

Kids and Stress

You're not the only one stressing out.



Childhood is a time of fun, games, and carefree living...right? We like to think so, but these days, many kids are stressed. You may not think kids have much to be stressed about, but they can be under pressure at school, have high expectations placed on them by parents, or be in the midst of a family breakup. And unlike adults, children haven't had the chance to learn healthy coping skills.

Is your child stressed out? If so, what are the possible causes, and what can you do as a parent to help your kid cope?

God will never give you anything you can't handle, so don't stress. - **Kelly Clarkson**

Stressors for Kids

Stress is not a bad thing. Your body needs a certain amount of stress to function and learn. However, too much stress for children can hinder healthy development, lead to destructive behaviors, or cause health problems. Stress can come in many different forms and can affect kids at any age. Some of the most common stressors for kids are school, grades, homework, family problems, peers, friends, gossip, and bullying. Think about your child's situation. Could he or she be experiencing unhealthy amounts of stress in any of these areas?

How Kids Cope

Children display stress differently than adults. Many times they keep their emotions pent up inside and then exhibit them in physical ways like headaches, stomach aches, or even nausea. Young children may begin to regress to behaviors such as bedwetting, frequent crying, whining, temper tantrums, or being especially clingy. A child who is normally active and boisterous may become listless and quiet. Or a child who is usually docile and obedient may become angry and act out. Older children may become withdrawn and irritable, and schoolwork and relationships

may suffer. Teenagers may turn to drugs, eating disorders, bullying, or sex to cope with their stress.

Kids have varying coping strategies when it comes to stress in their lives. Without some sort of coping mechanism, the stress may become overwhelming. Some kids cope by distracting themselves with playing, listening to music, watching TV or playing video games, talking to a friend or parent, eating, crying or losing their temper, trying to fix the problem, or even taking stress out on themselves in unhealthy ways (banging their head, hitting or biting themselves).

How Can Parents Help

Unless you have abnormally talkative and open children, they probably won't come right out and say they need your help, but they do. Children need their parents to talk with them, to cheer them up, to help them fix what's bothering them, and to just be together. As a parent, you can't always prevent your child from feeling stressed, sad, or angry, but you can help them recognize and express their feelings in healthy ways.

Listen to your kids and ask questions to help them understand and express what they're feeling. Teach them healthy coping skills like talking out problems, performing breathing exercises, maintaining a sense of humor in all situations, or getting plenty of physical exercise. You'll also need to set a good example for your child. If you get angry and start yelling when you're stressed, expect your child to act the same way. If you come home and drink alcohol after a stressful day, don't be surprised if your teenager does the same thing. A child who knows how to deal with stress in a healthy way will be better prepared to function as an adult in a stressful world.

What children need most when it comes to managing stress is a strong family unit. When they feel loved and secure in their place in the family, they will be better able to face challenges that come their way.