

COPING WITH STRESS

Everyone experiences stress, regardless of age. It is a normal part of everyday life. Limited amounts of stress can motivate us to achieve our goals, but excessive stress can have an overwhelming and debilitating effect on our lives. This is why it is so important to have the right tools to positively cope with life's stressors.

What can you do as a parent to help your child positively cope with stress?

- Spend time with your child and try to understand how they are feeling
- Do activities as a family: Physical activity is an excellent way to burn off stress
- Give your child a chance to calm down; teach them different breathing exercises to relax
- Implement a bedtime routine to help your child wind down at the end of the day
- Ensure your child gets the recommended amount of sleep based on their age; tired children get stressed easier

Additional stress-coping tips

- Talk to a friend or trusted adult
- Practice deep breathing
- Increase physical activity
- Play with a pet
- Be creative: Play music, paint, draw, dance
- Stay on top of schoolwork and prioritize workloads
- Ask for help



This material is provided by York Region Public Health. For more information on staying healthy, please visit york.ca/healthyschools

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Public Health

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york.ca/healthyschools



HEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS AND RELATIONSHIPS

Feeling connected and close to others is an important part of having good mental health. Friendships and relationships are a big part of a child's educational experience and can greatly impact how students feel and behave in school.

Benefits of healthy friendships and relationships:

- Making challenging times more manageable
- Increasing resiliency that is carried through to adulthood
- Developing social skills and learning how to positively relate to others
- Building confidence, self-esteem and a sense of belonging



Ways to help your child develop healthy relationships:

- Model healthy relationships at home
- Encourage your child to participate in group activities and hobbies
- Provide opportunities for social interactions outside of school (in line with current COVID-19 guidelines, including virtual activities)
- Encourage diversity by inviting your child to get to know children from different backgrounds
- Be open and non-judgmental when talking to your child about their friendships

Having a positive social support system is important to maintaining good mental health, which contributes to overall well-being.

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MIND YOUR HEALTH

Mental health is a part of overall health and it can change with age or life circumstances. One in five students struggle with mental health challenges. It is important to talk to your children about their well-being and be able to recognize signs of poor mental health.

What are signs of poor mental health?

- Avoiding friends and family
- Rebelling against authority
- Not doing things they used to enjoy
- Frequent mood swings
- Getting significantly lower marks in school

What can you do as a parent to support your children and help them manage mental health challenges?

- Encourage your children to talk about their feelings
- Respect your children's feelings
- Stay positive and avoid being judgmental
- Take your child(ren) to your family doctor to explore concerns



This material is provided by York Region Public Health. For more information on mental health, please visit york.ca/healthyschools. Your child can speak with a counsellor from Kids Help Phone over the phone or chat online by calling 1-800-668-6868 or kidshelpphone.ca

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SLEEP

Is your child getting enough sleep?

Children who are not getting enough sleep usually demonstrate the following signs: they fall asleep in class and have trouble with memory, concentration and motivation. They can also show feelings of moodiness and depression.



How do you encourage your child to get the most out of sleep?

- Set up a regular bedtime that allows your child to sleep the recommended eight-to-10 hours each night
- Encourage your child to be physically active on a regular basis
- Discourage your child from drinking or eating caffeinated drinks or chocolate after 4 p.m.
- Limit napping to 30 minutes, if possible
- Turn off bright lights and decrease the use of cellphones, TVs and other electronic devices before bedtime

What are the benefits of sleeping well? A good sleep:

- Boosts the immune system, which helps healing
- Supports faster growth and development
- Helps in regulating appetite and metabolism
- Improves memory
- Improves emotional well-being, which stabilizes mood and reduces anxiety

Sources:

[Kids Help Phone: Get Better Sleep with These Tips](#)

[Canadian Paediatric Society: Teens and sleep](#)

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TAKE FIVE BREATHING EXERCISE

Deep breathing is one of the best ways to manage emotions and cope with stress. Deep breathing exercises can quickly change a stress response into a relaxation response.

Try this simple breathing exercise with your child:

1. Start with one hand: Stretch your fingers out like a star.
2. With your other hand, use your pointer finger to trace the hand that is stretched out.
3. Trace your hand: Slowly slide up one side and down the other side of each finger.
4. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth.
5. Now, put the last two steps together: Breathe in through your nose as you trace up one finger and breathe out through your mouth as you trace down. Keep going until you have finished tracing your hand.



This free relaxation tool is beneficial for your child because:

- It can be done anywhere
- It can be done at anytime
- It will help calm and relax your child

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TALKING TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT THEIR MENTAL HEALTH

Talking about mental health can be difficult. As parents, you may feel you are protecting your child by not discussing this subject with them. Research shows that talking with your child about their emotions, fears and changes in behaviour creates an environment for open communication.



Here are some ideas to start the conversation with your child about mental health:

- Remind your child that they can share anything with you and assure them that you will not judge or be upset with them
- Begin by talking about any changes you have noticed in their behaviour and any comments or observations from their teachers, friends or family
- Tell them you're interested to hear about how they may be feeling
- Give your child a chance to think about what you have said before they answer
- Manage your own emotions and do not give up, even if your child pushes you away. Remind them that you are there for them and allow them time before you bring it up again
- If your child shares something that worries you, tell them that you are happy that they shared this with you and that you will help them [find the appropriate professional](#) to discuss this with. Reassure them that you will be with them throughout the process

Sources:

[School Mental Health Ontario: How to Talk With Your Child When you Feel Concerned They may be Struggling With a Mental Health Problem \(https://smho-smso.ca/\)](https://smho-smso.ca/)

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WHAT IS RESILIENCY?

Resiliency is using a mix of positive qualities and skills to cope with difficult and stressful everyday experiences. Resiliency allows people to bounce back from negative events, ask for help from others, know their own strengths and weaknesses, and to take care of themselves.

Here are some ways to help raise a resilient child:

- Actively listen and be present when your child is talking with you. Show interest in what is going on in their life. Make time to connect with them, whether it's eating a meal, sharing a laugh or doing a fun activity together.
- Encourage your child to share their feelings and respect their emotions. Role model good emotional health by managing your own emotions and helping your child label and describe their feelings.
- Support your child's unique interests and strengths to help build their self-esteem and skills. Provide opportunities for your child to develop new skills and confidence by having them help with chores around the house.
- Role model positive thinking by practicing daily gratitude. Offer positive and realistic ideas for looking at negative events.



Sources:

[Psychology Foundation of Canada: Parent's Tips and Strategies \(www.psychologyfoundation.org\)](http://www.psychologyfoundation.org)

[Psychology Foundation of Canada: Kids Can Cope – Parenting Resilient Children at Home and at School](#)

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