

# Stress

How much is  
**TOO MUCH  
STRESS?**

Signs of stress  
**IN CHILDREN  
& TEENS**

*Self Quiz:*  
**MEASURE YOUR  
STRESS LEVEL**

**10 tips**  
for better stress  
management

**Is stress affecting your health?**

INSIGHTS magazine is a publication of Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services and is reviewed by Pine Rest clinical and medical staff. INSIGHTS is produced by the Pine Rest Marketing and Communications Department.

To learn more about stress, visit [pinerest.org/stress](http://pinerest.org/stress).

#### About Pine Rest

The fourth largest behavioral health provider in the U.S., Pine Rest is a comprehensive mental health center for treatment, higher education and research.

#### Services for Stress

Pine Rest provides treatment for stress to people of all ages from young children to older adults and at all levels of care.

#### Outpatient

Counseling, therapy, psychiatry, neuromodulation, psychological assessment & testing, classes and support groups.

866.852.4001

#### Teletherapy

866.852.4001

[pinerest.org/teletherapy](http://pinerest.org/teletherapy)

#### Inpatient & Partial Hospitalization

616.455.9200

800.678.5500

TTY 616.281.6446

#### Psychiatric Urgent Care Center

Same-day psychiatric evaluation and treatment for adults (18+). Walk-ins welcome and virtual appointments available.

616.455.9200

800.678.5500

TTY 616.281.6446

#### Stress Information and Treatment

[pinerest.org/stress](http://pinerest.org/stress)

## CONTENTS

<b>What is Stress .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Who Gets Stress .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>How Stress Affects Health.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>What's Stressing Us Out.....</b>	<b>5</b>
Social Media Worries.....	5
<b>Stress in Children and Teens .....</b>	<b>6-7</b>
Signs of Stress in Children .....	7
<b>Post Traumatic Stress Disorder .....</b>	<b>8-9</b>
PTSD Symptom Clusters .....	8
<b>How Stressed Are You .....</b>	<b>10</b>
Take the Stress Quiz .....	10
<b>10 Tips for Better Stress Management.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>The Importance of Emotional Support .....</b>	<b>12</b>



Pine Rest is an Associate Member of the National Network of Depression Centers ([nndc.org](http://nndc.org)).

#### Mailing Address

Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services  
300 68th Street SE  
Grand Rapids, MI 49548

# What is Stress?

***Are You Stressed? Today? Absolutely. I'm late for work and trying to get the kids off to school; my mother needs me to go to the doctor with her this afternoon; I have a mountain of work at the office and piles of laundry at home and there's major construction on the freeway. Yes, I'm definitely stressed!***

Stress is a part of life and not all of it is bad. Your body responds to stress as if you are in danger. It produces hormones that increase your heart rate, make you breathe faster and give you a burst of energy. It is the body's way of protecting you. Stress helps you stay focused and alert and in an emergency can save your life.

This is called the “fight or flight” stress response and you use it frequently. It is what keeps you energized and focused during a presentation, allows you to respond quickly – like preventing your infant from falling down a flight of stairs and prompts you to study up on recent tax legislation rather than golfing with your buddies.

**But too much stress can be harmful to your health.**

Often, the problem is that you can get so used to stress that it begins to feel normal and you are unaware of how it's affecting you. Stress can negatively impact your mood and productivity, your relationships with family and friends, your health, even your ability to enjoy life.

## 12 Warning Signs of Too Much Stress



- Agitation, inability to relax
- Anxious or racing thoughts
- Chest pain, rapid heartbeat
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Eating too much or not enough
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Irritability, moodiness
- Nausea, dizziness
- Procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities
- Unable to concentrate
- Using alcohol or drugs to relax and “unwind”
- Worrying incessantly

# Who Gets Stress

Everyone experiences stress, however not everyone is affected the same. Your stress level can be influenced by any number of factors such as physical health, quality of personal relationships, amount and extent of responsibilities and commitments and how much help or support you receive from others. Your stress can also be impacted by traumatic events such as the death of a loved one, a serious illness or loss of a job. Life transitions such as puberty, starting at a new school or job, moving, marriage, birth of a child and an empty nest are often associated with spikes in stress levels. Stress accumulates; so the more stressful factors you are experiencing, the more likely you will be affected negatively.

