



Angela Ruggiero  
**ON STRESSING OUT**

# Angela Ruggiero

**ICE HOCKEY; OLYMPIC GOLD MEDALIST; TWO-TIME U.S. NATIONAL TEAM MEMBER**

14

From the time I was 8 years old until 14, I was the only girl on the boys' ice hockey team and the only girl in the whole league. The guys on my team were always great—like brothers to me. But the boys on the other teams were pretty cruel.

They would swear at me and call me names. They would try to make fun of me, call me a man. And they would even call me fat. Even their parents, in the stands, would shout out, "Get the girl! Get the girl!"

I was nervous and fearful of what I would face at each game. Who would be picking on me? Which big goon would they send out after me? What names would they call me? I would watch the boys' faces to see who was looking at me the wrong way. I would always hear, "She doesn't belong here."

It's a good thing that I was bigger than most of the boys. I learned to deal with the worry and nervousness. I was determined to prove them wrong. Of course I belonged there!

All of this prepared me to deal with the incredible anxiety I felt when I went away from home at age 14. I had an amazing opportunity—a scholarship to a great prep school in Connecticut, with

a great girls' ice hockey team. But I was leaving home at 14, leaving my friends and team, and leaving warm, sunny California.

I was so nervous. I was worried about the schoolwork. I was worried about the new team. I was worried about the kids—would they like me? Would I fit in? I was concerned about the cold weather. But I was most anxious about what to wear. What did they wear at prep school "back East"? I had no idea. I was so anxious—I was having sleeping problems. My body would start to shake. It felt like my head was racing.

Then I got to Choate. I had to adjust—I was the complete outsider. Something else was new for me—skating on an all-girls' team. At first, I wondered if I would be good enough. Getting out on the ice to skate changed all that. It was a lot of fun playing on the girls' team, and they soon became my close friends.

Being good at sports really helped me through all this. All I had to do was gear up and get on the ice, and all my confidence would come back. I was so comfortable as an athlete. It helped to calm me down. I kept thinking—it's just a game. It's a game that I'm good at. It's a game that I love.

**"BEING GOOD AT SPORTS REALLY HELPED ME THROUGH ALL THIS"**

# STRESSING OUT

Adults aren't the only ones who stress out. Everyone, especially girls your age, has stuff go on in their lives that can cause stress and worry. Your family is having money problems. You're getting teased for being a tomboy. The person you have a crush on doesn't even know you exist. Even just getting dressed and wanting to look fly for school can stress girls out. Practically every topic in this playbook, from drug pressure to the skinny struggle can make your muscles tense, your bottom lip quiver and your teeth grind...if you let it.

Some kinds of stress are actually good and can help you out. Think about it. Before a big competition, you get butterflies in your stomach and your palms sweat like crazy. That's stress. The adrenaline that pumps through your body making you nervous actually helps energize you to step it up and play hard. The same thing goes for anxious feelings you get before a test, performance or even an important talk with your parents.



## Deal With It!

- Pay attention to your body when you get worried—take time to relax and calm down
- Exercise—move the stress out of those muscles (run, jump, ride, whatever works!)
- Laugh—think of funny stuff to get your mind off of it
- Talk, write or sing it out—to yourself or someone who's a good listener
- Learn relaxation tricks—yoga, meditation, visualization or a trusty old-fashioned nap

When life gets hot, I stay cool. Keeping it real for me means venting when I get mad, blowing off steam when I get heated. I really like the yoga thing. It gets me into this calming zone.

Stressing out is a normal part of life. It's how you react to a stressful situation that is key. If you do not have a way to name your stress and drain your body and mind of it, your body and mind can get messed up! Let's say your mom is getting divorced—again—and all the changes and heavy emotions are building up inside of you and making you feel tense and anxious. Your basketball game is in a slump, you can't focus at school and you have this whacked out pain that won't go away in your neck muscles. You need to not just ignore the stuff that's tripping you out—you need to recognize that it can become a big problem and figure out how to let go of it. Find a way that works for you to release your stress—maybe it's by talking to a friend or expressing yourself in

## Red Flags

### Do YOU HAVE ...

- Tight muscles
- Headaches/Dizziness
- Stomach aches and other problems
- Shortness of breath
- Grinding teeth
- Tremors and shaking
- Trouble sleeping
- Speech problems

### YOU'RE HEADED FOR ...

- Concentration/memory problems
- Difficulty in school and sports
- Anger, isolation, suicidal thoughts

a journal, poem or other artistic way. If you need something more, take an hour each day to walk in your favorite place or paint in your bedroom with your favorite CD blasting or ask someone older than you for help.

Stress happens. Don't let it take over your life. Get rid of it in whatever healthy way works for you, go to someone you trust for help if you need to and keep on keepin' on. There's far too much fun to be had in the world to let stress build up and get you down.

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION, CALL OR SURF:

- A **National Institute of Mental Health**  
1-888-ANXIETY
  - [www.mhsource.com](http://www.mhsource.com)      Mental Health Information
  - [www.nmha.org](http://www.nmha.org)      Mental Health Information
- Additional resources are listed in the Resources section of this Guide.*