

HELPING KIDS COPE WITH STRESS

YES, EVEN CHILDREN EXPERIENCE STRESS. Stress can be caused from schoolwork, changes at home such as divorce, moving to a new school or town, dealing with a traumatic event such as a hurricane, or being exposed to tragic events through the media. Toxic stress can have a negative effect on children's brain development.

All individuals react differently to situations and children react within their developmental stage. What one person may find extremely stressful may not be stressful to someone else; and how one child reacts to stress may be entirely different from another child. It is important to help your children learn to identify what causes them stress and learn healthy ways to cope.

Learning healthy ways to deal with stress at a young age will help them cope with difficulties they will experience throughout their lives. Before you can help your children, it is important to first recognize your children are dealing with stress.

SYMPTOMS YOUR CHILD IS DEALING WITH STRESS:

Changes in sleeping pattern

- Fear of sleeping alone
- Nightmares
- Sudden onset of bedwetting

Mood swings

- Irritable or withdrawn
- Overwhelming feelings of sadness
- Overreacting to minor problems
- Throwing tantrums

Complaining of physical pain

- Headaches
- Stomachaches

Teasing/bullying others



As a parent, you can offer the following support:

- Offer an opportunity for children to talk about how they are feeling and why
- While listening to your child, label out loud the names of the emotions he might be feeling (For example: You must have felt it was unfair/disappointing)
- Create problem solving solutions together
- Be a positive role model
- Keep kids on a regular schedule
- Encourage healthy eating and proper rest
- Help kids plan and prioritize school assignments—time management skills help decrease feelings of stress
- Provide play experiences and exercise where children are able to release built up tension such as playing a sport, taking a walk or riding a bike
- Tell or read stories about other children in similar stressful situations
- Give hugs and back rubs—physical attention is always comforting

WHEN GOING THROUGH A DIVORCE, separation or other family changing situation:

- Let the child know they are not to blame
- Do not involve children in adult disputes and try to handle conflicts when children are not present
- Work with the other parent to provide a consistent routine for the child
- Let the child ask questions and remember to do what is in the child's best interest

WHEN MOVING to a new school or town:

- Prepare your child for the move to the new surrounding and allow them to express feelings of sadness for leaving their old school
- Take a tour of the new school and allow them to be familiar with places such as the bathrooms, libraries, and principal's office before their first day
- Keep kids on their regular schedule, especially meals and bedtimes
- Help your child make new friends by introducing them to different social settings with kids their own age
- Make sure to keep the lines of communication open and check-in daily with how your child is adjusting
- Be a role model and think positively

WHEN DEALING WITH A TRAUMATIC EVENT:

- Allow your child to mourn; give them time to heal
- Let them ask questions and answer honestly
- Limit your child's exposure to the tragic event—children may feel the event is still happening and many pictures from the media may be too graphic for children, especially when they are young
- Kids want to know everything will be okay. Take the opportunity to tell them about the kindness and support others offer those affected by the event

HERE'S HELP



Use the **Family Resources on pages 91–95** to learn about a variety of family support services available in your community.