



Maximize Love, Manage Stress

WHY?

Infants and toddlers thrive when their world seems loving, safe and predictable. When you express love and respond to their needs, you teach children that they can count on you.

Over time, showing and responding to love helps children learn to manage their feelings and behavior. As they grow, feeling secure in their relationships gives them the confidence they need to explore, learn and take on life's challenges.

Young children are affected by your emotions, both good and bad. So, it is important to find strategies that help you cope with stress. Caring for yourself benefits your child.

Tips for Infants (Newborn – 12 months)

Hold Them

Hold, kiss and cuddle your infant! Do not worry about spoiling them. There is no need to hold back on sharing love.

Respond to Them

Your infant depends on you to meet their needs. Watch and listen for clues about how they feel and what they need. For example, a cry or whimper may mean that they are hungry or hot. Over time, you will learn to read your infant's signals. Respond to what you notice. This helps them learn that you care. It also teaches them about cause and effect.

Comfort Them

When upset, infants have a hard time calming down on their own. They depend on you to help manage their emotions, so comfort them when they get fussy or cry. Bit by bit, they will learn ways to help soothe themselves (like sucking their thumb). Some babies cry more than others. If your baby cries a lot, raise the issue with your doctor.

Play with Them

Your baby loves to look at your face. Hold them close, smile, make silly faces and talk in a playful voice. Around 6 or 8 weeks, they will start to smile back. This means they are happy and learning the basics of communication. Have little “conversations” where you respond to each other’s sounds and facial expressions. Take breaks if your baby seems tired or overwhelmed. They might show this by looking away from you.

Have a Routine

Settle into a consistent routine or schedule for daily activities like feeding, naps, bathing, reading and bedtime. Every baby is a little different, so it may take some time to figure out a rhythm that works for your family. Keep in mind that routines change as your baby gets older. For example, bedtime or nap time may change over time.

Manage Household Stress

Stress is normal, but too much stress is bad for a baby’s brain. Things that cause stress for an infant are loud noises, adults who seem upset or angry, or when adults do not respond to their needs. It is important to have strategies for coping when your life gets stressful. Talk to friends, family or your doctor about ways to deal with stress.

Plan to Avoid Stress

What situations tend to be stressful? Think about those situations ahead of time and plan how you can improve or avoid them. For example, try to avoid trips to the store right before your child’s nap time.

Moment of Gratitude

Take a moment to think about a few things that make you grateful, big or small. Reflect and enjoy that feeling for a few minutes.

Go Easy on Yourself

Life can feel overwhelming and we all make mistakes. Focus on the big picture and be gentle with yourself when things don’t go as planned. Ask for help. All parents need help.

Redirect

Testing limits is a natural part of learning. Focus on the things your baby can do instead of the things you don’t want them to do. If necessary, try redirecting their behavior with another activity.

Role Model

Your baby learns how to act by watching you. Model the behaviors you want to pass on to them, like being kind and generous or handling challenges calmly (just do your best).

Describe Other People

Build your baby’s awareness of other people and children by describing their feelings and behavior. “She is laughing because the puppy licked her face.”

Put Words to Feelings

Pay attention to your child’s sounds, movements and facial expressions. Put words to their feelings, preferences and needs. “You were scared when that dog barked.” “You must like those carrots. You had two big bites.”

Reassure When Nervous

Your emotions affect how your baby feels about a situation. If you have to separate from your child, talk and smile to reassure them. Say “Mommy/Daddy will be back” so they learn to connect that promise with your return.