

High school students reflect on the stress in their lives at Teen Symposium in Appleton

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(Photo: Wm. Glasheen/USA TODAY NETWORK-W, USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin)

APPLETON - Laurene Rottier knows she worries too much about her grades.

If she's not happy with a grade, the Kimberly High School sophomore will talk to her teacher, try to earn extra credit and learn what she can do better next time.

She has to stop herself from stressing about it. Music helps. Maybe some food. And a nap couldn't hurt either.

"That's really helpful for me at least," she said.

Rottier is on a youth board that helped United Way Fox Cities organize this year's Teen Symposium, which focused on teen stress and was held Monday at the Radisson Paper Valley Hotel in downtown Appleton.

The event attracted about 300 students from 16 local high schools to listen to speakers and talk to each other about stress and the challenges they face in their daily lives, said Mandi Dornfeld, organizer of the event for United Way Fox Cities.

"We're really focusing on wellness," she said. "Stress is a huge issue for kids in high school."

The source of stress for many students was increasingly busy schedules, academic challenges and concern for their future after high school.

"Thinking about college debt makes my hair want to fall out," Rottier said. "It's insane."

A panel of older high school and college students answered questions from high school freshmen about challenges they've faced and how to balance multiple responsibilities at the same time.



A crowd listens as Jack Loken, a student at Xavier High School, speaks as part of a panel during the United Way Fox Cities' Teen Symposium on Monday at the Radisson Paper Valley Hotel in Appleton. Wm. Glasheen/USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin. (Photo: Wm. Glasheen/USA TODAY NETWORK-W, USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin)

Marki Hietpas, a junior at Little Chute High School, was on the panel and told freshmen students they shouldn't be afraid to ask for help if they need it, even if it means going to counseling.

Hietpas said she sought counseling and eventually began taking medication after she struggled with anxiety as a freshman. But she found support in other places, too.

"I talked to my mom a lot," she said.

A few handwritten posters on the walls offered encouraging messages — "You can do this" — as students asked questions of the panel.

Esteban Guerra, a senior at Neenah High School, was also on the panel and said the source of stress for high school students doesn't always have to be as serious as academics.



Students take part in a Yoga tutorial during the United Way Fox Cities' Teen Symposium on Monday at the Radisson Paper Valley Hotel in Appleton. (Photo: Wm. Glasheen/USA TODAY NETWORK-W, USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin)

"It could be something as small as what clothes you're going to wear," he said. "There are a lot of people judging you in high school."

Tony Gonzalez, vice president of community development for United Way Fox Cities, said it is important for students to find balance to cope with all the stress they're feeling in their lives.

"Students feel a lot of pressure to achieve and excel," he said. "I know some high school students that are a lot busier than I ever was when I was younger."

Students tend to lean on each other for help. Rottier said she has taken calls from friends in the middle of the night who were worried about a test the following day or stressed about other things in their lives.

"It's nice to have people around you that will calm you down," she said.