

STRESS BUSTER TOOL KIT

FOR FAMILIES & COMMUNITY



INDEX

Resources to help guide you

01	What are ACE's?
02-04	Self Care Tool for Adults
05-06	What is Toxic Stress?
07-08	How to Reduce the Effects of ACE's and Toxic Stress
09-10	The Benefit of Supportive Relationships
11-12	Parenting with ACE's
13-14	Improving Mental Health
15-16	Good Sleep Habits
17-18	Using Mindfulness
19-20	Promoting Exercise
21-28	*Spanish Versions Available

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WHAT ARE ACES?

AND HOW DO THEY RELATE TO TOXIC STRESS?

“ACEs” stands for “Adverse Childhood Experiences.” These experiences can include things like physical and emotional abuse, neglect, caregiver mental illness, and household violence.



The more ACEs a child experiences, the more likely he or she is to suffer from things like heart disease and diabetes, poor academic achievement, and substance abuse later in life.



TOXIC STRESS EXPLAINS HOW ACES “GET UNDER THE SKIN.”

Experiencing many ACEs, as well as things like racism and community violence, without supportive adults, can cause what's known as **toxic stress**. This excessive activation of the stress-response system can lead to long-lasting wear-and-tear on the body and brain.



The effect would be similar to revving a car engine for days or weeks at a time.

ACE's Aware Self-Care Tool for Adults

When a person has experienced significant Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), their body may make more or less stress hormones than is healthy. This can lead to physical and/or mental health problems, such as diabetes, heart disease, anxiety, smoking, or unhealthy use of alcohol or other drugs. Safe, stable, and nurturing relationships can protect our brains and bodies from the harmful effects of stress and adversity. The following tips can help you manage your stress response. Healthy nutrition, regular exercise, restful sleep, practicing mindfulness, building social connections, and getting mental health support can help decrease stress hormones and improve health. Here are some goals you can set to support your health. [*Check the goals that you are choosing for yourself!*]

Healthy relationships. I've set a goal of...

- Spending more high-quality time together with loved ones, such as:
 - Having regular meals together
 - Having regular “no electronics” time for us to talk and connect with each other
- Making time to see friends and create a healthy support system for myself
- Connecting regularly with members of my community to build social connections
- Asking for help if I feel physically or emotionally unsafe in my relationships
 - The National Domestic Violence hotline is **800-799-SAFE (7233)**
 - The National Sexual Assault hotline is **800-656-HOPE (4673)**
 - To reach a crisis text line, **text HOME to 741-741**
- Create your own goal: _____

Exercise. I've set a goal of...

- Limiting screen time to less than ___ hours per day
- Walking at least 30 minutes every day
- Finding a type of exercise that I enjoy and doing it regularly
- Create your own goal: _____

Nutrition. I've set a goal of...

- Eating a healthy breakfast daily (with protein, whole grains, and/or fruit)
- Drinking water instead of juice or soda
- Limiting my alcohol consumption

ACE's Aware Self-Care Tool for Adults

- Eating at least 5 vegetables and/or fruits every day
- Choosing whole wheat bread and brown rice instead of white bread or rice
- Create your own goal: _____
- Sleep.** I've set a goal of...
 - Being consistent about going to bed at the same time every night
 - Creating a cool, calm, and quiet place for sleep, and a relaxing bedtime routine
 - Using mindfulness or other stress reduction tools if worry is keeping me up at night
 - Turning off electronic devices at least 30 minutes before bed
 - Create your own goal: _____
- Mindfulness.** I've set a goal of...
 - Taking moments throughout the day to notice how I'm feeling, both physically and emotionally
 - Practicing mindful breathing or other calming technique(s) during stressful situations
 - Finding at least one thing to be thankful for each day
 - Creating a regular routine of prayer, meditation, and/or yoga
 - Downloading a mindfulness app and doing a mindfulness practice 20 minutes per day
 - Create your own goal: _____
- Mental health.** I've set a goal of...
 - Learning more about mental health and/or substance use services (e.g., counseling, groups, medications)
 - Identifying a local mental health professional or support group.
 - Scheduling an appointment with a mental health professional
 - If I am feeling like I am in crisis, I will get help
 - The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is **800-273-TALK (8255)**
 - To reach a crisis text line, **text HOME to 741-741**
 - Create your own goal: _____

Here are some other goals that you can set to help yourself be healthier.

- Self-Care.** I've set a goal of...

