



# PRESSURE

True Stories by Teens About Stress

Edited by Al Desetta  
of Youth Communication

free spirit  
PUBLISHING®

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### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Pressure : true stories by teens about stress / edited by Al Desetta.

p. cm. — (Real teen voices)

Includes index.

ISBN 978-1-57542-412-5 — ISBN 1-57542-412-6 1. Stress in adolescence. 2. Stress management for teenagers. I. Desetta, Al.

BF724.3.S86P74 2012

155.5'189042—dc23

2012013824

eBook ISBN: 978-1-57542-656-3

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Reading Level Grades 9 & up; Interest Level Ages 13 & up;

Fountas & Pinnell Guided Reading Level Z+

Cover and interior design by Tasha Kenyon

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

Printed in the United States of America

S18860413

### Free Spirit Publishing Inc.

Minneapolis, MN

(612) 338-2068

[help4kids@freespirit.com](mailto:help4kids@freespirit.com)

[www.freespirit.com](http://www.freespirit.com)

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# INTRODUCTION

Family, friends, school, and relationships—while these can all be sources of support for teens, they can also lead to plenty of stress and conflict. In *Pressure*, teens describe how stress has affected them and what they're doing to lead more relaxed and healthy lives.

In “Enjoy the Moment,” Ngan-Fong Huang has pushed herself relentlessly all her life to achieve academically. But by her senior year in high school, she begins to question her driven approach to life.

“Sometimes worrying too much just overwhelms me,” she writes. “Last term, for instance, I went out of my mind over grades and college applications.”

While it's important to plan for the future, Ngan-Fong also realizes that life is too stressful when she doesn't enjoy and value the present moment: “We should also spend time appreciating what is right before our eyes, since the present is what we have now.”

In “House of Stress,” the author is weighed down by taking on adult responsibilities in the family: “I sweep, clean the kitchen, and mop. When my stepsister doesn't help out, I clean the entire house alone.” The author also has to babysit her disobedient siblings.

“I often feel frustrated and angry at the situation,” she writes. “I don’t want to be the kind of person who blows up, and I’m not, but that just leaves me feeling more frustrated.”

The writer hopes that when she finally moves out of her house, she won’t take all that frustration, anger, and stress with her. Rather, she hopes she takes away “the knowledge and ability to handle my responsibilities.”

The stories in *Pressure* show teens engaging in a wide range of activities to release stress in healthy ways. One writer turns to Buddhist chanting to clear her mind. Janae Marsh finds calm and gains perspective by reading. Niya Wilson relaxes by doing yoga. Several others deal with personal problems through writing.

“I would open up completely in my diary,” says one author. “It’s almost like my head went from heavy to empty, especially when I wrote about my father’s behavior. When I wrote my angry thoughts, my mind was less stressed. It’s like I told someone my feelings and they offered to listen. I didn’t feel sad or suicidal anymore.”

Sports and exercise are a great help to other writers. Martin Smith plays basketball while D’nashia Jenkins runs track. Emily Orchier takes long walks.

The stories in this book offer a window into many teens’ lives. You are sure to find within its pages people and experiences you can identify with and relate to.



You might find that you can get more out of the book by applying what the writers have learned to your own life. The teens who wrote these stories did so because they hope that telling their stories will help readers who are facing similar challenges. They want you to know that you are not alone, and that taking specific steps can help you manage or overcome very difficult situations. They've done their best to be clear about the actions that worked for them so you can see if they'll work for you. For further help, this book also features interviews with therapists and counselors about the causes of stress, how it affects people, how to identify it, and how to deal with it.

Another way to use the book is to develop your writing skills. Each teen in this book wrote 5 to 10 drafts of his or her story before it was published. If you read the stories closely you'll see that the teens work to include a beginning, a middle, and an end, along with good scenes, description, dialogue, and anecdotes (little stories). To improve your writing, take a look at how these writers construct their stories. Try some of their techniques in your own writing.

If you'd like more information about the writing program at Youth Communication or want to read more teen essays, visit [www.youthcomm.org](http://www.youthcomm.org).



# POETRY KEEPS ME CALM

*by Ashunte Hunt*

When I was 14, I was put in my first group home. I was facing many struggles at that time. I was still grieving for my parents, who had died when I was younger, and I was living with a stepmom who abused me. I also had to deal with bullying from my peers in middle school.

I was caught in a circle of abuse. I'd get beat up in school, and then I would go home and go through the beatings that my stepmom called "discipline." When I was put in the group home, I had to deal with a whole

new situation all by myself, so I got really stressed out.

**Not being able to express my feelings gave me no choice but to keep them bottled up inside, and the more I bottled up my feelings, the more likely I was to explode.**

I had no way to express my feelings because I wouldn't talk to anybody. I didn't trust them. Not being able to express my feelings gave me no choice but to keep them bottled up inside,

and the more I bottled up my feelings, the more likely I was to explode. My anger kept rising and rising, and then I'd get into fights or vandalize property. I always had evil thoughts in my head.

