

REVISED &  
UPDATED



# FIGHTING INVISIBLE TIGERS

Stress Management for Teens

Earl Hipp

free spirit  
PUBLISHING®

© 2014 Free Spirit Publishing. All rights reserved.

Praise for the revised & updated edition of  
***Fighting Invisible Tigers***

---

“A top pick for community library parenting collections.”—Midwest Book Review

“This best-selling book by Earl Hipp gives teens information on how stress affects health and decision-making. . . . Students will learn stress-management skills, such as assertiveness, time management, and relaxation exercises.”

—*YouthWorker Journal*

# FIGHTING INVISIBLE TIGERS

Stress Management for Teens

REVISED & UPDATED THIRD EDITION

Earl Hipp



free spirit  
PUBLISHING®



Text copyright © 2008, 1995, 1985 by Earl Hipp  
Illustrations copyright © 2008 by Free Spirit Publishing Inc.

All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. Unless otherwise noted, no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without express written permission of the publisher, except for brief quotations or critical reviews. For more information, go to [www.freespirit.com/company/permissions.cfm](http://www.freespirit.com/company/permissions.cfm).

Free Spirit, Free Spirit Publishing, and associated logos are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Free Spirit Publishing Inc. A complete listing of trademarks is available at [www.freespirit.com](http://www.freespirit.com).

### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Hipp, Earl, 1944-

Fighting invisible tigers : stress management for teens / Earl Hipp. — Rev. & updated 3rd ed.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN-13: 978-1-57542-282-4

ISBN-10: 1-57542-282-4

1. Youth—United States—Life skills guides—Juvenile literature. [I. Stress (Psychology)] I. Title.

HQ796.H495 2008

155.5'18—dc22

2007044631

eBook ISBN: 978-1-57542-860-4

Free Spirit Publishing does not have control over or assume responsibility for author or third-party websites and their content. At the time of this book's publication, all facts and figures cited within are the most current available. All telephone numbers, addresses, and website URLs are accurate and active; all publications, organizations, websites, and other resources exist as described in this book; and all have been verified as of February 2013. If you find an error or believe that a resource listed here is not as described, please contact Free Spirit Publishing. Parents, teachers, and other adults: We strongly urge you to monitor children's use of the Internet.

The perfectionism scale on page 101 has been reprinted with permission of *Psychology Today*.

Reading Level Grade 6; Interest Level Ages 11 & Up;  
Fountas & Pinnell Guided Reading Level X

Edited by Douglas J. Fehlen

Illustrated by Tyson Smith

10 9 8 7 6

Printed in the United States of America

S18861113

### Free Spirit Publishing Inc.

Minneapolis, MN

(612) 338-2068

[help4kids@freespirit.com](mailto:help4kids@freespirit.com)

[www.freespirit.com](http://www.freespirit.com)

Free Spirit Publishing is a member of the Green Press Initiative, and we're committed to printing our books on recycled paper containing a minimum of 30% post-consumer waste (PCW). For every ton of books printed on 30% PCW recycled paper, we save 5.1 trees, 2,100 gallons of water, 114 gallons of oil, 18 pounds of air pollution, 1,230 kilowatt hours of energy, and .9 cubic yards of landfill space. At Free Spirit it's our goal to nurture not only young people, but nature too!



Printed on recycled paper  
including 50%  
post-consumer waste

### Free Spirit offers competitive pricing.

Contact [edsales@freespirit.com](mailto:edsales@freespirit.com) for pricing information on multiple quantity purchases.

## Dedication

This book is dedicated to all those young people who are fighting invisible tigers without help and support.

## Acknowledgments

Writing is only one piece of bringing a book into the world. It also takes a publisher who “gets it,” contributors, editors, artists, printers, and office and warehouse people all doing their parts to put this book in your hands. It’s this whole crew I want to thank for their special skills and contributions. I feel truly blessed to have them on my team.

In addition, my very special thanks go out to:

My publisher, Judy Galbraith, for her ongoing commitment to the young people she serves. She is one of my heroes and a great role model.

My editor, Douglas Fehlen, for his keen eye, helpful perspective, and patient encouragement.

All the teachers and school staff who daily give their best so kids can learn.

The helping professionals who work with young people in so many different roles, but with the common goal of creating better lives for kids and families.

