



## Feeling Overwhelmed with Parenting Demands?

Are you stressed by the demands of raising children—helping with homework, handling the logistics of after-school activities, sports, doctor's appointments, birthday parties? When you became a parent, was being overwhelmed part of the job description?



If you'd like to take a step back—if you are feeling maxed out—but don't know what to do, read on.

Here are some strategies to help you build resilience. (*And no, they don't involve spending lots of money*). These opportunities focus on what you can do right now at home. Right now, in your neighborhood. Give yourself permission to reduce your stress and be happy—in whatever ways work best for you.

### 1. Change your perspective.

People sometimes experience anxiety after letting their worries take over. Are you releasing your tensions in unhealthy ways?

- **Break down big problems into smaller parts.** This means tackling challenges head on yet doing so one at a time. This is often called compartmentalizing. Imagine putting each cause of stress inside separate plastic containers. Now visualize closing the lids. Segmenting challenges decreases stress because it spurs the realization problems can be dealt with individually, while the rest can be "stored" for another time. *Watch this video to learn more* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ozRPhZRd-fA>).
- **Know how much power** (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18399953>) **you give to each stressor in your life.** Sometimes stress comes from real danger, but in most cases, the amount of stress we feel has more to do with how we think about the obstacles in our way. Take an accounting of how much influence you are giving to each challenge you are facing.

### Reach out to others for help.

This is not a sign of weakness—in fact it is the opposite. Licensed and certified psychologists (<https://locator.apa.org/>), social workers, and other mental health professionals can offer support and suggestions for big and small setbacks. A trusted pastor, rabbi, imam or other religious figure can help you with some faith-based strategies (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24320650>), as well.

If you are looking for help for yourself or someone else, you may be tempted to call someone who advertises in a local publication or who comes up from a search of the Internet. While you may, or may not, find a competent therapist in this manner, it is wise to check on credentials. Competent therapists hold advanced academic degrees and are trained in techniques for treating anger management. They should always be licensed to practice in your state.

Look for therapists affiliated with local universities or mental health facilities. You can also check membership listings on the websites of professional organizations, such as the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies (<http://www.findcbt.org/FAT/>) or the American Psychological Association (<https://locator.apa.org/?65287036.239706272.1566497997-1531462394.1566497997>).

## Ask yourself these key questions whenever a challenge pops up:

[Back to Top](#)

- **Is this a real tiger or paper tiger?** (Yes, a tiger!) Remember, humans are built to successfully flee ferocious carnivores. Our internal stress response launches us into survival mode—a period during which it's nearly impossible to think clearly. You'll solve problems more effectively if you are able to recognize most problems don't represent immediate danger. Once you recognize that, you'll be able to more effectively calm your thinking and determine what you need to do next.
- **How will I feel about this problem tomorrow? Next week? Next year?** Do you know the musical, *Annie*, and its famous song, "*Tomorrow?*" This show-stopping tune reminds us that our struggles nearly always ease with the passage of time. "*The sun will come up tomorrow*," a good reminder when trying to keep things in perspective.
- **Is this "good" situation permanent?** OK, maybe this is a bit glass half empty. But sometimes—without meaning to think self-defeating thoughts—we do. We get nervous we're unworthy of success. In the worse cases, we might even sabotage our good fortune. Don't do this to yourself! Come to appreciate all the wonderful events in your life. You've earned it.

## 2. Give yourself a safe space to express feelings.

Writing—in any form—is a powerful way to lower stress and develop a more resilient mindset.

### Why writing your thoughts and feelings is so good for your health:

- **Writing allows you to let go of controlling emotions.** Once they're on the page, our thoughts and feelings are no longer at the forefront of our minds. We're able to worry less by writing more.
- **Writing alters memories of stressful events.** Research (<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/15b8/bc129008e7aaffbf79b7ead6f868d76e4ad.pdf>) shows writing about stressful experiences, for example, has improved the health of many different people. Putting pen to paper has been proven to not only decrease stressful memories but improve (<http://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/189437>) how people cope with them. This is why reviewing your old writing, for example, can be a great way to reflect on the lessons you've learned along the way.
- **Remember: You don't need to write every day.** Writing can simply be a tool whenever you need to release tension or make sense of an emotion. Writing—in any form—shouldn't add stress to your life! Write for yourself, not for others.

