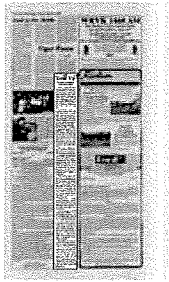




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Gear Up

***Prioritize and balance
to minimize stress***

Stress. It's generally not a welcome element of daily life, but nonetheless, it's often there. For some students, stress is such a large part of life that it can interfere with their well-being as well as their achievement in school. Whether brought on by peer pressure, difficult classes, a busy schedule or family problems, counselors say students can take steps to alleviate some stress.

Eighth-grade students and high school students share some of the same stresses. "Freshmen tend to stress out over social issues--those 'he said, she said' kinds of problems. Also, freshmen are trying to get accustomed to a new school, new teachers, new schedule, and they seem to struggle with those adjustments," says Janice Miller, Guidance Counselor at Rockcastle County High School. "Seniors have so many stressors! They are trying to make decisions about what they are going to do after high school, and they have to fill out applications, write essays, and meet deadlines. Plus, they have to deal with the emotional stress of moving to a new phase in their lives."

All students, Miller says, stress over homework and balancing that work load with extracurricular activities and jobs.

Counselors recommend that when students experience these stresses, they reflect on what is most important to them. Students sometimes must make choices and prioritize their activities. Is it more important to have an after school job or to be on the basketball team? Should those Saturday hours be spent studying for

a difficult class or hanging out with friends?

When students need to talk, Miller says, "Counselors' offices are a good place to start because they give students the opportunity to 'vent'. Students often don't realize that simply talking about what is bothering them does help!" She also sees counselors as helping students work out problems with teachers by acting as a go-between or referring students to other resources that can help them.

"Parents are also a valuable resource," Miller says. "Students sometimes feel 'pushed' by their parents, and communicating with them about what is going on is an excellent way to relieve some of the tension."

Even though they might be facing a busy schedule, Miller says students are expected to be "well rounded" when competing for scholarships and other honors. "I think that students have to choose their extracurricular activities wisely. If they can be involved in a few meaningful activities that they enjoy, they are better off than if they just try to rack up a list of activities just for the effect on applications," Miller says. Sometimes that means taking an honest look at what is most important and letting something go.

Participation in extracurricular activities can also teach students social skills, responsibility, respect for others and teamwork.

So to minimize stress, reflect and prioritize. And, Miller adds, "Don't spread yourself too thin. Make sure that your commitments are worthwhile, meaningful activities. Finally, although after school jobs are good experiences, keep them in perspective. Remember that you have the rest of your life to work, and that right now, school is your most important job."