



## Apps For Raising Happy, Healthy Children



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for the Institute for Safe Families

**W**e all want to be the best parents we can be. This booklet helps you to recognize how things in your past, such as how you were raised, can help you parent or can get in the way and make it hard for you to be the kind of parent you want to be. Some adults have pasts that can haunt them. Parents need care and support too. In this booklet, you will also find strategies for both you and your children to be stronger, happier and healthier.

This resource has phone numbers, cell phone Apps, ideas and websites that may be helpful to you or someone else you know who is a caregiver for children including step-parents, teenage parents, grandparents, relatives and other caring adults.

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Every parent and adult who cares for children wants to raise happy, healthy children. When parents feel safe and supported in their own lives, they can take better care of their children. While families may have different cultural values about parenting, all children need to feel safe and connected with their caregivers.

Parenting is hard work. Even on the best of days, all parents have moments when they feel frustrated, disappointed or embarrassed when they can't keep it all together. If parents had a difficult childhood themselves, these feelings can make tough times even harder to deal with. Being a single parent can be really difficult as well. There are simple things a parent can do to help children and themselves do better in tough times. A first step is to know how children respond to stress and to understand how stress in our own childhood may affect us as adults.



#### Parenting Helplines for Anonymous Support and Advice:

Parent Helpline: 1-855-4A-PARENT (1-855-427-2736)

Boys Town National Hotline: 1-800-448-3000

Child Help: 1-800-4A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453)

All stress is not bad. Dealing with losses and bad times teaches children how to deal with the ups and downs of life. But, there are things that can be so scary or stressful for children that there can be lasting negative effects. The most important thing for children who are dealing with high levels of unhealthy stress is to have supportive parents and other caring adults who can help them cope.

The way a child is affected when something bad happens may not be obvious right away. Since no two children are the same, each child will have a different response. When children can't let their feelings out or tell their own stories, bottled up emotions often come out later as unwanted behaviors and problems such as temper tantrums and teens feeling like nobody cares about them.



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The way a child is affected when something bad happens may not be obvious right away.

When stress is severe, goes on for a long time, or if several bad things happen close together in time, it can be harder for children to get through the bad times. Signs that children are having trouble coping include:

- Acting out, being aggressive or fighting with other children
- Difficulty paying attention
- Problems with calming down
- Being hyperactive and impulsive

Children who are over-stressed are more likely to have physical health problems, such as headaches, stomach problems and asthma. The good news is that everyday things that parents do with their children such as reading stories, singing songs, and giving lots of hugs can help children get through tough times.



[fosteringresilience.com](http://fosteringresilience.com)

Parenting tips to foster strengths in children, recognize signs of trouble in children, and a special section for teens on how to manage stress.



[nctsn.org](http://nctsn.org)

Understanding children and stress



DOWNLOAD A QR CODE READER APP TO ACCESS RESOURCES ON YOUR SMARTPHONE!

SCAN ME!



# IT'S ABOUT PARENTS TOO!

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**REDUCE STRESS!**

Simple Steps for Parents

Tough times that you had as a child can affect you as an adult in unexpected ways. Feeling stressed out or sad most of the time and having panic attacks as well as using alcohol, drugs, tobacco or over-eating to cope can be reactions to what happened when you were a child.

Parenting takes a lot of energy and focus. If you are feeling tired, overwhelmed or are struggling with memories from your childhood, it can be more difficult to understand your children's behaviors and needs. If you don't feel safe, it is harder to help your children feel safe. When stressed, parents may use forms of discipline that don't work. Spanking and hitting children can cause them to act out and be more aggressive.

If you had hard times during your childhood, it's important to know ***it's not your fault***. It's not about *what's wrong with you*, it's about understanding *what happened to you*. Understanding how things that happened during your childhood connect to how you feel now is an important part of healing and can prevent other problems for you and your kids. Recognizing things that you keep doing but want to change, and then finding healthier ways to manage that stress can help you to feel better and to be the kind of parent that you want to be. Parents also need people to talk to who will listen and be there for them.

## SIMPLE STEPS FOR PARENTS TO REDUCE STRESS

-  **STOP WHAT YOU'RE DOING FOR A FEW MINUTES** and take some deep breaths until you feel calmer. It can be hard to remember what helps when things are really stressful. Check out "Tactical Breather Trainer," a free cell phone App that uses pictures and talks you through deep breathing or go to [www.childdevelopmentinfo.com](http://www.childdevelopmentinfo.com) and search for "52 proven ways to reduce stress".
-  **TRY TO IDENTIFY THINGS THAT ARE ESPECIALLY STRESSFUL** (for example, toilet training or talking with your teen about dating and sex) and see if someone else can help with or do that task.
-  **TALK WITH A TRUSTED FRIEND**, neighbor or family member about what's going on.
-  **FIND A PARENTING SUPPORT GROUP** to connect with other parents. Connect with other parents online at [www.nationalparenthelpline.org/articlesblogs/nph-blog](http://www.nationalparenthelpline.org/articlesblogs/nph-blog) or ask an expert online at [www.parenting.org](http://www.parenting.org).



