

# SOS

# Stressed Out Students

**Presentation for  
Parents and Guardians**

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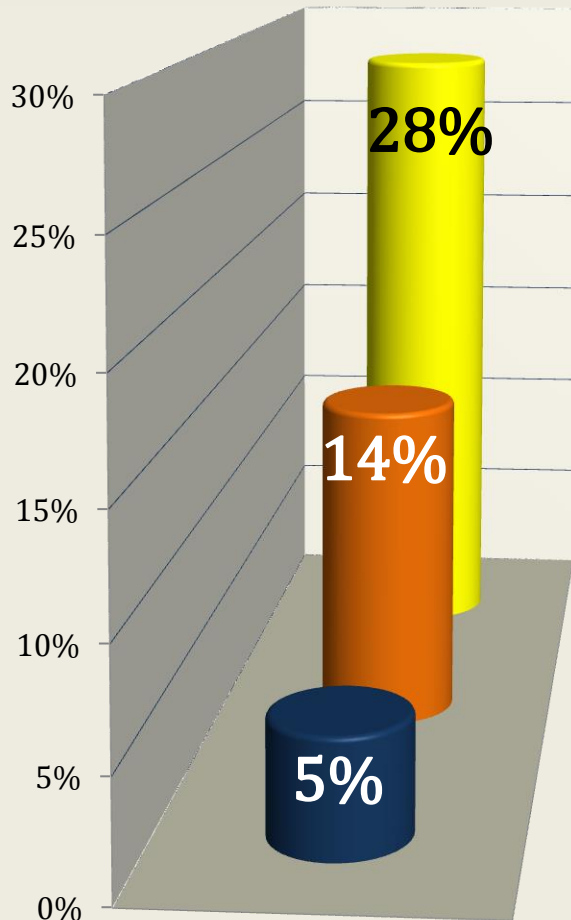
# Key Understandings

- Youth experience stress.
- Temporary stress is good for you — it promotes health and resiliency.
- Stress can be managed with healthy coping strategies.
- Chronic or acute stress can impact learning, mental & physical health, and brain development.
- Adults can model and teach healthy stress-coping strategies.
- We can help by creating nonthreatening environments & help youth normalize their stress response.



# Rating Extreme Stress

(Stress rated 8, 9, or 10 on a 10-point scale)



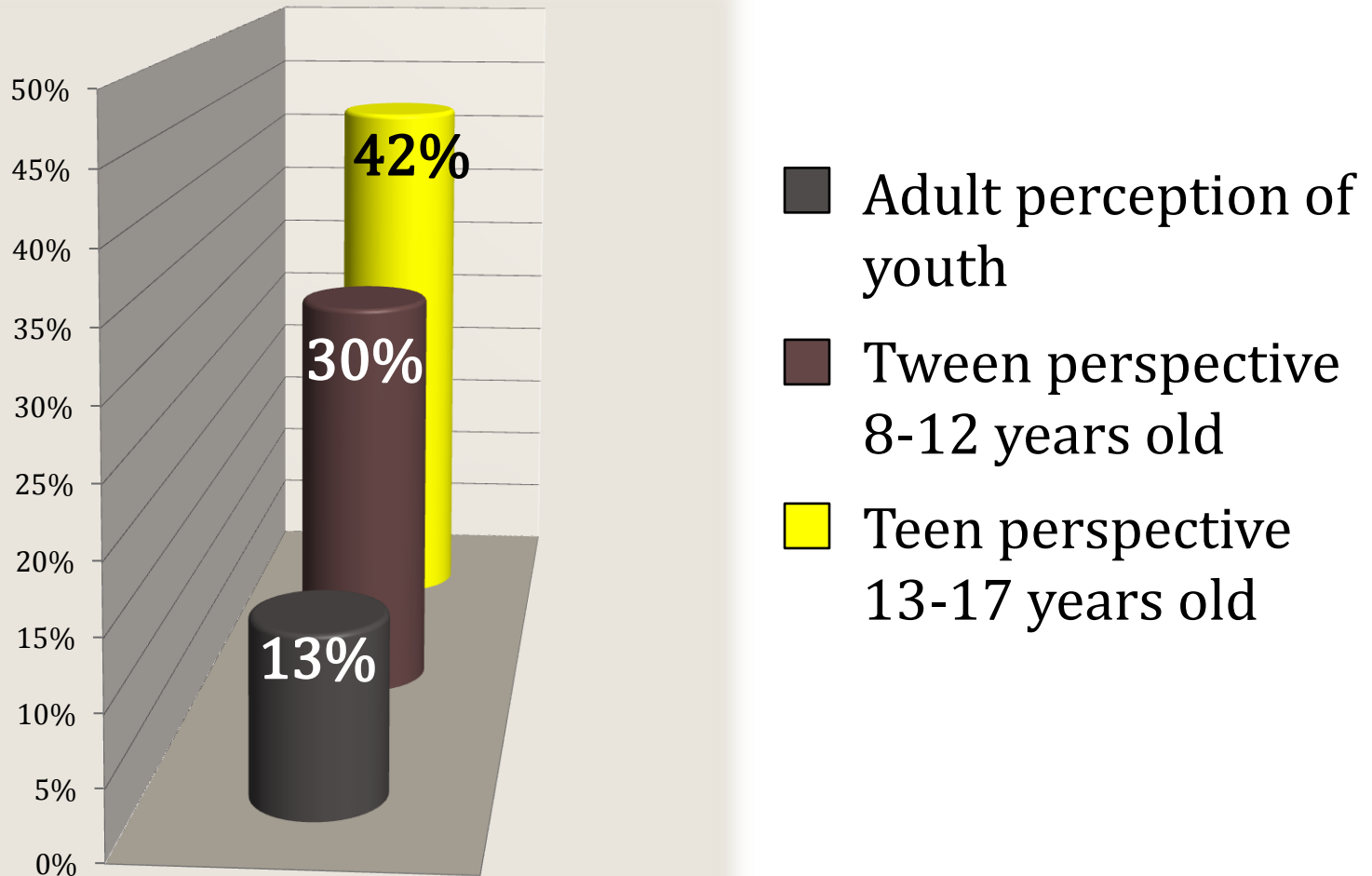
■ Adult perception of youth

■ Tween perception 8-12 years old

■ Teen perception 13-17 years old

Adults n=1,568 Youth n=1,206  
APA, 2009

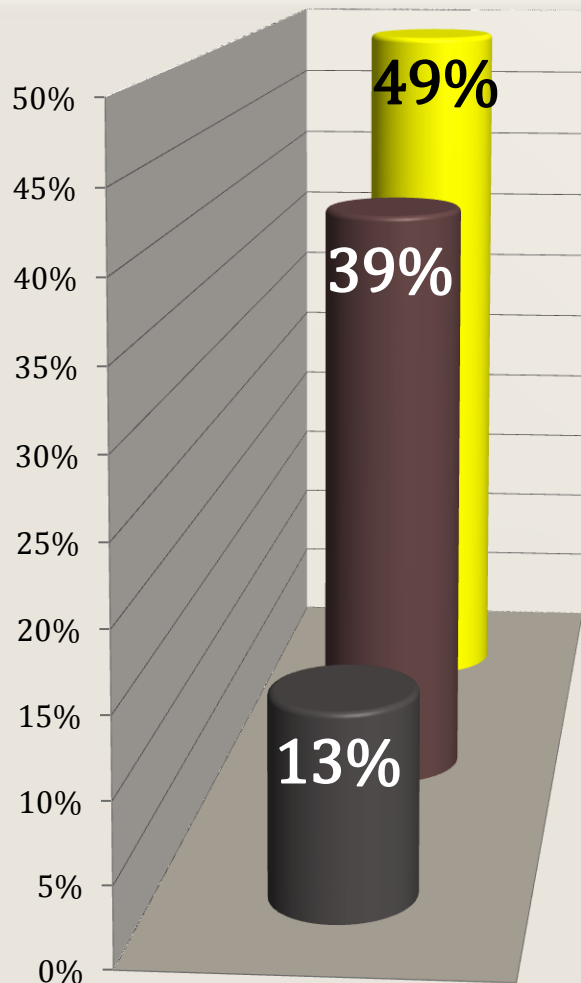
# Physical Symptoms Associated with Stress



