

Managing Stress

What's Happening

Everyone has stress, whether it's a bad day at work, car trouble, or simply too many things to do. However, too much stress can make it hard to parent effectively. After a while, your children may show signs of being stressed out too!

What You Might Be Seeing

Some signs that you are stressed include the following:

- Feeling angry or irritable a lot of the time
- Feeling hopeless
- Having trouble making decisions
- Crying easily
- Worrying all the time
- Arguing with friends or your partner
- Overeating or not eating enough
- Being unable to sleep or wanting to sleep all the time

A build-up of stress also can contribute to health problems, including allergies, a sore neck or back, headaches, upset stomach, and high blood pressure.

What You Can Do

It is important to learn how to manage your stress—for your own sake and for your children. The following suggestions may help:

- **Identify what's making you stressed.** Everyone's stressors are different. Yours might be related to money, work, your surroundings (traffic, crime), your partner, your children's behavior, or health issues.
- **Accept what you cannot change.** Ask yourself, "Can I do anything about it?" If the answer is "no," try to focus on something else. If there is something you can do (look for a new job, for example), break it into smaller steps so it doesn't feel overwhelming.



- **Have faith.** Look back at previous times when you have overcome challenges. Think "This too shall pass." Consider that people who attend church, pray regularly, or practice other forms of spirituality tend to have less stress.
- **Relax!** Try deep breathing, meditation, yoga, or listening to music. Take 30 minutes to play a board game and laugh with your kids.
- **Take care of your health.** Getting enough sleep can make a big difference in your stress level. So can eating healthy foods and getting some exercise.
- **Take time for yourself.** Take a bath, read a book, or pick up a hobby. When you can, hire a babysitter (or trade time with a friend or neighbor) and get out for a few hours.
- **Develop a support network.** Don't be afraid to ask for help. Older children can set the table. Your spouse or partner could take over bedtime a few nights a week. Friends might pick up the kids from school to give you a break.

Remember: Learning to manage your stress will improve your happiness and show your children that they can handle stress, too!

* This tip sheet was created using information from experts in national organizations that work to prevent child maltreatment and promote well-being. At <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/preventing/preventionmonth/resources/tip-sheets/>, you can download this tip sheet and get more parenting tips, or call 800.394.3366.