

Fact Sheet



Family Life Month Packet 1999
Family and Consumer Sciences
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Strong Families ... Strong Futures

Teachers Helping Young Children in Times of Stress

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Childhood stress has many sources. Both positive and negative events may contribute to the stress a child experiences. When an extra demand is placed on a child's ability to cope, stress occurs.

For many children stress comes from common changes, such as: starting school or child care, birth of a new baby, illness, separation of parents, divorce, change of parent's employment, moving to a new location, or death in the family.

Some children experience traumatic stress. These children may be homeless, survivors of natural disasters, using drugs or alcohol, and/or children having children. They may live in fear from violence in their schools, neighborhoods, or homes.

Recognizing that stress exists and ensuring that basic physical needs are met is important. Rather than trying to shield children from all stress, provide them with basic coping skills to prepare for the future challenges of life. Teachers can model acceptable ways to deal with life stress.

Symptoms to Look For

Change is a natural part of the development of children. However, no two children experience change in exactly the same way. Children may benefit from different types of support. Look for both positive and negative behaviors that are not the norm for the child. Noticeable emotional,

social, physical, and intellectual changes may be a signal to check out the possibility of stress as a factor.

Emotionally, a child under stress may appear more fearful, sensitive, tense, aggressive, greedy, angry, restless, and/or irritable. If the child does not know why he or she feels this way, stress could be a factor.

Socially, a child under stress may be more aggressive or withdrawn. Both of these symptoms can lead to feelings of isolation, which may increase stress levels.

Physically, children under stress may be more prone to accidents, illness, ulcers, and/or headaches. They may have lower energy levels, trouble with constipation, or diarrhea even though they are healthy. They may bite their fingernails.

Intellectually, children under stress may be easily distracted or restless. They may have difficulty concentrating or making decisions. Their expression may seem dull or vacant. They may be preoccupied with images of monsters or other threats and/or daydream more than usual.

Some Ways to Help

- 1) Set realistic expectations for each child's developmental level.
- 2) Contribute to each child's positive self-esteem by providing encouragement.
- 3) Nurture and cherish all of the children in your care. Accept them for who they are.

- 4) Guide each child by letting him or her know when behavior is acceptable. Verbally recognize positive behavior.
- 5) When unacceptable behavior occurs, redirect children by stating their options. Help them find acceptable ways to express negative feelings.
- 6) Communicate using I messages: When _____ I feel _____ because _____.
- 7) Take the time to develop mutual respect and trust between you and the children.
- 8) Listen to what the child is saying. Use active listening skills.
- 9) Model appropriate ways to deal with stress and change.
- 10) Interact with the child. Allow time for children to share their thoughts. Plan time for children to play alone, in small groups, and in large groups.
- 11) Involve children as helpers. Be patient as it may take longer to complete the task when the child is helping you.
- 12) Discipline using logical consequences. Limit use of “time out.”
- 13) Provide a space for the children’s things while they are with you.
- 14) Remember the value of laughter.
- 15) Encourage the parent(s) to seek professional help when needed.

Source

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