face academic demands like homework, exams, and upcoming assessments. Sometimes, study stress is simply about managing extracurricular activities on top of school material. It's normal for students to feel stressed from time to time, but when this stress becomes overwhelming, it can interfere with their ability to concentrate, complete tasks, and find motivation to come to school, socialise and maintain their overall well-being.

❖ **How Prevalent is Study Stress?**

Recent research has shown that over 60% of adolescents have reported feeling stressed daily, which demonstrates the prevalence of study stress in student populations.

Additionally, high school students have reported higher stress levels than adults, which suggests that the stress starts on early in the education. Study stress can have physical effects, such as headaches, stomach aches, sleep disturbances. Often it presents itself in the form of mental issues, for example, anxiety, depression, anger. Lastly, it certainly influences behaviour, as students experiencing high study stress are more likely to be socially withdrawn, easily distracted, less motivated.

❖ **Common Signs of Study Stress.**

This was briefly mentioned above, but let's dissect the different signs of stress in students.

The signs are categorised into physical, emotional & behavioural.

- **Physical Symptoms:** Headaches, stomach issues, or other unexplained aches, difficulty in sleeping or sleeping too much, changes in appetite (eating too much or too little), fatigue and constantly feeling drained even after resting.
- **Emotional Symptoms:** Increased irritability or mood swings, feelings of frustration, anxiety or nervousness about upcoming assessments/assignments, lack of motivation, and difficulty concentrating.
- **Behavioural Symptoms:** procrastination or avoidance of homework, social withdrawal and less time spent with friends, increased use of distractions (e.g. phones, TV, video games) to escape.

❖ **What Causes Study Stress?**

Similarly, to the signs of study stress, the causes of it can be broken down into several categories. Stress can arise from many different sources, therefore understanding and recognising these common triggers can help you become aware of when your child is struggling and when he/she might need extra support.

- **Academic Pressure:** high expectations, either self-imposed or from parents and teachers, can be a significant source of stress. Students may feel they need to achieve perfect grades in every subject.
- **Time Management Struggles:** balancing schoolwork with extracurricular activities, family responsibilities, and social commitments can overwhelm them greatly.

Procrastination often exacerbates this, as students scramble to finish assignments at the last minute.

- **Test Anxiety:** many students experience high levels of anxiety before and during exams. This can lead to panic attacks, performance issues, even for the students who are well-prepared.
- **Perfectionism:** similarly, to academic pressure and test anxiety, the desire to do everything perfectly can increase stress levels. Students can feel that anything less than perfect is a failure, which can be overwhelming and confusing for them.
- **Social & Peer Pressures:** navigating friendships, social media, and peer comparisons can be emotionally challenging. Some students may feel pressure trying to fit in or to not be judged by their peers, adding another layer of stress.
- **Family Expectations:** parents & guardians who have high academic expectation or place heavy emphasis on academic success may unintentionally increase stress. It is essential to openly communicate with your child and try to balance the expectations with emotional support.

❖ **So, What Can Parents Do to Help?**

- **Create a positive & organised study environment:** ensure your child has a quiet, well-lit, organised space for studying. A clutter-free environment can help reduce distractions and make study sessions more effective.
- **Encourage healthy routines:** help your child establish a balanced routine that includes time for studying, relaxation, physical activity and socialising. Encourage break time during study sessions to avoid burnout.
- **Promote Self-Care:** stress management is not only about academics; physical and mental health play a huge role. Ensure your child is getting quality sleep, nutritious meals, enjoyable activities.
- **Support emotional regulation:** help your child find ways to cope with stress, such as deep breathing, mindfulness, positive self-talk, seeking help. Encourage them to express their feelings and reassure them that it is okay and normal to experience stress.

- Be supportive: while it is important to show interest in your child's academic progress, try to avoid putting too much pressure on them. Be supportive, be an active listener, help them problem-solve.
 - Normalise mistakes: let your child know that mistakes are part of learning, and no one is expected to be perfect. Encourage them to have a growth mindset, instead of a fixed one. This means focusing on effort and improvement, rather than just outcomes.
 - Seek professional help if needed: if your child's stress becomes unbearable or leads to more serious issues, consider seeking support from within the school or even externally.
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❖ FAQs

1. *Q. How can I tell if my child is experiencing study stress?*

A. Signs of study stress can vary, but common indicators include changes in behaviour, mood, or physical health. Look for signs like irritability, sleep disturbances, difficulty concentrating, loss of appetite, headaches, or stomach aches. If your child is procrastinating, withdrawing from social activities, or showing signs of anxiety about assignments and exams, they may be feeling stressed. It's important to have open conversations with your child about their feelings to get to the root of the issue.

