

As adults, coping with family responsibilities and problems such as too much work, or too little, it's easy to forget that children also have pressures in their lives that cause stress. Stressful situations are a normal part of life, they can help both adults and children learn how to solve problems and become stronger people. But too much stress can cause problems.

As parents we have to perform a difficult balancing act. On one hand we need to help buffer children from the effects of too much stress, but we also need to give them the chance to meet challenges and solve problems by themselves.

The following examples offer tools for parents concerned about their child's or teen's stress:

- 1. School means opportunities for learning and making friends,** but it also can mean things to worry about like homework, tests, and relationships. It is common for children to worry about being liked and accepted by other children. Parents can help by taking an interest in what happens at school every day (not just in the classroom, but on the playground, too), by praising their efforts and by encouraging them, and not putting too much pressure on them to get top grades.
- 2. Organized sports can cause real anxiety for some children** when there's a lot of pressure on them to win. Teach children to take part for the sake of enjoyment, not just to win or please you. Praise their efforts, especially if they or their team loses.
- 3. Encourage children to welcome changes in their lives, rather than fear them.** You can help by providing them with new experiences and activities and always giving them your support.
- 4. Give children the chance to solve problems for themselves sometimes.** Jumping in and solving problems for them may seem like a caring thing to do, and sometimes it's the easiest. However, in the long run it makes it harder for children to learn to solve problems for themselves. Always be there to discuss solutions with them, to offer suggestions, and praise them for their efforts to work things out.
- 5. Giving children the chance to do new tasks will help them** feel competent and increase confidence. Make sure the tasks aren't too hard for them, and remember they're only children. Don't expect perfection.
- 6. Make sure children have plenty of opportunities to run around and play.** Being physically active helps reduce stress. Ball games, skipping, bike riding, running, jumping, and swimming are all good activities.
- 7. Don't forget to allow children time to "daydream."** Having free time for unstructured play or to just sit and think is important for children's emotional growth.
- 8. Think about how much television children watch.** Do you need to limit how much they watch and what they watch? Do they have enough time to play, think and chat with you without the distraction of TV, for instance?

Remember, being a supportive and loving parent who praises children for their efforts — not just their successes — in all areas of their lives will help them become confident adults. If you are a parent having difficulty with your children, or you have concerns about their behavior or well being, there are people who can help.

Source: New South Wales Health

You can find help at AltaPointe by calling its access call center, **CarePointe**, at (251) 450-2211.
Go to AltaPointe.org for more information about mental illness and AltaPointe services.