
Become Your Child's Calming Coach

When the unexpected happens how do you react? You might call a friend, take a walk, read, write down your thoughts, or listen to soothing music. Over time, you have learned what works best to reduce your stress. Many of these options are not available to a preschooler.

Your child worries, fusses, and frets, just like you do. The book, *KidStress*, points out that parents *greatly underestimate* how much children worry. When stressed, a young child might have physical symptoms such as headaches, overeating, disrupted sleep, or stomachaches. Emotional reactions to stress overload for children may include sadness, worry, whining, irritability or picking fights. Social symptoms may show up as avoiding people, not being cooperative or picking on others.

Helping your child learn to cope with stress will result in short and long term benefits, including:

- Improved learning ability.
- Increased positive behavior.
- Protection from effects of excess stress.
- Brain development and self-regulation.

Coach Your Child to Use Calming Techniques

Teach your child to stay calm and have positive energy by appealing to one or more of the five senses: sight, sound, touch, smell and taste. Experiment to discover which strategies work best for your child. Encourage your child to notice when they start to feel stressed so they can apply calming techniques at the first signs of stress.

Sight – Create a space with comforting items, such as a stuffed animal, soft pillow, or a pleasing picture. Find a safe and quiet spot in nature, perhaps under a tree in the yard. Take a picture of these special places for your child so they can take it along when visiting others or while traveling.

Sound – Experiment with music and other sounds that may calm and soothe your child. Birdfeeders and chirping birds, wind chimes near an open window, or the sound of running water may help soothe your child. Humming, laughter or singing a simple song may break the cycle of frustration and negative thinking.











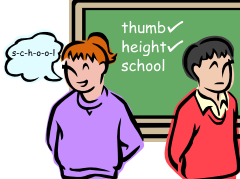





Touch – Try rubbing your child's hand gently on smooth or rough textures like stones, tree bark, or running water. The feel of a warm blanket or the cooling temperatures of an icy cold beverage can relax and renew your child's positive energy. Playing with a dog or petting a real or stuffed animal, rubbing a piece of silk or corduroy in the pocket, sitting in someone's lap, rocking, or giving a hand or neck massage may assist in settling down and calming a child.

Smell – Our sense of smell is the strongest memory maker. Try lavender scented soap to soothe or citrus scented hand soap to energize. Take a deep breath and smell the fresh grass, earth, freshly cut fruit, or the aroma of spices like mint or cinnamon. Exhale slowly and feel a calmer feeling take over.

Taste – Eat slowly and focus on the feeling of the food in your mouth and the taste on your tongue. Slowly drink a refreshing, cold glass of water.

Movement – Movement requires the use of multiple senses and can reduce a child’s stress quickly. Try pacing (walking back and forth) with a child if they shut down when stress strikes. Try standing up instead of sitting down to talk through a problem with a child. Use a rocking chair or offer a rubber ball to squeeze to help a child focus and start to relax. Running in place or jumping up and down can let off steam in a healthy way.

As your child’s calming coach it is important to offer a balance of physical, mental, social, and spirit-lifting ways to release stress. Your child’s body needs good nutrition, regular exercise, enough sleep and plenty of play breaks to stay healthy. Children are naturals at lifting their own and other’s spirits with humor, play, a sense of wonder about nature and relaxing. This is a gift that needs to be encouraged throughout life.

Healthy Ways to Cope with a Child’s Distress			
Physical	Mental	Social	Spirit-Lifting
 Good Nutrition	 Think Positive	 Express Feelings	 Relax
 Regular Exercise	 Practice to Improve	 Talk with Others	 Humor
 Get Enough Sleep	 Realistic Expectations	 Settle Conflicts	 Play
 Take a Break	 Positive Self-Talk/Put-Ups	 Help Others	 Enjoy Nature

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 Witkin, G. (1999). *Kid stress: What it is, how it feels, how to help.* New York: Viking Penguin.

This document can be made available in alternative formats, such as large print, Braille, or audio tape, by contacting your county Extension office. (TTY 1-800-947-3529)

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