Stress is the feeling we get when situations put too much pressure on us. Family members who are stressed may feel irritable, anxious, worried, or depressed. Too much stress affects how children and parents interact and function. Signs of stress include: an increase in arguments, snapping at each other, sleeping difficulties resulting in fatigue, and a tendency to withdraw from each other.

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Relax and Refresh

Children model their parents’ behavior, so it is important that parents cope with stress in healthy ways. There are many different ways that families can promote relaxation and prevent stress. Here are some suggestions:

1. **Aim for balance.** Work toward a healthy lifestyle that involves a balance of work, play, and rest. Avoid taking on too much work or planning too many social activities. All families need some ‘down’ time to relax and refresh. Encourage children to take a break. Learn to say ‘no’.

2. **Make time to talk about it.** If you your child or spouse is looking stressed or anxious, make a point to ask how they’re feeling and give them your full attention. Problem-solve ways to decrease stress and cope with challenges.

3. **Create a positive home environment.** Decrease clutter and make sure some living spaces are relaxing to spend time in (e.g. soft lighting, calming scents, pillows, comfortable furniture, TV-free zones).

4. **Develop healthy family habits** that help prevent and decrease stress such as eating a healthy diet, staying physically active, getting enough sleep, and doing fun activities together.

5. **Do activities that are relaxing.** Come up with a list of relaxing activities that can be done together as a family (e.g. taking a walk, listening to calming music, going on a picnic) or alone (e.g. reading a good book in bed, sipping hot chocolate or herbal tea, taking a warm bath) and make a point to do them.

Mindfulness-based Strategies for Reducing Family Stress

Mindfulness-based strategies have been found to be helpful for reducing stress, improving parent-child relationships, and increasing self-regulation and coping. Yoga, stretching, and deep breathing have been shown to decrease the physical and emotional effects of stress. When relaxation strategies are done together as a family, it can benefit the family as a whole.
Strategies for Relaxation to do Together as a Family

Think about teaching one to two of the following strategies to your child. Better yet, do them together!

1. **Deep Breathing** helps slow down the body’s stress reaction by decreasing the heart rate and increasing feelings of being in control. How? Do Balloon Breathing (diaphragmatic breathing): “Close your eyes and place your hand on your stomach. Image your stomach is a balloon. As you breath air in through your nose, your stomach will rise or fall like balloon. Hold for 3 seconds. As you release air through your nose, your stomach will deflate like a balloon. Imagine you are letting all your worries leave your body.” (See Appendix C of the Calm Moments Cards [http://www.everymomentcounts.org/up_doc/Appendix_C_8-28-16.pdf](http://www.everymomentcounts.org/up_doc/Appendix_C_8-28-16.pdf))

2. **Yoga** and stretching helps to relax built up tension in muscles while deep breathing. Holding yoga poses helps a person feel connected with one’s body. 15 simple yoga poses with diagrams and instructions are provided in Appendix C of the Calm Moments Cards [http://www.everymomentcounts.org/up_doc/Appendix_C_8-28-16.pdf](http://www.everymomentcounts.org/up_doc/Appendix_C_8-28-16.pdf).

3. **Toe tensing** draws tension down from the rest of the body. Lie on your back and focus on your toes. Move your toes up toward your face and hold for 10 second. Relax for a count of 10. Repeat.

4. **Visualization** (or guided imagery) uses imagination to release negative thoughts and think of something soothing (e.g. lying on a warm beach and listening to waves). Try color visualization. Close your eyes. Imagine a favorite color that makes you feel peaceful. With each breath, imagine taking in the color and moving it throughout the body while breathing out. Imagine being filled with this relaxing color.

5. **Laugh**. Laughter can be a great stress reliever. Make a point to tell jokes and be silly.


7. **Listen to music**. Have your child listen to fun and/or calming music after school for 10 minutes behind closed doors without interruption or activity.

8. **Make a point to give hugs and cuddle**. Hugging a loved one can decrease stress and help us feel emotionally connected. Cuddling with a pet can be calming as well.

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**Resources**

4Calm Moments Cards (Deininger, Kolic, & Young, 2014). These 17 cards provide thinking, focusing & calming, and sensory strategies for reducing stress. Parents can refer to the cards specific to starting the day or doing homework. The Appendices provide fun activities that can easily be done at home. This is one of the Every Moment Counts model programs. Website: [http://www.everymomentcounts.org/view.php?nav_id=213](http://www.everymomentcounts.org/view.php?nav_id=213).


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