

FEBRUARY 2010

Proactive Approach to Parenting Stress

There are a few absolute truths about raising children no matter what your parenting style: children do not come with an instruction manual; each child is unique; and what works for one child will not necessarily work for another. Thankfully, there are a lot of parents out there facing similar challenges. We can all stand to learn a thing or two from other parents' experiences as well as current research.

Handling your child's misbehavior can be a stressful part of parenting. It is critical to find ways to manage your stress when you and your little one do not see eye to eye. Dealing with stress appropriately is important for three reasons:

- **Stress wears you out and makes your life harder on all fronts;**
- **Stress interferes with your ability to effectively discipline; and**
- **Mishandling stress deprives your child of the opportunity to learn how to handle his/her own stress.**

At one point or another, a parent says or does something to their child that they wish they had not. Control your emotions by using some of the short- and long-term strategies below, and you will be less likely to lose your cool when things seem out of control.

Here are some short-term fixes to get you started:

- **USE A DELAYING STRATEGY.** Instead of immediately flying off the handle, pause and take a few deep breaths. Some people count to 10 or even 25—whatever it takes to give you a few moments to collect yourself.
- **SAY A PRAYER OR REPEAT A MEDITATIVE PHRASE.** These options provide quick, proven calming effects and can be done anywhere at any time.
- **TAKE A MOMMY/DADDY TIMEOUT.** Sometimes temporarily withdrawing from the conflict is the best course of action. Remember, this is only temporary. Do not leave your child unattended for a long period of time if s/he is in distress.
- **TELL YOUR CHILD WHAT YOU'RE FEELING.** Describe what you're feeling out loud, even if it's through tight lips, in order to give yourself a moment to weaken the emotion and regain a more rational state of mind.
- **RELIEVE STRESS WITH YOUR CHILD.** Let your children watch you calm down when you are stressed. Teach them techniques that are age-appropriate so that they can learn from the experience.

Long-term stress management methods help support your overall ability to stay calm under pressure.

These long-term tactics benefit all aspects of your life, not just with your child:

- **DEVELOP A SUPPORT NETWORK.** Family, friends, co-workers and/or support groups are the most common sources of support for parents. Finding people who can be a source of advice, comfort or empathy is especially important for stay-at-home parents. Get to know other parents by volunteering at your child's school, starting a playgroup or joining a moms' group.
- **MAKE TIME TO RELAX.** We all need time for ourselves, as well as time to relax with our kids — play board games, go for walks or watch movies.
- **GET A BABYSITTER.** Every parent could use some kid-free time. Worried about the cost? Try trading off babysitting nights with other parents.
- **START A HOBBY.** There are dozens of fun hobbies that are good stress relievers. A few ideas include: crafts, gardening, reading, sports, rebuilding cars or learning how to play a musical instrument.
- **EXERCISE REGULARLY.** In addition to improving your health, regular exercise is one of the best ways to reduce and prevent stress. Ride a bike, power walk, hit the gym or try an exercise video. Start small and see if you can work up to 20-30 minutes a day. You'll see and feel results in no time.
- **DON'T FORGET TO DELEGATE.** You are not in this alone! Enlist your family to share the workload. Even young children can handle simple chores such as setting and clearing the table, taking clean laundry to the correct rooms and making up their beds. Don't hesitate to ask for help.

FREE Parent Education Workshops

- **Nurturing Child Development Through Play**
February 9, 2010 Holy Rosary Catholic School,
4920 Brentwood Avenue, Jacksonville, FL 32206
- **Child Growth & Development – Caring for Your Infant & Toddler**
March 9, 2010 St. Stephen Child Care & Learning Center,
525 North Davis Street, Jacksonville, FL 32206

Parent as Child’s First Teacher Initiative

The “Parent as Child’s First Teacher” Initiative is funded by the Early Learning Coalition of Duval County and is designed to encourage, honor and support parents in their role as their child’s first teacher. Episcopal Children’s Services, Nemours BrightStart! and United Way of Northeast Florida team up to offer free parent training sessions at various sites across the community to promote family involvement at child care centers.

