



# better you

IMAGINE THAT.

5 words kids crave  
"I have time for you"

More than nerves  
Talk back to anxiety

Weight of the world  
Helping teens cope

Mean screens  
Apps embolden cyberbullies



# Online overload

## Kids consuming electronics or electronics consuming kids?



Unlimited screen time earned a collective parental shrug when the pandemic pushed school, work and social activities online.

“We became much more reliant. Screens helped us stay busy, stay distracted and entertained,” said Jamie Ryder, PhD, CHI Health Licensed Clinical Psychologist. Excessive screen time can lead to behavior problems, less attention on school work and even turn into a dependency that harms developing brains.

With more happening “in real life,” parents are wondering how to set healthy limits.

Dr. Ryder emphasized being a good example. “If you have your face buried in a screen, that’s the behavior you are modeling for your kids.”

Setting new limits starts with a conversation. “You can say: We’re going to reset. It’s not a punishment. We’re doing this for everyone in the family,” Dr. Ryder said.

Decide on the number of minutes and limits – such as no screens in

bedrooms – and stick with them.

As a family, brainstorm alternatives to online time, such as reading books, new hobbies, musical instruments, crafting, board games, sports and more.

“Keep in mind screen time can be very rewarding,” Dr. Ryder said. Getting social media “likes” and leveling up in games has a physiological impact. “You are releasing dopamine into your prefrontal cortex. The screen is all about instant gratification.”

Physical activity is one antidote. “Exercise is a great way of releasing dopamine and reinforcing healthy brain connections,” she said.

Dr. Ryder also recommends taking a technology-free day as a family. “In 18 months we’ve become heavily reliant on screens, so this is a chance to reemerge and get back into nature,” she said.

## Strength for your struggle

Tough doesn’t cover it. The pandemic continues to take a toll on us all. And when kids hurt, families hurt.

CHI Health is here for you. We are the largest provider of Behavioral Services in Nebraska and southwest Iowa with care options that work for families.

With our Virtual Care, you can talk to a mental health provider from the comfort of home. As many as one in two behavioral visits are conducted virtually.

No matter where you live, CHI Health can connect you to a care provider – so no one has to struggle alone.

### Connect to Care Today!

If you have a mental health concern, and it’s not an emergency, you can call 24/7 for help and/or referral:

**402-717-HOPE**

(Omaha/Lincoln/Council Bluffs)

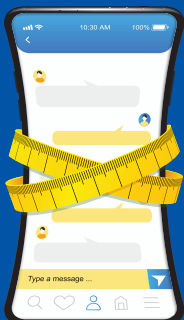
**308-865-2000**

(Kearney/Grand Island)

[CHIhealth.com/Behavioral](https://CHIhealth.com/Behavioral)

**Help is closer than you think.**

## Go on a digital diet



- Be in charge. “Kids need to know that the phone is a privilege, not a right.”
- Set limits early. “It makes it much easier to transition into teen years.”
- Talk about it. “Teach kids about making good choices about inappropriate content and bullying.”
- Keep screens out of bedrooms. “It doesn’t allow their brain to wind down and delays bedtime.”
- Recharge phones overnight in a central location. “So teens aren’t texting at 2 am.”

### Screen limit benefits

- More sleep
- Better grades
- Lower risk of obesity
- Less aggression
- More positive/pro-social behavior

# More than nerves?

## Anxiety doesn't have to be overwhelming



Why will teens go to incredible lengths to dress, talk and act exactly alike?

One word — anxiety. The overwhelming fear of standing out is a leading trigger for today's teens according to Joe Nelson, LIMHP, PLADC, CHI Health Mental Health Therapist. "The teen brain, more specifically the medial prefrontal cortex, is obsessed with what others are thinking."

High parental expectations and the ongoing quest to fit in can be overwhelming for some — one in three adolescents ages 13 to 18 will experience an anxiety disorder.\*

"Even what we consider small stuff, like stress over fashion brands, is big stuff for those with an anxiety disorder. Worry and dread become

too constant and too intense, affecting daily life," Nelson said. "It's a continual cycle of 'what ifs' and 'I can't's' with concentration, confidence, sleep and appetite suffering. In severe cases, physical symptoms can be crippling."

Addressing anxiety before it leads to other mental health problems — depression, substance use, even suicide — is essential.

