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Stress Management For Children : A Guide For Parents

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Stress Management for Children: A Guide for Parents

Joseph E. Balog, Ph.D. and Linda F. Balog, Ph.D.
Stress Management for Children:
A Guide for Parents
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A Guide for Parents

by Joseph E. Balog, Ph.D. and Linda F. Balog, Ph.D.
Illustrated by Susan Covert

The Child and Adolescent Stress Management Institute
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DEDICATION

To our children,
Chad, Corey, and Casey
who enrich our lives and make our job
of parenting that much easier.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The staff of The Child and Adolescent Stress Management Institute are delighted to share with you this manual on childhood stress. Many people helped in making this manual a reality, and we are deeply grateful to every one of them. Either directly or indirectly, each person noted below played a significant role in moving this manual along the road from ideas to a completed project. We could not bring you this information on childhood stress without these individuals, and we are very thankful for their contributions and support.

First and foremost, we want to thank New York State Senator Ralph Quattrociocchi for helping us procure financial support for this project from the State of New York. Without this financial aid and Senator Quattrociocchi’s concern for the health of children, this project would never have progressed from the stage of a proposal to the final stage of a publication. We are also deeply indebted to Kathleen Richards who played a significant role in helping us write this manual. Her writing and editorial skills were essential to this project and her friendship and desire to help children in need were invaluable.

Special thanks are due to our illustrator, Susan Covert. Her creative insights and talents brought a special touch to our manual that allowed us to express our work in a more effective manner. Special thanks must also be given to Richard Black. Richard’s creative, technical, and administrative advice about design and production were critical in helping us to shape our work into a finished product for publication.

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Finally, we are grateful to our former dean, John Phillips, and our departmental chairperson, Andrew Brown, at the State University of New York. Their administrative support and personal encouragement were instrumental in helping us to continue our work and complete this manual.

Joseph E. Balog
Linda F. Balog
# Stress Management for Children: A Guide for Parents

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As adults, it's not difficult to identify sources of stress in our own lives. We live in a complex, pressured world, filled with concerns over jobs, bills, family, community and more. From our day-to-day hassles to the larger issues, such as illness and death, from our own lives to the issues shaping our world, stress is ever constant.

There's no question that stress is a real presence in our lives — so much so that many health care professionals estimate up to 90 percent of all today's health problems may be stress-related.

Stress management, or the need for stress management — in one form or another — is also a presence in our lives. Some people see stress management as a focused set of actions, such as hobbies, exercise, or socializing. Others view stress management as part of a refined sense of self-awareness, one goal toward the development of a sense of purpose.

When we think back to our childhoods, we remember simpler times, few responsibilities, and a limited number of choices. Consider the world in which your parents were raised. They had a very different childhood from your own. The difference between generations is far more dramatic than just the passage of years, because each successive generation reflects a whole new world.
With that in mind, think for a moment about your child’s world, which is shaped, to a large extent, by economics, politics, the environment, social trends and the media. This indeed is the information age: computers in the classroom and in the home; “space bridges” between the Soviet Union and the United States; satellite dishes in our own backyards. Our children absorb an extraordinary amount of information. And much of it can be deeply disturbing: the homeless, AIDS, terrorism, the controversy over abortion, acid rain, nuclear proliferation, crime, drugs, all of it — and much more.
Consider a few statistics:

- Three in five children born today will be raised in a single-parent household.
- Two in four children aged 13 and under live in dual-career families.
- More than seven million children are in day care.
- The number of latch-key children is on the rise.
- "Quality" time spent with parents is decreasing to an average of about eight minutes per day.
- One in six children has tried marijuana and one in three has tried drinking before the ninth grade.
- In the last 20 years, the percentage of girls under 15 years old who have had sex has tripled.
- Since 1960, the suicide rate for children under 15 has also tripled.
- One out of five children today is raised in poverty.
- Television has commonly become a substitute for family interaction.
- Rates of child abuse are increasing.
- The threat of AIDS has forced adolescents to view sexual relationships as a potential life and death concern.
Now, think about the more immediate pressures on your child: school, sports, after-school lessons. And the family: Perhaps there's been a divorce in your family; or maybe both you and your spouse are in the workforce; or perhaps your family has moved recently. These factors, while commonplace in our society, can be highly stressful to children.

Each life event represents change, to which the child must adapt. And, each change can be considered a stressor. The more a child is exposed to stressors, the greater the child's vulnerability to the effects of stress.

A continuing debate among experts focuses on these questions: How much of a child's nature is formed by his/her environment, and how much is actually the child's own personality? What accounts for the sometimes dramatic difference among children who have been raised in the same environment? Why do some children seem able to handle tough situations with relative ease, while other children find relatively easy situations stressful?

While this manual can't begin to answer that question, we can tell you that a certain amount of stress in our children's lives is inevitable — even healthy. But, when stress in children becomes prolonged, intense or particularly frustrating, it can be harmful.
Among the ways to determine if your child is experiencing unhealthy levels of stress are to become aware of:

—your child’s personality and whether or not your child is resilient to stress or vulnerable to it;
—some early physical and emotional warning signs of unhealthy stress; and
—the types of experiences that your child may be having that would cause high levels of stress.

As you read through this manual, you will find a number of exercises and readings that will help you practice interacting with your child in ways that will help strengthen your child’s sense of self-awareness and self-esteem. These exercises and readings are designed to help you and your child recognize and reduce the negative stress in your child’s life, while building stress-resilience and resistance.

This manual is specifically designed for parents of children in kindergarten through fifth grade – from five to 10 years old. But, the same principles can be helpful in identifying and managing stress in children under five and over 10 years of age.
What is Stress?

There's no mystery to stress — either in adults or in children. Stress is simply the way we physically and emotionally respond to a change in or perceived threat to our lives — big or small, good or bad.

Of course, change isn't the only stressor. We all know that even the daily demands of our lives can be highly stressful. Just as life itself — and the changes that accompany it — are inevitable, so too is stress. But, even if we could avoid stress, we wouldn’t want to. After all, stress is essential to a normal, healthy existence.
It’s important to realize that stress itself is neither good nor bad. The positive or negative aspects of stress come into play in the way we handle the changes in our lives. When stress happens in manageable doses and when we adapt to change in positive stress-reducing ways, our lives become enriched.

The same is true of children. But, there are some big differences between stress in adults and stress in children. First of all, children have much less control over their lives than adults do. The world in which children live is created by adults, who choose neighborhoods and schools. And, secondly, children do not have the reasoning (cognitive) powers that adults do.

As adults, we’ve spent years developing tools that we use when confronted with stress. Time and stress management are becoming increasingly recognized topics. Then, there’s jogging, gardening, cooking classes and other recreational activities. And, of course, there are all kinds of ineffective reactions to stress, such as shopping, gambling, drinking, and others.

