

# Stress-Management Plan

When kids are stressed, their first impulse is to relieve the discomfort. They don't sit down and rationally think about the best way to do something. They find relief by acting impulsively or following the paths most readily available to them, the ones they may see other kids taking. Most young people simply don't know healthier and more effective alternatives. Unless we guide them toward positive ways to relieve and manage stress, they may choose the negative behaviors of their peers or the culture they absorb from the media. They may become caught up in a cycle of negative coping methods and risky behaviors such as using alcohol or drugs to relieve their stress. We need to help them avoid that cycle.

Here is information from the American Academy of Pediatrics to aid parents in helping their children manage stress.

## Ten-Point Stress-Management Plan

People with a wide range of coping strategies can manage stress more easily. The following plan is designed for adults and children. Remember when you model healthy coping strategies, your children learn by example.

- 1. Figure out what the problem is and make it manageable.** What is the cause of the stress, what is it doing to you, and how can you solve the problem? Learn to break big problems into smaller, more manageable parts.
- 2. Avoid things that bring you down.** If we teach kids to identify the people who frustrate or bother them, situations where stress usually arises, and things that provoke or intensify stress, then they can learn when and how to avoid those stressors.
- 3. Let some things go.** People who waste their energy worrying about things they can't change don't have enough energy left over to fix the things they can.
- 4. Exercise.** When people exercise, they keep their bodies healthy, think more clearly, and manage stress better because exercise uses up stress energy.
- 5. Learn to relax your body.** People who use deep breathing exercises, make changes to their body posture, and do other relaxation techniques, such as yoga and meditation, can better control their stress.
- 6. Eat well.** A healthy body helps us manage stress.
- 7. Sleep well.** Getting enough sleep on a consistent basis is essential for good health and keeping stress levels manageable.
- 8. Take instant vacations.** Use your mind to imagine a special place whenever you need to escape the stress of the moment. Reading, a nature walk, hobbies, and a warm bath all offer great instant vacations.
- 9. Release emotions.** We often lock unwanted feelings away, thinking we will deal with them later. But, for many people, later never comes. Create outlets for feelings and emotions such as doing art or music, talking feelings out with someone you trust, writing down feelings in a journal, practicing prayer or meditation, or having a good laugh or cry.
- 10. Make the world a better place.** When we contribute to our communities, we can put our own troubles in perspective and build a sense of purpose.

## Keep in Mind . . .

- When you choose strategies from this plan, select those you think will work, not those that will impress someone else.
- The plan cannot be imposed on children; it has to be welcomed to be effective. If your children don't take to one strategy, try another.
- Don't stress about the stress-management plan! Don't feel that your children must be exposed to everything in the plan to manage stress successfully.

These points are suggestions that you can adapt for your children and yourself. No one is expected to use all of them all the time.

## Getting Help

All people, even the most stable, reach their limits sometimes. It is not a sign of weakness on our children's part nor is it a sign of poor parenting on our part.

Whenever your children seem troubled, the first step is to reinforce that you are there to be fully supportive. Listen, give hugs, be a sounding board, sometimes even offer advice, and give them hope that things will get better.

If you feel your children need more help than you can give, be assured that mental health professionals who work with children have the training to ensure a safe, even enjoyable experience. Ask your children's pediatrician, school counselor, or trained professional at your place of worship for recommendations and then speak to the professional to feel confident you have found the right match for your children.

## For More Information

American Academy of Pediatrics  
[www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org) and [www.HealthyChildren.org](http://www.HealthyChildren.org)

Center for Parent and Teen Communication (interactive stress-management plan)  
<https://parentandteen.com/teen-stress-management-plan>

Adapted from *Building Resilience in Children and Teens: Giving Kids Roots and Wings* by Kenneth R. Ginsburg, MD, MS Ed, FAAP.

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