



Helping Your Kids Handle Stress

Major Stresses/Problems

We know there are countless sources of stress for teens today. In 1986 an extensive survey was conducted by Children and Teens Today. The readership of this magazine has a common element – whether they are ministers, lay counselors, therapists, administrators or counselors, they all work directly with children and/or adolescents.

The question was: What do you see as the major stress/problems facing today's teenagers? Of eight suggested answers given, 72.4 percent of those who responded listed "problems arising from parental divorce/remarriage," with "peer pressure to drink/alcoholism" coming in second at 68.2 percent. Here is how people pinpointed the remaining six problems listed:

59% --- acceptance of sexual intercourse/experimentation at a young age;

48% --- pressure to experiment with drugs;

45% --- depression;

30% --- the need to attain academic excellence;

28% --- attempts at suicide;

23% --- fears arising from the threat of nuclear war.

The readers were invited to describe other major problems, which were not listed, and the problems mentioned most often were parent and family-related difficulties.

Let's look at an adult stress study and apply it to the lives of children and teens. The Holmes-Rahe Life Event Scale serves as our example.

You will find below the forty-three life events listed in that scale. They have been adjusted to fit situations in the life of a child – that is, "spouse" is changed to "parent," "work" to "school," etc. the point value of each life event remains the same.



LIFE EVENTS

1. Death of a parent	100
2. Divorce of parents	73
3. Separation of parents	65
4. Parent's jail term	63
5. Death of a close family member (e.g., a grandparent)	63
6. Personal injury or illness	53
7. Parent's remarriage	50
8. Suspension or expulsion from school	47
9. Parent's reconciliation	45
10. Long vacation (Christmas, summer, etc.)	45
11. Parent's or sibling's sickness	44
12. Mother's pregnancy	40
13. Anxiety over sex	39
14. Birth of new baby (or adoption)	39
15. New school, classroom or teacher	39
16. Money problems at home	38
17. Death (or moving away) of close friend	37
18. Change in studies	36
19. More quarrels with parents	36
20. (Not applicable to a child or teen)	
21. (Not applicable to a child or teen)	
22. Change in school responsibilities	29
23. Sibling going away to school	29
24. Family arguments with grandparents	29
25. Winning school or community award	28



26. Mother going to work or stopping work.....	26
27. School beginning or ending.....	26
28. Family's living standard changing.....	25
29. Change in personal habits (e.g., Bedtime, homework etc.)	24
30. Trouble with parents – lack of communication, hostility, etc.....	23
31. Change in school hours, schedule or courses.....	20
32. Family's moving	20
33. A new school	20
34. A new sport, hobby or family recreation activity.....	19
35. Change in church activities – more involvement or less	19
36. Change in social activities – new friends, loss of old ones, peer pressure	18
37. (Not applicable to a child or teen)	
38. Change in sleeping habits – staying up later giving up nap, etc.	16
39. Change in number of family get-togethers.....	15
40. Change in eating habits – going on or off diet, new way of family cooking	15
41. Vacation.....	13
42. Christmas.....	12
43. Breaking home, school or community rules	11

Totaling the score, you may be surprised to find how quickly an average child can reach the 300-point in a child's life, far more rapidly than in the life of his parents. Six hours of school alone can subject him to the possibility of any combination of life events 8, 10, 15, 18, 22, 25, 27, 31 or 43 on almost a routine basis. In addition, the ups and downs of his social life add the chance of stress from life events 13, 17, 32, 36, 39, or 41. He is especially susceptible to personal injury because of the high percentage of his time spent in physical activities such as bike riding or skating. In addition, he may fall victim to any contagious disease that strikes the school.



We as parents cannot eliminate all the stresses of a child's life. Some of them will always be there, but we can do the following:

1. Realize that our children live under constant stress.
2. Recognize any stressors that we or our environment tend to place on a child.
3. Take steps to eliminate those stressors which can be eliminated.
4. Teach our children how to handle stressors of life.

The following are the stress-producing situations in the order in which the children perceived them, from most stressful to least stressful.

Kids' Responses to Children and Stress

1. Losing a parent
2. Going blind
3. Being held back a year in school
4. Wetting pants in school
5. Hearing parents quarrel
6. Being caught stealing
7. Being suspected of lying
8. Receiving a bad report card
9. Being sent to the principal's office
10. Having an operation
11. Getting lost
12. Being made fun of in class
13. Moving to a new school
14. Having a scary dream
15. Not getting 100 on a test
16. Being picked last for a team
17. Losing in a game
18. Going to the dentist
19. Giving a report in class
20. Acquiring a baby sibling

Compare your answers with those of the children here. How close did you come? If you are like most parents, you will be surprised by the results. Does this make you want to listen more closely to your children?

Why not ask your own children to rank these in the same way for themselves? You may be surprised.