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## Personal Tips & Strategies Supporting your Teen

Teenage years are characterised by rapid learning, risk-taking, building relationships and establishing a sense of self. Parents are often bombarded with news articles on the very real dangers of alcohol-fuelled accidents and violence, party drug experimentation and risky behaviours. Particularly at this time as teenagers come to the end of their schooling and participate in “schoolies” and end of year activities, parents worry about risky behaviours becoming dangerous.

As parents, it is important to keep the communication open, to talk through choices and consequences, to show understanding about risk-taking and partying. We want our kids to make choices, not to be afraid to say “no” and to call us, as parents, if they are in trouble or scared. It is important to talk to them about looking out for each other, not to leave their friends alone or with strangers.

This stage of development is intense for our teens as they experience significant brain and hormonal changes whilst navigating external demands and influences from peers, teachers, parents, carers and of course, ever-present and unforgiving social media. We are witnessing an exponential increase in mental health issues among teens. So how can we support teens to proactively manage stress through these tumultuous times?



### Good sleep

Poor sleep often accompanies stressful times. Make sleep a priority in the household, parents and children. Review Wi-Fi settings and make sure that devices are out of the bedroom (that means the adults too).

Teenagers experiencing stress might lie awake worrying at night and be too tired to function well the next day. This can set up a poor sleep pattern. The Sleep Health Foundation recommends these tips to help your child establish healthy sleeping patterns: avoid screen time an hour before bed and encourage reading or listening to relaxing music instead to help wind down; support your teen to establish and stick to a routine around bed and wake-up times; encourage them to get around 7.5 hours of sleep per night, which is the optimum amount of time for teenagers. Read more [here](#).

### Keep active

There is plenty of evidence on the benefits of exercise in reducing stress. Exercise stimulates the release of dopamine, a feel-good hormone that helps to alleviate feelings of stress. Other benefits of exercise include improved concentration and opportunities for social interaction. Be ready to try something new to you both – perhaps paddle boarding and roller-skating – you could have a good laugh! Encourage your child to get involved in a team sport or club that involves activity for social interaction and connection with others.



## Food and mood

It is now very well established that food impacts mood - what your teen eats plays a role in their ability to cope with stress. Eating well will help ensure your teen stays healthy and has the resilience and energy they need to deal with stressful situations. Highly processed foods contribute little nutrition to the diet and deplete the body of vitamins and minerals during digestion. Encouraging your child to eat whole foods can give them the energy required for the developmental years of adolescence, boost their nutrient stores for times of stress and keep them well generally. Planning the weekly menu and cooking together can be fun and encourages them to take responsibility for their health with your guidance. Read more detail [here](#).



## Social connection

This is one of the most important protective factors through adolescence. This period of development is hallmarked by the quest to find a tribe and in today's technology age this invariably includes online as well as face-to-face friends. Friendships can be fraught with struggles, and a non-judgemental listening ear can help a teen to navigate these issues successfully, learning some skills for life. Teenagers can feel lonely and isolated for a range of reasons and being able to connect anonymously with people online can be a great source of comfort and support. This raises a lot of fear and trepidation for parents but if carefully monitored with safety at the heart of your conversations with your teen, online friendship can help to mitigate anxiety and loneliness. If you require support with this issue, AccessEAP is here to support you and/or your teen to manage relationships well.

## Managing social media consumption

A lot of parents feel that technology, particularly social media is a modern-day scourge; however, the evidence is showing that as with food consumption, in moderation and with exposure to helpful sites - technology can be a positive influence in the lives of our teens. A [recent study](#) found that, with the exception of cyberbullying, sleep and exercise have been found to be more critical markers, than social media exposure, for adolescent wellbeing. Modelling healthy digital attitudes and behaviours as parents is very important and it helps if rules in the family apply to everyone – not just the teens. A family “digital detox for a day” goes a long way!

## Resources and support for you and your teen

*Reach out, don't bail out* is a catchphrase used by [Reachout.com](#) – an excellent online resource for young people and parents. Evidence tells us that our teens generally feel more comfortable accessing support online rather than face-to-face; hence, the establishment of websites such as [Reachout.com](#) and online counselling with, for example, [eHeadspace](#) and AccessEAP.

Your EAP generally provides support for family members, which includes counselling for teenagers, nutrition consultation, financial and career counselling. Read more on the AccessEAP website [here](#). For a confidential conversation with one of our experienced clinical professionals, please contact **AccessEAP** on **1800 818 728**.

