Make sure that you are not pushing your child too hard. Avoid nagging and criticizing; be positive.

If you think your child is under stress, check your home life for obvious sources of stress. For example, is the child involved in too many activities? Is he ill or overtired? Have there been family problems?

Then check the situation at school. Has the teacher noticed anything causing stress for your child? Is there any reason to suspect learning or behavioral problems?

Most parents have the ability to deal with their children's stress load. But if a change in behavior persists, or many attempts to help your child don't work, seek professional advice.

Consider having a conference with the teacher to talk about your child's problem. Even if you can't solve the problem, your child will know that you are concerned. Feeling support from you can be soothing.

Provide plenty of chances for your child to have successful, positive experiences outside of school. Participating in activities such as art, dance, religious groups, and sports give children a sense of accomplishment. Success outside of school will give your child more confidence to deal with a difficult school situation.

Putting Knowledge to Work

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REVISED BY DON BOWER,
Extension Human Development Specialist,
from publications originally prepared by
Mary White and Mary Anne Pace-Nichols.

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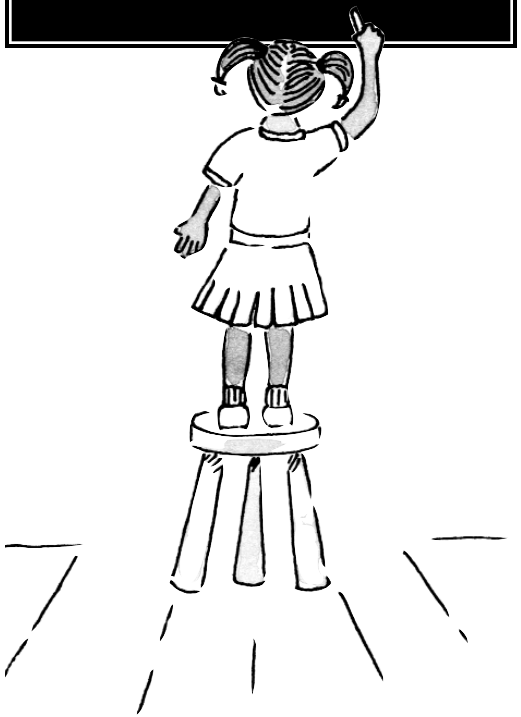
GALE A. BUCHANAN, DEAN & DIRECTOR

TIPS FOR PARENTS

Children and Stress



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Children and Stress

Wouldn't it be nice if we could guarantee our children a rosy, perfect childhood? After all, what do kids have to worry about?

In reality, plenty! Although we may think that children should be happy and carefree, they feel stress just as adults do. Pressures come from the outside (family, friends, school) and also from within.

But children do not always have the maturity or experience to deal with stress. To children, when something bad happens, it's **a disaster and will last forever**.

Parents are the best defense against stress. We can help children learn to weather life's storms and become stronger in the process.

Stress at school

School is your child's "job." It's where he spends most of his time. His work is scored and measured, and he compares himself with others every day. Academic stress and social pressure are two big causes of anxiety for school-age children.

Meeting parents' and teachers' high expectations for school can be stressful. The build-up of schoolwork, homework, after-school activities, tests, projects, and changes in routine can be overwhelming.

Children also feel pressure to be popular with their friends and classmates. Saying no to a friend is stressful. It's also stressful to keep up with a friend's nice clothes or expensive toys.

How can I tell if my child is stressed out? Look for short-term changes in your child's behavior, such as:

- frequent stomachaches or headaches
- withdrawal from friends and family
- sad, jittery, or irritable behavior
- temper tantrums
- school avoidance

What can you do?

First, understand her personality. Children are born with different temperaments, that part of their personality that influences how they react to new situations. Some babies tend to be fussy and hard to soothe, while others are calmer and more easy-going. A child's basic temperament usually does not change as she grows, although she will learn many ways of adapting to new experiences, such as stress.

Spend quality time and listen. When children feel stressed-out, they need you to notice. Give your child your time and full attention. Be compassionate and try to understand his feelings.

Create as much order as possible. Routines help children feel secure and also help them keep up with schoolwork. Provide a place to study, and set specific times for schoolwork, meals, chores, entertainment, and bedtime.

Give your child encouragement about things he does well. Do not compare your child to someone else. Reassure him that all kids have pressures, and let him know that you believe he can handle them.

Suggest ways to help your child cope with stress. Read a book, see a funny movie, or walk the dog together. Have your child keep a journal. Be creative.

Look at your own behavior. Children under stress need encouragement and support.