Adults n=1,568 Youth n=1,206

APA, 2009

# Sleep Issues Associated with Stress

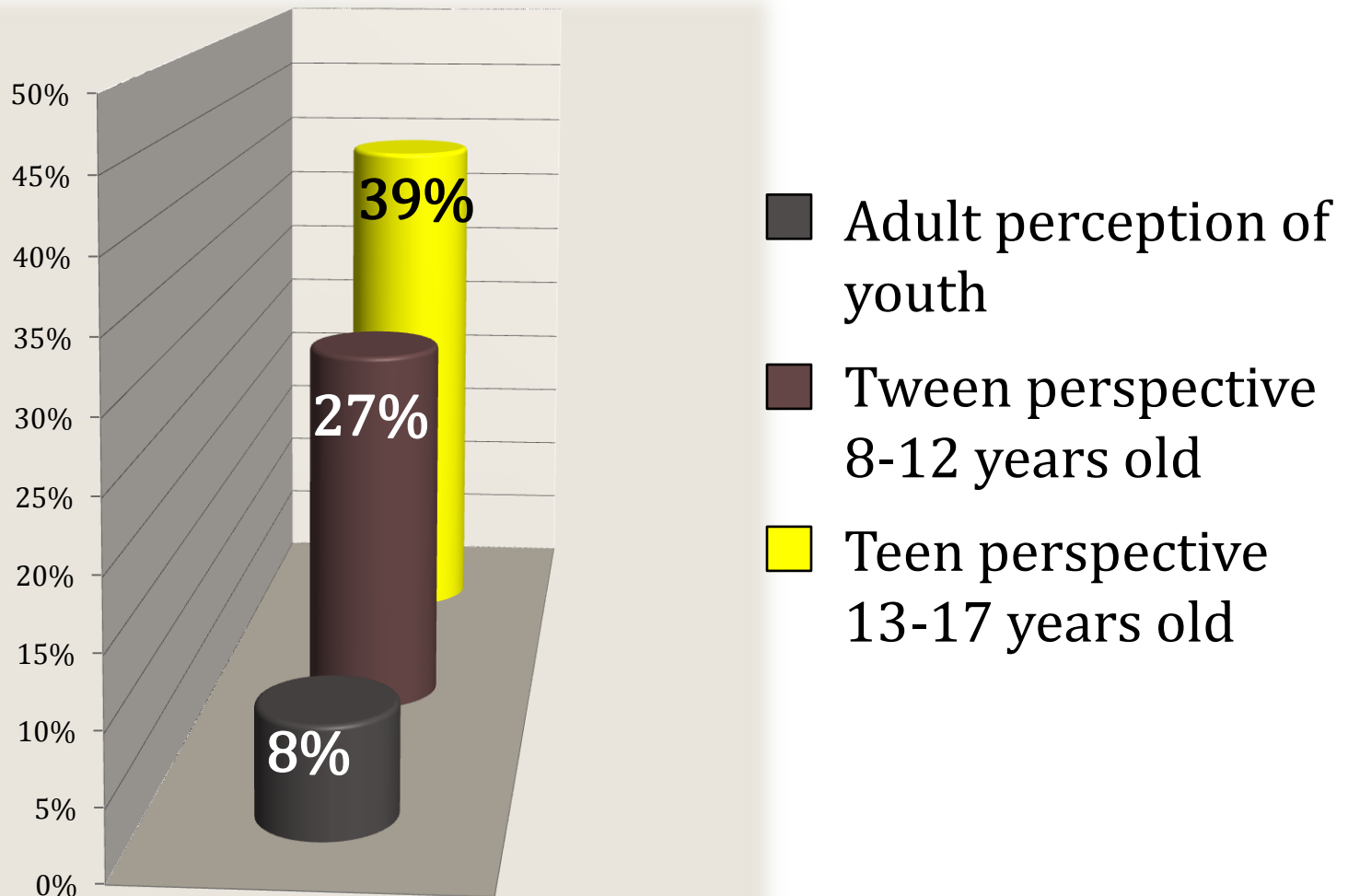


- Adult perception of youth
- Tween perspective 8-12 years old
- Teen perspective 13-17 years old

Adults n=1,568 Youth n=1,206

APA, 2009

# Eating Issues Associated with Stress



# What makes a good parent?

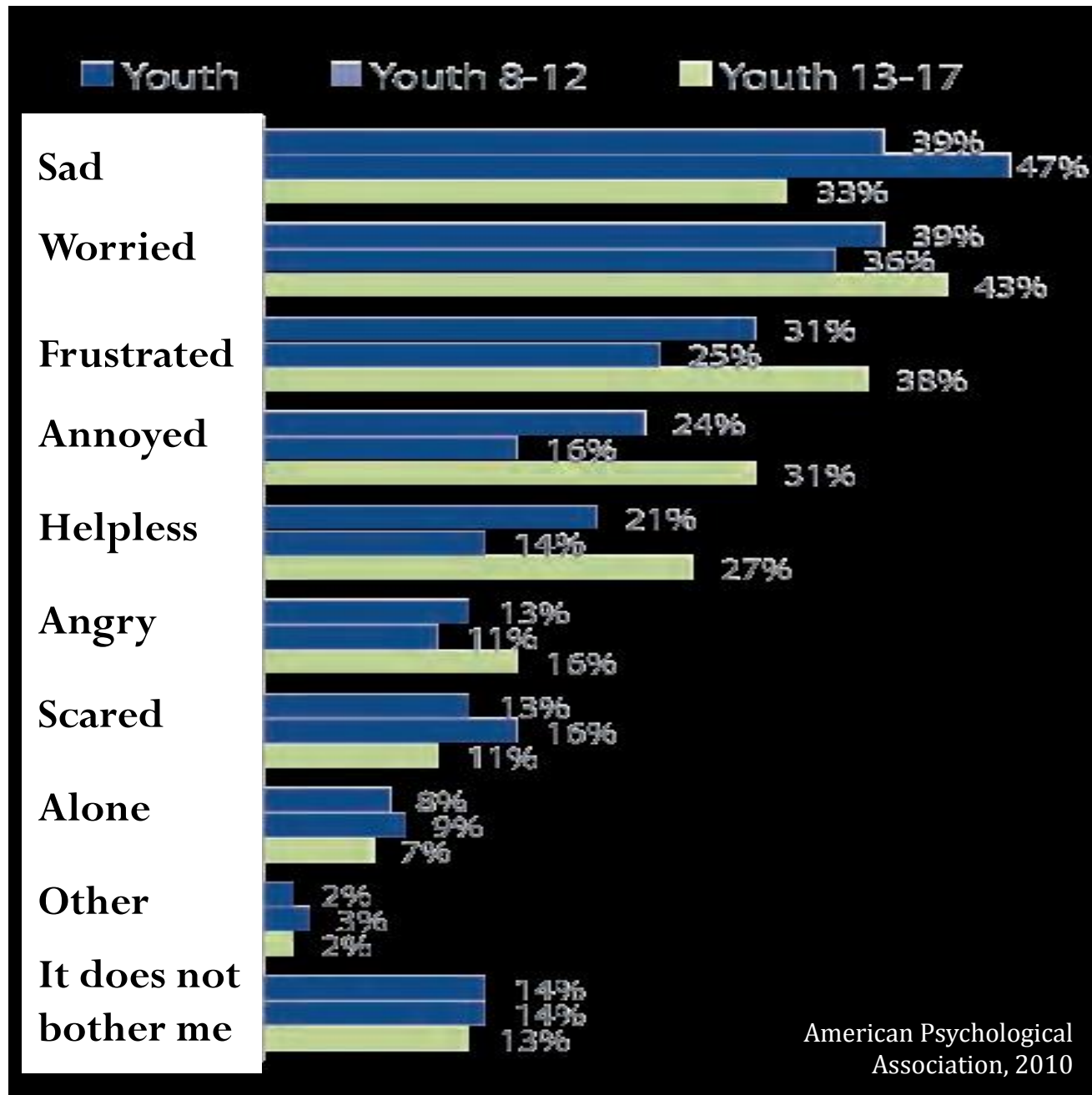
The #1 essential parenting skill is the ability to provide love and affection.

