

HELPING KIDS MANAGE STRESS



Children today encounter many stressors, from academic pressure and after-school activities to shifting friendships, social media, and family responsibilities. While a small amount of stress can build resilience, too much unmanaged stress may affect mood, sleep, concentration, and overall health. By understanding what stress looks like in children and teaching them healthy ways to cope, parents and caregivers can help kids thrive emotionally and physically.

Recognize the Signs of Stress

Stress doesn't always show up in obvious ways for kids. Be alert for signals such as irritability, frequent headaches or stomachaches, loss of interest in favorite activities, appetite changes, or withdrawal from friends and family. Younger children may show stress through clinginess, temper tantrums, or regressions in behavior. Recognizing these signs early allows you to step in with support.

Teach and Practice Healthy Coping Skills

Helping children develop a 'toolbox' of coping strategies equips them for life. Simple techniques such as deep breathing, stretching, listening to music, journaling, or creating art can help calm the nervous system. Encourage outdoor activities like biking, hiking, or simply playing at the park, which combine physical movement with the natural stress relief of fresh air. Practicing these activities together can reinforce their importance and normalize stress management.

Maintain Healthy Routines

Consistency and structure help children feel safe and supported. A regular sleep schedule, nutritious meals, and predictable routines can reduce stress and create a sense of security. Equally important is balance—kids need downtime and unstructured play just as much as structured activities. Overscheduling can heighten stress, so allow space for rest and fun.

Create Open and Supportive Communication

Children need to feel heard. Encourage them to talk about what worries or overwhelms them. Practice active listening—maintaining eye contact, asking gentle follow-up questions, and avoiding judgment. Even if their concerns seem small to you, validating their feelings teaches them that their emotions are important and manageable. This open channel of communication also makes it more likely they'll turn to you when bigger issues arise.

Model Positive Stress Management

Children learn best by observing the adults around them. Demonstrating calm problem-solving, talking openly about your own healthy coping strategies, or showing how you use relaxation techniques provides a living example. When you respond to challenges with patience and positivity, your children learn that stress can be managed rather than feared.

When to Seek Professional Help

Sometimes stress may go beyond what a family can manage alone. If stress starts to disrupt your child's daily life, school performance, or relationships, it may be time to seek additional support. School counselors, pediatricians, or child-focused mental health professionals can provide guidance and resources tailored to your child's needs.

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