

Episode 15: Teen Stress, Anxiety and Mental Illness

FULL TRANSCRIPT (with timecode)

00:00:10;01 - 00:00:27;21

M1: Hello and welcome to Episode 14 of the What's Up. APS podcast I'm your host Frank Bellavia. We're going to talk about stress anxiety and mental health issues in teens. We'll be right back after this. Listen.

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F7: I guess is that anybody. I love my job. You love driving a bus. I really do. Well. I love riding your bus Mr. Dan.

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M5: Always. Oh buddy here grab a tissue. Arlington public schools is looking for bus drivers. If you're interested due to AP As UVA dodged us for more information. Arlington public schools one hire at a time.

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M1: Welcome back to what's up as podcast on the home front Bill. And today we're joined by Natalie Edwards a licensed clinical social worker at Yorktown High School. And Michelle best who has a number of different habits including parent and co-facilitator of Miami the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

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M2: We're going to talk today about stress anxiety and mental health issues in teens. Thank you both for joining us today on the podcast. First let's just start start with you. As a social worker and licensed therapist working with teens. What are some of the concerns you hear about in terms of mental health. So one of the biggest concerns I. Have. With mental health and adolescents now is. Growing anxiety with. School both middle school students and with high school students anxiety is coming earlier and earlier we see younger and younger students and that's certainly one of the biggest concerns is teaching kids to.

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F5: Handle this anxiety when they're still young and well they got the skills before it. And guys think they're.

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M2: Showing a new co-facilitator support group here in Arlington. For parents who are looking for help on youth mental health issues talking about the group these suicide came about as. We realized that there was kind of a vacuum in. Terms of how.

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F2: Families and Children within that there. There are definitely resources for adults and children do. Teenage years. We try to help families with. Just support encourage. Guidance that comes with questions. And we also help them a little bit with. Their. Processing.

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M2: System. Of course not. Only when we were talking about the episode before we started to mention that. Some stress in teens is OK. Talk a little bit about that what you what you meant by that.

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F6: Sure. So stress is a normal healthy emotion. We can all get stressed especially when one particular deadline comes up or we have one particular test for studying for extra harder. Does at work. We all get stressed. But the thing about stress is that it's temporary and we can overcome it and that's just a tip for a particular situation. What's concerning is when that stress turns into anxiety and the stress turns into depression and some of the students we see within a yes don't have those skills to manage this stress to make it. What should be only a temporary feeling a temporary emotion. And we see it turning into anxiety and we see it turning into depression and that's what we consider a mental health concern when they're feeling those anxiety and depression feelings that we have to worry about.

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M2: You touched on school work and stuff like that being causes of stress in teens. What are some other things that could cause stress and anxiety in teens. Well what's unique is that. Every school.

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F6: Students have different things. That I think. It's going to vary between the count me of what their staff to how there's certainly concerns that they're stressed about school and deadline concerns. We have seniors stressed about college application deadlines. We have decision making deadlines coming up for seniors. So. And. Sometimes unfortunately our students feel that stress from their surroundings. So they don't get it as home as much and they're not as pressured to bring home as good grades. Unfortunately. We can we can teach our kids to relax and we can teach our students. That we can overcome this little bit of stress. But unfortunately when they get to school and the other students around them are stressed at just as much. We'll talk about. The.

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M2: Signs and symptoms that you can watch out for. But I want to go back to a show and talk about. You mentioned good group to you co-facilitator what's the format for the group one compared to the parents expected for your time when your when your groups. So we started our groups. Out with kind of an introduction we go round the circle and we usually sit around a large table all around a circle and we kind of introduce ourselves and say why we're here.

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F2: With a little Turkish just a brief introduction and then we often ask What can we help you with. So. That will then guide our conversation through the evening so you will once some people come in every time we eat. It really is kind of a drop in. Taste. Of. Participation. It is not a commitment. And we drink evenings. We try to end them on a positive note. We have a board with a list of. A list of.

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F4: Ideas and which when are we going to take home with us. And so we all get. With that we're kind of prepared to give. Face.

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M2: Are these self referral to counsellors and social workers for teens. How do they do they come to your group. So the parents come into our group O'Hair and I advertise. Through.

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F3: Some of the service we haven't had any. Most of them through special education type of service are able to serve a special education Aeolus or some the schools allow me to. Advertise our group and then get referrals from people Grainer friends. I've had a few school referrals so it's kind of. Kind of come from other directions.

