



Stress in Kids May 2012

While many parents often feel the stresses of parenting their children, it is important to recognize that children also experience stress; even very young children have worries and feel stress to some degree. Stress is a function of the demands placed on us and our ability to meet them. Adults tend to view the world of children as happy and carefree, but that isn't always the case. Some stress is normal. But childhood stress has ranked as a top health concern among children. (<http://stress.about.com>) The demands can come from outside, such as family, school, friends and such, but it can also come from within: what we think we should be doing.

Sources of Stress:

- Separation from parents in early school years
- Academic and social pressures for older kids
- Over-scheduling: kids need time to relax, play creatively
- World news such as war, terrorism and natural disasters
- Their parents worries: trouble at work; a relative's illness; arguing between spouses or adults in the home; financial issues
- Factors such as illness, death or divorce can complicate and add to stress kids already have

Remember: talk about adult worries when children are not present. Even when kids are in their rooms or in another part of the house while parents are talking, they hear and can pick up on a number of things. Children will pick up on parents' anxieties and begin to worry. Some of these may not be a big deal to the adults, but can cause significant stress for kids.

Reducing Stress:

- Proper rest and nutrition boost coping skills
- Make time for children every day; make yourself available to them
- Express an interest in their day
- Talk about what could be causing stress and work on solutions
- Anticipate stressful situations and prepare kids
- Let them know it's okay to feel some stress and reassure them
- Breathing exercises help one to stop, relax and refocus
- Drawing pictures to express feelings; journaling for older children
- Play and care for pets
- Participate in sports or other types of exercise
- Ask for a hug when they need one
- Enjoy music
- Provide "down time"

Teach Coping Skills:

- If a child won't talk about their stressors, try talking about your own and show them that you are willing to tackle tough topics, both for you and for them
- Books can help young kids identify with characters (*Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* by Judith Viorst; *Tear Soup* by Pat Schweibert, Chuck DeKlyen, Taylor Bills; *Dinosaurs Divorce* by Marc Brown and Laurene Krasny Brown)
- Seek professional attention if behaviors persist; if stress causes serious anxiety; when problems at home and school are cropping up
- Teach skills dealing with optimistic, positive thinking and help them to trust in themselves

Helping children learn to manage stress will assist them now as well as help them to have less stressful adult lives because they have learned the skills to face what will inevitably come their way. Most parents have skills to help their children deal with stress, but if your child won't talk with you about the behaviors you see, contact a counselor or therapist. **Remember, SCIP at your child's school is also available to assist you.**

Please consider these ideas as you plan a relaxing summer...Reduce Stress!