

# MENTAL HEALTH

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## Student Stress

### The rise of mental illnesses and how to cope with stress as a teen.

Have you ever felt suffocated by life, extremely stressed from what is being asked of you? Well, a recent study by YouGov shows one in four students suffer from mental health problems.

A mental illness is a health condition involving emotion, thinking or behaviour – or a combination of all three. They consist of things like anxiety, depression, eating disorders, schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. They are just as important as physical illnesses and are nothing to be ashamed of. They are normally overlooked in schools as they can be hard to notice; teens have become very competent at hiding them. But schools are becoming more aware of mental issues in pupils. Recognising a mental health issue at a younger age can prevent more severe and long-lasting problems.



Physical effects of stress in kids/teens, photo from WebMD

We all suffer from stress, however, excessive amounts of work at school can trigger mental health issues, as teens aren't usually taught how to handle stress. Stress in adolescents has been linked to withdrawal, aggression, risky behaviour and substance abuse.

The teenage brain is at a unique stage of development and a study from the John Hopkins University School of Medicine suggests the brain of a teenager is more sensitive to the stress hormone cortisol, and therefore may feel its effects more quickly. The prefrontal cortex of the brain is also less developed, and could mean teens experience stress for longer than adults.



Stressed teen, photo from Doorways Arizona

So if you get angry when your mum turns off your TV programme, break down over doing homework or if you lock yourself away in your room, you could be suffering in silence.

Remember, you are not alone, many young people identify as having some mental issues. What's most important is knowing when to get support.

When to seek help:

- ❖ Often feels anxious or worried
- ❖ Are very irritable
- ❖ Have lost interest in things you used to enjoy
- ❖ Engages in risky behaviour
- ❖ Smokes, drinks, uses drugs, self-harms
- ❖ Trouble sleeping, frequent nightmares
- ❖ Suicidal thoughts
- ❖ Hears voices



Reducing stress, photo from Mango Health

To cope with stress or mental illnesses steer away from illegal drugs, alcohol and tobacco. You should exercise and eat regularly. Most importantly you should decrease negative self-talk; challenge negative thoughts about yourself with alternative neutral or positive thoughts. Learn to be proud about doing a 'good enough' job and take a break from stressful situations when you can. Take positive action, engage in activities that make you happy and talk to friends that you trust.

We all experience the emotional ups and downs of adolescence, the fear of failure, uncertainty about the future and tougher academics. In spite of this, you should never keep your emotions bottled up. You shouldn't feel suffocated by life.

**Goldington Academy** has many different resources and facilities in place to help with student stress. There are many quiet places to go if you need some alone time or a place to clear your head, like the library or the garden area. There are many trusted adults to talk to if you need help, like form tutors, subject teachers, dinner ladies and office staff. The most predominant staff member for help with stress being Mrs Sanger, the Learning Integration Centre Manager. There is also a Mindfulness club run by Miss Geeraerts to help you clear your head and release some of your stress. Goldington runs on peer encouragement and students are always there to help others. We have the anti-bullying ambassadors and buddies specialising in this area; their job is to look out for other pupils and to make sure everyone is as motivated, and as untroubled as possible.