All the young people who took a risk to so freely share their comments in this book.

All of my family and friends, my safety net of support, who remained available and “on my side” throughout the writing of this book.

My sweet partner in life, Gwen, for her help and patience as I work on making my dreams come true.

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Fighting Invisible Tigers .....	2
How Can This Book Help? .....	3
<b>Stress 101: The Lowdown on Invisible Tigers</b> ....	<b>5</b>
The Fight-or-Flight Response.....	6
Short- and Long-Term Stress.....	10
Coping Strategies .....	12
10 Myths About—and the Last Word on—Stress.....	18
<b>10 Tiger-Taming Techniques</b> .....	<b>22</b>
<b>#1</b> Get Moving .....	<b>25</b>
Some Benefits of Physical Activity .....	26
The FIT Formula for Physical Activity.....	26
<b>#2</b> Fight Stress with Food.....	<b>33</b>
Why Is Eating Healthy So Important? .....	34
Bad Diet Habits .....	34
Why It Can Be Hard to Eat Well.....	37
<b>#3</b> Find Your Calm Center .....	<b>41</b>
What Are Relaxation Techniques? .....	42
Focused Breathing.....	44
Sitting in the Calm.....	48
Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR).....	51
<b>#4</b> Stand Up for Yourself .....	<b>57</b>
Assertiveness Skills.....	58
The ASSERT Formula.....	60



<b>#5</b>	<b>Weave a Safety Net of Support .....</b>	<b>67</b>
	The Importance of Weaving a Safety Net.....	68
	The Five Levels of Relationships.....	69
	Strengthening Relationships .....	74
<b>#6</b>	<b>Take Charge of Your Life .....</b>	<b>77</b>
	Writing Your Own Script.....	78
	Reaching Your Goals.....	79
<b>#7</b>	<b>Get Time on Your Side .....</b>	<b>87</b>
	How Time Management Can Help You.....	88
	Setting Priorities .....	89
	Time Management Tips.....	93
<b>#8</b>	<b>Risk Trying New Things.....</b>	<b>97</b>
	Are You a Risk Taker?.....	98
	Start Small and Give Yourself a Chance to Learn.....	99
	Avoiding Perfectionism .....	100
	Find Support and Celebrate Successes .....	105
<b>#9</b>	<b>Stand on Solid Ground.....</b>	<b>107</b>
	Decisions Are Powerful.....	108
	Making Decisions When the Pressure's On.....	109
	Managing Peer Pressure .....	111
<b>#10</b>	<b>Choose the Upside View .....</b>	<b>116</b>
	Seeing the Upside .....	117
	Positive Self-Talk .....	118
	Lighten Up .....	119
	<b>First Aid for Tiger Bites .....</b>	<b>123</b>
	When Is It Time to Get Help?.....	123
	<b>A Final Word.....</b>	<b>127</b>
	<b>Index .....</b>	<b>128</b>
	<b>About the Author .....</b>	<b>133</b>





"Mike's ticked off about what I said."

"I don't have time to get all my stuff done."

"What if I don't make the team?"

"Dad and Cindy aren't getting along."

"I have too much homework."

"My grades are terrible."



# Introduction

Do you ever feel worried or stressed out? If so, you're not alone. Everyone feels upset or overwhelmed at times.

Facing one tough challenge at a time might be okay, but that's not how life usually works. Instead, one thing piles on top of another. In a single week you might have to finish a big project, take a few tests, perform in the school play, put in hours at your job, and do a bunch of other things. At the same time, you might also be dealing with situations that come up at home or troubles you have with friends.

Stress is the feeling you have when facing many challenges at the same time. Imagine every worry, tough homework assignment, health concern, relationship problem, computer glitch, and disagreement is a separate rubber band around your head. That would be very uncomfortable, right? But it can get worse. As more stressors show up, more rubber bands get layered on until your head is completely covered. The pressure you feel on the inside of that ball of rubber bands is stress.

Knowing where to start fixing things can be difficult because stress comes from all of the pressures you have in your life. It's normal to feel anxious and uncomfortable every day when you're feeling stressed—like something is wrong—even though you can't say exactly what it is.

