



Girl Scouts®

Ten Tips for Helping Children Deal with Stress

With news and conversations full of natural disaster and war, as well as families being affected by these disasters, children and teens may be feeling very stressed and need you to help them cope. Children and teens do not have the combination of life experiences and critical thinking skills that can help allay stressful thoughts and feelings. These ten tips can help you recognize signs of mental and emotional tension and prevent an overload of stress in young people.

1. **Recognize that children handle stress in different ways.** Some show a regression in behavior – acting younger, more fearful, and clingier. Outbursts of anger and aggression are also signals at all ages. A child or teen who withdraws or who seems sad or who has trouble sleeping or who shows significant changes in appetite may also be showing signs of stress.
2. **Encourage conversation.** Look for opportunities to ask about feelings and opinions. Some of the best conversations happen in a car with the radio, CD player and cell phone off.
3. **Think about your own reactions** – are you feeling very stressed and is that being communicated to your children? Find ways to relax yourself so that you can stay calm for them.
4. **Look for creative ways to deal with stress.** For younger children, puppets may help them act out their feelings. Teens could be encouraged to write their thoughts in a journal or diary. Reading books together not only provides valuable family time, but also gives everyone a deeper understanding of world events. Realizing how a character (real or fictional) coped with a disaster, loss of home, war, or difficulty can give lessons that can be emulated.
5. **Plan for some exercise or sports** – activities that the family can do together to release tension. From sledding to swimming, biking or gardening, getting everyone to move more makes a big difference in mental outlook as well.
6. **Volunteer together.** Look for opportunities in the community in which you can make a difference. Being able to contribute also helps your family to bond and understand what your family's values are.
7. **Try to acknowledge how a child may feel.** Taking a child's or teen's concerns seriously, rather than minimizing them, builds a foundation for more open communication.
8. **Answer questions honestly and share what is age appropriate.**
9. **Don't make a promise that you can't keep.** You can't tell your child that a disaster will never affect your family. You can say that the chances are very small and that you will do whatever you can to keep the family safe.
10. **Keep tabs on what your child is viewing and hearing** – at home and at school. Know when to pull the plug on TV, and radio. When the news is on, try to view it together so you can discuss what you have seen and heard.