[anxietybc.com](http://anxietybc.com)

Advice for parents, other caregivers and youth on how to manage anxiety.



[albertafamilywellness.org](http://albertafamilywellness.org)

Videos and resources about how children's brains develop.



**Tactical Breather Trainer App**

Scan to Download the Tactical Breather App in the App Store





If you don't own a smartphone, links to all of these websites are available online at:

[www.instituteforsafefamilies.org](http://www.instituteforsafefamilies.org)

All forms of child abuse (physical, sexual and emotional) and neglect are very stressful for children. Living in homes where adults are hurting or threatening one another is also harmful for children. Information about helping families when there has been abuse, neglect or other trauma can be found at [www.nctsn.org/resources/audiences/parents-caregivers](http://www.nctsn.org/resources/audiences/parents-caregivers). For information about how to recognize child maltreatment and prevention tips for parents go to [www.preventchildabuse.org](http://www.preventchildabuse.org). You can call these help lines 24 hours a day:

**Child Help: 1-800-4A-CHILD (422-4453)**  
**Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-SAFE (7233)**  
**Treatment Referral: 1 800 662-HELP (4357)**

 **nsvrc.org**  
Sexual abuse prevention resource for parents.

 **preventchildabuse.org**  
Information on healthy development of children and how to prevent abuse before it ever happens.



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The following questions ask about some of the problems that many families experience that can be stressful for children. These questions are adapted from a study called ACES, which stands for Adverse Childhood Experiences. Please answer the questions below about things that you and your child(ren) may have experienced.

Did you (before you were 18 years old) or your child live with someone who:	YOU		YOUR CHILD(REN)	
	YES	NO	YES	NO
Was depressed, mentally ill or suicidal?	YES	NO	YES	NO
Served time in jail or prison?	YES	NO	YES	NO
Was a problem drinker or an alcoholic?	YES	NO	YES	NO
Used illegal street drugs or abused prescription medications?	YES	NO	YES	NO
<b>Did you (before you were 18 years old) or has your child had any of these things happen:</b>				
Had a parent or guardian who died?	YES	NO	YES	NO
Heard or saw someone being stabbed or shot?	YES	NO	YES	NO
Placed in foster care?	YES	NO	YES	NO
Bullied by other children?	YES	NO	YES	NO
Treated badly or unfairly because of something about you such as your race, sexual orientation, place of birth, disability, etc.?	YES	NO	YES	NO
Punished or disciplined by being slapped, hit or spanked?	YES	NO	YES	NO
Punished or disciplined by being hit with a belt, paddle, brush or other object?	YES	NO	YES	NO

**If you answered yes to any of the questions above, consider talking with your health care provider about how these experiences may have affected you and/or your child(ren).**



## BUILDING BLOCKS FOR HAPPY, HEALTHY FAMILIES

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There are messages and skills that you can share with your children that can strengthen them and help them do better in good times and bad times. When children learn these, they build connections in their brains that help them to succeed in school, to behave in the ways you would expect, and to become happier and healthier. When parents manage stress in positive ways, parents' brains can change in ways that will help them to be healthier and happier too! These strengths build on one another like building blocks that can help children of all ages and their adults to better deal with stress.

## LOVE ↔ STRENGTH

The questions below ask about positive things that help children when times are tough. Take a minute to think back to your childhood and answer these questions about yourself.

### As a child (before I was 18 years old):

I had someone I could talk to when I was upset or scared.	YES	NO	NOT SURE
I knew that my parent(s)/caregiver(s) loved me.	YES	NO	NOT SURE
There was someone in my life who helped me feel important or special.	YES	NO	NOT SURE
I was able to ask for help when I needed it.	YES	NO	NOT SURE

# I AM CONNECTED

## [ HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS ]



[instituteforsafefamilies.org](http://instituteforsafefamilies.org)  
Download parent booklets about positive discipline, early brain development, adolescent brain development, and helping children exposed to violence



[familytlc.net](http://familytlc.net)  
Steps for building stronger relationships with your children and helping them succeed



- Warm, loving relationships with your children build a foundation that will stay with them forever. Be firm and consistent, but not scary, when you discipline them, and give them lots of praise when they do what you want them to do— **“You did a good job being quiet like I asked you to. Good listening!” “I appreciate that you came home on time tonight. I know I can trust you.”**
- Tell your children how important they are— **“I’ll always love you”** and **“I love you for who you are.”**
- Have fun together – play, laugh, and do things with your children that they enjoy. **“Jake, why don’t we walk over to the park together so you can show me the skateboarding jump you were talking about?”**
- Taking time for yourself and seeing friends without your kids can help parents to be less stressed. You are not being a “bad” parent when you take time for yourself. It might even make you more patient with your children to be with friends and other people who care about you.