## Stress Overload

Dealing with a lot of stress can make people feel cornered—like there's nowhere safe to turn. Making good decisions under this kind of pressure can be difficult. Instead of calmly coming up with solutions to a problem, feelings of tension or anger can get in the way and cause people to do things that make a situation worse.

## Fighting Invisible Tigers

---

When you're stressed out, it can feel like you're in a thick jungle with lots of dangerous tigers—ferocious, hungry, but invisible tigers. You can't see them, but you can sense them quietly stalking you.

### Imagine . . .

You're alone in a steamy jungle. You've been hacking through it for days while huge mosquitoes chomp at your flesh. Weird noises and strange smells fill the air. Every now and then you hear a deep, menacing growl . . . and you worry what's going to happen next.



Now imagine living with this fear every day—always watchful, always on edge and ready to react in an instant. That’s how a person who doesn’t know how to handle stress can feel. Being on guard every minute takes an enormous amount of energy—whether it’s watching for real tigers or invisible ones in the form of tests, homework, bullies, friendship fallouts, or other challenges. Constant worry about what might happen next is exhausting and can push you to your limit.

The bad news is you can’t keep stress out of your life completely—situations will come up that cause you to feel uncomfortable, frustrated, or overwhelmed. The good news is you can learn more about stress and positive ways to deal with the challenges and hard times. You can learn how to fight the invisible tigers when they do show up.

## Stress Is Serious Business

High levels of stress over long periods of time can have severe effects. You might begin to feel aches and pains and get sick more often. Your performance at school and in other activities may suffer. Stress can also affect your moods, you might start to feel angry, sad, lonely, or depressed.

## How Can This Book Help?

The goal is to help you stay healthy, meet challenges, feel great about yourself, and make the most of your life. *Fighting Invisible Tigers* offers ideas you can use to really understand stress and handle it in positive ways:

“**Stress 101: The Lowdown on Invisible Tigers**” has information on stress and its physical and emotional effects. You’ll read about some of the unhealthy ways people deal with feeling overwhelmed, and learn the important difference between short-term coping techniques and real stress management.

In “**10 Tiger-Taming Techniques**” you’ll learn about important skills you can use to manage stress—helpful strategies you can start using right now to relieve some of the pressure you feel and prepare for future challenges.

## 4 Fighting Invisible Tigers

Finally, “**First Aid for Tiger Bites**” has helpful suggestions for when you feel like you’ve hit your limit. If you’re feeling upset or overwhelmed right now, you can check out this section (page 123).

Reading this book may not make you an expert tiger tamer overnight, but practicing the skills can help you make your invisible tigers seem smaller and much less ferocious. I sincerely hope that with less stress, your heart, mind, and spirit will be more open to the joys of life.

Good luck, and my very best wishes go with you on your adventure.

### **Earl Hipp**

P.S. I like hearing from my readers. If you’re willing to share, I’d enjoy hearing about how you’re doing and what you’re learning. I may even be able to help others by sharing your thoughts in my books and presentations. Feel free to send your comments or questions to me in care of:

#### **Free Spirit Publishing**

217 Fifth Avenue North, Suite 200

Minneapolis, MN 55401-1299

Or email me at [help4kids@freespirit.com](mailto:help4kids@freespirit.com).

# Stress 101: The Lowdown on Invisible Tigers



Stress may seem like a modern phenomenon, but actually it's been around for millions of years. Even in the times of cave-dwelling humans, people struggled with problems that made life complicated, difficult, and frightening—fires that wouldn't start, bad weather, spoiled meat, damp caves, unruly neighbors, and the challenge of simply surviving. But the most serious stressors for cave dwellers were the wild animals that saw them as, well, lunch.

## The Fight-or-Flight Response

---

On a nice day in the jungle, for example, a huge hungry saber-tooth tiger could suddenly leap at the cave dwellers. Because most tigers are in no mood for conversation, these early humans learned to react instantly to either attack the cat or run for safety. This required

a finely tuned nervous system that could mobilize the body into what we now call the fight-or-flight response. Over millions of years, the people with the best fight-or-flight skills lived on to tell stories around the fire, and the others . . . well, let's just say they didn't make it home for dinner.

While most of us will never have to face real tigers, the world we live in can feel every bit as threatening as the one that cave dwellers experienced. Think about it for a moment: There are a lot of situations that can make us feel upset or seriously threatened.

