

Stress and Anxiety Age 8 Summary

Why Stress and Anxiety?

Children and adults both experience stress. Feelings of stress are naturally built-in mechanisms for human survival and thriving. These feelings are the body's way of warning you when there is danger and calling your attention to problems that need resolving. Children ages 5-10 are learning about their strong feelings, and you, as a parent or someone in a parenting role, can help your child learn to identify and grow skills to handle their stress -- an important skill they will use throughout their life.

Tip Even though signs of stress and anxiety may look the same, they are different and require different approaches to handle each. While mild anxiety may respond well to coping strategies used to manage stress, a child experiencing anxiety may need additional help from a mental health professional to determine if they have an anxiety disorder. Anxiety disorders are different from feelings of stress or mild anxiety, which are short-term.

**STEP
1**



Get Your Child Thinking by Getting Their Input

- *“When do you feel stressed?”*
- *“When do you feel uncomfortable, frustrated, or angry?”* (These feelings can occur to mask underlying stress.)
- *“What time of day?”*
- *“What people, places, and activities are usually involved?”*

Trap Be sure you talk about stress at a calm time when you are not stressed.

**STEP
2**



Teach New Skills

Learn together! Because stress is a part of everyday life, it is essential to teach our children how to manage daily stressors. Teaching builds basic skills, grows problem-solving abilities, and prepares your child for success. Teaching also involves modeling and practicing the positive behaviors you want to see, promoting skills, and preventing problems.

- Model behaviors (and your children will notice and learn).
- Get exercise and fresh air.

- Remember to breathe.
- Create quiet time.
- Set a goal for daily connection.
- Notice, name, and accept feelings regularly.
- Brainstorm coping strategies for yourself, such as imagining a favorite place, walking, drinking water, taking deep breaths, counting to 50, drawing, coloring, or building something.
- Design a plan for when stress takes over so you don't have to think in those moments. What will you do or say? Where will you go?
- Create a calm-down space.
- Work on your family feelings vocabulary. Use specific feelings words to describe your state of mind and help your child tell theirs.
- Teach your child how to stop repetitively analyzing problems or concerns.
- Create a family gratitude ritual.

Tip Deep breathing removes the chemicals that have flowed over your brain so that you regain access to your creativity, language, and logic versus staying stuck in your primal brain. Practicing deep breathing with your child can offer them a powerful tool anytime, anywhere, when they feel overwhelmed with heated emotions.

Tip Although some feelings associated with stress and anxiety do not feel good, it is essential to remember that every feeling is a vital message from ourselves. Set the rule or expectation in your household: Having feelings is always okay! This helps each family member feel safe to express what they are feeling. What you do with those feelings is the crucial next step.



Practice to Grow Skills and Develop Habits

- Use “Show me...” statements like: “*Show me how you use your safe base to calm down.*”
- Practice your plan for managing stressful situations.
- Recognize effort: “*I notice how you took deep breaths when you got frustrated. That's excellent!*”
- Proactively remind: “*Remember what we will say when we keep playing worries repeatedly in our mind? What is it?*”

Tip After a tough day, your child may be internally beating themselves up for what they did and said earlier. So, end the day with love. They need to hear that you love them NO MATTER WHAT on those days.

Trap Don't continually repeat a request when children are stressed or upset. Children often need more time to calm down, regain perspective, and move on. Be sure to wait long enough for your child to show you they can take steps to self-manage. Your waiting could make all the difference in whether they can do what you need.

STEP 4 SUPPORT

Support Your Child's Development and Success

- Ask key questions to support their skills: *"You have a test coming up today. Do you remember how to help yourself if you feel stressed?"*
- Learn about development. Becoming informed about your child's developmental milestones will offer you empathy and patience.
- Reflect on outcomes. *"It seems like you couldn't sleep last night because you had so much on your mind. Did you have a hard time paying attention in class? What could we do tonight to help?"*
- Stay engaged. Try out new and different coping strategies to see what works best.

STEP 5 RECOGNIZE

Recognize Efforts

- No matter how old your child is, your positive reinforcement and encouragement have a significant impact.
- There are many ways you can reinforce your child's efforts. It is important to distinguish between three types of reinforcement – recognition, rewards, and bribes. These three distinct parenting behaviors have different impacts on your child's behavior.
 - Recognize** even small successes to promote positive behaviors and expand confidence: *"I noticed when you got frustrated with your homework, you told me how you were feeling and took some deep breaths. Excellent."* Recognition can include nonverbal acknowledgment such as a smile, high five, or hug.
 - Rewards** can be helpful in certain situations by providing a concrete, timely, and positive incentive for doing a good job. A reward is determined ahead of time so that the child knows what to expect, like *"If you finish your homework before dinner, we will have time for a bike ride after dinner."* (if you XX, then I'll XX) The goal should be to help your child progress to a time when the reward will no longer be needed. If used too often, rewards can decrease a child's internal motivation.
 - Unlike a reward, **bribes** aren't planned ahead of time and generally happen when a parent is in a crisis (like in the grocery store checkout line and a child is having a tantrum. To avoid disaster, a parent offers to buy a sucker if the child will stop the tantrum). While bribes can be helpful in the short term to manage stressful situations, they will not grow lasting motivation or behavior change and should be avoided.
- Build celebrations into your routine. For example, *"We'll finish our bedtime routine first, and then we can snuggle up to a good book and talk about our day."*

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