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Listening, learning, and living together: it's the science of life.

Managing Childhood Stress¹

Melanie Bean and Suzanna Smith²

As a parent, perhaps you've heard, "You don't know what it's like to be a kid these days!" Unfortunately, they're probably right. Many children today face stressors and experience trauma that are different than those endured by their parents' generation. Today's children are pushed to make above-average grades and excel in extracurricular activities and athletics. Additionally, they endure exposure to their parents' stresses in the home, as well as school violence and terrorism.

Most theorists agree that the responses children have to stressful situations is an innate reaction; however, the susceptibility to stress-related behaviors in children can be linked to several factors, such as environment, genetics, modeling stressful behavior after anxious parents, or through rewards or punishments for displaying anxious behaviors.

How do you know if your child or teen is experiencing stress? Dr. Suzanna Smith from the University of Florida explains that the signs of stress may include children expressing that they feel afraid or scared, or their grades may drop suddenly. Perhaps they are extra-clingy or needy; they may go back to behaviors they've outgrown, such as bed-wetting or thumb sucking, and they may withdraw from others.

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2. Melanie Bean, undergraduate student, and Suzanna Smith, associate professor, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, University of Florida, and Executive Producer, Family Album Radio, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611.

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There are many actions parents can take to assist their children with managing stress. For example, spend time together. Follow daily family routines and work together. Children thrive on predictable patterns. You may find that helping children manage their stress can be good for the grown-ups too!

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