"Unfortunately, anxiety disorders don't just go away on their own. It's important to tell someone who can help," said Nelson. "Your doctor can rule out any physical conditions and recommend a mental health professional for proper diagnosis. Finding out what's causing the symptoms can be a great relief."

### Talk back to anxiety

Teens tend to overgeneralize, getting caught up in black and white thinking. Exploring a few questions can help them take back control.

#### 1. What are you worried about?

Everyone at school thinks I'm a loser.

#### 2. Why do you think that?

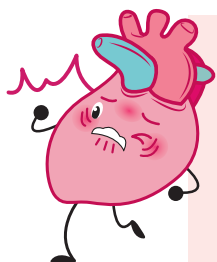
John laughed while I was practicing my jumpshot.

#### 3. What do we know to be true?

Only John laughed. My friends from the team hung out with me after practice. Coach is starting me on Saturday.

#### 4. How can you change this worry to positive thought?

The people who matter most support me. If I keep working hard in practice, it's likely I'll be the team's high scorer.



### Physical symptoms of a panic attack\*

- Pounding or racing heart
- Tingly or numb hands
- Sweating, chills, trembling
- Chest pain
- Breathing problems
- Stomach pain, nausea
- Weakness or dizziness

\*National Institutes of Mental Health

# Weight of our world

Today's teens have more to process



In a typical year, teens have a lot on their minds — fitting in at school, being part of social crowds and excelling in extracurriculars. But, this last year was no typical year. It was perplexing for all of us. Perhaps the most challenging part? There's no date on the calendar when “normal” life will resume.

“Nobody can provide reassurance that things are going to get better on any kind of timetable and the uncertainty of not knowing when things will be okay again is very challenging,” said Michelle Roley-Roberts, PhD, CHI Health Licensed Clinical Psychologist.

Take the stresses of the pandemic and pile those on top of typical teen worries and the political and social divide our country experienced. It can be a lot for our kids to cope with — sometimes too much.

“Kids feel like they need to take a stance on certain issues,” said Dr. Roley-Roberts. “Adolescence is about testing the waters and figuring out who you are, wearing many hats.

Now, it seems if you try on one hat, you'll always have to wear that hat — no matter if it doesn't fit you.”

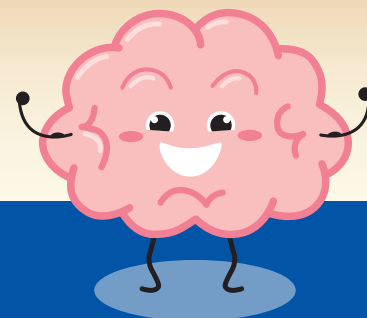
The consequence of all these thoughts and pressures is increased feelings of anxiety and depression.

“If you think about a boiling pot and we had it on medium before — it's now on high and feelings are starting to bubble over and over,” Dr. Roley-Roberts said.

So what can we do for our kids?

Let them know it's okay to feel sad and uncomfortable sometimes. If “sometimes” becomes more like “all the time,” reach out for help. Despite the challenges we've had and continue to face, the good news is our kids are often better at adjusting to all the changes.

“It's harder as an adult to go through something like a pandemic,” Dr. Roley-Roberts said. “I hope our kids look back in five or 10 years from now and find that they're more resilient than they ever thought they could be. I hope they're stronger because of it.”



## Set your brain up for success

You can positively impact your brain health.

- Don't skimp on the ZZZs. Get 8-10 hours of quality sleep each night.
- Food = brain fuel. Scrap the sugar and processed foods (i.e. breakfast cereals, soda, packaged pastries) and reach for wholesome, nutritious options (i.e. almonds, yogurt, low-sugar oatmeal).
- Sweat out the stress. At least 60 minutes of daily exercise can help teens reset and refresh.
- Make sure your glass is always half full. Drink plenty of H2O to keep your brain hydrated.

# Outsmart stress

## Teach teens how to manage



How do carefree kids turn into stressed-out teens? Easy, says Bridget Mostek, LIMHP, Mental Health Therapist at CHI Health. School pressure, college or career decisions and family financial concerns top the worry list.

“It’s not that kids have less stress than adults. They just have limited experience recognizing and verbalizing stressors in their life. Also, they are amazingly adaptable, allowing more and more stress to build — it sneaks up on them. Teens don’t realize the toll continually activating the body’s ‘fight-or-flight’ response is taking on their health and wellbeing.”

