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To: scott@afamilyforeverychild.org
Subject: Helping your child deal with stress



Dear

There are many things that can cause stress in a child's life. Adopted children often experience higher levels of stress due to a variety of factors. Moving into a new family and adjusting to their way of living can be stressful. Traumatic past events can be stressful to a child, and may be triggered by certain memories, objects, smells or situations. When your child becomes stressed out, work with him/her on what they are feeling and how to cope. The following are some strategies you can employ when your child becomes stressed:

"Notice" out loud. Tell your child when you notice something is bothering him or her. Try and phrase it like "It seems you're still upset about what happened at school". Never accuse your child or put the child on the spot. Avoid phrases like "What happened now?" and "Are you still mad about that?". Be sympathetic to what your child is going through, and show them that you care and want to understand so you can help them work through it.

Listen. Ask your child to tell you in their own words what is wrong. Make sure to listen attentively and don't judge, blame, or lecture your child. Avoid telling your child what you think they should have done. The point is to let your child voice their concerns and feelings. Ask questions like "Then what happened?" to get the whole story. Let your child take his/her time in telling you the story.

Briefly comment on what you think your child was feeling and experiencing. Use phrases like "That must have been upsetting", or "No wonder you felt mad when _____", or "That must have seemed _____". By doing this you are showing your child that you understand how they felt, why they felt that way, and that you care. Your child will feel supported and understood, which is very important when they are experiencing stress.

Label it. Younger children may not have the words necessary to describe their feelings, and may become angry or frustrated. Help your child learn the words he/she needs to identify their feelings by using them in your conversation. In doing so, this will help your child develop emotional awareness and recognize their emotional states.

Think of things your child can do. Help your child think of a couple of ideas that will help solve a specific problem that may be causing them stress. Start the brainstorming, but let your child do a majority of the work so they can build confidence. Support their good ideas, and ask them questions like "How do you think this will work?"

Listen, and then move on. Sometimes all a child needs is to talk and have you listen in order for their feelings of stress and frustration to go away. After they are more relaxed, change the subject by moving onto something more positive. Encourage your child to participate in an activity to help make them feel better. Avoid giving the problem more attention than it needs.

Limit stress whenever possible. Identify certain situations that are causing your child stress, and think of ways to change things. For example, if your child is involved in a lot of after-school activities and they are stressed out about homework, cut down on the number of activities your child participates in so there is enough time for homework.

Be there. Simply telling your child that you are there for them whenever they are

ready to talk can help your child feel better. They may not want to talk right away, but knowing that you are there for them when they are ready will help. If your child doesn't feel like talking right away, initiate an activity the two of you can do together, like cooking, taking a bike ride, watching a movie, baking a dessert, etc. Your presence will be comforting and may eventually prompt your child to open up about what is bothering them.

Practice patience. Try and resist the urge to fix every problem, no matter how much it hurts to see your child upset or stressed. Focus on helping your child become a problem-solver. This will allow them to take on life's ups and downs as they come, calm down, put their feelings into words, and bounce back.

You can't solve all of your child's problems as they go through life, but by teaching coping strategies, your child will be prepared to manage any future stressors.

[Kid's Health: Helping Kids Cope with Stress](#)

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