



North Central Health Care

# CURBING CHILDHOOD STRESS

HEALTHY HABITS FOR STRESS FREE KIDS



# UNDERSTANDING STRESS

## What It Is And How It Can Impact Youth

**Stress is a common experience for many of us.** It's that feeling of pressure or tension that comes with a challenging situation and can often cause significant impacts on our daily lives. While a little bit of stress can motivate us and help us perform better, too much stress can have negative effects on our physical and mental health.

When we encounter a situation that our brain perceives as dangerous or threatening, it triggers the release of stress hormones, which prepare our body to fight or flee. This can cause a variety of physical and emotional responses, like increased heart rate, faster breathing, and heightened emotions.

Stress is not just limited to adults, it can also affect children. The pressures of school, social dynamics, and other challenges can trigger stress responses in kids that can affect behavior and well-being. As parents, it's important to recognize signs of stress in our children, such as changes in appetite, sleep, mood, and behavior. By understanding the causes of stress and how it affects our children, we can better support them and teach them healthy coping mechanisms. Teaching kids stress management techniques like deep breathing, mindfulness, and exercise can help them manage their stress and navigate life's challenges with confidence and ease.



## 6 Signs Your Child Might Be Stressed

It's important for parents to be aware of these signs and to talk to their children about any concerns they may have. Encouraging healthy coping mechanisms, such as exercise, mindfulness, and open communication, can also help children manage stress effectively.

**CHANGES IN BEHAVIOR:** Watch for changes in your child's behavior, such as acting out, being more withdrawn, or displaying more irritability than usual. These changes can be a sign that your child is experiencing stress.

**PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS:** Physical symptoms such as headaches, stomachaches, and changes in eating or sleeping habits can be a sign of stress in children. Pay attention to any new or persistent symptoms your child may be experiencing.

**REGRESSION:** Sometimes children who are stressed will exhibit behaviors that they have outgrown, such as bed-wetting or thumb-sucking. This can be a sign that your child is struggling with stress and needs extra support.

**ACADEMIC/SOCIAL STRUGGLES:** If your child is struggling in school or has difficulty interacting with peers, it may be a sign that they are experiencing stress. Stress can impact a child's ability to learn and socialize, so it's important to address these issues as soon as possible.

**EMOTIONAL CHANGES:** Look for changes in your child's emotional state, such as increased anxiety, mood swings, or signs of depression. These changes can be a sign that your child is struggling with stress.

**INCREASED SENSITIVITY:** If your child becomes more sensitive than usual, particularly to criticism or negative feedback, it may be a sign that they are experiencing stress. They may also become more reactive to things that wouldn't normally bother them.

# Helping Your Kids Manage Stress

## + BUILD RESILIENCE

**As parents, we all want our children to be happy, healthy, and resilient.** However, with the demands of school, extracurricular activities, and social dynamics, kids today are under more pressure than ever before. This can lead to stress, anxiety, and other mental health challenges. While it's impossible to shield our children from all the stresses of life, there are things we can do to help them develop healthy coping mechanisms and prevent stress from becoming overwhelming. In this article, we'll explore simple but effective ways to prevent stress in kids, from encouraging physical activity to fostering open communication and creating a supportive environment. By incorporating these habits into our children's lives, we can help them develop the resilience and skills they need to navigate life's challenges with confidence and ease.

## HELPING KIDS COPE

### Tips For Reducing Stress & Anxiety In Kids

#### ENCOURAGE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY:

Regular exercise is an effective way to reduce stress in kids. Physical activity helps to release endorphins, which are chemicals that improve mood and reduce stress. Encourage your child to participate in activities they enjoy, such as sports, dance, or martial arts.

#### CREATE A CALM ENVIRONMENT:

A calm and peaceful environment can help to reduce stress in kids. Avoid over-scheduling and allow for downtime and relaxation. Create a quiet space where your child can retreat when feeling overwhelmed.

#### TEACH RELAXATION TECHNIQUES:

Deep breathing exercises, meditation, and visualization can help kids to relax and reduce stress. Teach your child simple relaxation techniques and encourage them to use them when feeling stressed.

#### ENCOURAGE SOCIAL CONNECTIONS:

Strong social connections can help to reduce stress in kids. Encourage your child to spend time with friends and family, participate in group activities, and develop strong relationships.

#### PRACTICE GRATITUDE:

Gratitude can help to reduce stress and increase happiness in kids. Encourage your child to practice gratitude by writing down things they are thankful for each day or expressing gratitude to others.

