



HIGH SCHOOL

HIGH STRESS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- **PAGE 3:** Introduction to This Zine
- **PAGE 4:** Mental Illness
- **PAGE 5:** Statistics in Our Own Dartmouth High
- **PAGE 6:** My Personal Experience
- **PAGE 7:** A Real Life Example of Stress in School
- **PAGE 8:** Poems by Other Students
- **PAGE 9:** My Own Poem
- **PAGE 10:** Coping Techniques for Anxiety and Stress
- **PAGE 11:** About The Author
- **PAGE 12:** Information sources

INTRODUCTION TO THIS ZINE

Stress is defined as any change or pressure in the environment. Stress in moderation can be helpful to high school students in many ways. It can motivate them to study, and to do better. Adolescence is an important time to learn to deal with stress because teens can then deal with it better in college and in their adult lives.

But too much stress has many effects on the body and mind. In the short term it can cause anxiety; over long periods of time, elevated levels of stress hormones can degrade the immune system, cause heart problems, exacerbate respiratory and gastrointestinal issues, and bring on chronic anxiety and depression.

High school students have described that schoolwork, grades, and college admissions constituted their greatest sources of stress. Many students are only stressed about these things because they internalize pressures from parents, teachers, and peers. But schools in more dangerous areas can experience more intense stress because of physical safety: such as criminal intruders, gang activity and drugs, which parents are powerless against. So how do we create the right kind of school environment for students, one in which the kids are preparing themselves for life with the right amount of stress, but aren't destroying themselves in the process?

Education. Schools can help stressed and anxious students by teaching them coping strategies as part of the curriculum. This zine is meant to raise awareness for the emotional struggles kids feel everyday, so, hopefully, changes can be made in a school environment to lower these struggles.

MENTAL ILLNESS

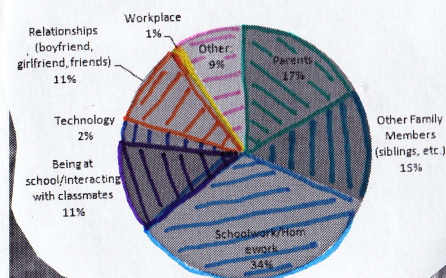
CAN STRESS TRIGGER MENTAL ILLNESSES?

Stress hormones release sedatives which can lead to low energy. Constant release of these sedatives through negative stress can contribute to the likelihood of being depressed. Stress can extend episodes of bipolar disorder or even make it more intense, which will further disrupt day-to-day activities and responsibilities. Patterns of stress can intensify feelings of anxiety and/or panic attacks. Chronic activation of stress hormones is likely to contribute to severe anxiety, which can include a high heart rate, nausea, etc.

STATISTICS:

1. In a year 1 in 5 Canadians will experience a mental health problem or illness.
2. By age 40, about 50% of the population will have or have had a mental illness.
3. Suicide accounts for 24% of all deaths among 15-24 year olds
4. It is estimated that 10-20% of Canadian youth are affected by a mental illness or disorder

What is causing you the most stress right now?



IMPACTS OF STRESS

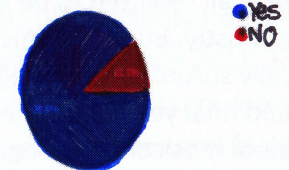
In developing children and teens, cases of prolonged stress can slow the brain's growth as well as its development. Chronic stress during teen develop can negatively affect the immune system, which could affect immune responses as the child grows.