While not always obvious, there are subtle clues to watch for.

“Any change in eating or sleeping habits, frequent aches and pains, or avoidance of normal daily activities. Kids may be frustrated and angry — lashing out, or have no energy seeming overwhelmed,” said Mostek. “You might notice problems concentrating, forgetfulness, or a greater sense of time pressure.”

### Preventing prolonged or “chronic” stress is key to keeping depression and anxiety at bay.

“You aren’t actually going to perish if forced to speak in public. It’s a perceived threat triggering stress, not an actual physical one. Recognizing most threats aren’t as immediate as

they may feel can help to change our mindset, lessening or eventually eliminating the body’s stress response.”

Recognizing triggers and having a strategy to quickly calm the body and mind is a first step.

“Breathing, taking a walk, talking to a friend, whatever works to help reverse the body’s stress response and work to minimize the number of times it’s triggered unnecessarily throughout the day,” said Mostek.

If you think someone you care about may be suffering from high stress, depression, anxiety, or any other mental health condition, contact a mental health professional in order to receive a proper diagnosis and support.

## Chillax?

Make time for it.



We schedule everything...why not relaxation? Releasing tension and regaining equilibrium is crucial for our health and wellbeing. Build relaxation into your life. Pencil in a daily dose of family downtime — start with 60 minutes every day.

### Set the mood to destress

- Turn off all screens—especially phones
- Dim the lights—try green light to promote sleep
- Introduce scents—lavender has calming properties
- Play calming music—make a family playlist
- Ditch the to-dos—focus on the present

### Reconnect as a family

- Take a walk
- Play a board game
- Cook together
- Visit a new place
- Connect through questions
- Watch the sunset/look at the stars
- Family meditation/yoga

# Mean screens

## Anonymous apps embolden bullies



A recent survey of Nebraska high school students showed 15.7 percent of teens reported being cyberbullied.

“It’s a bigger issue today than it ever has been,” said Jessica Jackson, LIMHP, CHI Health Mental Health Therapist. “Because it’s not just at school, it’s 24/7.”

The anonymous nature of some apps and social media platforms lends itself to a culture of kids being mean without fear of retaliation.

“It’s easier for kids to bully because it’s harder for others to identify them,” she said. “There are fewer consequences and it’s easier to deceive ourselves into

thinking we’re not doing something wrong.”

Beyond the anonymity, some apps make messages temporary, and conversations can disappear within seconds.

“Kids think they can say things because their words will just ‘go away.’” Jackson said. “They lack empathy to understand how that really affects another person.”

There are many reasons why someone becomes a bully.

“They could be bored, jealous, or they may feel a sense of vindication when targeting others because they have been in that position and want to take

the power back.” Jackson said.

In a majority of cases she sees, Jackson says teens are the cruelest about others’ appearances. “They tend to attack others for the way they look, their weight, their clothing, things like that.”

Parents are encouraged to monitor and limit social media use, and enforce consequences for bad behavior.

“There are a lot of bad examples of bullying in our world from adults, and if kids see that, they think it’s okay,” Jackson said. “Help them recognize the words they are saying are hurtful to people, and it can last like any physical scar.”

### Confront cyberbullying

Suspect someone is being cyberbullied? Think they may be the antagonist?

#### What to say:

- “Not everyone looks, feels or acts the same, it’s important to be kind.”
- “If you wouldn’t say it to their face don’t say it online, in a text, or a post.”
- “Picture the situation in reverse and think about how you would feel if the shoe was on the other foot.”
- “Never put anything online that you wouldn’t want classmates to see.”
- “Keep passwords and personal information private.”
- “Don’t send messages when you’re angry or upset.”

#### What to do:

- Respect kids’ privacy while remembering that safety overrides privacy concerns.
- Encourage open communication about feelings and emotions.
- Urge face-to-face connections and hobbies offline.
- Be aware of changes in mood, stress, anxiety.
- Look for sadness, isolation, anger, or secretive behaviors, especially around their phones.
- Take note of new friends and social circles.
- Block bullies and consider consulting a school counselor.



### Help is closer than you think.

Need help, but it’s not an emergency? CHI Health is the largest mental health provider in Nebraska and southwest Iowa. With more than 60 psychiatry providers and more than 70 therapists, there’s a provider near you. To get started, go to [CHIhealth.com/findaprovider](https://CHIhealth.com/findaprovider).