Can you guess what the #2 essential parenting skill is?



**Parents ability to manage stress was a good predictor of the quality of their relationship with their children.**

# How Children Feel When Their Parent is Stressed



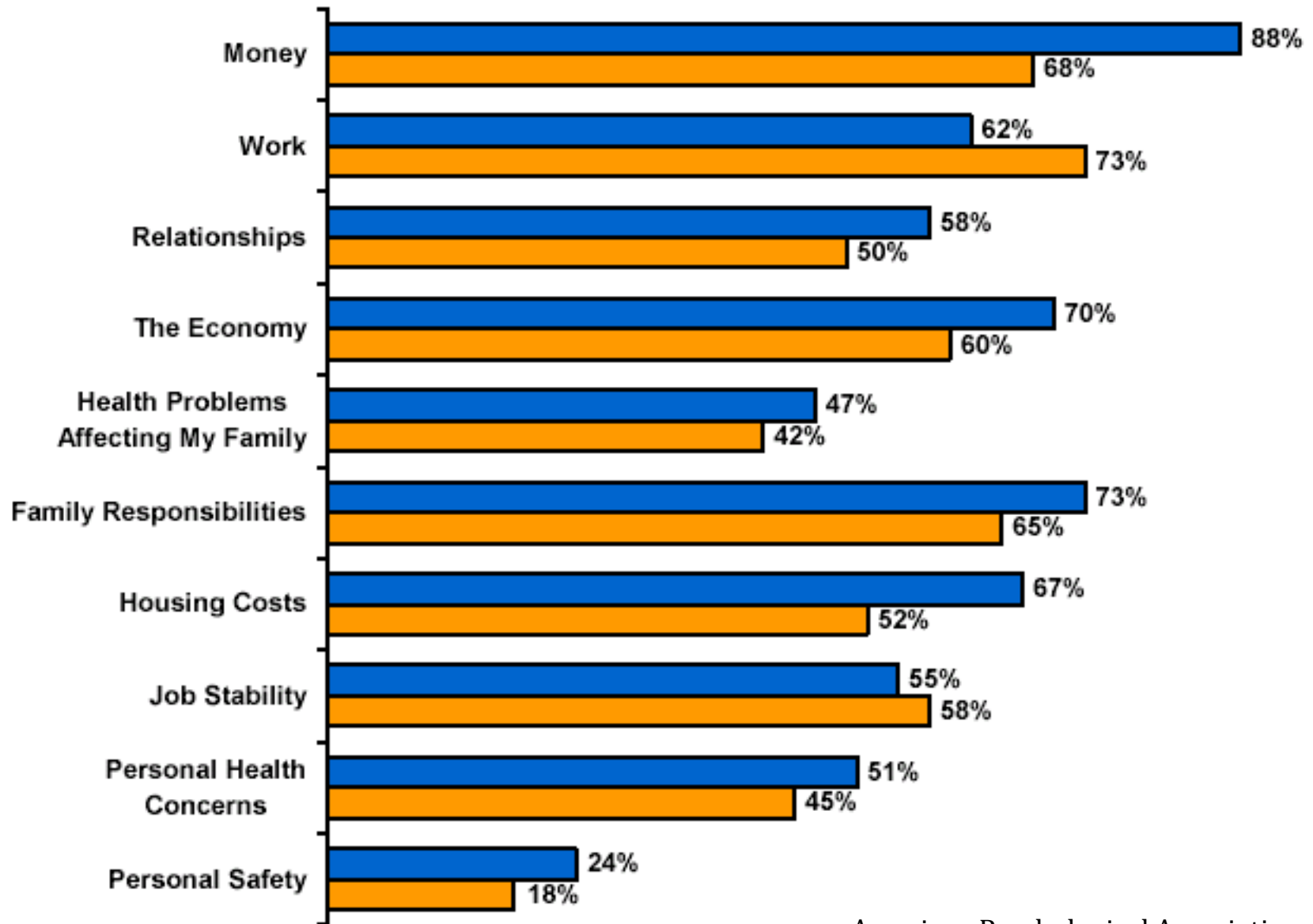
American Psychological  
Association, 2010



