

CHILDHOOD STRESS

Many experts are becoming concerned with the growing amount of stress. There are, in fact, many factors causing stress to be heaped on children today. These factors include the high divorce rate, increased desire of parents to have successful children, increase in dual-career families, desire to educate children at an earlier age, the media confronting children with all facets of sexuality at an early age, the high crime rate in our society, and society pushing children to achieve.

The immigrant children of past generations were required to work hard for long hours each day. This was considered to be stressful to children. However, even more stressful are the parental responsibilities that many children today now face. These parental responsibilities are a result of parents not being at home, or in some cases, the parent is at home but so tied up in their own problems and circumstances that the child is forced to parent the parent. Whatever the situation may be, these parental responsibilities are extremely stressful to the child and may cause severe stress reactions physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially in the child.

A child's reaction to stress may include restlessness, irritability, an inability to concentrate, behavior disorders, headaches, stomachaches, loss of appetite, unexplained fears, sadness, loss of temper, aggressive behavior, drop in grades, depression, and drug and alcohol abuse. Stress can cause a child to feel less positive self-worth and may lower self-esteem. A child may exhibit mood changes, loss of energy, nail biting, or nervousness.

Methods of dealing with stress in children are similar to methods used by adults in dealing with stress. These include getting appropriate exercise, eating nutritionally, and enjoying hobbies. Parents can aid their children in dealing with stresses by helping them to manage their lives. Help children to allow plenty of leisure time for themselves and to eliminate some of the competition in their lives. Parents should evaluate the pressure that they place on the child to achieve and possibly eliminate some of this undue pressure. Children can be taught to relax and to talk out their worries with a parent or counselor. In addition, children can be taught acceptable means of dealing with anger. It is important that a child receives adequate sleep. Parents should evaluate the schedules and demands placed on of the child, identifying areas that could be improved.