

Family Focus: Parenting The Young Child
Helping Children Under Stress
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Children's reactions to stress vary. Likewise, there are many coping strategies. Children become more resilient, or are able to bounce back from stress, when they live in a supportive environment. This means that adults help children develop a range of coping strategies. An important part in reducing stress is a stress-free environment. A stress-free environment is having people who listen, having the ability to find hope, and finding ways to anticipate stress and learn ways to avoid it.

Some ways adults can help:

- Show how they cope in healthy ways-like staying calm, controlling their anger, and thinking through a plan.
- Be pro-active - tell children about changes in schedules,
 - plan activities where children can show their feelings - like books, art, puppets, play and writing
- Develop children's thinking skills - ask open ended questions about solutions to problems, like "What could we do about this?"
- Help children tell reality from fantasy. For example, a child's behavior didn't cause his or her parent's separation.
- Find time to talk about stressful events and everyday events.
- Help to develop a child's special interest. Children will then feel proud about themselves.
- Teach deep breathing. Ask children to close their eyes and think about a quiet or happy place.
- Teach ways to solve problems - who else can help?
- Let children know that it is okay to feel angry, alone, scared, or lonely. Give names for children's feelings and words to help express their feelings.
- Have high, clear expectations without being overly rigid.
- Provide ways for children to contribute to the family in meaningful ways.
- Show caring and warmth.

Research shows that children learn how to cope with stress and life changes when they are supported.

Factors that help to support children during stressful times include:

- A healthy relationship with at least one parent or close adult.
- Well-developed social skills.
- Well-developed problem-solving skills.
- Ability to act independently.
- A sense of purpose and future.
- At least one coping strategy.

- A sense of positive self-esteem and personal responsibility.
- Religious commitment.
- Ability to focus attention.
- Special interests and hobbies.

What can you do to help your child cope with stress?

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