

## Q & A Mindline



**Dr Roshan Jain**

Senior Consultant Psychiatrist &  
De-addiction Specialist  
Apollo Hospitals, Bangalore

**Q We have a 16-year-old son and we noticed quite a change in his behaviour lately. He is giggly and odd or irritable, argumentative and demanding. He defies family norms and stays away from home for long periods. His grades are not looking good. How do we manage the situation? Please advise.**

The teen years can be turbulent as teenagers try to adjust to the transition to adulthood. It is a time when there is a rise in expectations both internally and externally, besides competition and peer pressure amongst other causes. Depending on the temperament and personality of the teen, adjustment reaction (a temporary self-limiting condition) can be manifested along with a range of behavioural and emotional problems. Anyway, here your description seems more like an adjustment reaction or oppositional behaviour.

Firstly, it is worth exploring possible illicit drugs use like smoking or consumption of cannabis (ganja or weed) or sniffing of solvents (like thinner, adhesive or ink whitener). The

latter's use is more common in younger people, as they have easy access to these household products in their neighbourhood shops.

Abuse and addiction to solvent is no longer restricted to street children on railway stations or pavements. Boys and girls from well-to-do families are fast falling prey to this deadly habit. One reason being, it is cheap and easily available. Solvent abuse can be associated with behavioural changes from mood swings to suicidal tendencies. If your son's stay away from home is coinciding with behavioural changes, then it may be related to drugs misuse or other difficulties.

Additionally, there may be underlying mood disorders like depression or bipolar illness which may explain mood swings. Such illness may be inherited and/or triggered by stressors such as interpersonal problems, abuse, harassment and exploitation. We cannot be careful enough with youngsters in this day and age.

It takes two to tango! Therefore, avoid engaging with him when he is on the verge of picking up a tiff, and de-escalate arguments by responding in a consistently calm voice and manner. Remain supportive while keeping a close eye on his whereabouts and friends. Try talking to him alone and confidentially, and offer unconditional support. If you have a good relationship with your children they are likely to approach you first with their problems.

Many affected children prefer to talk to independent health care professionals especially a psychiatrist, who can conduct health and other issue investigation, and treat as necessary.

**Q I feel it's difficult to escape stress and it's even harder coping with the rising demands. I often feel overwhelmed and this affects everything I do. Please**

**advise me on your top stress-busting tips.**

There is a countless list of advice on busting stress. Amongst them would be things like restore work-life balance, learn to say 'no,' effective time management, prioritize, take regular breaks, slow down, de-clutter, stop and think, practice silence, and so on.

Stress has become an unavoidable part of our lives. Stress to us is what tension is to the stringed musical instrument like violin or guitar; too little and the music is dull and raspy; too much and the music is shrill or the string snaps. Stress is within us and not outside. It is dynamic and varies with the way we relate to external situations and circumstances. It can vary between individuals but also within an individual.

What was stressful earlier may not be later; as this can depend on the way we change relational aspect and perception. Therefore as we tune ourselves to perceived stress at the right tension, the musical notes of life manifest in totality. In other words, as we harmonize we better enjoy the music of life, or it becomes disturbing noise. A noisy life is injurious to the mind, body and soul. I suggest we 'harmonize' with the world around us, thereby harmonizing with the relentless demands.

While you can't always alter or avoid the stressor therefore one needs to 'raise the bar.' The means, we raise our threshold for burnout and stress by becoming physically and mentally more agile and astute. Research suggests that regular exercise for 30-45 minutes for 4-5 days per week improves concentration, focus, sense of wellbeing, energy levels and enthusiasm besides reducing stress and depression. Overall, it will improve resilience and threshold of being affected by unwavering demands of life that slowly drains the energy out of us all.

Ask your queries at [bpositiveQA@apollolife.com](mailto:bpositiveQA@apollolife.com)