Generally, those who have a strong support network; practice healthy habits for nutrition, sleep and exercise; have realistic expectations of themselves; have a life purpose; and are willing to ask for help are better equipped to handle stress (known as resiliency) than those who do not.

## Gender Can Influence Stress

Men and women share many of the same top stressors such as financial concerns, job security, health, family and relationships. However, since many women are expected to juggle roles and responsibilities at work, at home and for care of children, parents and/or other relatives, they can be left feeling overwhelmed by time pressures and unmet obligations.

In general, reactions to stressful situations can also vary by gender. According to a study reported in the *Psychological Review*, women are more likely to “tend and befriend.” A nurturing behavior, tending is “designed to protect and to relieve stress,” and befriending seeks and maintains social connections. Men more often react with “fight or flight” responses.

## Aging

Life after 60 can bring on a whole new set of stressors including the illness or death of a spouse or partner, health issues, diminishing hearing and eyesight, retirement and financial concerns, and family caretaking demands. Limited physical ability due to joint pain or imbalance can curtail physical exercise or even getting out to social, religious or family activities. Stress can be compounded by the fear of further endangering health through everyday tasks such as cooking, cleaning or gardening.

## Discrimination

Whether for race, ethnicity, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation or low income, discrimination is unfortunately an ongoing stressor for many in our country. The discrimination may be interpersonal (when a single individual or group targets an individual with treatment that could include insensitive comments, slurs, microaggressions, threats of harm or violence) or institutional (when society provides less access to resources such as jobs, quality education, housing, criminal justice and other social determinants of health).



# How Stress Affects Health

Long-term bouts with stress may lead to serious health problems, and chronic stress can affect nearly every system in your body. Stress can cause or exacerbate anxiety disorders, depression and abuse of alcohol or drugs. Stress can suppress the immune system, increase the frequency and severity of migraine headaches, asthma and blood sugar fluctuations in diabetics. If you already have a health condition, stress can make it worse.

Stress has been associated with:

- Heart Disease
- Asthma
- Diabetes
- Headaches
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Gastrointestinal Disorders



## What's Stressing Us?

Stressful by itself, the effect of the COVID-19 global pandemic is contributing to and exacerbating many other stressful conditions such as economic distress, financial and job insecurity, loss of housing and less access to social supports. The negative effects seem to be falling disproportionately on the poor, the elderly, minorities, migrants and the incarcerated.

A majority of Americans say the federal government response to coronavirus (84%) and the economy (71%) are significant sources of stress, according to the 2020 Stress in America™ survey by the American Psychological Association (APA).

COVID-19 stress is also taking a toll on U.S. parents according to the APA survey. Some of the top sources of stress around parenting include concerns about long-term impacts on children's social development (71%), managing distance/online learning (71%), meeting basic



needs (70%), access to healthcare (66%) and missing out on major milestones (63%). Despite these challenges, 82% of parents say they are grateful for the additional time they've had with their child during the pandemic.

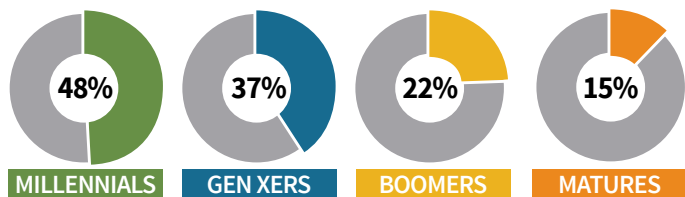
Following the death of George Floyd and the surge of civil unrest, most Americans say the future of our nation is a major source of stress (83%) and this is the lowest point in history they can remember (72%), according to the APA survey. Black Americans (55%) reported discrimination is a significant stressor. Most Americans say police violence towards minorities is a significant source of stress (71%).

