

WELLBEING

No worries?

An increasing number of young people are suffering from anxiety in what should be the happiest time of their lives. Here's what parents can do to help

Your younger years are often thought of as the most carefree time of your life. However, as actresses Lena Dunham, Jennifer Lawrence and Emma Stone and singers Adele and Frankie Sandford have shown, this is not always the case. They are just some of the young stars to have spoken out about their past struggles to overcome anxiety and in doing so, they've started a conversation between parents and their children about the pressures on young people and the unhappiness those pressures can cause.

In your teens and twenties, you are likely to have no dependents and fewer financial responsibilities than at any other time in your adult life. But according to several British charities, the concept of a "no worries generation" is becoming increasingly out of step with reality.

According to young people's organisation YouthNet, a third of young women and ten per cent of young men suffer with panic attacks triggered by stress and anxiety. The Prince's Trust, meanwhile, interviewed 2,265 16- to 25-year-olds for its Macquarie Youth Index 2015 and found that 13 per cent of them often feel too anxious to leave the house and more than half become anxious or worried about everyday situations.

Anxiety is defined as a feeling of unease, such as worry or fear, usually associated with a perceived threat of something going wrong now or in the future. While feeling nervous about things such as exams or job interviews is normal, it is when the anxiety is ongoing and has no specific that it becomes problematic.

The most common diagnosis for sufferers is general anxiety disorder, where they experience low-level anxiety most of the time, leading to symptoms such as trouble sleeping, lack of concentration, feeling irritable, angry

or depressed, a loss of self-confidence and panic attacks.

In adults, the biggest causes of stress and anxiety are money worries, ageing, ill health and work problems. While young people may not worry about, say, ageing, they may well be concerned about their finances and employment status and have additional pressures. Plus the rise of the internet and the growing impact of social media means that as well as traditional pressures

such as schoolwork, exams, and arguments with parents and siblings, there are now a host of new ones affecting young people, including being teased or bullied online and feeling in competition on social media, with all the feelings of inadequacy that this can engender.

The key to successfully tackling your child's anxiety is in recognising symptoms and knowing when to seek help. This is very important as mental anxiety can cause young people to lose their appetite, start skipping school, run away, self-harm and even attempt suicide. They may also turn to drugs or alcohol to try and ease their symptoms.

Fortunately, there are steps parents can take if they are concerned that their children may be suffering. According to the Royal College of Psychiatrists, if you teach them the following, it should help them to cope:

- Don't suffer in silence. Talking to somebody you trust can help you deal with stress and work out how to tackle the problems causing it.
- Write down what is causing you stress then take each one in turn and list all the things you can do to tackle them. This will help you sort things out in your head. Problems are always easier to deal with one at a time than when in a big jumble.
- Take a break and do something you enjoy or something relaxing, such as having a hot bath or watching a film.
- Exercise. This produces endorphins which make you feel good.

• If you suspect that a young person you know is struggling, contact any of the following organisations for advice: Childline (0800 1111); Young Minds (080-8802 5544 or visit youngminds.org.uk); Youthnet (youthnet.org).



(Clockwise from top left) Lena Dunham, Adele, Jennifer Lawrence and Emma Stone have all talked about their battles with anxiety

HEALTH NOTES

Green party

Mental health charity Mind is encouraging all of us to tackle anxiety and stress by getting outside. Ecotherapy is the use of green space, gardening and outdoor exercise to improve mental wellbeing. So turn off your computer, grab your family and head for the great outdoors.



• **Appy talk** Stressheads is a clever mobile game and information app created by YouthNet to help young people identify and cope with stress. It's free to download from iTunes and Google Play.



Gut feelings

Researchers at Oxford University have found that the prebiotic Bimuno, which increases good bacteria in the gut, can also have an impact on emotional processing and stress hormone levels, leading to suggestions that it could play a role in the treatment of anxiety. Bimuno Prebiotic Powder, £9.99, from Boots, health shops and bimuno.com.