

Helping Children Express Feelings

Let children know that it is important to share feelings.

Encourage children to talk about their feelings.

Provide opportunities for children to share both their positive *and negative* feelings.

Acknowledge feelings without apologizing or giving in.

Be a good listener.

Try not to judge feelings. All feelings are acceptable, but all behaviors are not.

Ask simple questions that help children understand what it is they are feeling.

Share a similar feeling or experience you have had, but be careful not to change the focus to you or to use your story to minimize the child's feelings.

Help children distinguish between what they feel and what they do.

Encourage many different ways to express feelings. For example, an angry child may hit a pillow, draw a picture, go for a walk, or talk to a sympathetic friend.

Helping Children Handle Stress

1. Make sure your child is rested and healthy. Does your child eat good food, get enough rest, and exercise?
2. Help your child develop interests and hobbies that comfort him when he feels lonely, or amuse him when he is bored.
3. Help your child develop ways to relax, to "blow off steam" in safety, and to take care of herself.
4. Encourage your child to do his or her best and to succeed when possible, but also to understand that failures and disappointments are a part of life. Help your child ease the pain of a failed friendship, sport, or grade through your acceptance of her as a person. Share with her how you cope with disappointment.
5. Help your child make sense of the world. Share your beliefs and values about what's really important and central to your life. Show your child what you "fall back on" in times of stress.
6. Help your child know that she or he does have control of his or her life, body, and feelings. She or he does not have to put drugs into her or his body, or have sex to feel better.
7. Encourage your child to help others. Helping others is its own reward, and serves to reduce one's stress.
8. Develop a generally positive attitude toward life. If you feel like a victim, your child will probably feel like a victim too. If you look forward to the future, so will your child.
9. Be aware of your own stress. How you cope with your stress directly affects children.
10. If you feel you are under too much stress, make some life adjustments if you can, or get some help. Talking with a clergy person, your doctor, other health resource, or having a heart-to-heart talk with a friend may help. Think of ways in which you can tackle problems that result in stress. Show your children that you care about and can work to change poverty, racism, sexism, homophobia, and the many other societal pressures that cause stress.
11. Help children learn how to set realistic goals and plan how to achieve these goals. For example, how can a child plan and take steps to: make the basketball team, get a part in the school play, buy a new jacket, get an after-school job.
12. Remember that not all stress is bad. Taking risks is healthy and an important part of growing and learning. Riding a two-wheel bike, making a new friend, trying a sport or activity for the first time, and starting a new school all may be stressful but also provide us with opportunities we wouldn't have had without taking risks.