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M2: How often do you meet weekly. We meet twice a month charism or Devilly. How significant is stress. How significant is our problem and teens in our region across the nation. OK.

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F5: So getting teens stressed is a healthy typical emotion for any team. They're going to feel stressed out when they have a deadline or a test coming up. And that's not what our biggest concern is our biggest concern is when that stress turns into anxiety. Stress is a symptom and often leads to anxiety and we get to a team feeling anxious in situations a team feeling anxious about going to school and feeling anxious about test. That's when it is a mental health concern and that's. A significant problem. Unfortunately the biggest concern with anxiety is it often manifests. Itself. And it. Turns into a bigger. And. Bigger problem than what we can. Manage. So the biggest problem is teaching the teens and students now how to manage their anxiety how to cope with anxiety how to use coping mechanisms. To help them get a grasp on anxiety now and teach them the skills that they need for their future. What are some of those coping skills.

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M2: To teach teach to you. Sure silly optimism can teach teens to keep a fidget with them in the classroom that will opt in help when they're feeling anxious about who's calling on them or they're going to get called on.

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F5: Giving them a stressful fidget or a little piece of Plato or something. Bridget spinner. I know that's a very popular.

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F1: Concept. There's another thing that we teach kids often write down their anxieties. When they're able to write down everything that they're nervous about or worried about in the coming week. It allows them to their brain to compartmentalize that.

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F5: I know that we've been going into the different classrooms and we've been teaching kids how to make their own stressful and to make it unique for them it's something that they want to keep in their hands and play with their hands. We also taught them if we keep a list of hearings ideas you can often go back and you can say wait what was that worried about this thing for you know number two on the list. That's not a problem. Let me cross it off and allow you to give me the control over what you're going to be worried about that week or what's coming up and makes as much control as you have over those.

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M2: Things. What are some signs. That parents and teachers should be alert to. That might indicate. That who is struggling with anxiety or depression. I like. To say that parents and other teens the best and when your teen is not being yourself. Is a concern. And you should start talking to your teen about what's going on and you should start. Trying to figure out how you I'm a big but we've seen a lot of students crying in school. Anxiety leading to crying sometimes they don't know why they're crying sometimes they just need a break from the outside there's too much going on. Avoidance is the big. Sur and. If your kid does yours to. Try to get out of going to school does your student quit the baseball team teachers union drop out of the debate team itself is something that they're not wanting to participate in it or doesn't want to go near anymore. With that.

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F5: Kind of isolation. We recognize that as a symptom of depression not hanging out with friends anymore not socializing not keeping your connection your community friends. You want to make sure that your kid. You know. I say and. Parents know their students better than anyone else and you want to make sure that they're still being themselves. Can they put aside the homework and then still go out and play soccer. And have a good time playing with their friends are really doing the homework on the weekend and managing this project but still able to go out and go to. A movie with friends you want to make sure that they're balancing their school with friends. You don't recognize any of those signs or symptoms of.

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M3: Appointments or isolation. If parents see this what should they do. If parents see kids being so isolated or or what you just described what should they do. Does that make it take your kid out. Of.

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F2: Your team if your teen is not going out with friends. Maybe it's time for you take them. To. Maybe. Maybe take them to. Or to go just. Fine. It's time to unify. A couple of friends over. To do something. To try to make sure that you're. Your. Teen is not. Isolated is. Kind of. Critical Path. Activity. Sometimes our teens are so stressed out and they can't handle that and they just need the time with. Their family. And so really one of your goals is to keep your. Teenager from isolating themselves. Many of them will go stand there and. Refuse to go to school refuse to go anywhere. And just to make sure that you are continually in your teens life. Is kind of a very important. Piece. Want to the games whenever they want to do whatever will keep them talking to you.

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M2: Sitting around the dinner table as a family. Maybe special outing with your child.

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F3: Absolutely. Really kind of depends on your child you need to know what their interests are and you need to be willing to pursue them. With them. So if your team is. Into. Playing games maybe you need to go figure out how to make that video game which is always a challenge for me. If your if your. Child is into doctor. Maybe you need to go head a field or a trained soccer game. So there's lots of different ways to interact. With your teenager. What they really need though more than anything else is to know that. You are on their side. And one of the things I like to do with my team is to promise all you know you're telling. Like she said a list. Of things that are. Just about. To go through and say well we can do this. Just know that is it can it can be.

