Your Employee and Family Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Stress in children

Children experience stress just as adults do, but it often goes unrecognized. Today, the pace of life is faster, and changes occur rapidly and frequently. There are many factors that contribute to stress in children's lives. Stress can interfere with children's motivation, attention, perception, memory and the entire learning process.



One of the greatest contributors to stress in children's lives is hurry —to get ready, to go from one place to another, to do well and to grow up. Family upheavals due to death or divorce, family health problems, tension and quarrelling in the home lead to children's fear, anxiety and emotional overload, and can also contribute to chronic stress.

Signs and signals that indicate a child might be experiencing undue stress include:

- Recurring headaches, tummy aches or neck pain
- Increased irritability, sadness, panic or anger
- Being more quiet than usual
- Trouble relaxing or sleeping
- Lethargy, daydreaming or withdrawal from activities
- Excessive energy or restlessness
- Reverting to less mature behaviours
- Nervous habits such as nail biting, hair twisting, thumb sucking or sighing deeply
- Subtle reactions, a strained look or frowning
- Trouble getting along with friends

Stress-management techniques

Children who have experienced stress for some time need extra patience and reassurance. They might respond to a combination of the following:

- **Physical contact.** Hugging helps children relax and builds self-esteem.
- **Listening.** Ask children how they feel.
- **Encouragement.** Help children find something they are good at and tell them how proud you are of them.
- **Honesty and openness.** Talk and encourage children to express their feelings openly.
- **Security.** Try to be consistent.
- **Physical exercise.** Exercise helps burn off stressful feelings.
- **Humour.** Help children see the funny side of things.
- **Quiet.** Allow for quiet time.
- **Balanced diet.** Encourage children to eat a healthy, varied diet.

Teach children to recognize the symptoms of stress and the changes they feel in themselves (e.g., rapid heartbeat, sweaty palms, fast breathing, headaches, tummy aches, tense muscles and panicky feelings).

Find out about any significant events in your children's lives. Caring adults are very important for

children. Provide an environment that promotes a relaxed lifestyle. To set an example, model peaceful living and good relaxation techniques with your spouse.
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