# Significant Source of Stress

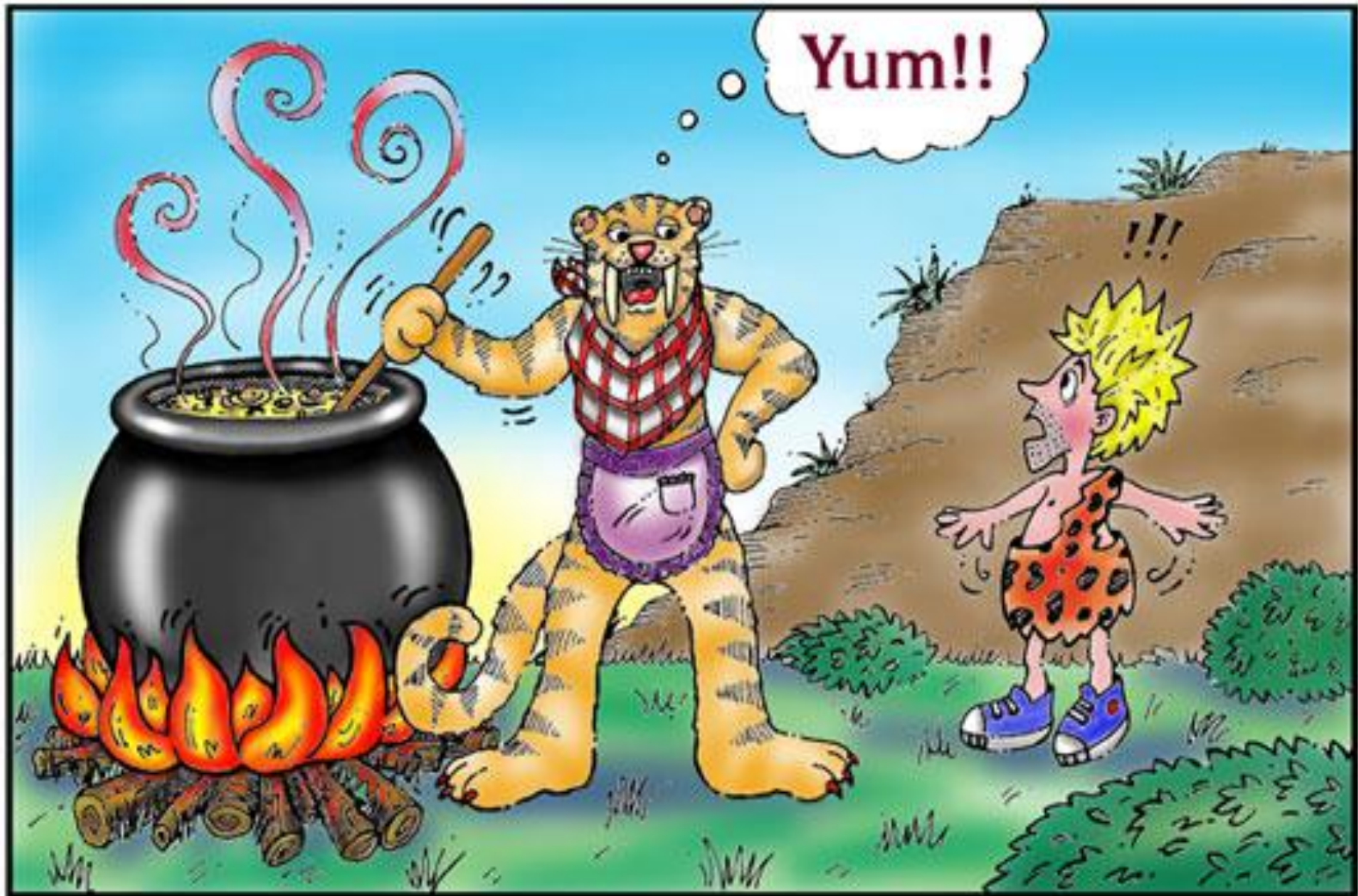
■ Mothers

■ Fathers



American Psychological Association, 2009

Q626: For each one, please indicate how significant a source of stress it is in your life.



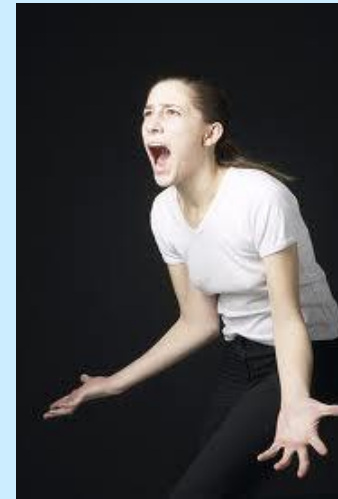
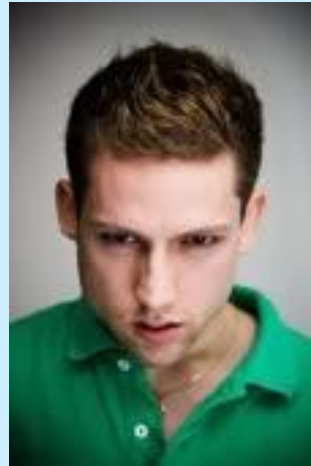
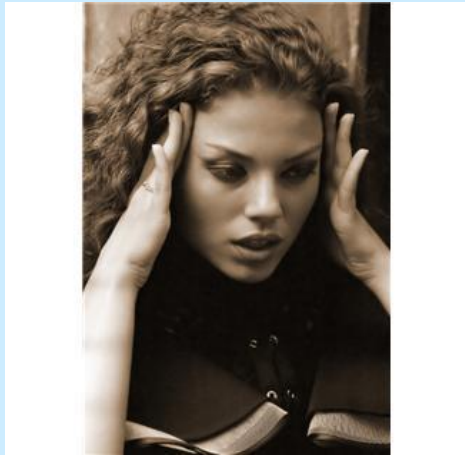
**Stress has always been with us.  
It can keep us safe and alert to danger.**

**FIGHT —or— FLIGHT**

# FREEZE

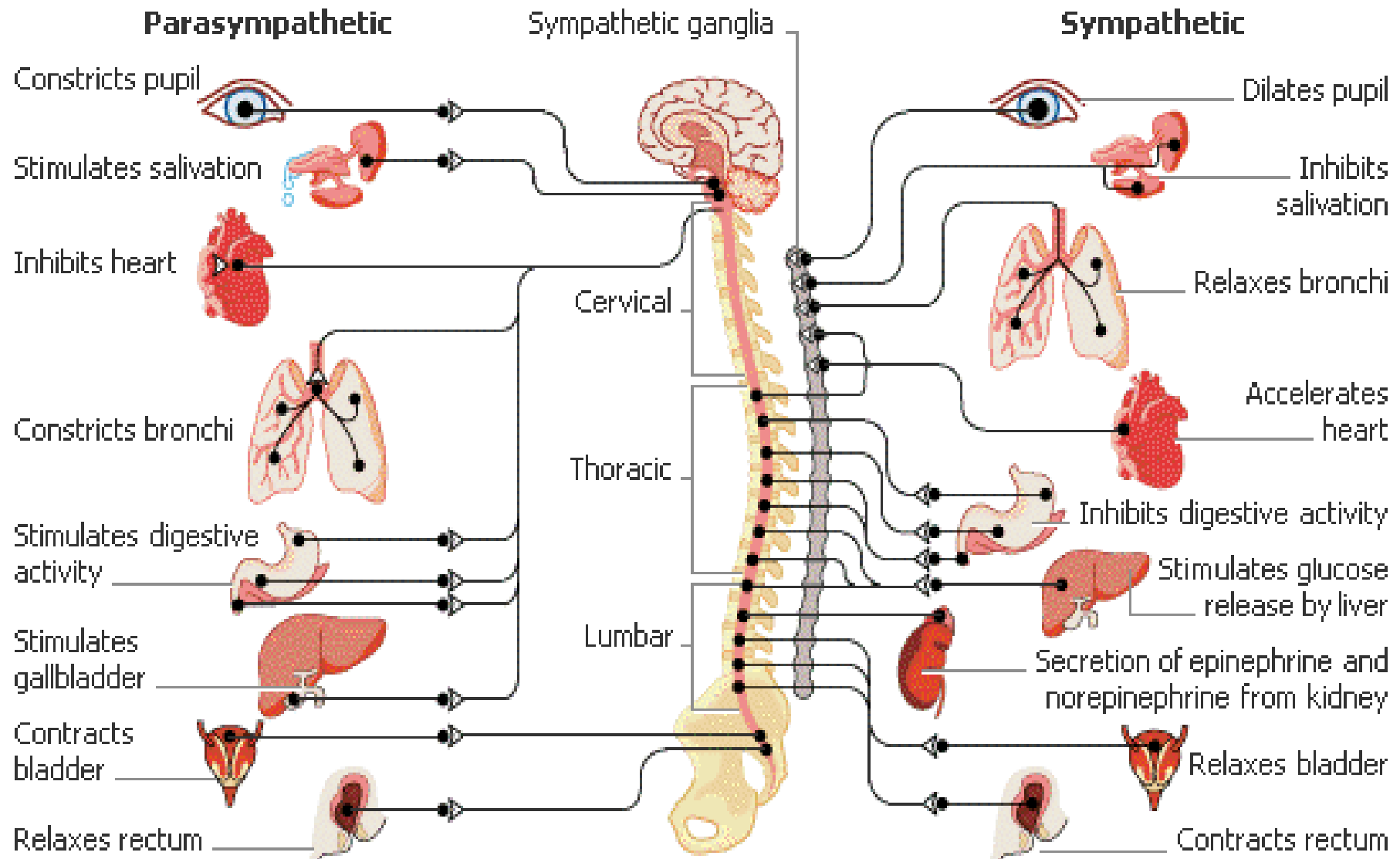




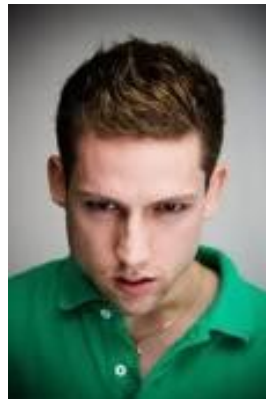


Is a mind and body reaction when we **perceive** a challenge or a tough situation or person.  
We may feel that we have no control.