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M2: We can do. High school is a critical time and stressful for all teens. Should parents maybe start doing some of this stuff. Just to maybe.

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M3: Get ahead of it just in case it does. They could start seeing that their kids really try to manage it. Before it becomes a serious issue of course.

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F4: Absolutely. You should always be ahead of. The game on this. The middle and high school years are really hard and our kids are becoming more and more independent. And separating from us. And during that time we had the delicate balance. Of encouraging. Become more independent. And at the same time maintaining that bond with them. So that when there is something wrong. That there is no response to us. So. As as they age and they become more independent we need to kind of follow them instead of when they were little they kind of followed us but we need to make sure that we are there at that.

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F5: Point. So we talked about what should parents do when they recognize or see some of signs or symptoms and they're starting to recognize that change in the characteristic with their child. I want to say reach out to someone at the school. So there is counselors social workers and psychologists at every school. And if you just touch base with someone who knows your student your kid to say hey you know I was kind of worried about that. He stayed in his room all night or they quit the baseball team. Someone at school will be happy to check in with that student someone at school. You know talk with the kid about what's going on. Are there some pressure is there something that you can't tell the parents home about. So that's definitely one option that I would say is great grandparents to do really talk to someone at the school hope. School will tell him what this is doing. And recommend a therapist or recommend someone on the outside for. Student. Continuously. Do you have any advice for how adults can talk to.

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M2: Young people and when they meet we are under a great deal of stress and seem to have a difficult time coping with certain situations.

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F5: So back to what Michelle was saying that get to know your kid a little bit. What I always tell parents is one. Great way. Is. Always make sure you're talking to your students every day. You're talking to your kids. And that's hard to do because we as parents are often addicted to our own and we're looking on our own or laptop or we have to get all this and one more e-mail. Put down your phone get your student down your phone and you need to make sure that you're talking with them. No phones no distractions. You need to make sure you're talking with them every day. One great idea that Michelle talked about was having dinner. We have to remember that. Food is a comfort food. Makes us feel comfortable. It's very nourishing. It's a nurturing thing to engage with someone else. So you know even if it's a quick 20 minutes or even if it's just half the family sit down at the table and eat with someone and talk with them that way. Talk about your day stressors. And even normalized stressors because at work we can tell our students like oh I'm really stressed out I have this deadline by you know once a time of then I'll be able to relax and I'll feel better once it's done. And so we can normalize that stress is temporary stress is OK. Stress is a normal thing. But then we can overcome it and we can't. Get over. You know over come get over that feeling. It's a temporary feeling. I also would. Say that driving in the car is great. Students don't

actually always look you in the eye and tell you the truth. But they're not going to look you in the eye and say oh I got bullied at school. If someone is making you comfortable by. Driving in the car if you're able to put down those phones for a couple of minutes then your student does not have your phone and your focus on the road and you're looking straight ahead. You can have an open conversation with them and nothing more comforting environment because there's no face to face. Interesting look me in the eye. So you recommend that. Those meals eating and then the car is a great way to talk to your kids.

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M2: They're just keeping the phones away from them in the car to get back home.

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F5: And I think we as adults aren't guilty by that too of looking at our ground when our kids talking to them. We were touched on how coping mechanisms can help.

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M2: Teens deal with stress or anxiety. Is there a difference between how teens cope and how adults cope or just learning how to do this as a teen. Hope you. As an adult. I think the consequences change between you and your team.

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F4: When you're an adult. And I say there's a whole. Shit through your teen years into adulthood. That everybody is on that track a little bit differently in terms of developing. I don't know that it is the magic age of 18 that we're going to cope with it. Differently. Mental illness is usually diagnosed by the mid 20s. So we're finding that a lot. Of our college students are heading off to college and not making it through that freshman year. And. That's a much harder time to have. This hit. That during the teen years. So it's really important to kind of be on guard on watch and working really hard even if your child is. Grinding and doing. Great. That does not mean that you don't keep these things going in these relationships and watching her stress going during those years because you need to make sure that they are learning the skills so that when they hit college. Which is much harder. That they're ready to handle that.

