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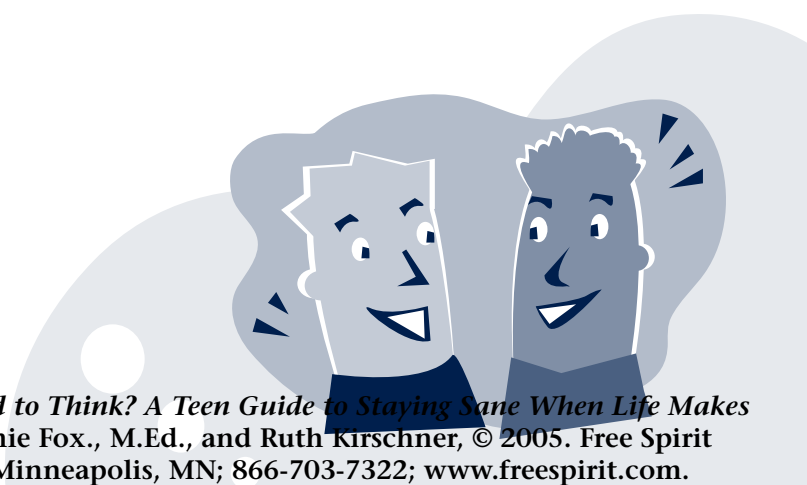
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Stress and Your Brain

What does your brain have to do with stress? The short answer is *everything*. Brains aren't just for learning algebra or cramming for the SATs (though they're good for those things too). Your brain is the storehouse for who you are. Even though it only weighs about three pounds, your brain is where all your memories, feelings, beliefs, opinions, dreams, fears, great ideas, and random facts (state capitals, your locker combination) are stored.

It's also the home of your stress response. All of the emotions and physical reactions you experience when you're stressed are part of this response, and your brain controls them. You can't rewire your brain to become immune to stress, but by understanding how different parts of your brain work (and don't work), you can start changing how you respond.

Your Exuberant Brain

Scientists once thought that the brain had its biggest growth and developmental spurts long before the teen years. As it turns out, that's not entirely true. Research now shows that the brain changes and develops at an incredible rate during the teen years, forming amazing new connections and pruning the ones it no longer needs. Scientists refer to this as *exuberance*.

What does this mean for you? That you're changing constantly. Your thoughts, interests, activities, and moods can shift and go in whole new directions every day. But this also can contribute to your stress level. You might find yourself being more impulsive, making choices or taking chances that don't always make sense to you later—especially when you're stressed. For better (mostly) and for worse (sometimes), it's all thanks to what's going on in that exuberant brain of yours.

Your brain: an act in three parts

Picture your brain as having three main parts. (It's actually a lot more complex than that and doesn't really come in "parts," but this will help you get the idea.) All three parts of your brain work together to make you who you are.



The three parts, which have developed over the course of life on earth, are:

- the “survival” or reptilian brain, also known as the core brain (which first appeared 300 million years ago)
- the “feeling” or mammalian brain, a.k.a. the limbic brain (which has been evolving for the past 50 million years or so)
- the “thinking” or neocortex brain, also called the new brain (which has been evolving for about the past 5 million years)

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Too Stressed to Think?

A Teen Guide to Staying Sane When Life Makes You Crazy

School pressures. Family problems. Dating and relationship issues. Multi-tasking, deadlines, the future, rules, rumors, worries, decisions, popularity, mean people, peer pressure, conflicts, expectations, an overloaded schedule . . . They all add up to stress.

Stress is part of life, and most people think there's not a lot you can do about it. Actually, there is. You can learn about stress. You can understand how stress affects your brain and body—how it blocks you from thinking clearly and making good choices, how it keeps you off balance and wears you down. You can create and maintain a less stressful lifestyle. This book is your guide, your teacher, your friend, and maybe your lifeline, depending on how stressed-out you are.

Look inside to find:

- The basics about stress and your brain
- The lowdown about stress and your body
- Stress-busting tools you can use
- Tips on creating a more manageable schedule so you can relax and enjoy being a teen
- “Think About It” and “Write About It” activities that build your skills
- Real-life stories of teens facing challenges, dealing with problems, and learning to manage the stress in their lives
- Tried-and-true ways to work through conflicts with family, friends, boyfriends and girlfriends
- Proven ways to take care of yourself
- Where to go for more info whenever you're ready



The bottom line? Stress affects everyone, but it doesn't have to run or ruin your life. You can stay cool and make smart choices. Right now is a great time to start.

Annie Fox, M.Ed., is a writer, educator, and online advisor for teens. Her book *The Teen Survival Guide to Dating & Relating* is based on hundreds of teen email questions. **Ruth Kirschner** is a teacher, author, illustrator, and playwright. Annie and Ruth co-created the “Stress and Ethics” curriculum for teens, which inspired this book.

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