

## Stress in Children and Teens



Children and teens notice and react to [stress](#) in their family and also experience their own stress. It is important to recognize stress in children and teens and help them with healthy coping strategies. The strategies they learn often stay with them into adulthood.

Generally, anything that may cause children fear and anxiety can cause stress. This can include being away from home, starting a new school or moving to a new location, being separated from parents or caregivers, worrying about school and getting along with others, worrying about their changing bodies, and worrying about the future.

The following are some common signs of stress in different age groups.

### Signs of stress in children and teens

Preschool and toddlers	Elementary-age children	Preteens and teens
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anger</li> <li>• Anxiety</li> <li>• Eating and sleeping problems, including nightmares</li> <li>• Fear of being alone</li> <li>• Irritability</li> <li>• Regressing to infant behaviors</li> <li>• Trembling with fright</li> <li>• Uncontrollable crying</li> <li>• Withdrawal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being distrustful</li> <li>• Complaining of headaches or stomachaches</li> <li>• Feeling unloved</li> <li>• Having no appetite</li> <li>• Having trouble sleeping</li> <li>• Needing to urinate frequently</li> <li>• Bed-wetting</li> <li>• Not caring about school or friendship</li> <li>• Acting withdrawn</li> <li>• Worrying about the future</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anger</li> <li>• Disillusionment</li> <li>• Distrust of the world</li> <li>• Low self-esteem</li> <li>• Stomachaches and headaches</li> <li>• Panic attacks</li> <li>• Rebellion</li> </ul>

### Helping with stress

Adults can help children and teens with stress in many ways. Two important ways are creating a low-stress environment and helping them develop positive coping skills.

The following can help develop a low-stress environment:

- Acknowledge your child's feelings. If appropriate, reassure them that you can understand why they would feel sad or scared.

- Develop trust and let your child know that mistakes are learning experiences.
- Be supportive and listen to your child's concerns. Allow your child to try to solve his or her own problems, if appropriate. But offer to help and be available to your child when he or she needs you.
- Show care, warmth, and love. Hug your child often.
- Have clear expectations without being overly rigid; emphasize cooperation over competition. Do not over-schedule your child with too many activities.
- Find ways to have your children contribute to the family.
- Build on the strengths of the family.
- Be aware of what your child wants (not just what you want).

It is important to help children develop positive coping skills, as these skills are often carried into adult life. You can help by:

- Providing a good example. Keep calm and express your anger in appropriate ways. Think through plans to reduce stress and share them with your family.
- Encouraging rational thinking. Be sure your children think about consequences of their actions. Help them understand what is fantasy, and what is reality. For example, a child's behavior did not cause a divorce, or they are not failures because they were not picked first for something.
- Providing them with some control. Allow your children to make choices within your family framework. For example, allow them to arrange their room, choose family activities, and help make family decisions.
- Talking openly. When appropriate, talk about your stressful day. Encourage them to talk about what is bothering them.
- Finding a physical activity and/or hobby that they enjoy and encouraging them to participate.
- Encouraging them to eat healthy foods and emphasizing the importance of a healthy lifestyle.
- Learning and teaching your children relaxation skills such as breathing exercises, muscle relaxation exercises, meditating, praying, yoga, drawing, or writing.

## Health Tools

Health Tools help you make wise health decisions or take action to improve your health.

Actionsets are designed to help people take an active role in managing a health condition.

- [Stress Management: Helping Your Child With Stress](#)

## Related Information

- [Healthy Habits for Kids](#)
- [Stress Management](#)
- [Growth and Development, Ages 15 to 18 Years](#)

- [Stress Management: Helping Your Child With Stress](#)
- [Headaches in Children](#)

## Credits

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