**Recognizing When Children Are Stressed and Helping Them Deal With It**

It's tempting for grown-ups to remember childhood as an idyllic time. Sometimes, we adults think that since children don't have to worry about paying the bills, keeping a job, cleaning the house, and so forth, they can't possibly have any problems.

This is a really counterproductive way of thinking, though, because children do get stressed. And they need your help to deal with it.

Children do not have the coping mechanisms, born of experience and maturity, that adults do. This is why seemingly small things can be very upsetting to children. So be patient and learn to recognize your kids' stress and help them cope. Here are some things to look for and some tips on helping them deal with their stress.

**-Physical Symptoms**

Stressed children may exhibit physical symptoms, such as diarrhea, hives or rashes, restless sleep, changes in appetite, and /or nausea.

**-Emotional Psychological Symptoms**

A stressed child may exhibit depression, excessive sensitivity, or social withdrawal. Stressed kids may be aggressive or have angry outbursts.

So if you see these symptoms in your child, what can you do? It's tempting to do nothing. Parents may think it will go away on its own, or that their child will outgrow it. But stress needs to be confronted and coped with so that it does not become entrenched in your child's thought and behavior patterns. Here are some things you can do.

**-Listen**

Really listen. You may ask your stressed child what's wrong, or why he is acting a certain way, and you may not get an answer. Or you get an answer like "Nothing." But really listening means paying attention to your child's words and body language even when they don't know you're watching. Certainly asking your child what is wrong is a good thing to do; it shows you care.

But don't interrogate her, or expect your child to be able to verbalize exactly what's occurring in her life and how it's affecting her. Even some adults have trouble with this. So try to "read" into the passing comments, complaints, and body language of your child.

**-Express Empathy**

If you express empathy, it shows your child that you do notice and understand. Verbally expressing empathy can also help your child build a vocabulary to explain his stressful feelings. You might say, "I bet it hurts your feelings when people call you names. It hurts mine, too," and share an experience from your past.

**-Help Your Child Be Proactive**

Work with your child in finding solutions to his stress. Sit down and make lists of things he could do, such as writing a letter to the stress-causing person or cutting back on some of his extra-curricular activities.

Let your child know that she does not have to be doing something 24 hours a day to have personal worth. She has worth because of who she is!