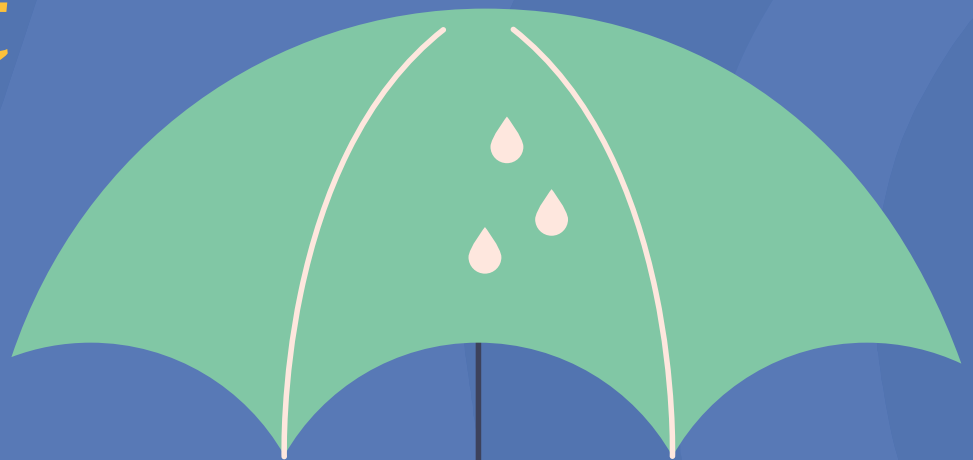


5 Tools to Help Children and Teens **Overcome** **Pressure and** **Burnout**



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It's not just grown-ups who experience burnout and achievement pressure.

Kids do, too—and it starts early, even before adolescence. Educational environments can be intense and demanding, and kids are spread thin with the demands of school, hobbies, and extracurriculars. How can parents and other family members support children and teens to overcome the stress that comes with living in today's world?

➤ First, look at the external stressors.

The first step is to reassess their schedule and see where you might make more room for downtime—relaxing, hanging out with friends and family, and enjoying the luxury of just doing nothing once in a while.

For example, is there anything they're involved in that has a net negative effect—like a late music lesson that ends up depriving them of sleep and impacting their homework, or joining a team and then spending every game on the bench? In some cases, you may just need to wait another year.

➤ Then help them build internal resources.

Changing their environment and expectations can do wonders to restore a kid's joy and sense of freedom. But supporting a child's inner resources is perhaps even more important. Even the most carefully calibrated schedule can't keep away the inevitable stressors of life.

So kids need resilience—the ability to withstand, adapt to, and recover from adversity. Having resilience doesn't mean kids avoid sadness, disappointment, or failure. But people who are resilient bounce back more easily from roadblocks.

> Can kids learn to be more resilient?

We each have different levels of the qualities associated with resilience, depending on our temperament and personality. However, we all have the ability to increase our levels of resilience through small changes in the way we live and the way we think. For example, we can increase our feelings of gratitude by focusing on the good things that happen to us, not just the difficult and painful experiences.

Another powerful way for kids to build resilience is by identifying and activating our strengths. When they discover their own unique talents and character strengths, they can learn how to utilize these gifts to address daily challenges. Building healthy habits also promotes resilience—whether that's physical exercise, meditation, time in nature, or connecting with friends.



5 Evidence-Based Exercises **to Help Teens Build Resilience**

> Tool #1: Yoga Pose for Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the state of being present, in the moment, with nonjudgmental awareness of what's going on within and around you. According to research, this skill allows us to better regulate our emotions and be fully present in our experiences. Here's a yoga pose that can help children and teens develop mindfulness.

Child's Pose

1. From hands and knees, lower your hips toward your heels.
2. Spread your knees wide apart while keeping your big toes touching. Soften the belly onto the tops of the thighs.
3. Rest your forehead on the floor and rest your torso on your thighs. Knees can be together or apart.
4. Extend your arms forward, with palms facing down, or bring them back to rest alongside your thighs, with palms facing up.
5. Breathe in for a slow count of five, then breathe out for a slow count of five.
6. Stay in the pose for as long as you wish.



