



Children's Health

Stress

HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD HANDLE IT

The ideal memories of childhood are of innocent, fun-filled days spent playing. In truth, childhood is not without its stresses. Many are part of the normal growth process, some are societal and some are imposed by unexpected events such as divorce or death. Children may react to stress with behavior that may appear to be immature, inappropriate or disturbing to you. Since most stress can't be avoided, children need to learn tools to cope.



WHAT A PARENT CAN DO

- Help your children understand what's happening to them by reading books about what's bothering them.
- Encourage your children to tell you their feelings. Listen and accept how they feel without always offering solutions.
- Be aware that when you're feeling stressed, they are, too. Feeling alone heightens the stress. Set aside time with each child every week.
- Find a calm, quiet time to talk with your children. Help them recognize their bodies' reactions to stress. Do their palms sweat? Do their stomachs ache? Do they have headaches?
- Teach your children how to calm down with deep-breathing exercises. Teach them to take slow, deep breaths and imagine that they're sucking in air all the way to their feet. Then have them exhale the "stressed" air and let go of tense feelings.
- Encourage them to imagine a comforting mental image. They can picture themselves safe in bed, on the playground, cuddling with a family pet or sitting on a parent's lap. They can include as many details as possible of the image they choose.
- Remind them of and show them unconditional love. Let them know that not bringing home an "A" does not diminish the love you feel for them.
- Let them know it's OK to cry. Crying is a natural stress reliever.
- Let them know that their efforts make a difference.
- Reassure them that some things are not their faults. Life comes with stresses that can't always be controlled.
- Help them eat a well-balanced diet. Avoid foods containing sugars, caffeine or chemicals. Offer healthy snack foods such as fresh fruit and vegetables, crackers and fruit juices.
- Encourage your children to exercise if they feel stressed out.

