

UN-L for Families  
Nancy Frecks, Extension Educator  
UN-L Extension  
SW 4 Counties  
Chase-Dundy-Hayes-Hitchcock

### Help Children Cope With Stress

Many times when a child acts out or misbehaves it is because the child is under a lot of stress. Children may not always know the best way to deal with that stress but parents can help.

Stress for a child can come from an outside source such as a parent or a sibling. Parents can examine their own stress levels to find out if their own actions are causing stress for their child, recommends Extension Educator, Leslie Crandall. Children depend on their parents for emotional security. When parents are tense, upset and inattentive, it disrupts the flow of normal activities. This is the time when parents need to take a deep breath and take time to talk and listen to their kids. The best thing a parent can do is acknowledge a child's feelings, for example, by saying, "I understand you are very angry." This opens the door for children to talk because it shows someone is willing to listen. A parent should not always feel like they have to advise, analyze or have all the answers. Helping a child to look at all the choices is a good way for children to learn to solve problems and relieve stress. This helps encourage a child and teaches him or her self-respect.

Children who learn this at a young age will be more likely to cope with stress as adults. Being able to discuss and vent angry feelings can help keep those feelings from creating more severe problems such as emotional difficulties, family violence or alcohol abuse.

Other factors that affect how children handle stress are changes in the child's diet or sleeping pattern, illness, or tiredness.

One last word - show affection to the child by a hug or a simple touch. The affection will help give a stressed out child a feeling of security.

For more information on child development, contact your local University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension office or visit <http://www.extension.unl.edu/child-youth>.