# 5 words kids crave? “I have time for you”



**Call it emotional tug of war. As children get older, they start becoming more independent, but they still want your attention.**

“In their peer culture, they sometimes don’t want to be seen being dropped off by mom or dad,” said Michael Pella, LIMHP, CHI Health Mental Health Therapist. “But they still want to know they are loved and their parents are there for them.”

When kids want to talk, it’s important to make time. If interactions are positive, they’ll be more likely to reach out for reassurance and perspective. “If they don’t feel like they will be judged or dismissed, the probability of them going to mom and dad is much higher,” Pella said. His advice:

**Listen** – “It’s extremely important. Just listening and not judging. Be in the moment and set your phone aside.”

**Repeat** – “Paraphrase a little bit what they’re saying so they know they’ve got your full attention.”

**Validate** – “They want to know what they’re experiencing is normal and real for them. Maybe relate to something that happened to you as a kid.”

**Ask** – “Use open-ended questions, like: ‘What do you think?’”

**Empathize** – “Be on their level. It’s about walking hand-in-hand through the most difficult parts of being a kid, because it isn’t always easy being a kid.”

**Suggest** – “Give them information in a nonjudgmental, non-authoritarian way. It’s about empowerment. If you start to make choices for them and/or tell them what to do, they will pull away.”

**Stay calm** – “Keep emotions level and keep your voice tone level. If there’s any anger, they will tune you out and/or match this intensity. Be honest, open, with love.”

**Persist** – “Have little check-ins sporadically. Your child might not want to talk the first, second or third time. The fourth time they might have so much to say, you’ll think, oh my gosh!”

## More Ways to “Show Up”

Go to their activities

Leave them little notes of encouragement

Make a favorite meal

Watch a movie/go on a walk

Use humor as a relationship builder/laugh at yourself

Do an activity that kids want to do



## Youth suicide: Sounding the alarm

It’s a frightening statistic. For girls age 12-17, emergency department visits for suspected suicide attempts were 51% higher in early 2020 compared to the same timeframe in 2019, according to the CDC. Among boys, the increase was 3.7%.

Suicide has been on the rise for over a decade and remains the second leading cause of death for boys and girls age 10-24. It’s a topic that makes most people uncomfortable, yet ignoring this issue can be life-altering for all.

Now more than ever, parents need to watch for feelings of hopelessness or any sign of self-harm. Help is available 24/7.

### Call 911:

If you are a danger to yourself or others, or know someone who is.

Call 24/7 for help and/or referral:

**402-717-HOPE**

(Omaha/Lincoln/Council Bluffs)

**308-865-2000**

(Kearney/Grand Island)

[CHIhealth.com/Behavioral](http://CHIhealth.com/Behavioral)

**Help is closer  
than you think.**



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#### Lincoln

CHI Health St. Elizabeth

CHI Health Nebraska Heart

#### Nebraska City

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#### Omaha

CHI Health Creighton  
University Medical Center  
- Bergan Mercy

CHI Health Immanuel

CHI Health Lakeside

CHI Health Midlands

#### Plainview

CHI Health Plainview

#### Schuyler

CHI Health Schuyler

### IOWA

#### Corning

CHI Health Mercy Corning

#### Council Bluffs

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#### Missouri Valley

CHI Health Missouri Valley

Outpatient and virtual mental wellness services  
available at 23 CHI Health Clinics located in  
Nebraska and southwest Iowa.

For more information:

**CHIhealth.com**

**402-717-HOPE** (Omaha/Lincoln/Council Bluffs)

**308-865-2000** (Kearney/Grand Island)

**Mental health services aren't just for those in crisis.  
We are here to serve you and your family whenever  
you need help.**

## In a crisis, call:

CHI Health Behavioral Services  
(Omaha/Lincoln/Council Bluffs)  
**402-717-HOPE**

CHI Health Richard Young  
Behavioral Services  
(Kearney/Grand Island)  
**308-865-2000**

Nebraska Family Helpline  
**1-888-866-8660**

Boys Town National Hotline  
**1-800-448-3000**

National Suicide  
Prevention Lifeline  
**1-800-273-8255**

Red Nacional de  
Prevención del Suicidio  
**1-888-628-9454**

*If you are a danger to yourself  
or others, or know someone  
who is, call 911.*

[CHIhealth.com/Behavioral](https://CHIhealth.com/Behavioral)