

The Teenage Guide to  
**STRESS**

**To every teenager who needs a bit  
of extra support, reassurance and understanding.  
You are not alone.**

The content of this book is not intended as medical advice  
and is provided for informational purposes only.  
If in doubt, please consult a health care/medical professional.

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NICOLA MORGAN  
The Teenage Guide to  
**STRESS**



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# Introduction

When I tell adults about this book, most think it's a good idea. But a few say things like, "We survived without a book to help us. Why can't today's teenagers just get on with it? They'll survive." I have no sympathy with that view!

Here's why.

First, just because there was nothing to help us "in our day" doesn't mean that was better. If there'd been a sympathetic and informative book when I was a teenager, I'd have used it, and I bet most people would.

Second, why be satisfied with just *surviving*? Isn't it better to *thrive* and achieve your potential instead?

Third, although a bit of stress doesn't usually lead to illness or serious consequences, sometimes it does. And too much stress over a long time often makes us ill and unable to do our best. If we can prevent that, surely we should try?

Importantly, if you learn how to manage stress while you're young, you can use the same skills throughout your life. That will save heartache, illness and money.

Another thing some people say is, "In my day we didn't even have 'stress' – it's a modern invention." I agree that we *talk* about stress more nowadays, because we know more about it, but stress itself isn't new. And nor is the word – back in 1904, the sociologist G. Stanley Hall described adolescence as a period of "upheaval and

trauma, storm and stress". In past generations, people who became ill with what we now know are symptoms of stress might have been given addictive tranquillisers, or left to become more ill, or ended up in a mental hospital for a while, or even for a long time. There were dramatic and unpleasant medical remedies; anything except good, healthy, sympathetic ways to prevent stress causing trouble.

It's far better to learn to manage stress *before* it causes bad symptoms and spoils this period of your life, surely?

It's important to realize that not all stress is bad, though. Feeling nervous before an exam or an interview can help us perform extra well. Worrying about a decision can help us think it through properly. And having some difficult days or periods can help us appreciate holidays and breaks even more. But when stress goes on for too long and is too strong, when it gets in the way of happiness and achievement and health and stops us doing what we want and need to do, that is not good.

Teenagers also have many stresses which we didn't have in our day. The pressure of exams is greater and more constant; the price of failure or misbehaviour can be higher; risks and temptations are often stronger. Adults may have forgotten other things that make adolescence difficult: changing bodies, fear of the future, new knowledge about the sometimes-scary things in the wider world.

You may be going through problems that your parents either didn't have or have forgotten. You may be worried about your friends. You may have had bad experiences with social media. You may be experiencing bullying. You may feel sad or scared or angry or confused in ways you find hard to talk about. This book is here to help. And there are many resources at the end to help you further.

So, the advice in this book aims to help you worry less about whatever you worry about and to give you strategies for relaxation. I'm going to help you recognise and manage stress before it becomes too difficult. And throughout the book there are real comments from real people – teenagers and adults – who share their memories and advice to show you that you are not alone.

*The Teenage Guide to Stress* will make everything feel more normal, less stressful, less worrying, more positive. It will help you not just survive but also thrive. Being a teenager does not have to be so hard.

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Edinburgh, 2013  
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## How the Book Works

**SECTION ONE** explains what stress is and what it can do to you and looks at some of the ways in which teenage stresses may be different from others.

**SECTION TWO** deals with loads of issues that worry many teenagers and offers guidance, sympathy and advice. For many of you, simply discovering that your worries are normal will be enough to make you feel better. Understanding will get you a long way.

I'll also talk about some pre-existing conditions you may have, such as OCD or dyslexia, and how they might be different during adolescence. If you're worrying about something that isn't mentioned, this does not mean you are the only person in the world with that problem. You're not. It just means this book isn't long enough to mention every human worry.

**SECTION THREE** looks at ways of dealing with and preventing symptoms of stress, as well as healthy ways of looking after your mind and body. And once you've learnt what to do, I suggest you teach those skills to the adults you know. If you have a stressed adult in your life, that's probably making your life tougher, too, so it makes sense for everyone to understand how to deal with stress. Adults don't know it all.

At the end of the book, there are lists of resources for all the topics I cover.

### **What is a “trusted adult?”**

Often, part of my advice is to talk to a “trusted adult”. But what do I mean and how do you find one? Many adults want to help you, even if they don’t personally know you, and many have special training in different aspects of adolescence or stress or various problems. The best person to choose will depend on you, your particular situation and the adults in your life. Never think that there is no one for you – I promise there is, but you may have to go and find them.

