

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. It's 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 tips from pediatric experts for managing stress for parents:

Try not to bring stress home

It isn't easy, but separating work life from home life is important. Try talking briefly to a friend, spouse or coworker to help defuse stress before you leave work. Imagine putting your problems in a box to compartmentalize them. This can help redirect your energy to your home life and children. On the drive home, be aware of how you're feeling. Is traffic increasing your stress? If so, try to 'chill.' Take a deep breath or play music. There's nothing better than coming home to a warm welcome from your kids and family. If not, 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 deal 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, to encourage and to enjoy a unique 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, playing cards, 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.

Ask for backup when you need it

Feel overwhelmed 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 from your reaching out. You'll make better decisions, you'll be a better listener and you'll 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. This 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 did you last truly connect with your partner? Plan to get away from your everyday routine. Make time to do things on your own, as a couple. 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 you can enjoy your time together.

Keep your life well-balanced

Avoid overscheduling yourself every day and on weekends. 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. Also, every balanced life should include physical activity. The fact that working out and playing sports are great stress-relievers is icing on the cake.

The best reason of all to manage your stress is a simple one – 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.