ACE's Aware Self-Care Tool for Adults

- Limiting screen/social media time to less than __ hours per day
- Making a plan for what to do when I'm feeling stressed out, angry, or overwhelmed
- Planning with my partner, friends, or family to get support when I need it
- Making regular appointments with my medical provider(s), including for preventive care
- Identifying my strengths and learning more about building resilience
- Create your own goal: _____

For more information, please visit:

From ACEs Aware: <https://www.acesaware.org/heal/resources/>

Mental Health and Substance Use:

- **The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI):** <https://www.nami.org/help>
 - 1-800-950-NAMI (6264); **Crisis Text Line – Text HOME to 741-741**
- **The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Facilities Locator:** <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/locator>



What Is Toxic Stress?



Everyone feels stress!

And not all stress is bad. Stress can help bring attention to what's important and be a motivator for problem-solving. But too much of the wrong kind of stress can be unhealthy. For children, this kind of stress can become toxic over time, affecting the way their brains and bodies grow. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) like abuse or neglect can cause this kind of stress and can harm a child's long-term health. Because of this possible impact, it's important to know a little more about stress and the different ways people's bodies can respond.



Positive stress response:

This is the body's response to temporary stress. Stress hormones help the body do what's needed in the moment. Once the event passes, the stress response turns off and the body goes back to its normal state. For example, starting a new child care arrangement or getting shots might lead to a positive stress response. Children can gain confidence and learn coping skills when supported through this type of stress.



Tolerable stress response:

This is the body's response to more lasting and serious stress. With tolerable stress, a child needs the help of a supportive caregiver to help her stay calm and turn down the stress response. With this support in place, the body can more easily return to its normal state. Tolerable stress can occur during events like an injury or natural disaster.



Toxic stress response:

This is the body's response to lasting and serious stress, without enough support from a caregiver. When a child doesn't get the help he needs, his body can't turn off the stress response normally. This lasting stress can harm a child's body and brain and can cause lifelong health problems. This type of stress results from exposure to things like abuse and neglect.

Want to know more? Keep reading to learn about stress busters and toxic stress.

How does toxic stress affect children's bodies?



The brain:

Toxic stress can make it harder for children to sit still, pay attention, and learn. It can affect other behavior, too, causing children to have trouble remembering rules and to forget to think before acting. It can also affect a child's moods and feelings.



Immunity:

Toxic stress can make it harder for bodies to fight off infection and illness. For example, children may have more frequent colds and ear infections, or health conditions like eczema or asthma.



The heart:

Toxic stress can increase a person's risk of developing high blood pressure, elevating levels of inflammation that can damage the arteries. These conditions can lead to heart disease, stroke and other serious health issues later in life.



Hormones and development:

Toxic stress can impact growth and development. It can also lead to obesity and changes in the timing of puberty, as well as other issues.

How can adults protect children from toxic stress?


When caregivers consistently care for children and offer support, they feel safe. This feeling of safety is good for their brains and bodies. Other protective factors for your child include eating healthy food, getting regular exercise, getting a good night's sleep, practicing mindfulness, and getting mental health support when needed. Together, these factors help lower the stress response and can help reduce the potential negative effects of ACEs.



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How to Reduce the Effects of ACEs and Toxic Stress

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) may increase a child's risk of health problems, but parents' consistent care and support help to protect children's health. Relationships with loving and supportive adults can reduce children's stress levels. Even simple activities like playing with bubbles, bear hugs, lullabies, listening to music together, and coloring can make a difference.

What's the best way to respond to a child's ACEs? If possible, prevention of ACEs is best. In addition, you can:

- Tune in and learn your child's signals. Help your child calm down when you sense that she is stressed or scared. Soothe your child, and teach ways to calm down when feeling upset.
- Talk and play with your child. Babies like to be rocked, cuddled, and massaged. Toddlers thrive on hugs, shared stories and songs, and daily routines. These actions can help children feel seen, heard, and understood.
- Focus on managing your own stress. This can help you better adjust the way these feelings impact how you respond to your child. Having a calm parent will help protect your child during periods of stress.
- Take your child to regular medical visits. Your medical provider can help you understand when your child's health may be at risk.

Other ways to help your child's body deal with stress:

- Stick to daily routines. They help children know what's happening next, which can reduce stress.
- Have your child exercise regularly. Make sure your child is getting at least an hour per day of active play.
- Help your child eat well. Good nutrition builds brain health and protects the body. Serve fruits and veggies at meals and avoid junk food.
- Turn to supportive relationships in your family and community.
- Ensure your child gets adequate sleep. Sleep gives the body time to grow and recharge and children who get adequate sleep manage stress more easily.
- Seek mental health care if needed.
- Practice being in the moment; try breathing and meditation. It can help the body manage stress.
- Talk to your health care provider about whether your child's ACEs might be affecting his health and what you can do about it.

