

Helping Your Children Cope with Stress

By Carol Denbow

Compared to our lives as adults, it may seem as if children don't have any stress at all. But children can experience stress just as much or more than adults. They may not show outward signs of stress because children experience stress in different forms. It is important to identify and help you children cope with the stressors in their lives on a daily basis.

When children are asked what causes them stress, the most common answers are school, homework, grades, family, friends, peer pressure, and being teased. Some children respond to stress by injuring themselves, over-eating, losing their temper, or being silent. Others, in a healthier effort of coping, might play, listen to music, watch TV, play video games, cry, or talk to their parents. It's crucial to your child's mental and physical health that they utilize positive means of relieving stress.

Parents need to watch and be aware of their children's stresses and help them deal with them. Otherwise, children may practice unhealthy ways to cope. When parents teach their children the right ways to cope with stress, they are teaching them habits the children will use to better cope with stress as adults.

The following are general guidelines to assist you in helping your child identify and cope with stress.

1. When you notice an emotional change in your child, ask them how they're feeling and if there is something on their mind. Give them the opportunity to express themselves.
2. Children often have difficulty opening up their feelings to their parents for fear of being judged. Show patience and compassion. Actively listen to what they have to say.
3. Avoid being judgmental or telling them they had made a mistake, and that they have caused this outcome and stress.
4. Help your child find coping strategies. Find out what they enjoy doing that relaxes them and help them incorporate those activities into his or her life.
5. Be there for them with open arms, love, and understanding. Children aren't stupid; they're just small people with real stress.

If you as a parent are suffering from stress, learn and practice your own stress relieving exercises. Stress can be contagious; and when an adult close by is experiencing stress,

it can reflect back to the child.

Just as adults do, children can learn and practice healthy stress-relieving techniques. Once you've mastered your own mental and physical stress-reducing exercises, pass on the lesson to your children. You will be helping them to set a foundation for living a more stress-tolerant lifestyle.

The truth is, children want help from their parents. They want to talk, get help with their problems, and just spend time together. Dedicate time to spend one-on-one with your child every day.

Paying close attention to your children's emotional needs is the best way you can help them cope with stress. If your child is noticeably depressed and refuses to discuss the reason with you, you may want to seek professional help.

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