FREE Parent Education Workshops

Make plans to attend Nemours BrightStart!’s free parent education workshops where you can meet with other parents and caregivers of young children, as well as child health and development experts from Nemours to discuss topics such as:

- February 9, 2010 – Nurturing Child Development Through Play
- March 9, 2010 – Child Growth & Development – Caring for Your Infant & Toddler
- March 30, 2010 – The Importance of Fathers & Single Dads – Joys & Challenges
- April 13, 2010 – Creating Routines & Managing Transitions

All workshops are held from 6:00 – 7:30 p.m. Reserve your space today, call Blair Blackard at (904) 697-3156 or e-mail bblackard@nemours.org. You may also register online at Nemours.org/brightstart. **CHILDCARE IS NOT PROVIDED – please help us support the adult learning environment by making other arrangements for your children.**

Born Learning Workshops

Make learning fun and take advantage of everyday moments for learning with your pre-school child with United Way’s Born Learning workshops. Workshops are free, and all participants will receive fun items such as a “Kids Basics” key ring and playbook to take home. For more information, call United Way of Northeast Florida at (904) 390-3225, or visit www.aboutunitedway.org.

Guiding Stars of Duval

Episcopal Children’s Services and the Jacksonville Children’s Commission are providing support and training in family involvement to child care centers in Jacksonville as part of the city-wide Quality Rating Improvement System for child care centers. Contact the Early Learning Coalition of Duval County to learn how you can find star ratings for local child care centers at (904) 208-2040 or visit www.elcofduval.org.

Your Discipline Toolbox: Tools & Techniques

In order to reduce your family’s stress and positively manage your home, develop a discipline toolbox and stock it full of the following tools:

Prevention. The best way to avoid having to use your “discipline tools” is to do everything you can to prevent bad behavior from happening in the first place.

- **PAY ATTENTION.** Closely supervise activities and be aware of your child’s warning signs such as being tired, hungry or cranky.
- **DANGER-PROOF YOUR HOUSE.** Your child is less likely to get into trouble when enticing (and dangerous) items are out of reach. Put valuables away; attach child safety latches on cabinets; plug in socket covers; block stairways; keep the lid on the trash; and close the pantry door.
- **EMERGENCY MOMMY/DADDY BAG.** Don’t leave home without it. Always carry a bag packed with toys, snacks and extra clothes, so that you are prepared any time your little one tests your patience.
- **MODEL THE BEHAVIOR YOU WANT TO SEE.** We all know that children imitate their parents—for better or worse. Make it for better.

Create a Specific Plan With Your Child. Ask your child what the consequences should be if the rules are broken. You don’t have to agree—the important part is asking for your child’s input. Keep the rules specific and realistic. Be sure to enforce consequences consistently, or the rules won’t work and you can count on repeat performances of bad behavior.

- **TIPS FOR SETTING UP HOUSE RULES & CONSEQUENCES.** Jennifer Wolf, a Certified Parent Coach, offers these tips for creating house rules:

- Keep them simple
- Limit your list to 3-5 rules so they are easy to remember
- Use positive language
- Let your kids participate in creating the rules

Wolf offers these sample House Rules to get you started:

- Treat one another as you would like to be treated
 - Use an “indoor voice” and “walking feet” when you are inside
 - Say “please” and “thank you”
- **TRACK BEHAVIOR WITH CHARTS & CHECKLISTS.** Charts and checklists serve as visual reminders to encourage positive behavior. Establish short- and long-term goals when you set up the chart and offer incentives to motivate your child to reach those goals. Use fun stickers to reward small achievements such as picking up toys; use bigger rewards (such as a pizza night or a new toy) once your child has earned a set amount of stickers.

Make the Plan Work. Once you have set up house rules and have a checklist in place, your child will know exactly what is expected. Enforce the plan consistently so that your child's world becomes more predictable and therefore, less stressful.

- **SHOW YOUR CHILD WHAT YOU WANT DONE.** Demonstrate what needs to be done and encourage your child to do it with you. For instance, say, "Why don't you help me pick up the toys and put them in the toy box?" or "Let's clear the table / load the dishwasher / pick up your dirty clothes."
- **GIVE KIDS TRANSITION TIME.** Even adults don't like to be told to do something immediately. Transition time makes it easier for kids to pull themselves away from one activity and get involved in another, while also learning the concept of time.
- **PRAISE GOOD BEHAVIOR OFTEN, BUT APPROPRIATELY.** Praise encourages children because they want to please their parents. However, giving too much praise may water down a child's sense of accomplishment and can sound insincere.

