AMERICAN COLLEGE OF
Lifestyle Medicine

STRESS MANAGEMENT

Helping Kids Manage Stress



Stress is normal, but kids need tools to handle big feelings. Teaching calming skills early helps them feel safe and in control.

1 Name the Feeling

- **Help your child learn words for emotions like:** Happy, Sad, Angry, Tired, Afraid, Proud
- Use an **emotion chart** to make it fun!

PAPER PLATE EMOTIONS MASK

Masks: Cut a paper plate in half. Write an emotion on the back side of the plate. Together, draw the nose and mouth of each emotion's face (smile, frown, confused).
Charades: Take turns holding the mask up to the bottom half of your face and making your eyes and eyebrows match the emotion on the mask. Have the other person guess which emotion you are expressing.
Next level: Ask the person to come up with a coping skill that could be used when feeling that emotion.

2 Practice Breathing

Breathing helps calm the body and mind. Teach these when your child is calm:

- **Blow bubbles or a pinwheel** – See the breath in action!
- **Five-Finger Breathing** – Trace each finger while breathing in and out slowly.
- **Square Breathing** – Draw a box: breathe in 4 seconds, hold 4 seconds, breathe out 4 seconds, hold 4 seconds.

Tip: Use breathing before bed or when upset.

3 Try Mindfulness

Breathing helps calm the body and mind. Teach these when your child is calm:

- **5 Senses Game:** 5 things you see, 4 things you feel, 3 things you hear, 2 things you smell, 1 thing you taste.
- **Coloring, free play, or time in nature**.

BEHAVIOR PIGGY BANK

Together, create fake coins or dollars out of construction paper or cardboard with different positive coping behaviors on each. Come up with a list of different prizes (i.e. fun family outing, new book). Every time your child utilizes a positive coping behavior, they can put that coin in their piggy bank (mason jar). Once they have filled up the piggy bank, or at the end of the week, they can choose one of the prizes from the list. You can also make each prize worth a different amount of coins, so your child can also save up their positive behavior coins and 'cash in' whenever they have saved up enough money.

4 Make a Calm Corner

- **Soft rug or bean bag**
- **Books and stuffed animals**
- **Sensory items:** Smell: scented stickers, See: glitter jar, Feel: silly putty or soft fabrics
- **Creative tools:** crayons, puzzles
- **Movement:** yoga cards or stretch bands



5 Use Helpful Apps

Try kid-friendly mindfulness apps:

- Stop, Breathe, Think Kids
- Calm
- Headspace
- Smiling Mind



PARENT TIPS

- ✓ Practice these skills daily, not just during meltdowns.
- ✓ Model calm behavior—kids copy what you do.
- ✓ Make stress management fun and part of your routine!

Big feelings are okay. With your help, kids can learn to calm down and feel better.

