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SIGNALS AND SYMPTOMS

Some psychologists believe that kids today are faced with more stress than kids of previous generations. Changes in family structure; competition in academics and extracurricular activities; the “always on” of technology and social media; expectations from teachers and parents, and the demands kids put on themselves can cause a near-constant level of stress and anxiety. Left untreated, chronic stress and depression can weaken the immune system and make kids more susceptible to illness and fatigue.

Stress, Anxiety and Depression in the Elementary Years

Elementary school age children may find it difficult to verbalize when they are feeling stress, so parents need to listen for other words such as: tired, bored, scared, or worried. Parents should also be on the lookout for these common behavioral cues, according to the American Psychological Association (APA):

Warning signs in the Elementary Years may include:

- Temper tantrums
- Moodiness
- Not wanting to go to school
- Crying or displaying surprisingly fearful reaction
- Clinginess
- Excessive trips to the school nurse
- Saying negative things about themselves and others, such as, “No one likes me,” “I’m stupid” or “Nothing is fun.”

Parents of elementary age children should consider these changes in behavior serious; talk to your child’s school counselor and/or teachers if your child exhibits these signs. Show your child support by listening and providing a safe environment at home. See more tips for parents on the following pages.

“ESPECIALLY NOW, MY SENIOR YEAR IS REALLY STARTING TO STRESS ME OUT BECAUSE I’M PULLED IN SO MANY DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS. YOU HAVE TO MAKE DECISIONS AND THOSE DECISIONS WILL AFFECT YOU FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE.” **BRANDON, AGE 17**



When children make poor choices or engage in risky behavior, it may be their way of expressing that they need help.
Stacey DeWitt, founder and CEO, Connect with Kids

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

Sometimes it is difficult for parents to know exactly what to do when they see their child hurting, acting out, or behaving in ways they simply don't understand. However, when a child makes poor choices or engages in risky behavior, it may be that child's way of expressing that he or she needs help.

For younger children, parents can try these strategies to help their children control stress and anxiety:

- Help children choose words for their feelings. Ask them if they feel nervous, scared, worried, sad. Then ask what is making them feel that way.
- Acknowledge your child's feelings and encourage the use of positive statements. Create positive statements for anxiety-producing situations such as, "My mom or teacher will be there to help me" or "I am safe and I know who will be picking me up to go home."
- Show your children a few simple, effective stress management techniques such as taking deep "cleansing" breaths, thinking and repeating positive statements, and visualizing calming images. Work with your child to practice these techniques on a regular basis.
- Talk with your kids about what they see and hear in the media. For younger children, parents can more closely monitor what they watch on TV or view online to help them understand what is going on in the world and provide reassurance of their safety.
- Establish a bedtime routine that helps your child relax; suggestions include starting with a warm bath, followed by playing soothing music or reading relaxing stories.
- Spend reassuring, quality time with your children. Laugh and play with no particular goal or outcome. This can reduce the anxiety of having to achieve in all of their other activities.
- Let your children know that you love them unconditionally and that you are always available to talk and listen.

Parents can also help children learn to keep stress under control by encouraging them to take good care of themselves, including getting enough sleep, eating a well-balanced diet and exercising every day. Experts also suggest that parents build a support network of friends and family who can provide help if necessary.