

STRESS SIGNS

Stress and Your Child

Each child has their own unique stress triggers and responses. However, there are some signs that are commonly associated with stress in childhood and adolescence. Noticing these behaviors and moods may indicate that your child is having trouble managing one or more stressor.

PRESCHOOLERS

- › Increase in tantrums or crying
- › Regression in behavior: needing a pacifier, thumb-sucking, potty problems
- › Sleep disturbances, fear of the dark, nightmares
- › Clinging to parents or, conversely, pulling away
- › Refusing to eat

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL-AGE

- › Angry outbursts, intensely irritable most of the time, aggressiveness
- › Uncharacteristic behavior: clingy, withdrawing, less cooperative, stubborn
- › Talk often about new or recurring worries/fears; repeatedly checking things
- › Constantly seeking approval or reassurance from adults
- › Develop anxious tics or habits, such as hair chewing
- › Bed-wetting, frequent urination
- › Frequent physical complaints, such as bellyache, without cause
- › Restless, fidgety, in constant motion, can't sit still
- › Sleeping too much, too little, can't fall asleep, frequent bad dreams
- › Appetite changes
- › Won't join in with others, trouble with or disinterest in making friends

TEENS / PRETEENS

- › Loss of confidence, self-doubt, fear of making mistakes
- › Excessive worrying, panic attacks or fear of panic attacks
- › Poor concentration, school issues, avoids participation
- › Loss of interest in things they used to enjoy
- › Irritable, overreacting, agitated, trouble controlling anger, rebellious
- › Low energy, sleepy, too much or too little sleep, trouble falling asleep
- › Ongoing physical issues – head/stomach aches – without medical reason
- › Spending more time alone in their room, avoid activities with others
- › Eating habits change, overly focused on weight, diet, exercise
- › Engage in delinquent behaviors, self-harm, or substance misuse

Beyond Stress

It can be challenging to distinguish between a child who is stressed and one who might be dealing with an anxiety disorder or depression.

Watch for changes in your child's norms. Notice if stress signs are increasing and strategies aren't helping. Note if behaviors or moods start to interfere with daily life and continue for weeks or months.

Reach out to talk with your pediatrician or a mental health professional. Your EAP can help you get connected.

If your child talks about suicide or hurting themselves or others, get help immediately. You can call 911.

References

Healthwise. (2018). Stress in children and teenagers. Retrieved from <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/health-topics/ug1832>

National Institutes of Mental Health. (2019). Child and adolescent mental health. Retrieved from <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/child-and-adolescent-mental-health/index.shtml>

Understood.com. (n.d.). The connection between stress and anxiety. Retrieved August 25, 2020 from <https://www.understood.org/en/friends-feelings/managing-feelings/stress-anxiety/anxiety-why-its-different-from-stress>

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ADDRESS THE STRESS

Workbook



Everyone feels stress in life. It can be uncomfortable, but when we know how to manage it, it can actually help us learn, grow and be more resilient. Management techniques not only give us the power to relieve the stress, but every success can help build our sense of confidence and be a blueprint for how to handle new challenges. The management tools in this workbook can help your child (and you) handle stress more effectively. You might want to explore them together.

What is stress?



STRESS

A feeling of pressure in your body and mind.



STRESSOR

A challenge that triggers the feeling.



INTERPRETATION

Thinking you can't manage the stressor leads to worry.

Stress is a pressure we feel when facing some sort of challenge. This pressure tells us we need to figure out a way to handle the challenge in order to feel balanced and "safe" again. When we feel that we have what we need to deal with it, the pressure can be positive – pushing us to succeed. When we feel like we might not be able to handle it, it can make us feel worried and anxious.

Signs of stress

How can you tell you're getting stressed? What does it feel like in your body? Do you act differently? Can you name what you're feeling? List signs you notice for the stress levels below.



I'm not sure I can handle this.

This is hard, but I can handle it.

What makes you feel stressed?

What sort of experiences create a feeling of pressure for you? Think about and write down some things that stress you. Put an "X" next to those that often make you feel worried or anxious.

Managing stressful thoughts

We can't always stop stressful thoughts from coming, but we can find ways to manage them. This can make it easier to handle the stress and help us work through the stressor that caused it.

TIC the boxes to put a worry in its place

Thinking about a worry you have, consider the questions on the right. Then either put an **X** in the box for no or a **✓** for a yes.

TRUE?

Is my worry true, realistic, or likely?

- › What does the evidence say?
- › Could there be other outcomes or explanations?
- › How has it turned out before?
- › What seems like the most likely scenario?

IMPORTANT?

How big of a deal is it in the big picture?

- › Is there a chance I'm blowing it out of proportion?
- › Looking at everything, how much does it matter?
- › How much impact will it really have?
- › Is it worth so much time, attention, and energy?

CONTROL?