Children also have outlets to stress, but almost never recognize them as such. Because children have fewer coping skills and less self-awareness than adults, they rarely make use of the tools that are available to them. When children are disturbed by changes in their lives, they often internalize the pressures that they feel, or they exhibit emotional or physical reactions.
Compare life to the string of a harp. Pulled too tightly, the string first goes out of tune and then breaks. If the string is too loose, it makes no music at all. Only when tightened to just the right amount of tension is the string in tune.

It’s not only a matter of reacting appropriately to stress, therefore, but also a matter of developing stress-resistant personalities to help children cope with the inevitability of stress.

As any harpist will tell you, the best quality strings are the strongest, able to withstand repeated tightening and tuning without breaking.
Raising a Stress-Resistant Child

Life is unpredictable.

No matter how carefully we plan our lives, no matter how precisely we lay out the future, life has a way of surprising us. Some of us welcome change — even the most difficult, because it challenges us to grow. Some of us, on the other hand, resist even the most pleasant change in circumstances, because we like things to remain the same.

But, regardless of our own attitudes toward the transitions in our own lives, it’s important to recognize our responsibilities to shaping our children’s attitude toward life.
Many of our responsibilities as parents are obvious. For example, children crave limits, security and routine. It is the responsibility of parents to provide a warm, loving and stable environment in which structure and boundaries are established.

Other responsibilities include:

—helping our children learn the benefits of healthful living habits, such as proper nutrition, exercise and rest.

—developing and maintaining an atmosphere in which open, honest communication is fostered.

—encouraging our children to cultivate appropriate friendships that will enhance their sense of social acceptance and self-esteem.

—promoting the development of challenging, yet realistic goals, and providing guidance and support that help children work toward the attainment of their goals.

—ensuring that our children have time for fun and relaxation in their lives.

Many parental responsibilities, however, are just as fundamental as those listed above. Yet, these duties are rarely approached with the same forethought and understanding. For example, as parents, we are responsible for helping our children learn to cope with frustration, and for limiting the number of frustrations in their lives.
In other words, it is a parent’s duty to develop a sound strategy for managing stress in children. Some components of that strategy suggested by Dr. Emmy E. Werner might be:

— to accept your child’s temperamental idiosyncracies, allowing some experiences that challenge — but do not overwhelm — your child’s coping abilities;

— to convey to your child a sense of responsibility and caring, and in turn, reward your child for helpfulness and cooperation;

— to encourage your child to develop a special interest, hobby or activity that can serve as a source of pride;

— to model, by your own example, a conviction that life makes sense, despite the inevitable adversities that we all encounter.

Dr. Werner’s research shows that adults can help children — even during periods of intense stress — if children have people in their lives who show commitment and caring. These are attitudes that help insulate the child from negative stress. A sense of purpose in life is the glue that holds the child together, helping them become less vulnerable and more resilient.

Evaluating Your Child's Vulnerability to Stress

Review both the Capable Kid list and the Vulnerable Kid list on the next pages. Place a checkmark next to any behavior that is characteristic of your child.

If most of your checkmarks are in the Capable Kid list, your child has characteristics that will help him or her be more resistant to daily stress as well as to periods of intense stress.

If you have between one and seven checkmarks in the Vulnerable Kid list, your child is slightly vulnerable to stress. If you have between seven and 15 checkmarks in this list, you child is moderately vulnerable to stress. More than 15 checkmarks in this list indicates that your child is very vulnerable to stress.
**Characteristics of a Capable Kid**

- Spontaneous
- Active, energetic
- Happy
- Excited about good things
- Resourceful*
- Confident*
- Opinionated (but open to new ideas)
- Reflective
- Thoughtful, sensitive to others
- Physically affectionate
- Able to confront people when concerned or upset*
- Willing to take risks
- Fond of himself or herself
- Relaxed
- Responsible
- Helpful
- Cooperative
- Able to express feelings easily*
- Able to feel things intensely
- Has a sense of direction in life*
- Has goals and ambitions
- Has a sense of humor
- Has good eye contact
- Can postpone gratification
- Seeks help when needed
- Owns up to mistakes

*The most important characteristics of the Capable Kid.*
Characteristics of a Vulnerable Kid

- Overly sensitive, shy
- Moody, irritable
- Withdrawn, preoccupied+
- Frequently sick without organic cause+
- Constantly needs reassurance
- Defenseless
- Frequently says “I don’t know”
- Lonely, unable to make friends
- Dependent, clinging
- Frequently frightened
- Isolated+
- Secretive, uncommunicative+
- Defensive
- Resists being touched or hugged
- Clumsy, accident prone
- Belligerent, uncooperative+
- Easily angered
- Complains constantly
- Stubborn
- Inability to concentrate
- Impatient
- Eats too much or too little
- Has a generally negative attitude
- Impulsive
- Often tired
- Performs poorly in school (but is capable of doing better)
- Overactive, frenetic
- Has problems going to sleep
- Has poor eye contact
- Laughs nervously
- Has nervous tics
- Stutters
- Grinds teeth
- Has frequent, severe nightmares+
- Bites nails
- Wets bed
- Lies or distorts+
- Takes things that belong to others

+ The most serious characteristics of the Vulnerable Kid
The world of television is filled with families who live in harmony whose only conflicts are those that can be resolved within a 30-minute episode. And, even in less-than-ideal circumstances, television family members always exhibit warmth, affection and mutual respect for one another.

But, we all know that television is not life. Nor is television even a reflection of life. Rather, it is a reflection of fantasy. Life is far richer and much more complex than could ever be depicted in a television show.

Families are composed of individuals — each with a different personality and each with a different set of needs and priorities. Conflict — to one degree or another — is a part of all family life.

All families live with stress in their daily lives, and often share the same stressors.
Some families, however, can successfully manage their stress, while others succumb to it. Some families learn to control family stress, while others allow stress to control their family lives.

Among the most common symptoms of a stressful family are:

— a constant sense of urgency and hurrying; no time for relaxation
— an underlying tension that causes sharp words, misunderstandings, and fighting among siblings
— a mania to escape — to one’s room, car, garage, anywhere just to get away
— a feeling that time is passing too quickly, that children are growing up too fast

Most families experience these symptoms at one time or another. But, if your family always or frequently has these symptoms, your family may be suffering from excessive stress.

On the next page are 25 situations that can lead to an increase in stress in normal family life. Check the 10 that create or have created the most stress your family life. After you have checked those 10, number them 1 through 10 in the order of degree: 1 as most stressful; 10 as least stressful.
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<td>_ Economics/finances/budgeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>_ Guilt for not accomplishing more</td>
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<td>_ Housekeeping standards</td>
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<td>_ Insufficient couple time</td>
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<td>_ Insufficient “me” time</td>
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<td>_ Overscheduled family calendar</td>
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<td>_ Overvolunteerism</td>
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<td>_ Unhappiness with work situation</td>
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<td>_ Children’s behavior/discipline/sibling fighting</td>
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<td>_ Family member(s) feeling unappreciated</td>
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<tr>
<td>_ Lack of shared responsibility among family members</td>
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<td>_ Self-image/self-esteem/feeling unattractive</td>
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<td>_ Spousal relationship (communication, friendship, sex)</td>
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<td>_ Teen behaviors</td>
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Effectively coping with family stress

No family is immune from stress. But, healthy families, even when they are confronted with great amounts of stress, develop effective ways for handling demands.

