

Children can feel stressed, too!

Adults aren't the only ones who feel stress. Children feel stress, too.

What is stress?

Stress is the feeling of exaggerated tension or excitement. Looking forward to a long overdue trip or anticipating a special event can add stress to a child's life. Stress can involve expecting a good or bad outcome.

Why do children experience stress?

Children need predictable environments to feel secure. Predictable routines and activities help children to build proficiency. Some children are more sensitive to changes in expected activities and routines. They may not have the words to express what they are feeling and begin to "act out" instead.



Since both positive and negative events can cause overstimulation leading to stress, parents and caregivers need to observe a child's behavior in order to detect if stress is causing changes in the child. Each child demonstrates his or her unique way of dealing with stress. A birthday party or a special trip can create the same behavior changes as a negative event if the child has reached maximum coping levels. Watch your child for changes in habits or behavior.

Stress can show up as:

- u Becoming accident prone
- u Excessive aggressiveness
- u Appetite loss
- u Bed-wetting
- u Grinding teeth
- u Insomnia

Why is stress harmful?

In very young children stress can actually affect brain development. The brain controls not only the intelligence of a child but also the social and emotional make-up of a child. If harmful amounts of stress hormones such as cortisol are constantly being secreted in the brain as a result of stress, a child may develop learning and emotional difficulties. That is not to say that some stimulation is not a good thing, just not too much over too long a period of time. Your child will let you know how much is too much. You just need to be on the alert.

