

# **GUIDANCE ASSOCIATES OF PENNSYLVANIA**

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## **Children and Stress**

Childhood is a stressful time - believe it. There's peer pressure and the need to 'fit in' with friends and other children. Then, there are the demands of school and whatever may be happening at home. All this while undergoing the most rapid physical and mental development in a person's life.

While there's no way to eliminate stress from the lives of children, we can help our children learn to cope with it.

Here's a start:

Normal, natural stress. Stress is a normal part of life. Deadlines at work, tax time, and heavy traffic are natural, stressful situations most adults learn to live with. But what about children? New situations like tryouts for the soccer team and situations that take getting used to like homework are new, "unnatural," stressful situations for kids. Prepare the child by talking about those situations before they happen. And let the child know that it's normal and natural to sometimes get "uptight".

Know your child. What is your child studying in school? What's he/she playing during recess? What are his/her friends like? What do their friends like to do? To help your child face stress, knowing what goes on in his/her life is a first line of defense.

Academic targets. Stress that while it's important that your child does his/her best in school, that doesn't mean being the best in class. Agree to an appropriate academic target - I'll get two more spelling words right on Friday's test versus I'll win the spelling bee. Or I'll turn all my homework in on time this month versus I'll make the honor roll.

Daily routines. Stress often occurs when routines change dramatically. Keep your child's routine as consistent as possible - bedtime at the same time each night, a visit to a grandparent's house every weekend, lunch or homework at the same time each day. A regular, stable schedule can go a long way in reducing stress in a child's life.

Play and relax. There is such a thing as "rushing through" childhood, and mental health professionals say it's among the leading causes of stress in a child's life. Help your child budget his/her time so that there's enough time to play, relax, and do whatever it is kids do best.

Be a good listener. Everyone needs someone they can talk to, even children. Be a good listener for your child. They may not be worrying about a mortgage payment or a problem at work, but their problems are just as great - and just as in need of a good ear.

If you have questions or would like more information on helping your child handle stress, please call your Employee Assistance Program at Guidance Associates of Pennsylvania (717) 732-2917.