



Types of Stressors for Children

Frustration happens at every age of childhood. Many factors may cause frustration such as hunger, boredom, lack of sleep, the inability to master something new, or having expectations that are feel unreachable. Environment is also a trigger. For example, Grandma may be sick, or Dad is away for deployment. Below are some additional stressors children may have:

- Worrying about schoolwork or grades
- Juggling responsibilities, such as school and work or sports
- Problems with friends, bullying, or peer group pressures
- Changing schools, moving, or dealing with housing problems
- Having negative thoughts about themselves
- Going through body changes, in both boys and girls
- Seeing parents go through a divorce or separation
- Money problems in the family

Not all stresses are harmful. The struggle to learn to ride a bike or to read describes how stress can be perceived as a challenge that helps children grow toward a more mature form of behavior. Thus, stress is essential to child development and marks the passage of developmental milestones throughout life (Anderson & Fulton, 1987).

Children in elementary school become most frustrated during their attempts to achieve mastery in a specific area, whether it is sports, academics, or socializing. They are also becoming more aware of their parents' feelings and emotions and more concerned with making sure that they do not disappoint them.

Teenagers are attempting to navigate the social world, which is the main source of anxiety and frustration at this stage. Friendships, fitting in with certain crowds, and defining their own identity in relation to peers can weigh heavily on teenagers as well as the pressure to do well in school and extracurricular activities.

For more information on the stressors of the military lifestyle and the services available to help military families, check:

https://digitalcommons.providence.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1094&context=socialwrk_students



Techniques to Try with Kids

For more information, check: <https://www.savethechildren.org>



Flower and Candle—Pretend you have a nice smelling flower in one hand and a slow burning candle in the other. Breathe in slowly through your nose as you smell the flower. Breathe out slowly through your mouth as you blow out the candle. Repeat a few times.

Lemon—Pretend you have a lemon in your hand. Reach up to the tree and pick a lemon with each hand. Squeeze the lemons hard to get all the juice out – squeeze, squeeze, squeeze. Throw the lemons on the floor and relax your hands. Then repeat, until you have enough juice for a glass of lemonade! After your last squeeze and throw, shake out your hands to relax!



Lazy Cat—Pretend you are a lazy cat that just woke up from a lovely long nap. Have a big yawn. And a meow. Now stretch out your arms, legs and back – slowly like a cat – and relax.

Feather/Statue—Pretend you are a feather floating through the air for about ten seconds. Suddenly you freeze and transform into a statue. Don't move! Then slowly relax as you transform back into the floating feather again. Repeat, making sure to finish as a floaty feather in a relaxed state.



Stress Balls—Make your own stress ball(s) by filling balloons with dry lentils or rice. Take the ball(s) in one or both hands and squeeze and release. Experiment with squeezing the ball. Find a way that is right for you, adjusting the speed, pressure, and timing of your squeezes to whatever way you like.

Turtle—Pretend you are a turtle going for a slow, relaxed turtle walk. Oh no, it's started to rain! Curl up tight under your shell for about ten seconds. The sun's out again, so come out of your shell and return to your relaxing walk. Repeat a few times, making sure to finish with a walk so that your body is relaxed.