# The Sympathetic and Parasympathetic Divisions of the Nervous System



# Stress Is Between Our Ears



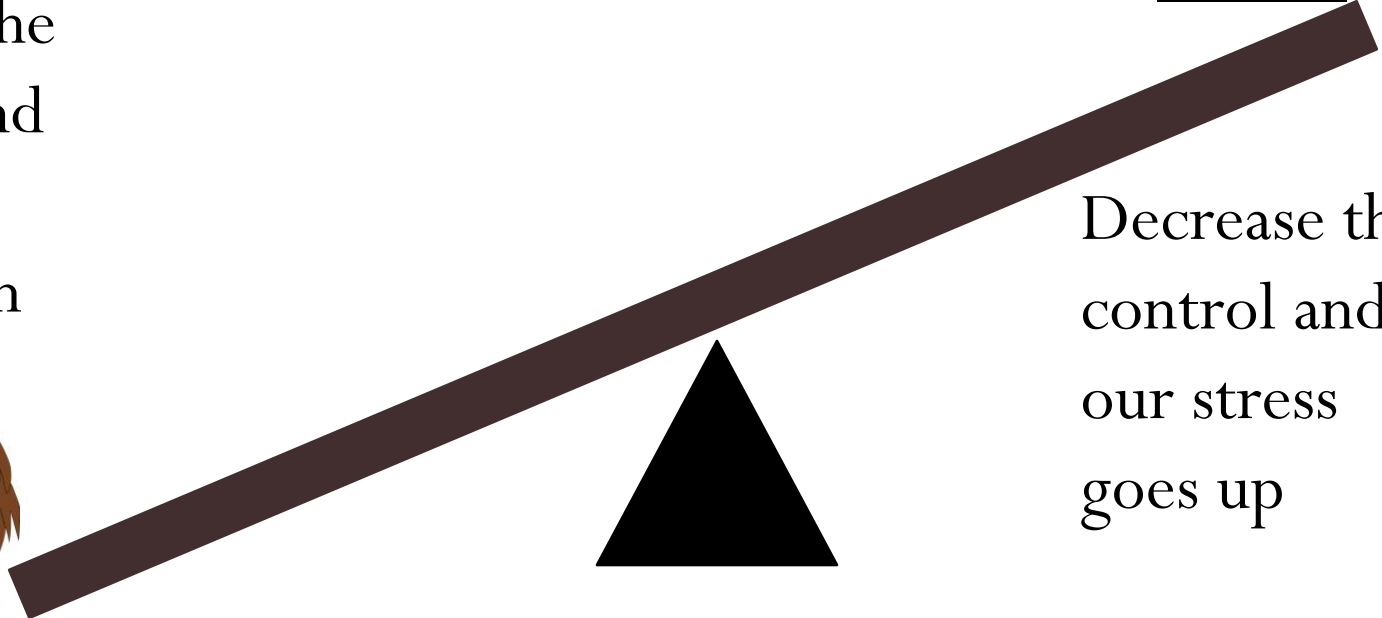
Stress is something we create through our reaction to what happens. It's how we handle stress that makes the difference.

# The Stress We Experience Is our Reaction to a Perceived Loss of Control Over an Adverse Situation

Increase the  
control and  
our stress  
goes down

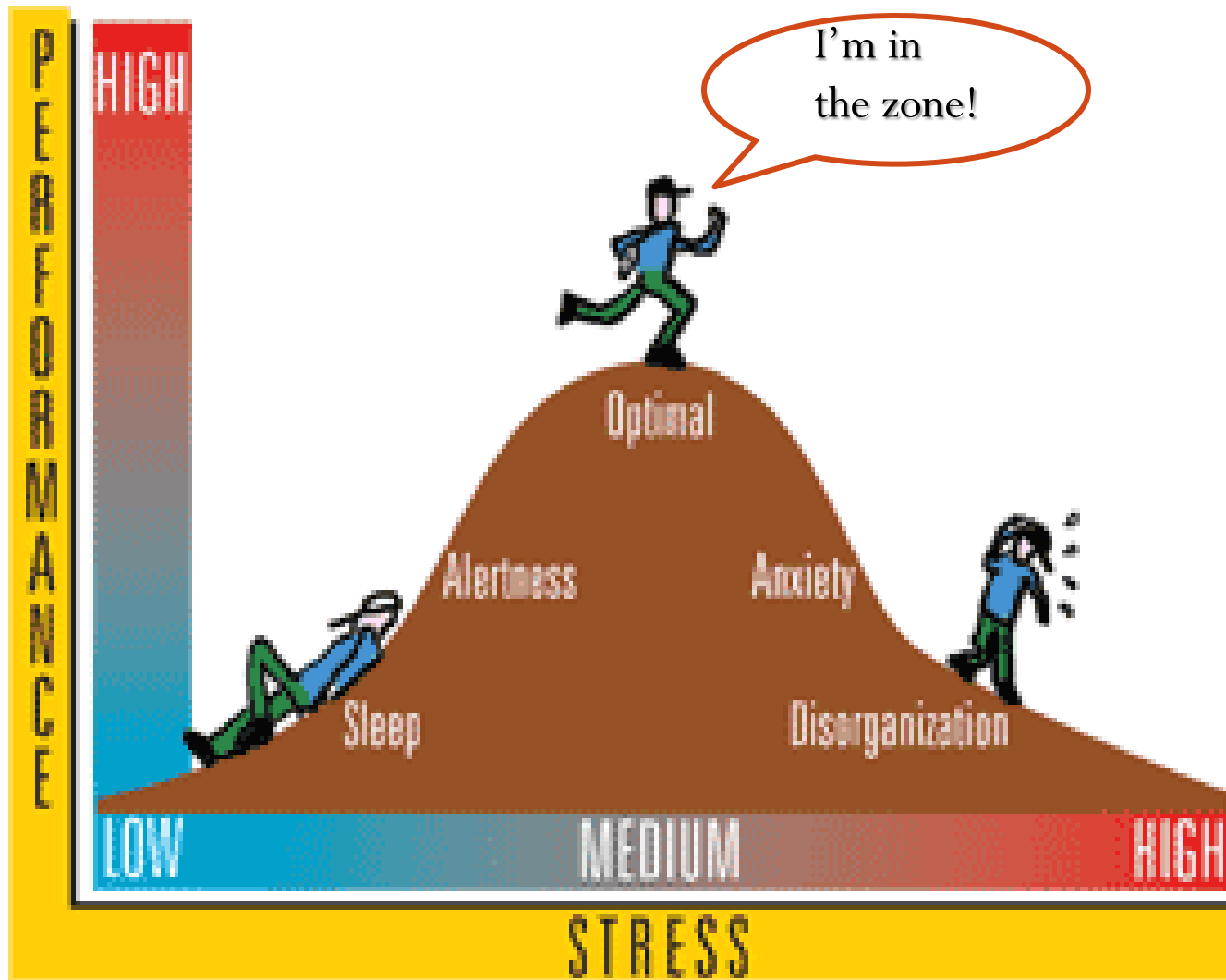


Decrease the  
control and  
our stress  
goes up



A certain amount of stress is a normal part of life.

