Teenage Self-Care: Making It Through the Adolescent Years

[Neil McNerney](http://reducehomeworkstress.com/author/pwpadmin/) August 1, 2012 [Virginia Tech](http://reducehomeworkstress.com/category/virginia-tech/)

(this blog post is one in a series of posts contributed by students in my graduate family therapy course at Virginia Tech. Please take a moment to comment)

“I hate my life.”

These are the words of countless teenagers as they wake up early to go to school, stay late after school for extracurricular activities, do homework, and are left with little time to engage in one activity that isn’t noted on the agenda.

Enjoy life

In the busy mornings, afternoons, and evenings of the American teenager, finding time to recharge your batteries can be challenging, here are some quick tips for taking care of yourself during your teen years.

* Eat Healthy

I know, I know. What am I, your mother? Well, while you can’t see my face, I do have a slight beard growing, so I certainly hope not… There’s nothing wrong with having your favorite sweet now and again. Unfortunately, these high calorie snacks often provide a quick burst of energy, followed by a crash. Grabbing your favorite fruit, veggie, or whole grain cereal or bread can provide energy for a longer duration, making your day that much easier.

* Be Inspired

There is a quote I like to live by, “He who has a why, can bear most any how.” It helps me in the midst of stress, as it reminds me of the strength I have within. Many already have sayings, poems, speeches, or quotations you live by. Use them! If you have not yet come across something that so speaks to you, go online and search through quotes of historical figures or literary characters you admire. It may provide just the boost you need persevere through tough times.

* Physical Activity

And now I sound like your gym teacher… Many teens are members of school athletic teams, which serve as great sources of exercise, social involvement, and fun. For those of use who are not so athletically inclined, making an effort to engage in some small form of exercise each day can help to elevate mood, increase energy, and build self-esteem. Besides, whatever guy or gal is currently running through your mind will probably dig your healthy lifestyle.

* Do a Good Deed

It can brighten up a person’s day when someone spontaneously does something nice for them. The funny thing is, in doing that good deed you can make your own day as well. Acts of altruism can help to lift your mood, as well as providing you with yet another reason to love the person you are!

* Plan Your Free Time

WAIT, WAIT!!! Don’t leave the page just yet. I promise, this is going to make sense. If you’re anything like I was as a teenager (and as a college student, and as I was earlier today), you may find yourself spending your free time away without feeling very relaxed. To cite an example from my own life, in the past I have spent hours on facebook or youtube, surfing away. In the end, I feel no more relaxed than when I began. If you’re talking to friends on facebook, that’s great! Or if you’re watching a youtube video you’re interested in, that’s fine too! But when you’re investing all of your free time in these sites and are not finding the experience relaxing, then something needs to change. Plan out activities you perhaps used to enjoy, but no longer engage in, or commit to trying something new that you haven’t done before.

* Find Your Spiritual Life

Many go to organized religious services, and if you find these fulfilling, by all means go and fulfill away! If not, spend some time immersing yourself in whatever it is you deem most important in your personal world.

* Nighty Night!

Alright, I was such an offender on this one. Growing up, I would stay up to watch Late Night with Conan O’Brien a few nights a week. That meant staying up until 1 AM, only to wake up at 6 AM! The following days were often pretty terrible. I would be exhausted and depressed most of the day, and my attention span deteriorated to that of a 10-year-old girl with Bieber on the mind. Sleep schedules can be tricky, and in our teen years, our bodies go through physical changes encouraging us to stay up later (if you’re interested in this phenomenon, google “delayed phase preference”). A good night’s sleep really can do wonders, so if you find yourself dealing with stress, anxiety, or depression, try adjusting your sleep schedule

* Don’t Let Life Pass you by

While some may see you as a lazy teenager, spending hours upon hours doing absolutely nothing and then complaining when something is asked of you, I think we both know that this is an inaccurate portrayal. You have a lot on your plate with school, homework, extracurricular activities, and maybe even a job. Sometimes, you just need to give yourself permission to be yourself, momentarily letting some of your responsibilities fall by the wayside. If you have what it takes to get a project done early, that’s awesome! But if you cannot remember the last time you did something just for you, well, now might be a great time to start…

Andrew Harar is a counselor-in-training pursuing his master’s degree at Virginia Tech. He is enrolled in Neil McNerney’s Psychotherapy with Children and Adolescents in a Systems Context course. Andrew has worked with adolescents in the past and is pursuing further work with them in the future.