For updates about what's stressing us out and tips on managing stress, visit [pinterest.org/stress](https://www.pinterest.org/stress).

### SOCIAL MEDIA WORRIES

I worry about negative effects of social media on my physical and mental health.

(% that strongly /somewhat agree)



SOURCE: Stress in America™ Report, American Psychological Association ([www.stressinamerica.org](http://www.stressinamerica.org))

# Stress in Children and Teens

Children and young people also experience stress: from doing well in school, making friends or meeting expectations from parents, teachers or coaches. Positive stress can provide the energy to tackle a big test, presentation or sports event. Too much stress, however, can create unnecessary hardship and challenge.

Adults may not realize their children or teens are experiencing overwhelming stress so tuning into emotional or behavioral cues is important. Here are some tips to recognize stress in children:

## **Negative Changes in Behavior**

Youth, especially younger children, find it difficult to verbalize when they are experiencing stress. It can manifest itself through changes in behavior, including: acting irritable or moody, withdrawing from activities that used to be fun, routinely expressing worries or complaining more than usual about school. Teens may significantly avoid parents, abandon longtime friends

or express excessive hostility toward family members. These negative changes in behavior are not always linked to excessive stress but almost always a clear sign that something is wrong.

## **“Feeling Sick” May Be Caused By Stress**

Stress can also appear in physical symptoms. Excessive trips to the school nurse, frequent stomachaches or headaches (when they have been given a clean bill of health by their physician), or an increase in complaints in certain situations (before a big test) may indicate significant stress.

## **Changes in Interactions With Others**

Sometimes a child or teen may seem like their usual self at home but be acting out in unusual ways in other settings. Network with other parents, teachers, school administrators, coaches and extracurricular activity leaders so that you know how your child or teen is doing in the world around them.



### Listen and Translate

Children may use other words for stress such as “worried,” “confused,” “annoyed” and “angry.” They may also say negative things about themselves, others, or the world around them such as “No one likes me,” “I’m stupid” or “Nothing is fun.”

### Seek Support

If you are concerned that your child or teen is experiencing stress on a regular basis, get help from a licensed mental health professional. Psychologists have special training to help people identify problems and develop effective strategies to resolve overwhelming feelings of stress.



