



Stress & Anxiety

in High School - The Struggle is Real

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- Former CFISD Coordinator of High School Guidance & Counseling
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The Teen Brain - Important Things to Know

- During adolescence, the brain goes through rapid changes in its shape and size and also in how it works.
- The brain reaches its biggest size in early adolescence and continues to develop and mature until the mid-20s.
- The structures and connections in the brain that help to manage emotions are in flux during adolescence, making teens especially vulnerable to stress and anxiety.
- Teens need more sleep than children and adults.
 - Research has shown that melatonin (the “sleep” hormone) levels in the blood are naturally higher later at night and drop later in the morning in teens than in children and adults.
 - Teens should get about 9 to 10 hours of sleep a night. Lack of sleep can make it hard to pay attention, increase impulsivity, and may increase the risk of irritability or depression.
- The teen brain is resilient. Although adolescence is a vulnerable time for the brain and for teenagers in general, most teens go on to become healthy adults.

How Prevalent is Anxiety Among Teens?

- Anxiety disorders are the most common mental health disorder in the United States.
- Different resources provide different statistics regarding the percentage of adolescents affected by anxiety.
 - **Johns Hopkins All Children's Hospital:** 1 in 10 to 1 in 13 people suffer from anxiety, with about 8% of children and teenagers experiencing an anxiety disorder.
 - **ADAA (Anxiety and Depression Association of America):** Anxiety disorders affect 31.9% of adolescents between 13 and 18 years old.
 - **NIMH** found that 19 percent of all US adults have suffered from an anxiety disorder in the last year, as opposed to nearly 32 percent of teens. In addition, teen girls suffer from anxiety disorders more than any other group.
- The number of teens experiencing an anxiety disorder has grown during the COVID-19 pandemic.



What Causes Anxiety?

- The causes of anxiety disorders aren't fully understood.
- Life experiences such as traumatic events appear to trigger anxiety disorders in people who are already prone to anxiety.
- Inherited traits also can be a factor.
- For some people, anxiety may be linked to an underlying health issue.
- In some cases, anxiety signs and symptoms are the first indicators of a medical illness.
- Sometimes anxiety can be a side effect of certain medications.

Stress vs. Anxiety

Stress

- Response to external cause (big test, fight with friend)
- Resolution of issue causes stress to go away.
- Stress can be good or bad. It can give a person the momentum to meet a deadline or it may cause loss of sleep.

Anxiety

- Response is internal (personal reaction to stress).
- Persistent feeling of apprehension or dread that won't go away, and interferes with how a person lives his/her life.
- It's constant, even if there is no immediate threat.

Commonalities of Stress & Anxiety

Both can affect a person's mind and body causing symptoms such as:

Excessive worry

Uneasiness

Tension

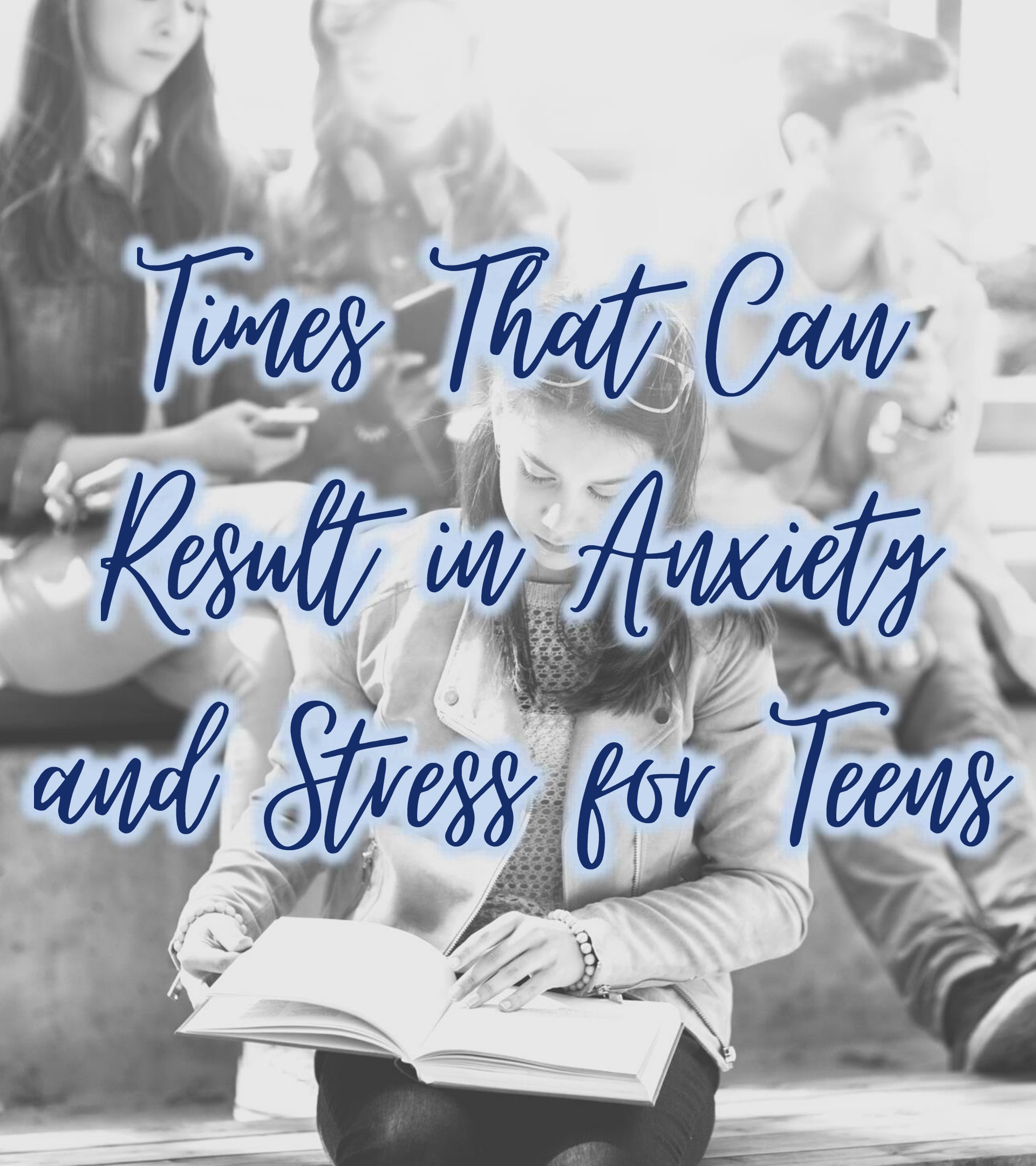
Headaches or body pain

High blood pressure

Loss of sleep



*Information source: National Institute of Mental Health



Times That Can Result in Anxiety and Stress for Teens

During the teen years, a time when teenagers brains are changing and they want more autonomy and independence, there are many stressors such as:

- Starting High School
- Looking a particular way
- Fitting in with friends
- Final examinations/schoolwork
- Performing in plays, etc. at school
- Going to dances and school formals

Now more than ever, teenagers have even more worries with political affairs, the effects of the pandemic, and social media.

Moving Up To 9th Grade

Can Be Exciting and Stressful

- Because 3 to 4 middle schools feed into one high school, the total number of students in a freshmen class is typically two to three times larger than the 8th grade class from the sending school.
- Some of the concerns/worries/fears that might cause students to experience stress and anxiety when entering high school include:
 - Getting lost (They've moved from a "village" to a "city" going from MS to HS.)
 - Not having middle school friends in their classes
 - The group of friend(s) from MS now have different lunch times.
 - Trying out for sports teams/drill team/cheerleading, etc. and worried about making the team.
 - Being picked on by older students; singled out due to differences.
 - Realization that the grades they make at the end of their first semester of 9th grade will be calculated and become the starting point of their high school GPA.
 - Other worries/concerns/fears?



*Survey of Cy-Ranch Counselors:
Stressors Presented To Them By
10th - 12th Graders*

Sophomores (10th) – Rigor of classes; choosing the right courses for endorsement/academic path to follow over the next two years.

Juniors (11th) – class rank/GPA for college applications; preparing to apply to college, balancing school/work/home expectations.

Seniors (12th) – college applications, Senioritis, unknown future, leaving home, balancing work/school/home expectations.



*Survey of Cy-Ranch Counselors:
Stressors Presented To Them By
All Grades*

Relationships

Friendships

Grades/earning credit

Extracurricular activities

Peer pressure

Time management



Performance Anxiety

Performance Anxiety is a feeling someone might have in a situation where performance is very important or there is a lot of pressure to do well, such as:

- Test Anxiety (high school subject tests/state testing /SAT/ACT)
- Trying out for a school play
- Singing a solo
- Pitching in the big game
- Submitting applications to college

Pre-test strategies for a student with test anxiety :

- Focus on strong study strategies without distraction
- Envision success
- Get a good night's sleep before the exam
- Practice coping strategies such as:
 - calming breathing
 - Self-calming via progressive muscle relaxation
 - positive thoughts

Forms of Anxiety

Anxiety can take many different forms. Some are more physical, some are more related to mental worry, and some only present in specific situations.

Social Anxiety

- Fear of being negatively judged or rejected by other people.
- Worry about acting “stupid” or boring.
- Fears and worry can cause avoidance of social interactions.