In general, families who successfully cope with stress recognize and expect stress to be a normal part of family life. They seek solutions to their stress problems instead of looking for a target to blame. They also feel stronger rather than weaker, after having experienced and solved negative stress.

To reduce stress in your family try incorporating some of the following key characteristics into your family life.

In dealing with money:

—Talk openly about money with family members.
—Do not link self-esteem with the amount of money earned.
—Invest time in developing money-management skills
—Take time to teach children about money.

In dealing with children:

—Spend time with your children and enjoy those moments.
—Choose a comfortable parenting style and cultivate confidence in your right to be a parent.
—Develop and communicate reasonable expectations for your child.
—Take time to listen, discuss and effectively communicate with your child.
—Become more interested in relationships than in discipline; set clear, but flexible rules.
—Practice and demonstrate good problem-solving skills.
In dealing with time management:

- Balance work with family life.
- View time as a controllable commodity.
- Schedule time to be alone and with your spouse.
- Be sensitive to stress and take active measures to handle it.
- Set aside time for play and have fun together.
- Assign priorities to your activities.
- Assign household responsibilities to all family members.

Overall, families who cope effectively with stress:

- Have a good sense of self-esteem.
- Exhibit family bonding and optimism with a shared understanding that ordinary stress can be handled.
- Demonstrate empathy for family members who are experiencing problems.
- View the stress which family members experience as normal — not a sign of weakness.
- Work together to develop skills for solving controllable stress-producing problems.

Neighborhoods and Stress

The neighborhood in which you live can be a source of stress to your child. Just as neighborhoods vary, so do the types of stress that can affect the child. But, it's important to note that no neighborhood is stress-free. That is, certain stressors are present in a city neighborhood, that a child would not encounter in a suburban or rural setting. Conversely, children who live in rural and suburban environments are by no means isolated from neighborhood stress.

Consider: regardless of the neighborhood in which you live, your income level or your educational level, you and your family are part of the larger world, a world which is reflected in your own community. For example, poverty, crime, drugs, and other societal conditions are present in every community to one degree or another.

At the same time, each type of neighborhood offers its own unique advantages. City children often learn to appreciate ethnic diversity, access to public cultural facilities, and many other benefits. The child raised in a suburban setting often enjoys the benefits of a more affluent lifestyle (although affluence can also be a stressor). Children brought up in the country are usually more aware and respectful of nature.
A few examples of stressors that might affect your child...

in an urban neighborhood could be:
— noise
— pollution
— crowded conditions

in a suburban neighborhood could be:
— emphasis on materialism
— value placed on sameness of people, lifestyle
— emphasis on competition

in a rural setting could be:
— isolation from other children
— lack of sense of community
— family’s well-being dependent on nature, weather
Schools and Stress

School — and everything that surrounds the experience of school — can be a tremendous source of stress for your child. The causes of school stress are related to the child and/or the learning environment (including the teacher).

The child’s unique personality, social skills, ways of interacting and adapting to the school environment all have an impact on the level of stress that affects your child.
Causes of Stress Related to the Child:

As you work toward building stress-resistance in your child, it's important to help him or her understand that some stressors cannot be changed, while others can be. For example, the child cannot avoid taking tests regardless of the degree of stress that tests might cause the child. Tests, therefore, are among stressors that can't be changed. However, if stress is being caused by lack of preparation for test-taking, that stressor can be changed.

Among the child-related causes of stress in school are:

- personal goals
- learning new social skills and academically-related behaviors
• a conflict between the values learned at home and those taught in school
• personal competence and ability (i.e., expectations of parents, report cards, anticipation of tests, mastery of new knowledge)
• self-esteem
• fear of aggressive behavior from other children (bullies vs. victims)
• peer relationships
• disabilities or special needs
• family mobility, transferring to a new school
• parents' separation or divorce

Of course, there are also a number of causes of stress that are related to the learning environment itself or the teacher:
• clutter, trash, debris on floor
• old, outdated bulletin boards or none at all
• theft, violence, fear of getting beat up
• classes too large, infrequent one-on-one interaction between teacher and child (Teachers usually pay attention to only one-third of the class — responders. Attention to individual students may average only six hours per year.)
• fiercely competitive academic environment
• environment oriented more toward girls than boys (i.e., curriculum not action-oriented)
• overly strict teacher
  —rules with iron hand
  —requires permission for everything
  —keeps material under lock and key
  —doles out harsh punishment
  —criticizes child in front of peers
• tired, burned-out teacher
• dull, boring assignments
• few graded papers returned to students
• overemphasis on improving test scores rather than on learning ("teaching to the test" on standardized tests)
• reading instruction for all kindergarteners
• no instruction
• large-group instruction with no provision made for ability grouping, individual instruction, or learning style
• time pressures
• teacher stereotypes children, imposing false expectations
• children are labeled too quickly and too early
• children forced to deal with adult issues too early
• decreased emphasis on fantasy, play, imaginative activities in kindergarten
• increasing academic pressure at an increasingly earlier ages

Stress is an ever-present and constantly increasing component of the school environment.

Parents have a responsibility to work with schools to undertake a comprehensive approach by teachers, health educators, school nurses, school psychologists, and counselors to promote a healthier, less-stressful environment for children.
Identifying Symptoms of School-Related Stress

Of course, children experience and show stress in many different ways, but usually in a combination of physical, emotional, and behavior symptoms. Check off the symptoms in the following list that you and/or your child’s teacher may be observing in your own child:

- stomachaches
- headaches
- neckaches
- sweating
- dry mouth
- shallow breathing
- faking illness
- “freezing” or going blank
- incoordination
- nervousness or anxiety
- depression
- hair-pulling
- hand-wringing
- thumb-sucking
- nail-biting
- extreme fears
- boredom
- hesitant to talk
- frequent fighting or other aggressive behavior
- unwilling to participate in school activities
- shows lack of interest in reading and learning
- overly worried about grades
- studies very hard, but is average student
- marginal or failing performance
- unable to meet demands of school work
- trouble concentrating
- withdrawal from friends and activities
- upset, and unable to explain why
- irritable, stays angry for long time
- seeks constant attention
- class clown
- disrupts class
- hyperactive
- tells lies, steals, cheats
- trouble with classmates, teachers, principal
- deliberately gets into trouble to be sent out of class
- difficulty sleeping at night staying awake during day
- helplessness
- low self-esteem

Note: Keep in mind that while the symptoms listed here may be caused by school-related stress, they can be considered general symptoms. Thus, they may indicate stress caused by a variety of sources.
## More School Stressors

Below, listed in order of intensity and grade, are some common stress signals that you or your child’s teacher may be observing in your child. In the right-hand column are possible causes of the stress.

