



Work Smart Live Smart

From Kid To College Bound Dealing With Post-Secondary Stress

**By
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Parents are bound to worry when their kids go off to post-secondary school. Will they eat, go to sleep and wake up without their supervision? Will they be able to keep up with the work? Will they make friends or socialize too much? Will the pressure to use alcohol or drugs be too great?

How can you help your student become stress smart? Beverly Beuermann-King, a stress and wellness specialist with Work Smart Live Smart pulls together some great strategies that can make this school year less stressful for your post-secondary child.

UNDERSTAND THE SOURCES

The [College Undergraduate Stress Scale \(CUSS; 1998\)](#) was developed by Renner and Mackin to specifically identify the sources of stress that can be experienced by college students. This update from the Holme's and Rahe's Social Readjustment Rating Scale found an extremely high mean total stress rating score of 1247 in their research. Here are some interesting sources on their 100-point scale:

Being raped	100
Contracting sexually transmitted disease	94
Finals week	90
Oversleeping for an exam	89
Flunking a class	89
Ending a steady dating relationship	85
Financial difficulties	84
Writing a major term paper	83
Sense of overload in school or work	82
Negative consequences of drinking or drug use	75
Difficulties with parents	73
Talking in front of class	72
Lack of sleep	69
Difficulties with a roommate	66
Job changes (applying, new job, work hassles)	65
Declaring a major or concerns about future plans	65

A class you hate	62
Starting a new semester	58
Registration	55
Maintaining a steady dating relationship	55
Being away from home for the first time	53
Getting sick	52
Concerns about appearance	52
Getting straight A's	51

Your student will face many changes and challenges from registration to choosing classes to exposure to new people, ideas and temptations that can lead to identity issues. Some of these stressors may be somewhat predictable based on the time of the school year. For example:

September

- Registration
- New school and community environment
- Homesickness

October

- Realization that life at college is not as perfect as they were lead to believe by peers, parents, teachers or counselors
- Mid-term workload pressures
- Dating and self-esteem because so much value is placed on dating

November

- Academic pressure is mounting because of time management and difficult work
- Homesickness develop
- Economic anxiety because funds from summer begin to run out

December

- Extracurricular time strain
- Final exam stress
- Christmas blues - some students can't go home for break
- Economic anxiety as push to work more hours during holidays

January

- Post-Christmas blues and being away from home again

February and March

- Couples ties weaken or strengthen
- Academic pressure increases again because of midterms

April and May

- Summer job pressures
- Papers and exams piling up
- Depression of leaving friends and facing conflicts with parents

LEARN TO RECOGNIZE IT

Post-secondary stress is something to worry about. When it comes to acknowledging and handling stress, students are among the most vulnerable segments of the population. The American College Health Association cites “stress as the number-one impediment to academic performance in its national college health assessment”. Stress can take its toll not just on academic performance but even further. The *Christian Science Monitor* reported in May 2003, “in the USA, 1 in 10 college students has been diagnosed with depression.”

Look for changes in behaviour – especially eating, sleeping and socializing patterns. Some students become distracted and have difficulty concentrating, while others will mention more colds and flus. How your child is affected by stress may be very different from how you are affected by stress. You may become more verbal while your child becomes more withdrawn. Learn to listen and ask specific questions when you are concerned.

DEVELOP STRATEGIES:

Student Tips For Dealing With Academic Pressures

1. **Set goals and prioritize.** Determine exactly what you want to accomplish – academically, personally and in your chosen field. Prioritizing allows you to be more efficient. Realize that it is okay to say ‘no’ especially when you already have a full schedule.
2. **Get organized.** By becoming more organized, you can reduce your stress level drastically. Make a weekly schedule of all your activities. Allow time for breaks, exercise,

nutrition, socialization, reviewing of notes as well as planned classes, tests and assignments. Get your supplies and desk in order. Label folders so you can easily find information. Utilize spare minutes and accomplish small tasks while you are waiting. Know when you are the most productive during the day and plan accordingly. Allow for down times.

