

Resiliency training program helps teens deal with today's stresses

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Amid reports that rank today's teens as the most stressed generation in the country, a new study offers hope for helping them effectively manage stress and build long-term resiliency. A pilot study, published in the spring issue of the journal *Advances in Mind-Body Medicine*, describes how a stress-reduction/resiliency-building curriculum developed by the Benson-Henry Institute (BHI) at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) helped a group of Boston-area high school students significantly reduce their anxiety levels, increase productivity and effectively manage stress over time.

The authors note that this approach may be just the right treatment for youths who report feeling more stress than all other age groups. The 2014 annual survey of the American Psychological Association found that teens reported experiencing a greater amount of stress than did any other age group and that their most significant sources of stress included financial insecurity and conflict at home and with peers.

Experiencing high levels of stress has surprisingly significant long-term implications, including everything from physical and psychological health problems, to [poor academic performance](#) and an inclination toward harmful lifestyle choices.

For over 30 years, the BHI has been working to prevent these short- and long-term consequences through its Resilient Youth (formerly known as the Education Initiative) program (<http://www.bensonhenryinstitute.org/resilient-kids-program-starts->

[may-27](#)). Program directors Rana Chudnofsky, MEd, and Laura Malloy, LICSW, train educators in a curriculum that teaches the science of stress and relaxation, as well as how to help students use relaxation strategies such as breathing and imagery along with positive psychology techniques such as reframing one's thoughts.

In this latest study, 12 teachers at a Boston public charter school received six hours of training in the [resiliency](#) curriculum, which they then implemented with students over the course of six to eight weeks, depending on class schedules. Students who received the curriculum, ranging in age from 13 to 19, reported significant reductions in perceived stress and anxiety and a greater ability to manage [stress](#) and practice healthy lifestyle behaviors after participating in the program. This was true immediately after they had completed the program as well as a year later, indicating that the program is effective in both the short and long term.

Researchers hope to build on this evidence with future larger studies. The Resilient Youth directors are particularly interested in understanding which aspects of the resiliency [curriculum](#) are most effective, for what stressors it is most helpful and how long students will continue to use the skills they learn. 'It's important for us to continue to expand our research not only to help us continually refine and improve the program but also to demonstrate to educational and political leadership that this work is worth investing in on a broad scale for the benefit of our children,' says Marilyn Wilcher, a co-author of the Advances paper and BHI senior program director.

Provided by Massachusetts General Hospital

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