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Tips for Talking with Teens About Stress & Mental Well-Being

Change to Chill talked with a group of teen interns about things that help and what things hurt when it comes to talking about stress.

Do...

- Help teens remember that, while important, grades, test scores and athletic performance **don't define them as a person**. They're much more than that.
- **Help teens put things in perspective.** Remind them that tough or stressful situations will pass. Put yourself in their shoes...even if something doesn't feel like a big deal to you, recognize and provide understanding that it feels like a big deal to them.
- **Make time to be there** – both physically and mentally.
- **Take time to talk.** Start with the small stuff to build a trusting relationship. This makes it easier to talk about bigger issues when they come up.
- Spontaneous, meaningful **affection and encouragement** goes a long way.
- Support the idea that **self-care is a good thing**. It doesn't mean that teens are lazy, weak or something is wrong with them to check in and take a break when they need to.
- **Talk more openly about stress/anxiety/depression as issues that affect all of us!** They are real medical conditions, just like having an ear infection or diabetes. Remind teens that it's okay to struggle and **they're not alone in what they're feeling**.
- **Mental health is important for everyone.** Mental health includes day to day stressors and big life events – it means coping with life! Mental health is happening everywhere – in the school, at home and in the community. Chances are, someone you know is stressed or dealing with a mental health issue.
- **Address stigma.** Remind teens that seeing the school counselor or a therapist is nothing to be embarrassed about! They're there for the big stuff and the small stuff. Make sure teens know where to find help if they need it.

Don't:

- Make comments like, **“You’re only a teenager, you barely have anything to worry about.”**

Instead...Remember that teens have limited life experience. You probably have major life events to compare small stuff to (going to college, getting a job, raising a family, etc.) while teens don’t typically have that context. Listen and respond without judgement.

- **Make assumptions/judgements** about doing poorly on a test or getting a bad grade.

Instead...Ask WHY teens didn’t do well. Have a conversation. Be present and engaged and care (or at least act like you do)!

- **Shoot down ideas right away.**

Instead...Take the time to be interested and listen. When a teen is excited about something give them a listening ear. If you don’t support the idea/choice engage in a meaningful conversation about it and explain your point of view.

- Simply be annoyed about how much **time teens are spending on their phones.**

Instead...Learn about social media. Things like Snapchat and Instagram are part of normal interactions and how teens stay connected now. Even if you don’t agree with it, it is the way teens stay connected now. If screen time becomes an issue, talk about boundaries that work for you and the teen.