ACEs don't just affect children,

they affect families. Some of the most important things you can do to stop the effects of ACEs include learning to manage your *own* stress so you can be a healthy, stable, and caring presence for your child. This includes making lifestyle choices such as eating healthy food, getting regular exercise, making a good night's sleep a top priority, and practicing mindfulness. Getting mental health support can also be helpful if you experienced ACEs and trauma in your own childhood or are currently experiencing stressful or traumatic situations in your life. The good news is that science shows how bodies and brains grow and change *every minute of the day!* This means that by starting *today*, putting some of these lifestyle choices into action and getting the right help when you need it, can help build a healthier future for you and your family.

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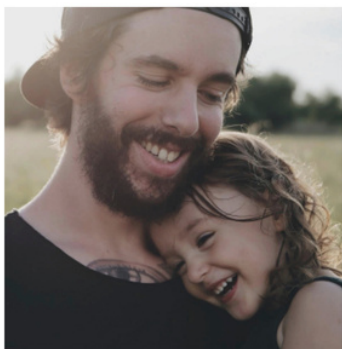


The Benefit of Supportive Relationships



Relationships are important

for the health and well-being of every family. All families face difficulties. For some, the challenges are intense or too frequent for a child to manage. When a child is stressed often, is stressed for a long period of time, or experiences a severe stressor without the support of a caring adult, her body may react with a what is called a “toxic stress” response. Over time, without the right support from a trusted caregiver, this toxic stress response can harm a child’s developing brain and body. But the good news is—*it doesn’t have to!*



The first thing you can do is get support for yourself. A healthy, stable parent can more easily provide his child with a loving and supportive home life. Safe and nurturing relationships can protect children’s brains and bodies from the harmful effects of stress and adversity. Other things, like healthy nutrition, daily exercise, making a good night’s sleep a priority, practicing mindfulness, and getting mental health support if needed, can also help. These practices are great for you, and also for your child!

Supportive Relationship

Parents also need reliable and supportive relationships for sharing thoughts and feelings. You can build strong relationships in your community by connecting with family, friends, faith communities, and local resources such as parenting groups. Making healthy relationships a priority will help you feel more supported, which can *improve your ability to do the following:*

- Parent in ways that help your child feel safe, cared for, and protected.
- Provide a safe space for your child to explore, learn, and grow.



- Teach your child words for different feelings, like sad, happy, and mad. Help them recognize how and where they feel these emotions in their bodies. Sometimes the first sign of feeling stress is having a tight chest or a clenched jaw! Labeling and understanding these emotions is an important step in learning to manage feelings in a healthy way—for both adults and children!
- Set age-appropriate limits, state expectations clearly, and be consistent with age-appropriate discipline that focuses on teaching, not punishment.
- Treat everyone in the household with respect.
- Keep adults in your household from using violent or abusive language around or directed at children.
- Avoid physical discipline with children.
- Use daily routines to provide structure and a sense of safety.
- Tell your child when there will be changes to the daily routine, and what these changes will mean for him.
- Give your child some choices—like asking if she would like to brush her teeth before or after bath time.
- Pay attention to your child’s signals and respond with love and care.
- Make sure you enjoy special one-on-one time through play, stories, bath time, and shared meals.
- Let your child take the lead by letting him choose an activity and paying attention to him without distraction when you do something together.
- *Recognize when you are feeling stress!* When this happens, have an action plan. For instance, you might think about taking an “adult time out” for a few minutes. This will allow you to take a deep breath, refocus, and return to your family in a calmer state of mind. This is important! Because when kids see adults around them manage stress in a healthy way, they learn to do the same thing.

These practices help create safe and stable homes that are good for everyone in the family.

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Parenting with ACEs



As an adult, you may still feel the effects of your own Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). What does this mean for your own health? This depends on how many ACEs you experienced as a child. It *also* depends on whether you've had certain positive experiences that help reduce the effects of stress. These positive experiences are known as "protective factors." Did a friend, family member, or mental health care professional provide support during your childhood? Do you have a good support system in place now? These experiences help reduce the effects of ACEs. The impact of ACEs also depends on factors such as how you personally manage stress. Let's start by talking about how stress works.

