

SPECIAL EDITION

Issue: Spring 2012

EVERYONE HAS S-T-R-E-S-S!



Sorry, there is no such thing as a stress free life. No matter how hard we try to simplify or untangle our lives, there will always be a need for strong coping skills. As adults, we become accustomed to a certain degree of chaos, but children are just learning to adjust to the unpredictable world around them.

There are many causes of stress in children. Some children are very sensitive, and any type of change or unforeseen circumstances can cause their bodies to go on high-alert. Other children are more "thick-skinned" and even-keeled, and not much bothers them.



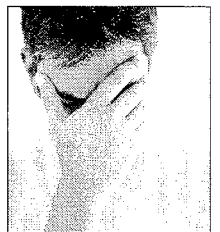
There are certain situations that consistently spark stress and they are all around us. At school, stress can come from an unstructured classroom, unclear or unreasonable expectations, or fear of failure. At home, stress can occur through a lack of family routines, overscheduling, prolonged or serious illness, poor nutrition, chronic financial difficulties, family strife or abuse. With peers, stress can be a result of changing school

buildings, having to deal with a bully, fitting in with the crowd, or moving to a new community.

How do you know if your child is stressed out? Although stress looks different for everyone, no one knows your child like you do. If you see big changes in irritability or emotionality, you may want to dig a little further to find out what is going on. You may not be able to make the problem go away, but you sure can help the way it is handled.

The most common symptoms of stress in children are sleep problems, inability to focus, physical complaints, toileting problems, social isolation, anxiety or a big drop in grades.

Find a comfortable spot in your house to put your feet up and relax. Remember, your children's emotions are often a reflection of yours. Sometimes you have to look into a mirror to see how much stress has affected your busy life. Take charge! The constructive changes that you make can serve as a positive model for your children.



IN THIS ISSUE:

Everyone Has Stress	1
What is Stress?	1
Stress Busters For You and Your Child	2
Little Things That Can Go A Long Way	2
The Ultimate Stress Relief	3
Good Stress and Bad Stress	3
How Children Cope With Stress	4
The Self-Talk Strategy	4
Books For Children On Stress	4

What Is Stress?

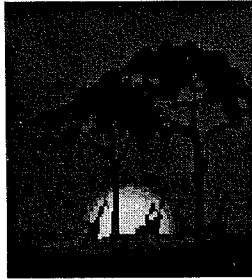
Stress is a feeling that's created when we react to particular events. It's the body's way of rising to a challenge and preparing to meet a tough situation with focus, strength, and heightened alertness.

The events that provoke stress are called **stressors**. Stressors include a whole range of situations, from facing life-threatening danger to making a class presentation.

Source: KidsHealth.org

STRESS BUSTERS FOR YOU AND YOUR CHILD

Parental stress can affect children. Research indicates that children feel sad, frustrated, worried, annoyed, helpless, angry, or scared when their parents are experiencing stress in their lives.



Prepare your child for upcoming activities that you anticipate will be stressful by talking openly about what to expect and how to handle it. Be careful not to overreact to situations, which can cause unnecessary anxiety.

Stress at home can also be linked to stress in the classroom. A few stress reducers that may be beneficial for you and your family can include:

1. Give yourself a time-out when you feel yourself getting to the point of annoyance. Walk away to a quiet place.
2. Repeat a calming phrase that will help you control your emotions, such as *"You are good at what you do. Relax, you can do this."*

3. Be proactive by taking ten minutes out of your busy day to do something that you really love. Read a book, have a cup of coffee or just put your feet up and recharge your batteries.

4. Imagine yourself in a quiet peaceful place, such as the beach on a sunny day.

5. Do elevator breathing. Pretend that you are on an elevator on the top floor. Each deep breath that you take brings you down a floor until you are at ground level.

6. Find the spot on your body where you feel the most tension, tense that muscle up for 3-4 seconds, and then relax it. Repeat until the tenseness subsides.

Any healthy technique that you choose to cope with stress would be beneficial for your family. The key is finding what works best in any given situation. Experiment with different ways to deal with difficult situations until you find something that works.

*Ride a bike * Run * Watch a movie * Write a letter * Get ice cream * Nap * Read a book * Hike * Call an old friend * Laugh*

LITTLE THINGS THAT CAN GO A LONG WAY

How Parents Can Help:

- Be aware of your child's behaviors and emotions.
- Build trust with your child.
- Listen to your child without judgment.
- Be available and open to talk with your child when they are ready.
- Teach and model good emotional responses.
- Encourage your children to talk to you when they feel overwhelmed.
- Encourage healthy and diverse friendships.
- Encourage physical activity, good nutrition, and rest.
- Teach your child to logically problem-solve.
- Limit your child's time on computers and video games.
- Use predictable consequences for poor behavior.
- Help your child select appropriate extracurricular activities, and limit over-scheduling.
- Give your child some ownership in decision-making, when appropriate.
- Monitor television programs that could worry your child, and pay attention to their use of computer games, movies, and the Internet.
- Make children aware of the harmful effects of drugs and alcohol before experimentation begins.
- Monitor your own stress level. Take care of yourself.
- Contact your child's teacher with any concerns regarding changes in behavior or mood.
- Seek the assistance of a physician, school psychologist, or school counselor if the stress escalates.



