Children Coping With Stress Essay, Research Paper

CHILDREN COPING WITH STRESS

While some stress is normal and even healthy, children today seem to encounter many stressful life events at earlier ages. Stress shows itself in children by complaints about stomachaches, being nervous, trouble sleeping, anger flares, and infections.

There are a variety of reasons for children to feel stress. Death, divorce, remarriage, moving, long illness, abuse, family or community violence, natural disaster,

fear of failure, and cultural conflict may each heighten stress. Under stress, the heart rate and breathing are at a higher speed and muscles are tense. Multiple stressors

worsen the stress level and the length of the stress. Our bodies need relief from stress to reestablish balance.

Reactions to stress vary with the child s stage of development, ability to cope, the length of time the stressor continues, intensity of the stressor, and the degree of

support from family, friends, and community. The two most frequent indicators that children are stressed are change in behaviors and regression of behaviors. Children under stress change their behavior and react by doing things that are not in keeping with their usual style. Behaviors seen in earlier phases of development, such as thumb sucking and regression in toileting, may reappear.

Typically, preschoolers lack self-control, have no sense of time, act independently, are curious, may wet the bed, have changes in eating habits, have difficulty with sleep or speech, and cannot tell adults how they are feeling.

Preschoolers under stress each react differently. Some behaviors may include irritability, anxiety, uncontrollable crying, trembling with fright, eating or sleep problems. Toddlers may regress to infant behaviors, feel angry and not understand their feelings, fear being alone or without their parent, withdraw, bite, or be sensitive to sudden or loud noises. Feelings of sadness or anger may build inside of them. They may become aggressive or angry, have nightmares, or be accident prone.

Just as children s reactions are each different, so are their coping strategies. Children can cope through tears or tantrums or by retreating from unpleasant situations. They could be masterful at considering options, finding compromising solutions, or finding substitute comfort. Usually a child s thinking is not developed fully enough to think of options or think about the results of possible actions. Children who live in supportive environments and develop a range of coping strategies become more resilient. Resiliency is the ability to bounce back from stress and crisis. For many children, a supportive environment is not present and many children do not learn a set

of positive coping strategies.