### Kindergarten

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stressor</th>
<th>Signal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Uncertainty + fear of abandonment by a parent.</td>
<td>1. Shows fear at nap time; daydreams; has trouble with parents’ leaving; nail-biting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Fear of wetting themselves.</td>
<td>2. Makes frequent trips to bathroom; occasional wetting; nail-biting; thumb-sucking; finger twirling in hair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Fear of punishment/reprimand from teacher.</td>
<td>3. Shows desire to please teacher, but is uncertain how to; fears teacher may not be pleased or may be angry.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### First Grade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stressor</th>
<th>Signal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Fear of riding the bus.</td>
<td>1. Tries to persuade parents to drive him/her to school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Fear of wetting in class.</td>
<td>2. Overly concerned about “what if” situations; daydreams; occasional wetting in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stressor</td>
<td>Signal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Teacher disapproval.</td>
<td>3. Continually seeks approval of teacher; does not show independence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Ridiculed by child peers and older students in the school setting.</td>
<td>4. Becomes &quot;inward&quot;; expresses desire not to go to school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Received first report card - not passing to second grade.</td>
<td>5. Frequent negative self-talk (&quot;I can't do it&quot;) and low self-esteem</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Second Grade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stressor</th>
<th>Signal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Frequently misses particular parent.</td>
<td>1. Wants to go home, be with parent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Fear of not being able to understand a particular lesson (e.g., won't be able to spell words for test, pass test).</td>
<td>2. Inattention, crying, impatience with self.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Not being asked to be a &quot;teacher's helper.&quot;</td>
<td>3. Feels disliked by teacher; seeks any teacher attention — positive or negative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Fear of discipline from teacher.</td>
<td>4. Refuses direct eye contact in a teacher-student activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Fear of being different from other children in dress and appearance.</td>
<td>5. Feels disliked by other children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stressor</td>
<td>Signal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Being chosen last on any team.</td>
<td>1. Doesn’t want to play “this stupid game”; is absent on a given day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Parent conference.</td>
<td>2. Failure to notify parent or take home notices; display of psychosomatic illness on this given day, or “perfect” behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Fear of peer disapproval and fear of not being liked by teacher.</td>
<td>3. Complains about being excluded from favorite activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Fear of test-taking and fear of not having enough time to complete work expectations on any and all test assignments; fear of failure to perform well.</td>
<td>4. Careless work; absence on test day; task avoidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Staying after school.</td>
<td>5. Rushes to complete schoolwork; wants to make commitment for getting picked up on certain days.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Fourth Grade

## Stressor

1. Being chosen last on any team.

2. Peer disapproval of dress or appearance.

3. Fear that a particular friend will select a different friend or share "their" secrets.

4. Fear of student ridicule.

5. Fear of not being personally liked by the teacher.

## Signal

1. Doesn't want to play "this stupid game"; is absent on a given day.

2. Will change clothes several times in the morning before reaching a decision on what they want (and intend) to wear; hostility shown toward adult who selects that day’s outfit.

3. Jealously guards a friendship.

4. Name-calling is "fair play."

5. Wants to associate with the teacher.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stressor</th>
<th>Signal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Being chosen last on any team.</td>
<td>1. Doesn’t want to play “this stupid game”; is absent on a given day team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Fear of losing “best friend” or that friend will share “secrets.”</td>
<td>2. Jealously guards best friend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Fear of being unable to complete schoolwork.</td>
<td>3. Procrastinates on task assignments; completes work carelessly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Fear of peer disapproval.</td>
<td>4. Expects to select own clothing, own activities, own friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Fear of not being a “big sixth grader” next year.</td>
<td>5. Continually generates information/concerns on grades or “passing.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Activities and Stress

Activities, such as sports, art, dancing and music lessons, scouting, and others can be invaluable to the development of a child's social skills, confidence, and sense of self-esteem.

For example, sports can teach children the value of competition and team spirit, provide the basis for friendships, and significantly increase physical fitness.

But, for all their value and popularity, sports can also induce a large measure of stress in children. Too often, the expectations of adults come into play as the emphasis shifts from fun (where it belongs) to performance and winning. In addition, today's children are participating in such sports as football and hockey at an earlier age than ever before, which increases the chance for serious injury.

With so much pressure on excelling in whatever the activity or activities may be, it's important that we help children learn to keep their participation in perspective.

First, make certain it is the child's choice to take part in activities — not peer pressure, parental pressure, or the desire to please the parent. Then, encourage the child to have fun in his or her activities and reward them when they improve their athletic skills. Remember, all children can show improvement in athletic ability at some level. Reward this improvement, it will build a sense of adequacy and positive self-esteem. Here again, the concept of a stress-resistant child becomes important; children need to be able to resist the activity-related pressures that surround them, have a sense of control over their involvement, and feel good about their ability to perform in challenging, yet appropriate tasks.
Society and Stress

Childhood has never been easy. Although we like to think of childhood as a time of innocence, reality is never that simple. While some people are fortunate to have enjoyed childhood years of happiness and comfort, no generation has been without its own problems and stresses.

In this century alone, American children have grown up during wars, in economic depression, laboring in factories and mills, suffering the effects of segregation, and more. Many of those stressors have been eliminated through legislation — child labor, for example, and segregation. But poverty is still an overwhelming fact of life for many Americans, as is racism and other deplorable conditions of our society.

And, in some cases, new stressors have replaced the old:

- the proliferation — and implication — of nuclear weapons; the potential of devastation of our children’s generation.
- environmental issues, including air and water pollution, dangerous pesticides in our foods, oil spills, the extinction of certain species, the “greenhouse” effect on our weather, etc.
- the stability or instability of our economy.
- drugs, crime, violence.
- an increased emphasis on materialism, the acquisition of “things.”
- natural catastrophe, such as earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, floods, droughts.
Television

Much of what shapes our perception of the world and our society comes from television. Does television reflect our society? Certainly. Does society reflect what is shown on the tube? To a large extent.

Today’s child is exposed to issues that can be almost impossible even for adults to handle. These days, few subjects are taboo, and indeed are discussed openly on day-time talk shows and soap operas — if not in the home: drugs and alcohol, violence and crime, incest, abortion, and sexually transmitted disease.

Television plays an enormous role in a child’s development, especially if the quantity and quality of television viewing is not carefully monitored by the parents and caregivers. The average child watches television between four and five hours each day. Many children, in fact, spend more time in front of the television set than they do in the classroom or participating in after-class activities. As our time becomes more constrained, the television is increasingly used as a babysitter.

Television viewing itself is probably not harmful to children, and can indeed be a truly educational medium. But, without guidance, television can produce stress in children.
You’ll want to work to reduce television-caused stress in children by:

- Taking an active role in deciding what types of television programs your child is allowed to watch.

- Limiting the amount of television your child views. Television should not replace other forms of entertainment, such as physical activity, reading, or having fun with friends and family.

