HOW DO I...

Help my child cope with stress?

Advice for Parents and Caregivers

- When your child shows signs of stress, **it's important to validate their emotions and let them know that it's completely normal to feel overwhelmed sometimes.** Using words like, "frustrated," "worried," or "scared" can help them identify and express their feelings.

- **Show genuine interest in how your child is feeling.** As they share their thoughts with you, make sure that you're actively engaged in the conversation and listen without judgement. Share your own experiences with stress.

- **Remember, your own emotional state can influence your child's.** Take time for self-care and learn how to manage your own stress effectively. A calm caregiver is better equipped to help a stressed child.

- **Help your child learn that stressful situations can have many interpretations.** Challenge negative thoughts ("Everyone hates me!") by gently guiding them towards more balanced perspectives ("Maybe they just had a bad day"). Teach them not to blame themselves or others and avoid dwelling on the worst part of the situation.

Scan to watch our video on this topic.

- Instead of trying to eliminate stress entirely, **help your child learn to "ride the wave" of difficult emotions.** Teach them coping strategies like deep breathing, mindfulness exercises, or creative expression to tolerate discomfort and bounce back once big feelings or stress have had a bit of time to fade.

Tips & Resources →

8 Tips for Helping Kids Deal with Stress

1. **Normalize, label, and validate feelings.** Help your kids understand that there are a variety of ways that people respond to and cope with stress. Make sure they know they can come to you for help working through difficult feelings.

2. **Be supportive**. When your child is stressed, avoid blaming or being dismissive. Instead, listen and be supportive.

3. **Stay calm.** As easy as it is to become anxious in response to your child's stress, it is crucial to try to remain calm. Caregivers who can stay regulated in stressful situations are better able to help.

4. **Help kids be problem solvers.** You can't always solve the problem that is causing the stress, but you can help kids think like problem-solvers. Encourage them to find the root cause and brainstorm ways to address it, whether that means getting more sleep or taking something off their plate.

5. **Don't think in extremes.** Help your kids learn that it's usually not helpful to blame themselves or others, jump to extremes, or imagine terrible outcomes for the future. Instead, they can focus on what they can control in the moment.

6. **Get comfortable with discomfort.** Often when our kids are struggling, we want to do anything we can to help them feel better. But learning how to gently tolerate uncomfortable feelings that come with stressors is a good life skill.

7. **Model positive coping skills.** Children pick up behavior patterns from adults, so one of the best ways to teach your kids good coping skills is to practice them yourself and point out what you are doing.

8. **Offer a variety of strategies.** There is no one-size-fits-all technique for coping with stress, so try to fill your child's toolbox with options. These can include things like deep breathing, exercise, journaling, listening to music, or playing with a pet.

To learn more, check out these helpful resources:

How to Cope with Stress
Coping Skills for Kids

When the World Feels Like a Scary Place
Book by Abigail Gerwitz, PhD

How to Model Healthy Coping Skills
The Child Mind Institute

The Child Mind Institute is dedicated to transforming the lives of children and families struggling with mental health and learning disorders by giving them the help they need to thrive. We've become the leading independent nonprofit in children's mental health by providing gold-standard care, delivering educational resources to millions of families each year, training educators in underserved communities, and developing tomorrow's breakthrough treatments.