



Coping with Stressful Events

It is natural to feel anxious, angry and afraid after a stressful event. Stressful events can affect adults as well as children, and children may look to you to explain what is happening and for guidance. Here are some steps you can follow to manage your stress and help children cope.

Take Care of Yourself

Stress may affect how you feel, think and act, but the effects should lessen with time. Accept your feelings and give yourself time to recover at your own pace and in your own way. Reach out to others and ask for help if you feel stuck or overwhelmed.

Remain Calm and Reassuring

If your children see that you are very anxious and worried, it may make them feel afraid and insecure. You can help children by staying calm and by reducing your own stress and anxiety. This will reassure them and help them feel safe.

Know How Children React to Stress

Stressful events can affect the way children and youth feel, think and behave. Their reactions may vary depending on their age and their understanding of the event.

Reactions Common to Children and Youth of All Ages

- Complaining of aches and pains without actually being sick
- Anxiety, fear or sadness
- Changes in appetite
- Problems sleeping and/or nightmares
- Sudden changes in behavior

Reactions Common to Pre-school Aged Children

- Clinginess
- Aggressive behavior, such as hitting, kicking and biting
- Bed-wetting, thumb-sucking
- Constipation
- Being afraid of the dark or refusing to sleep alone
- Believing something they did caused the event

Reactions Common to Early School Aged Children

- Clinginess or being afraid of the dark
- Avoiding school or having problems with schoolwork
- Problems with peers

Reactions Common to Pre-teens and Teenagers

- Acting out of character (rebellious or aggressive behavior, or risk-taking, such as drug use)
- Withdrawal and loss of interest in usual activities
- Problems at home and at school
- Denying their reactions, such as stating they are fine when they are actually upset

Make Time for Your Children and Answer Their Questions

Your children may feel confused and afraid, and they may have many questions. Don't ignore their worries. Answer their questions and explain the facts in a way that they can understand. Let them express their feelings, and tell them it is okay to have such feelings. Spend extra time with them.

Limit Exposure to the News

A lot of exposure to the news on TV, in the papers or through social media (like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) can also increase worry and confusion. Try to limit the amount of news you and your children take in. For teens and youth, ask what they know about the event from school, their friends or the media. Have open conversations about the event and its effect, but limit the time you spent on these discussions.

Keep Family Routines, but Be Flexible

Routines, such as family meals, schoolwork, chores and friends, give a sense of normalcy and control. Try to maintain familiar routines as much as possible, but be flexible so you can adapt to any change in circumstances. This will help you and your children cope. Temporarily relax rules and expectations if necessary, including letting your children sleep with the light on or in your room if they are scared.

Make sure you and your family eat well, sleep enough and get some exercise.

Help Children Stay Connected

Being connected with family members and friends can help children and youth feel protected. It can also help them support one another and ask for help if they need it.

Know When and Where to Get Help

Most people can cope with this stress on their own, or with support from family and friends. If the reactions linger or make it difficult to cope with daily life, you or your loved ones may need professional support.

For help finding services or making an appointment, text **WELL** to 65173, call NYC Well at **1-888-NYCWELL** or visit nyc.gov/nycwell. NYC Well is confidential and free. Chat and texting services are available in English, Spanish and Traditional Chinese. For services in other languages, call 1-888-692-9355.

For more information about depression, visit nyc.gov/health/pubs and search **depression** or call 311 to request a free copy of the Depression Health Bulletin.