Generalized Anxiety Disorder

- Worrying excessively about everyday things like home, school, or friends.
- These worries are difficult to control.

Panic Attacks

- Panic Attacks are the physical manifestation of anxiety.
- Physical symptoms of panic attacks include: headaches, feeling like you’re outside of yourself looking in, dizziness, stomachaches, nausea, rapid breathing, quick heart rate; tense muscles, sweating, and shakiness.
- Panic Attacks always have a trigger, but can feel totally random.
- A panic attack is not a heart attack and it won’t make a person suffocate.

*Information source: Anxiety Relief for Teens/Regine Galanti, PhD.

Forms of Anxiety Continued:

Phobias

- Intense fears of specific situations, often to the point of being irrational because the fear doesn't match the reality of the threat.
- Phobias typically focus on animals, insects, germs, extreme weather, or enclosed spaces.

Separation Anxiety

- Fear of being away from people to whom the person feels close, typically his/her parents.
- Imagine the worst will happen when apart.

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

- Involves thoughts that stick in the person's head and causes distress. Thoughts become obsessive which causes a behavior (a compulsion).
- The compulsive behavior makes the person feel better for the short term, but can lead to more obsessions that only make him/her more anxious and produces more compulsions.

Signs/Symptoms of Anxiety in Teens

Worries

Irritable/nervous

Restless

Wound-up

On edge

Easily fatigued

Difficulty concentrating

Mind going blank

Sleep problems

Muscle tension

Headaches

Stomachaches and pain



*Information source: Johns Hopkins All Children's Hospital/J. Katzenstein, Ph.D.

Strategies for Teens to Cope with Stress & Anxiety

Learning what causes or triggers stress and what coping techniques work can help reduce anxiety and improve daily life. It may take trial and error to discover what techniques work best.

Activities that teens can try when they start to feel overwhelmed:

- Keep a journal.
- Download an app that provides relaxation exercises like deep breathing and visualization, or tips for practicing mindfulness (process of actively paying attention to the present moment).
- Exercise and eat healthy regular meals.
- Follow a sleep routine and make sure to get plenty of sleep.
- Avoid excess caffeine.
- Become aware of negative thoughts and negative self-talk and challenge them.
- Reach out to friends and family members who help you in a positive way to cope.



• What Can I Do To Help My Child?

- Acknowledge your teen's fears and emotions. Don't ignore or dismiss it with statements like, "You don't need to worry about that." Take your child's emotions seriously. Let them talk and be silent and listen.
- Remind them that other kids are anxious, too. Avoid labeling teens with negative adjectives like "shy" or "anxious".
- Start with a level of exposure to things of which your child is worried. Slowly work up to the "worry" and provide positive reinforcement for tasks and social activities they are worried about.
- Give your child love and empathy.
- Make time to talk to your child daily without distractions.
- Encourage a healthy diet, physical activities and good sleep habits.
- Strong parent-teenager relationships are good for young people's mental health and is protective.

When Is It Time To Talk To A Professional?

Older children and teens may benefit from a professional evaluation if they:

- are struggling to cope.
- have symptoms of stress or anxiety that won't go away.
- have lost interest in things that they used to enjoy.
- have low energy.
- sleep too much or too little, or seem sleepy throughout the day.
- are spending more and more time alone, and avoid social activities with friends or family.
- diet or exercise excessively, or fear gaining weight
- engage in risky or destructive behavior alone or with friends.
- have thoughts of suicide.
- have periods of highly elevated energy and activity, and require much less sleep than usual.
- say that they think someone is trying to control their mind or that they hear things that other people cannot hear.

Psychotherapy (also called talk therapy) and **medication** are the two main treatments for anxiety. Many people benefit from a combination of the two.

CTSD Mental Health Resources

If you have concerns about your student's emotional health, please reach out to his/her Cy-Ranch counselor who can provide further resources, if needed.

Some available CFISD resources include:

- **CFISD Referral Information & Community Resource Guide** (updated yearly) can be found online at [cfisd.net>Departments>Guidance and Counseling](http://cfisd.net/Departments/Guidance%20and%20Counseling)
- **Youth Service Specialist** assigned to Cypress Ranch HS – Darryl Bush
 - Darryl is also assigned to:
 - Anthony Middle School
 - Smith Middle School
 - Rennell Elementary
 - Warner Elementary
- **CFISD Mental Health Intervention Team (MHIT)** comprised of four licensed professional counselors, two licensed psychologists and two mental health police officers.

Informational Resources

The National Institute of Mental Health

Johns Hopkins All Children's
Hospital/Jennifer Katzenstein, Ph.D.

Anxiety Relief for Teens/Regine
Galanti, Ph.D.

ADAA – Anxiety and Depression
Association of America

Mayo Clinic

