

Dealing with stress

Available at <https://jigsaw.ie/dealing-with-stress/>

The pandemic turned people's plans for the last couple of years upside down. Effects will probably be felt for a some time to come too.

Young people, in particular, have been heavily impacted. Missed opportunities due to social restrictions, job insecurity and uncertainty about the future have led to challenging situations.

Stress is one of those words we use so often it has almost lost its meaning. To gain a better understanding of how to deal with stress, this article covers:

- **What is stress?**
- **When is stress good and when is it bad?**
- **What causes stress?**
- **Tips for dealing with stress.**

What is stress?

Stress is a signal that our body or mind gives us. It lets us know that something is not great and needs to be looked at.

For pre-historic or early humans, stress appeared in response to serious danger, like meeting a bear while out hunting. Stress hormones like adrenaline and cortisol gave the boost we needed to deal with the threat: either 'fight or flight'.

Our bodies still respond to threats the same way today. Even though the bear has now been replaced by a maths exam or a row with our boyfriend/girlfriend. Stress can cause a physical reaction: our body tenses and our heart rate speeds up.

When is stress good and when is it bad?

When young people come to Jigsaw with feelings of stress, we say it's not possible to completely rid your life of it. But it is possible to better manage, and reduce your stress levels.

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Stress is your body trying to tell you something so learning to listen to it is a good start:

Stress isn't always a bad thing. In fact a little bit of stress can be helpful. The caveman can run away from the bear. You get the energy boost to tackle two hours of trigonometry questions.

But too much stress can also cause us to freeze. The caveman pretends to be dead when he meets that bear because he can't out-run it.

For you, there's a big exam in a few days and all you can do is stare at the cover of your books. You're frozen because you don't know where to start. To get away from the feelings of stress, you look at YouTube instead. Sound familiar?

Stress rarely appears alone. You might also be feeling down, anxious, angry, irritable, overwhelmed or overloaded. Stress can interfere with our sleep and leave us lacking motivation. It may also make it difficult to concentrate.

What causes stress?

When we can't identify what's stressing us out, then we don't feel able to change anything.

It's rare we are stressed about just one thing. Usually it's a combination of things at once that are difficult to manage, that could be some of the following:

- Exams or pressure from teachers or our parents/guardians
- Arguments at home or a chaotic house
- Worries or stress about friends or friendship groups.

Stress can build up and affect our body and mind. Your thoughts become 'I can't manage what is being asked of me'.

Discover what is really bothering you

Getting in tune with yourself is the first and most essential step for dealing with stress.

Think of stress as an alert telling you there are parts of your life that might need changing. To defuse this alert, you'll need to work out what's triggering it.

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This sounds simple. But, often we are unaware (or afraid to admit) how much a relationship, job, person, or lifestyle is stressing us.

Be your own stress detective

You might notice you get stressed doing college work from home. Many have been in situations where our families are spending large amounts of time working or studying at home. Even if we usually get on well, being forced to spend more time with our family can lead to increased strain.

If it's a family member you are finding difficult, ask yourself why you are so affected by them. Setting and keeping boundaries for ourselves, can protect us from being hurt by others.

If you are struggling to stay motivated during these most times, goal setting can be useful to give us a sense of direction.

When you feel overwhelmed

You may feel overwhelmed and are convinced everything is stressing you out. If this sounds familiar, get yourself a special notebook and record everything you do throughout the day. Next to the action you took, write down how stressed you feel on a rating of one to 10.

Patterns will emerge after a few days. You might discover that deadlines or exams always set you off, or dealing with a certain person. Or also on weeks where you have no day off between work and study.

If you're feeling overwhelmed due to changes in circumstance, be kind to yourself. It's OK to not be OK.

Tips for dealing with stress

Talk it out

Saying out loud how you're feeling to someone else can make a huge difference. This could be with a friend, parent, counsellor or teacher.

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They don't have to have all the answers (in fact, they probably won't). But talking about what's stressing you will help you find your own solutions.

You might also like to try [Jigsaw Live Chat](#). Talk to our online team via webchat about what is going on for you and different ways to manage it.

Write it all down

This might seem daunting, but your problems will seem a lot less overwhelming when they're all out on the page. You can keep a journal, or burn the pages afterwards if you really want to.

Break things down into manageable chunks

Maybe your room has been in a mess for months and it just seems too much to manage. If you get a to-do list and write 'clean room', it'll be too daunting to even start. Instead, start with something manageable, like 'do washing', or 'de-clutter desk'.

Achieving a simple task (and ticking it off the to-do list) gives us a little boost. This often reduces our stress and motivates us to tackle another manageable task. Before we know it, what once seemed like a task too big to start, is done.

Watch that inner voice

Notice how you talk to yourself. Make sure you're not being overly critical, which will make you more stressed.

Find time – and ways – to relax

There are countless ways to unwind your body and mind. Find out what works for you and schedule it into your week. It could be running, flicking through a magazine, deep breathing, or colouring books.

No matter how busy we are, we all need downtime.

Videos about stress

<https://jigsaw.ie/when-is-stress-good-and-when-is-it-bad/>

<https://jigsaw.ie/where-does-stress-come-from/>

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