

Childhood Stress

What are the signs of stress in young children?

Often, children do not know they have stress and cannot verbally express themselves. Look for these signs that may indicate stress in your child:

- Suddenly acts different.
- Often sick (with headaches or stomach aches).
- Has nervous habits such as biting nails.
- Eats too much or won't eat enough.
- Reverts to baby-like behavior (bed-wetting, baby-talk).
- Hurts other people or breaks things.
- Doesn't want to talk or be around others.
- Cries easily.

What causes stress in babies?

- Receiving too much attention/stimulation
- Lacking attention/stimulation
- Lacking secure attachments with adult caregivers

What causes stress in young children?

- Big changes (new baby, new home, divorce, new child care program).
- Growth spurts.
- New stage of development (asserting independence in toddler hood).
- Being tired, hungry, or sick.
- *Too much* or *too little* structure in their lives.
- When adults around them feel stress.
- Their sense of security is threatened.

To help your child cope with change:

- Talk with your child about change.
- Explain that fear, anger, or worry is normal.
- Keep consistent in other areas such as favorite blanket or bedtime story.
- Make time for your child to relax.
- Ensure your child a balanced free and structured time.

You can reduce or avoid stress in your baby's life by:

- Providing conditions for adequate sleep.
- Allow frequent feedings (breast milk/formula)
- Provide a healthy diet when solid foods begin.
- Providing quiet times away from other people.

- Avoiding bright lights when baby is in room.
- Avoiding loud or startling noises.
- Allowing extra sleep when there is a lot of extra activity.
- Responding quickly when your baby cries.
- Showing your love with a warm touch: cuddling, rocking, and hugging.