

YOUTH FARM STRESS

Farmers can become stressed by a range of challenges – low commodity prices, debt, weather events, animal and crop issues, illness, injuries and other problems. This stress can carry over into farmers' personal lives and families. As a result, youth may experience stress from their family's farm conditions.



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WARNING SIGNS OF STRESS

Farm stress can affect youth emotionally, physically and socially. Signs of stress in youth in those categories follow:

EMOTIONAL:

- Acting Out (physically or verbally out of character)
- Mood swings
- Depression
- Excessive sleeping
- Lack of motivation
- Anxiety
- Isolation

PHYSICAL:

- Excessive tiredness
- Trouble sleeping
- Headaches

- Tension (muscles in back or neck)
- Excessive sickness and absenteeism
- Butterflies in stomach
- Experimentation and use of drugs and alcohol

SOCIAL:

- Change in normal routines, temperament and behavior
- Change in friends who influence in negative ways
- Loss of interest in extracurricular activities
- Dropping out of social engagements



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WAYS TO HELP

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

If you notice the warning signs of stress in youth and have a trusting relationship, reach out to them or their parents to talk. In this conversation, you can identify the behaviors you noticed and provide the following resources and suggestions for assistance or treatment.

- Community Mental Health
- Private and or school counseling
- Support groups (Farm Bureau)
- Positive youth development (4-H or mentoring programs)
- Extracurricular activities (after-school programs or sports)
- Spiritual practices of faith-based support

WAYS ADULTS CAN SUPPORT YOUTH IN STRESSFUL CIRCUMSTANCES

Sometimes youth are hesitant to verbalize the need for assistance when dealing with the effects of farm stress. In that case, adults can step in as advocates.

WAYS TO HELP, CONTINUED

Adults can:

- Create opportunities for conversation.
- Use open-ended questions.
- Listen without solving problems.
- Listen without judgement.
- Encourage physical activity.
- Encourage positive talk.
- Create space for “kids to be kids.”
- Provide healthy meals and snacks.

STRESS REDUCERS

In addition, there are several things that youth and families experiencing farm stress can do at home together to reduce stressful feelings. These techniques are beneficial for all families and can increase their bond while reducing stress.

- Mindfulness and breathing techniques
- Laughter and fun
- Talking without electronics
- Healthy eating
- Exercise
- Community service
- Appropriate amounts of sleep
- Caffeine avoidance

- Positive talk
- Family time and family activities
- Community events such as fairs and festivals
- Sports and outdoor activities including biking and hiking
- Cooking together
- Cultural arts and the theater

WAYS YOUTH CAN SUPPORT PARENTS IN STRESSFUL CIRCUMSTANCES

Most youth are resilient. They may experience stressful feelings due to their family’s farm circumstances but are more likely than adults to regain normalcy fairly quickly with short-term support or treatment. If youth are well balanced and supported, then they may turn into a resource for their parents who are experiencing stress.

Youth can:

- Assist with chores.
- Help out with siblings.
- Become more self-sufficient regarding meals, homework and other areas.
- Remind parents to have fun.
- Organize clothes and lunches the night before for school or other events.
- Be flexible.

RESOURCES

MSU EXTENSION EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Michigan State University Extension offers educational programs for those who are dealing with the effects of farm stress. Please visit https://www.canr.msu.edu/managing_farm_stress/index to learn more about managing farm stress.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

American Psychological Association. *Talking to teens about stress*. <https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/stress-talk.aspx>

Mohr, P. (2017, Sept. 21). Farm stress challenges mental health. *The Farmer*. <http://www.the-farmer.com/farm-life/farm-stress-challenges-mental-health>

Morin, A. (2018, Oct. 12). 10 signs your teen is stressed out. *Verywellmind*. <https://www.verywellmind.com/signs-your-teen-is-stressed-out-2611336>

University of Maine Cooperative Extension Publications. *Youth and stress*. <https://extension.umaine.edu/publications/4429e/>

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To learn more, visit msue.msu.edu/managingfarmstress.

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