

BREATHE TO THRIVE

RECOGNIZING STRESS IN CHILDREN: AGES 0 TO 3 YEARS OLD

As a parent, it may be difficult at times to recognize when your baby is experiencing stress. Even though your baby cannot talk, he or she can still communicate his or her feelings through movements. Parents should observe their infant and respond quickly to their baby's needs. Look at the chart below; it lists signs that could mean your baby is experiencing stress and what might be causing the stress.



What parents might notice in their infant:

- Saluting - this looks like a baby stretching out his or her hand towards you, (usually the back of the hand toward you) and up towards his or her face.
- The baby extends his or her arms and splays his or her fingers apart.
- If your baby all of the sudden start yawning, hiccupping, or sneezing multiple times.
- If your baby arches his or her back and neck and pushes away.
- If your baby cries. This is usually a last sign when all other signs have been ignored.
- The baby will become frantic and move all extremities wildly or the baby will just shut down, shut his or eyes and tune everything out.
- Trouble sleeping, irregular sleeping pattern.
- Changes in bowel movements.

What might be causing stress:

- Allowing a child to cry it out without parental attention and affection.
- Not feeding the child when hungry.
- Not offering comfort when the child is disturbed or distressed.
- Limiting body contact during feeding, throughout the day, and during stressful parts of the night.
- Low levels of human attention, stimulation, conversation and play.
- Issues with breast milk or formula.
- Overstimulation.
- Being overtired.
- Environmental stress between caregivers.

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RECOGNIZING STRESS IN CHILDREN: AGES 3 TO 5 YEARS OLD

Now that your baby is transitioning into preschool, your child will be experiencing new surroundings and will be spending less time in your care. This can create mixed emotions, such as excitement and nervousness. The way your child experiences stress will change as will the reasons why he or she may feel anxious. Listed below are some behaviors you might notice when your child is experiencing stress and what might be happening to cause your child stress.



What parents might notice in their child:

- Change in regular sleep and eating habits.
- Change in emotions (e.g., showing signs of being sad, clingy, withdrawn, angry).
- Increase in crying or tantrums.
- Nightmares and fears at bedtime.
- Physical ailments, such as headaches or stomachaches.
- Anxious tics, coughs, or body movements.
- Frequent reliance on habits such as hair chewing or thumb-sucking.
- Changes in bowel movements.

What might be causing stress:

- Separation anxiety.
- New family dynamic or big family changes.
- Potty training.
- Overwhelming schedules.
- Unexpected world events.
- Personal traumatic experiences.

RECOGNIZING STRESS IN CHILDREN: AGES 5 TO 10 YEARS OLD

As your child transitions into the elementary school years, you are now experts in knowing your child's behavior; however, sometimes, when your child experiences stress, his or her behavior may be misunderstood or unrecognizable. Listed below are some behaviors and ideas as to why your child may be experiencing stress.

What parents might notice in their child:

- » Mood swings.
- » Changes in sleeping patterns.
- » Bedwetting.
- » Physical ailments, such as headaches or stomachaches.
- » Soothing behaviors, like biting nails, hair pulling, thumb sucking.
- » Lie, bully or defy authority.
- » Nightmares.
- » Become clingy.
- » Academic challenges, trouble concentrating on schoolwork.
- » Becomes more aggressive.
- » Withdrawing, becoming more isolated.
- » Overreact to minor problems or increased irritability.
- » Hyperactivity.
- » Refusing to attend school.

What might be causing stress:

- » Academic pressure.
- » Fear of disappointing parents.
- » Forming friendships.
- » Sport performance pressure.
- » Changing schools.
- » New family dynamics.
- » Overscheduled.
- » Living in an unsafe home or neighborhood.
- » Developing specific fears or phobias.



BREATHE TO THRIVE

RECOGNIZING STRESS IN CHILDREN: AGES 10 TO 18 YEARS OLD

As your child starts to transition into the adolescent years, the type of stressors and how he or she responds to stress will begin to change. Parents should try to keep an open mind and line of communication with their teen and not assume their teenager is just moody. Think about when you were a teenager and how stressful it was and how you managed to cope with these stresses. Listed below are some behaviors you might notice in your teen and what might be happening to cause him or her stress.

What parents might notice in their

- » Lost interest in former enjoyments.
- » Poor sleeping and eating habits.
- » Wants to be alone, avoids friends and family.
- » Talks about suicide or complains that life is just too hard to live.
- » Feels guilty or not worth anything
- » Experiences a sudden drop in their grades.
- » Displays extreme anger and or sadness and overreacts to many situations.
- » Worries constantly about his or her appearance and or physical problems.
- » Is constantly afraid.
- » Constant physical ailments, like headaches or stomachaches.
- » Withdraws from social situations or becomes isolated.
- » Refuses to go to school or skips classes.
- » Can't make decisions or concentrate.
- » Consistent nightmares.
- » Consumes alcohol, cigarettes or drugs.
- » Gives little attention to his or her appearance.
- » Defies authority.
- » Increased promiscuous behavior.
- » Breaks the law and or hurts others.
- » Takes extreme risks.
- » Nervous habits, such as nail biting, pacing.

What might be causing stress:

- » Academic and sports pressure.
- » Peer pressure.
- » Low self-esteem.
- » Overscheduled.
- » Family pressure or new family dynamics.
- » Bullying.
- » Changes in bodies.
- » Fear of disappointing parents.
- » Depression.
- » Eating disorders.
- » Social pressure.
- » Discrimination.
- » Social media.
- » High personal expectations.
- » Changes in school.
- » Changes in friendships.
- » Financial stress.
- » Personal traumatic event.
- » Romantic relationship changes.

