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PARENTING TIPS FOR CHILDREN/YOUTH EXPERIENCING STRESS

CREATING MENTAL WELLNESS WITH OUR CHILDREN

As a parent, it is difficult to compare your own stress with your child's stress. When asked to identify what it is that causes them the most stress, children/youth usually respond with:

- Grades, school, homework
- Family
- Friends

Although their stressors may be different from what you experience as a parent, children and youth are definitely impacted by anxiety from stress. Sometimes stress in small doses may be helpful in motivating changes in behavior; however, since everyone is different, the causes or amount of stress that make your son or daughter feel overwhelmed will be different. Each person sees situations differently and has different coping skills. Here are some signs that your child is stressed out:

- Clenched jaw, tight back, shoulders, and neck
- Increase heart rate
- Moodiness, irritability, or short temper
- Increase in nervous habits like foot tapping
- Trouble concentrating
- Feel like they want to cry all the time
- Changes in appetite and sleep
- Indigestion or stomach aches
- Difficulty making decisions
- Sweating
- Loss of interest in hobbies
- Headaches, nausea, dizziness

When your child is showing these signs it is a good idea for him/her to figure out what is causing the stress.

Listed below are some ways in which young people can relieve stress.

Play with a pet Play/listen to music Write in a journal Have a hot bath
Redecorate a room Paint Bake Cookies Watch a good movie
Massage feet Have a good cry Take a nap Go for a walk
Read a funny book Plant flowers Dance Exercise
Pray Meditate Go to church Connect with loved ones
Laugh Deep breathing Help someone in need Play a card game

As a parent you want to be supportive. The best way to connect with your son or daughter is by taking the following steps:

BE AN ACTIVE LISTENER- Listen to your son talk and allow him to express his feelings without judging or interrupting. Listen to everything he has to say.

INVITE CONVERSATION- Start the conversation with something unrelated and easy to talk about. If you start the topic with something really heavy and focused on your ideas, your daughter may close up and fear another "lecture or judgement opinion."

PAY ATTENTION- While your son is talking, focus on what he has to say without interrupting and try not to think how you are going to respond. Hear him out and if you are doing something stop what you are doing and LISTEN.

EMPATHIZE- Avoid jumping to conclusions. Put yourself in your daughter's shoes. It will help you understand how she feels and what she is saying.

RESTATE- In your own words repeat the main thought or ideas you felt your son was trying to tell you. Try restating his thoughts with a phrase such as "What I hear you saying is..."

ENCOURAGE- Use neutral words and avoid agreeing or disagreeing with your daughter at that moment. Instead, try to prompt her to continue her story with phrases like, "Can you tell me more?"

REFLECT- It will help your son to evaluate and clarify what he is feeling if you show that you understand how he feels: "It sounds like you feel..."

USE PROMPTS- Using signals like an occasional nod will show you would like more information.

ASK OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS- Try to not ask questions that can be answered with a simple "yes" or "no." Ask questions that require more information: "Tell me how you feel about that?"

SUMMARIZE- Put all the facts and feelings together. It allows your daughter to add or make corrections. Make statements and be to the point, "This is what I understand you have said."

VALIDATE- Acknowledge your son's feelings, worth and efforts, "It must have been hard for you to..." or "You have done some great work at..."

BRAINSTORM TOGETHER- Help your daughter think of activities she could do to solve the problem at hand, or an activity that will relieve her stress. Support her idea by saying, "that sounds like it could really work. How do you think it will go?"

PARENT TIP: Offering suggestions or advice is **NOT** active listening. Active listening is hearing your son and helping him solve his own problems and developing his own positive coping strategies. You will help to build a more resilient person.