

Stop Family Stress

Just mentioning the word stress can create tension for some people. We have been conditioned to think of all stress as being bad.

Of course, much of today's stress has negative consequences. But it is impractical and unrealistic to think that we can eliminate all stress from our lives. Some stress is actually healthy and can help generate new approaches to the situations we face.

Unfortunately, unhealthy stress also exists. And as parents, children will follow our examples. They model how we handle stressful situations. Often, we can significantly reduce this stress and make a real difference in our family life by keeping a few basic principles in mind when a conflict arises.

- 1. Find the source of the stress**

After a blowup occurs, we are usually concentrating so hard on settling the dispute that we fail to look at the cause. Take a minute and examine the situation. Most likely the source of the stress is fairly simple, and it may not appear to be at all related to what happened.

- 2. Have family meetings to discuss problems**

These meetings need not be formal. You can simply ask everyone to stay at the dinner table a few extra minutes while you speak about what is on your mind. But make sure you keep your discussion short. If new problems arise that require more discussion, ask that they be dealt with next time.

- 3. Emphasize mom and dad as stress role models**

It is important for parents to handle stress in a healthy way. Children often imitate what they see at home. Be aware of how you and your spouse (or other family members) work out your differences. Keep the level of hostility down, even if you have to bite your tongue, so that the tension dissipates quickly.

- 4. Put your marriage first**

Parents sometimes end up on different sides of an issue. It is critical to remember the supreme importance of your marriage. What is good for the overall marriage is usually good for the particular crisis. Ask yourself, "Over the long haul, how important is this one event in my life?"

- 5. Set times for chores, meals, and homework**

Even though this may seem impossible, it can work. Turning the TV off for a couple of hours every afternoon, for example, could give everyone time for homework and chores. If the schedule for TV time creates a conflict, you can rotate times from week to week.

- 6. Cut down the noise level**

Special attention should be given to loud radios, ringing phones, and other noisy disturbances. Often, a blaring TV in the background can make a stressful situation even worse. Simply turning down the volume on the telephone can make a big difference, especially if the phone rings about the time dinner begins to burn.