

HELPING CHILDREN DEAL WITH STRESS

September 16, 2023

While it can be unpleasant, everyone feels stress at some point. Children aren't immune to this normal part of life. As a parent, it can be very difficult to see your child dealing with stress. In fact, your child's stress may most likely create stress for you! [Psalm 34: 4-6](#) tells us that God cares about our distress and provides comfort and relief from our troubles. You can cling to this promise, even as you support your child in times of stress.

Here are some considerations when supporting a child who is experiencing times of stress:



Recognize the signs of stress. Your child may exhibit physical symptoms such as a sore stomach, headache, change in sleeping or eating habits, or other physical symptoms. They may also have emotional symptoms such as crying, whining, clinginess, emotional overreaction, tension, or anxiety. Other symptoms in behavior might include aggression, lashing out, stubbornness, or explosive outbursts. Resources from organizations such as [SAMHSA](#) or CMHA (Canadian Mental Health Association) can help you better understand the warning signs and risk factors of stress in children.

Reassure your child that everyone has stress. Help them understand that there are normal reactions to stressors. Talk with your child. Listen to their feelings and thoughts if they are willing to share. As well, share some of your own. Don't feel that you have to solve the issue for your child immediately. Let them know that you are their biggest cheerleader and that you love and care for them and their well-being.

Ensure routines are maintained as much as possible. Along with a stable and loving environment, maintaining adequate sleep, nutrition, and exercise is important. It can also be helpful to evaluate your child's current schedule, activities, and routines to explore ways that they can be modified to alleviate or reduce some of their barriers.

Teach your child coping skills. Breathing exercises, incorporating physical activity, and even prayer can alleviate some of the physical symptoms of stress, while talking things through with a trusted adult or creating quiet times and spaces for themselves can ease some of their worries. Stress can also be reduced by identifying and challenging negative or self-defeating thoughts that may exacerbate their worry. Be sure to offer validation and express your confidence in their ability to manage stressful situations by using some tools that you've talked about together. Avoid the temptation to solve their problems for them.

Watch for traumatic stress. Sometimes, stress goes beyond what is a normal and expected response. Connect with an expert if your child's emotions or behaviors persist or become unmanageable. Be sure to monitor for signs of increasing unhappiness or depression, or difficulty interacting with others at home or school.

Study God's Word together. Dig into what God's promises are for us in times of distress and trouble. Share with your child what those promises have meant to you in your times of difficulty. Pray together. Encourage yourself and your child with [Psalm 55:22](#), "We belong to you. We tell you what worries us and you won't let us fall."

Stress is a regular part of life, both for our kids and ourselves. By providing tools, being available to our kids, and guiding them to trust in God, we can help equip them to handle the stress they're facing.

Want to do a deep dive? Check out Family Fire's article [Promises for Tough Times](#)

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<https://kidscorner.net/parent-blog/helping-children-deal-with-stress>
Printed on June 4, 2026