# I UNDERSTAND HOW YOU FEEL

## [ EMPATHY ]

- Children learn to think about other people's feelings when you show them that you understand how they feel.
- Watch for signs that tell you how your children are feeling and ask questions such as **"How did you feel when Johnny started crying after you took his toy away?"** or **"Shawna, what were you feeling when you shouted at me and slammed the bedroom door?"**
- Experts teach us that you will not spoil a child by hugging and caring for them when they are crying. In fact, the more you hold and hug and kiss your children, the more they understand that you care and will be there when they need you. And teens need to know that you'll still be there for them too. You are also teaching your children how to love and support others.



## MORE GREAT RESOURCES:

- When your toddler acts out, stay close. Make sure he is safe from harm and offer physical comfort. Rock her or hug him while saying **"I am right here and I love you"** while also correcting behavior by saying something like **"but you cannot hit your sister."** This will help your child to "unload" difficult feelings. And you are showing your child the kind of caring behavior that you want him to learn.
- Teens tell us that they often feel like no one understands or asks them how they feel. Ask your teen how she is feeling and tell her how you are feeling too—**"I am frustrated with you. The reason I am frustrated is that you promised you would talk to me if you needed help with your writing assignments. Your teacher just called and told me that you are three assignments behind. What can we do to solve this problem?"**



**healthychildren.org**  
This website from the American Academy of Pediatrics offers loads of information on children's physical and mental health needs.



**parentingscience.com/teaching-empathy-tips.html**  
Parenting Science is dedicated to families who want information based on the scientific evidence.



**BUILDING BLOCKS FOR HAPPY, HEALTHY FAMILIES**



Web sites listed in this booklet are for informational purposes only. Endorsement is not implied.

# I AM IN CONTROL

[ SELF-REGULATION ]

BUILDING  
BLOCKS FOR  
HAPPY  
HEALTHY  
FAMILIES



[self-regulation.ca](http://self-regulation.ca)

Brochure (PDF) about how to help children identify when they are becoming over-stressed and help them learn how to calm down.

- Children need to learn to manage their emotions and how they behave. This helps them to be able pay attention and do better when things are stressful.
- Help your child to recognize what stresses her (*"It's scary when I hear yelling."*) and what it feels like when he starts to feel out of control (*"I get hot all over and make fists."*) Ask your child to talk to you about it.
- Children learn how to deal with stress from you. Practice ways to reduce stress with your child. *"Let's pretend we're blowing bubbles and take some deep breaths so we can both calm down. I'm taking a deep breath in and blowing a big bubble to you. Now you take a big breath and blow a bubble to me."*
- Exercise helps children to burn off energy and calm down. Try simple movements such as telling your child, *"Pretend you are a squiggly, wiggly piece of spaghetti—now shake and wiggle until you feel all quiet inside"* or if things start getting heated up while talking with your teenager, *"Let's both cool down a bit. Why don't you play some basketball or go for a walk and we'll talk later."*

# I CAN DO IT!

[ SELF-ESTEEM ]



GOOD JOB!

- Children need to learn early to believe in themselves; you are their most important confidence builder.
- Catch your child doing something good and say things like, *"I'm proud of the way you shared your toy with your brother"* or *"You really look great today. Have a good time with your friends."*
- Your children are not "bad," although sometimes their behaviors are difficult. When you want to change something that your child is doing, start by praising and encouraging him. For example, *"You did a good job listening to me when I told you to stop pinching your friend, Tommy. Thank you. But, it's not OK to hurt someone else. Next time, try using your words to say what is making you mad."*
- Being the kind of parent you want to be builds your confidence too!



Go to [kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/](http://kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/) select "Developing Child's Self-Esteem" – for great ideas for young children, teens and parents too.



[journeyofhearts.org](http://journeyofhearts.org)

Online healing place with resources and contacts to help adults and children deal with loss and grief.

**Know Someone Who Needs Help?**

Share this brochure with your friends, family, or loved ones who might need help & support.



Partnering with Parents, Apps For Raising Happy, Healthy Children has been created with support from:



[instituteforsafefamilies.org](http://instituteforsafefamilies.org)

...  
This brochure is available to  
download from ISF's website.

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[aap.org](http://aap.org)

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Pennsylvania Chapter

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[pascan.org](http://pascan.org)



[multiplyingconnections.org](http://multiplyingconnections.org)



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America**

[preventchildabuse.org](http://preventchildabuse.org)