

Stress Management Tips For Your Children

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It is never easy for parents to know what to do for a child who's feeling stressed. As the world works towards herd immunity to contain the spread of the coronavirus and its mutated strains, parents and caregivers of children are living through a moment of great anxiety. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), children may respond to stress in different ways such as being more clingy, anxious, withdrawn, angry, agitated, or even bedwetting. Respond to your child's reactions in a supportive way by listening to their concerns and give them extra love and attention. Try keeping children close to their parents and family by avoiding separation from their loved ones as best as possible.

The American Psychological Association (APA), says the key to helping children manage stress is teaching them to problem-solve, plan and knowing when to say yes or no to activities and commitments. The idea is not to make everything smooth and comfortable but to ensure children and teens are taught how to manage stress, so they do not begin to self-medicate with food, drugs and alcohol. In other words, they will reach for something to make them feel better right away, and usually it won't be something healthy. Stress can also lead to mental health problems such as anxiety and depression, disorders that are becoming more common in youth.

Since stress is a natural part of life, your goal is to teach your child and teen healthy strategies for coping with their stress. The silver lining is that when they get the chance to practice dealing with setbacks at this age, they develop resilience and the tools needed to be an independent adult, successfully handling future challenges. Children who have a clear sense of personal competence, and who feel loved and supported, generally do well. Here are some tips you can use to help your children and teens manage their stress successfully:

#1 Notice out loud:

Tell your child or teen when you notice that something is bothering him or her. If you can, name the feeling you think they are experiencing. Be sympathetic and show you care and want to understand.

#2 Listen to your child:

Ask your child to tell you what's wrong and listen attentively and calmly, with interest, patience, openness, and caring. Avoid any urge to judge, blame or lecture, just take your time and let your child take his or her time, too.

#3 Comment briefly on the feelings you think your child was experiencing:

Doing this shows that you understand what your child felt, why, and that you care. Feeling understood and listened to helps your child feel supported by you, and that is especially important in times of stress.

#4 Put a label on it:

Many younger children do not yet have words for their feelings so if your child seems angry or frustrated, use those words to help them learn to identify the emotions by name. Doing so helps children communicate and develop emotional awareness while being less likely to reach the behavioral boiling points where strong emotions come out through behaviors rather than communicated with words.

#5 Help your child think of things to do:

If there's a specific problem that's causing stress, talk together about what to do. Encourage your child to think of a couple of ideas. You can start the brainstorming if necessary, but don't do all the work. Your child's active participation will build confidence and you should support the good ideas and add to them as needed.

#6 Listen and move on:

Sometimes talking and listening and feeling understood is all that's needed to help a child's frustrations begin to melt away. Afterward, try changing the subject and moving on to something more positive and relaxing. Help your child think of something to do to feel better and don't give the problem more attention than it deserves.

#7 Just be there:

Children and teens don't always feel like talking about what's bothering them and sometimes that is fine, as long as you let them know you'll be there when they are ready. Despite not wanting to talk though, children don't necessarily want parents to leave them alone so you can help them feel better just by being there. Keep their company and spend some time together by suggesting or initiating something you can do together.

#8 Be patient:

As a parent, it hurts to see your child unhappy or stressed, but try to resist the urge to fix every problem. Instead, focus on helping your child, slowly but surely, grow into a good problem-solver, someone who knows how to roll with life's ups and downs, puts feelings into words, calms down when needed, and bounces back to try again.

Covid-19 has created a stressful period for everyone, including and especially your children and teens but the message you send to them about it and their ability to handle it makes a big difference in their ability to get through it. Remote learning and not being able to see their friends or participate in fun activities is both sad and stressful too. Work on modeling how to maintain a positive attitude while being realistic with them about the fact that the situation isn't ideal. Show them you are willing to work on managing the stress in a healthy way because they will learn a lot by watching how you cope with the ongoing distress of the pandemic.

Parents can't solve every problem as children and teens go through life, but by teaching healthy coping strategies, you'll prepare them to manage the stresses that come in the future.

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