



Childhood Stress

As adults, it's easy to assume that the lives of children are free of worry and anxiety. Surprisingly, although it may look different than adults, kids take on stress too. "Stress usually stems from outside pressure, like school or family matters," says Doctor Jennifer Houtman of Bronson Internal Medicine & Pediatrics – Lifetime Wellness. "But sometimes, the source of their stress comes from the inside, like setting high expectations for themselves."

Check out these common causes of childhood stress and practical ways you can help your child relieve his or her anxieties:

- **Academic expectations** - Many kids seek approval from their parents by aiming to achieve above average grades. This pressure for perfection can become an obsession, which can take a toll on their emotional well-being.
- **Social pressures** – All kids have the desire to fit in among their peers. This may result in feelings of self-consciousness and low self-esteem.
- **Sports & competition** – Emphasizing the importance of winning can send the wrong message to kids. Focus on encouraging them instead of setting expectations for them.
- **Family issues** – Kids can sense when there is relational tension within their family. Often, they put blame on themselves, which can negatively affect their emotions.

Relieving Stress

- **Go back to the basics** – Your child may be more susceptible to stress if he or she isn't getting enough sleep or eating nutritious foods. Set children up for success by making sure their basic needs, including moderate exercise, are being met.
- **Daily check-ins** – "Kids often don't express their feelings because they don't want to feel like a burden," says Dr. Houtman. "Establish open lines of communication by making it a daily priority to ask about the highs and lows of their day."
- **Anticipate & prepare** – Sometimes it's possible to prepare for situations that may be more stressful than usual. For example, if your child has an upcoming test, make a study plan weeks in advance. If he or she has an upcoming doctor's appointment, start discussing what may happen, like receiving a flu shot or a blood draw.

Don't forget that small doses of stress are normal and healthy. When stress arises, encourage your kids to share their feelings. Together, brainstorm solutions to combat or ease anxiety. Assure them that you will always be there to support them.

This article is brought to you by Bronson Children's Hospital, southwest Michigan's only children's hospital. For more information about children's health, visit bronsonhealth.com/children

Sources: kidshealth.org, medlineplus.gov