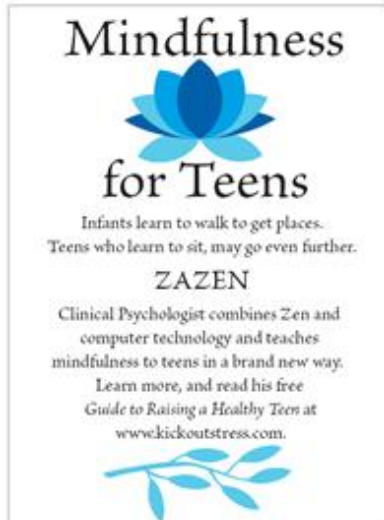


# Guide to Raising a Healthy Teen

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Parents today are under more and more pressure to find ways to help their children navigate the hurdles in their lives, so their kids can reach their true potential and succeed in Life. The best advice for parents is to try to do your best in the present moment, rather than ruminating over the past or unproductively worrying about the future. This advice is, , while easy to give, is however, very difficult to follow. Parents' minds are filled with fears of whether their kids are going to be damaged by early exposure to drugs, alcohol and sex. Will their kids be accepted by peers, succeed in school and sports, get into a good college. In their attempts to alleviate their own fears, parents often times "overbook" their kids, enrolling them in sports,

after school activities, volunteer work -anything to get them away from the negative effects of mindless videogames or computer chat. Many of these frantic moves to immunize their kids from a failed life, frequently backfire with kids "burning out," because the pressure to get someplace else, robs them of enjoying the process of learning and living in the present. And when kids drop out of things they previously enjoyed, or lose enthusiasm for new challenges, they fail to develop Resilience – the capacity to cope with life's setbacks, let go of disappointments and invite new challenges. Kids find it safer to withdraw than to risk failure. And as these kids narrow their exposure to new activities, friends and challenges, they miss out on the necessary building blocks to developing positive self worth and confidence to succeed in life. Pleasure from success suddenly is replaced with stress and withdrawal from friends, family, school and sports.

**So how can a parent help their child?** As parents we would all like to help our children avoid the suffering we went through during our life time. A common pitfall for most parents is giving well intentioned advice without first listening to their children. Kids are not different than adults – we all want to be known by another, and not feel alone. Kids need their parents help in identifying and sorting out any number of competing and at time confusing set of feelings and thoughts. Sometimes listening in itself provides the necessary calm to allow a teen to resolve their own problems. At other times suggestions may help your teen consider alternative paths to helping them address a crisis.

Another way of helping your child is to respect their sovereignty. They have been thrown into this world with their own set of DNA, parents, siblings and environment which is unique to them – and different from their parents. While it is only natural for a parent to use their own experience as a template from which

to educate their children, there is no guarantee this will succeed. It's realizing that what might have been incredibly helpful to you as a child or teen, could be useless to your own child. Listening, and searching together for whatever solutions *they* arrive at will serve your child well. You can help give your child a map, but their growth comes when they walk the path on their own. This however should not be considered a *liaise fair* approach to parenting- far from it. Kids need structure. They need to know you love and support them. They also need to know there are negative consequences for not keeping curfew, practicing dangerous behaviors it relates to sex, drugs, smoking and alcohol: not being responsible in school ...etc. Its all right to establish a policy of trust with confirmation – you accept in good faith what your teens tells you they will be doing, and that your reserve the option to confirm or check in on them.

A third way to help your child is modeling through your own actions. What you do, how you treat yourself, spouse, children and others acts as a powerful guide for your children of how to treat themselves and others.

**So how does stress prevent success?** Not all stress is bad. For limited periods of time stress can be a good thing. It can increase attention and concentration while preparing for a test, or it can pump you up for a good race. Following a principle of the Yerkes-Dodson Law, efficiency increases with stress to a point, but if stress continues after that point, efficiency will begin to decline steadily. When stress continues and becomes chronic, it becomes bad, taking a severe toll on both parent and child, and can lead to any of a number of negative results including poor health, anxiety, depression and a lowering of functioning with friends, in school and in sports. In severe circumstances, the help of a professional and medication might be needed. But before things get so bad, and alternative approach can be very helpful.

Stress needs to be looked at from the perspective that families are highly interdependent- and if one member is unhappy or anxious, it affects everyone. Alleviating the stress one member of the family, will enhance the functioning and happiness of the family as a whole. This principle was illustrated to me at a talk I was giving. When I asked a mother whether her child was anxious, she responded: "My daughter's not anxious, she is a carrier. She appears calm; I'm the one who's a nervous wreck." Treating individuals out of the context of their family may limit the success one has in stress reduction. In the *Kick out Stress Teen Stress Reduction Program*, we encourage parents and other family members to practice the same stress reducing techniques taught in the program.