#### PRIORITIZE SLEEP:

Lack of sleep can contribute to stress and anxiety in kids. Establishing a regular sleep schedule and ensuring your child gets enough sleep each night can help to prevent stress. Aim for at least 8-10 hours of sleep per night for younger children and 9-12 hours for older children.

#### AVOID OVER SCHEDULING:

Over-scheduling can lead to stress and burnout in kids. Be mindful of your child's schedule and ensure they have adequate downtime to rest and recharge.

#### ENCOURAGE CREATIVE EXPRESSION:

Creative expression can be a powerful tool for reducing stress in kids. Encourage your child to engage in creative activities such as drawing, painting, writing, or playing music.

#### MODEL HEALTHY COPING SKILLS:

Children learn by example, so modeling healthy coping skills can help to prevent stress in kids. Show your child how to manage stress in healthy ways, such as through exercise, relaxation techniques, and social connections.

#### PROVIDE A BALANCED DIET:

A healthy diet can help to reduce stress in kids. Encourage your child to eat a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins. Limit sugary and processed foods, which can contribute to stress and anxiety.

# FOOD FOR THOUGHT

## How Nutrition Can Help Reduce Stress and Anxiety in Kids

**As a parent,** you want to do everything you can to support your child's mental and emotional well-being. While there are many strategies for managing stress and anxiety, one area that is often overlooked is nutrition. What we eat can have a powerful impact on our mood, energy levels, and stress response, and making small changes to your child's diet can make a big difference in their overall well-being.

One important way that nutrition can help manage stress is by regulating blood sugar levels. When we eat sugary or processed foods, our blood sugar levels spike, causing a surge of energy followed by a crash. This can lead to feelings of anxiety, irritability, and fatigue in our children. However, by encouraging them to eat complex carbohydrates like whole grains, fruits, and vegetables, you can help stabilize their blood sugar levels, providing a steady source of energy and reducing their feelings of stress and anxiety.

Another essential nutrient for managing stress is omega-3 fatty acids found in fatty fish, nuts, and seeds. Studies have shown that omega-3s can reduce inflammation and promote relaxation, helping to alleviate symptoms of anxiety and depression in children.

A balanced diet rich in whole, nutrient-dense foods can also help reduce stress by supporting overall health and well-being in your child. By encouraging them to eat a diet high in fruits, vegetables, lean protein, and healthy fats, you can help nourish their body and provide the energy needed to manage stress effectively.

***A balanced diet rich in nutrient-dense, whole foods, can support your child's stress response system and promote overall well-being.***


It's also important to avoid or limit foods and substances that can exacerbate stress and anxiety, such as caffeine, alcohol, and processed foods. By making these small changes to your child's diet, you can support their body's stress response system and promote overall well-being.




# Foods That Can **BOOST** or **BREAK** Your Child's Day

The meals and snacks we offer to our children can greatly influence their overall well-being. It's important to be mindful of the food groups we incorporate into their diets, as they can significantly impact their ability to cope with stress. The following chart outlines how different food groups affect the body. Making adjustments and providing our children with the right foods can provide them with the necessary support to manage stress effectively. **Nutrition is a valuable tool and skill that we can teach our children.** By choosing wholesome foods, we're helping them learn how to care for their minds and bodies.


## STRESS REDUCERS




**COMPLEX CARBOHYDRATES:** Complex carbs such as whole grains, legumes, and vegetables are a good source of fiber and nutrients that can help regulate blood sugar levels and promote feelings of calm and well-being.




**FRUITS AND VEGETABLES:** Fruits and vegetables are rich in vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants that can help protect the body from stress-related damage.



**HEALTHY FATS:** Healthy fats such as those found in fatty fish, nuts, seeds, and avocado can help reduce inflammation and promote relaxation.



**LEAN PROTEIN:** Lean protein such as chicken, fish, and beans can help stabilize blood sugar levels and promote feelings of fullness and satisfaction.




**PROBIOTICS:** Probiotics found in fermented foods such as yogurt, kefir, and sauerkraut can help promote a healthy gut microbiome and reduce stress-related inflammation.


### REMEMBER:

No single food can eliminate stress on its own, but incorporating a variety of these stress-reducing foods into your diet can help support your body and promote overall well-being.


## STRESS INDUCERS




**PROCESSED FOODS:** Processed foods such as fast food, packaged snacks, and sugary drinks can increase inflammation in the body, which can contribute to stress and anxiety.