The stress response

Your body's stress response is designed to help you survive. When you sense danger or any kind of threat, your body's natural reaction is to increase blood pressure and heart rate so you have the energy to run or fight back. Another reaction is to freeze and shut down. These reactions are your body's way of trying to keep you safe. When used from time to time, these stress responses work well. However, when you experience frequent or severe stress during childhood, your body may learn to respond to small problems as if they were big ones. This could be why little things, even a toddler's tantrum or spilled milk, can feel overwhelming. It can also explain why you may sometimes feel anxious and threatened even when in a safe and calm place. When you're only a little stressed, you may feel alert, aware, and able to cope well. But when you become overly stressed, you may feel panicked and anxious. You may also feel numb, exhausted, or emotionally drained.

Parenting is demanding, and it can easily trigger this stress response. Very simply, because of how brains and bodies react to stress, it is harder to process information when stress levels are too high. You may experience feelings of *stress overload* such as:

- difficulty calming down
- a quicker-than-normal temper and feelings of impatience
- difficulty thinking logically
- a limited ability to "read" others and judge the needs of your children



Breaking the ACEs Cycle

Some adults who had ACEs when they were children have a harder time providing a safe and nurturing environment for themselves and their children. In addition, being a parent with ACEs can increase the risk that your children will also have ACEs. It's important to know about this connection. Ensuring that you and your child live in a safe, trusting and healthy environment is one of the most important steps you can take to protect your child. If you need resources, your health care provider or a mental health professional can help.

The good news!

Although people with ACEs may be at higher risk for many health issues, it's never too late to get support! Because bodies and brains are constantly growing and changing, things you do to improve your health *today* can make a *big difference* over time! Learning healthy ways to cope with stress and build resilience can help. This skill-building means developing healthy habits for stress management now that improve your ability to handle difficult situations *in the future*. Also, learning about what's age-appropriate for your child can give you perspective when his behavior is challenging.



How to reduce the effects of ACEs

Many lifestyle changes can help reduce the effects of ACEs. Relationships with other supportive adults can help your brain and body *turn down the stress response* and build resilience. Making time to relax, engage in a fulfilling hobby, or participate in a fun activity can help a lot, too! Good sleep habits, healthy eating, and regular exercise are other important tools to manage stress. Mindfulness practices can also help. Some parents find it helpful to seek out mental health professionals for their own exposure to ACEs and trauma. Talk to your own doctor about the health risks associated with ACEs at your next medical visit. Together, these protective factors can help *improve the health and well-being* of your whole family!

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Improving Mental Health

Mental health is just as important

as physical health. For example, depression can be just as crippling as a broken arm or leg. Seeking mental health treatment is about taking action as soon as you notice a problem, so your child or other family member can get the help they need and feel better.

Mental health support can play an important role in protecting children from the effects of toxic stress. Counseling and other kinds of mental health treatment can be helpful for children who have faced difficulties in life. This kind of support may also help you if you've experienced trauma as a child or adult.

If your child has experienced adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), or if someone has expressed concern about your child's mental health or behavior, you might consider seeking professional help. Another reason to seek help is if your child's physical health seems to be affected. Some examples of this include if your child:

- gets colds or stomach aches often
- has difficulty falling or staying asleep
- screams or cries a lot
- has a "flat" expression that doesn't seem to show much emotion



- is anxious or gets very upset when separating from a caregiver
- is defiant or has frequent tantrums
- shows the behaviors of a younger child, such as clinginess or unexpected toileting accidents
- has symptoms of asthma, which can get worse under stress

Share any worries you may have with your health care providers. They can connect you with a mental health specialist who is a good fit for your family. You may be referred to a social worker, psychologist, or psychiatrist. Sharing your child's struggles, and your own worries, is an important first step. You can also explore lifestyle choices to support better emotional health. These choices include: eating healthy food, getting regular exercise, promoting healthy sleep routines, practicing mindfulness, and having caring, trusted relationships to lean on. These activities will support healthy minds and healthy bodies for parents and children alike!

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Good Sleep Habits



A good night's sleep

Getting a good night's sleep plays a big role in children's mental health, physical health, and overall well-being. In fact, sleep is just as important to children's development as nutrition and physical activity!

Unfortunately, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) can disturb sleep. Paying special attention to your child's sleep can help in many ways. Research shows that children who get the right amount of sleep are sick less frequently, focus and behave better in school, and manage stress more easily.

