

# What to Do When the Kids Are Driving You Nuts: Stress Management for Parents





"AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION CAN BE WORTH  
A POUND OF CURE"



One of the best ways to keep from becoming stressed out is to keep the levels of stress in your life as low as possible. You should become familiar with *The 7 Easy Ways To Prevent Stress*:

### The 7 Easy Ways to Prevent Stress

**#1 Use Good Parenting Skills:** Using the skills described in the other tip sheet can increase your effectiveness and decrease the times when things go badly. These skills include:

- Ways to change behaviors through using *Clear Requests*
- Targeting *Behavior Goals* with Point Charts
- The *Nuts and Bolts of Building a Point Chart* to use with your child
- *Linking* rewards and consequences to daily Point Chart goals

**#2 Take Care of Your Relationships:** One of the best ways to keep the stress levels in your life as low as possible is to work on the relationships in your life. Healthy adult relationships will help keep your overall stress levels down and will help you be a more effective parent! A good book that can teach you how to build and keep good adult relationships is *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* by Dr. John Gottman.

### The 7 Easy Ways to Prevent Stress (continued)

**#3 Good Diet:** A good diet helps your body cope with diseases and stress better and generally will make you feel more energetic and healthy. Taking care of your body is vital to effective parenting – your body needs a good diet! When our bodies are not given a healthy diet we have to work harder to get through our day and we will not be as able to fight off illness. Your children need you to be as physically healthy as possible. It's always a very good idea to run your ideas about dieting and changing your diet by your family doctor – remember, your family doctor is an important resource in coping with stress!

**#4 Water:** Most of us don't drink nearly enough water. Our bodies stop working at their best when the water level gets low – even when it only goes down a little bit. When our bodies don't have enough water, our muscles don't work as well as they usually do. More importantly, when our water levels are low, our brains don't work as well, and our ability to manage our emotions and stress in our lives goes down. *Drinking at least 8-10 cups of water could help prevent these problems. It's a cheap and easy way to prevent stress!*

**#5 Exercise:** One of the best ways to keep your body healthy is to exercise regularly. Your doctor will tell you that 15-20 minutes of low impact exercise a day can greatly increase your overall health, help your immune system fight off sickness and can really improve your mood. We will talk about ways that your body and your mind impact each other on the next couple of pages. Remember to talk with your family doctor before beginning a new exercise plan or when changing the exercise program you currently use. Some good exercises might include:

## The 7 Easy Ways to Prevent Stress

(continued)

### **#6 Be Assertive – Not Aggressive**

What does “assertive” mean? You are being “assertive” when you stand up for your personal rights and express your thoughts, feelings and beliefs directly, honestly and spontaneously in ways that don’t harm others. Assertive people are clear and direct – but they are not aggressive. When you are assertive, you show respect for yourself and for others. Assertive communication will help the people in your life to take responsibility for their actions and choices. Assertive communication allows you to express your negative feelings in healthy ways and will help you avoid the buildup of resentment. This in turn will help you keep situations from being more stressful than they need to be and will often prevent negative situations altogether. Compare the *aggressive* and *assertive* statements below, and imagine how it would feel to hear each one.

#### Example of *Aggressive* Statement:

“I *hate* trying to talk to you when you’re angry!”

#### Example of *Assertive* Statement:

“I find it hard to talk with you when you are so upset.”

### **#7 Get Organized: The Joy of Time Management**

One of the most common causes of stress is being disorganized. Here are some ways to help prevent stress by getting your life to run more smoothly:

- Make lists
- Put important things at the top of the list
- Learn to say “No”; avoid scheduling too many things
- Schedule breaks – we all need them
- Avoid big decisions when stressed



## DEEP BREATHING EXERCISE



Take a few minutes and try this simple exercise. It will turn off the *Stress Response* and turn on your *Relaxation Response*. It is a nice way to catch a break during the day or after some stressful parenting time!

### DEEP BREATHING EXERCISE

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- 1. Sit in a comfortable position:** Don't cross your legs or arms – this cuts off blood flow and can make your Stress Response start up. It's best to sit with your arms on your thighs or on the arms of the chair and with both feet flat on the floor.
- 2. Take 3 deep cleansing breaths:** This means you want to breathe in for 2-4 seconds, hold your breath for 2-3 seconds, and then breathe out for 4-6 seconds while trying to force all the air out of your body. It's best if you breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth.
- 3. Try to breathe so that only your stomach rises and falls:** This is a natural way to breathe – slow and deep. However, most of us breathe rapidly and take shallow breaths from our chest. Remember that rapid and shallow breathing is part of the Stress Response; long slow breaths are part of the *Relaxation Response*. Athletes and singers often try to breathe this way. (It's called breathing from the diaphragm.)

As you inhale, concentrate on your chest remaining relatively still while your stomach rises. It may be helpful to imagine that your pants are too big and you need to push your stomach out to hold them up.

- 4. Take 5 minutes for slow relaxing breaths, continuing to breathe so that only your stomach moves:** Try to breathe deeply and slowly while imagining that your body is heavy and sinking deeper and deeper into the chair. Close your eyes and think about the word **CALM** while concentrating on relaxing your body. The word **CALM** will help you remember to relax the different parts of your body. (Turn the page to learn how ☺.)

### DEEP BREATHING EXERCISE

(continued)

5. **The CALM reminder:** While taking slow and deep breaths, the word **CALM** will help remind you to relax some of the major parts of your body. As you can see below, each letter in the word stands for a different body part.

**C**hest: Breathing slower and deeper

**A**rms: Shoulders sag

**L**egs: Loose and flexible

**M**outh: Jaw drops open slightly

When you close your eyes and think or say the word **CALM**, imagine all the stress or tension leaving your body as you exhale. Each time you exhale you may feel your body becoming a bit more relaxed. Sometimes this exercise can be even better if you spend time thinking about peaceful things. A really good thing to do is to picture the peaceful place in your mind as completely as possible.

6. **Try to practice this breathing exercise at least once or twice a day:** Remember that *taking care of you* is very important. This is a quick and easy way to give your body and your mind a break. Don't convince yourself that you are too busy to practice some stress management – your kids need you healthy and rested!



Please go to the next page to read a summary of this chapter and a preview of Chapter 6.



## *Chapter Summary/Preview of Chapter 6*



***Congratulations*** on finishing this very important chapter on *What to Do When the Kids Are Driving You Nuts: Stress Management for Parents*. You should now have a pretty good handle on:

- *Understanding stress*
- *Recognizing stress*
- *Managing Stress*
  - *Avoiding Unhealthy Coping Methods*
  - *Preventing Stress - "An Ounce of Prevention"*
  - *The 7 Easy Ways to Prevent Stress*
  - *What You Think Really Matters - The Connection Between Our Minds and Bodies*
  - *Low Cost Ways to Manage Stress*

We hope you have found the tools in this chapter helpful. We invite you to continue on to our other tips sheets covering: *Involvement and Communication: Two Antidotes for Low Self-Esteem*.

- *Unhealthy Family Habits That Can Hurt Self-Esteem*
- *The 6 Steps to Effective Encouragement — the Key to Good Self-Esteem*
- *Child-Directed Play: A Good Self-Esteem Builder*
- *Problem Solving Through Negotiation*
- *Getting to Know Your Child's School Life*