



MANAGING PARENTAL STRESS

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Life as a parent brings both joy and stress. Whether you're a stay-at-home parent or working parent, stress will at times find its way into your life. And it can manifest itself in many ways, perhaps keeping you up at night or chipping away at your patience with your child(ren).

Recognizing stress is critical to minimizing its impact on your life. Here are several common indicators of high stress:

- Insomnia
- Sudden weight loss/gain
- Less interest in activities you usually enjoy
- Getting sick more often than usual
- Difficulty concentrating
- Anxiety or trouble relaxing
- Angry outbursts
- Exhaustion

Some stress is necessary in life, but you can learn to manage it so it doesn't overwhelm you. Here are some suggestions to help you reduce stress so you can enjoy being a parent even more. Don't feel like you have to do everything on the list. Pick some ideas that work for you and try them first.

- **Create a daily ritual/routine** with your family. Security and predictability can give everyone in your family a sense of control and reduce stress.
- **Exercise regularly.** Even a walk around the block is helpful.
- **Remember empathy above all!** One of the first steps in teaching children empathy is helping them learn about emotions in general. All people share the same range of emotions, but young children have difficulty labeling and identifying them. When children name their feelings, they learn to understand and control their emotional world. When your child feels understood, your stress should decrease.
- **Spend time with friends,** family, co-workers, and/or other parents. Developing a support system is critical for managing stress. If you're a stay-at-home parent don't isolate yourself — get out there and socialize with other parents and playgroups.
- **Schedule in some "chill time."** If you don't usually leave time to relax, then schedule it in your calendar. You don't have to say yes to everything—too many "yesses" leave no time for you. You can also schedule some quiet time with your kids (reading, movies, arts-and-crafts, low-key games, walks).

- **Find a fun new activity.** Take an art course, garden, bicycle, or learn an instrument. You can even learn this new skill with your child. Learning something together can bring you closer while providing a space to constructively unwind.
- **Sleep.** If you develop insomnia, notify your doctor to discuss a plan. If you can, nap when your child naps.
- **Make positive statements** toward others and positive self-statements. Increasing self-esteem tends to decrease stress.
- **Try to rest during a work break** (if you work outside the home). On weekends ask a friend to watch your child for an hour so you can nap.
- **Write down your stress.** Try to identify your exact stressors and create ways to control them.
- **Organize your home.** Create games with your kids to help everyone keep organized. Try to accept that it will get messy again. Just do your best to create an environment that won't add stress to your life.
- **Create a chore list for your kids.** Ask for help when you need it. Take others up on offers to help.
- **Meditate.** Meditation can take many forms. Do what works for you. Listen to relaxing music, practice deep breathing, do yoga, or just practice sitting in silence.