

Stress management for parents

You work hard in a high-stress job. You fight traffic to pick your kids up from daycare, school or sports. Then you go from chauffeur to chef at home. No wonder toddler tantrums, or teenage rebellion can push a parent over the edge. Learning to manage stress can give you the patience, energy and perspective to be the parent you want to be. And it will pay dividends for your health and ability to function well.

Here are some stress management tips for parents from pediatric experts:

Try not to bring stress home

It isn't easy, but separating work life from home life is essential. Try talking briefly to a friend, spouse or co-worker to help defuse stress before you leave work. Try resolving work stress outside of the home or with a therapist. On the drive home, be aware of how you're feeling. Is traffic increasing your stress? If so, take a deep breath or play music. There's nothing better than coming home to a warm welcome from your kids and family. Find your child and get a hug.

Seek opportunities for fun

Choose activities to do with your kids that make you happy. You'll feel better about yourself and will bond better with your kids. Love sports? Coach or cheer for your child's team (but avoid making everything a win-lose situation). Are you a bookworm? Read to your kids, then discuss the book. It's an opportunity to be positive, encourage reading and enjoy closeness.

Remember to relax and recharge

Take time for yourself every day. Even if it's just an hour in the evening after the kids go to bed, it's really important to have time to "reset" as a parent. You probably know what works for you. Whether it's yoga, meditation, reading a book, watching TV or playing sports, try to incorporate it into your day. At day's end, get a good night's sleep. Equally important is keeping kids on a routine schedule, especially for bedtime.



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Ask for backup when you need it

Feel stressed at times? Don't be afraid to ask your family or your spouse for help. Trying to be Supermom or Superdad is a recipe for stress and your kids will benefit when you reach out. You'll make better decisions, be a better listener and enjoy interacting more with your children. You'll be less tempted to yell and more likely to model proper behavior for them.

Connect with fellow parents

Form connections with families whose kids are similar in age to relate to others in the same boat. You'll find you're not alone. Bonding in this way helps to normalize any feelings of stress. Talking with other parents lets you know that everyone goes through similar stressors.

Take a break from it all

When was the last time you genuinely connected with your partner? Plan to get away from your everyday routine. Make time to do things on your own as a couple. Having a "date night" once a month can help to keep your marriage strong and alleviate stress. Plan a getaway or vacation for your family, too. Consider scheduling some time off when your kids have school breaks so that you can enjoy your time together.

Keep your life well-balanced

Avoid overscheduling. Signing kids up for too many extracurriculars can stress them out – and the extra time, coordination and driving required kicks up the pressure on parents. Physical activity and sports are great stress relievers, but everything should be done in moderation to maintain a balanced life.

The best reason to manage your stress is a simple – it allows you to feel the joy of parenting. The more you experience good times and happy interactions with your kids, the easier it will be to handle bed-wetting, sibling rivalry and other parenting challenges with grace.



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