

Combating Parental Stress

Has your daily "to-do" list gotten so long that it no longer fits on a single piece of paper? Or do you have so much to do that you don't even have time to make a to-do list? You're not



alone. Parents today are working longer hours and commuting greater distances to and from work. Their days don't slow down when they get home. Kids' after-school schedules can be jam-packed, making life busy-and often stressful-for parents.

Why is there so much parental stress?

There is no single answer to this complex question. Many things contribute to stress among parents, including:

- ✓ Having good childcare and knowing that their kids are safe during the hours when parents are away from them.
- ✓ Facing major life events such as a divorce, death, and midlife crisis.
- ✓ Having financial worries-from paying monthly bills to saving for a child's college education to giving financial help to aging parents.
- ✓ Being unemployed or fearful of being laid off from work.
- ✓ Facing nagging health problems.
- ✓ Feeling the strain of caring for an aging parent, chronically sick child, or family member with special needs.

Parents, like kids, also may be trying to do more in a single day. Technology items like computers and cell phones were supposed to help us save time-and they do! But instead of savoring that extra time, parents often pack in more tasks and chores.

How does stress affect parents and families?

According to one study, parents (especially of older children) suffer from higher levels of depression than adults who do not have children. Parents often focus on caring for their children and forget to take care of themselves. When parents don't pay attention to their physical and mental health, they put themselves at risk for stress-related problems like tension headaches, chronic fatigue, and depression.



Research also shows that the emotional well-being of children is strongly linked to their parents' mental health. To put in plainly: Parents who are stressed out often have kids who are stressed out. Your kids learn how to cope with life's ups and downs by watching how you manage stress. If you manage it well, you'll not only feel better, but you'll be a model for your kids and teach them how to manage stress in their lives.

How can parents manage stress?

Make friends and build strong social networks. Studies have shown that having one or two close friends or even a large group of friendly acquaintances is vital to emotional health.



Many people live far away from their extended family members, so look to friends to fill this emotional need. Being friends with other parents also can lead to timesaving benefits like carpooling to and from activities.

Prioritize your to-do list in order of importance. What has to get done today? What can be deleted? What can wait until tomorrow? Tackle today's things first and then come up with a game plan for getting everything else done. You might have to say, "I won't have time to mop the floor until Saturday," but that's OK. Just having a plan for getting things done can help relieve stress.

Make sure your to-do list includes a little personal time for yourself. Have coffee with an old friend, take a bath, go for a walk, read a book, or take a nap. The goal is to do things that renew and energize you. Don't let yourself get run down! When you take time to revitalize yourself, you have more to give to others.

Sometimes there seems to be no time for parents to de-stress and parents may feel guilty about calling a timeout for themselves. What parent has time for a break when there is homework to help with, recitals to attend, practices to drive to, and work to be done? Moms and Dads spend most of their time trying to raise happy, healthy kids, but your kids want happy, healthy parents! If you're over-stressed, you're probably not at your best-and your kids know it. So, call a personal timeout and address the stress. You'll be helping yourself and your family.

If you're constantly feeling overwhelmed, you may need professional help. Stress can lead to other health issues, so don't hesitate to talk about it with your family doctor or a mental health counselor.

The material found in this document has been adapted from the article "Combating Parental Stress", available at <http://family.samhsa.gov/set/parentstress.aspx>