### The Power of Fight-or-Flight

The fight-or-flight response gets your body ready to do battle or run like the wind at the first hint of danger. It is so sensitive that simply thinking about hungry tigers or any other frightening things can get you fired up and ready to go.

"The environment is being destroyed—will we even have a place to live in 50 years?"

"Since we moved to this town, I haven't been able to make friends."

"I lost my cell phone—it had all of my numbers in it."

"My life is drama central. Justine hates me and Maria says I stepped in on her crush."

"Someone was stabbed in my neighborhood and I'm afraid to walk alone."

"I'm overweight and everybody in my class ignores me."

"There's a guy at school who thinks I'm his personal punching bag."

"My friend Sam is into some really bad things."

"What am I going to do when I finish school?"

"I get sad when I see starving people on TV."

"I have a huge test next week that makes up half my biology grade."

"My parents had a major fight—Mom moved out."

## 8 Fighting Invisible Tigers

Some challenges definitely are more difficult to deal with than others. But the problem is, whenever you're up against something, anything that makes you feel worried or threatened—even if you're just thinking about it—your body still responds as if it's meeting a hungry tiger. At the first hint of trouble, the alarm goes off, and instantly your body gets ready to fight or run away.

During times of high stress, the fight-or-flight response causes many physical changes in your body—all at the same time—and if you don't understand what's happening, it might feel like you're having a serious medical problem.

### Effects of Fight-or-Flight

Here are some of the ways your body might react to stress:

**Your heart pounds.** The body needs all the oxygen-rich blood it can get, and it needs it in a hurry, so your heart pumps harder and faster. Your breathing also speeds up to make more oxygen available.

**Your hands and feet become cooler.** Small capillaries in the hands and feet constrict to force blood toward the brain and into the large muscles used for running and fighting.

### Stress Affects Your Mind

Stress not only causes changes to your body, but it can also cause your brain to short-circuit. When you feel stressed, the decision-making part of your brain goes offline and stress chemicals flood your system. So what does this mean? When you're stressed, you are a lot more likely to make bad decisions or do things that can make a situation worse. Teens are especially affected by this process because their brains are developing very quickly and changing during adolescence.





**There is a rush of warmth to your face.** The carotid arteries in the neck open up to allow more blood to the brain, sometimes causing the cheeks and ears to turn pink. You might get a pressure headache.

**Your mouth gets dry and your stomach feels upset.** During fight-or-flight, the digestion process shuts down so blood is available for the body's largest muscles.

**You feel restless.** Glands and organs produce chemicals—including adrenaline—that help prepare the body to move. You may feel tingly or have “butterflies” in your stomach.

**Your hands sweat.** Anticipating the extra heat that running and fighting generate, the body turns on its climate-control system and produces moisture on the surface of the skin. Evaporation of this moisture creates a cooling effect.

## Find Out More

***Stress Relief: The Ultimate Teen Guide* by Mark Powell.**

Full of information on stress, this book offers ideas for handling tough situations. It also describes meditation and breathing exercises for calming down.

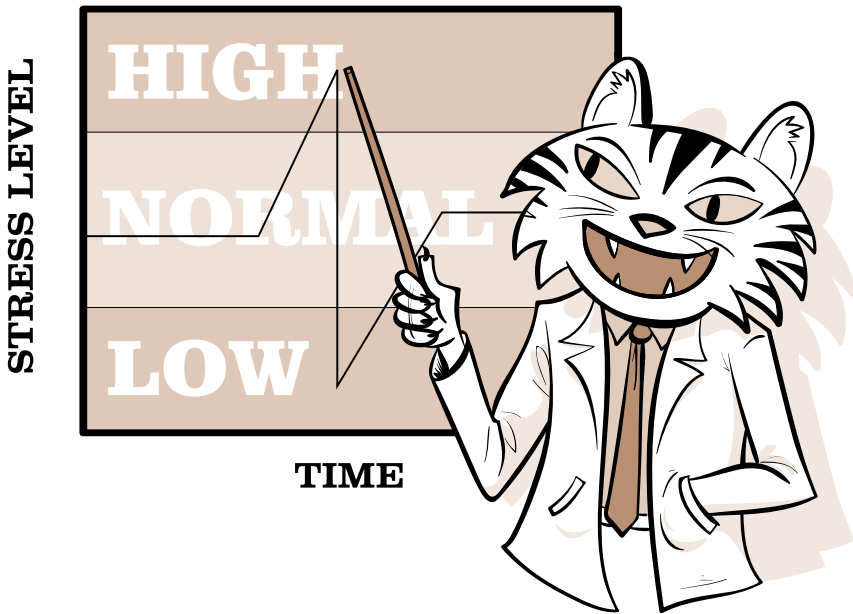
**TeensHealth ([www.teenshealth.org](http://www.teenshealth.org)).** This Web site has a lot of advice on dealing with stress as well as many other health concerns. Visit the site to find articles, teen stories, and resources.

