



A monthly publication provided by your child's school in recognition of your role as a partner in education.

# Resources for Families

## Helping your child manage stress

Stress is a part of daily life for most adults and a growing number of kids. Higher expectations and busy extracurricular schedules have resulted in higher levels of stress, especially among older students who juggle activities, school work and college preparation.

Stress related to school and work isn't going away. It is important for students to learn tools for managing stress so they can succeed, even when they face challenging situations.

### School-related stress

The pressure to succeed in school is a big source of stress and anxiety for some students. If they learn to manage these feelings now, they will develop skills for work-related stress after graduation. The skill of managing stress will also help students perform well in their current situation – the classroom.

Research shows that too much stress is unhealthy, mentally and physically. Children who are anxious about their learning, their abilities, their homework – almost anything – will have elevated levels of cortisol, the hormone associated with stress.

Though cortisol has its benefits, a perpetual state of elevated cortisol levels, or even regular spikes in levels are damaging to the body in numerous ways, including impaired cognitive abilities.

Studies also show that increased instances of elevated cortisol levels leads to lowered cortisol levels down the road, which is also problematic. The other, more immediate effect is that the physiological energy needed for the body to regulate stress hormone levels detracts from the energy available to focus on learning.

Mental state, then, has a big impact on learning ability. Students who are too stressed can't focus and won't perform as well in school.

## Tips to help younger students reduce classroom stress

A student's environment can play a big role in stress levels. Classrooms can be a source of calm for students or add to anxiety. The following tips are based on recommendations from psychologists and may help parents understand their child's classroom environment:

- Avoid clutter and too much visual stimulation.
- Allow for movement and fidgeting. Too much sitting can affect concentration and focus.
- Reduce noise. Too many hard surfaces bounce noise around the room. Keep the music station in a corner of the classroom.
- Some kids have difficulty moving to new activities. Build in transition time to help them adjust.

[www.teachthought.com/uncategorized/5-easy-ways-to-reduce-student-stress-in-the-classroom/](http://www.teachthought.com/uncategorized/5-easy-ways-to-reduce-student-stress-in-the-classroom/)

## Tips to help older students reduce classroom stress

In upper grades, time management plays a key role in stress management. Here are some strategies for teachers that could also apply to work and home environments:

- **Make expectations clear**  
Do students understand the course requirements? If your child seems anxious about school, it may help to discuss the class syllabus and assignments and help them plan a study strategy.
- **Talk about relevant past experiences and strategies**  
Your personal experience may provide valuable tips that your own children can use. Share what worked for you as a student – and



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what didn't work. There is also wisdom in mistakes. Your child might appreciate that you also struggled or had challenges to overcome.

If you can't remember your own student days, the following study tactics may help: make flash cards, explain concepts through pictures or on a poster board, make a study plan and timeline.

- **Help students do a self-evaluation**

Talk to your child about their learning style. It may help them to understand how they learn, so they can base study habits on their learning style. Is their style visual, auditory or tactile? Do they learn better by watching, listening or doing?

- **Create a calm environment**

Exam and study environments should be calm. Consider playing calming music during homework.

Suggest destressing techniques, such as deep breathing, visualizing something unrelated to the stress of the moment, and have your child tell himself /herself to be calm while taking deep breaths.

- **Encourage peer collaboration and mentoring**

Encourage your child to connect with others in the class. They can share concerns with each other, provide reassurance or share notes during study time.

- **Start with easy questions**

To build confidence, suggest that they start study time with easy work. Get the less difficult assignments out of the way first.

- **Create a “we're all in this together” environment**

Remind your child that their peers are likely feeling the same way they are. If they are stressed out, chances are good that their

classmates are, too. And if they feel unprepared, they are probably in good company.

- **Teach students to channel stress energy into something positive**

Homework and exam stress are not all bad. They can be effective motivators for working hard and preparing. Encourage students to plan-the-work and then work-the-plan by organizing time, planning ahead, reflecting on what worked in prior classes and seeking information from teachers when they are confused. <http://teaching.berkeley.edu/alleviating-students-stress>

### **Good stress vs. bad stress**

When students are feeling overwhelmed or stressed about school, remind them that some stress – not chronic stress – is actually a good motivator and can push us to optimal levels of alertness and performance.

Researchers have found that stress hormones from short-lived stress can help our brains adapt. “I think the ultimate message is an optimistic one,” said Daniela Kaufer, associate professor of integrative biology at UC Berkeley.

“Stress can be something that makes you better, but it is a question of how much, how long and how you interpret or perceive it.”

<http://news.berkeley.edu/2013/04/16/researchers-find-out-why-some-stress-is-good-for-you/>