## Signs of Stress in Children

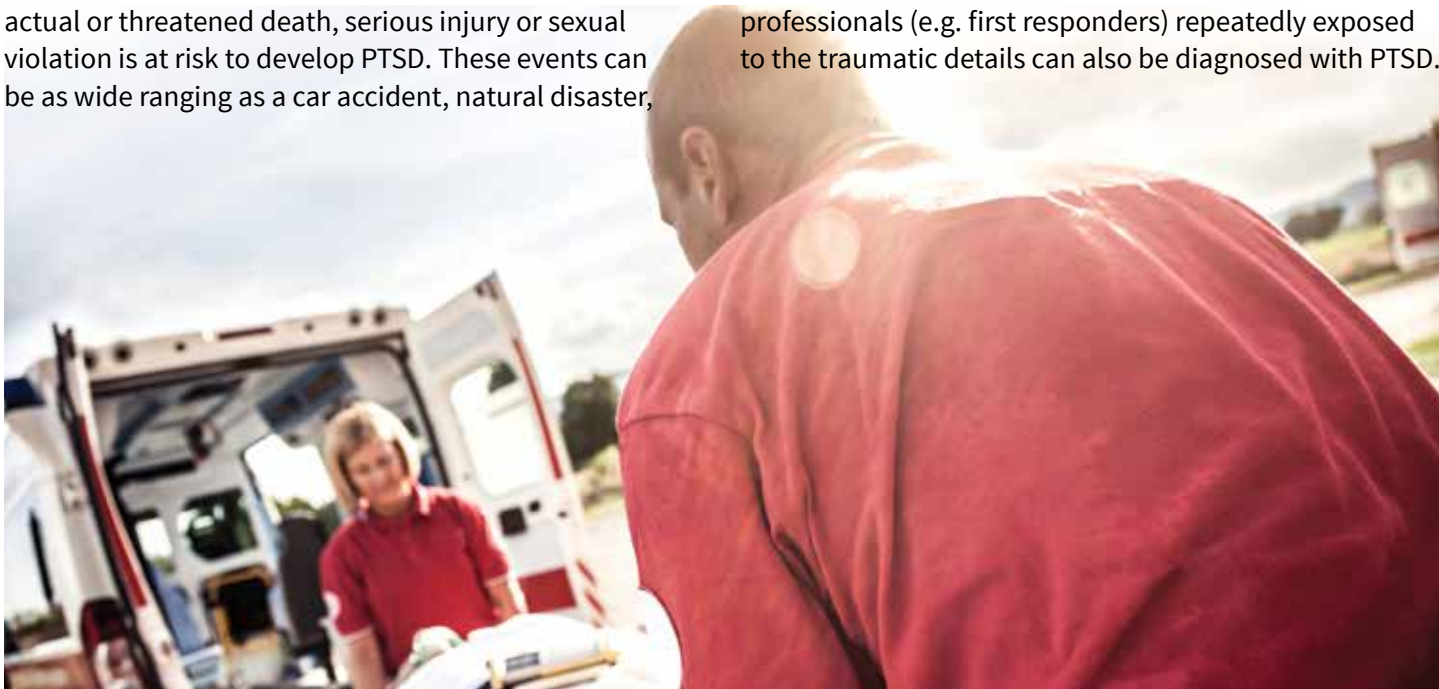
- Acting irritable, moody or crying
- Withdrawing from activities that used to be fun
- Routinely expressing worries
- Complaining more than usual about school
- Displaying surprising fearful reactions
- Clinging to a parent or teacher
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Eating too much or too little
- Frequent stomachaches or headaches
- Acting out in unusual ways
- Using words like “confused,” “annoyed” or “angry”
- Negative self-talk like “I’m stupid,” or “No one likes me.”

SOURCE: American Psychological Association Help Center

# Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Many think of combat veterans when talking about post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). However anyone who witnesses or experiences an event or events that involve actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violation is at risk to develop PTSD. These events can be as wide ranging as a car accident, natural disaster,

witnessing a crime, workplace accident or traumatic birth experience. Individuals who learn of a close relative or friend involved in death or threatened death and professionals (e.g. first responders) repeatedly exposed to the traumatic details can also be diagnosed with PTSD.



## PTSD Symptom Clusters

In order to be diagnosed with PTSD, a doctor or clinician will look for symptoms from each of four symptom clusters: intrusion, avoidance, negative alterations in cognitions and mood, and alterations in arousal and reactivity.

Intrusion	Avoidance	Cognition & Mood Changes	Arousal & Reactivity Changes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involuntary &amp; recurrent memories</li> <li>• Traumatic nightmares</li> <li>• Flashbacks</li> <li>• Intense or prolonged distress after exposure to reminders</li> </ul>	Avoiding trauma-related <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thoughts</li> <li>• Feelings</li> <li>• People</li> <li>• Places</li> <li>• Conversations</li> <li>• Activities</li> <li>• Objects</li> <li>• Situations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can't recall key features of event</li> <li>• Negative beliefs about self or world</li> <li>• Distorted blame</li> <li>• Persistent fear, horror, anger, guilt or shame</li> <li>• Diminished interest in activities</li> <li>• Feeling alienated</li> <li>• Inability to feel positive emotions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Irritable or aggressive</li> <li>• Self-destructive</li> <li>• Hypervigilance</li> <li>• Exaggerated startle response</li> <li>• Problems with concentration</li> <li>• Sleep problems</li> </ul>



The symptoms adults experience may vary. For a few people, the symptoms become so severe they cannot take care of themselves.

