

## How Parents Can Help Kids De-stress

**Problem-Solving training/Role Play can help school age children cope with stress.** When your child describes a stressful school situation, practice playing different roles in the conflict. This teaches kids how to imagine what other people feel, and also teaches them that there are different ways to handle stress. Help your child solve problems by finding more than one solution, then choosing the best.

**Muscle relaxation teaches kids what it feels like to be totally relaxed.** Have the child sit in a chair, or lay down, and have them make a really tight fist or make his arm muscles really tight like a rubber band that's going to snap. Then tell him to open his hands and wiggle his fingers and make them relaxed, limp. Then do this with the rest of his body, the legs, the feet, head and face, tightening and releasing the muscles. Kids learn from this exercise that there's a difference between a stressful body and a relaxed one and that they can control it.

**Breathing exercises help children slow down their nervous systems:** Ask a child to sit in a chair and put her hands on her chest and take a deep breath in. Ask her to pretend her body is like a building and on the first breath she is filling the first floor with air, then blowing it out. On the second breath in, she fills the second floor, until she's all the way in the attic, filling the attic with air and blowing it out. By repeating this several times, she can calm herself down. Kids can do this in a classroom when they're feeling nervous about taking a test, for example. This is a technique they can use for a lifetime.

**Visualization techniques during times of stress can make children feel calmer.** This involves changing the focus from something stressful in the moment to something unrelated to that stressful situation. Tell your child to close their eyes and try to see - in their mind - their own name. Ask them "Can you spell your name in your mind? Can you spell it backwards? Can you picture what a camel looks like? What does its head look like? How many humps does it have?" This technique teaches kids how to re-focus their energy, and calm down.

**Imagination** - Another technique is to imagine peaceful situations. You can ask your child to imagine five situations that he or she feels good in. Teach him to close his eyes and imagine that he's there, at the park, on the football field or on the beach or wherever he's most relaxed and happy. Tell him the next time he's in a stressful situation, he can close his eyes and imagine that happy place or situation to find an inner calmness.

**Reflective listening involves rephrasing your child's comments to show them you understand what they've said - that you're listening.** Your child might say, "Mom, when I have to answer a question in school, I feel sick." And you say "When you get called on, you have butterflies in your stomach?" By reflecting back what he's said, you have shown him that you're really listening, and that it matters what he feels, no matter what that feeling is.

**Acceptance of feelings as temporary** - It's important to help children understand that feelings pass. If you spoke with your daughter today about how she was feeling sad, you might ask her tomorrow how she's feeling. If she says she feels better, you might say, "I'm glad you're feeling better, and I'm glad that today is a better day." This way, children can begin to learn that stressful feelings pass and that they don't last forever.