Utilize Tools from the Discipline Toolbox. When the time comes to discipline your child, always try the least severe technique first. If that doesn't work, increase the consequence severity until you find something that works. Try these strategies to find what's most effective with your child:

- **USE NEUTRAL AUTHORITY.** This is a useful concept for those parents or kids who find themselves in a power struggle. Refer back to your house rules to establish authority by saying, "The house rules say you may not speak to your brother in that tone of voice."
- **TIME IT OUT.** Try saying, "The timer says you have 3 more minutes before we have to leave." Or play "Beat the Clock" and ask, "Can you finish [cleaning up your toys or setting the table] before the timer rings?" Kids love to win, and this gives them a chance to win a race against the clock.
- **1-2-3-COUNTDOWN.** After you've asked your child to do something (leave the TV to come to dinner or put on pajamas) and s/he hasn't done it, explain that you'll count to three and if s/he still hasn't done what you asked, enforce an established consequence.
- **CREATE A DISTRACTION.** Redirect your child's attention from something s/he can't have to something s/he can, without engaging in conflict. For example, instead of arguing and insisting that it's time for bed, change the subject and ask which story s/he would like to hear. Carefully get your child's attention in order to redirect it—try kneeling down to his/her level and be sure to make eye contact.

- **TAKE AWAY SOMETHING DESIRABLE.** If two children are arguing over a toy and can't figure out how to share it, the toy goes into "toy timeout." Use a timer the same way you might handle a timeout with your child.
- **REQUIRE RESTITUTION.** Have your child apologize, do something nice for the wronged party or help clean up the mess so s/he will learn from the experience and make up for misbehaving.
- **REPRIMAND.** The key with reprimanding is to do more than just scold—you must also tell your child what to do differently. Effective reprimands have three parts: 1) point out the unacceptable behavior; 2) explain why it is wrong; and 3) tell your child what to do instead.
- **TIMEOUT.** Save timeout as a last resort. Locate a designated timeout spot (a chair or even the bottom step), and explain that the timeout cannot start until the child is sitting there. Experts suggest that one minute per year of age is appropriate. Place a timer where the child can see it and help him/her understand that timeout lasts until the designated time is up. Remember to discuss alternative behaviors after the timeout is over to help reinforce the lesson.

All of this is much easier said than done, but by using these strategies consistently, living by the house rules will become second nature to you and your family. Here are a few final tips to keep in mind:

- **PICK YOUR BATTLES.** Examine your values to decide what really matters to you, and let the other things slide. Remember to look at what your child is doing to help around the house, instead of what s/he isn't.
- **HAVE SEVERAL BACK-UP PLANS.** Each child has unique interests, strengths and personality traits. Having a variety of strategies will enable you to use the ones to which your child responds best. Remember: make rules in advance, let your child know what the consequences are, and stick to them.
- **OFFER INCENTIVES.** Kids love getting rewarded for their good behavior. Incentives may be used along with behavior charts and checklists or as individual rewards for your child when s/he does something you've asked. They can be as small as a wink, or as large as a trip to Disney World, but keep in mind that what one child values as special may not be the same for another child.
- **SAVE THE MOST SEVERE CONSEQUENCE FOR LAST.** If you start with the biggest hammer, you'll run out of options too fast and your authority as a parent will be diminished.

From *How To Behave So Your Preschooler Will, Too!* by Sal Severe, 2004

Parents seeking more information, tips and resources can visit www.nemours.org/brightstart or call (904) 697-3118.

Win a \$100 Winn-Dixie Gift Card

Congratulations to Samerica Doles, Winner of the \$100 Winn-Dixie Gift Card!

When asked to tell us how she used the tips and tools provided in the last newsletter to foster her child's reading skills, Samerica wrote: "My four-year-old daughter and I read together almost daily. I make funny faces and create voices to enhance the story's character. I also encourage my daughter to tell me about the pictures and try to read certain recognizable words back to me. I even have her read grocery store ads to me and am amazed when she articulates certain products and their cost. Her vocabulary has increased tremendously. I often catch her trying to 'read' alone. I love it!"

Thanks to the generosity of Winn-Dixie, we are able to offer an extra incentive for you to participate in Parenting Improvement Activities. After reading this issue of *BrightStart!News*, try one of the suggestions offered in the newsletter and briefly tell us about your experience. We will select one participant as the winner of a \$100 Winn-Dixie gift card.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone Number (in case we have questions): _____

E-Mail: _____

This Month's Parenting Improvement Activity.

Use the tips and tools provided in this newsletter. Write to us and tell us about a time that you have used a tool from the "Discipline Toolbox." Tell us about your experience and how these tools were effective in positively managing your child's behavior.

Mail to: Attention: Kathy Ingram, Nemours BrightStart! 841 Prudential Drive, Ste. 1600, Jacksonville, FL 32207

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