## Stress Performance Connection

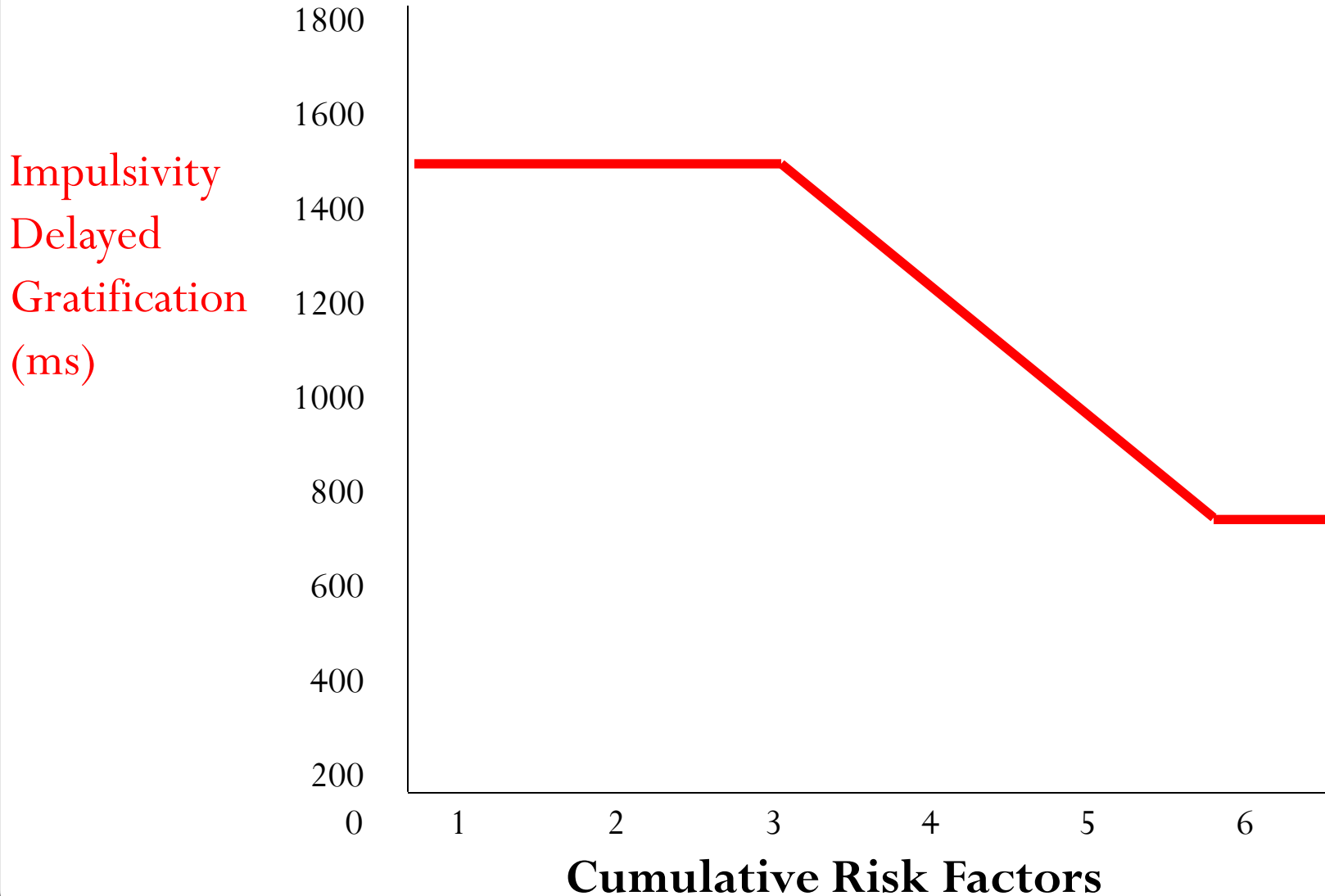




# Types of Stress

- Positive
- Tolerable
- Toxic

# Cumulative Risk Factors: Greater Stress = Greater Impulsivity



# Children Are Vulnerable To Stress

- Family disruption: divorce, called to war, moving
- Parents mental health
- Socioeconomic distress
- Temperamental vulnerability
- Abuse
- Neglect of child's needs
- Overscheduled, hectic routines (*the hurried child-teen*)
- Parties, pets, new siblings
- Test anxiety

# Teen Stress Overload

- Being bullied or exposed to violence or injury
- Relationship stress, family conflicts, or the death of a loved one
- Ongoing problems with schoolwork related to a learning disability or other problems
- Crammed schedules, not having enough time to rest and relax, and always being on the go

# Children & Teens React To Stress in Different Ways

Watch for  
changes in  
habits or  
behavior

- Illness
- Withdrawn
- Nervous
- Show anger
- Demand attention
- Isolate themselves
- Easily agitated
- Irritable
- Lethargic
- Lazy
- Aggressive

Some children & teens handle stressors better than others.  
They are **resilient**.

# Physical Stress Warning Signs

Headaches

Insomnia

Sleep disturbances

Low back pain

Fatigue

Tiredness

Cold hands and feet

Neck and shoulder pain

Indigestion

Stomachaches

Dizziness

Menstrual distress

Nausea

Loss of appetite or overeating

Heart palpitations, chest pain

Restlessness

Asthma attacks; eczema

Frequent colds and flu

Frequent low grade Infections

# Behavioral, Cognitive and Emotional Signs of Stress

Memory problems

Inability to concentrate

Poor judgment

Seeing only the negative

Anxious or racing thoughts

Constant worrying

Overuse of alcohol, drugs, food

Criticizing others

Compulsive gum chewing

Easily upset

Boredom-apathy

Panic attacks or anxiety

Moodiness

Irritability or short temper

Agitation, inability to relax

Feeling overwhelmed

Loneliness

Depression, general unhappiness, sadness

Feeling powerless

Thoughts of running away

Emptiness, doubt

Feeling pressured, hurried, hassled

Lack of sense of humor



## **Additional Possible Indicators of Teen Stress**

- Significantly avoiding parents
- Abandoning long-time friendships for a new set of peers
- Expressing excessive hostility toward family members



# Asking Kids How They Cope



52% play or do something active

44% listen to music

42% watch TV or play video game

30% talk to friend

29% try not to think about it

28% try to work things out

26% eat something

25% hurt themselves

23% lose their temper

22% talk to a parent

11% cry

Teens.....

