

Helping children navigate stress (*and life!*)

Childhood can be stressful for a variety of reasons. Helping your child navigate stress can make a big difference in their well-being. Supporting your child and teaching them coping skills will help them bounce back from stressful situations now and for the rest of their life.

Brought to you by:

Bethel Family Clinic, Tundra Women's Coalition, and
Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation

How can I help my child navigate stress?

1

Know the signs

Caregivers are usually the first to notice changes in their child. Learn the signs of stress, and become more attuned to how your child shows stress.

5

Share and honor your traditional values

Traditional values are another tool we can utilize to help us stay well. Talk with your kids often about the importance of these values.

2

Practice checking in

Work on ways to help them understand and monitor their behaviors and reactions to things happening around them. Teach them activities that promote positive coping skills and stress relief.

6

Continue teaching and learning

Recognize that you and your child can both learn together. When teaching, make sure to remind your child that you love them.

3

Talk about safety

The first thing any child needs is to feel safe. Reassure them that you are there to support them. Help teach your child the differences between safe and unsafe interactions.

7

Be the first line of support

If you notice any changes in your child that concern you, please give your child extra support and know that it's okay to reach out for help if needed.

4

Listen, believe, and support your child

Your child needs to know that you hear them. Listen without interruption or questions. Repeat back only what you heard them say. Do not give advice or judge them. Believe your child when they tell you how they feel or how they view a situation. There are no right or wrong feelings!

1

Know the signs: When your child might be under stress



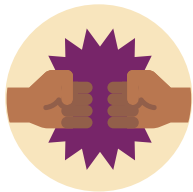
Changes in eating

Not eating or overeating, especially junk food



Changes in sleep

Nightmares, not sleeping enough, and/or sleeping too much



Increase in aggressiveness

Hitting, bullying, destroying property



Clinginess

Wanting to be with caregiver all the time; increase in whining



Increase in anger

Tantrums, foul language, cruelty to animals



School problems

Not attending school, not doing work in class or at home, getting into trouble in class, changes in grades



Withdrawing

Being alone or wanting to be alone most of the time



Mood swings

Mood swings that are sudden and extreme: going from happy to mad quickly and without any apparent reason



New nervous habits

Biting nails, pulling hair/eyelashes, scratching skin



Other

Alcohol or drug use, staying out late, being secretive, sudden changes in friends

2

Practice checking in

Work on ways to help your children understand and monitor their behaviors and reactions to things happening around them. Do these activities together to promote positive coping skills and stress relief.



QUICK ACTIVITY: Check in with your body

When you notice that your child is feeling “antsy” or “zoning out,” teach them to pause and ask them how their body feels. Then practice some of these tips!

Feeling antsy?

- Close your eyes - this gives your brain a break
- Breathe! Inhale for 3 counts, hold for 3 counts, then exhale for 6 counts
- Put your hands in your pockets
- Press your thumb & pointer finger together while taking deep breaths
- Give yourself a hug while taking deep breaths
- Stand with your feet hip width apart and rock back and forth

Zoning out?

- Blow on your hands and then rub them together
- Rub your ear lobes between your thumb and pointer finger rubbing from top to bottom; repeat!
- Do 3-5 squats and then run in place for 30 seconds; repeat as needed
- Stand on your tip toes and bounce
- Drink cold water slowly or splash some cold water on your face

Ask your child how their body feels again once they have tried one of the above activities. Feel free to try different activities until one works. These tricks can work for adults, too. The next time you are feeling antsy or having a hard time concentrating, try one of these for yourself. When we are calm, we can help calm others, including our children!





QUICK ACTIVITY: Find your family strengths

When we are stressed, feeling antsy, or zoned out, it can be hard to focus on what is going well. Finding your strengths is a great way to take care of yourself and your family. Ask your kids to help you answer the questions below and talk about what makes your family strong!

- We feel good about our family because...
- Our favorite things to do together as a family are....
- Write or draw how you show each family member that you care about them.
- List out each member of your family and then take turns writing one thing you like about each person listed and read it out loud to each other.
- List or draw 3 things that make you laugh.



LONG-TERM ACTIVITY: Creating routines

Routines are a great tool to use for helping manage your children's behaviors and emotions. Routines help to alleviate stress by helping kids know what is expected of them. Routines can be especially helpful when it comes to nighttime habits and sleep!

Importance of sleep: A rested child is a better-behaved child. Sleep is as important as food, water, and shelter. When we sleep, our brains and bodies have a chance to recover and rebuild from the day's activities.

