

## Helping Children Cope with Stress

Children and youth are sometimes confronted with things that cause them to worry. Illness, accidents, traumatic events and even routine things such as report cards and final exams can cause stress and anxiety. Most of the time children and youth cope with stressful situations successfully. Occasionally, they need support in handling stressful situations.

Reactions to stress vary from one child to the next. The following chart summarizes common stress responses:

| Elementary School  | Middle School  | High School   |
|--|--|---|
| Immature behavior<br>Irritability and agitation<br>Anger, aggression, tantrums<br>Clinginess<br>Poor concentration<br>Withdrawal from friends and activities or an increased need for contact with friends and family<br>Sleep difficulties, including nightmares and bedwetting | Physical complaints such as headaches and stomachaches, loss of appetite<br>Poor school performance<br>Withdrawal from friends or an intensive desire to be only with friends<br>Sleep disturbances<br>Increased frustration, anger and/or conflict with parents and peers<br>Regressed behavior | Agitation<br>Lack of energy<br>Lessened interest in peers or an intense desire to be only with peers<br>Irresponsible or delinquent behavior<br>Physical complaints<br>Sleep disturbances<br>Eating difficulties<br>Poor concentration<br>Frustration, anger or aggression towards parents or peers |

### How you can help your child:

- Illness, crises, or other traumatic events can exaggerate stress. When this occurs assure your child that many adults are working together to insure everyone's safety.
- News reports can contribute to stress. It is okay to turn off the TV or to change the channel so that your child doesn't become overloaded.
- Be aware of your child's normal behavior and emotions so that that you will notice any changes that may be caused by stress or worry.
- Be flexible and allow time in your daily routines to address concerns as they arise.
- Discuss situations in a calm and caring manner.
- Help your child clarify misconceptions and restate information as necessary.
- Remind your child of things he or she has done in the past to that helped him or her through difficult times and encourage the use of these strategies.
- Reassure your child that when stressed emotional responses are normal.
- Encourage your child to make healthy choices in what they eat and drink and to allow more time for sleep, exercise, and relaxation.
- Be alert for reactions that seem especially intense or unusual. Consult with your child's school counselor or school psychologist if you have concerns or questions.