

Helping Children Cope with Stress



STRESS can affect anyone—even a child—who feels overwhelmed. Stress comes from the demands placed on a person and his or her ability (or perceived ability) to meet them. Childhood stress comes from outside sources (family, friends, school, illness, death of loved ones, divorce, and disasters) and from within (pressures children place on themselves).

What are the signs my child is feeling stress?

- Mood swings
- Acting out
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Bedwetting
- Stomachaches
- Headaches
- Nightmares
- Separation anxiety
- Overreactions to problems
- Drastic changes in academic performance
- Refusal to participate in activities
- Trouble concentrating
- Problems completing schoolwork
- Withdrawal
- Regression (common in younger children; may include thumb sucking, hair twirling)
- Lying, bullying, and defiance of authority (common in older children)

You may not be able to keep your child from feeling frustrated, sad, or angry, but you can help him or her cope with these emotions. Seek help when problems appear to be serious and/or interfere with daily living. Talk to your child's doctor or a counselor.

How can I help my child?

- Make time for your child each day.
- Give your child lots of hugs and kisses.
- Notice your child's feelings out loud.
- Listen to your child—allow him or her to talk about things that may be causing stress.
- Help your child by discussing potentially stressful situations and helping him or her prepare for them.
- Just be there. Respect your child and tell him or her you'll be there when he or she is ready to talk.
- Be patient. Resist the urge to fix every problem. Help your child grow into a good problem solver.
- Avoid talking about your troubles around your child.
- Ensure that your child gets proper rest.
- Ensure that your child gets proper nutrition - balanced meals and regular eating times.
- Ensure that your child gets enough exercise.
- Avoid overscheduling. Help your child manage his or her time and responsibilities.
- Ensure that your child has play time and quiet time.
- Monitor exposure to news about trauma.

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