

# INTRODUCTION

Family, friends, school, and relationships—while these can all be sources of support for teens, they can also lead to plenty of stress and conflict. In *Pressure*, teens describe how stress has affected them and what they're doing to lead more relaxed and healthy lives.

In “Enjoy the Moment,” Ngan-Fong Huang has pushed herself relentlessly all her life to achieve academically. But by her senior year in high school, she begins to question her driven approach to life.

“Sometimes worrying too much just overwhelms me,” she writes. “Last term, for instance, I went out of my mind over grades and college applications.”

While it's important to plan for the future, Ngan-Fong also realizes that life is too stressful when she doesn't enjoy and value the present moment: “We should also spend time appreciating what is right before our eyes, since the present is what we have now.”

In “House of Stress,” the author is weighed down by taking on adult responsibilities in the family: “I sweep, clean the kitchen, and mop. When my stepsister doesn't help out, I clean the entire house alone.” The author also has to babysit her disobedient siblings.

“I often feel frustrated and angry at the situation,” she writes. “I don’t want to be the kind of person who blows up, and I’m not, but that just leaves me feeling more frustrated.”

The writer hopes that when she finally moves out of her house, she won’t take all that frustration, anger, and stress with her. Rather, she hopes she takes away “the knowledge and ability to handle my responsibilities.”

The stories in *Pressure* show teens engaging in a wide range of activities to release stress in healthy ways. One writer turns to Buddhist chanting to clear her mind. Janae Marsh finds calm and gains perspective by reading. Niya Wilson relaxes by doing yoga. Several others deal with personal problems through writing.

“I would open up completely in my diary,” says one author. “It’s almost like my head went from heavy to empty, especially when I wrote about my father’s behavior. When I wrote my angry thoughts, my mind was less stressed. It’s like I told someone my feelings and they offered to listen. I didn’t feel sad or suicidal anymore.”

Sports and exercise are a great help to other writers. Martin Smith plays basketball while D’nashia Jenkins runs track. Emily Orchier takes long walks.

The stories in this book offer a window into many teens’ lives. You are sure to find within its pages people and experiences you can identify with and relate to.

You might find that you can get more out of the book by applying what the writers have learned to your own life. The teens who wrote these stories did so because they hope that telling their stories will help readers who are facing similar challenges. They want you to know that you are not alone, and that taking specific steps can help you manage or overcome very difficult situations. They've done their best to be clear about the actions that worked for them so you can see if they'll work for you. For further help, this book also features interviews with therapists and counselors about the causes of stress, how it affects people, how to identify it, and how to deal with it.

Another way to use the book is to develop your writing skills. Each teen in this book wrote 5 to 10 drafts of his or her story before it was published. If you read the stories closely you'll see that the teens work to include a beginning, a middle, and an end, along with good scenes, description, dialogue, and anecdotes (little stories). To improve your writing, take a look at how these writers construct their stories. Try some of their techniques in your own writing.

If you'd like more information about the writing program at Youth Communication or want to read more teen essays, visit [www.youthcomm.org](http://www.youthcomm.org).

