

Tips for Parents: School Stress

Pressure is a fact of life. But why are some people able to respond to pressure with energy, while others are frozen by anxiety? How can you help your children respond to the challenges of day-to-day life with self-confidence instead of fear?

What is stress?

We all face deadlines, pressure to perform, and judgment from others. However, people react very differently to the same situation. One child faces a big exam with tears and hopelessness, sweaty palms, and a blank mind. Another faces the same exam with energy and self-confidence, breathing deeply and writing carefully.

Their reactions determine their level of stress. Pressure is unchangeable, but we can maintain a manageable level of stress by not over-emphasizing our limits, and by realizing that failure is not the end of the world. A grade is less important than what was learned.

How can I help my child handle pressure?

Children need to learn how to deal with pressure, not how to ignore it. Here's how you can help:

Examine your attitude. Do your expectations of your children reflect their abilities and their desires? Do you focus on success or effort? When your children bring home schoolwork, do you praise correct answers as well as examining wrong ones? Support, not unrealistic expectations, encourages good performance.

Create a sense of order. Stick to consistent schedules for meals, study hours, and bedtimes. Try to eliminate the "morning rush hour." Encourage your children to choose their outfits and to organize homework, permission slips, lunch money, and books before they go to bed. Set alarm clocks fifteen minutes earlier.

Be observant. Recognize the signs of stress. Some children withdraw from activities or relationships. Others have fits of anger or anxiety or try to blame outside factors for their performance: "It wasn't my fault." Headaches, nightmares, bed wetting, stomachaches, and changed eating habits are also signs of stress.

Be a good listener. Focus on the positive. Praise effort and emphasize the importance of practice. Hugs and kisses let your child know that it's OK to make mistakes. Make sure your child realizes that he has the power to change his predicament. Even if he can't change the fact that he has to take an exam, he can change the value he places on getting an "A". Finally, don't hesitate to contact teachers or school counselors.

Explore different stress-reduction techniques.

Encourage your children to find out what works best for them. Here are some ideas:

Exercise. Even just a ten-minute brisk walk can relieve muscular tension and nervous tension. Exercise stimulates heart rate, circulation, and the release of hormones that help the body reduce the effects of stress naturally.

Get it out. Talk. Encourage your children to talk not only to you, but also to friends, relatives, teachers, counselors, neighbors, and anyone else they trust. Welcome your children's friends into your home and help them build supportive friendships.

Write. Keeping a journal is a good way to let out tension. Looking back at old journal entries can also put stressful situations into perspective.

Take care. Encourage your child to take some time for herself to do something she enjoys. Spending time alone, reading a good book, listening to music, or taking a long walk can all be relaxing.

For more information:

Web article:

[US Department of Education Parents and Children Together Series: Stress and School Performance](#)

Books:

Adams, Mark; Powell, Kelly. "Stress Relief: The Ultimate Teen Guide (It Happened to Me, 3) The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2003

Curtis, Jamie Lee; Cornell, Laura. "I'm Gonna Like Me: Letting Off a Little Self-Esteem". Joanna Cotler, 2002

Hardcastle Stanford, Beverly; Yamamoto, Kaoru. "Children and Stress: Understanding and Helping." Association for Childhood Education International, 2001.

Romain, Trevor; Verdick, Elizabeth. "Stress Can Really Get on Your Nerves! Free Spirit.

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