Smoking

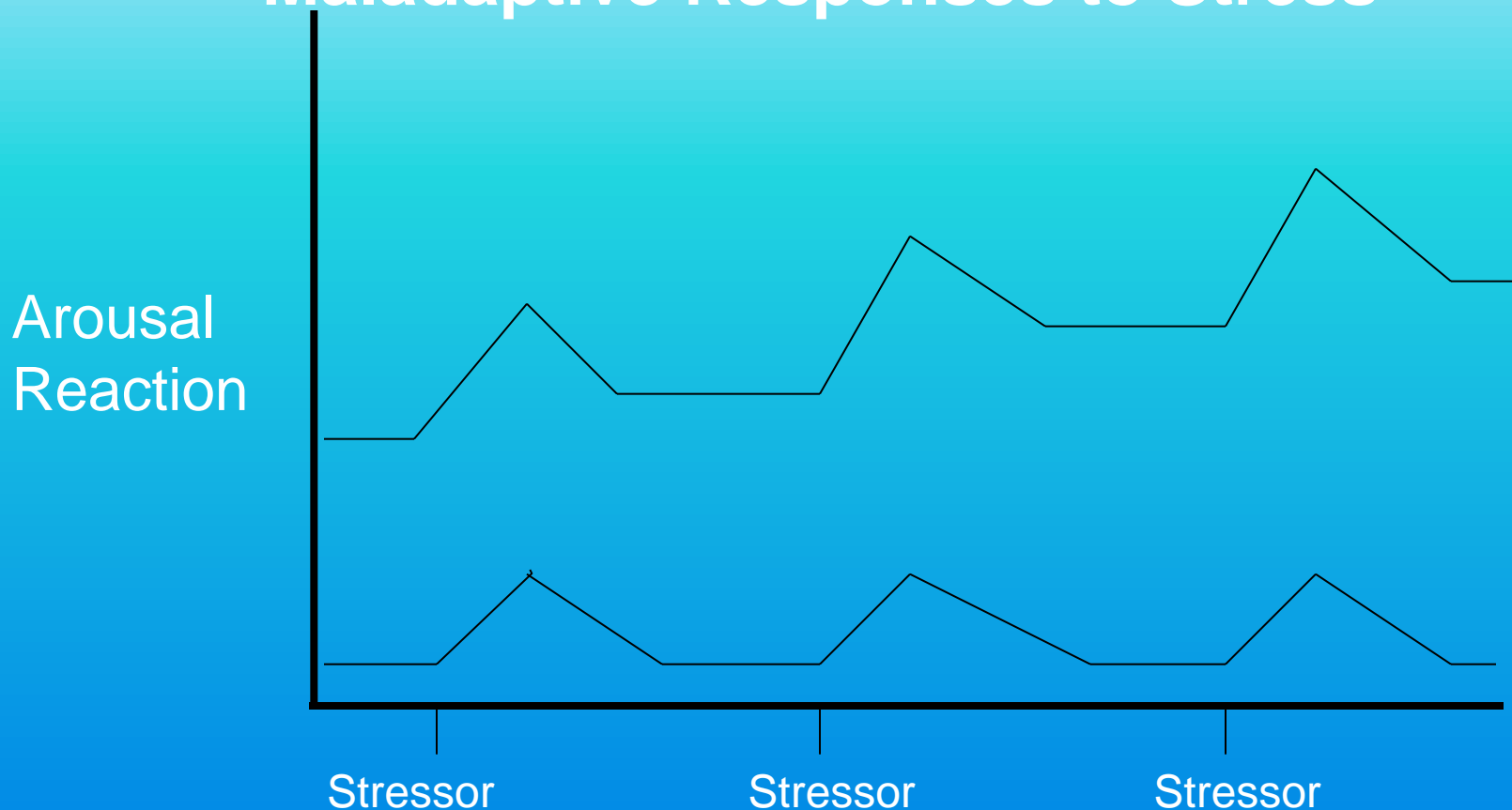
Alcohol

Other drugs

Sleep

Family Connections

# Comparing Normal and Maladaptive Responses to Stress



In the normal person, arousal reactions return to normal after the stressor is dealt with. In maladaptive responses to stress, the arousal reaction continues even after the stressor has been dealt with. In other words, the set point or baseline of arousal reactions is steadily moved upward.

# Toxic Stress and the Brain

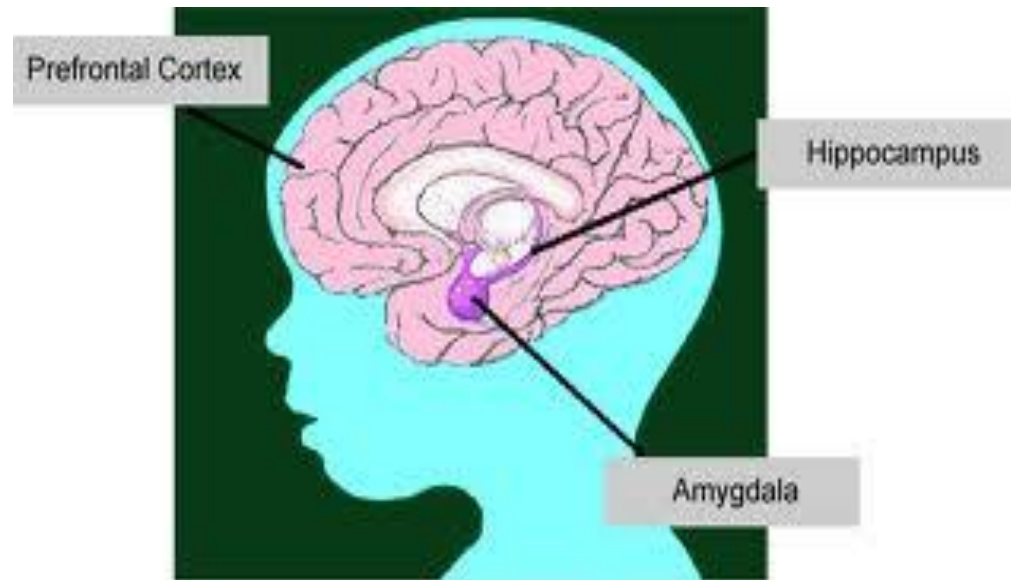


- Impair brain circuit connections
- In extreme, results in smaller brain
- Low stress threshold results in becoming overly reactive to adverse experiences throughout life
- High levels of cortisol (stress hormone)
  - ✓ Can suppress immune system
  - ✓ Damage hippocampus (learning & memory)
  - ✓ Cognitive deficits can continue into adulthood

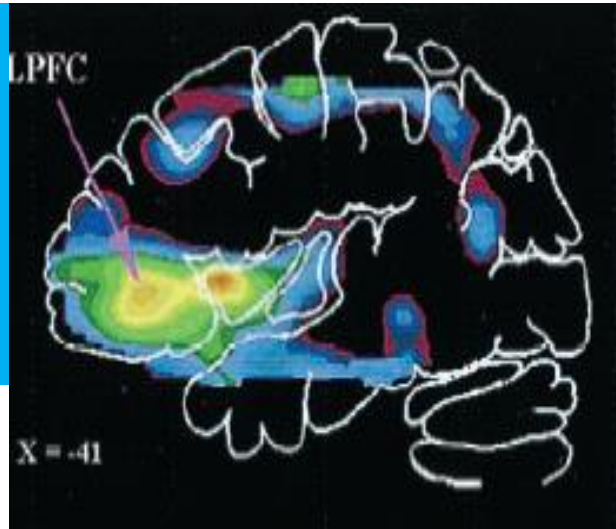
# Stress, Learning and the Brain

## Hippocampus

- Most receptive to stress
- Critical for new learning, forming explicit memories of facts, details and important life events.
- Stress and memory are highly correlated.

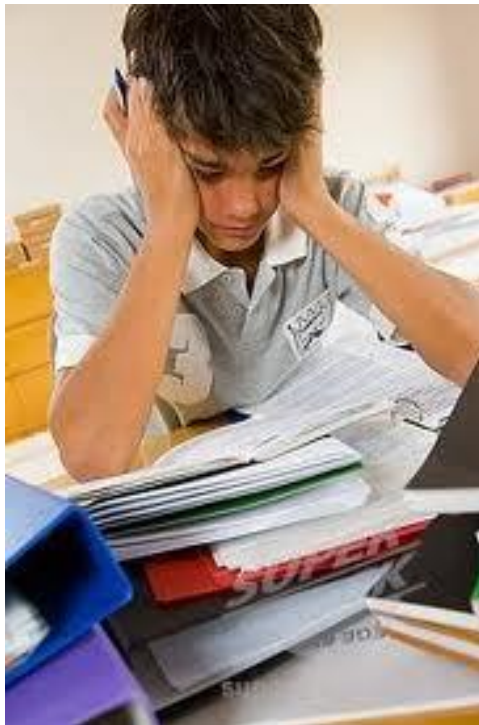


# Stress, Learning and the Brain



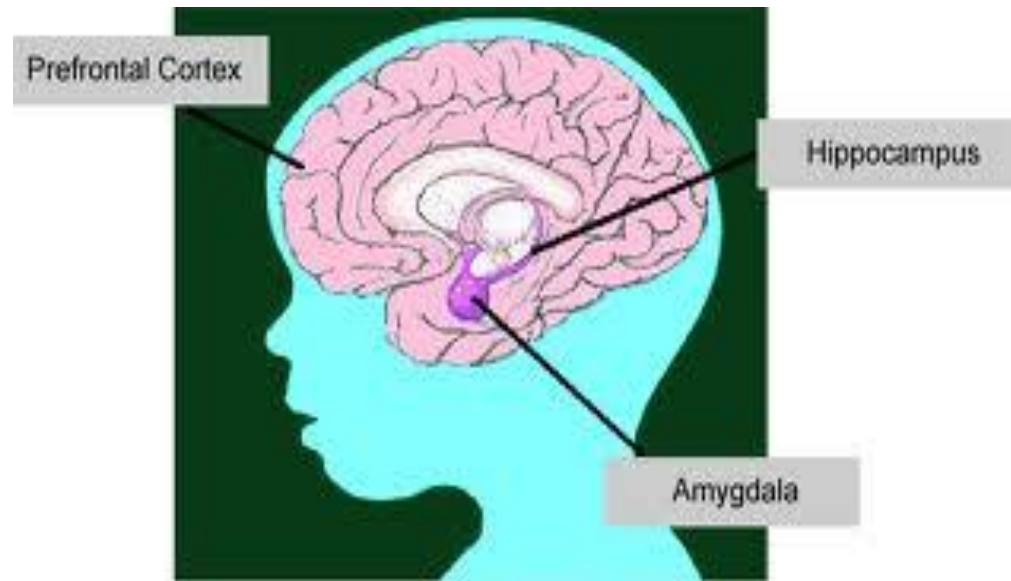
## Prefrontal Cortex (PFC) the Executive Function:

