

## Resilience: 8 Tips for Helping Children Cope with Stress

by award-winning author and stress relief expert Susie Mantell

Teens, tweens and even tots need safe, safe coping skills for resilience amid day-to-day stress at home or at school. They may experience academic or social pressure or bullying, health challenges, or witness family problems, and confusing or troubling world events. The need for caring adults to listen, and to help interpret events and emotions in age-appropriate and comforting ways, is one of the greatest challenges to any parent. Sensitive and intuitive — children don't miss much. Along the journey to creating healthy ways to manage your own stress in an ever-changing world, don't forget to fasten your kids' seatbelts too.

### 1. Make time to be alone with each child in the family every day, with no interruptions.

*(Hint: You will not likely "find" it, so you'll probably need to create this time.)*

A few quiet minutes for sharing the day's positive events, and airing little worries can prevent worries from growing into big ones. Starting this practice at age three or four opens the door for later years when it may be difficult to pry that door open — from either side.

2. **When your child seems to want to talk about something, be ready to really listen—between the words—and without judgment.** If it's not a good time, schedule a date together for an hour later. Be prepared for anything, and for not necessarily being able to fix it. Simply expressing worries sometimes has a way of diminishing their power.

3. **Encourage drawing, storytelling,** creative arts and physical activities that are healthy, safe, readily available ways to discharge anxiety or anger.

4. **Make it your business to monitor and restrict your children 's TV, movie, music and Internet exposure.** Their psychological safety is as much our responsibility as their physical protection

5. **Young children need to learn to self-soothe in safe, healthy ways.** Casually share some of your own day-to-day stress-busting successes to demonstrate that everyone experiences, and copes with, stress. *(e.g. "Today I was so frustrated in a long line at the bank, so you know what I did? I opened my wallet and looked at your picture from the picnic last summer. Then I remembered how much fun that picnic was and how hard we all laughed. It cheered me right up! Would you like to go on a picnic this weekend?" Or, "Last night I had a little trouble sleeping, so I turned on the light and read for a few minutes until I got drowsy, and fell right back to sleep.")*

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**Part 2: Children and Stress — Helping Kids Cope**

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**6. We teach by example — Intentionally or not.** For many parents, how we cope with stress was learned in childhood, watching the adults around us. Was there shouting or aggression at home? Excess drinking, or smoking? Door-slamming or isolation? Or did the adults around you go for a walk to clear their heads? Or talk things over to problem-solve calmly? Did they meditate, or pray? Did they have themselves a good, cleansing cry, or get hugged — then refocus on a productive approach to the problem?

**7. There really is no such thing as hiding a serious problem from children. Only *trying* to hide one.**

Even when children don't understand the stress in Mom or Dad's life, they're likely sensing it on levels they may not be able to articulate. It's not fair, nor wise, to share all adult problems with children, but they probably sense when things are not right, so be on the lookout for their need for reassurance.

**8. Perspective is an invaluable asset, and a wonderful gift to give your children.** Having spent over twenty years working with young children and their families, my personal thought on, "*I'm having a bad day!*" is that very, very few entire days, start-to-finish, are completely and irreparably bad. Remind children that while they may be having a really tough hour, or a very hard morning, somewhere in this day some nice things will happen too. Then do something fun together, and make a list of the day's nice moments.

**Closing Thoughts:**

- Take time to slow your children's world down and make it a lighter, gentler, safer place.
- Give them language to express their fears and questions and wishes.
- Nothing will take the place of your child's trust that you're willing to help no matter what, and it's never too early —nor too late —to make sure they know that.

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