



Stress much?

Imagine not feeling totally rushed, tired, cranky and overwhelmed this year. It's possible! Really.

If you dread the stress of school pressures, we've got some good news. No matter what grade you're going into this fall, it *can* be your best year ever. The key? Here are five proven stress-busters:

1. Be reasonable

Fab plans are great, but are your goals realistic? You don't have to be extraordinary to be successful. No one is a perfect student, musician, friend, artist, dancer *and* athlete. Limit after-school stuff to a few activities, and commit to only one sport each season. Otherwise, you'll be scurrying from lacrosse practice to dance class to youth group and getting home at 9:30 p.m.—to, oh, about three full hours of homework.

2. Stay balanced

Girls who feel content usually have mastered a balance of work, play and rest. Sure, there are lots of things you'd rather be doing, but getting your assignments out of the way first is smart. Get behind and you have to play catch-up. Sleep is another priority. Go to bed at the same time every night, and don't cheat yourself of a good night's snooze.

It's way OK to take breaks, too. Doodle, write poems, play flute (just for fun), listen to CDs, or daydream about your crush. And don't diss the social scene. Hang with friends, gab on the phone, and surf online. Just don't overdo it. Um, balance, remember?

3. Think positively

Self-confidence goes the distance. *Think* of yourself as a girl who can handle stress well, and it's likely you *will* handle stress well. Put the kabosh on pointless comparisons to superstar sibs and buds,

and just do your own thing. As for slip-ups? Hey, they happen to *everyone*. Overreacting will just worsen the stress. When you drop your lunch tray, your BFF makes a rude comment or you're spawning a giant zit, deal with it. Pick yourself up, and move on. It's just one awful day. Tomorrow, you can start fresh.

4. Gauge stress

Stress can sneak up on you, so try to notice the signs before it spirals out of control. Nodding off in Spanish? Snapping at your sib? Having another headache? Maybe your teachers are really piling it on, or you've had a cold, a breakup or more chores to deal with. Cut back where you can. Consider turning down the next couple of babysitting gigs or dropping French club for now.

5. Get help

Many girls hide their anxiety for fear of seeming lame or ticking off the 'rents. But there's no shame in being stressed out. A truly together girl knows when to ask for help. Talk to your parents if you're feeling overworked. Sure, they want you to do well—but they also want you to be healthy and happy, right? Teachers, too, are usually happy to assist. Get feedback about not only what you are doing wrong, but also about what you are doing right.

If you need help more regularly, consider getting a tutor. Wouldn't it be great if French conjugations or geometry theorems didn't make you hyperventilate? If you're still feeling overwhelmed, see your guidance counselor to figure out ways to lighten the load. Maybe you can switch to less strenuous classes or put off a requirement until you're ready.

There will always be stuff in life that's challenging or disappointing. But when you make good choices and keep a cool head, you'll be able to manage things like a pro. Trust us, you'll be more energetic and feel awesome about what you do accomplish. So hold your head high and kick stress in the butt!

Roni Cohen-Sandler is the author of Stressed-out Girls: Helping Them Thrive in the Age of Pressure. ✿