***Too Stressed to Think? A Teen Guide to Staying Sane When Life Makes You Crazy* by Annie Fox and Ruth Kirschner.**

Stress affects everyone, but that doesn't mean it has to take over your life. This book provides background on what makes stress difficult to handle and offers practical tips for staying sane.

## Short- and Long-Term Stress

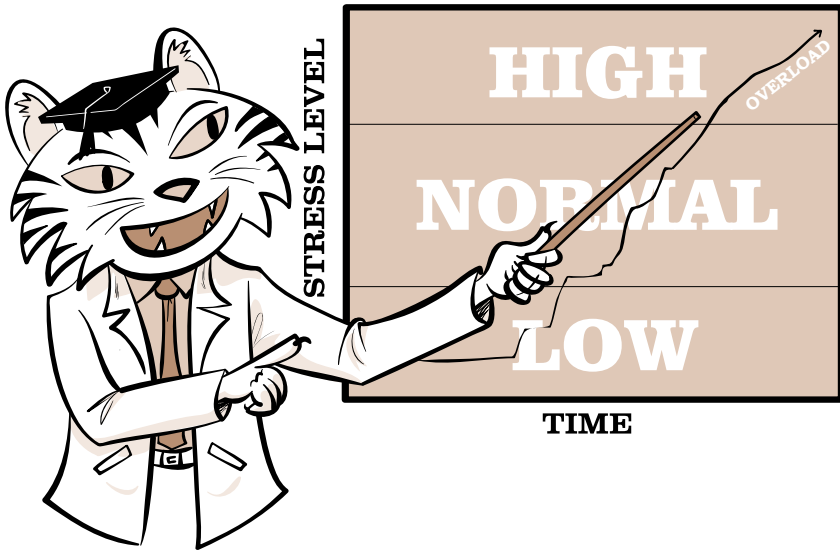
The fight-or-flight response can take a lot out of you because battling tigers—real or invisible—is a whole body experience. Fortunately, these moments of intense stress don't usually last very long. After the immediate danger of a stressful event passes, the body gradually calms down and enters a period of rest and recuperation before returning to a normal state. This type of an event is called short-term stress.



Short-term stress usually passes pretty quickly and without a lasting impact. But what happens if you have a lot of things causing stress in your everyday life? What if your life is full of invisible tigers—large and small—that don't ever seem to go away?

When you're experiencing many stressors over long periods of time, your body may not have time to calm down, rest, and recuperate. Because you want to keep going, it's easy to adapt to higher and higher stress levels without realizing it. You might think you are

doing okay, but you're actually living with an unhealthy amount of stress. This is why long-term stress can be so harmful—people don't realize the toll it's taking until they reach their limit.



Seriously stressed people are usually trying to stay on top of things—even when they feel stalked by invisible tigers. But high levels of stress can be overwhelming. You might try harder and harder to keep up with all the challenges you are facing while—without realizing it—gradually losing physical energy, the ability to think clearly, and your performance edge. It's like chopping wood with an ax and never taking time to sharpen the blade, or trying to surf the Web using an Internet connection that is getting slower and slower. Eventually, things that were easy become more difficult.

### Stress and Pimples

While many effects of stress are quite serious, others can simply be annoying. For example, some researchers believe there is a link between stress and pimples. In the largest-ever study done on acne and stress, teens with high-stress lives were 23 percent more likely to have their acne get worse. Apparently, when you're stressed, your skin knows it, and may react with angry eruptions.

