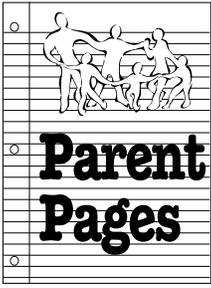


# Stressbreakers for Parents



One of the keys to a healthy lifestyle is learning how to deal with stress. Stress is a natural reaction to everyday challenges and change. No one can avoid it. Difficult situations like family or work problems, worries about money or feeling out of control cause stress. Even positive experiences like having a baby, getting a promotion or completing an important project at work can cause stress.

What's most important is not the stress, but how a person reacts to it. Parents need the skills to resist or adapt to stress before it takes a toll on their health. Stress can be a factor in health problems such as infections, ulcers, migraine headaches, allergies, high blood pressure and heart disease.

When stress strikes, parents can feel overwhelmed, frustrated and angry. They may feel like lashing out at their kids, especially when they are annoying or defiant. Stop. Don't take your stress out on your kids.

So what can you do to cope? Here are some tips for dealing with stress more effectively.

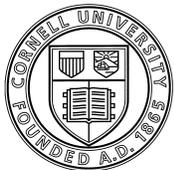
## *Take time out.*

- ◆ Stop in your tracks. Step back or sit down.
- ◆ Calm yourself down by counting to 10, 20 or 50 - whatever it takes. Or recite the alphabet backwards.
- ◆ Take a coffee, tea or hot milk break. Since caffeine can increase your stress reactions, make it decaffeinated.
- ◆ Put your child in a safe place and go to another room or outside for a few minutes.
- ◆ Lie on the floor with your feet up on a chair. Place a cool washcloth on your face. Think of the most peaceful and beautiful place you could be and stay there for five minutes.
- ◆ Designate a corner, chair or quiet spot as a "time-out" place where you or your child can go when you are stressed out.
- ◆ Practice rhythmic breathing. Inhale deeply through your nose and hold for a count of three. Exhale slowly. Repeat five times. Practice breathing from your diaphragm, which is the muscle below your lungs and at the top of your abdomen.

## *Take time for yourself.*

- ◆ Set time aside - early in the morning, when kids are napping or at school or when everyone's asleep - just for you. Forget what you "should" be doing and treat yourself to some relaxing activity.
- ◆ Take a soothing bubble bath.
- ◆ Ask your partner for a massage. Practice giving yourself a facial massage.
- ◆ Listen to your favorite music.
- ◆ Read a good book.

~ *Continued* ~



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- ◆ Start an interesting and satisfying hobby.
- ◆ Have someone watch the kids so you can go for a walk, take a class, exercise or see a movie.
- ◆ Cultivate friendships. When you're feeling bored or lonely, phone a friend for company. Develop a personal support system.
- ◆ Do something different. Visit a museum or take a weekend vacation somewhere you have never visited.
- ◆ Balance work and play. Constant work leads to constant stress. Balance your life with recreation -- such as sports, hobbies or reading

***Take care of yourself.***

- ◆ Listen to your body. When you're tense, your head aches, your muscles tense and your heart may pound. When this happens, slow down. Your body is telling you that you're pushing too hard.
- ◆ Reduce your consumption of sugar, caffeine, nicotine and alcohol.
- ◆ Eat three balanced meals each day.
- ◆ Get plenty of sleep. Sleep improves your ability to deal with stressful situations. Most people require at least seven hours of sleep each night.
- ◆ Get plenty of exercise. When you feel blue, angry or upset, get into an enjoyable physical activity. Exercise relaxes the body and helps you deal with mental stress.
- ◆ Communicate your feelings in appropriate ways. Ask for help when needed. Talk it over. When things build up, talk with a trusted and respected friend. Often a friend can help you see a new side to a problem.
- ◆ Avoid self-medication. Drugs may not help you adjust to stress. Don't rely on over-the-counter and prescription medicines. Your ability to handle stress must come from within.

***Take a positive view of parenting.***

- ◆ Let your children know when their behavior makes you happy.
- ◆ Compliment and reward your children for their cooperation.
- ◆ Hug your child and say, "I love you," more often.
- ◆ Join your children in their play and learn to be playful.
- ◆ Have fun with your kids. Laugh more.
- ◆ Treat your children and yourself to something really special now and then.
- ◆ Do something for others. Take your mind off yourself and your immediate situation. Doing something for somebody else -- no matter how small -- will make both of you feel good.
- ◆ Share family responsibilities. Prevent parental burnout by dividing chores among all family members. Even kids can do their part by completing little tasks around the house.

*Source: Tim Jabn, Human Development Specialist, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County. Parent Pages was developed by Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County.*