➤ Tool #2: A Self-Compassion Exercise

Self-compassion means extending the same kindness and forgiveness to yourself as you would to a friend or loved one. Turns out, self-compassion is more important for happiness than self-esteem: Research shows that people who are compassionate to themselves are much less likely to be depressed, anxious, and stressed, and much more likely to be happy, resilient, and optimistic about their future. Strengthening this quality early can help kids navigate the expectations, pressures, and self-doubt that come with growing up and finding your path.

Kristin Neff is one of the best-known researchers on the topic of self-compassion and how it enhances well-being. The exercise below comes from her website, self-compassion.org.

How Would You Treat a Friend?

1. Think about times when a close friend feels bad about themselves or is really struggling in some way. How would you respond to your friend in this situation (especially when you're at your best)? Write down what you typically do, what you say, and the tone in which you typically talk to your friends.
2. Now think about times when you feel bad about yourself or are struggling. How do you typically respond to yourself in these situations? Please write down what you typically do, what you say, and the tone in which you talk to yourself.
3. Did you notice a difference between how you talk to others and how you talk to yourself? If so, ask yourself why. What factors or fears come into play that lead you to treat yourself and others so differently?
4. How do you think things might change if, when you feel bad, you responded to yourself the same way you would to a friend who was struggling?

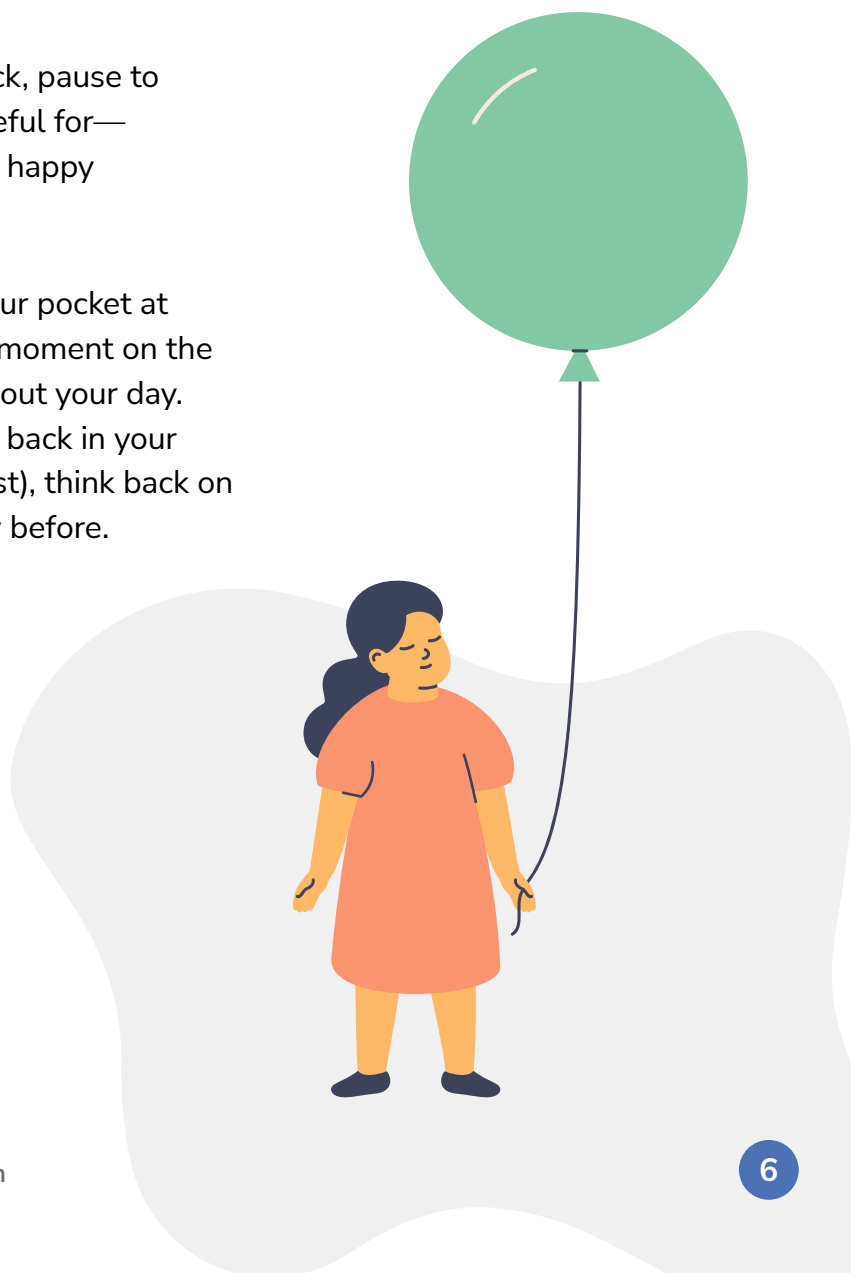


➤ Tool #3: Growing Gratitude

By consciously activating a sense of gratitude, we can enhance our happiness levels and strengthen our overall resilience. Simply by noticing the good things around us and acknowledging the people who support us, we promote our own mental health and develop more satisfaction in our lives. Studies show that gratitude exercises positively impact people of all ages in both the short and long term.

The Gratitude Rock

1. Find a rock or other small object that you like—one that feels good to hold or has an interesting texture.
2. Every day, carry this rock around with you in your pocket, or wear it on a chain around your neck or your wrist.
3. Whenever you see or touch the rock, pause to remember something you are grateful for—anything at all that makes you feel happy and thankful.
4. When you take the stone out of your pocket at the end of the day, look back for a moment on the things you felt grateful for throughout your day. The next morning, when you put it back in your pocket (or around your neck or wrist), think back on what you were grateful for the day before.