- Initiating discussion of whatever issue is presented on the news or in other programming. In other words, if your child is watching a program — including the news — on which a difficult subject is being handled, don’t avoid talking about it. Use such situations as opportunities to openly discuss values, opinions.

- Making sure your child understands that situation comedies, detective shows and other programs as well as television commercials are fiction:
  
  —Life’s problems are rarely solvable in 30 or 60 minutes. Nor are we failures if we can’t solve problems as easily as is shown on our favorite shows. Rather, life presents us with challenges that we can solve over time.

  —Our own lives shouldn’t be compared to the fictional lives of television characters, who are often presented in an idealized manner: expensive clothing, “attractive” people, affluent neighborhoods. These situations are merely entertainment — not reality.

  —Our families shouldn’t be compared to television families, who, perhaps laugh more than we do, or get along with one another better, or have an easier time in school, or have more friends.
How Children React to Stress

Children react to stress in a wide variety of ways, all of which fall into the categories of:

- Emotional
- Behavioral
- Physical

Within each category, of course, there are extremely serious symptoms of stress, for which parents should seek professional attention.

In most cases, emotional, behavioral, and physical symptoms of stress can be handled by being aware of the stress and the stressor and then managing the stress. Naturally, the more stress-resistant your child is, the more your child will benefit from stress management.

Keep in mind, too, that there are many positive stressors in a child’s life. Vacations, holidays, birthdays, school or sports awards and parties can be very exciting — and stressful — occasions for children, and can produce many of the symptoms listed below. Temporary emotional, behavior, and physical symptoms such as excitability, sleep-related problems, and others can often be attributed to specific events in your child’s life.

As you begin to help your child assess and manage stress in his or her life, you’ll want to become aware of these symptoms:
Emotional

- Excitable, impulsive
- Cries easily and/or often
- Fearful of new situations; new people
- Daydreams often
- Overly shy
- Feelings hurt easily
- Worries more than others about being alone, illness or death, etc.
- Defensive; chip on shoulder
- Short attention span
- Frequently unhappy
- Becomes easily frustrated
- Submits to being controlled by friends
- Sulks; pouts
- Frequent nightmares
### Behavioral

- Picks at things (nails, fingers, hair, clothing)
- Sassy to adults
- Has problems making or keeping friends
- Learning difficulties.
- Disobedient; or obeys but is resentful
- Gets into trouble frequently
- Denies mistakes or blames others
- Steals
- Fails to finish projects
- Unable to stop a repetitive activity
- Boasts and brags
- Bullies others
- Tells lies
- Cruel
- Wants to control situations
- Argumentative
- Doesn’t get along with brothers and sisters
- Clings to caregiver
Physical

- Restless
- Speech problems (stuttering, hard to understand)
- Problems with eating (poor appetite; eats compulsively)
- Headaches
- Stomachaches; vomiting; nausea
- Problems with sleeping (can’t fall asleep or needs too much sleep; up too early; up during the night)
- Bowel problems (frequently loose; constipation; irregular habits)
- Vague, frequent aches and pains
- Grinds teeth when awake or asleep
- Clumsiness, even in easy manual tasks
- Continual self-stimulation (thumbsucking, masturbation, etc.)

You’ve been reading about many of the causes and symptoms of stress in your child. In the next section of this manual, you’ll discover how you and your child can learn to recognize and manage the stress in his or her life.
Introduction

Although stress is a part of life that cannot be avoided, harmful levels of stress must be controlled.

But, don’t look for quick fixes to stress, either in your own life or in your child’s. There are no easy answers to the sometimes complex and deep-rooted problem of stress. Effective stress management encompasses a set of skills that are acquired and refined over a lifetime.

Developing a stress-resilient child requires constant nurturing and attention. As a parent, you want to protect your child from the stressors he or she faces today. That’s perfectly natural. It’s also natural for you to want to prepare your child for the stressors he or she will face in the future.

In doing so, however, don’t let the process of providing advice and guidance develop into the process of molding your child. As you help your child learn to manage stress, you need to recognize and respect his or her individuality, autonomy, independence, and uniqueness.

Remember, the goal isn’t simply to teach your child to manage today’s stress; you also want to build a framework in which your child acquires the competence, capabilities, and independence to handle stress throughout life — especially when you’re not around to help.
Keep in mind that one of the best ways to help your child manage stress is through your own example. Demonstrate to your child that stress management is a conscious choice, a daily priority in your own life. And make sure that your child understands that stress management requires commitment. Never let stress management techniques become a chore. The best type of stress management is a strategy that uses a comprehensive, interesting, and fun approach.
Developing and Nurturing a Stress-Resilient Child

The most effective way to help children manage stress is to help them cultivate resilience to stress.

Resilience enables us to bounce back after being stretched by a stressor. Not only does stress resilience allow us to recover quickly, but knowing that we will recover helps us keep the stressor itself in perspective.

In other words, stress-resilience means that we’re less apt to be bothered by the relatively mild stress of our day-to-day annoyances, and more prepared to handle the larger stresses of major life events.

According to Dr. Emmy E. Werner, the key to developing a stress-resilient child is to create a balance between the stressful life events that a child faces and the protective factors that enhance a child’s resilience to stress. Dr. Werner teaches us that we can help children, even when they are experiencing high levels of stress, if children encounter people who give meaning to their lives and a reason for commitment and caring.

That bond with a caregiver — parent, grandparent, sibling, or babysitter — can make the difference between a child who thrives, even in the most difficult conditions, and a child who develops serious learning or behavior problems. Dr. Werner believes that this stress-protecting strategy helps to insulate children from negative stress.

There is a great body of research which shows that children raised in extremely adverse environments can cope well if they have a strong, secure relationship with their parents.

During the bombing of London during World War II, for example, there were mass evacuations of children to safer locations in rural areas. Among the children who were separated from their parents, those who came from warm, loving environments coped better with their new surroundings than those who came from families in conflict. But, the group that fared best of all were children who stayed in London with their parents — even though the devastation of their surroundings was remarkably stressful.¹

Of course, throughout history there are many examples of the significance of the relationship between parent and child in developing resilience to stress. The lesson, however, is timeless. “Each of us can impart this gift to a child,” said Dr. Werner, “in the classroom, on the playground, in the neighborhood, and in the family — if we care enough.”²


What Children Need — Strengthening the Bond

Strengthening the bond with your child is a matter of reinforcing the connection you already have with your child, while creating and communicating an atmosphere of approval, acceptance, and security. Children whose parents approve of and fully accept them tend to develop the self-confidence, independence, and capabilities they need to be resilient to everyday stresses as well as the stresses caused by larger, more significant life events.

Approval and acceptance of your child doesn’t mean that you approve and accept all levels of the child’s behavior, or that you believe that child has reached his or her “best.” It does mean that you believe — and show that you believe — that your child is a lovable, worthwhile individual, one hundred percent of the time. No matter what.

