



Make Prevention a CHOICE

Children and Stress

Stress is a normal everyday part of life for both adults and children. Stress is a natural part of children's lives and becomes harmful only when the stress begins to overwhelm the child. Parents can teach their children how to deal with stressful situations. Remember, children learn from their parents; including how to manage stressful situations.

Preschool Age

Preschoolers are too young to use problem-solving skills to work through most situations. They need your reassurance and support because they have little control over their own lives.

Common Stressful Situations: Addition of a new baby to family, being separated from parents, changing daycare or preschool, and anything scary or unknown.

Common Signs of Stress: Nightmares, being more irritable than normal, becoming more clinging or demanding, and crying more than usual.

What You Can Do

It is your responsibility as a parent to pick up on these warning signs of stress and respond to them because your child does not understand the stress he/she is under. You can help your child understand the situation by trying to explain it in a simple reassuring language. A parent can encourage a child to talk about his/her feelings and fears. Do **NOT** tell your child that his/her fears are silly or unreal; they are very real to him/her. You may be able to ease a child's tension and stress by being understanding, supportive, and giving affection. Holding a child may ease stress and increase sense of security. Set an example for your children by showing them how you positively manage your stress.

School Aged Children (6-12 yrs)

Life can be stressful for children of this age group because they are learning to deal with pressures at home and how to cope with a world that now involves school and friends.

Common Stressful Situations: Having to make new friends, jealousy of siblings, pressure to make good grades, worrying about their changing bodies, being criticized, and peer pressure.

Common Signs of Stress: Children may regress to younger behaviors such as bed wetting, they may withdraw, develop sleep problems, develop speech problems, difficulty at school, stealing, lying, cheating, sadness, crying, and frequent accidents.

What You Can Do

Encourage your children to talk about problems and be there to listen as they try to work out their problems. This will help your child develop problem solving skills. Those children with supportive and

understanding parents cope best with stress. If there are problems with school, talk with teachers to set realistic goals for your child. Sometimes children take on too many activities and become overwhelmed, or not enough and become isolated.

Be patient with your children; show them that you care about the problems they are dealing with and that you are available to help them work through situations that are causing them stress. This will teach them how to manage stress when they become adults.

Sometimes it may be necessary to seek outside help. If your child is in trouble at school or has problems you feel are beyond your parenting skills, you may want to seek advice from a mental health professional. If your child is "too perfect" he/she may also be experiencing excessive stress. You can try different techniques, like the family council or talking with teachers and school counselors.

Teenagers

Growing up is one of the most stressful parts of being a teenager. Teenagers worry about physical appearance, sexuality, changing bodies, and searching for their identity. Teenagers are sensitive to criticism and often have a low self-esteem.

Common Stressful Situations: Relationships, taking tests, lack of self-confidence, nervousness about competition, and taking on too many activities.

Common Signs of Stress: Eating or weight changes, excessive daydreaming, drug abuse, unusual tics. Teens often respond to stress by withdrawing, becoming rebellious, and getting into trouble. Learning to deal with stress and problems in a constructive manner will help him/her to learn to deal with stressful situations as adults and they will gain a positive attitude about themselves.

What You Can Do

Keep the lines of communication open. Let your teenager know that he/she can come to you to discuss stressful situations. Teens often want your attention more than your advice. Listening to your teen may be the best help you can give to him/her. If you give advice, be careful, your teen may take it as criticism. If you start to see signs that your child is using drugs or talking about suicide, seek professional help immediately! You can watch for signs of depression, risky sexual practices, and personality changes.

Ways To Help Your Child Learn To Cope With Stress And Pressure

- Teach your child how to solve problems. He/she needs to learn how to identify problems, weigh their possible solutions, and select what is best for them.
- Take the time to talk and listen to your child. Let them know what is happening in the family without burdening them with your stress and problems. When your child does something well, compliment him/her and remember that children need affection.
- Teach your child that quiet time and physical activity can be relaxing.
- Show your child that you can positively cope with stress. Be supportive and respectful of your child.

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