5

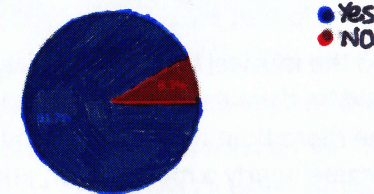
STATISTICS IN OUR OWN SCHOOL

I created a survey and asked students in my grade various questions relating to school stress. Here are some of the results:

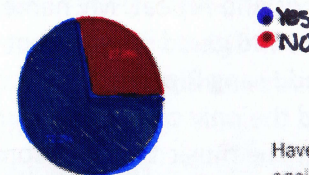
Have you ever felt stressed out or anxious because of school work?
35 responses



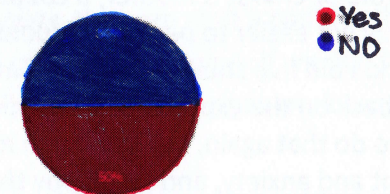
Have you felt, or known someone who felt stressed or anxious because of school?
35 responses



Have you ever felt stressed out or anxious because of the teachers?
36 responses



Have you felt stressed or anxious because of bullying, either against you or against someone else, in your school?
36 responses



6

MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH SCHOOL RELATED ANXIETY

In middle school, I closed up. Don't know when, don't know why. But suddenly, I wanted to be invisible. And it was fine, my silent life. I was happy, mostly. But sometimes it frustrated me, that I couldn't talk, that I physically shrunk when asked a question or looked in the eyes. So in my third and final year of middle school I picked up a form to audition for the school musical. Meaning, I had to go from silent and invisible, to singing in front of people. Go big or go home, right?

I sat on my bed staring and the crumpled sheet, my hands balled to my chest, for a long time. I physically could not touch the sheet, felt as if it was coated in poison. My lungs felt tight and I was crying, just looking at the paper. Because singing was something I hated. Even alone or in the shower, I didn't sing.

But I knew that if I didn't do the musical I would regret it. I would stay in my shell forever, and I would be throwing away the chance to meet anyone. And that scared me more than the thirty second audition. So the day of the audition came nearly a month later, and I sat in the chair with my arms and legs folded, still trying to be small, trying to breathing that sometimes worked: four seconds in, hold for four seconds, four seconds out, hold for four seconds and repeat. My name was called, and I stood at the front of the room and glued my eyes out the window, on the high school across the road. I sang Riptide by Vance Joy, the first song you learn on the ukulele and the only one I could think I wouldn't forget the words to. And it was fine. The music teacher tapped his foot to the beat, and I almost smiled.

I got the role of the mother, a couple of lines and nearly half a song, solo. It only got easier to perform. I couldn't feel the eyes of the audience in the dark. I did five shows. Sang five times.

Thinking back on the experience now, I don't know if I'd ever have the courage to do that again, but I live with my pride that I did overcome my stage front and anxiety, and I'm happy that I did.

7

THIS IS A WAKE-UP CALL. THESE ARE AREAS WE NEED TO PAY ATTENTION TO."

A REAL LIFE EXAMPLE OF STRESS IN SCHOOL

The Toronto District School Board asked 103 000 students from grades 7 through 12 questions about their emotional well-being in 2011. The results showed high numbers of Toronto's tweens and teens are stressed out about their futures, that they are lacking confidence and feeling down. The survey found that in Grades 7 and 8, almost 60 % of students worry about their future most of the time. And in high school, it grows to almost three-quarters.

Grade 12 students Marwa Turabi and Alexis Yacoub hear about such worries all the time, the two are part of a mental health support and advocacy group called "Better Than Mirrors" at Scarborough's Sir Wilfrid Laurier Collegiate Institute. They ran a workshop where they asked the biggest fears of students. "I'm scared I will never love myself. I'm scared I will lose my mom. I'm scared I'll never be successful. I'm scared I'll never be loved," Turabi said, listing examples. "They're scared they won't be successful." Teens reported feeling "reasonably happy," but when asked more specific questions, the stressors begins to show: they feel tired, have trouble concentrating or making decisions, and are losing sleep because of it.

Hirad Zafari, a Grade 12 student, said this time in his life is "crucial" and "full of stress."

"The Grade 11 and Grade 12 years, they can start a path for the rest of your life. We are reminded of that so often, too — if we don't make the right decision or best decision now, it's not going to work out well in the future."