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M2: As well. And if you have a if you're a parent of a senior who's getting ready to go to college and they are learning new skills what do you tell them to do when they're at college. Because obviously if they're going out of state or out of town you're not there to see those signs at colleges is a stressful environment. What has helped parents in that situation. I think the first thing I would want to make sure. Of as a parent is that my. Kid. Knows where the mental health center is.

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F2: And that we know how to make that appointment. If that were to become necessary. My. My kid is not exhibiting signs before college. Many many of these college kids do start to experience a lot of stress thoroughly for the first time. They're responsible for finding their own.

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F3: Irresponsible for doing their own laundry and then they have all of this homework on top of them as well. And it's is a lot to put on an 18 year old 17 year old 19 year old. All of them a time nothing additional work. Plus all the individual responsibility. So walking into that I think it's really for. You know where the resources are and that your kid knows where the resources are on campus even if they're

sure they know them. Better to know where they are ahead of time. And to be looking for them when you're in a. Place where they're not really.

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M1: Functional. Again we're talking with Natalie Edwards a licensed clinical social worker at Gortat High School.

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M2: And Michelle best who's a co-facilitator of the National Alliance on Mental Illness. Can you point our listeners to any particular resources or information on youth mental health that your group has been helpful to families.

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F3: Know there's quite a few things that I typically bring up to families. First as Natalie mentioned you're seeing a problem go to your school counselor to address the teacher or. Find someone to connect you. With what's available in your school. Because they have are trained to help you out. I'm a firm believer in this. Find another adult whom you trust in your community because sometimes teens don't want to talk to us and they don't want to talk to the people at school. But there might be somebody like a soccer coach or a somebody through a later religious group you know. Church group or Sunday guy. Who they can trust and develop a relationship with. Make sure that there is somebody out there that you approve of how they're willing to have a relationship with you or with your kid. I think that's really important. Of modeling is always. Really beneficial and that's making. All the better if it happens to be a young adult. You can. Kind of hang out other resources if your teenager is in crisis. There's something called the Children's Regional Crisis Response Line and that's called C squared or C or 2. And all this information is on the yes website. I highly recommend going there. But you will come into your home if you have something if you have prices going on right then and there you can call. And they will come in here and you can make it. You have to really be going on in your home and you're worry about the safety of your. And your child. If you. Were. Ever. Please please make sure that you call. Somebody who. Is. See I trained. And. Those are trained to work with your kids and a very compassionate. Police officers are trained to work with you. It's a very compassionate way. The rules. For. Her. Kids. Are. The same. Are the best the people say. There's a kind of the two things before you make any kind of decisions. In the meantime there are much smaller things you can do in. The Arlington. Department. Human Services has a lot of services that are offered are offered on a sliding scale. And they will contract. And. You got a lot going on that bring somebody into your home to help you with your student. So I mean there are there are. There are hotlines that you can call. There's just so many. Much of this is actually on the ABS Web site. So I use that as my first resource here and work your way through.

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M2: And for those listeners who want to see that it's if you go on our home page viewed us and scroll down to crisis need help. Now you click on that and all those are all those resources are there. If somebody wants to become part of your group. Come to one of your facilitation groups how can they go about doing that.

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F3: It's a little tricky if you don't have the flyer in front of you. Right. We meet on. The second floor. Sometimes it changes to holidays Sunday evenings. So if you were to go to the.

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F2: Website Nadhmi Northern Virginia Web site and look for their support groups. You would find a listing of support groups and ours is at Arlington and is pacifically. Catered 12 focused.

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M2: At all. All of those in the description. Of the show so people can have those as well.

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F5: You know that there anything that you want to point out those resources for families I think they reach out to they yes say we did a great job listing of what we need in the area. Just like Michelle said counselors and social workers at school know a lot more resources. You know what you need. You feel like you and your family have a specific need to reach out to someone is. Actually. With the best.

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M4: Care. Natalie Schroeder thank you both for taking time out of your busy schedule to come and talk to us about this important issue and again if. Parents have any questions please please contact your school counselor or somebody of the school to talk with your with your child and you can go to our Web site has paid us and click on the crisis detail now for more of those resources. Thanks again for joining us.

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M1: Do you have any other questions on this topic or if you have a topic that you want to to hear as talking about. Give us an e-mail apsnews@apsva.us. Send us a tweet. @APSVirginia. And we'll talk to you next time. Thank you.