## Get Help!

If you feel like you're reaching your limit, it's important to talk with someone you trust—like a parent, teacher, or friend—right away. The person you share with might have solutions to challenges you haven't thought of. See "First Aid for Tiger Bites" (pages 123–126) for more ideas about what to do when you're feeling overwhelmed.

## Coping Strategies

---

Life is full of situations to deal with—responsibilities at home, schoolwork, figuring out where you fit in, friendships. And then there are the unexpected stressors that can happen at anytime. So how do you cope? What is "coping" anyway?

Think of coping as the short-term approach to dealing with the feeling of being stressed. Coping behaviors don't fix the problems that cause stress, but they can give you temporary relief from anxious feelings. There's nothing wrong with most coping activities—things like watching TV or napping—as long as they aren't harmful and don't go on forever.

What are some of these short-term actions people use to cope with feelings of stress? There are three basic categories.

### 1. Distraction—Or, I'll deal with it later.

**"When I need a breather, I go for a bike ride."**  
—Sarah, 12

**"At the end of a long day, I like to check out my Web page. It helps me decompress all the stuff that's happened to me."**—Mario, 14

Distractions are the most common coping activities. They're usually pretty harmless and include things like using the Internet, reading, eating, or playing video games—pretty much any activity that allows you some time away from stressors. Distractions can be good for short-term relaxation and can even be productive. For example, taking a short break for a snack while studying is a way to briefly get away and come back with clearer focus. But taking too many breaks—such as to text your friends or chat online—won't get your work done and can increase the stress you feel.

Distractions help you avoid feeling stressed for a little while, but the more you use them to procrastinate, the more the stress you're avoiding creeps to the surface. That's often when people move on to the next level of coping.

## 2. Avoidance—Or, I might deal with it . . . sometime.

**“My friends and I are pretty intense basketball players. We could play hoops all night.”—Kwame, 13**

**“I admit it—when I don't want to do something, I go online. It's weird because I seem to get lost in time. Sometimes I look at the clock and it's hours later.”  
—Brie, 14**

Think of avoidance as distractions carried to the extreme—like when watching a little TV becomes watching every night for hours and hours. It's when a simple activity starts to take up more and more of your time and energy and causes you to put off dealing with things you're worried about or don't want to do. Unfortunately, this can lead to a *vicious circle* of behavior. That's when distractions pretty much take over your life. For example, hanging out with friends is great and can be an effective way to de-stress. But spending all your time with friends—day and night, in person or online—to distract yourself from difficulties at home or school shows a pattern of avoidance.

**Overachievement.** Some serious avoidance activities can appear to be positive. For example, people who are bothered by some deep problem

may get super-involved in activities and overachieve to try to overcome negative feelings they have. They may excel in the classroom, be star athletes, and stay active in many school clubs. People who do this may seem to be totally together, but all of their activity is really a way to avoid dealing with the main problem.

**People who overachieve often don't have the time, energy, or awareness to address the root feelings of stress.** This can quickly become a vicious circle—the more time spent staying busy, the worse a person might feel. The more badly they feel, the more active they become. Around and around it goes in a spiral, down into a deeper and deeper hole of isolation. Vicious circles can close in from all sides, growing tighter and tighter. Because the people affected are so concentrated on trying to keep it all together, they may not notice things steadily getting worse.

**Procrastination.** Pretty much everyone puts off boring or hard tasks from time to time. Some of the smartest, most motivated, and successful people are known (or secret) procrastinators. When you occasionally put things off, you can pretty much survive—even if it means a late night of studying at some point. But continuously using procrastination as an avoidance strategy can invite a vicious circle—one where mountains of things pile up for you to do, and you develop more drastic ways to avoid facing it all. Before long, you might have a stress-filled mess of missed deadlines, poor excuses, and confused priorities.

**Procrastination is most dangerous when it becomes a way of avoiding the hardest parts of life—like tough problems at home, breakdowns in your relationships, or difficulties at school.** When you put off dealing with really hard problems or emotions, you can find yourself living with high levels of anxiety or confusion. You might end up feeling panicked or isolated until something inside you breaks. It's like slowly shaking a can of soda. Things look the same from the outside, but when you pop the tab—POW—you have one big, nasty mess on your hands.

