

# Parents Provide the Biggest Role in Their Child's Success

Contributed by Jeannine Virtue

## Children with stress and anxiety

In a world where we, as adults, are stressed to the maximum, it makes sense that our children are also living very demanding lives. With most jobs requiring a college degree, the pressure to succeed is more prominent than ever. Children with such disabilities as ADD or ADHD may feel particularly bombarded by stress and anxiety.

Even children who do not suffer from neurological challenges feel the everyday pressure from parents, teachers and peers. Combine these pressures with any disadvantage and you may end up with a child who is in complete distress. Anxious children are often overly tense or uptight. Some may seek a lot of reassurance, and their worries may interfere with activities. Because anxious children may also be quiet, compliant and eager to please, their difficulties may be missed.

Parents should be alert to the signs of severe anxiety, such as change in appetite, sleep pattern or overall disposition, so they can intervene early to prevent complications. It is important not to discount a child's fears.

Studies suggest that you may notice more anxiety when a child must make transitions, such as a new teacher or a new school. To avoid adding extra stress during these trying times, you may consider introducing the child to his/her new surroundings, slowly (i.e., meeting the teacher/seeing the school before the year begins). Ask your child if he/she has any concerns or questions and address each one appropriately.

Other major causes of stress are tests and exams. Research has shown that providing students with tools and strategies that build both emotional skills and healthy physical habits when preparing for a test can help them overcome test anxiety and the associated symptoms, while improving their ability to prepare for and perform on critical testing.

It's important to help students identify what they are feeling and give them tools that will help them learn to manage emotions such as anxiety, self-doubt, anger or frustration. The proper physical habits enable students to have enough energy and stamina for their brain to do its job of thinking and analyzing for a sustained period of time. A lot of times before we have to do something like take a test, much of the anxiety we feel is a build-up from negative what-if thoughts. What if I fail, what if I can't remember anything, or what if I run out of time.

Try writing a what-if question that is positive and can help you take the big deal out of the situation and begin to see things in a different way. Examples of these kinds of questions are, What if I can remember more than I think I can? What if I can feel calmer than I think I can?

If you feel that your child may be experiencing a higher stress level than expected, you may want to try a few simple suggestions. First, school counselors can be very helpful in a student's ability to adjust. They can relieve some of the anxiety by helping the student choose classes that he/she is prepared for. Counselors can also answer any questions the child may have. Ask your child if he/she is experiencing any problem at school that they need help with (for example, if a child is being bullied he be extremely anxious about going to school at all). If your child is still having trouble adjusting, you may want to seek medical assistance from a psychologist or psychiatrist.

All-in-all, the process of adjusting begins at home. Parents need to ensure that their children are eating a well-balanced diet, getting plenty of sleep and that there is an open line of communication. Make sure that your child can come to you at the onset of a problem, before it escalates. Most importantly, do not expect more than your child is capable of. Each student learns at different pace and it can be very detrimental to expect your child to keep up with someone else (like a sibling, for example).

We can all work together to provide our children with the proper resources to become happy, well-rounded adults. Jeannine Virtue is a freelance journalist who specializes in health topics.

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