- **Decision making**
- Emotional control (calming, focus)
- **Paying attention**
- Short- term memory
- **Long-term memory**
- Think before we act



PFC functioning is suboptimal in children and teenagers in response to stress

# Stress, Learning and the Brain



## Amygdala

- Alarm of the brain or watchdog of the brain
- Processes fear and anger
- Can “hijack” the brain and PFC or executive function doesn’t function
- Act before we think

# Chronic Stress

- Impairs working memory
- Impairs social skills
- Impairs habit changes
- Impairs decision making

**Often  
symptoms of  
unmanaged  
stress are  
mistaken as  
inappropriate  
behavior.**





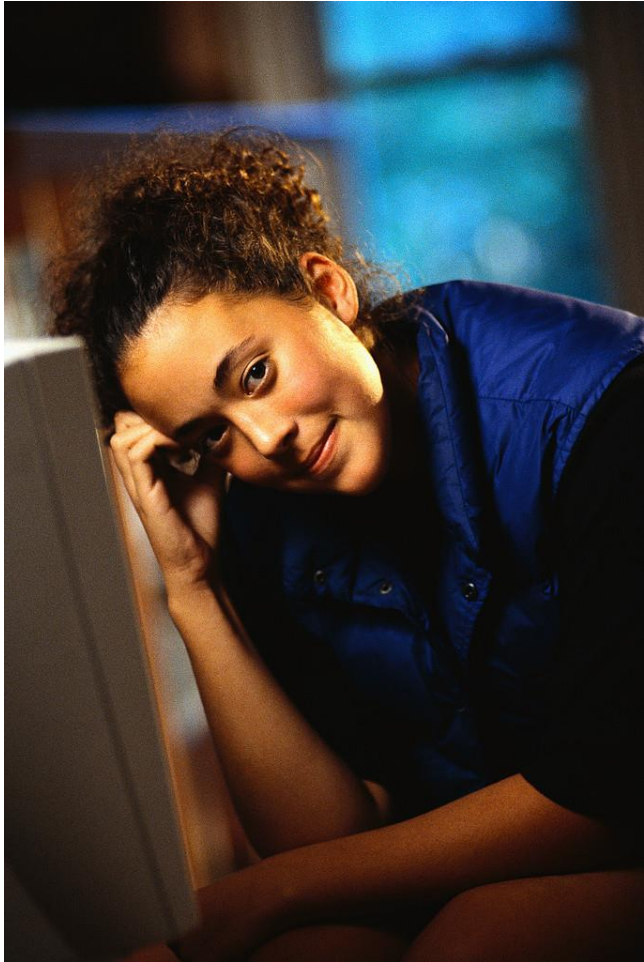
# Unhealthy Coping Can Result in a Range of Problems



- Poor academic performance
- Conduct problems
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Suicide
- Eating disorders
- Violence

(Kovacs, 1997; Matheny et al., 1993)

# Optimal Learning



- Optimal learning state is relaxed alertness
- Environment with high challenge and low threat
- Need to feel safe to learn and remember

# Helping Your Child-Teen Cope with Stress

- ❑ Love, affection, & support
- ❑ Vigorous exercise
- ❑ Talk through problems
- ❑ Practice relaxation & self-calming skills
- ❑ Teach that mistakes OK
- ❑ Clear rules and consequences
- ❑ Teach how to handle difficult situations
- ❑ Tell stories of effective coping
- ❑ Be a role model dealing with stress



Good news!  
**You have  
choices.**

You can learn to  
manage your stress  
and emotions to  
become calm,  
focused and alert.

# Practices to Teach

- Relaxation and recovery in non-stressful times
- Identify stressors and what is controllable
- Social and emotional skills
- Problem solving
- Emotional self regulation
- Cognitive restructuring  
(affirming self talk, reframing thoughts)

# The Relaxation Response

A state of focused awareness with  
an attitude of interest.

The mind's chatter is reduced and  
becomes clearer and calmer.



# The Basics of How to Relax



- Mental attitude is passive, non-judging, and neutral
- Repeat a simple mental or physical stimulus such as breathing, a word, phrase, image, or movement
- Optional: a comfortable position and quiet environment



# Relaxation Effects Your Mind and Body



- ✓ Less stress and anxiety
- ✓ Reduces muscle tension
- ✓ Quiets the mind
- ✓ Improves sleep
- ✓ Improves focus & concentration
- ✓ Helps you think before you act
- ✓ Helps with creative problem-solving



*Laugh*



# Stress Busters Breathe

**Exercise or  
Play sports**



Read a  
good book



*Take a walk*

**Listen to  
calming  
music**



**Yawn and  
Stretch**



*Sit quietly*

**Talk with  
a friend**



**Make  
music**

**Draw**



**Picture  
yourself in  
a beautiful  
place**




*Relax in a  
comfortable  
spot*



**Play  
with  
your  
pet**





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## **Workshops**

The Well-Balanced Professional: Resilient and Relaxed  
Students, Stress and Learning  
The Resilient and Relaxed Learner  
Developing Children's Self-Management  
and Self-Regulation Skills





I can not, and should not, be cured of my stress,  
but merely taught to enjoy it.

Hans Selye, 1950

KidsHealth<sup>®</sup>

from Nemours

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For Parents For Kids For Teens



Helping Kids Cope With Stress

KidsHealth> Parents> School & Family Life> Tough Topics> Helping Kids Cope With Stress

AAA Text Size Print

Listen

To adults, childhood can seem like a carefree time. But kids still experience stress. Things like school and their social life can sometimes create pressures that can feel overwhelming for kids. As a parent, you can't protect your kids from stress — but you can help them develop healthy ways to cope with stress and solve everyday problems.

Lea este artículo en Español

Kids deal with stress in both healthy and unhealthy ways. And while they may not initiate a conversation about what's bothering them, they do want their parents to reach out and help them cope with their troubles.

But it's not always easy for parents to know what to do for a child who's feeling stressed.

Here are a few ideas:

**Notice out loud.** Tell your child when you notice that something's bothering him or her. If you can, name the feeling you think your child is experiencing. ("It seems like you're still mad about what happened at the playground.") This shouldn't sound like an accusation (as in, "OK, what happened now? Are you still mad about that?") or put a child on the spot. It's just a casual observation that you're interested in hearing more about your child's concern. Be sympathetic and show you care and want to understand.

**Listen to your child.** Ask your child to tell you what's wrong. Listen

[http://kidshealth.org/parent/positive/talk/stress\\_coping.html](http://kidshealth.org/parent/positive/talk/stress_coping.html)

# Brief Definition

- Anxiety is a general feeling of apprehension or worry and is a normal reaction to stressful situations
- **Red flags** should go up when the feelings become excessive, thoughts become irrational and everyday functioning is debilitated
- Anxiety disorders are characterized by excessive feelings of panic, fear, or irrational discomfort in everyday situations

