

Coping With Stress

Everyone—adults, teens, and even children—experiences stress at times. Stress can be beneficial. It can help people develop the skills they need to deal with possible threatening situations throughout life. Stress is not helpful when it prevents a person from taking care of themselves or their family. You can put problems into perspective by finding healthy ways to cope. Getting the right care and support can help reduce stressful feelings and symptoms.

Stress is a reaction to a situation where a person feels threatened or anxious. Stress can be positive (e.g., preparing for a wedding) or negative (e.g., dealing with a natural disaster). The symptoms may be physical or emotional.

After a traumatic event that is very frightening, people may have strong and lingering reactions. These events may include personal or environmental disasters, or threats with an assault. These strong emotions may be normal and temporary.

Common reactions to a stressful event can include:

- Disbelief, shock, and numbness
- Feeling sad, frustrated, and helpless
- Fear and anxiety about the future
- Feeling guilty
- Anger, tension, and irritability
- Difficulty concentrating and making decisions
- Crying
- Reduced interest in usual activities

- Wanting to be alone
- Loss of appetite
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Nightmares or bad memories
- Reoccurring thoughts of the event
- Headaches, back pains, and stomach problems
- Increased heart rate, difficulty breathing
- Smoking or use of alcohol or drugs

Healthy Ways to Cope with Stress



Feeling emotional and nervous or having trouble sleeping and eating can all be normal reactions to stress. Here are some healthy ways you can deal with stress:

- Take care of yourself.
 - Eat healthy, well-balanced meals
 - Exercise on a regular basis
 - Get plenty of sleep
 - Give yourself a break if you feel stressed out
- Talk to others. Share your problems and how you are feeling and coping with a parent, friend, counselor, doctor, or pastor.
- Avoid drugs and alcohol. These may seem to help with the stress. But in the long run, they create additional problems and increase the stress you are already feeling.
- Take a break. If news events are causing your stress, take a break from listening or watching the news.

Recognize when you need more help. If problems continue or you are thinking about suicide, talk to a psychologist, social worker, or professional counselor.

If you or someone you know needs immediate help, please contact the one of the following crisis hotlines:

- Disaster Distress Helpline: 1-800-985-5990
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (1-888-628-9454 for Spanish-speaking callers)
- Youth Mental Health Line: 1-888-568-1112
- Child-Help USA: 1-800-422-4453 (24 hour toll free) Coping With Stress

Helping Youth Cope with Stress

Children and adolescents often struggle with how to cope well with stress. Youth can be particularly overwhelmed when their stress is connected to a traumatic event—like a natural disaster (earthquakes, tornados, wildfires), family loss, school shootings, or community violence. Parents and educators can take steps to provide stability and support that help young people feel better.

Tips

Tips for Parents –

It is natural for children to worry, especially when scary or stressful events happen in their lives. Talk to your children about these events. This can help put frightening information into a more balanced setting. Monitor what children see and hear about stressful events happening in their lives. Here are some suggestions to help children cope:

- **Maintain a normal routine.** Helping children wake up, go to sleep, and eat meals at regular times provide them a sense of stability. Going to school and participating in typical after-school activities also provide stability and extra support.
- **Talk, listen, and encourage expression.** Create opportunities to have your children talk, but do not force them. Listen to your child's thoughts and feelings and share some of yours. After a traumatic event, it is important for children to feel they can share their feelings and that you understand their fears and worries. Keep having these conversations. Ask them regularly how they feel in a week, in a month, and so on.
- **Watch and listen.** Be alert for any change in behavior. Are children sleeping more or less? Are they withdrawing from friends or family? Are they behaving in any way out of the ordinary? Any changes in behavior, even small ones, may be signs that your child is having trouble and may need support.
- **Reassure.** Stressful events can challenge a child's sense of physical and emotional safety and security. Take opportunities to reassure your child about his or her safety and well-being. Discuss ways that you, the school, and the community are taking steps to keep them safe.
- **Connect with others.** Make an on-going effort to talk to other parents and your child's teachers about ways to help your child cope. It is often helpful for parents, schools, and health professionals to work together for the well-being of all children in stressful times.