

## Mental Stress and Coping Strategies in Adolescence

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### Abstract

*Adolescence is very important stage of human beings. It is the stage which decides the direction as well as destination of the individual. It is the stage when there are several physical and mental transformation occurs. This stage is also known as the stage of stress and storm. Mental stress among adolescence give rise many complications related to career, education, life style, hobbies, habits, activities etc. In adolescence it is important that mental stress should be deflected to mental peace. If mind will be calm, cool it will work positively and adolescence will get the goals of their life and be always successful.*

**Keywords:** *Adolescence, physical and mental transformation, mental stress, mental peace.*

### Mental Stress

Mental stress can affect anyone from children to adolescents to adults. There are many definitions of stress. A good way to think about stress is that it is a feeling that may occur in response to positive or negative situation in which our body's natural response – biological and psychological – is to be in a heightened state of readiness, allowing us to perform well under pressure.

People can experience mental stress in different degrees, from mild to severe. “Just enough” stress can be a good thing and indeed critical to survival. However when this stress response fails to switch off and reset itself after a challenging situation has passed, or if it worsens to the point of distraction, it can lead to more significant psychological problems and even worsen some medical conditions. It is a type of mental stress – related mental illness that can affect one's feeling – thoughts, behaviours, formation of value pattern and achievement. Following figure can show the effect of mental stress on performance.

### Mental Stress in Adolescence

Stress in adolescence has been a subject of debate for more than hundred years. According to Hall (1891) adolescence is the period of stress and storm during which abrupt biological changes take place. These biological changes cause disruption in psychological states. The adolescent passes through a near psychotic state. Hall saw adolescence as an inevitable and culturally universal stage of psychological stress. Rube (1956) believes that in

childhood the person is sheltered and protected but as he grows the protection is withdrawn which causes disturbance. Ackerman (1958, 1962), holds that adolescence is a state of storm and stress and further argues that adolescence is mostly characterized by anti-social behavior, over conformity with peers and dissatisfaction in relation with family and community.

