

## Hand-out for Parents

# HELPING STRESSED-OUT KIDS

SOME STRESS IS NORMAL. But too much stress can make it difficult for children to concentrate, learn and get along with others. Overstressed kids may be more whiny, clinging, irritable, or prone to tantrums than usual. The good news is that adults can do a lot to help children deal with stress.

### Stay connected

Supportive relationships are the single most important stress reliever for children.

- Staying connected to your kids and spending time with them can reduce their stress by helping them feel safe and cared for.
- Time together and emotional support help children recover from stressful events.

### Reduce stress in your child's environment

- Make sure your child gets exercise and time to play.
- Eating healthy food and getting enough sleep help kids' brains and bodies cope with stress. Tired, hungry kids get stressed out more easily.
- Morning routines get the day off to a good start and bedtime routines help children relax and fall asleep.
- Learn to manage your own stress. Your stress and the mood problems it causes can be a source of stress for your kids.

### Make time for physical activity and play

You know that tense, revved-up feeling that's part of stress? Physical activity and play can help relieve that tension.

- Activities like going for a walk or bike ride, shooting baskets or dancing to music release brain chemicals that help children feel less tense and anxious.
- Unstructured play – including outdoor play and play with friends – helps children relax and feel good.
- When kids feel better physically, it is easier for them to feel better mentally and emotionally.



### Relaxation breathing

Deep breathing helps people calm down and relax. Even young children can learn this.

- Ask your child to sit or lie down and close her eyes.
- Ask her to imagine she has a balloon on her belly.
- Tell her to breathe in slowly and imagine the balloon filling with air, while you count to four.
- Then have her let the air out the balloon by breathing out slowly while you count to four.
- Repeat five times.

### Teach children to solve problems

Problems create stress, so solving the problem relieves it. It's helpful to break a problem down into small steps.

- What is the problem?
- How does it make me feel?
- What are some possible solutions?
- Which solution do I want to try?
- How well did the solution work?

Young children will need a lot of help with problem-solving. It takes a long time for children to solve problems on their own. But if you help them problem solve regularly, they will gradually learn an important life skill.