



**Ami** MAGAZINE Originally Published in Ami Magazine,  
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# Helping Teens *and adults* Tackle **ANXIETY & STRESS**



**Over the past year**, there has been an increase in anxiety and stress levels in adults, teens, and children. What can be done to help deal with this stress and anxiety in teens? Be it schoolwork, the pressure to get into a good yeshiva or seminary, social pressures to “meet certain standards” among friends, or the need to feel accepted in school, it’s not easy being a teen!

Below are excerpts, presented in a question-and-answer format, from several experts with an excellent grasp on the issues and anxieties facing teenagers. These include **Rebbetzin Sora Bulka**, menaheles of The New Seminary, **Mrs. Rifka Schonfeld**, the noted therapist and author who has helped thousands navigate anxieties and stress, and **Dr. Pamela Siller**, clinical Psychiatrist at Interborough Developmental and Consultation Center.

**In our post-Covid era, cases of anxiety and stress seem to have gone up. Why do you think this is the case?**

**Rebbetzin Bulka:** I’m not qualified to offer a ‘diagnosis.’ But I certainly see this phenomenon. It may be because teens sense their own parents’ sense of insecurity, perhaps with job losses, perhaps the loss of close relatives, and perhaps the uncertainty of what tomorrow may bring. Whatever the trigger, the fact is that children who need to grow up with a sense of safety and confidence have seen how the world can turn upside down in a moment. The nature of the pandemic is different from all previous crises, and information and misinformation

bombards everyone. People don’t know what to believe or whom to believe.

**Dr. Siller:** Teenagers, who can more fully comprehend the magnitude of the pandemic, may be faced with a changed world view and diminished idealism, as well as a greater sense of their own mortality. This may be compounded by learning to live with the loss of loved ones. For those who were unable to be academically successful with remote learning, catching up on missed assignments during crucial high school years can be anxiety-provoking as well.

**Mrs. Schonfeld:** I have definitely seen an uptick in those seeking help for anxiety and stress. The pandemic created a situation in which

# worry stress children fear anxiety nervous adults behavior teens overwhelmed butterflies

many people were forced to tackle complex issues that they had never encountered before. In addition, many people were forced to tackle those issues alone. Without our regular support networks, we all experience more stress and anxiety.

With Covid now on the downturn B"H, parents can help take away some of the stress by supporting their children's full return to a normal "social" routine in school and elsewhere. A parent's love acts a support system for a child whether they are at home, in school, or even away in seminary. Knowing there is a parent that loves them and believes in them provides a child the confidence s/he needs to thrive, which in turn helps melt away some of their anxieties.

Being in high school can lead to stress and anxiety, especially among girls. Considering the likes of peer pressure, self-image, getting into seminary among other areas, what is a proper message to convey to parents and girls during their high school years?

**Mrs. Schonfeld:** An important message that we can give girls and their parents is to build our children's self-esteem. In her book *The Confident Child: Raising Children to Believe in*

Themselves, social psychologist Terri Apter explains that self-esteem has more impact on a child's growth than even intelligence or natural ability. When children believe in themselves, they will feel less anxious about what they do and how their peers look at them. They will feel good about themselves, and this will help have greater belief in their future successes.

This extends to shidduchim as well. The more we build our children's base of self-esteem and self-confidence, the less anxious they will be and Be'H this will lead to their continued success.

**Dr. Siller:** No matter what the individual circumstances are, everyone should remember that they are not alone. Additionally, there is no shame in asking for help

Are there strategies you can recommend to help teens cope with anxiety and stress, and perhaps even rise above their anxieties?

**Mrs. Schonfeld:** There's no one size fits all approach to anxiety and stress, as each person feels something a bit different and copes in various ways. That said, there is one thing that I often tell people and it's in my children's book *My Friend, the Worrier*. Anxiety is like a monster,

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## **"ANXIETY IS LIKE A MONSTER, IF WE KEEP FEEDING IT, IT WILL KEEP GROWING."**

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if we keep feeding it, it will keep growing. When we pay attention to the anxious thoughts, a cycle of fear and anxiety is created. Therefore, we all have to work on not feeding that anxiety monster with a cycle of worries.