2. *Q. What should I do if my child is constantly procrastinating?*

A. Procrastination is often a sign of stress, fear of failure, or feeling overwhelmed. Start by helping your child break tasks into smaller, manageable steps and create a realistic study schedule. Praise effort rather than focusing only on outcomes. Encourage them to tackle the hardest tasks first, when their energy is highest. You can also help them create a "study ritual," such as setting a timer for 25-minute focused study sessions followed by a 5-minute break,

known as the Pomodoro Technique. This can help reduce feelings of overwhelm and increase productivity.

3. *Q. How can I support my child if they feel anxious about upcoming tests/exams?*

A. Test anxiety is common, and it's important to reassure your child that feeling nervous is normal. Help them prepare by creating a study plan well in advance, so they don't feel rushed. Encourage active study techniques, such as summarizing key points, using flashcards, or practicing past exams. On the day of the test, remind your child to take deep breaths and stay calm. Positive self-talk—such as "I can do this"—can also help reduce anxiety. Be interested in their experience but make sure to not be overbearing. Always ask them questions but if you notice that they are not in the mood to talk about a matter further do not push them.

4. *Q. My child is a perfectionist and gets very stressed if they don't get perfect grades.*

How can I help them?

A. Perfectionism can create significant stress, as the fear of failure often leads to excessive pressure. Encourage your child to focus on progress rather than perfection. Praise their efforts and emphasize the importance of learning from mistakes. Help them understand that everyone makes errors, and it's a normal part of the learning process. You can also model healthy behaviours by discussing your own challenges and how you manage setbacks. Encouraging a growth mindset—where effort, persistence, and improvement are valued more than outcomes—can help alleviate perfectionistic tendencies.

5. *Q. How can I show interest in my child's academic work without adding pressure on them?*

A. It's important to show your child that you care about their academic progress without making them feel like they have to meet your expectations. Instead of

focusing on grades, ask open-ended questions about what they're learning, how they feel about their work, or what they enjoyed most during the week. Praise effort and persistence, and create an environment where mistakes are viewed as opportunities to learn. By focusing on the process rather than the outcome, you help your child develop a healthy attitude toward school and reduce unnecessary pressure.

6. *Q. My child has a lot of extracurricular activities, and I'm concerned that it's contributing to their stress. What can we do?*

A. While extracurricular activities can provide valuable experiences, too many commitments can lead to burnout. Sit down with your child to review their schedule and discuss which activities they enjoy most and which may be causing stress. Prioritize activities that align with their interests and personal growth. Encourage balance by ensuring they have enough time for rest, homework, and socializing. If necessary, help your child learn how to say "no" or limit their involvement in activities to maintain a healthy balance.

7. *Q. My child seems to be coping well with stress at home, but I'm concerned about how they handle stress at school. How can I help?*

A. It's important to ensure that your child has a strong support system both at home and at school. Encourage them to talk to a teacher, educational advisor, or school psychologist if they're feeling overwhelmed. Schools often offer resources, such as time management workshops or stress management programs, that can help. If your child is reluctant to speak up, help them find the words to express their feelings. Being proactive and fostering a connection between home and school will help ensure your child feels supported in all environments.

8. *Q. When should I consider seeking professional help for my child's stress?*

A. If your child’s stress is affecting their daily life, sleep, eating habits, relationships, or school performance, it may be time to seek professional help. Anxiety, chronic worry, or feelings of helplessness that persist for weeks can be signs of a more serious issue like anxiety or depression. A school psychologist can help assess your child’s emotional well-being and provide them with strategies to manage stress more effectively. However, sometimes external long-term support is more appropriate.

❖ Final Thoughts.

Stress is a normal part of life, but when it comes to school, it’s essential to help your child manage it in healthy ways. By being understanding, providing emotional support, and encouraging healthy habits, you can help reduce the negative impact of study stress. Open communication and a balanced approach will enable your child to thrive academically while maintaining their overall well-being.

Remember, it's not about eliminating stress entirely, but about teaching your child how to cope with it in ways that empower them to succeed. Whether it’s breaking down tasks, practicing mindfulness, or seeking help when needed, every step you take to reduce stress will help your child build resilience and confidence—both in their studies and in life.

If you have any concerns about your child’s stress levels or would like further resources, don’t hesitate to reach out to the school psychologist.

- The Mind Hub, by Marina Stavrou