Here are some ideas to help your children get enough sleep:

- **Keep regular routines.**
Children thrive with predictable routines and love quality time with their parents or caregivers. If you do the same activities with your child at naptime and bedtime, it can help everyone relax and help your child settle more easily into sleep. Try reading a book, singing a quiet song, or just talking quietly with your child. Ask her about the best part of her day, and then share yours!
- **Keep bedtimes and wake-up times consistent.**
Our bodies are healthier and our brains work better when our sleep schedules are regular and predictable. It also helps the bedtime routine go more smoothly when kids know what to expect. Try to have your child go to bed around the same time each night. A consistent bedtime can also make waking up the next morning much easier!



- **Stay active during the day.**
Make physical activity, like a walk to the park, a visit to the playground, or playing a favorite sport together, a family routine. Children who get enough exercise also have an easier time going to bed at night.
- **Limit screen usage, especially in the evenings.**
Avoid screens (television, phones, and tablets) in the sleep space. Research shows that the light from the screens keeps children and adults from feeling sleepy and relaxed in the evening. Screen use before bed can make it more difficult for children to fall asleep and stay asleep.
- **Pay attention to the bedtime environment.**
Create a space that helps children fall asleep. Keep lights dim and noise levels low. The temperature should be cool (high 60s to low 70s) rather than cold or hot. Beds should be comfortable places for sleep, not play.
- **Seek support from a health care provider.**
Talk to your pediatrician if your child experiences frequent awakenings, frequent nightmares or night terrors, or sleepwalking.



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SPANISH VERSION AVAILABLE





Using Mindfulness

Mindfulness is paying attention to the present moment.

It is the process of being aware of the thoughts, feelings, and sensations happening inside you, *and* tuning in to what is happening around you.



Mindfulness exercises can help turn the stress response down! Doing mindfulness everyday can improve your and your child's physical and emotional health.



It is easier to be mindful in your everyday life when you practice regularly. The good news is that you can practice *anytime!* The more you do, the faster it becomes a habit, and the more easily your stress response calms down! Apps and websites provide easy ways to try different kinds of mindfulness practices—you can even practice with your child or a friend! Other ways to practice include paying close attention to details while playing with your child, walking, driving home, or exercising. Research shows that mindfulness can help reduce all kinds of stress, including the stress of parenting.



Children who have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) may have difficulty getting themselves back to a relaxed state once they become stressed. Belly breathing is one easy strategy you can teach to your children, and *also* try yourself:

- Have your child sit or lie down.
- Have your child place one hand over the belly, the other hand over the chest.
- Model how to inhale through the nose and feel the belly rise.
- Exhale through the mouth and feel the belly lower.
- Repeat three to five times.
- Make it fun by pretending to blow out a candle or that you're blowing up a balloon as they inhale and exhale. You can also have your child hold a stuffed animal on his belly and watch it move up and down while they breathe deeply. These "breathing buddies" can help children see and feel what deep breathing looks like, so that both their brains and bodies remember. This will help make mindfulness and breath relaxation exercises a *healthy habit for life!*

Breathing practices can be a nice addition to your child's bedtime routine. Prompt your child to try breathing deeply when she feels stressed or worried. Set a good example by doing it yourself, and model how to take deep breaths when *you* are stressed. For example, you might say, "I am so frustrated by this traffic. But I can't change it! Please help me calm my body and mind by taking three deep breaths with me." Afterward, talk to your child about how it felt. This might be "Wow, I was very upset, but then I took three deep breath and I feel *much* better now!"

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**SPANISH VERSION
AVAILABLE**

Promoting Exercise



Exercise is a great way for children to manage stress and ease feelings of anxiety and depression. Being physically active with your children is even better! It's healthy for your brain and body, and it can be a lot of fun for both of you!

Exercise is also a good way to fight the effects of toxic stress. It can reduce the risk of obesity and other health problems such as diabetes and heart disease. Daily physical activity for children can help improve behavior and concentration, boost the immune system, and reduce stress hormones—all are areas that can be affected by Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

Here are some ideas to help your children get enough exercise:

- **Turn off the screens.**

Encourage active play inside or outside. Make physical activities like a regular walk or a swim part of family life. Limit screen time, including phones, televisions and other screen devices, to 1 hour per day. For children under 18 months old, screen time other than video chatting (so that they can talk to family, friends or grandparents) should be discouraged. Children 18–24 months old should not watch screens alone.

- **Plan ahead for play.**

Make sure your child has a time and place to play. If exercise isn't a priority, it won't happen. Put it on your calendar and plan active family outings. Playing together will promote strong family health and also provide a great bonding opportunity!