The Ultimate Stress Relief: A Good Support System

The best defense for stress is to have a good offense. You and your children need a person or group with whom you can confide in. Whether it's to vent frustrations or share secrets, talking to others is a great outlet for releasing stress.

The first step is to find peers that you can trust. This is not always an easy thing to do. Trust is so valuable, yet so elusive at the same time. When you find a person that you can rely on, cultivate that relationship. Good news or bad, a friend that stands behind you is the one that you should cherish forever.

Look for a support system that respects how you feel, without judgment or criticism. Having a neutral sounding

board is important for airing ideas as well as frustrations. Having respect means that communication is mutual and open. Not having to deal with repercussions or negativity allows for unconditional support, which combats stress by not letting the pressure build.

Building a support system also requires honesty. Constructive feedback is extremely helpful in fueling positive change. When we make ourselves stronger, we are in a better position to deal with everyday stressors.

Don't underestimate the power of a good support system. Being proactive and discussing feelings of stress is much better than waiting until you are totally overwhelmed without anyone to talk to.

Stress is when you wake up screaming...

And you realize that you haven't fallen asleep yet.

Anonymous



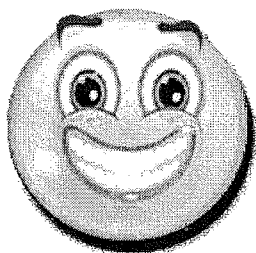
Good Stress and Bad Stress... *and the wisdom to know the difference.*

Good stress is when the fear of some upcoming event is so powerful that it motivates you to take positive action.

You plan, research, pick brains or go above and beyond to prepare yourself.

Although the feeling of uneasiness is not pleasant, the results are rewarding. Think about giving a big speech to strangers.

The stress can actually push you to a higher ability level that you may not have achieved without it.



Bad stress is destructive.

You get stuck, your thoughts cycle, and you spin your wheels until you totally exhaust yourself.

The weight of this stress holds you down and hinders your ability to perform.

You may get tired easily, you look defeated and snap at people who don't deserve it.



Embrace good stress.

Create a plan to minimize bad stress.

How Children Cope With Stress



Children may practice a variety of their own stress-relieving techniques. As a parent, you may want to talk through a problem, but this approach may not work for your child. Remember it isn't about what skills are effective for

you, but what clicks with your child.

Research tells us that the most popular coping strategies children reported using were doing something active, listening to music, watching TV, playing video games or talking things out. As long as any of these strategies are not hindering education, fitness or relationships, they can be viewed as constructive, if done in moderation.

There are also some unhealthy strategies that children have reported doing such as overeating, temper outbursts, self-harm, substance abuse or aggressive behavior. These are poor choices that need more positive replacements.

Building stress-relief tools is a life skill that everyone needs to develop. The first step is to help your child identify their stress sources, and then assist in generating options for coping with them. Some strategies may be immediate, and some may involve making a long term plan, but either way, it's a really good place to start.

Watching your child struggle with stress can be hard, but just being present even when your child doesn't want to talk right away is equally important. Sometimes children just need to know that a parent is there to support them if needed.

The Self-Talk Strategy

I can do it!

The concept of self-talk involves having dialogue with yourself to improve focus and enhance self esteem. Saying things like "*I have an exam and I am going to do well!*" is an example of positive inner language.

Self-talk helps concentration by repeating the steps relating to fundamental skills, especially in sports. This mental repetition increases the probability that a technique will be stored in the body's memory. Combine this process with visualization, and the chances for improvement are very high.

Self-talk also works to enhance self-esteem and protect the confidence level. When others make negative comments, self-talk can drown out those counterproductive words and help a person maintain a good sense of self-worth.

Discuss the philosophy of constructive self-talk with your child. If you want to be creative, have him/her construct a rap song with the lyrics being their own personal self-talk. If they memorize the song, they can listen to the it any time they need a confidence boost.

BOOKS FOR CHILDREN ON STRESS

(Ages 8 and up)

Don't Stress! How to Keep Life's Problems Little by Nancy Krulik

Stress Can Really Get on Your Nerves!
by Trevor Romain and Elizabeth Verdick

Be the Boss of Your Stress (Be The Boss Of Your Body) by Timothy Culbert M.D. and Rebecca Kajander

Past Tense: Healthy Ways to Manage Stress (Slim Goodbody's Life Skills 101) by John Burstein



SPECIAL EDITION

Written by Barb Butcher
Edited by Susan Quinn
School Psychologists

School City of Hammond

Dr. Walter J. Watkins, Superintendent
Connie Manous, Special Ed. Director
219-933-2400

Hammond School Board

Deborah White, President
Anna Mamala, Secretary
George T. Janiec, Member
Cindy Murphy, Member