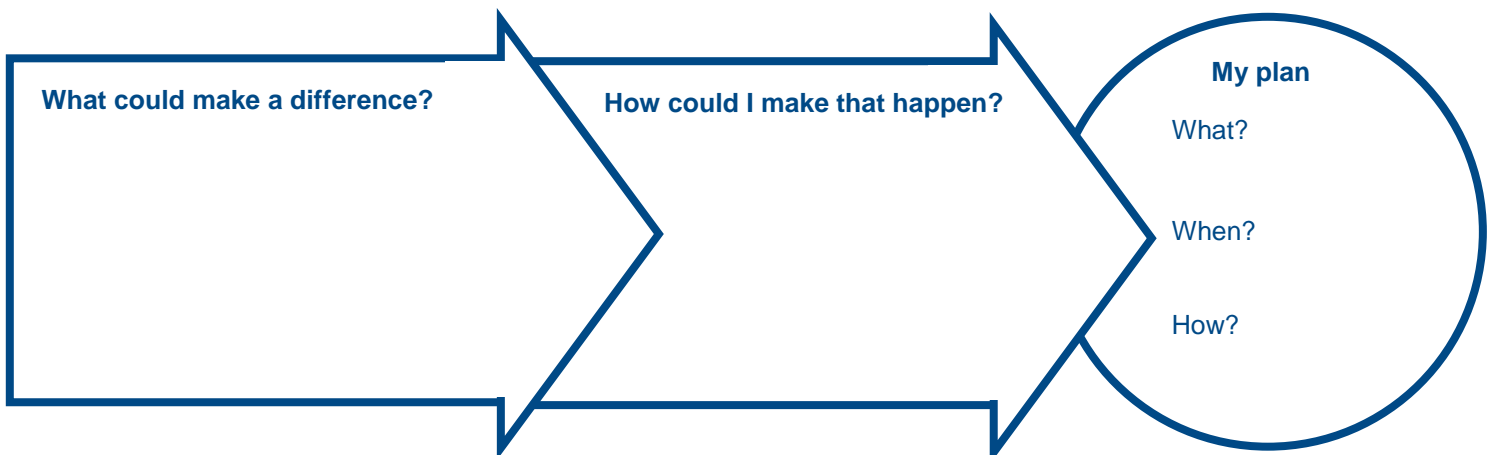
Can I do something about it?

- › Have I managed something like this before?
- › If I can't solve the whole problem, can I tackle parts?
- › Is this completely beyond my control?

If a stressor is beyond our control, we can work on letting that worry go. We can look at "parking" worries that seem like they might be true but aren't very important. We can tackle those later as needed. We can brainstorm solutions for worries that seem true, important, and within our control in some way.

Brainstorm solutions

You can do this on your own or with someone else helping. Think about all sorts of ways to address a stressor. Consider obvious solutions and "outside the box" solutions. Decide which option seems best, then think about how you could make it happen. If it seems overwhelming, break it down into "bite-size" steps. Finally, write down your plan!



Worst-case scenario reality check

Worrying about all sorts of "what ifs" can tire us out. Sometimes it helps to just imagine the worst outcome, then think what we could do to be okay if that happened.

- › I'm worried about:

- › What's the worst outcome I can imagine for this worry?

- › How could I deal with that?

- › Who could help me?

Managing stressful feelings

It can be hard to think clearly and find our balance when struggling with anxious feelings. Try the techniques below and see if they can help you feel calmer.

Be a friend

It's easy to be hard on ourselves when we feel stressed and worried. But being kind to ourselves can help us feel stronger and less fearful. Think of someone who you care about. Imagine them having this worry. What would you say to them to make them feel better? Write it down. Then try saying it to yourself.

Change the channel

List three things you enjoy that you could do to take a time-out from worry:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Come to your senses

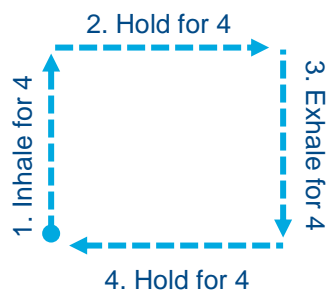
When anxiety starts getting overwhelming, take a deep, calming breath, then slowly look around the room and find...

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can touch
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste



Take a breath

Slow deep breaths naturally help our bodies to calm down and stop feeling so tense. When your body feels more relaxed, it can help your mind relax too. Try out the technique below called **Square Breathing**. You can do this anywhere, anytime.



- Close your eyes and picture a square. Choose one corner to be your starting point.
- Count slowly to four as you inhale through your nose. Picturing your breath moving up one side of the square. You can also trace an outline of a square with your finger.
- Then count slowly to four as you hold your breath and visualize moving across the top.
- Then move down next side; count slowly to four while exhaling.
- Then hold without breathing in or out for a count of four on the last side.
- Repeat 2 to 4 times. (Note: you can adjust count to whatever feels comfortable for you.)

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Resilience builders

Learn more about key ways to be strong in the face of stress.

Growth mindset



<https://biglifejournal.com/blogs/blog/teach-growth-mindset-kids-activities>

Friendships



www.verywellfamily.com/making-and-keeping-friends-2633627

Healthy basics



www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/wecan/tools-resources/index.htm

Developing interests



www.care.com/c/stories/5239/tips-on-finding-your-childs-passion/