➤ Tool #4: Giving to Others

Research shows that helping others offers mental and physical health benefits that strengthen resilience. When we do something good for someone else, our brains produce more feel-good chemicals, like oxytocin and progesterone. In turn, these neurochemicals lower stress and promote overall health and well-being. On a more conscious level, helping others allows us to feel more connected and purposeful, which increases our happiness levels.

Do Something Kind for Someone Every Day

Giving to others in a small way every day helps children and teens build a habit of generosity. And thinking about others' needs can help them shift the focus away from their own negative or anxious thoughts. These gestures of kindness can be simple while still being meaningful, such as:

- Taking a neighbor's dog for a walk when they're sick or busy
- Holding the door open for someone
- Calling an older relative just to say hi and find out how they're doing
- Complimenting a friend
- Letting someone cut in front of you in line



➤ Tool #5: Activate Your Character Strengths

Character strengths reflect who you are at your core. They are positive parts of your personality that affect how you think, feel and behave. Using their character strengths can help kids more effectively face challenges and navigate stressors. Studies show that activating strengths creates long-term benefits, including higher levels of happiness and lower levels of depression.

Three Good People: A Strengths-Spotting Exercise

This exercise from the Therapist Aid website is great for the whole family to do together, or for a group of kids to try.

1. Name an inspiring character from a book, movie, or TV show.
 2. List their strengths.
 3. Describe how they use their strengths to overcome challenges, or in everyday life.
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1. Name an inspiring person.
 2. List their strengths.
 3. Describe how they use their strengths to overcome challenges, or in everyday life.
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1. Think about yourself.
 2. List your strengths.
 3. Describe how you use their strengths in everyday life.

Now reflect on what you discovered—in writing, with the whole group, or in pairs.

- What strengths do you share with the fictional character and the person you know?
- What strengths do you possess that the others do not?
- What is a strength of yours that you often overlook?
- Is there an area of your life where you could better put your strengths to use?

Need more support to help kids build resilience and overcome expectations and burnout?

Browse our library of resources, learn more about our mental health treatment programs for ages 7–11 and 12–18, and schedule an assessment with one of our expert clinical staff.

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