- **Provide active toys.**

Think balls and hula-hoops. Keep an eye out for used bikes, tricycles, and ride-on toys. Just having these things around can help you and your child sneak in active time. Look for a list of nearby community parks and other resources that support active play.



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**SPANISH VERSION
AVAILABLE**



Fruit Smoothie

- 1 Stand with your feet wide apart (A).
- 2 Turn your right foot out to the side (A).
- 3 Breathe in and bring your arms out to your sides (A).
- 4 Breathe out and bend down to your right side like a pitcher ready to tip over (B).
- 5 Place your right hand towards your right shin while your left hand reaches over the top and pour yourself a refreshing fruit smoothie (B).
- 6 Hold for 2 breaths.
- 7 Breathe in as you come back to the start position (A).
- 8 Switch sides and repeat.

NUTRITION TIP!

Try making a fruit smoothie for a refreshing drink and a healthy snack. Try the Great Grape Smoothie recipe at www.cachampionsforchange.net.

Cómo mejorar la salud mental



La salud mental es tan importante como la física.

Por ejemplo, la depresión puede ser tan paralizante como una pierna o un brazo fracturado. Buscar atención de salud mental consiste en actuar tan pronto como se dé cuenta de un problema, para que su hijo u otro miembro de la familia reciba la ayuda necesaria para sentirse mejor.

El apoyo de salud mental puede desempeñar un papel muy importante en proteger a los niños de los efectos del estrés tóxico. La psicoterapia y otros tipos de tratamiento de salud mental pueden ser útiles para los niños que han tenido dificultades en la vida. Este tipo de apoyo también podría ayudarle a usted si ha sufrido algún trauma siendo niño o adulto.

Si su hijo o hija ha tenido alguna experiencia infantil adversa, o si alguien ha expresado alguna preocupación acerca de la salud mental o el comportamiento de su hijo, debería pensar en buscar ayuda profesional. Otra razón para buscar ayuda es si la *salud física* de su niño parece estar afectada.

Este podría ser el caso si su hijo:

- tiene resfriados o dolores de estómago a menudo
- tiene dificultad para conciliar el sueño o permanecer dormido
- grita o llora mucho
- la expresión de su rostro no parece mostrar mucha emoción
- está ansioso o se altera mucho cuando se separa de una persona que se ocupa de él
- tiene una actitud desafiante o rabietas frecuentes
- muestra comportamientos de un niño más pequeño, como aferrarse a una persona o accidentes inesperados en el control de esfínteres
- tiene síntomas de asma, que pueden agravarse por efecto del estrés

Comuníqueles todas sus preocupaciones a sus profesionales de salud. Ellos podrán ponerle en contacto con un especialista de salud mental que sea adecuado para su familia. Usted podría ser referido a un trabajador social, psicólogo o psiquiatra. Compartir con otros las dificultades de su niño y sus propias preocupaciones es un primer paso importante. También puede explorar distintas opciones de estilo de vida para apoyar la buena salud emocional. Estas opciones son: consumir alimentos saludables, hacer ejercicio regularmente, promover rutinas de sueño saludables, practicar la concentración y tener relaciones de afecto y confianza en las cuales apoyarse. Estas actividades contribuirán a mentes sanas y cuerpos sanos, tanto para los padres como para los niños.



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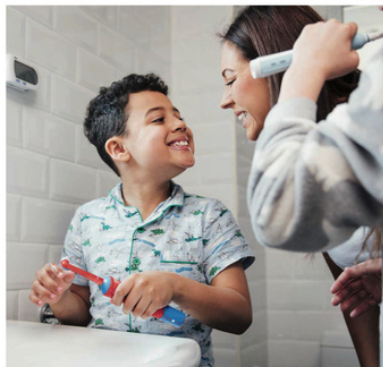
Buenos hábitos de sueño

Los buenos hábitos de sueño desempeñan una función primordial en la salud física, la salud mental y el bienestar general de los niños. En realidad, el sueño es tan importante para el desarrollo de los niños como lo son la nutrición y la actividad física.

