

Helping children build inner strength to cope with the ups and downs of growing up is one of the best things parents can do for them. Often we cannot prevent things going wrong for children but we can try to help them build the strengths that will help them cope.

# coping skills for children

## What parents can do

### Belonging

One of the most important things your child needs is a sense of belonging. Children need to know that someone or some people really care and will always be there for them. These people can be a mother and/or father, a grandparent or another reliable person who cares for them a lot. When your child learns to belong in this way, it gives them the ability to make attachments to other important people in their life. If you are sick or not there for some reason, having someone else is very important for your child's healthy development.

### Self esteem

In childhood, children need to know that they are loved because of the special people they are. You need to tell them this often and show them by spending time with them and supporting their interests.

*They need to feel they have a place in the family - that they are missed if they are away and have a part in what needs to be done, such as family chores.*

### Self control

Children need to develop a sense of being able to manage things for themselves as they grow up. There are lots of ways that you can teach them this kind of confidence:

- ◆ Show delight in what your child is learning.
- ◆ Help them to learn to do things for themselves instead of always having the answers given.
- ◆ Give your child choices. Be prepared to let them have their choice.
- ◆ Ask your child's opinion about things that are to do with them (you do not always have to do what they say but help them to feel that they have some say).
- ◆ Start to teach them to solve their own problems. For example, if two children are quarrelling you can get them

to listen to each other's feelings. Then ask them to think about what they could do to try and fix the problem. They might need a lot of help at first but it is worth the effort in the long run.

- ◆ Give approval and encouragement for trying new things and for getting something right, even if your child doesn't get it all right at first.
- ◆ Give your child lots of time to do what they are good at. It is tempting to keep them practising what they aren't so good at. Although this may be necessary, they also need time to succeed.
- ◆ Give them opportunities to learn a craft and new skills.
- ◆ As your child gets older give them responsibility for doing things for themselves, such as working out how to spend pocket money, get a meal, shop for themselves (within reason).

## REMINDERS

- Children need to feel loved and lovable just for themselves, not only when they do things well.
- Children need to feel they have some control in their lives.
- Children need to feel that they can be successful at something.
- Children need a sense of belonging.
- Children are helped by having people apart from their parents who care about them and support them.
- Grandparents can be a special support for children and teenagers.

## Protect children from adult problems

If you are having trouble with your child's other parent make an effort to keep your child out of what is adults' business. Help your child to see it is not their fault (children often believe it is). They also need to know that whatever happens somebody will be there for them. You might want to find another caring adult such as a grandparent to support your child while you are feeling very stressed.

## Find outside support

Children often do better when life gets difficult if they have some support people apart from parents. This could be a grandparent, relative, family friend or teacher. As your child gets older their own close friends can provide some of this support.

## Family rituals

The special little things you do every day and on special occasions help build a sense of inner security. When families are in trouble sometimes these rituals get forgotten. Special rituals are about how you celebrate birthdays, name days, Christmas and other special days. These can include the day your child was adopted, or started school, or started her periods, or your family became a stepfamily. Examples of daily rituals include:

- ◆ something special that you do when your child gets home from school
- ◆ what you do at mealtimes.

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# Helping children

## to manage stress

By Dr Nick Kowalenko

Children and young people, like us, experience stress every day. They can benefit from learning how to handle stress better. When they succeed they feel more in charge of their lives and more able to succeed at school, in relationships with their friends and family and in other parts of their lives.

Some sources of stress for young people come from:

- school demands and frustrations
- negative thoughts about themselves
- growth changes
- problems with friends or parents
- unsafe living environments and neighbourhoods
- being ill, or their parents being ill
- death, injury or illness of someone important to them
- too many changes (school, teachers, where they live etc).

Some young people can become overloaded with stress. When this happens they need help. Sometimes a break from the stressful situation can help - like listening to music, talking to friends or exercising.

Parents can help their children monitor stress, show them how to manage it and watch for signs of overloading.

Sometimes overloading with stress goes on for too long and young people really lose their confidence. They can become quiet and withdrawn, anxious and 'wobbly', or irritable, angry and miserable.

When this happens parents can help children learn to bounce back and recover their confidence by:

- finding time to talk and listen
- asking how you can be of support
- reminding them of their good points
- helping them build friendships and handle conflict with friends
- encouraging them to exercise and do things they enjoy
- talking openly about your concerns.

To do any job well you need to take time off too. Just a chance to recharge your batteries through sharing parenting or being with friends will help keep your energy up.



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