Children may show symptoms like repetitive play or physical problems such as stomachaches and headaches. Just as the symptoms differ, so does the onset of PTSD. While symptoms typically appear within three months of the traumatic event, it can be many months or even years later that people begin to have problems.

The good news is that PTSD can be treated. If someone you know experienced a trauma, encourage them to get help dealing with the event. The sooner they talk about it and work on it, the better off they will be and the less likely they are to experience PTSD.

# How Stressed Are You?

Stress is additive. It piles up. Stress affects both mind and body and without your being aware of it, stress can add up to dangerous levels that can have serious health consequences. This Holmes and Rahe Stress Scale is a well-known tool for measuring the amount of stress you've experienced within the past year. To calculate your score:

**1.** Circle the value of each event that has occurred in your life within the past 12 months.

**2.** Add the values you circled. Note: If you experienced the same event more than once in the same year, add its score again to your total for each extra occurrence.

**3.** From your total, find the relationship to health changes that may result in hospitalization as shown below. That's your probability unless you have the internal or external resources to manage stressful conditions.

Life Event	Mean Value	Life Event	Mean Value
1. Death of spouse	100	23. Son or daughter leaving home	29
2. Divorce	73	24. Trouble with in-laws	29
3. Marital separation	65	25. Outstanding personal achievement	28
4. Jail term	63	26. Spouse begins or ends work	26
5. Death of close family member	63	27. Begin or end school/college	26
6. Personal injury or illness	53	28. Change in living conditions	25
7. Marriage	50	29. Revision of personal habits	24
8. Fired at work	47	30. Trouble with boss	23
9. Marital reconciliation	45	31. Change in work hours or conditions	20
10. Retirement	45	32. Change in residence	20
11. Change in health of family member	44	33. Change in school/college	20
12. Pregnancy	40	34. Change in recreation	19
13. Sexual difficulties	39	35. Change in church activities	19
14. Gain of new family member	39	36. Change in social activities	18
15. Business readjustment	39	37. A moderate loan or mortgage	17
16. Change in financial state	38	38. Change in sleeping habits	16
17. Death of close friend	37	39. Change in number of family get-togethers	15
18. Change to different line of work	36	40. Change in eating habits	15
19. Change in number of arguments with spouse	35	41. Vacation	13
20. A large mortgage or loan	37	42. Christmas	12
21. Foreclosure of mortgage or loan	30	43. Minor violations of the law	11
22. Change in responsibilities at work	29		
<b>Your total:</b> _____			