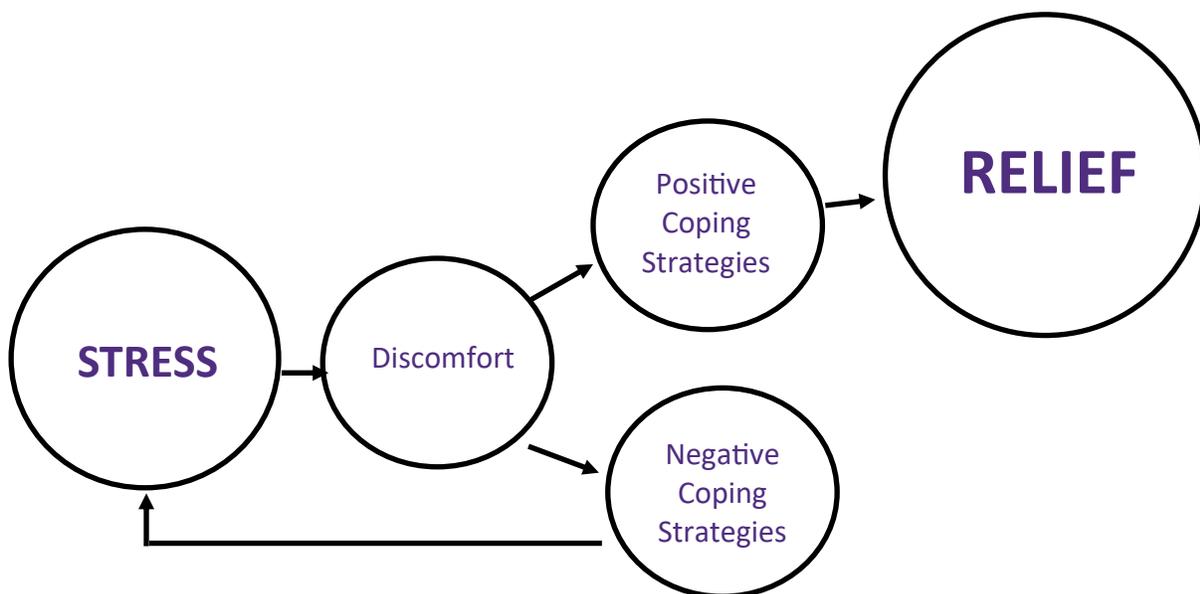
Signs of Stress in Children

Caring adults should offer hope that things will get better. For example, parents may use one or more of the following ways:

1. Remove at Least One Stressor—Change or cancel at least one stressor in the child’s life (decrease contact with another child or adult who causes conflict).
2. Transfer Coping Strategies to Other Life Situations—Demonstrate how a coping strategy may be used in another situation (listening and communication skills with adults and interactions and building friendships with peers).
3. Teach New Coping Strategies—Although coping strategies or evasive actions used by children can serve to temporarily relieve a child’s state of extreme stress, adults must be observant to note when these behaviors or actions become self-destructive. When children rely on coping behaviors over extended periods of time, the decision needs to be made to make a conscious effort to teach children the following: how to make friends; how to act and manage conflict; how to communicate, be cooperative, and work together; how to be pleasantly assertive; how to solve problems.
4. Teach Children to Identify and Face Stress—Mindfulness yoga practices help older children deal with stress and behavior. For example, breathing practices are one of the first steps in yoga and mindfulness classes.

Stress and Coping Cycle

Source: Center for Parent and Teen Communication www.parentandteen.com





Signs of Stress in Children

Children tend to mirror their surroundings. For example, if they see that Mom always gets frustrated, they will copy the behavior (Bowie, 2011).

In order to help children deal with stressful situations, parents and teachers need to gain an awareness of the signs of stress in children. The following list can indicate that young children are experiencing high levels of stress in their lives:

- Acts sullen, defiant, or aggressive against others, even adults
- Regressive behaviors present at a younger age
- Is overly sensitive to mild criticism or is highly demanding of others
- Bullies and may get other children to join in
- Clings to and shadows adults
- Has constant need to sleep, although physically well OR has frequent nightmares/sleep disturbances (such as bedwetting, teeth grinding)
- Has trembling of hands or facial twitches although apparently well
- Displays reduced attention capacity
- Stutters, uses disfluent speech, or refuses to talk
- Decreased appetite, upset stomach, or other vague stomach pain

For more information on supporting resilience in military families, check:

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/emotional-wellness/Building-Resilience/Pages/Supporting-Resilience-in-Military-Families.aspx>

MCEC[®] Resources

- *SchoolQuest™* is an interactive tool, specially designed to support highly mobile military-connected parents & students: <https://schoolquest.militarychild.org>
- Military Student Consultants: This program is the portal for all questions student and parent related. You can submit your specific questions concerning transition barriers and receive specialized support. To contact a Military Student Consultant, email msc@militarychild.org
- The MCEC[®] podcast series covers an array of informative and important topics with guests from all walks of life. Visit [Podbean](#), [Google Playstore](#), or [iTunes](#)

MCEC[®] Parent Support Resources

- Find other MCEC[®] Parent Support [webinars](#) related to this topic on our official website [MilitaryChild.org](https://www.militarychild.org)
- Contact your local Parent Support team for workshops offered in your community: <https://www.militarychild.org/programs/parent-to-parent>
- If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to: Parents@MilitaryChild.org

MCEC[®] Parent Support empowers military-connected parents with resources to be their child's first and best advocate. Learn more about ways to get involved and stay informed about upcoming webinars, workshops, and additional resources by emailing Parents@MilitaryChild.org.