

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

HELPING YOUNGSTERS MANAGE STRESS

Children may show signs of stress through negative changes in their behavior.

Stress is a normal part of life, and can provide the energy needed to tackle a difficult problem or challenge. Too much stress, however, can cause emotional and physical problems in both children and adults. Preschoolers, for instance, may show distress and anxiety when separated from their parents. Older kids may feel pressures related to school, friends, and family. Children may show signs of stress through negative changes in their behavior. They may also complain of physical symptoms that aren't connected to a specific medical problem.



Possible signs of stress in children include the following:

- Mood changes, such as irritability, anger, crying, and restlessness or agitation.
- Complaints of physical symptoms such as stomach pain or headaches.
- Sleeping too much or too little.
- Appetite changes: eating too much or too little.
- Lack of interest in activities he/she used to enjoy.
- Withdrawal from friends and family or excessive hostility toward family members and authority figures.
- Falling grades and loss of interest in school.
- Antisocial behavior such as aggressiveness, lying, stealing, and defiance.

Negative changes in behavior that persist for several weeks or more are a red flag that something is wrong. Parents can help their children deal with stress by modeling healthy coping strategies themselves, making time to listen to their concerns and challenges, showing interest in their lives, and being available even if the child is not ready or willing to talk. Sometimes overscheduling contributes to stress in children. Talk to your child about his/her schedule and interests, and reduce the number of weekly activities if necessary. Healthy eating and adequate sleep can also help children cope better with stress.

Seek professional help if your child's change in mood or behavior persists, or stress is causing continuing problems at home or school. The school counselor, family doctor, or Employee Assistance Program are good places to start.