**Academic Pressure: 5 Tips From An Expert On Coping With School Stress**

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Much has been made of recent studies revealing that Millennials (young people ages 18-29) are America's most stressed generation. But younger members of Gen Y know that the pressure begins long before they're legal. With exam pressures and college admissions anxiety at an all-time high, academic stress can become a daily struggle as early as middle school. According to an Associated Press/MTV survey, school was the most frequently-mentioned source of stress for 13 to 17-year-olds.

Whether it's your parents pushing you to boost your GPA, teachers criticizing you for a less-than-stellar test scores, or your own drive to get in to your first-choice college -- or some combination of the three -- academic pressure can get the best of you if you don't learn how to deal with it properly.

"I think it all ties in to fear," Susan Stiffelman, author of "Parenting Without Power Struggles," tells the Huffington Post. "Fear of not getting into a college, fear of not getting financial support if that's what you need, fear of not shining in college or in high school so that you're employable. Fear is a powerful motivator, but it also creates and generates tremendous amounts of stress."

We chatted with Stiffelman, a psychotherapist who has helped countless teens cope with school stresses, about her best tips for managing academic anxiety. Scroll down for five helpful ways to get through your high school years with less stress.

**1. Take time for self-care.**

Stiffelman emphasizes that you have to start with the basics, like sleep. "You have to give your organism the means to cope with stress, and that includes healthy food, non-harmful substances, sleep (dramatically more than most kids think they need), down time... Building into your day right-brain activity that lets you digest what you've been going through and process it. Those are some basic and almost biological needs we have."

Taking time to pause from the relentless pace of everyday life and enjoy creative activities that keep you from dwelling on or stressing over school pressures can go far in decreasing your stress levels.

**2. Learn to change your thinking.**

"You cannot get stressed out unless you believe your thoughts," says Stiffelman. "All stress is precipitated by stressful thinking."

When you start stressing about not finishing your project on time, your mind builds a case for why what you believe is going to happen willhappen -- and this can be paralyzing. So, when combating negative thinking patterns, Stiffelman recommends coming up with specific examples to counter the stressful thoughts. Think instead of concrete ways that you can create the time to work on a project, and how your previous line of thinking isn't accurate.

**3. Take assignments one baby step at a time.**

Stiffelman advises her young clients to chunk their work down into manageable, bite-sized portions that feel less overwhelming than looking at the big picture. If you have an essay to write that's making you feel anxious, list the individual steps that lead to the destination of the essay being finished (finding sources, creating an outline, writing an intro), and the task will begin to feel less daunting.

"List what you have going on, and list how much time each thing is going to take," she suggests. "Chunking things down makes them feel more manageable and less anxiety-inducing."

**4. Lower your goals.**

No, we're not talking about being a slacker. According to Stiffelman, following the truism "Lower your goals, you'll achieve more," can help to relieve stress and boost academic success.

Instead of setting your goal to be getting the highest grade in the class, set a goal to feel satisfied with your performance.

**5. Stay balanced during exam periods.**

The importance of taking breaks and working in time to relax during your busiest and most stressful periods can't be overestimated, Stiffelman urges. No matter how hard you push yourself, nobody can maintain constant focus, and you will burn yourself out if you try. Take frequent, short breaks for fun activities so that you'll be able to go back to your writing or studying refreshed.

"Do something that, even for 15 minutes, brings you back to yourself," says Stiffelman. "I'll often say, 'What did you love to do when you were six years old?' Do a little bit of that when you're in prep mode to counterbalance the stress -- no brain can work for 24 hours."