Importance of routines: Routines help children prepare for the transition to bedtime. These routines can be practiced every night. Routines take patience and daily practice to turn into healthy habits.

Example routine

- 1 Start "wind-down time" about 1 hour before actual bedtime. As bedtime approaches, avoid screens and high energy activities such as TV, mobile phones, video games, and rough play.
- 2 Prepare your child for the transition. Say things like "You have 10 minutes to finish, then the screentime or rough-housing will stop and we will do something quiet." Then give another reminder when there are 5 minutes left.
- 3 Encourage quiet activities such as coloring, reading, telling a story, or sharing the best part of your day. Let your child choose which quiet activity they want to do before bed. If you have more than one child, let them take turns to pick the activity for a night.
- 4 Reassure them that tomorrow is a new and exciting day. "We need to sleep so we can have more fun tomorrow!" If it was a stressful day, you could say, "We need to sleep so we can feel better and have a better day tomorrow."
- 5 Tell your child you love them!



Bonus for parents

Sleep routines not only help children—they help you too! Take advantage of the time your kids are lying quietly in bed/sleeping to have some much needed and deserved time to yourself. Use this time to do something you enjoy or just to relax at the end of a long day.

3

Talk about safety

One of the best ways you can care for your kids is by talking with them about personal safety. Personal safety is an important topic for all parents to teach their children. When we teach about safety, we often teach things like “tell me where you are going and who you will be with,” “do not play with matches,” and “do not go near the river alone.” Including lessons about safe and appropriate touch is also important.

Safety lessons

Body parts

Teach your child about all body parts, including private body parts, or “the parts that are covered when we go swimming.” Teach them that they are in charge of their own bodies, and support them in setting limits.

Refusal skills

Let children know it’s okay to say “No, stop!” or “I don’t like that!” If someone tries to touch them in a way they do not want, they should get away and keep telling an adult until someone listens!

Types of touch

Teach about the 3 types of touches: safe, unsafe, and unwanted. Make sure your child knows the difference between each type and let them know they can always say “NO!” to any touch they do not want and to tell a safe adult.

Safe touches:

Make children feel cared for and loved. Help to keep a child clean or healthy. Ex: cleaning a baby’s diaper is a safe touch because it helps the baby stay clean, healthy, and cared for.

Unsafe touches:

Hurt children and leave them feeling disrespected such as punching, kicking, pinching, etc. This can also include when someone touches their private body parts.

Unwanted touches:

Any touch that feels uncomfortable to a child, including well-intentioned hugs and kisses from family. If the child does not like a form of touch, support them in setting limits and saying no!



QUICK ACTIVITY: Talk about safety together

Make sure your kids know what to do if they experience an unsafe or unwanted touch.

Practice what to say

Children who practice these phrases when calm are more likely to use them when a situation begins to feel unsafe.

- Say “no!” or “stop!” in a loud, strong voice
- “Get away!”

List and identify safe adults with your child

- Tell a safe adult about what happened.
- If the adult ignores or doesn't believe them, keep telling other safe adults until someone listens.

Practice
what to say!

List of safe adults

4

Listen, believe, and support your child

It is important to listen to your kids.

Children often speak indirectly about things that happen. Listen and respond when a child asks a question or makes a statement such as “I don’t like Uncle.” Explore the comment and find out what your child is thinking.

If your child tells you about a touching problem, **stay calm, listen, and believe.** Call your local police or the Alaska State Troopers at 907-543-2294. Do not overwhelm your child with questions. Listen to what they want to share and let law enforcement know exactly what they told you. Law enforcement has people who are trained to talk to children about this. Explain to your child that you will be there for them in this process.



Believe your child.

Believe your child when they tell you how they feel or how they view a situation. There are no right or wrong feelings!

Accept your child for who they are. Give them what they need – quiet time, time to cry or be angry, etc. Just sit with them and don’t dismiss their feelings. You can tell a story of a time you felt that way to validate their feelings and make them feel connected and less alone. Keep the focus on your child and how they are feeling.



It is important to know where your child is and what they are doing!

Know where your child is and who they are with. In the YK Delta, 97% of sexual abuse offenders are known and trusted by the children they abuse. Additionally, technology is opening our children up to possible unsafe situations such as receiving inappropriate phone calls, texts, and photos.

