When your child is stressed by everyday demands or unexpected changes you play a critical role in creating balance and modeling healthy stress management.

What is stress?
- The physical and psychological reaction to daily challenges, demands and pressures
- A natural response when exposed to unexpected or traumatic events

Stress can be “good” or “bad”
Stress to some degree can be healthy. It alerts us to danger, lets us know something is wrong, motivates us to get something done or meet a deadline and encourages us to work hard to overcome challenges.

Children can be stressed by seemingly positive events like having a new sibling, starting school or competing in a sporting event.

Stress becomes unhealthy when demands and pressures overwhelm a child’s or family’s capacity to cope.

Stress can become distress when a child does not have access to a parent or adult who can help them calm down, organize their feelings and learn to strategize, problem-solve or prioritize when facing challenges.
Key factors that help children navigate stress:

- Having a strong connection to a caring adult who offers encouragement and support
- Being allowed to express a range of emotions without being ignored or dismissed
- Working through strong emotions in a healthy manner with a sense of “I am okay”
- Having parents who model healthy coping and create a strong, stable foundation at home; or having a “safe haven” where they can go for protection and comfort
- Feeling physically and emotionally safe, so they can engage in positive problem solving and decision making

What you can do:

- Validate your child’s fears and feelings.
- Help him organize his thinking and prioritize daily demands.
- Help him view life’s challenges and mistakes as opportunities to learn and grow.
- Listen without giving advice. Be supportive while they “figure it out,” and offer guidance not answers.
- Model saying “no” and setting boundaries that prevent unhealthy overload.
- Model eating right, exercising and balancing work and play.
- Model a calm response to stressful situations by pausing and taking a few deep breaths before responding.
- Attend a FREE CHKD workshop on family stress or mindful parenting.

For more information on parenting and current classes visit CHKD.org/ParentingResources or CHKD.org/classes.

Your child’s pediatrician should be your primary source of advice about your child’s health.