

# Open Forum 1

## Web Site Transcript

### Chapter 7

A = Reporter, B = Doctor, C = Jerome

A: Tonight's topic—stress in the schoolyard. America's teenagers are getting unhealthy, and not from fast food, but from a fast pace of life. We investigate why. I'm standing outside the Benjamin Franklin High School in downtown Philadelphia. Franklin High is a good school. The students here work hard, get good grades, and go on to good colleges and universities. But behind the success lies a growing problem. Here's Dr. Jane Carson of Philadelphia Children's Hospital.

B: I see a lot of patients from Franklin High, and I believe that high school can be an unhealthy environment for teenagers.

A: Really? Are you talking about weight problems or lack of exercise?

B: Sometimes. But the biggest danger is stress.

A: I see.

B: Stress is everywhere in high schools—in the classroom, on the sports field, and in the schoolyard. And it's having a seriously detrimental effect on the health of our children.

A: I'd like you to meet Jerome. He's 17 years old and he's a student at Franklin High. Jerome was a straight-A student. He played basketball, and had lots of friends. Then, last year, everything changed. Jerome, would you tell us what was going on?

C: I was just really stressed at school. The classes were really hard, and my parents and teachers were always talking about choosing a college. And I knew that if my grades went down, I wouldn't be able to get into a good university.

A: So, what happened?

C: Well, the stress was really bad. I couldn't concentrate anymore because I was always so worried about the future. I started getting Ds and Fs in my classes. And that meant I was dropped from the basketball team. I loved basketball. Playing sports helped reduce my stress! So, the situation just got worse.

A: So bad, in fact, that Jerome's parents took him to see a doctor. Dr. Carson, what did you think about Jerome when you first met him?

B: When I first saw Jerome, he was depressed.

A: Is that unusual for a bright student like him?

B: Unfortunately, no. When a young person has a lot of stress from many different sources—school, sports, parents, friends—he can easily get depressed.

A: Why is that?

B: At this age, it's difficult for most teenagers to set priorities—that is, they don't always know what's important and what's less important. So, sometimes, everything in their lives becomes really important. You know, the brain has limits, too. If you're thinking about too many things, you can't concentrate on immediate needs.

A: So, that was Jerome's problem. His chronic stress made him unable to do his schoolwork. And because his grades were low, he couldn't play on the basketball team. And because of that, he didn't see his friends on the team as much.

B: That's exactly right.

A: But, how common is this problem, Dr. Carson? Does it only exist at top high schools and in top students?

B: No, not at all. I was at a conference last month with doctors from all round the U.S. and Canada—Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, Toronto. Everyone had similar stories about stressed and depressed teenagers. This is more than just a local problem, and it's affecting students from all different backgrounds.

A: So, what's the solution?

B: There's no easy cure for depression! But, I believe that we need to change the social environment first. So, I talk to the parents and encourage them to put less pressure on their child. It's good to ask about grades, but not to emphasize them too much. I talk to teachers and coaches to help them understand their students. If they know that a student is depressed, they can help a lot. For example, a teacher can give a little more time for an assignment. Finally, I encourage the student to schedule some time for relaxation—to listen to music, or go to the movies, or just talk with friends.

A: Back here at Franklin High, Jerome is feeling better, thanks to Dr. Carson's help. Jerome's story has a happy ending. He's applying to colleges, and his parents, teachers, and friends are supporting him, not pressuring him. But the problem of stress isn't going away. For more information on stress and our young people, visit our Website at...