

School stress taking a toll on kids

By Patti Neighmond, NPR

When high school junior Nora Huynh got her report card, she was devastated to see that she didn't get a perfect 4.0.

Nora "had a total meltdown, cried for hours," her mother, Jennie Huynh of Alameda says. "I couldn't believe her reaction."

Nora is doing college-level work, her mother says, but many of her friends are taking enough advanced classes to boost their grade-point averages above 4.0. "It breaks my heart to see her upset when she's doing so awesome and going above and beyond."

And the pressure is taking a physical toll, too. At age 16, Nora is tired, is increasingly irritated with her siblings and often suffers headaches, her mother says.

Teens Talk Stress

When NPR asked on Facebook if stress is an issue for teenagers, they spoke loud and clear:

"Academic stress has been a part of my life ever since I can remember," wrote Bretta McCall, 16, of Seattle. "This year I spend about 12 hours a day on schoolwork. I'm home right now because I was feeling so sick from stress I couldn't be at school. So as you can tell, it's a big part of my life!"

"At the time of writing this, my weekend assignments include two papers, a PowerPoint to go with a 10-minute presentation, studying for a test and two quizzes, and an entire chapter (approximately 40 pages) of notes in a college textbook," wrote Connor West of New Jersey.

“It’s a problem that’s basically brushed off by most people,” wrote Kelly Farrell in Delaware. “There’s this mentality of, ‘You’re doing well, so why are you complaining?’ ” She says she started experiencing symptoms of stress in middle school, and was diagnosed with panic disorder and generalized anxiety disorder in high school.

“Parents are the worst about all of this,” writes Colin Hughes of Illinois. “All I hear is, ‘Work harder, you’re a smart kid, I know you have it in you, and if you want to go to college you need to work harder.’ It’s a pain.”

Parents are right to be worried about stress and their children’s health, says Mary Alvord, a clinical psychologist in Maryland and public education coordinator for the American Psychological Association.

“A little stress is a good thing,” Alvord says. “It can motivate students to be organized. But too much stress can backfire.”

Read the whole story