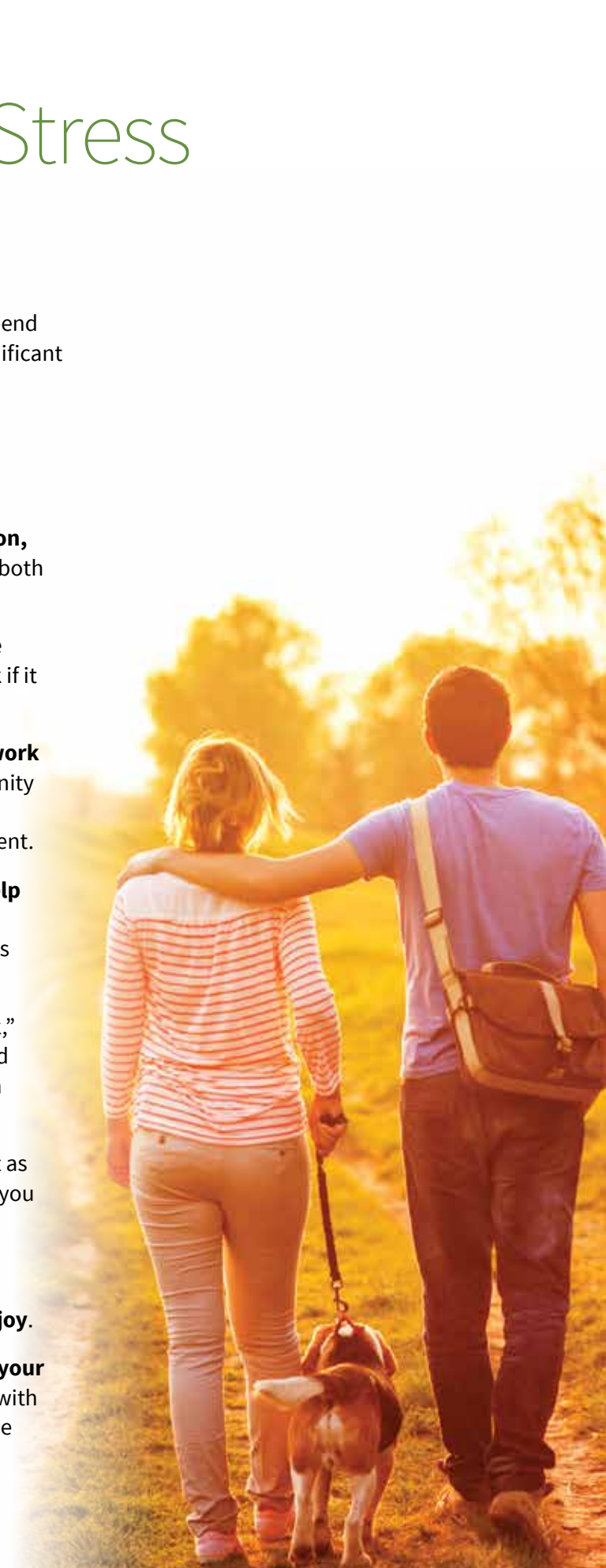


Total	Probability of Becoming Ill from Stress
150-199	37% - low to moderate chance of becoming ill in the near future
200-299	51% - moderate to high chance of becoming ill in near future
300+	79% - high or very high risk of becoming ill in near future

# 10 Tips for Better Stress Management

There are a variety of ways to handle stress, but all of them depend upon the individual's willingness and ability to make some significant changes in his or her life.

1. **Exercise** is one of the best ways to manage stress. Just 30 minutes a day can make you feel better mentally and physically and reduce stress.
2. Explore other ways to cope with stress such as **meditation, yoga, tai chi** or other similar types of programs that are both physical and contemplative.
3. **Set priorities.** Decide what you can do and what you are unable to do. Say no when asked to take on another task if it will add too much stress to your life.
4. Stay in touch with those who provide your **support network** whether it's family, friends, church associates or community organizations. Ask for help if needed to relieve stress from family obligations such as caring for an elderly parent.
5. If you cannot cope with all the stress in your life, **seek help** from your family physician or a qualified mental health professional, particularly if you are using alcohol or drugs to cope.
6. If work is your biggest stressor, instead of a "coffee break," **take work breaks.** Take a short walk; go out to lunch and avoid talking about work; try to make a clean break from work at night and on the weekends.
7. If you have a health problem or condition, don't ignore it as the stress in your life may make it worse. Make sure that you **get enough sleep.**
8. Make sure your **diet is a healthy,** nutritious one.
9. Make time to **relax** and **schedule activities that you enjoy.**
10. Reach out to a good friend and **talk about the stress in your life.** Sometimes just sharing your worries and concerns with someone you know and trust can help relieve some of the stress and increase your ability to deal with it all.



# The Importance of Emotional Support

Having a strong social network of family, friends, neighbors and/or coworkers improves your ability to cope with life's stressors on your own. Your network doesn't need to be large for you to benefit. It's the quality of your connection ... your ability to open up, trust your confidence won't be broken and that you will not be judged ... that's most

important. It's best if you don't lean on just one since different people in your life can support you in different ways. If you don't have anyone you can feel safe with, reach out to a mental health professional to help you through a stressful time.

