

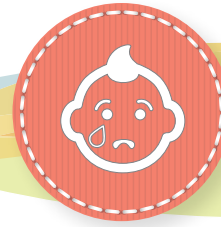
Stress and Your Child

Stress occurs from many things, such as having too much to do, not having enough money, moving, or losing a job. Trauma occurs when someone experiences something that is physically or emotionally harmful. Are there times when your life is stressful? Have you or your child seen or experienced anything scary or frightening? Sometimes, adults think babies and young children are “too young to understand” or “too young to remember.” However, research shows that babies and young children do get stressed and do have memories of trauma. Both babies and children feel stress in their bodies and show stress through their behaviors. The good news is that you can do things to protect and help your child—even if life is stressful or you have experienced trauma. Remember, whatever is going on in your life is not your child’s fault. Take a deep breath when you are frustrated. With your love and protection, you can help your child feel safe.

Keep in Mind

- Babies and young children show stress through their behavior. Changes in your child’s behavior, such as in sleeping or feeding, might be a sign of stress.
- Long-term stress affects a child’s developing brain. It is important to recognize stress in your child so you can help reduce it.
- Here are some possible signs of stress in young children:
 - Eating disturbances
 - Difficulty sleeping
 - Regression in skills such as potty training
 - Clinginess; not wanting to leave you
 - Headaches or stomachaches
 - New fears; nightmares
 - Problem behaviors such as hyperactivity or aggression
- Your child might experience stress when developing and learning new skills—for example, when they begin to separate from you, or when they are toilet training.
- Young children don’t understand why they feel stress. You can help your child by naming their feelings and reassuring them that they will be okay.
- All families experience different types of stress. Children and families also react to stress in different ways. Your child learns to react by watching you.
- Your love, comfort, and gentle touch help to protect your child against stress.
- Behavioral health specialists can help you and your child deal with severe or ongoing stress. Talk to your health care provider.

(continued)



Stress and Your Child *(continued)*

Suggestions

- Be aware that your baby or young child is paying attention to everything they see and hear.
- As much as possible, keep your baby or child away from situations or images that are violent or scary. This includes shows or games on television, phones, computers, and tablets.
- Limit talk about your fears and worries around your baby or young child. When your child is nearby, be positive.
- You can reduce your child's stress by staying calm and using a calm voice—even when you are stressed.
- Comfort your child when they are scared or worried. Hold them close and talk to them. "That loud noise was scary. Did it scare you? How can I help?"
- Talk to your young child, even your baby, about how you think they are feeling. Use words such as happy, scared, mad, or worried. When your child begins to talk, encourage them to use feeling words.
- When big changes happen in your family's life, such as welcoming a new baby or moving, keep your schedule and routines as much the same as possible. Routines help children feel safe and secure.
- Make sure your child's day has a mix of active and quiet times. This gives your child different ways to deal with any stress.
- Prepare children for the big changes (such as starting preschool) and little changes (such as saying goodbye at preschool) in their lives. Change is stressful. Knowing what to expect will help decrease fears and worries.
- Let your child know you love them and will always be there for them. Your child needs you to let them know things are okay. They will feel secure knowing that you are there for them.

Questions? Concerns? Talk to your child's health care provider.