

Ask the Pediatrician: How to cope with stress and violence at home

July 24 2023, by Dr. Maya Ragavan and Dr. Kimberly Randell, American Academy of Pediatrics



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We know that stress and conflict happen in relationships. This can sometimes include emotional, physical, sexual and financial abuse or

controlling behaviors. As pediatricians, we are here to support you and your family.

This information may be helpful to you, your family, your friends or others in your community who are experiencing [stress](#) and [violence](#) at home.

We want to start with this: Being a parent takes a huge amount of love and hard work. It is so important to remember that parents who experience violence do a great job caring for their [children](#). But children can unfortunately experience stress when relationships are stressed.

Signs of stress can look different depending on the age of the child. Babies may be fussy, experience changes to their eating or sleep habits, or have trouble learning to walk or speak. Toddlers may have tantrums, challenges learning new skills or difficulty sleeping. Older children and teenagers may be sad, irritable, worried all the time, disinterested in eating, having trouble sleeping or getting stomachaches or headaches. Stress can show up in children in many other ways, too.

Some ways you can help your child cope when relationships are stressed:

- Help your child develop healthy routines, like reading before bedtime, eating breakfast and brushing their teeth in the morning.
- Talk to your child about things they are happy about or thankful for. Do fun things with them and celebrate their accomplishments.
- Practice focused breathing with your child. In a safe space, help your child slowly take deep breaths in and out to help them calm down.
- Connect your child to programs and groups that help them find spaces to talk and connect with other young people and

supportive adults.

Sometimes these strategies may not completely help take away your child's stress. If that happens, please remember that your pediatrician is here to help you. If you are worried your child is struggling with stress, anxiety or fear, please speak with your child's doctor. They will listen to you and provide support and affirmation. After learning more about your child's symptoms, they can work with you to make a plan and help find ways to support your child, including [support services](#) in your community.

As parents, we think so much about our children, but it's important to not forget about our own stress. In a place that feels safe, if possible, please take a few minutes each day to do something that is important and relaxing to you. It can be something like talking to a friend, reading a book, watching a funny video, breathing deeply, taking a walk or doing an exercise video. Some mobile apps can help remind and guide you to take moments to breathe and relax.

Sometimes talking to other parents can help, too. Parenting resources, such as The National Parenting Helpline (1-855-4A PARENT [855-427-2736], open 1 p.m. to 10 p.m. Eastern), provide confidential and free services. Your pediatrician may also know of other helplines or virtual parenting groups in your community.

Resources & safety

Pediatricians are here to help you and your family heal, thrive and connect with resources. Your pediatrician can connect you to a domestic violence services agency and other resources in your community.

Domestic violence services agencies provide different support and resources, depending on what is most helpful to you. The National

Domestic Hotline offers confidential and free services in multiple languages (www.thehotline.org; 1-800-799-7233). You can call, text or chat with trained professionals on their website, whatever feels safest to you.

When a parent is experiencing stress or violence in a relationship, they may not feel safe at home. As a parent, we know your No. 1 priority is keeping your child safe. If you are worried about your safety, or your [child](#)'s safety, local victim services agencies can help.

If you, your family, your friends or anyone you know are experiencing stress or violence in their relationships, please know you are not alone. As pediatricians, we are grateful for the amazing work you are doing each day and are here to support you. Please reach out if and when it feels safe.

More information: More information is available at HealthyChildren.org.

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