**Dr. Siller:** A number of things you can do when feeling overwhelmed include: Writing in a journal, imagining a stop sign in your head and focus on preparing for the day as well as Imagining a locked box to put all your worries in, only to be opened when you are in a calmer frame of mind. Taking a walk and doing exercise to release endorphins, and speak to a trusted friend, confidant, or therapist can all help one cope when stressed or anxious.

**Rebbetzin Bulka:** Strong family bonds are more important than ever. Good relationships between parents and children are critical. These need to be built step by step from the earliest years. Then, when something happens that rocks the boat, the reservoir of love and caring and good will can help to straighten it and to get them, all of them, safely to the other side.

**What can be done from a community standpoint to help encourage our teenage boys and girls to be more content with who they are and their overall lives and experiences?**

**Rebbetzin Bulka:** This is a question that gets to what we learn in Avos – it's all about kinah and taavah – what we're supposed to do is be 'sameiach bechelko', to understand that there is Someone in charge and that each and every one gets what they are supposed to. Your neighbor's success should only elicit positive feelings on your part, to 'fargin' their good fortune, and not, chas veshalom, to be filled with envy at what someone else has. This is a chinuch that we need for ourselves and for our

children. The community responds to excess with 'takanos'. The intent is good, the outcome not often so much. Wouldn't it be better if we could rejoice with others and celebrate our own special moments without looking over our shoulders at 'yenem'. Much healthier I believe.

**Mrs. Schonfeld:** I believe this question goes back to an earlier question and can relate to both girls and boys. We need to build our children's self-confidence from an early age. We need to allow them to fail and give them the tools to pick themselves up again. When children develop grit and resilience, they are will feel less anxiety and stress in all they do and will ultimately be able to cope with any adversity that life throws their way!



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*An acclaimed educator and social skills specialist, Mrs. Rifka Schonfeld has served the Jewish community for close to thirty years. She founded and directs the widely acclaimed educational program, SOS, servicing all grade levels in secular as well as Hebrew studies. A kriah and reading specialist, she has given dynamic workshops and has set up reading labs in many schools. In addition, she offers evaluations G.E.D. preparation, social skills training and shidduch coaching, focusing on building self-esteem and self-awareness. She can be reached at 718.382.5437 or at [rifkaschonfeld@gmail.com](mailto:rifkaschonfeld@gmail.com).*



*Thank you for changing my life!*



"My 18-year-old son spent three weeks with Mrs. Rifka Schonfeld this summer and it was time and money very well spent! She was experienced and caring, allowing my son to work through his challenges and fears. Rifka helped us map out a program that would be realistic and productive. I highly recommend Mrs. Schonfeld to other families who have struggling teens."

- PARENT OF CLIENT

Mrs. Rifka Schonfeld taught my child the life skills to overcome anxiety and fear. Our fun-loving, adventurous child is now back and more confident in many areas of school and life."

- PARENT OF CLIENT

"Mrs. Schonfeld helped me change my life. I was suffering from social anxiety that was holding me back on a number of fronts including relations with my family, professional achievement, and my self-esteem. She taught me about CBT and provided instruction on using CBT tools to alleviate my anxiety, allowing me to grow and achieve in many ways. I am grateful for her support and counsel."

- CLIENT

"My 15-year-old son began to display alarming symptoms of anxiety and mental distress. Thankfully, we connected with Mrs. Rifka Schonfeld. My son was able to resume his life and complete Mesivta, and is now a thriving bais medrash bochur. When anxiety or OCD rears its head, Mrs. Schonfeld is there for us for the support we need."

- PARENT OF CLIENT

*"You are a blessing to all the lives you've touched!"*

**testimonials**

**Rifka Schonfeld**  
THE NAME THAT HAS HELPED THOUSANDS

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