I looked at the world as if everybody was against me. I hated everyone I didn't know, and I grew very skeptical of the people I did know. And if I felt that I was being disrespected in any way, I just started spazzing like I was crazy.

I was my own Jekyll and Hyde—in certain situations I could control myself, but when someone provoked me I felt powerless to stop myself from going off on them. The people who pushed me to snap were the people who bullied me, made fun of my circumstances, and tried to play me like I was soft.

When I got mad in my group home, I turned into a demolition man. I demolished furniture, couches, chairs, walls, and my room. I also picked fights whenever people pushed my buttons.

One day in my group home the barber came through and I decided to get my hair cut. As I was waiting for my turn, I went downstairs and started playing a pinball game on the computer.

One of my peers came downstairs to tell me that it was my turn to get my hair cut. He tried to get me to go upstairs by turning off the computer screen. I turned it back on. I thought he was playing at first, so I didn't get mad or take it seriously.

He did it again and I turned it back on to continue playing. I started to get agitated. If my anger was a pot of water on the stove, it was just starting to bubble.

When he did it the third time, I turned it back on and told him, "If you turn off the computer screen again I will hurt you!" This time I was mad—the water was about to boil over.

Then he did it again. I was in a rage. We started fighting, we got a couple of hits in, then staff came to break it up.

I had so much anger in me at my group home that I didn't really want to deal with anything that anybody wanted me to do. But one day my favorite staff member let me listen to his Tupac and Eminem CDs. When I listened to Tupac and Eminem, I felt this unique feeling that no other artists gave me.

When I listened to Tupac's music, I got the message of street life and family problems. When I listened to Eminem's music, I felt the anger and rage that I'd been through. That's when the next stage opened up for me.

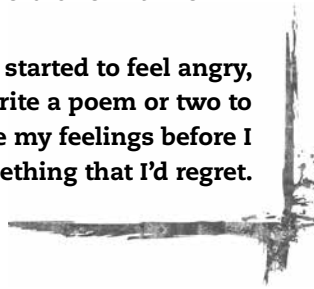
I was listening to one of Eminem's CDs and one song caught my attention. It was titled "Rock Bottom," and it was about how life can really push you to the edge and bring you down.

The first line pulled me in: "I feel like I'm walkin' a tightrope without a circus net." I related to that line because the lifestyle that I was going through made me feel like I was walking that tightrope. So I decided to write something of my own, and I got a piece of paper and a pencil.

In that first poem I expressed my built-up anger, rage, and depression. I didn't feel anything while I wrote it. But a week later I caught the feelings after reading it over and over again.

I called my first poem “Will somebody referee this fight I’m fighting?” One of the lines was: “I wouldn’t care if the grim reaper reap, ’cause my life is something that I now don’t want to keep.” And that line alone hit me so hard that I had to dig into myself and see what would make me write that, because I really didn’t recall writing it. That’s when I realized how much pain I was in and how much I needed to release all my stress.

**When I started to feel angry,  
I’d write a poem or two to  
release my feelings before I  
did something that I’d regret.**



So I started writing more poetry. The poems that I wrote in my group home were about me, my anger, depression, stress, and any other thing that bothered me. When I wrote poetry it was like I could just write forever to express my feelings, as long as I had enough paper and lead to do so.

The poetry affected my anger a little at a time. When I started to feel angry, I’d write a poem or two to release my feelings before I did something that I’d regret. I’d still be angry, but I could at least let some of it out before it got out of hand.

When I found out that my first love had cheated on me, I wanted to chop her head off. Her love was priceless and I felt she threw my heart in the trash. I was so angry that I had to release my anger or I would have ended up in jail. So the first thing I did was write two poems. Then,

when I saw her, I was able to stay calm even though it still hurt.

When I read over my poems I can acknowledge my feelings, and that helps me think about what I can do to make the situation better. I ask myself how I can do something different to avoid getting physical or making myself a threat to anybody.

I didn't get into that many fights after I started writing poetry, but I really can't say that it put an end to the fighting either. Sometimes I feel like going back to my old behaviors when I get mad because I still have a lot of anger inside of me. Certain situations give me flashbacks of how I would react if I were the old me.

I will still fight someone for disrespecting the memory of my mother and father, or for threatening me or my space. But it's been four or five months since I had my last fight.

And the last time I demolished something was a year ago. I was angry at my ex-girlfriend because we got into an argument over the phone, and I demolished my bowling trophy and some things that she had given me. I'll only demolish something now if I'm so upset that poetry can't help me.

Poetry can't help me get over the abuse I've been through or the fact that my parents are gone. I have to reach deep down inside to recover from those things, and even though poetry helps me get in touch with my

inside, it doesn't cover those subjects. It might help numb it at times, but it doesn't hit the spot like I want it to.

But writing my feelings on paper taught me how to look at the world differently. My temper has calmed down, and I don't feel powerless over my behaviors anymore. I feel like a real human being who can civilize himself and cool off on his own.

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