

# Children and Stress

**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](http://CHKD.org/ParentingResources) or [CHKD.org/classes](http://CHKD.org/classes).

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

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