Know who your child is communicating with on different platforms such as text message, Facebook, Snapchat, TikTok, and Instagram. Online bullying and contact with sexual predators, including sex trafficking, happens here in the YK Delta. Keep an eye on your children and watch for changes in behavior, emotions, school work, or socializing.

If you are concerned about where your child is going or what they are doing, **it’s okay to set boundaries.** In fact, this is just as important as making sure your child has food to eat and clothes to wear! Trust yourself and your decision-making as a parent. You know what is safe and unsafe for your child.

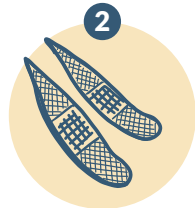
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Share and honor your traditional values

Traditional values are another tool we can utilize to help us stay well. Talk with your kids often about the importance of traditional values.



Help other people.



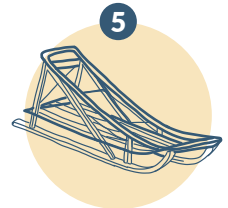
Help with family chores and needs.



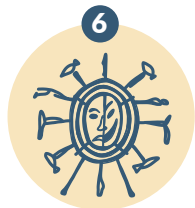
Go to bed early and get up early.



Think a lot and become wise.



Don't play too much; play after all your work is done.



Learn to do things by yourself.



Respect your elders.



Always show good behavior.



Listen to all advice.



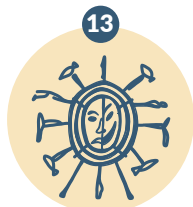
Remember what you are taught and told.



Respect other people's things.



Respect the animals you catch for food.



Learn from elders around you that teach you different things.



Never say bad things about others.



Connect with your community. Strong connections help children now and into the future.



QUICK ACTIVITY: Elder knowledge

What have our elders taught us about personal safety and our responsibility to keep our children safe? Tell stories and listen to elders as a family.

6

Continue teaching and learning

Discipline is a form of teaching and does not have to be a “bad” thing. In fact, discipline can help your child by providing consistency in what is expected of them, which can give them boundaries and reduce stress. Discipline can take many different forms. Try out these suggestions below to help your child learn positive behaviors!

Role Modeling

Children are always watching your actions. Model the behaviors you want them to repeat!

Encouragement

Catch your child doing something good! Praise your child for their positive behaviors with hugs, kisses, smiles, and by telling them specifically what was good about their behavior. This will build self-confidence and encourage them to behave in this way again!

Repetition

Teach your children about what specific behaviors you expect from them. Be clear and simple. Have your child repeat back what you share to ensure they understand. Show support even when they make a mistake, but remind them of your expectations. Children need to hear guidance over and over in order to learn!

Be mindful of your tone when talking with children. It's okay to just be there – you don't always need to say something. You can also start and end your teaching with “I love you and that is why I am trying to teach you the right way.”



QUICK ACTIVITY: Role modeling

- Think about your family's future. How do you want your grandchildren to be raised?
- The most important thing for anyone is to feel seen, heard and valued. Consider and discuss as a family: how do your family practices support each other in feeling seen? Heard? Valued?

7

Be the first line of support for your child

If you notice any changes in your child that concern you, such as behavior changes or struggles in school, please give your child extra support and reach out for help if needed. You can:

- Share traditional activities with your child
- Spend one-on-one time together
- Do some of the activities in this book together
- Be encouraging
- Reach out to professionals for therapy or medical services

Always start by telling your child that you love them and that you will be with them to work through issues together.

Resources

If you or your child are in need of assistance, please reach out for help!

For mental health services and support:

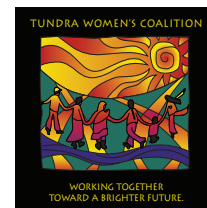
Bethel Family Clinic	(907) 543-3773
YKHC Behavioral Health	(907) 543-6100

For support related to child sexual abuse or other forms of violence:

The Children's Advocacy Center	(907) 543-3144
Tundra Women's Coalition	(907) 543-3444
Alaska State Troopers - Bethel post	(907) 543-2294
Bethel Police Department	(907) 543-3781

For mental health EMERGENCY:

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline	(907) 543-6499 or local public safety department or health clinic 1-800-273-8255
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Credits

Pages 1, 3, 4, 7, and 12: children images by Freepik.com

Page 9: Special thanks to John Pingayak of the Cup'ik Cultural Heritage Center, Kashunamiut School District, Chevak, Alaska, for permission to share these beautiful traditional rules. (907) 858-7713 ext 16. School year 1988-89