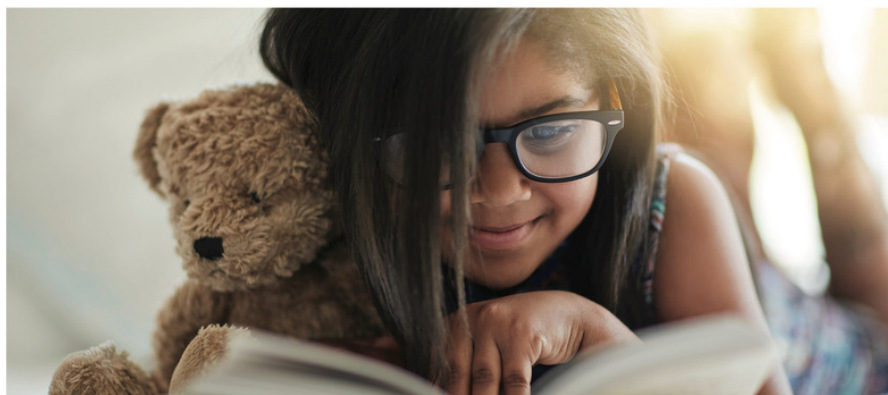
Lamentablemente, las experiencias infantiles adversas (ACE, por su sigla en inglés) pueden alterar el sueño. Prestar especial atención al sueño de su niño puede ser útil de muchas maneras. Los estudios demuestran que los niños que duermen las horas de sueño que necesitan se enferman con menor frecuencia, se concentran más y se comportan mejor en la escuela, además de manejar el estrés con mayor facilidad.

A continuación algunas ideas para ayudar a que su niño duerma lo suficiente:

- **Mantenga rutinas regulares.**
Los niños se desarrollan mejor cuando sus rutinas son predecibles y ellos pueden disfrutar de las horas que les dedican sus padres o cuidadores. Si usted hace siempre las mismas actividades con su niño a la hora de la siesta y antes de acostarlo a dormir en la noche, esto puede ayudar a que todos estén calmados y a que su hijo se quede dormido más fácilmente. Pruebe leyéndole un libro, cantándole una canción de cuna, o hablándole en voz baja. Pregúntele cuál fue la mejor parte de su día y después cuénteles qué fue lo mejor para usted.



- **Haga que día tras día las horas de dormirse y de despertarse sean siempre similares.** Nuestro cuerpo será más sano y nuestro cerebro funcionará mejor si nuestros horarios para dormir son regulares y previsibles. Si los niños saben lo que pueden esperar, la rutina a la hora de dormir transcurrirá con menos tropiezos. Trate de que el niño se acueste a dormir casi a la misma hora todas las noches. Un horario para dormir uniforme, también puede hacer que el despertar a la mañana siguiente sea mucho más fácil.
- **Mantenerse activo durante el día.** Haga alguna actividad física, como una caminata, una visita al parque infantil o practiquen juntos un deporte favorito y convierta esta actividad en una rutina familiar. A los niños que hacen suficiente ejercicio les resultará más fácil acostarse a dormir en la noche.
- **Limite el uso de las pantallas y dispositivos con pantalla táctil especialmente en la noche.** Evite las pantallas (televisión, teléfonos y tabletas) en el espacio para dormir. La investigación demuestra que la luz de las pantallas les impide a los niños y a los adultos sentirse relajados y soñolientos en la noche. El uso de las pantallas antes de acostarse puede hacer que sea más difícil para los niños conciliar el sueño y quedarse dormidos.
- **Preste atención al ambiente a la hora de acostarse.** Organice un espacio que ayude a los niños a quedarse dormidos. Haga que la luz en la habitación sea tenue y que los niveles de ruido sean bajos. La temperatura debe ser fresca (entre 65 y 72 grados) en lugar de fría o caliente. La cama debe ser un lugar cómodo para dormir, no para jugar.
- **Busque ayuda de un profesional de salud.** Hable con el pediatra si su niño se despierta varias veces en la noche, tiene pesadillas o terrores nocturnos frecuentes o es sonámbulo.



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Cómo usar la atención plena

La atención plena, también conocida como conciencia plena, consiste en prestar atención al momento presente. Es el proceso de estar consciente de los pensamientos, sentimientos y sensaciones que tienen lugar dentro de la persona y estar en sintonía con lo que pasa a su alrededor.



Los ejercicios de concentración pueden reducir la respuesta al estrés. La concentración practicada a diario puede mejorar la salud física y emocional de su niño o niña. .



Es más fácil concentrarse en su vida diaria cuando se practica con regularidad. Lo bueno es que puede practicarse en *cualquier momento*. Mientras más se hace, más rápido se convertirá en un hábito y su respuesta al estrés se calmará más fácilmente. Varias aplicaciones y sitios web ofrecen maneras fáciles de probar distintos métodos de concentración, que incluso podrá practicar con su hijo o un amigo. Otras maneras de practicar son prestar mucha atención a los detalles mientras esté jugando con su niño, caminando, conduciendo de regreso a la casa o haciendo ejercicio. La investigación muestra que la concentración en el momento presente puede reducir todos los tipos de estrés, incluso el estrés de ser padres.