## 3. Give back. It feels good to give.

The ultimate act of resilience—to make yourself feel stronger—is to reach out to other people when *they* need support. (*Read that line again—it can be lifesaving!*) When we give, we learn it feels good to help. We're then more likely to accept support when we need it.

### Helping others also helps us in these essential ways:

- **It boosts our well-being.** It's been studied! (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18198690>) When we volunteer, we put aside our troubles and gain perspective. Perhaps, we determine our difficulties aren't so bad after all. Giving back also comes with a welcome reminder: You matter, and you are valued.
- **It gives more opportunities for family time or solo time.** Volunteer solo or with your family. From local food pantries, to religious institutions, to your son or daughter's school, the opportunities to volunteer are everywhere (<https://parentandteen.com/volunteering/>). Some people even manage to turn the act of volunteering into a family vacation.

## 4. Practice what you preach.

Think about working on some challenging homework with your kids. How often do you hear them say, "*I can't?*" As parents, we can correct this self-defeating language with "*You can. Let's work on it.*"

## How you can be a model for your children:

[Back to Top](#)

### Modeling Self-Care



- **Add in "yet" to the end of your own self-defeating thoughts.** When so many of our own thoughts begin with words like *"I never"* or *"I can't,"* we close the door for progress. We undermine hope. Just like you do for your kids, work to add the transformative word "yet" to the end of your thoughts. *"I can't solve this problem"* becomes *"I can't solve this problem YET."* Hope and possibility are then restored with one simple word.

## Yet, another upside to taking care of yourself.

Taking advantage of these techniques has a wonderful, unexpected upside: by controlling how you handle stress, you model how best to manage challenges for your children. And that will no doubt help them build a more resilient mindset, too.

## More information

- The Importance of Self-Care: Why Parents Need Time Out to Recharge (</English/family-life/family-dynamics/Pages/Importance-of-Self-Care.aspx>)
- Helping Children Handle Stress ([/English/healthy-living/emotional-wellness/Pages/Helping-Children-Handle-Stress.aspx?\\_gl=1%2aetuzmm%2a\\_ga%2aMTMyMzY1NDM2OC4xNTE1MTA1ODA3%2a\\_ga\\_FD9D3XZVQQ%2aMTY1ODg0NDg0MC4xMDIyLjEuMTY1ODg0NTU1OC4w&\\_ga=2.168861605.581683914.1658755746-1323654368.1515105807&\\_gac=1.53158490.1656065135.CjwKCAjwwdWVBhA4EiwAjcYJEBvcd2SnTBQkpY0xBvtMK5KehPvKuefO8w7Xse6NqoyRDAXjJRyDEhoCSVQQA\\_vD\\_BwE](/English/healthy-living/emotional-wellness/Pages/Helping-Children-Handle-Stress.aspx?_gl=1%2aetuzmm%2a_ga%2aMTMyMzY1NDM2OC4xNTE1MTA1ODA3%2a_ga_FD9D3XZVQQ%2aMTY1ODg0NDg0MC4xMDIyLjEuMTY1ODg0NTU1OC4w&_ga=2.168861605.581683914.1658755746-1323654368.1515105807&_gac=1.53158490.1656065135.CjwKCAjwwdWVBhA4EiwAjcYJEBvcd2SnTBQkpY0xBvtMK5KehPvKuefO8w7Xse6NqoyRDAXjJRyDEhoCSVQQA_vD_BwE))
- Three Tips for Creating a More Resilient Mindset (<https://parentandteen.com/three-tips-resilient-mindset/>) (The Center for Parent and Teen Communication)
- Think Accurately About Stress (<https://parentandteen.com/think-accurately-about-stress/>) (The Center for Parent and Teen Communication)

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