



Enriching Lives

Talking with Your Children about Stress

According to a recent survey by the American Psychological Association (APA), countless Americans — both adults and youth — experience high levels of stress. Adults can more readily identify emotions and causes of stress, and contemplate strategies to manage stress. Young people may not identify signs of stress or know how to respond constructively. Parents can offer support and provide empathy and understanding to their children's experience. By knowing what to listen to, watch for and by seeking opportunities to engage in a dialogue with children of all ages; parents can help their children to more effectively manage life challenges. APA recommends the following tips on talking with your children about stress:

Be Available

- Notice times when your kids are most likely to talk — for example, at bedtime, before dinner, in the car — and be fully available to just listen.
- Start the conversation; it lets your kids know you care about what is happening in their lives.
- Find time each week for a one-on-one activity with each child, and avoid scheduling other activities during that time.
- Learn about your children's interests — for example, favorite music and activities — and show interest in them.
- Initiate conversations by sharing what you have been thinking about, or what other kids may be thinking about, rather than beginning a conversation with a question.

Listen Actively

- When your children are talking about concerns, stop whatever you are doing and listen.
- Express interest in what they are saying without being intrusive.
- Listen to their point of view, even if it's difficult to hear.
- Let them complete their point before you respond.
- Repeat what you heard them say to ensure that you understand them correctly.
- Realize that your children may test you by telling you a small part of what is bothering them. Listen carefully to what they say, encourage them to talk and they may share the rest of the story.

Respond Thoughtfully

- Soften strong reactions — kids will tune you out if you appear angry or defensive.
- Express your opinion without minimizing theirs — acknowledge that it is okay to disagree.
- Resist arguing about who is right. Instead say, "I know you disagree with me, but this is what I think."
- Focus on your child's feelings rather than your own during your conversation.
- Ask your children what they may want or need from you in a conversation, such as advice, help in dealing with feelings or assistance in solving a problem.

Consider

- Kids learn by watching their parents. Most often, they will follow your lead in how they deal with anger, solve problems and work through difficult feelings. Help your kids to adopt healthy coping strategies by modeling positive behaviors.
- Engage the family in stress-reducing activities, such as taking a family walk, riding bikes or dancing together.
- Young children may express feelings of stress or worry in their play. Pay attention to themes in their conversations and activities to gain a good sense of their concerns. Teens and older children are often more involved with peers than family as part of developing their own identity. Significant avoidance of parents, however, may be a sign that a teen is distressed and may need assistance.

ASSOCIATION FOR COMPASSIONATE TRANSFORMATION

12526 High Bluff Drive, Suite 300 / San Diego, CA 92130
Phone: 858 792 3541 / Fax: 858 792 3542 / www.a4ct.com

- Kids learn from their own choices. As long as the consequences are not dangerous to themselves or others, don't feel you have to step in each time.
- Shielding children from possible causes of stress or anxiety, such as unemployment, a parent's marital problems or an illness in the family, can worsen a child's anxiety because children commonly assume a worst case scenario. Help by providing age-appropriate information.

Seek Additional Help

If you have concerns that your child is experiencing considerable stress and the ideas are not sufficiently helping, seek advice from a licensed mental health professional such as a psychologist. Psychologists have specific training that can help both you and your child successfully manage overwhelming stress. **For additional information on managing stress contact Dr. Drecun at Dr.Drecun@a4ct.com or visit us online at [Association for Compassionate Transformation](#).**