There are no secrets to creating such an atmosphere. But, it does require commitment and consistency, along with some essential ingredients. Perhaps you’ve seen the poem that follows, and have thought about its wisdom. As you read it now, consider your relationship with your own child.
Children Learn What They Live

If a child lives with criticism,  
He learns to condemn . . .
If a child lives with hostility, 
He learns to fight . . .
If a child lives with ridicule, 
He learns to be shy . . .
If a child lives with shame, 
He learns to be guilty . . .
If a child lives with tolerance, 
He learns to be patient . . .
If a child lives with encouragement, 
He learns confidence . . .
If a child lives with praise,  
He learns to appreciate . . .
If a child lives with fairness, 
He learns justice . . .
If a child lives with security, 
He learns to have faith . . .
If a child lives with approval, 
He learns to like himself . . .
If a child lives with acceptance and friendship, 
He learns to find love in the world.

— Dorothy Law Nolte
A Four-Level Strategy for Managing Childhood Stress

Each of the following four levels of stress management for children should be a component of a comprehensive plan. None is an absolute answer to the problem of childhood stress; rather, each works in conjunction with the others.

- Building Self-Esteem
- Creating a Healthy Environment
- Providing Opportunities for Dissipating Stress
- Developing Stress Management Skills
Building Self-Esteem

Children need to feel good about themselves. It is, in fact, one of the most basic and important of human needs: to feel significant as a human being with unique talents, abilities, and a vital role to play in life.

When children feel this way about themselves it is called positive self-esteem. And, it is one of the most fundamental gifts that parents can give to their children. After all, the way in which we view ourselves — positively or negatively — affects everything in our lives, including our ability to handle stress.

Positive self-esteem protects and buffers children from a wide array of stresses, now and into the future.

To help build your child’s self-esteem, you need to provide a warm, supportive home environment, in which you listen, talk, hug and praise your child. Parents should look for opportunities to accent the positive traits of their children, while eliminating negative criticism.
Find something positive and encouraging to say to your child every day. Remember that your child has his or her own individuality and integrity, which you must respect in order to help them develop their own self. The key is to prepare your child for his or her world — not yours — by developing your child’s capability, competence, and security, while nurturing their sense of identity, belonging, and purpose.

The key is to give your praise when your child is involved in positive behaviors. Give your child a meaningful task to do and reward your child when he or she completes the activity. Ideally, you should:

- allow your child to have some choice in deciding what task should be done;
- use a team approach to the activity, where you and your child or other individuals work together on the activity;
- make the task meaningful and challenging; and
- give great positive emotional praise to your child when the task is completed.

Completing these four steps with your child will build a sense of adequacy and positive self-esteem (see the section on Required Helpfulness and Social Responsibility on page 60 for more information on this topic.) In addition to the above, try some of the suggested exercises on the following pages to help in building your child’s self-esteem.
What I Like About Myself

All too often, it's easier to focus on what we don't like about ourselves and others — including our children — than it is to focus on what we appreciate in ourselves and others. Frequently, it's a matter of practice. We need to practice thinking and talking about ourselves and our children in positive, loving terms. The following exercise should be done with your children in order to improve self-esteem.

List five words that best describe you:

Parent:
1. _______________________
2. _______________________
3. _______________________
4. _______________________
5. _______________________

Child:
1. _______________________
2. _______________________
3. _______________________
4. _______________________
5. _______________________

Now write a sentence about what you like about yourself.

Parent: _______________________
Child: _______________________

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Next, write a sentence that describes what you don’t like about yourself.

**Parent:**


**Child:**


Finally, using the examples below, rewrite the negative statement you wrote about yourself as a positive statement.

**Example:** I’m bad at sports.

**Rewrite:** I enjoy being part of the team; it’s okay that I’m not the highest scorer.

**Example:** I hate school.

**Rewrite:** Math isn’t easy for me, but I like the other subjects.

**Parent:**


**Child:**


---

Here’s How I See You

Words can be powerful tools. Receiving positive praise can make you feel good and influence the way you see yourself. The same holds true for children, but in a much more extreme fashion. That is, since children are still in the process of forming their own self-image, praise and criticism has a more significant effect on the way in which they view themselves.

You can help your child think of him or herself in a positive way by practicing using positive words to describe both yourself and your child. Of the descriptive words in the right-hand column, select three that you might use to portray yourself. Then choose three that you would use to describe your child. Next, have your child select three words to describe you and three to describe him or herself.

Parent
I see myself as:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
I see my child as:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Child
I see myself as:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
I see my parent as:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

**Set the Scene:** This step acknowledges the importance of the bedtime ritual to children. Just 15 minutes each night can be highly meaningful to your child.

**Create the Atmosphere:** The atmosphere should be warm, loving, and accepting. Practice good eye contact and physical closeness.

**The Formula:** Comprising four primary statements shared between the parent and child, this formula can be a wonderful way to say goodnight to your child. Dr. Saunders explains that you and your child each say the
following. Then, the other repeats the statement until it is understood correctly.

1. Something you like about yourself.

2. Something you did that day that you feel good about.

3. Something you are looking forward to doing tomorrow.

4. After each person has shared his or her statements, say, "I love you" accompanied by a hug, a squeezed hand, or loving rub on the back.

Making Friends

Friends are an important part of everyone’s life. But, to a child, friends play a crucial role in enhancing self-esteem, learning social skills, developing a support system, and managing stress. Many children, however, don’t always find it easy to make friends. Below are steps that can help you guide your child to more effectively learn skills for making friends:

**Introduce yourself.**

Trading names in a clear, normal tone of voice is a starting point. (For example, “Hi, I’m John.” “I’m Tim. I’m new here.”) This shows confidence on the part of the child who initiates the conversation. Others are attracted to confident people. They tend to respond positively to those who have behaved positively toward them.

**Tell the person about yourself.**

Telling the other person some facts about yourself, such as your school, your hobbies, or your interests helps get a conversation rolling. It also helps the person begin to learn about what the two of you have in common. This information helps the person evaluate if he or she wishes to become friends. A calm, clear voice works best. Avoid using a pleading or demanding tone.
Ask the person about him or herself.
Finding out about the other person helps keep the conversation going. It also helps you learn about what you have in common with the other person. Using good listening skills with the person shows respect and allows other people to know you are interested in them. People usually respond when they are shown genuine interest.

Invite the person to do something with you.
Doing something together begins the relationship. As you get to know the other person, you will be able to judge if you like each other well enough to become better friends. Some activities to try are playing together, going to each other's house after checking with parents, or going to a movie together.

Hear and accept the person's answer to the invitation — whether the answer is "yes" or "no."
Friends accept each other the way they are right from the start. Hearing and accepting "yes" from a friend is easy. Hearing and accepting "no" to an invitation is more challenging. You need to practice accepting a "no" answer and still feel good about yourself.

Congratulate yourself for taking the step to start a new friendship.
Starting a new friendship takes energy and commitment — and can be a risk, which needs to be acknowledged. Learning to say good things about yourself to yourself builds personal strength, self-confidence, and self-reliance, all of which make it easier to start a new friendship in the future.
The concepts of required helpfulness and social responsibility are based on the principle that helping others is the key to feeling needed, and in turn, serves to enhance our self-esteem. You can help your child understand that helping others can make him or her feel good.