**REFINED CARBOHYDRATES:** Refined carbohydrates such as white bread, pasta, and pastries can cause a rapid spike in blood sugar levels, which can lead to feelings of fatigue and irritability.



**CAFFEINE:** While some people find caffeine to be helpful for reducing stress, others may be more sensitive to its effects. Caffeine increases heart rate and blood pressure and can interfere with sleep, which can worsen stress and anxiety symptoms.



**SUGAR:** Sugary drinks and snacks cause a spike in blood sugar levels, followed by a crash, which can lead to feelings of anxiety, irritability, and fatigue.



**HIGH-SODIUM FOODS:** High-sodium foods such as processed meats, canned soups, and salty snacks can increase blood pressure and contribute to feelings of stress and anxiety.

### REMEMBER:

It's important to approach dietary changes with a balanced, flexible mindset. Try focusing on incorporating healthy foods into your diet rather than obsessing over avoiding certain foods.



# TEACHING MINDFULNESS

## The Ultimate Antidote for Stress and Chaos

Mindfulness is a concept that has gained a lot of attention in recent years, but what is it exactly? At its core, mindfulness is a mental exercise that helps develop a deeper awareness. Practicing mindfulness regularly can help children learn to tune out distractions and focus their attention on the present moment, which can have a wide range of benefits for their physical and mental health.

Studies have shown that mindfulness can be an effective tool for reducing stress, anxiety, and depression in children. It can also improve sleep quality, boost immune function, and reduce chronic pain. Moreover, mindfulness has been shown to improve cognitive function and enhance creativity in children.

As a parent, you can help your child practice mindfulness by exploring different techniques and exercises to find what works best for them. Encourage them to focus on their breath, notice



### THE BENEFITS OF PRACTICING MINDFULNESS

**Reduced stress and anxiety:** Mindfulness has been shown to be effective in reducing stress and anxiety. By focusing on the present moment, you can avoid getting caught up in worries about the future or regrets about the past.

**Improved mental health:** Mindfulness has been shown to be helpful for people with depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues. By developing a greater awareness of your thoughts and emotions, you can learn to manage them more effectively.

**Better sleep quality:** Mindfulness has been linked to better sleep quality. By reducing stress and anxiety, and promoting relaxation, mindfulness can help you get a more restful night's sleep.

**Enhanced cognitive function:** Mindfulness has been shown to improve cognitive function, including attention, memory, and decision-making. It can also enhance creativity and problem-solving skills.

**Better physical health:** Mindfulness has been linked to a range of physical health benefits, including lower blood pressure, improved immune function, and reduced pain.

**Increased self-awareness:** Mindfulness can help you develop a greater sense of self-awareness, including awareness of your thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations. This can lead to greater self-understanding and self-acceptance.

**Improved relationships:** Mindfulness can also help improve relationships, by promoting empathy, compassion, and non-judgment. By being more present in your interactions with others, you can deepen your connections and improve your communication skills.

*Practicing mindfulness can have a wide range of benefits for your child's physical, mental, and emotional well-being.*

their surroundings, and be present in the moment. You can also try mindfulness exercises as a family, such as mindful eating or mindful walks. Check out our mindfulness worksheet on the next page for some of the most simple and common ways to start incorporating mindfulness into your child's day. By teaching your child mindfulness, you are equipping them with a powerful tool that can help improve their overall well-being and foster a greater sense of calm and awareness in their daily life.

# Focusing On The **HERE** And The **NOW**

Practicing mindfulness with your children can be a powerful way to promote their emotional well-being and deepen your connection with them. **Over the next week, explore the range of mindfulness techniques listed below together.** From simple breathing exercises to nature walks and mindful listening techniques, each exercise offers a unique opportunity to cultivate mindfulness and deepen your sense of awareness as a family. As you try out each technique, pay close attention to how your child responds and consider incorporating those that resonate with them into your daily routines. This exercise can be a fun and engaging way to bond with your child while promoting their overall well-being.

**TIP:** Consider incorporating a mindfulness practice into your daily routine! Set an example for your children and help them develop their own mindfulness practices. As you learn and practice these skills yourself, your children are likely to follow suit and develop their own mindfulness habits.



## **Breath Awareness**

Take a few minutes to sit with your child. Have them close their eyes and breathe in deeply through their nose for 4 seconds. Have them hold for 4 seconds Then exhale slowly through their mouth for 6 seconds. Repeat a few times.



