

Healthy and Effective Ways to Manage Stress: Be Kind to Your Body, Mind, and Spirit

Stress Management Strategies:	Make it Fun For Kids:
	Body: <i>When we are stressed we can feel it in our body—our heart races, pupils dilate, muscles get pumped up and emotions intensify. We are ready for fight, flight or freeze. Often, today's stressors do not need this type of response causing unneeded wear and tear on our bodies.</i>
Breathe Take a moment and notice how you breathe. Now, consciously take a deep breath and fully exhale. Notice a difference? Deep breathing is the body's natural stress reliever.	Try belly breathing! Place your hands above your belly button. Slowly breathe in through your nose. Breathe deeply until you feel the air in your belly pushing against your hands.
Move Move to enjoy, unwind and release! Movement helps the body manage and release stress. Try stretching, yoga, walking/running, dancing, tai chi, qigong, swimming, skiing, skating, or team sports. Be creative and have fun.	Moving is fun! Play games like Duck, Duck, Goose or Red Light, Green Light. Teach your family your favorite sport. Learn fun yoga poses like the Twisting Dragon or Happy Baby.
Relax Use your 5 senses to help you unwind. Notice where you hold stress in your body by tensing & releasing your muscles, listen to relaxing music, smell lavender or another calming scent, notice the beauty around you, eat mindfully.	Create a relaxation box. Include items that promote self expression or a sense of calm, such as a stress ball, favorite music, writing or art supplies, joke book, calming scent, etc. Open during times of stress.
	Mind: <i>When we react in a state of stress, we lose our capacity to use our most sophisticated part of our brain—our prefrontal cortex. This area of the brain helps us weigh options, organize our thoughts and manage our responses.</i>
Stay in the Moment When we accept what is happening in the moment, we stop resisting what is so. There is less tension and more opportunity to take a fresh look at the situation.	Take a walk. Notice the sounds you hear, colors you see, temperature of the air and the way you feel. This is a fun exercise that connects you to the present moment.
Become Aware of Your Thoughts Often, we let our stressful thoughts run our lives without realizing we have a choice. Notice when you are feeling stress and see if you can identify the trigger(s) and your beliefs about the stressor. Are your beliefs 100% true? Is there a healthier belief?	Draw a line down the center of a piece of paper. On one side write your stressful thoughts and on the other side write encouraging responses to the thought.
Practice Acceptance Tame the inner critic. Without judgment, recognize when your thoughts become negative and self-defeating. Use affirmations to stay positive in the present moment.	Write an affirmation (a positive statement like "I am brave") on a small rock and keep it with you during times of stress.
	Spirit: <i>Research into stress management shows that people who are connected to their spirit are more resilient and report a greater sense of well being. Honor your spirit in a meaningful and authentic way for you.</i>
Laugh Laughter is an instant stress reliever and benefits your body, mind and spirit. Find something to laugh about every day for at least 15 minutes. Fake it at first, if needed. Then, let the laughter come!	Play the "Ha" Game. With family, lay on your backs with each person's head on someone else's belly. The 1st person says "ha" and each person follows - soon everyone is laughing!
Be Grateful Focus on the positive in your life. Take time to be grateful for at least 3 things every day. Keep a journal. Make it a family event.	Create a Gratitude Jar. Each day, family members write something for which they are grateful and place it in the jar. Read together at the end of the week.
Share the Love Give yourself and others the gift of compassion. Imagine breathing in and out through the area of your heart and generate the feeling of giving and receiving love. Take in the good feelings!	Practice Acts of Kindness. Choose a day to surprise someone with an act of kindness, like complimenting a friend, helping with an extra job at home or volunteering.