Required helpfulness can take a number of forms, both within the home as well as in the larger community. Your child might be required to assist in caring for a younger brother or sister or have other assignments around the home. Social responsibility might be demonstrated through volunteer work through school clubs or social organizations.

Link praise with meaningful behavior. That means that you should praise your child for positive behavior. Like adults, children want to hear good things about themselves. And, they want to know that the praise they receive fits the situation. In addition, linking praise with behavior not only enables you to be specific, but also serves to reinforce the positive behavior.

Helpful Me

In this exercise, your child should identify the ways in which he or she has been helpful to others, and what benefits were received both by the person(s) helped and by your child.

Activity:

I helped: ______________________________________

Benefits to those I helped:

Benefits to me:

(Examples: I feel good about myself. I like feeling dependable. I'm happy about being helpful.)
Changing the Environment

Your child’s environment can be full of many stressful life events. These stressful events can involve physical, mental, and social environmental conditions, such as divorce in the family, death of a loved one, separation from a parent, hospitalization, living in a conflict-ridden home, being a member of a large family, living in poverty, or many other situations.

Keep in mind that a child is not responsible for creating these conditions, nor is he or she capable of changing them. Of course, some of these situations cannot be altered by parents. But, other environmental conditions can be altered. And, whenever possible, parents should consider changing a stressful environment as part of a comprehensive strategy to manage childhood stress.

After all, it’s neither fair, nor effective to expect your child to adjust constantly to a stress-producing situation. Therefore, helping your child coexist with stress often means that you must find a way to alter your child’s environment in order to restore balance to his or her life.
As a parent, it's your responsibility to either remove a child from a stress-filled environment or change the environment in a positive way.

Sometimes, changing the environment can be accomplished with a reasonable amount of effort. For example, you have a great deal of influence on encouraging appropriate friendships for your child, making sure he or she has time to play, reinforcing healthy behaviors, cutting down on excessive chores, reducing unrealistic or over-burdensome expectations, and choosing proper food, shelter and clothing.

You can also work with teachers and parent-teacher associations to reduce stress in the school environment. In some cases, it might be appropriate for teachers and parents to agree to transfer a child to another classroom, change school schedules, or alter certain classroom arrangements.
Other ways you might enhance your child’s environment include:

- limiting the number of structured activities in which your child participates;
- identifying and — whenever possible — eliminating activities that cause stress for your child;
- allowing manageable amounts of stress along with warmth and supportiveness and a helping hand — rather than shielding your child from all stress;
- ensuring that you allow time for your child to have fun.

It’s not always easy to change your child’s environment. Our society needs more accessible and affordable child care, for instance. But, this level of impact on the environment is possible through well-organized efforts and a willingness and understanding of how to influence community, organizational, and political processes.

Social change is never easy, but it is possible. And, it is both highly rewarding and effective.
Creating Opportunities to Dissipate Stress

Creating opportunities to dissipate stress involves using three simple, yet very effective methods:

1. Engage your child in some form of exercise;
2. Involve your child in a fun activity;
3. Provide your child some old-fashioned play time, which does not involve too much structure or competitiveness.

Exercise

Pent-up stress can lead to a number of problems including poor concentration, illness, and aggression. Exercise is a wonderful way to release stress-generated energy. You should encourage your child to exercise at least three times a week, engaging in such physical activities as water play, swimming, dancing, walking, jogging, aerobics, jumping rope, skipping, tennis, stretching, bicycling, rowing, calisthenics, karate, and others.
The Benefits of Exercise

In addition to the fun and social interaction that children receive from exercise, they can also acquire a sense of self-esteem and satisfaction from mastering the demands of physical activities.

Other benefits of exercise include:

- increased strength and stamina
- reduction of fatigue
- maintenance of ideal body weight
- cardiovascular conditioning
- increased relaxation about an hour after exercising
- heightened resistance to illness
- increased energy
- enhanced alertness and mental capabilities
- improved self-confidence
- heightened resistance to stress
Stressbreakers

Stressbreakers are simple, comfortable, fun activities to use in order to provide children with time away from stress.

Stressbreakers involve using common activities that dovetail effectively with an ordinary day’s schedule, using these three steps:

1. Plan at least one activity per day;
2. Make sure the activity appears natural and spontaneous to the child; and
3. Have fun and enjoy the activity with your child.
During times of stress — or anytime — encourage your child to try these stressbreakers suggested below and on the following page, recommended by Dr. Barbara Kuczen, a leading expert on childhood stress:

- Enjoy a good laugh, watch a silly television show, tell a joke, be silly.
- Find images in the clouds.
- Hunt for a four-leaf clover.
- Go fishing.
- Go to a movie.
- Play a game, such as hide and seek, with parents, brothers and sisters or friends.
- Take your camera, and find an interesting picture.
- Color, paint or doodle.
- Read a favorite story.
- Plan a pretend vacation.
- Get a back rub.
- Call a special friend on the telephone.
- Watch fish swimming in a tank.
- Listen to the rain fall.
- Have a picnic.
- Take a walk.
- Sing or dance.
• Talk to a friend.
• Start or write in a diary.
• Get lost in a pleasant daydream
• Play with your family pet.
• Be alone for a few minutes.
• Give someone a big hug.
• Wrestle or tickle with your mom or dad.
• Shake it all out, by vigorously shaking arms, hands, body, legs, and head for a few seconds, then suddenly relax.
• Make some popcorn.
• Have a good cry.
• Make up fairy tales.
• Play frisbee.
• Plan and rehearse how you will handle the next time you feel stressed.

Playtime

It may seem too obvious or even silly, to recommend that you make time for your children to have time to play. But, in our hurried society parents too often over-emphasize the preparation of children for adulthood. As a consequence, parents sometimes forget to allow their children to be children. Don’t let yourself make that mistake. Make sure your child has leisure time activities, recreational fun, and good, old-fashioned play.

Allow your child to be a child. Provide him or her with playtime, which is really one of the most natural and effective ways of managing stress.
Developing Stress Management Skills

A child under negative stress — regardless of whether the stress is large or small — is experiencing a very unpleasant situation. Left unattended, a child’s stress response can lead to physical and emotional strain and even health problems.

There is good news, however. You can help your child “put the brakes” on stress by assisting them in developing effective stress management skills.

While these skills are fast and useful, they should be viewed as first aid. That is, these skills should not be adopted as a substitute for the development of stress-resiliency or the reduction of stressors in the environment. Rather, they are simply techniques that can be used by your child to achieve relaxation during times of stress.

