

TALKING TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT STRESS

As adults, we can become so used to stress that we may forget that children also get stressed just like we do. A child can become stressed at school. Grades, homework, problems with friends, teachers, or something that happened at lunchtime can make a student stressed.

Stress can also come from things happening in the neighborhood or at home. Stress is normal, but too much stress can get in the way of a child's healthy development. As a parent you know your child best and have the most power to help! Here are some tips...

Look for Signs

Stress may look different in every child. Look out for these common signs below.

- Changes in behavior (stops doing things they usually do, starts doing new things).
- Saying they do not "feel well" a lot (i.e. stomachaches, headaches, or feeling sick).
- Changes in how they act with other children at school or at home (fight a lot or become aggressive, do things without thinking, stay away from other children).
- Becoming whiny or acting like a much younger child to avoid doing something.
- Trouble falling asleep at night, sleeping or looking sleepy during the day, or not feeling rested after waking up in the morning.

Talk About It

It is important for us, as adults, to help children learn to work through their feelings. These are some important things to think about.

- Remind children that they are safe with you and make a list together of 3 other adults that they trust and can talk to about worried or stressful feelings. It is helpful to name different adults in the places that children spend time, such as: home, school, afterschool, a spiritual community, sports team, or extended family.
- Give them your full attention when children speak to you. Do a quick check of your body language and facial expression. Try to put away your phone.
- Help children make sense of what happened. Try to use words they understand.
- Tell children it is okay to talk about their feelings – especially if they are confused or upset.
- Let them know that it is normal for them to feel strong emotions. Let them know that there are ways to learn what do with their strong feelings. They don't have to stay stuck in them

Practice Coping

Teach them ways to handle stress

- Keep routines at home the same. Doing the same thing every day can help a child feel safe.
- Have children make small choices. It helps them know they can have control of their life.
- Help them have fun! Activities can help them relax. It is also a great way to keep kids learning and moving.
- Help them let out their energy in positive ways. This can prevent children from "acting out" later. Have them dance to their favorite song or run around a park.
- Teach them to talk about what they are feeling. It is important that children know they can talk about any feelings they are having.