

# ON THE MOVE

# Under Pressure

Jill Emerson had just completed a grueling match for her tennis team at Churchville-Chili High School. As mid-evening approached, she had not yet eaten dinner. And she was already laden with homework from her first day of classes.

"I don't know what time I'm going to sleep tonight," admitted Jill, 15, a parishioner at St. Christopher Church in Chili.

Jill added that she frequently logs less than five hours of sleep a night.

"If I sleep, things won't get done," she explained.

To some people, Jill's first day as a high-school sophomore might read like a prescription for getting stressed out. Yet based on comments from teens interviewed for this story, Jill's pace appears quite normal for her age group.

Normal, but not necessarily healthy.

During an Aug. 2 workshop on stress management — held at the Diocesan Youth Convention at SUNY Geneseo — Jill and other participants were asked to assess how much time they allot to such daily activities as sleep, social time, homework, phone calls, television and prayer.

Jill estimated that her typical day added up to ... 36 hours. Her over-planning tendencies were not unique; a majority of the other teens, also, found their schedules totaling well over 24 hours.

"Twenty-four hours a day is just not enough time anymore," Jill remarked.

As a result, Jill said, her stress level sometimes rises to an undesirable level.

"I get really touchy. If somebody

says something, I just snap at them," she said.

Tight schedules are surefire paths to stress, noted Erin Hannan, from St. Stephen's Church in Geneva. For instance, Erin juggled participation in sports, student council, yearbook and a school musical at Geneva DeSales High School last year. In addition, she also strives to meet the high academic standards set by her older brother, Luke, a senior at the school.

"I feel like I kind of have to live up to him, so that puts stress on me, too," said Erin, 15, a sophomore.

Katie Scozzafava can relate to the pressure of following a successful sibling. Katie, a sophomore at Nazareth Academy, was preceded by a sister, Karen, who graduated second in her class in 1996 and also starred in athletics.

"People would look at me as Karen Scozzafava's little sister. I let school bother me a lot," said Katie, 16, from Sacred Heart Cathedral.

Erin observed that many high-schoolers become stressed out because "they know everything they do academically is going to affect what college they get into, what career they're going into and how much money they're going to make. Colleges look at how well you do and how many extracurricular activities you're in."

Jill said that the shift from childhood to adulthood is also a major source of stress for teens.

"We're still growing up, still learning. So we don't know how to manage our time well enough," Jill said.

"We want more responsibility, but with responsibility comes more stress," said Matt Massa, 15, from St.

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- Matt Massa

Leo's Church in Hilton.

Katie noted that peer pressure surrounding drug usage, smoking, sexual activity and drinking also contribute toward teen stress. Dating ranks high on her list of stress-related issues as well.

"I see my friends who have a boyfriend, and they get me jealous. I feel pressured; as a 16-year-old, I feel like I should have that," Katie said.

Sarah Pavlina said she sometimes becomes so stressed that she loses track of her priorities.

"I don't even want to go to church in the morning. I'm so busy with everything else, I kind of forget how important that part of your life is," said Sarah, 15, from St. Mary of the Lake Church in Watkins Glen. She is a sophomore at Dundee Central High School.

All these pressures, Jill observed, can mount to disturbing levels.

"Some of my friends will start to cry because they have way too much to do," Jill said. "I want to help but I can't, because I have too much to do, too."

Matt added that other people's stress often adds to his stress level.

Story by staff writer Mike Latona • Photograph by Greg Francis

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