



## TALKING TO YOUR KIDS ABOUT...



# Stress

## Overcoming Childhood Pressures

**P**arents may wonder why their children should have to worry about stress. But today even kindergartners face pressures their parents may not know of.

Academic and social competition, fear of violence, divorced parents and confusion over sex and drugs are sources of stress for children who are too young to deal adequately with such things. A child suffering from stress may not be able to identify what's bothering her. Parents need to watch for the warning signs of stress in their children.

### **Warning Signs of Stress**

Youngsters react to stress in various ways. Some may spend more time than usual on their homework, never being able to "get it right." Others may simply give up in frustration. Children feeling social anxiety may withdraw from friends.

When a child is under stress of any sort, he may act anxious or depressed and can no longer cope with situations he once handled well.

### **When Parents' Stress Affects a Child**

Children are more sensitive to their environment than many parents realize. Your marital, financial or job-related stresses can affect them. If this happens, try to reassure them that you're strong enough to handle the situation.

No matter how bad things get, try not to use your child as a sympathetic ear by telling her all your troubles. Although some youngsters may seem calm and impervious to stress, no child has the inner resources for dealing with stress that an adult does. Love and caring among family members is the best way of getting through difficult times.

### **What You Can Do**

The best way for parents to help their children avoid stress is through unconditional love—the kind that says "I will love you no matter what." If your daughter knows you'll love her even if she doesn't get an "A" on her next exam, she's less likely to feel overwhelmed by schoolwork. The

same goes for your son's performance in sports or social pursuits. If the stress has an identifiable cause—for instance, procrastinating on school assignments—you can work with them to help them avoid the problem in the future.

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