**What kinds of stress do teenagers have?** Stress can emerge from any of a number of places in your child's life. Peer pressure relating to sex, alcohol, drugs. Pressure to perform well in sports or school in order to get into a good college. When asked what stresses them most, most kids respond that the stress of wanting to be accepted by their peers and have friends ranks first. Our culture and advertisers encourage kids to eat cholesterol laden and fatty foods, on the one hand - and to be thin and attractive on the other. Kids are put under

pressure to "succeed in life", which translates into something in the future - like getting into a good college, or getting a good job. Kids would be much better off if "emotional success" was given the same importance as "intellectual success" is given. Work by Daniel Goleman in Emotional Intelligence indicates that kids who develop emotionally are most likely to be happy and find success in many areas of their lives. We find that kids who learn to successfully manage stress in their lives develop both resilience in dealing with life's adversities, and capacity to feel good about themselves and the lives they lead. It's said that the mark of a great teacher, is when his student surpasses him in skill. If our kids learn ways of reducing stress in their lives, they will hopefully surpass us. What a great legacy to leave.

**There is no magic, just Practice.** There isn't really anything mystical or magic about learning the skills necessary to reduce stress in our lives. We have seen that when kids learn just one from any number of valuable techniques, they can significantly reduce their stress and become more successful in their lives. When kids and their parents are exposed to a number of practices, they can then choose ones which seem most useful to them. Breathing techniques, walking and sitting meditation, yoga, visualization techniques - these are but a few of the techniques taught by skilled professionals trained in stress reduction. Some people are skeptical of whether it will work for them or their teen. Some find reassurance to know that there is a 2,500 year track record of success in its use and it is promoted by current day physicians and scholars (see 1,2,3) Others are reassured that famous athletes use these same principles to give them an edge in their game. (See 3,4,5). While the techniques are not new, we have also found that the media of delivery is particularly important for kids today, if they are going to be interested in and learn. Consequently we have gone to where kids are, at their computers, and designed a program using beat driving music, and video animation to teach these same invaluable stress reduction practices. We have found that those kids, who can be encouraged to practice, learn a skill which lasts them a life time.

**How can I help my kid reduce the stress in their lives?** The first step for any parent is to be mindful of and learn how to manage the stress in your own life. That means managing the stress with your spouse, with your work, and finding a healthy life style of your own. It means finding a better balance in your life. Realizing that life is not a dress rehearsal for something which follows - but to take stock in and learn how to enjoy and find purpose in your present life - and not being obsessed of mistakes in the past, or of the future. Instead trying to live as rich and meaningful life as one can in the present - because the present in reality is all we have. Adding a little exercise to your life for a healthy body, eating better, getting enough sleep, taking time off to relax, take a nice walk - in short, taking time off for yourself, rather than living like you swallowed a metronome at birth. Only when you develop a spirit of kindness toward yourself, will you be able to be kind to others, your spouse and your children. Also realize that whatever calmness you achieve is reality only temporary, because life is

filled with the unexpected. What needs to become developed and practiced is the capacity to always come home to positive sense of yourself trying your best.

Tips on how to help your Kids:

- Listen carefully and with respect to what they are saying. Try to delay seeing things with prejudice eyes, and allow yourself to put yourself in your child's shoes, respecting their sovereignty
- When angry, take a few deep breaths, or return to a discussion of the problem with your teen only when you have controlled your anger. If you can't discuss it within 24 hours, write a letter and deliver and wait till you're able to discuss it without anger.
- Take time out to do relaxing things with the family together as a whole and with each member individually. This will maintain a balance or harmony in the home.
- Share with your children the values you have as a parent, and model this behavior whenever possible. Don't lecture your kids about the vices of smoking, when you yourself are addicted. Committing to freeing yourself will be the best advice you can give your child.
- Don't overbook your child, or convey that their value as a person is based on their performance. This will only lead to early "burn out." Find out what your child can have a passion for, or at least allow for the exploration of likes and dislikes so they can eventually find something they love and is theirs.
- Join your children in discussion, stating your values firmly, while listening to their views. Come to some consensus as to the rules of the house, the rewards for following the rules and the consequences in not following the rules.
- Allow for differences, watching not to impose your own ideas of life at the expense of not asking them first how they feel about something.
- Be a part of and participate as much as is possible both the struggles of your children and they joys. Your relationship with them is a prototype for future relationships.
- Develop the perspective that it is the process of being mindful of all that is troublesome and pleasurable in life, and both are powerful teachers to help us transform our own lives, and the lives of our children.
- A powerful approach aimed at accomplishing the above is *Kick Out Stress - Teen Stress Reduction Program*. Just think how much further your child can go in life, with just learning a few basic skills of mindfulness.

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