3. **Take effective notes.** Be selective and translate ideas into your own words. You will be better at retaining this information. Look for themes and repeated points to concentrate on. Don't write out information covered in your texts – refer to the text information for later studying.
4. **Minimize interruptions.** Block off a period of time when you can work without being disturbed. Shut your door or go someplace where you can be alone.
5. **Get plenty of sleep.** Inadequate sleep can lead to depression, anxiety, poor concentration, memory impairment and lowered resistance to illness. You need between seven to nine hours of sleep per night in order to rest your mind and body so they can perform well during the day. Many students view all-night study sessions as normal, but often the practice stems more from poor study habits and weak time-management.
6. **Take a break.** To maintain peak performance and reduce your amount of stress, you should take time to relax. Enjoy hanging out with your friends.
7. **Eat healthy.** Eating regular and well-balanced meals to provide you with enough energy to accomplish your daily activities. Avoid using drugs or alcohol to deal with your stress. These things will only mask the symptoms.
8. **Know when you need help and get it. Talk about your problems.** Talk to friends, advisors, professors, counsellors and family members. Talking about your problems will help ease your tension and anxiety and will help you find more ways to deal with those problems. Most colleges have health offices and clinics. Keep your health card information with you and know where to find pertinent information
9. **Give yourself time to adjust.** The work is harder and the pace is faster. Independent study is expected. Adjustment can take time and in most cases the tips above will lead to a smooth transition.

Student Tips For Handling Exam Time

1. **Keep up with your reading assignments** so that you will be reviewing familiar material
2. **Know what to study and what type of test it will be.** Will the test be multiple-choice, essay, true/false, or a combination? This is important to know because there are different ways to study for different types of tests. For a multiple-choice or true/false test, you may

have to know specific details, which requires paying more attention to detail when studying. For an essay test, you will have to study topics in a broader sense because you will have to be more analytical.

3. **Budget your time.** Don't become burned out by studying for six hours straight. Take 10-20 minutes breaks while studying. Study what you don't know, don't waste your time on reviewing what you have already learned.
4. **Study your way.** A good studying environment will allow you to better retain information, so pick a place that is conducive to your needs and similar to where you will write the exam. Prepare a list of likely test questions based on your notes. Some people learn most efficiently by reading, some by listening, and some by writing. Remember that repetition is key.
5. **Be a master test taker.** Review the whole test first. Read each question carefully. Avoid hurried answers. Proof read your answers. Look for related questions to build your answers on.

Student Tips For Handling Financial Stress

1. **Determine Expenses.** The first step in developing a college budget is knowing what costs you will incur. Fixed costs can include tuition, rent/room and board, car payments, car insurance, and parking fees. Variable costs can include entertainment, gasoline, food, utilities, hygiene necessities, clothes, car maintenance, books and phone bills.
2. **Identify Sources of Income.** Once you know what your fixed and variable costs are, you will need to determine if your sources of income will cover the costs. To help increase income, you may be able to get a part time job if you don't already have one. Check out the on-campus job postings as these may offer more flexible hours or advertise your services such as tutoring or editing. Just remember that your schoolwork comes first. Look at ways to share costs or find less expensive alternatives. Can you buy used books from another student?
3. **Avoiding Credit Card Woes.** Credit cards are a good way to build credit, but you can quickly become overwhelmed with debt if you aren't careful. Shop around for a card that offers no annual fee and a low finance charge. Pay the full amount each month and on time to avoid penalties and interest. Use your card sparingly as small purchases add up quickly.

Tips For Parents

And finally, as a concerned and responsible parent, remember to:

- Give advice, but don't dictate.
- Try not to be judgmental if your child's choices are not exactly what you would have them do.
- Establish academic and social standards of conduct before they go away. You can emphasize the difference between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour.
- Before you intervene, ask yourself whether you need to get involved. Is this something that they can work out, can you point them in the right direction, or are they facing a real crisis.
- Help them to learn from their mistakes.

With your guidance and support and by sharing the strategies listed above your child will be well on the road to becoming an independent and successful student.

Stress and wellness specialist, **Beverly Beuermann-King** translates current research and best practices information into a realistic, accessible and practical approach through her dynamic stress and wellness workshops, on-line articles, e-newsletters and media interviews and through a collaboration called *Awakening The Workplace*. Visit www.WorkSmartLiveSmart.com for more on Beverly and her wellness work.

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