



# Learning to Grow

MAKING A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

CENTER ON THE FAMILY ♥ UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

## Helping Your Child Cope with Stress

It's hard to imagine very young children feeling stressed, but they do. Have you ever noticed that your child seems to be fussiest or wants more attention when you're preoccupied with other daily demands, such as when you're preparing dinner towards the end of a busy day? Young children, infants in particular, can sense when you're stressed or upset, and that often causes them to feel stressed as well. They seek your attention because they want and need your comfort and reassurance.

Stress is a part of everyday life, even for young children. The first day with a new care provider or receiving a shot at the doctor's office are some stressful situations for children. However, according to the Center on the Developing Child, too much stress or constant stress can be harmful to young children's development. The way families handle stress and model how to cope with challenges affects how a child grows and develops. You play a very important role in helping your child feel safe and secure in stressful situations and helping them learn how to cope.



### In This Newsletter:

To support you in fostering your child's healthy development and school readiness, this newsletter includes:

- ♥ **Age-specific information** and suggestions about activities to do with your infant, toddler, or preschooler,
- ♥ **Featured activities** for each age group,
- ♥ **How This Helps:** a summary of your child's development as a result of doing these activities together,
- ♥ **Community Resources:** for more information, and
- ♥ **Suggested Books:** a list of books to read with your child.

1-2-10/14

# Infants

During infancy, a child’s brain grows rapidly. Exposure to constant stress can alter her brain development and have long-term effects on her physical, mental, and emotional development. It can be difficult to tell whether or not your baby is experiencing stress because of her limited ability to express her thoughts and feelings through words. However, **sudden or extreme** changes in her typical patterns of behavior may be reactions to stress. Here are some behaviors that may suggest that your baby is feeling stressed:

- ♥ Fussiness (more than usual)
- ♥ Poor appetite or uncontrollable eating
- ♥ Sleep disruptions

The most important way you can support your developing infant is by making time to enjoy rich experiences and positive interactions with her. Regularly spending time in play and enriching activities and validating her emotions and interests are the keys to building a loving, trusting bond with her. Here are some ways to support your baby:

- ♥ **Soothe your baby by gently bouncing, swaying, or rocking while holding her, or patting her back while she is lying down.** These movements mimic those your baby experienced while she was in the womb.

Because of their familiar and soothing effects, these types of motions may help your baby to calm down and/or fall asleep.

- ♥ **Help her to calm down by calming yourself.** Deep breaths have a calming effect. While holding your infant, take deep breaths. She will feel your chest rising and hear the constant, soothing sound of your breath.



## Activity for Infants: *Up and down*

Materials: None

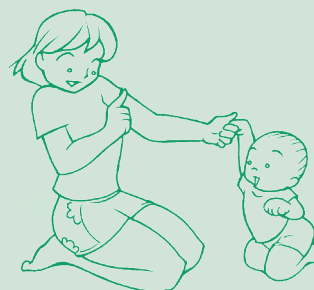
What to Do:

1. Get down on the floor with your baby.
2. Hold her hands in your own and gently raise her arms up above her head; then bring them back down. As you move her arms, say:

*Up, down.*

*Reach up, reach down.*

*Touch the sky, touch your toes.*



*(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps her development and school readiness.)*

# Toddlers

A strong attachment with parents and caregivers is important during the toddler years because it gives your child the confidence to learn and explore the world on her own—to become more independent. Because your toddler relies on consistency and routines to support her newfound independence, changes in these routines or in her environment (family problems, new care provider, etc.) can be stressful. Some signs that your toddler is reacting to stress include:

- ♥ Difficulty with toilet learning, i.e., resisting or reverting to earlier behaviors
- ♥ Clinging or withdrawing from others
- ♥ Chronic problems with biting or hitting

While these types of behaviors may seem like your toddler is “acting out” or “being difficult,” she may be looking to you to provide comfort and to help her feel better. Here are some ways to help support your toddler.

- ♥ **Provide something familiar.** Having something familiar to carry or have close by—a security

object or “lovey” that smells like home or a familiar person—can give a child comfort especially during times of stress. It helps a child to know the object is there when she wants it, even though she may not always be able to carry it with her.

- ♥ **Encourage active play.** Toddlers need an outlet to let out their energy and frustrations. Provide times each day when your toddler can run, jump, and yell in a place that is safe and appropriate.



## Activity for Toddlers: *It's Sticky*

Materials:

Cardboard box or plastic garbage bag  
A box of cornstarch

Water  
Tape

What to Do: (It is recommended you do this activity in an outside area for easy clean up.)

1. Cut open the cardboard box or plastic bag and lay it out flat
2. Tape down the edges to the floor or weight down the edges on the grass.
3. Place some cornstarch on the box or bag and mix it with some water, a little at a time, until you have a pasty consistency.
4. Encourage your child to walk or crawl through the paste, or to run her toy through it.
5. Talk to her about what happens as she moves around and how the paste feels. For example: “Your feet and hands are sticking to the paste and floor.”

**⚠ Safety Alert:** Never leave your child unattended as she does this activity. The play area could become slippery.

*(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps her development and school readiness.)*





# Preschoolers

Preschoolers who are stressed may feel something is wrong, but may not know how to connect what they're feeling with the words to describe them. As they look for reasons for these feelings and they can't identify anything that is causing them to be upset, they may begin to turn inward and blame themselves. Signs of stress in preschoolers may be seen in these types of behaviors:

- ♥ Difficulty sitting still, often touching and disrupting other children
- ♥ Lashing out and acting aggressively toward other children and adults
- ♥ Frequent tantrums

If there is a stressful situation at home or if your child is exhibiting behaviors that are not typical for her, have a simple conversation with her to see if something is bothering her. Keep in mind that she may have difficulty putting what she is feeling into words. Here are some ways to support your preschooler.