There are many techniques for reducing stress through relaxation. Try several of those mentioned here and help your child choose the one that is most comfortable and fitting with his or her personality. And, once an appropriate technique is selected, help your child practice the skills involved until they become second nature.
Among the most effective stress-reducing techniques are:

- Quieting Reflex for Children, better known as Kiddie QR, developed by Dr. Charles Stroebel and Elizabeth Stroebel.
- Programs for calming the mind, such as the Relaxation Response and meditation.
- Visualization techniques, which help children to relax by using their imaginations to create and think about relaxing scenes in their minds.
- Autogenic (self-motivated) training in which children learn how to tell their bodies to relax.
- Physical exercises such as progressive muscular relaxation or yoga.

Although each of these techniques has its own advantages and merits, we at The Child and Adolescent Stress Management Institute believe that Kiddie QR is highly effective in addition to being creative and fun for children. The next section provides an outline of the principles of Kiddie QR; the complete program and tape is available from our institute.
Kiddie QR

QR is short for the Quieting Reflex, a six-second technique that, with practice, develops a child’s own stress-reducing capabilities.

The QR technique is part of a creative and comprehensive program called Kiddie QR where children learn how to use imaginary body friends as resources to help them manage their stress. The Child and Adolescent Stress Management Institute offers complete workshops on Kiddie QR, and if you are interested in attending a workshop or having the institute conduct a workshop for your group, please contact us. However in the meantime, you can practice this very effective technique with your child by following the steps below:

- have your child think about an event that causes stress — this is the cue to use QR;
- have your child say to him or herself: calm body-alert mind — this serves as a positive self-suggestion;
- next, have your child practice to sparkle smile inwardly;
- next, have your child:
  - breathe in-2-3-4
  - breathe out-2-3-4
  - breathe in-2-3-4
  - drop his or her jaw and breathe out-2-3-4

Once your child learns QR, he or she can summon these resources on the spot, wherever and whenever the stressful situation is occurring. Because Kiddie QR is fast (just six seconds), fun, and effective, children are happy to practice the techniques; before long, QR is done automatically.

And, because it works, children begin to understand how to control their own responses to negative situations, and feel proud to have accomplished something so important.

The Stress Diary

A stress diary can be highly effective in helping your child become more aware of the circumstances in life that cause him or her stress and, in turn, track his or her reactions to stress. Awareness is the key, because only with heightened awareness of the stressors in our lives can we begin to modify our physical and emotional responses to such situations.

Also, tracking stressors provides a clue to circumstances that consistently induce stress. Some of these stressors may be among those that can be eliminated if the environment is changed.

On the following page is an example of a diary that your child can use to track his or her stress.
My Stress Diary

Name: ______________________________________

Directions: Keep track of the stressors you experience over the next four days. List the cause of stress you felt and how you reacted to the stress (did you get angry; did you feel sick? etc.). Also write down things that happened that made you feel good.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Day 1</th>
<th>Day 2</th>
<th>Day 3</th>
<th>Day 4</th>
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<tr>
<td>Before School</td>
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<td>In School</td>
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<td>After School</td>
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<td>Through Dinner</td>
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<td>After Dinner</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bedtime</td>
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A Comprehensive Approach to Effective Stress Management

Considered individually, each of the techniques discussed in this section are worthwhile. But, not one — on its own — can be considered stress management.

Truly effective stress management — both for adults and for children — is much more than a series of techniques. Rather, it requires a comprehensive, committed approach, which:

1. Prevents your child from experiencing harmful levels of stress;
2. Protects and buffers your child from too much stress; and
3. Helps your child to cope with negative stress when it arises.
An Eight-Step Action Plan

This manual was designed as a guide, which offers advice on solving the problem of childhood stress. But, advice itself isn’t a total solution. Your own approach needs to be tailored to your particular lifestyle, schedule, needs, and personality. No ready-made formula will be best or suit every individual.

With this in mind, you need to create your own effective program for managing your child’s stress.

Consider the approach of musical great Duke Ellington to musical composition: Since many of his musicians could reach and play certain notes beautifully, but not all notes, he had to write his music within those limits.

So, too, should you compose a stress management plan for your children within your own limitations.
To help you in composing your own stress-reducing plan for your children, try organizing the information you develop from this manual into the following eight steps:

**Action Step One**
Increase your knowledge of childhood stress.

**Action Step Two**
Help yourself and your child to recognize and tune in to early warning signs of stress.

**Action Step Three**
Conduct an appraisal of your child's sources of stress.

**Action Step Four**
Try to pinpoint the specific cause(s) of your child's stress that you wish to work on with your child.

**Action Step Five**
Use the stress management program described in this manual to develop your daily stress management goals. These goals should include using at least two activities per day from those described in this manual.
**Action Step Six**
Seek social support from a friend or loved one who will help you to plan and apply the stress management strategies discussed in this manual. Write your plan down in the form of a self-contract, and have your support person sign it with you.

**Action Step Seven**
Reward yourself when you successfully fulfill one of your self-contracts for helping your children to deal with their stress.

**Action Step Eight**
Periodically re-evaluate your stress-management goals to check your progress and to make any necessary modifications.
# My Self-Contract to Manage My Child's Stress

I, ________________, commit to planning and implementing a stress-management program for my child, ________________.

I have identified the following stress-related problems in my child:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem 1</th>
<th>Problem 2</th>
<th>Problem 3</th>
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</table>

My goals for managing these stress-related problems are:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Goal 1</th>
<th>Goal 2</th>
<th>Goal 3</th>
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I will take the following specific steps to accomplish the above goals:

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<thead>
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<th>Step 1</th>
<th>Step 2</th>
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This is how I plan to carry out the above steps on a daily basis:

<table>
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<th>Day 1</th>
<th>Day 2</th>
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</table>
I will set aside the following days and times for implementing my child’s stress management program and for achieving my goals:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

I will enlist the aid of _________________ as a helper, who will support and encourage my efforts.

Date:

________________________________________________________________________

Signed:

________________________________________________________________________

Signature of helper:

________________________________________________________________________

Review date:

________________________________________________________________________
The Beginning

It would be inaccurate to call the conclusion of this manual, “The End.” That’s because it is really a beginning — the beginning of your stress management program for your child.

Regardless of the type and style of the techniques you adopt to help your child manage stress, don’t overlook the basics: to love your child; spend time talking, listening, hugging; to provide a warm, supporting, praising home environment.

Don’t be put off if your child seems to resist your actions. While children sometimes show their resistance as a need for separation and independence from their parents, they do love this type of attention, and will grow to appreciate your efforts.

Look upon this entire continuous process not only as your responsibility, but also as a gift that you give — and keep on giving — to your child. Indeed, this is the most important and most valuable gift you can give to your child.

Consider:

An acorn grows into a massive oak by means of natural growth. A young colt matures into a powerful horse by instinct. But, childhood development is not just natural and instinctive. Rather, it is shaped by the decisions, actions, and commitments made by adults who are involved in the lives of children.
REFERENCE LIST


Balog, Joseph Eugene, 1950-

Stress management for children

For more information about stress management programs for adults and children offered by the Child and Adolescent Stress Management Institute, or if you are interested in receiving additional copies of Stress Management for Children: A Guide for Parents, write:

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