Es posible que los niños que han vivido experiencias infantiles adversas tengan dificultad para volver a un estado de relajación una vez que se han estresado.

La respiración abdominal es una estrategia fácil que puede enseñarles a sus niños (de 2 años en adelante) y que usted *también* puede probar hacer:



- Haga que su niño se siente o se acueste.
- Haga que su niño coloque una mano sobre el abdomen y la otra mano sobre el pecho.
- Muéstrelle cómo inhalar por la nariz y sentir que el abdomen se levanta.
- Exhale por la boca y sienta cómo baja el abdomen.
- Siga mostrándole esta respiración profunda hasta que su niño la entienda.
- Repita el proceso de tres a cinco veces.
- Haga divertida la actividad simulando que apaga una vela o que está inflando un globo mientras que el niño inhala y exhala. También puede hacer que el niño sostenga un juguete de peluche en el abdomen y lo vea cómo sube y baja mientras respira profundo. Estos “amiguitos de respiración” pueden ayudar a los niños a *ver* y a *sentir* cómo es la respiración profunda, de manera que tanto su cuerpo como su cerebro la recuerden. Esto hará que los ejercicios de concentración y de relajación de la respiración se conviertan en un hábito saludable para *toda la vida*.

Las prácticas de respiración pueden ser un buen complemento a la rutina de su niño antes de acostarse. Dígale a su niño que trate de respirar profundo cuando se sienta estresado o preocupado. Dé el buen ejemplo, haciéndolo usted también y muéstrelle cómo hacer respiraciones profundas cuando usted está estresado. Por ejemplo, podría decir, “Estoy tan frustrada con este tráfico. Pero puedo sentirme mejor. Por favor, ayúdame a calmar mi cuerpo y mi mente haciendo tres respiraciones profundas conmigo”. Después, hable con su niño acerca de cómo se sintió usted. Esto podría ser: “¡Vaya! Estaba muy molesta, pero hice tres respiraciones profundas y me siento *mucho* mejor ahora”.

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Promover el ejercicio



El ejercicio es una manera excelente de que los niños manejen el estrés y alivien los sentimientos de ansiedad y depresión. Mantenerse físicamente activo con sus niños es todavía mejor. Es saludable para su cerebro y su cuerpo y puede ser divertido para todos.

El ejercicio es también una buena manera de luchar contra los efectos del estrés tóxico. Puede reducir el riesgo de obesidad y de otras dificultades de salud, como la diabetes y la enfermedad cardiovascular. La actividad física diaria para los niños contribuye a mejorar el comportamiento y la concentración, estimular el sistema inmunitario y reducir las hormonas del estrés, aspectos que podrían mostrar las repercusiones de las experiencias infantiles adversas.

A continuación, figuran algunos consejos para aumentar el nivel de actividad física de su familia:

- **Apague las pantallas y dispositivos con pantalla táctil.**

Aliente la actividad física dentro de la casa o al aire libre. Haga que las actividades físicas, como una caminata o la natación, se conviertan en parte de la vida familiar. Limite a una hora diaria el tiempo que los niños pasan frente a una pantalla, ya sea de teléfonos, televisores u otros dispositivos. Para los niños menores de 18 meses, es aconsejable que no pasen mucho tiempo frente a una pantalla a menos que sea para videollamadas con miembros de la familia, como los abuelos, y con los amigos. Los niños de 18 a 24 meses no deberían ver las pantallas solos.





- **Haga planes para los juegos.**
Asegúrese de que su hijo tiene una hora y un lugar para jugar. Si el ejercicio no se considera como una prioridad no se hará. Póngalo en su calendario y planifique salidas con la familia que incluyan actividad física. Jugar juntos promoverá la buena salud de la familia, además de ser una gran oportunidad de fortalecer los vínculos.
- **Tenga a mano juguetes que exijan actividad física.**
Por ejemplo, pelotas y hula-hulas. Consiga bicicletas, triciclos y otros juguetes de segunda mano que tengan ruedas. Si estos juguetes están cerca, será más fácil que usted y su hijo encuentren tiempo para las actividades físicas. Pídale al especialista de HealthySteps una lista de los parques cercanos en su comunidad y de otros recursos que apoyen los juegos activos.

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call 211

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The Pregnancy to Preschool
Partnership at

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