- ♥ **Encourage your child to express her feelings.** Provide her with a blank notebook and have

her keep a picture journal, expressing her feelings through her drawing. Have her describe her pictures to you, if she wants to.

- ♥ **Teach your child calming techniques such as deep breathing.** Provide your child with simple instructions for calming techniques. For example: "First, sit comfortably, back straight and face forward. Next, let your hands rest quietly in your lap. Now, close your eyes and breathe easily and evenly. Count 10 breaths in and out as you feel the air moving through you." Do this with her.



## Activities for Preschoolers: *All About Me Poster*

### What You Need:

- Magazines or pictures
- Paper
- Glue or tape
- Blunt, child-sized scissors

### What to Do:

1. Have your child look through magazines or pictures to find things that represent who she is. Encourage your child to look for objects that make her happy or are things that are about her (e.g., favorite food, a picture of someone with curly hair because she has the same type of hair, etc.).
2. Have your child cut out these items and paste or tape them to a piece of paper.
3. As your child selects each picture, ask her to talk about the picture. For example, "What do you like about this picture?" or "How is this picture like you?"
4. Talk about how these pictures represent what makes your child special.

*(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps her development and school readiness.)*



# How This Helps

The activities suggested in this newsletter help promote many different aspects of development:

## Physical Development

- ♥ Use and strengthen large muscles
- ♥ Learn to use her senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching

## Social and Emotional Development

- ♥ Develop her unique identity
- ♥ Feel important and good about herself

## Language and Literacy Development

- ♥ Learn to ask and answer questions
- ♥ Increase observation, listening, and understanding skills and attention span

*(Continued on page 6)*

# Kids in the Kitchen

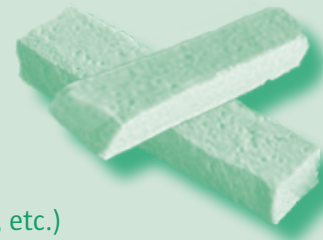
Cooking teaches valuable lessons. As you follow this recipe with your child, show her how to safely handle the items and allow her to do as much as she is capable of. Ask questions throughout the process to encourage her thinking skills. Make sure to wash your hands and your child's hands before preparing any food.

## Baked Tofu Sticks

Adapted from: [www.marthastewart.com/344302/baked-tofu-sticks](http://www.marthastewart.com/344302/baked-tofu-sticks)

### Ingredients:

- ½ package (7 ounces) firm tofu
- Vegetable oil or nonstick cooking spray, for baking sheet
- Salt (optional)
- Various prepared dressing or dips (ranch dressing, spaghetti sauce, ketchup, etc.)



### Instructions:

1. Cut the tofu into rectangles (about 3" by ½" sized).
2. Have your child line a baking sheet with a double layer of paper towels or a clean kitchen towel. Together, lay the tofu onto the lined baking sheet in a single layer, and ask your child to describe how the tofu looks and feels.
3. Place another baking sheet on top of the tofu, and press down firmly. You can place some canned goods on top of the baking sheets to add additional weight. Have your child make some predictions about what you are doing to the tofu. Explain that this process allows the tofu to release its excess liquid. Wait for 20 minutes or up to 1 hour until the tofu is dry.
4. While waiting for the tofu to release the liquid, do a tasting of various sauces and dressing. Pour a small amount onto spoons for your child to taste. Have your child describe the sauces and have her select one to use for the dipping sauce with the tofu.
5. When the tofu is dry, preheat oven to 375 degrees, and lightly grease a baking sheet with oil or nonstick spray; set aside.
6. Together, pat the tofu dry and sprinkle lightly with salt, if you desire. Have your child describe how the tofu has changed.
7. Have your child arrange the tofu sticks in a single layer on the prepared baking sheet, spacing at least ½" apart.
8. Bake the tofu, turning them halfway through, until both sides are light golden brown, about 12 to 15 minutes per side.
9. Cool and serve warm or at room temperature with the dipping sauce that your child chose.

## How this Helps (Continued)

### Cognitive Development

- ♥ Develop her thinking and problem-solving skills
- ♥ Develop her creativity and imagination



## Community Resources

### The Parent Line

<http://www.theparentline.org/>

A resource on child behavior, child development, parenting, caregiver support, and community resources.

### National Association for the Education of Young Children Young Children

<https://www.naeyc.org/files/yc/file/200809/Crawford.pdf>

This article gives practical suggestions for using books as a support system for children dealing with stressful situations.

## Suggested Books

Recommended by Hawaii State Public Library [www.librarieshawaii.org](http://www.librarieshawaii.org).

### Infants and Toddlers

#### **Hush Little Baby** by Sylvia Long

In this variation of an old lullaby, a baby rabbit is promised an assortment of presents from its adoring parent.

#### **Baby Faces** by Margaret Miller

A captivating and expressive board book for infants in which emotions are directly linked to facial expressions with such simple terms as “yucky,” “yum-yum,” and “uh-oh.”

### Preschoolers

#### **Too Many Toys** by David Shannon

Although he finally agrees that he has too many toys and needs to give them away, there is one toy that Spencer absolutely cannot part with.

#### **Wemberly Worried** by Kevin Henkes

A mouse named Wemberly, who worries about everything, finds that she has a whole list of things to worry about when she faces the first day of school.

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