

3. Stress and the Teen Parent

At a Glance...



Being a parent is stressful, no matter what your age. Being a teen parent can be very stressful because teen parents have many different roles. They are parents, children to their own parents, students, workers, friends, and possibly dating partners or spouses. All of these different roles can be confusing and can create stress. When parents are under stress, they are not likely to be the best parents to their children. It is important for teen parents to learn how to handle the stress they experience so that they can be the best parents possible to their children.

Time



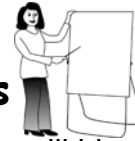
Approximately 1 hour

Core Concepts



- Because teens are in a stage between childhood and adulthood, they may have greater difficulty adjusting to the role of parents than will adults.
- The physical demands of parenting may be difficult for teens because their bodies have not completed physical development.

- Teens need ways to cope with the stress they experience as parents.
- Teens need to plan ahead to reduce the stress they experience from parenting.



Objectives

- Participants will identify things that cause them stress as parents.
- Participants will develop ways to cope with the stress they experience.
- Participants will plan ahead to reduce situations that cause them stress.
- Participants will find resources that can provide them with support as parents.

Materials



- ' Flip chart or board and markers
- ' Crayons or markers
- ' Toothpicks
- ' Construction Paper
- ' Glue
- ' Scissors
- ' Old magazines that you don't mind cutting up with pictures of people
- ' "Resources I Can Use" handout (G-3-a)

Ice Breaker



Give each participant a toothpick. Instruct them to break their toothpicks in half. This should be simple for each person. Now give another toothpick to each participant, but ask them to put all of their toothpicks together in a bundle. Let participants take turns trying to break the bundle of toothpicks in half. Depending on class size, the bundle will be more difficult or impossible to break. (If you have only one student, give her a bundle of toothpicks to break after she has successfully broken one toothpick.) Ask participants what this activity shows? Possible responses: *when we work together, we are stronger than when we work alone or when we have the support of others we can withstand more stress than we can when we are alone.*

Facilitator's Script



Being a parent is a tough job. It can be especially tough if you are a teen parent. Babies place lots of demands on parents. When you are in the process of growing yourself, it is hard to concentrate on your baby's needs. As a teen parent, you may find that you are under a lot of stress. What are some of the things about being a parent that cause you stress?

Have participants name things about being a parent that cause them stress. As they name them, list them on a chalk board or flip chart. Responses may include . . .

- not getting enough sleep
- not being able to go out with friends
- not having time to do homework
- having to take the baby everywhere you go
- having to work to support the baby
- having to miss school because the baby is sick
- never having money to buy what you want
- no one respecting your decisions

What happens to you when you are under stress? We are going to make a collage of the things that happen to us when we experience stress.

Give each participant a piece of construction paper, some crayons or markers, scissors, glue, and old magazines that you don't mind having cut up that have lots of pictures of people. Ask each participant to create a collage of pictures or words from the magazines that show how they feel when they are under stress. They can use the crayons or markers to write captions for the pictures or to decorate the collages. Allow about 30 minutes for this activity. Ask participants to share their collages with the rest of the group.

How do you cope with stress when you experience it? Let's make a list of some things you do to help you deal with stress you feel.

As participants make suggestions, list them on a flip chart or chalk board. You may refer to the handout "Tips for Managing Stress" (item 2j) from the lesson "De-stress Your Life" in Kid Smart (page 25) for suggestions if participants have trouble coming up with ideas.

Facilitator's Note

Instead of listing suggestions on the flip chart about managing stress, you might divide the class into two groups. Let one group work on collages about how they react to stress and the other group to make collages about how they cope with stress. Let each group share their collages with each other.

Review information, activities, and handouts from the unit *Managing Stress* in Kid Smart, pages 19 - 38. You may want to use some of those activities or remind participants of the things they did when they went through that unit.

What are some ways you can control stress? Look at the list we made of things that cause you stress as a parent? What are some things you might change that would reduce the amount of stress you experience?

Go over the list of stressors and see if participants can think of changes they could make that would reduce or eliminate those stressors. For example, if one is stressed by her toddler getting into everything at home, she can put away all the breakable or dangerous items in the child's reach or rearrange furniture to discourage climbing. This might reduce the number of times she must say no or correct the child. If not getting enough sleep is an issue, the teen parent might try going to bed earlier or taking a nap when the baby naps.

Give each participant a copy of the handout "Resources I Can Use" (G-3-a). Ask them to look over the list of resources and put a check in the box beside each of the resources they have used in the past. Have them to look over the list and see if there are other resources they might want to use in the future. Have them color in the boxes beside those resources on the list. Ask participants to share with each other about resources they have used that were most useful to

Homework

Ask participants to think of the best hint they could give to another teen parent that would help him or her to cope with the stresses of being a parent. Write the hint on a piece of paper and turn it in at the next class session. All of the hints will be compiled and made into a handout to share with all class participants.

If they would like to have their hints shared with others outside the class, they can use the Internet. The web site for Young Positive Parenting Online at [<http://www.yppo.com>] has a section called Parenting Tips. You can read over the tips other teen parents have already listed there and have class members add their own tips for others to read. These tips are very creative and really great hints that your class members will enjoy.