In an ideal world, parents or carers would be the first and best people to talk to. But it’s not an ideal world. You may not have a parent or carer, or they may be wrapped up in their own problems, which may not be their fault. (Parents are human and no one is perfect.) You may have a bad relationship with them. Some may have problems with alcohol or drugs or mental illness and not be in a position to help. Some parents, unfortunately, are not “trusted adults”. Sometimes, even if you do have a good relationship with them and they are wonderful people, you still may not feel able to talk to them about a particular problem.

So, if you can’t talk to your parents for any reason, who

else could you talk to? Depending on your particular situation and worry, here are some suggestions. All the professionals on this list – teachers, doctors and health workers etc – have a duty to protect you. This means that if they believe that you or another person are in danger of abuse, harm or neglect, they have a duty to inform a relevant adult, but they will discuss it with you first. They will talk to you about which adults will be the best people to tell, focusing on what is best for you. They are also not allowed to cover up a serious crime – no one is.

- **A teacher you like.** Teachers are not always trained in dealing with every problem but all have some training in what to do when a student comes to them for help. They know how to reassure you and make sure you find the right help.
- **Your head of year,** year tutor, “guidance” teacher or whatever name your school gives to the teacher in charge of “pastoral care” or wellbeing. (If you don’t know who it is, ask.) These teachers have training in dealing with confidential problems.
- **Your GP.** Doctors must keep everything confidential. However, as for all professionals, if they believe you are in serious danger, they must act to protect you, which might mean informing another adult after discussion with you.

- **Childline.** This is the best-known organisation for helping young people and is hugely respected and trusted. They have heard everything and know exactly what to say to help you. You can phone or have an online chat; phone calls are free and won't appear on the bill. They guarantee 100% confidentiality and will only take action if they believe your life is in immediate danger. Their website tells you a lot about the process of getting help. Take a look now, so you know what's there if you need it.
- **Any doctor or member of staff at a health clinic for young people.** Do an internet search on the phrase "health clinic for young people [enter name of your town or postcode]". They know how to help you in any medical or mental-health situation; advice is free and confidential (as with GP consultations); and you can make the appointment yourself, without being registered in advance.
- **A youth worker attached to Social Services,** if you happen to know one or have met one through a youth group, for example.
- **Any adult you've known for long enough to know they are trustworthy,** for example a family friend, relative, or the parent of a friend. For a general reassuring chat, they can be fantastic

and all you need. But for more serious or specific problems, such as anorexia, self-harm, depression and anything involving medicine, mental health or the law, speak to someone who has had relevant training.

- **Any helpline aimed at young people suffering from a particular problem.** Use the internet or my resource list at the back of this book to find a relevant organisation. See if it has a helpline and phone it. Such organisations often have online chat lines, too, so that you don't need to speak to anyone in person.

#### BE CAREFUL

Sometimes it is hard to know who to trust. It's important to follow your instincts, stay aware and alert, and to remember that not everyone is good. Some people are bad and are clever at making you trust them. The safest thing, if you are in any doubt at all, is to go through your school guidance department or to phone Childline.

Chat rooms may be good places to talk to others suffering from your problem but they are not places where you should necessarily trust people. Never give any personal details in a chat room, even your

**name or the school you go to. Never arrange to meet someone on your own. And if you ever feel slightly uncomfortable, even a tiny bit worried, tell a proper “trusted adult” and see what they say. Some dangerous adults hang around chat rooms pretending to be teenagers, and are very clever at befriending vulnerable people.**

**When choosing websites or chat rooms about a particular problem, be very cautious, selecting those with good medical advice and adult supervision.**

**Even the people on my list above are not necessarily perfect. Clever bad people can sometimes get through all the checks. So, my final advice when thinking about who will be your trusted adult is this: don't just speak to one. Choose two, separately.**

**That way, I believe you will be as safe as possible and your two trusted adults can really help you.**

## **Why should you trust me?**

I have done my very best to give good advice in this book. I've worked hard and spoken to lots of people. However, I simply can't know every situation and I can't see into your mind or home or fully understand everything that is

going on for you so that I can make everything right. Also, sometimes a situation is extra complicated and advice from one book won't be enough.

If you have medical worries, it's important to see a medical expert. I am not qualified to give medical advice and no advice in this book can replace professional help for serious medical conditions. I hope it will direct you to the right help where necessary.

How scientific is this book? Well, for a start, it's not a science book; it's a self-help book. But it's based on my understanding and experience and the things I believe and have discovered, or which I think are worth trying. Occasionally I mention research, but I don't give references as I would if this were an academic book. And I deliberately only mention research that I believe to be good or interesting, and which is reported in a high-quality journal.

Also, I've consulted many experts in many different areas. This book is not just the advice of one person, but is informed by the views of many experts and people who care very much that you should be as healthy, happy and successful as possible. You might sometimes not realize just how much we care.