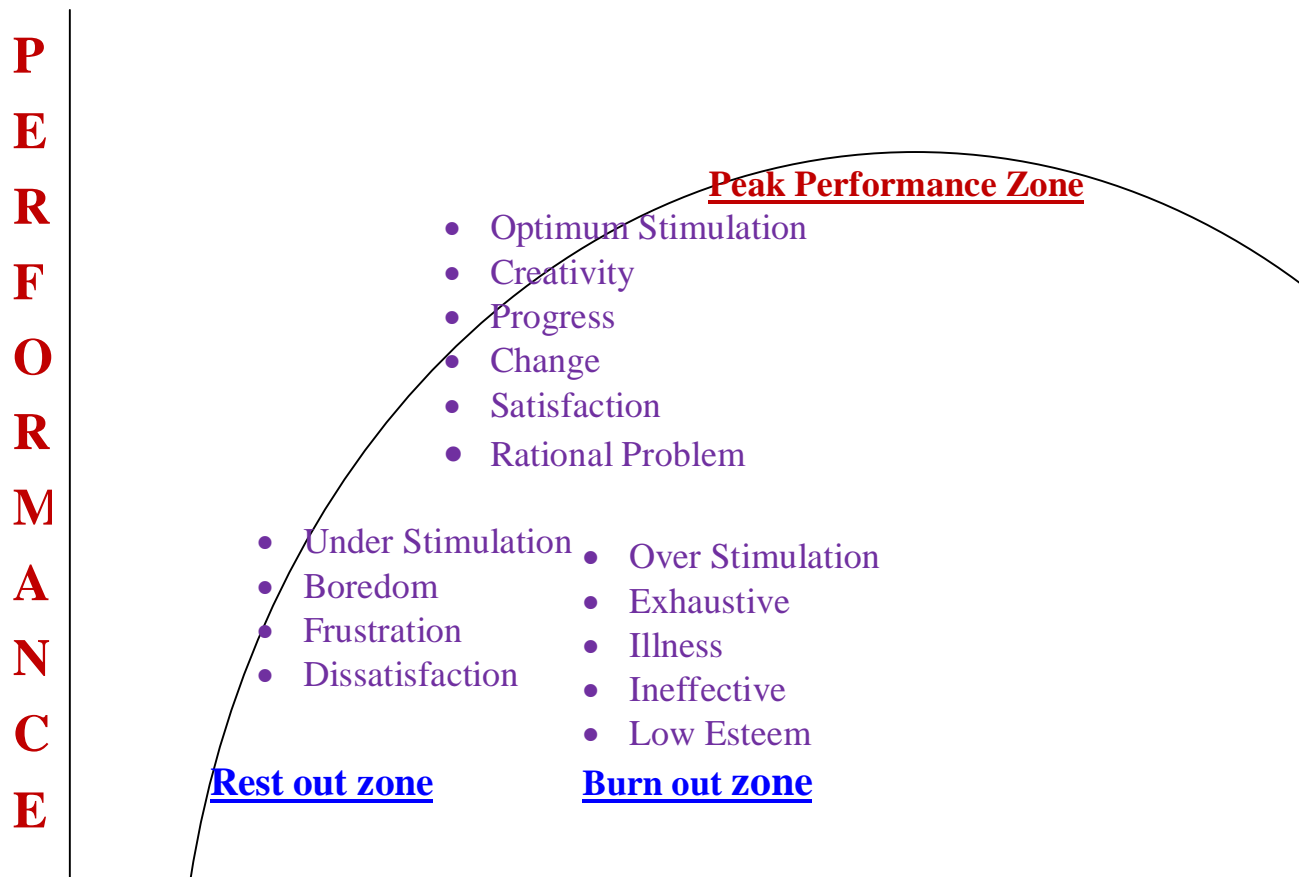


Figure showing effect of stress on performance  
(Source: - Kindler and Ginsberg (1990))

Greenaire (1970) also states that adolescence is often a time of painful emotional evaluation with a great variety of external manifestations and of inner stress. According to Bandura (1972) the adolescents of middle class families show stability. Cooperation and mutually satisfying relationships.

According to Erickson (1956), the major psychological tasks of adolescence, include search and establishment of identity in relation to oneself, family, peers and society. The individual seeks clarification

regarding his own existence. The adolescent is exceedingly conscious of his own appearance in the eyes of others as compared with his own conception of himself. If the individual fails to establish his own identity and is unable to fulfill developmental tasks then he will be in stress.

Duvall (1965) has pointed out that the teenagers represent a fundamental dilemma of life to grow and mature and to stay and be secure. This is a decade of dilemmas for parents too. They want them to grow independently but there is also a strong urge to keep them close and safe. Actually, society has not defined clear-cut role or expectations for adolescents.

It may be stated that unclear social definitions and expectations during adolescence may cause role discrepancy. Moreover, adolescent has to make major decisions about future adult roles which may further heighten self-awareness and uncertainty among adolescents. Adolescent may be stressed because of discrepancy between one's own beliefs and one's understanding of other's beliefs regarding him. It may be concluded that in all theories it has been accepted that adolescence is often a period of disturbance which may be caused by physiological changes, role and value conflict.

### **Stressors during Adolescence**

Adolescence is the period during which several dramatic changes at biological, social, psychological and cognitive level take place.

1. **Biological Changes** – Biological changes causes severe disruption in psychological status of adolescents. Pubertal development with physiological and psychological correlates have a vast impact on developing adolescents. These biological changes are universal, puberty is presumed as a time of stressful experience. Puberty involves internal changes as well as equally dramatic external physical changes. Many hormones show the fivefold increase over prepubertal levels. There are great individual differences in the timing of biological maturation during puberty. Tabin-Richards, et al, (1983) reported that girls who matured around the average time felt more attractive and had the most positive body image, and early maturers had a more negative body image than late maturers. Study showed that negative feelings were more common among unprepared or early developing girls. One's own perceptions of this timing may be particularly important. Pubertal changes and other aspects of change occur at an individual level.

2. **Cognitive Changes** – Adolescence is the period during which abstract reasoning begins. This is the period during which formal operation thinking develops. Studies have shown that not all young people develop this capacity during adolescence (e.g. Elkind, 1975). The person with formal operational thinking will react to his pubertal changes differently than the adolescent who is still at concrete thinking level. It may be easier to cope with pubertal change viewed simply as a change in appearance; as a concrete thinker might do. On the other hand nature of responses of others particularly adults, to pubertal change is complex and this stage may be less confusing to a young adolescent who has the cognitive capacity to take the perspective of another person, to understand the broader meaning of pubertal change biologically and socially and to recognize that the adolescent is not responsible for the response of others. Cognitive changes may help to facilitate adolescent adjustment or sometimes they may amplify the stress associated with puberty.
3. **Social Changes** – During adolescence, the boys and girls move out in the peer group. The role of adolescent in most of the societies is not properly defined. The adults expect that adolescent should act like an adult but at the same time they ask them not to do many things as they are not big enough. Hence, they don't understand exactly what they are supposed to do. This role ambiguity sometimes acts like a stressor.
4. **Academic stressors** –By the age of 14 to 16 years adolescents have to decide their career plans. To get admission in professional oriented courses is really competitive. Adolescents or young adults have to strive hard to achieve high grades. The actual options available to adolescents in terms of future educational and occupational opportunities are limited and cause stress. Many of these stressors are interrelated. In addition, individuals will be affected by stress to different degrees. Individual vulnerability may amplify the effect of any stressor. The risk research of Garmezy and associates (1980) demonstrated that some children and adolescents are relatively invulnerable to stress while other succumb readily. Better relationship with parents often prepare the adolescent to handle stressful events. The parents may help them in career planning and explain about their physical changes as natural process and help them to handle emotions. Social support can assist the adolescent to handle their stress. The process of looking like an adult is the first step towards becoming adult, but there are many other developmental task for the adolescent to master and to become adults.

