

Understanding and Relieving Parental Stress

By Carol Denbow

While parenting is a joyful, noble, and fulfilling experience, it can also bring stressful challenges into your daily life. Recent studies have shown that parents have significantly higher levels of stress and depression than people without children.

Surprisingly, those parents who showed more symptoms of stress and depression were parents of adult children still living at home, parents of adult children living away from home, and parents who do not have custody of their minor children. Those who showed the least stress and depression symptoms were parents living with their minor biological children, their minor adopted children, and those parents living with their minor stepchildren. It had originally been assumed that the latter parental groups would have experienced the greater amount of stress.

Single parents showed greater levels of stress and depression than married parents. It had also been assumed, and has now been found to be untrue, that women would be the more likely candidate for stress and depression. It seems, however, men and women are equally affected by stress and depression in parenthood.

Even after the children had moved out of the house, these symptoms remained. This may be because no matter how old their children are, parents still worry about them. The emotional toll of being a parent can be high.

Stress does not automatically come from things that happen to you, it comes from how you choose to respond to things that happen to you. If we can't control the situation around us, we can learn to deal with it in a way that makes it less stressful.

Parents need to take extra care of their emotional and physical needs in order to reduce stress. Unfortunately, people often turn to unhealthy methods of relieving their stress. Alcohol, drugs, or smoking seem to be the most common method to relieve tension. Incorporating positive and healthy stress-relieving techniques into your daily routine can help you maintain a better emotional balance and make you a better parent.

Distracting our stressful thoughts can provide quick relief and doing activities we enjoy provides a good outlet for our stress. There are many healthy ways to cope with and reduce physical and mental stress. Exercise, stretching, hobbies, yoga, Tai Chi, and even playing with your pet are all good physical coping methods. Meditation, music, and breathing exercises are wonderful mental outlets for our stress. Finding healthy avenues of relief to replace the bad ones will give you more energy and stamina, and will improve your overall outlook on life.

While quick fixes and certain activities may provide temporary relief from our daily stressors, they won't resolve the problem, which may have initiated the stress. Search out the cause and make a personal effort to change what you can to improve your situation and reduce future stress. It is important to openly discuss the issues causing your stress with your family. Once they are aware of your feelings, it may be easier for them to help you cope.

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