

Stress Got You Crazy?

Parenting is one of the hardest and most important jobs you will ever have. It can be demanding, challenging, and tremendously rewarding all at the same time. You need to remember that being a good parent, requires that you take care of yourself and that you ask for help when you need it.

- Take care of yourself! Be sure that you have a support system in place - friends, family, coworkers – people you can relate to and share your parenting challenges with. Having people support you as a parent is critical to your ability to deal with life's stressful situations.
- Be flexible and choose your battles. Sure, the kids may rebel at eating broccoli but is it worth making mealtime a battle? When you feel yourself about to explode, stop, take a deep breath, then take another. Even giving yourself a few moments before you react can be long enough to calm you down.
- Learn about child development. When you are about to lose your cool over your child's behavior, check to see if your expectations for your child are realistic. It is all too easy to assign your child a chore or expect a certain behavior from them that they may not be developmentally ready to tackle.
- Ask for help! Every community has a variety of resources that can and will make parenting a little easier. Look for programs through schools, community centers, and churches. It is all too easy to overlook your own symptoms of depression or anxiety when you are focusing on raising children.
- Remember that your children are only young once and being young naturally leads to mistakes. When you hear the plate crashing to the floor in the kitchen, remember you are dealing with a child – not an adult. Children learn by making mistakes and losing your temper is not the most effective way to teach them good behavior.

Adults tend to believe that children are happy and carefree without a concern in the world. The reality is that children often find themselves under a lot of stress but they do not know how to express their feelings well enough to tell you what is going on.

Stress in kids can come from outside sources (friends, family, school, sports, etc.) but just like adults, they can put a great deal of pressure on themselves. Kids know when they are expected to perform a certain way and they are more than capable of stressing themselves out over grades and extracurricular activities. In addition, parents can unwittingly put extra stress on kids by pushing their kids to excel in school or sports. Kids are also very receptive to their environment and can pick up on the stress in your life and find themselves overwhelmed.

Signs of stress in kids include:

Physical – stomach aches, nervousness, headaches, nausea, bed wetting, insomnia, nightmares

Emotional – lack of interest, moodiness, lashing out, irritability, depression, crying

Mental – forgetfulness, inability to concentrate, wide variations in school performance, disorientation

Behavior – wanting to be alone, nail biting, aggressive or withdrawn behavior, lack of energy, clinginess

As a parent, you need to watch for signs of stress in your children and talk to them about how to deal with their emotions and feelings. Take care of their physical and emotional needs. If your child will not talk about their stress, be an example and tell them about the stress in your life and how you deal with it. Take time to teach your kids simple stress relieving techniques like relaxation, deep breathing, positive thinking, and other coping skills. Remember, quality time with mom or dad is as important for a teenager as it is for a toddler.