## **Nature Walk**

Take a walk outside with your child and focus on the beauty of nature. Pay attention to the sights, sounds, and smells around. Notice the sensation of the sun on your skin, the breeze in your hair, and the feeling of the ground beneath your feet.



## **Gratitude Practice**

Have a short conversation with your child to reflect on three things they are grateful for today. Have them focus on small things that they might usually take for granted, such as a beautiful sunny day or a compliment from a teacher.



## **Mindful Listening**

Take a few moments with your child to simply listen. Find a quiet place and focus your attention on the sounds around you. Notice the different tones, pitches, and rhythms of the sounds. What can you hear?



## **Mindful Eating**

Over a shared meal, have your child focus on the flavors, textures, and smells of their food, and pay attention to their body's hunger and fullness cues. Avoid distractions like screens or reading while eating.



## **Digital Detox:**

Take a digital break with your child. Put away phones, computers, and other digital devices for a set amount of time each day. Instead, use this time to connect with nature, read a book together, or simply be present in the moment.



# North Central Health Care

## NORCEN.ORG/YOUTH

### ADDITIONAL YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES AVAILABLE ONLINE

#### Mental Health APPS + WEBSITES

Did you know there are tons of apps and websites available to help support your mind in a variety of different ways? Below are some of the top applications and website that you can access on your phone or computer for free!

**MY3**  
Designed to help stay safe while having thoughts of suicide, MY3 lets you customize a safety plan by noting warning signs, listing coping strategies, and connecting you to helpful resources when you need them most. As your journey from the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline as well as a 911 call. Additionally, choose three people to contact if you are experiencing suicidal thoughts.

**TEEN TALK**  
Teens can get support for whatever they may be dealing with from a trained team. It's a safe, non-judgmental space where you can anonymously post your issue at any time. Teens can talk about anything from anxiety, depression, relationships, family issues, school problems. More than 100 volunteer and professional experts are available to help understand your mood and strengthen your mental health.

**MOODPATH**  
Complete daily questions to assess your well-being and screen for symptoms of depression. The screening program aims to increase awareness of thoughts, emotions, and feelings. After a 2 week period, the app generates an electronic document that can be discussed with a healthcare professional. More than 100 volunteer and professional experts are available to help understand your mood and strengthen your mental health.

**SELF-HELP FOR ANXIETY MANAGEMENT**  
Users are prompted to build their own 24-hour anxiety toolkit that allows you to track anxious thoughts and behaviors over time, and learn 25 different self-help techniques. You can also use SAM's "Social Cloud" feature to confidentially connect an online community for additional support.

#### Taking control of your MENTAL HEALTH

Sometimes our mental health is within our control, and sometimes we may need help. Navigating our own mind can be tricky, but here are some lifestyle options, coping strategies, tips and tricks that may help.

##### ADDITIONAL WAYS TO COPE WITH ANXIETY OR STRESS

- Keep a Journal
- Practice Yoga
- Eat Healthy
- Avoid Excess Caffeine
- Identify Negative Thoughts
- Challenge Negative Thoughts
- Keep Busy
- Avoid Triggers
- Listen to Music
- Think of Something You are Grateful For
- Give yourself a Daily Compliment
- Think of 5 Things You can Hear Right Now

##### Get Plenty of Sleep

Getting enough sleep helps you grow and develop normally, pay attention throughout the day and maintain overall health. For teens, this means about 8-10 hours each night.

##### Focus on your strengths

Take time to think about what you're good at and ways to do more of those things. By focusing on and building your strengths, you can keep your stressors in perspective.

##### Do things that make you happy

Find activities or hobbies that make you happy and incorporate them into your daily life.

##### Engage in physical activity

Exercise takes our mind off stress and releases chemicals in our brain that make us feel better. This can be anything from a stroll in the park, to a downhill bike ride or basketball game with friends.

##### Talk to someone

#### Mental Health STIGMA

Ever wonder why every other part of our bodies get yearly check ups except for our brains? Us too! Especially since our mental health is so important and mental illness isn't that uncommon.

##### DID YOU KNOW...

**50%**  
50% of children age 8-15 experiencing a mental health condition **don't** receive treatment.

**MENTAL ILLNESS IS RANKED AS THE MOST STIGMATIZED ILLNESS**

**10 Years**  
The average delay between the onset of symptoms and treatment for

A mental health crisis can look different for everyone.

**NCHC CRISIS CENTER | 1.800.799.0122**