#### **COPING STRATEGIES TO REDUCE STRESS IN ADOLESCENCE**

Many adolescence adopt these coping strategies which may temporarily reduce stress, but they cause more damage in the long run:

- Smoking
- Drinking too much
- Overeating or under eating
- Zoning out for hours in front of the TV or computer
- Withdrawing from friends, family, and activities
- Using pills or drugs to relax
- Sleeping too much
- Procrastinating
- Filling up every minute of the day to avoid facing problems
- Taking out your stress on others (lashing out, angry outbursts, physical violence)

By having a take-charge approach and a positive attitude adolescence can reduce stress in their daily life.

The healthy ways to manage stress are as follows:

- **Adopt healthy study habit**–Place and time of study should be fixed. Place of study should be cool, calm and illuminated.
- **Learn how to say “no”** – Know your limits and stick to them. Whether in your personal or professional life, refuse to accept added responsibilities when you’re close to reaching them.
- **Attitude** –It is human nature to want to freak out. Your mind is a powerful tool; use it in your favor. Thinking rationally can take you a long way.
- **Laugh** – Do something that you enjoy, take on a hobby, hang out with friends, and learn to balance your life. If you are feeling upset, express your feelings. Don’t keep them to yourself because that will only add to your stress.
- **Avoid alcohol and cigarettes** –This is just a quick fix. Once the chemical leave your body, you are back to feeling stressed and you are probably worse off than when you started.
- **Healthy eating** –Get the proper nutrition. Eat at least one hot-home cooked meal a day.
- **Exercise** –Physical activities can help you in not only burning off calories, but burning off stress. Exercise helps release tension.

- **Relaxing your mind and body** –Take deep breaths. Visualize success. Set some “alone time” where you do something you enjoy. Practice “mindfulness”, focusing your attention on the present moment.
- **Sleep** – At least 7 hours of sleep are needed in order for your brain and body to function at optimum level. Avoid taking naps for more than 1 hour.
- **Healthy relationships** –Talk and hang out with friends. Find some you relate to and with whom you can share your problems with.
- **Time management** – Get a planner, create a schedule, or even a to-do list. Map out what your quarter will look like. Once you have done that, do a schedule for each week. Then create a schedule for each day. Be specific. Mark down your class meeting times, study time for a specific subject, mealtimes, fun activities, and sleep.
- **Organization** – Learn how to organize your notes, keep track of your assignments and note important due dates or date of exams. Establish your priorities for the day.
- **Spirituality** – Spiritually is regarded as finding meaning in your life, the ability to connect with others.
- **Determine your learning style** – Find out whether you are a visual, auditory or kinesthetic learner.
- **Find a support system** – Whether it’s your mother, sister, brother, friend or teacher, find someone you feel comfortable sharing your feelings with. Sometimes all we need is to vent off the frustration.
- **Make changes in your surroundings**– If you find it difficult to study in your dorm try moving to a place where there is no loud music, and brighter lights.

Besides above points adolescence can reduce stress through these normal activities-

Healthy ways to relax and recharge

- Go for a walk.
- Spend time in nature.
- Call a good friend.

- Sweat out tension with a good workout.
- Write in your journal.
- Take a long bath.
- Play with a pet.
- Work in your garden.
- Curl up with a good book.
- Listen to music.
- Watch a comedy

At last we can say that mild stress related to career, education, and profession is necessary in adolescence. So, that they can work positively to achieve the goal related to career, education and their profession respectively. But they have to follow discussed strategies so that they will be normal. It will necessary for their balanced in personality, and be successful in their life.

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