



Children react to stress in different ways based on their age, developmental stage and reason for the stress.

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Child Abuse Prevention Fund
MS 3085
PO Box 1997
Milwaukee, WI 53201
(414) 266-6300
www.capfund.org

Children and stress

Help reduce and control your child's stress

Stress is a normal part of life, and learning to cope with stress is an important part of growing up. Because children have not experienced many of the stressors that adults have, they lack skills to cope with stress.

Children deal with stress in many ways and some may develop physical, emotional and behavioral symptoms. You can help your child deal with stress by looking for warning signs and providing him or her with tools to control and deal with stress.

Signs that your child may have elevated stress levels

- Infants can be less responsive, cry frequently or become irritable.
- Preschooler may regress their behavior, wanting a bottle after being weaned or wetting their pants after being toilet trained.
- School-age children may develop sudden behavioral problems, such as disobeying or becoming overly aggressive.
- Teenagers can become rebellious, show signs of fatigue and develop symptoms such as headaches and stomachaches.

What parents can do

- Talk with your child's teachers and caregivers on a regular basis. They may be able to shed light on the sources of your child's stress.
- Prepare your child for life-altering change, such as moving to a new home. Take steps to make new situations less frightening or confusing.
- Limit the number of organized activities your child is involved in. Allow for down time in your child's schedule when he or she does not have anything to do or does not need be anywhere.
- Establish rituals and routines. They provide children with a sense of security and comfort.
- Build cushions into your families schedule so you and your children do not feel frazzled.
- Have realistic, age-appropriate expectations for your child. Unrealistic expectations can cause more stress because they set your child up for failure.
- Encourage your child to discuss his or her feelings with you. Be sensitive and listen actively, trying to help your child identify underlying stress in his or her life.
- Be a good role model. Your child will learn ways to deal with stress by watching how you handle it.