



Helping Your Child Manage Change



Some stress is a normal part of growing and living because your child's world--and your child--are constantly changing. Normal pressures and tension will naturally disappear as your child's reasoning and mental skills grow and experiences increase. This is especially true for the change that accompanies developmental growth. However, when change reaches the crisis level in your child, help from family members, a teacher, the family doctor, or other professionals may be necessary. In most cases, though, you can help your child cope with pressures of childhood by using the following techniques:

Think of how you react to change. Children learn from imitating the actions of parents and other adults. You may be surprised to discover that he or she reacts to pressures the same way you do. If you do not like what you see, a change may be in order for all.

Try to remember what it was like to be your child's age. View the situation on the child's level of understanding. Only by looking at the problem through your child's eyes can you grasp your child's feelings, reactions, and fears. Do not deny or make fun of your child for his or her worries. These worries are real to your child and need your attention.

Talk with your child about his or her concerns and problem behavior. Communication is a source of information, comfort, and security. Tension often reaches the boiling point when children feel like they are facing a change alone. Knowing that their worries can be expressed helps relieve some of the pressure, as well as builds a more rewarding parent-child relationship.

Tell your child the truth about family matters and crises. Your child does not live in a bubble. If you do not provide honest and simple accounts of a stressful event, your child will probably create an even more alarming explanation. The goal is to lessen or prevent your child's stress. Explanations which are simple, accurate, and at the proper level of understanding are best.

Involve your child in decision-making and problem-solving processes when dealing with changes. This will encourage your child's feelings of power and control. Stress from changes will be with your child throughout life, so by providing your child the necessary tools for handling this kind of stress now you will be helping him or her to cope with stress better later as well.

Select good children's books about changes and fears to read with your child. Books about moving, attending a new school, a new brother or sister, and other life events are good sources of honest information. They can clear up misunderstandings and feelings for your child, as well as help you to discuss difficult topics. They can assure your child that there are others in the world with the same problem, and give suggestions on how to manage the situation.

Use art and puppets to help your child express feelings and concerns. Through the use of art materials, your child can express feelings and thoughts that might be considered negative and unacceptable. These thoughts and feelings then can be handled in an acceptable manner. Learning to express emotions through creative channels gives the child an outlet for built-up tension that can be used throughout life. Because young children are limited in verbal ability, strong feelings can be expressed through art experiences which involve psychomotor activity, such as clay for pounding, paper for tearing and cutting, and nails for hammering. Puppets and dolls provide opportunities to examine reality, rehearse solutions, express emotions, gain control over situations, and encourage discussion.

Provide physical outlets to vent built-up tension. The inner tension that is stored needs to be released. Encourage your child to participate in physical activity when pressures seem ready to explode. Possibly join your child in biking, swimming, running, or even gardening. Physical activity releases negative tension through positive action. It is also important to get plenty of rest and eat nutritionally balanced meals during periods of high stress.

Be generous with hugs, kisses, and other signs of affection. Your child needs love and understanding more than ever during times of stress.