POEMS BY OTHER STUDENTS

When searching for whole poems about the stress school causes, I found many that were long, so I chose my favorite stanzas:

"TO MY FAMILY, I'M A FAILURE,
AND I'M A FAILURE TO MYSELF.
EVERYONE'S HIGH EXPECTATIONS
ONLY DAMAGED MY METAL HEALTH.
IF I EVER HAVE KIDS I WILL
ALWAYS TRY
TO MAKE SURE THE FEAR OF
FAILURE IS NOT THE REASON THEY
EVER CRY."

"THE WORST PART, HOWEVER, IS
NOT THAT YOU'RE A
DISAPPOINTMENT.
IT'S THE PERMANENT, NEVER
ENDING EMBARRASSMENT
OF ALWAYS FAILING AND
COMING LAST,
OF NEVER BEING GOOD
ENOUGH, YOUR CONFIDENCE
DROPPING FAST."

"THE ANXIETY WE FEEL TAKES
CONTROL OF OUR BODIES.
WE DON'T FEEL REAL WHEN WE
BECOME SO HEAVY.
IT LIES IN THE MIDST OF OUR PAIN,
AND EVERYTHING TURNS MESSY.
OUR MINDS PLAY A GAME CALLED
GOING INSANE."

"WE'VE BECOME SO RESTLESS AND TOO
BROKEN HEARTED.
MAYBE IT WAS THE FIRST DAY OF HIGH SCHOOL
WHERE KIDS RIDICULE AND WE LOSE OUR
IDENTITY.
IT MUST BE THE SYSTEM OF AN UNNATURAL
SOCIETY."

"THE BRUISES ON
HIS SKIN
WERE NOT
PUNISHMENTS
FROM HIS OWN
SINS.
BUT THEY WERE
THE CRUELTY FOR
HIS DIFFERENCES,
AND THE
CONSEQUENCE OF
HIS EXISTENCE."

MY OWN POEM

I WROTE ON MY OWN EXPERIENCE

IT HAS HANDS.

This feeling has hands

It has slender, scaly hands,
with long fingernails
that freeze anything they touch.

These hands slither through vents and sewers
and I can almost smell the hands
like the most suffocating smoke
before they pounce.

But there is nothing you can do.

They pounce,
pushing you down and
against a wall
shoving themselves down your throat.
One wraps around your lungs and
the other tightens around your spine.

They tug at the walls of your stomach like
loosening up a balloon.
Snatch your bones and rattle them.
They try to yank your teeth out of your gums
and crush your skull like an empty soda can.

Your eyes burn like acid.
Like fire.

But there's nothing you can do.

COPING TECHNIQUES FOR ANXIETY AND STRESS

(PG 4) Stress can intensify feelings of anxiety and/or panic attacks. Chronic activation of stress hormones is likely to contribute to severe anxiety, which can include a high heart rate, nausea.

- Take slow breaths for 3 minutes.
- Organize. Physical order often helps us feel a sense of mental order.
- Do a task 25% more slowly than usual. Allow yourself to savor not rushing.
- Find something that makes you laugh.
- Look at the situation you're in from a time point in the future, like six months from now. Does the problem seem smaller when you view it from further away?
- Exercise. Yoga especially can be really effective.
- Forgive yourself for not foreseeing a problem
- Drop your shoulders and do a gentle neck roll.
- Massage your hand, which will activate oxytocin.
- Limit your caffeine and alcohol intake
- Try to keep up with social activities
- Aim for 8 hours of sleep
- Listen to calming music

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

INFORMATION SOURCES

- **COPING WITH ANXIETY**

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/in-practice/201503/50-strategies-beat-anxiety>

- **INTRODUCTION**

<https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/10/high-stress-high-school/409735/>

- **MENTAL ILLNESS**

<https://www.pa-mojabutterfly.com/topic/r1-stress-in-high-school-students>

- **NEWS ARTICLE**

https://www.thestar.com/yourtoronto/education/2013/02/12/toronto_students_worry_about_family_school_and_future_survey_finds.html

- **POETRY STANZAS**

<https://www.familyfriendpoems.com>