

Wellness Articles

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Proposed publication date: June 20, 2016

Content provided by: Alberta Health Services – Addiction and Mental Health

Helping your child deal with stress

Childhood isn't all fun and games. Even young children can feel worried and stressed.

Stress can come from outside, such as family, friends, and school. It can also come from children themselves. Just like adults, children may expect too much of themselves and then feel stressed when they feel that they have failed.

How can you help your child with stress?

Adults can help children and teenagers with stress in many ways. Three important things you can do are to:

- Try to reduce the amount of stress in your lives.
- Help them build positive coping skills.
- Teach them to let stress out.

Reduce the amount of stress in your lives

- **Acknowledge your child's feelings.** When children seem sad or scared, for example, tell them you notice they are sad or scared. If appropriate, reassure them that you can understand why they would feel sad or scared.
- **Develop trust,** and let your child know that mistakes are learning experiences.
- **Be supportive,** and listen to your child's concerns. Allow your child to try to solve his or her own problems, if appropriate. But offer to help and be available to your child when he or she needs you.
- **Show love,** warmth, and care. Hug your child often.
- **Have clear expectations** without being too strict. Let your child know that cooperation is more important than competition.
- **Don't over-schedule your child** with too many activities.
- **Be aware** of what your child wants (not just what you want).

Build positive coping skills

It is important to help children learn positive coping skills. These skills are often carried into adult life.

- **Provide a good example.** Keep calm, and express your anger in appropriate ways. Think through plans to reduce stress, and share them with your family.
- **Teach them about consequences.** Children need to learn about the consequences—good and bad—of their actions. For example, if they do all of their chores on time, they will get their allowance. If they break another child's toy, they must find a way to replace it.
- **Encourage rational thinking.** Help your children understand what is fantasy and what is reality. For example, help them see that their behaviour did not cause a divorce, or that they are not failures because they were not picked first for something.
- **Provide them with some control.** Allow your children to make choices within your family framework. For example, allow them to arrange their rooms, choose family activities, and help make family decisions.
- **Encourage them to eat healthy foods,** and emphasize the importance of a healthy lifestyle.

Get the stress out

Finding ways to get stress out of their systems will help children feel better. The best ways to relieve stress are different for each person. Try some of these ideas to see which ones work for your child:

- **Exercise.** Regular exercise is one of the best ways to manage stress. For children, this means activities like walking, bike-riding, outdoor play, and individual and group sports.
- **Write or draw.** Older children often find it helpful to write about the things that are bothering them. Younger children may be helped by drawing about those things.
- **Let feelings out.** Invite your child to talk, laugh, cry, and express anger when he or she needs to.
- **Do something fun.** A hobby can help your child relax. Volunteer work or work that helps others can be a great stress reliever for older children.
- **Learn ways to relax.** This can include breathing exercises, muscle relaxation exercises, massage, aromatherapy, meditating, praying, yoga, or relaxing exercises like tai chi and qi gong.
- **Laugh.** Laughter really can be the best medicine. You can be a good role model in this area by looking for the humour in life. Your child can learn this valuable skill by watching you.