

What is Stress - Tips for Parents

Everyone is affected by stress and reacts to it in different ways. Stress is a way that our body responds to the demands made upon us by the environment, our relationships, and our perceptions and interpretations of those demands. We all experience both “good stress” and “bad stress.” Good stress is that optimal amount of stress that results in our feeling energized and motivated to do our best work. Good stress encourages us to develop effective coping strategies to deal with our challenges, which ultimately contributes to our resilience. Bad stress occurs when our coping mechanisms are overwhelmed by the stress and we do not function at our best. The same event can affect children and adults in very individual ways—one person may see a carnival ride as thrilling and another may see it as a major stressor. Stress can become distress when we are unable to cope or when we believe that we do not have the ability to meet the challenge. The solution is to adapt, change, and find methods to turn that bad stress into good stress.

Causes of Stress*	Symptoms of Stress in Children
At School. Stress can come from an unstructured classroom, unclear or unreasonable expectations, or fear of failure.	Irritability or unusual emotionality or volatility
	Sleep difficulty or nightmares
	Inability to concentrate
At Home. Stress can occur through a lack of family routines, overscheduling, prolonged or serious illness, poor nutrition, change in the family situation, financial problems, family strife or abuse, or unclear or unreasonable expectations.	Drop in grades or other functioning
	Eating or toileting concerns
	Headaches or stomachaches
	Unexplained fears or increased anxiety (that also can take the form of clinging)
Peer-related. Stress can be a result of changing school buildings, having to deal with a bully, trying to fit in with the crowd, or moving to a new community.	Regression to earlier developmental levels
	Isolation from family activities or peer relationships
	Drug or alcohol experimentation

**Stress tends to be additive in nature and with children can result in inappropriate behaviors, academic difficulties, or health problems. Parents can usually look back over recent events and see the causes of the behavior through the building of stressful situations.*

How Parents Can Help

- Encourage physical activity, good nutrition, and rest - maintain a regular routine for meals, exercise, and sleep.
- Build trust with your child - be available and open to talk when your child is ready. If family circumstances are contributing to the stress, be willing to answer questions honestly and calmly.
- Help your child aside time to relax and engage in recreational activities.
- Help your child select appropriate extracurricular activities and limit overscheduling.
- Encourage healthy and diverse friendships.
- Help your child have a part in decision-making when appropriate.

- Remind your child of his or her ability to get through tough times, particularly with the love and support of family and friends.
- Make your child aware of the harmful effects of drugs and alcohol before experimentation begins.
- Monitor your own stress level as a parent. Take care of yourself. Model positive coping strategies.
- Contact your child's teacher with any concerns and make them part of the team available to assist your child.
- Seek the assistance of a physician, school psychologist or school counselor if stress continues to be a concern.

Community Resource: Contact Anne Arundel County Systems of Care - Information and referral specialists are available to help callers find local RESOURCES for Children and Families [800-485-0041](tel:800-485-0041) or www.infoannearundel.org.

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