



stress reduction

PARENTING TECHNIQUES—AGES 10-13

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how does proactive parenting reduce stress?

RAISING CHILDREN IS STRESSFUL FOR EVERY PARENT, NOT ONLY PARENTS WITH PSYCHIATRIC DISABILITIES. To be a good parent, you need

to be continually attentive to the changing needs and wants of your child. This can be difficult, especially when you are trying to manage your household, engage in a relationship with your partner and possibly hold down a job at the same time. As a parent with a psychiatric disability, you may feel even more stress because, in addition to bringing up your kids and dealing with household challenges, you need to work at managing your symptoms.

One way to reduce this stress is to proactively parent. Proactive parenting involves actively taking charge of caring for your children by creating routines for them and organizing your time. For example, you may be feeling overwhelmed by the demands of your children, household, partner and job. A proactive approach to this problem is, for example, to create a written daily schedule for yourself and for your child/children. This schedule can break down all of the tasks that you need to do in a manageable way and it can help you see what your children need over the course of the day. This kind of planning can make you a better parent, and will help to reduce your stress.

On the following pages, we will examine some of the areas of concern to parents of children ages 10-13 and we will provide some tips for how to deal with stressful situations that may occur when parenting a “tween.” Some of these tips will be directly related to reducing your stress while others may be more general.



creating routines and schedules

When your child was younger, you may have tried to have him follow a sleeping and/or a feeding schedule. At the very least, your doctor may have recommended creating routines around bedtime and mealtime. This is because following a schedule or routine helps both you and your child. Knowing what to expect and planning for it lowers the stress that your child may go through during times of the day that involve transition. If your child is experiencing less stress, so will you.

Children ages 10 to 13 may be involved in a number of activities or sports teams after school. One way to create a schedule for them is to list what your child is doing every day after school and fit homework, family meetings and family dinners into that schedule. An example of a schedule for an 11-year-old might be:

- 7:00 a.m.—3:30 p.m. **School**
- 3:30 p.m.—4:30 p.m. **Come home from school and relax, downtime**
- 4:30 p.m.—5:00 p.m. **Practice the piano**
- 5:00 p.m.—6:15 p.m. **Soccer practice**
- 6:15 p.m.—7:00 p.m. **Family Dinner**
- 7:00 p.m.—8:30 p.m. **Homework**
- 8:30 p.m.—9:00 p.m. **Family meeting*/family time**
- 9:00 p.m.—9:30 p.m. **Get ready and go to bed**

*A family meeting is an opportunity for families to get together to discuss issues that pertain to the family.¹



household responsibilities

As your children get older, they can participate more in taking care of the family home. Having your children do different kinds of household chores is important; it not only helps you in a very real way, but it contributes to their feeling like a part of the family, increases their feelings of competency and self-worth, and allows them to grow into responsible adults. All of this translates into less stress for you.

Household chores that are age-appropriate for children from 10 to 13 (your child should do some of these, not all of these):²

- **Setting and clearing the table**
- **Making the bed and cleaning the bedroom**
- **Changing the sheets on the bed**
- **Cleaning the bathroom**
- **Feeding the family pet**
- **Sorting, washing/drying, folding, and putting away the laundry**
- **Sweeping and dusting**
- **Helping to prepare school lunches**
- **Helping to cook meals**
- **Taking care of younger sibling (with an adult around)**
- **Outdoor chores (helping with raking leaves or shoveling snow)**



spending time with your child

It is tremendously important for your child's development and for your relationship with your child, that you spend time together doing activities and communicating with each other.³ Children in this age range are just beginning adolescence. Not only may they have questions about the physical changes that are occurring to their bodies, but they may also have a lot of concerns that are more emotional or social in nature.⁴ Spending time with your child will

give him the opportunity to express these concerns and ask questions in a safe and healthy way. In addition, spending time together is a way of nurturing your relationship and increasing communication. The more positive experiences you and your children have together, the less stress you and your children will feel.

SOME ACTIVITIES THAT YOU CAN DO WITH YOUR CHILD AGES 10 TO 13:

- Take a walk in the neighborhood
- Go on a bike ride
- Read together
- Watch a movie together
- Do a computer activity together
- Take your child for a special treat (like an ice cream cone)
- Cook a meal together



how do i handle sibling issues?

Having brothers and sisters can be both a blessing and a struggle all at once. Some siblings adore each other and become life-long friends. Others may find it difficult to have to spend large quantities of time with a brother or sister who is very different from themselves. Inevitably, siblings will compete with each other for their parents' attention to some degree.⁵

What can you do to ease this competition and encourage good sibling relationships?⁶

- Don't try to treat each child equally. Think about what is appropriate for each child given their age and level of development.
- Avoid comparing your kids to each other.
- Remind your children of their family bond. For example, say "Help your brother set the table" as opposed to "Help Sam set the table."
- It is often a good idea to let your children sort their problems out on their own.
- Don't force friendships between your children: some children get along great, others less so. But remind your children that they must always treat each other with respect.
- Encourage patience in your younger child if your older one is being bossy, and in your older child if your younger one is tagging along too much.
- Encourage family cohesion. Do activities together as a family and have family meetings.⁷

The more that you can decrease competition between your children, the easier it will be for them to get along, and the less stressful your environment will be.



do i still need respite care?

RESPITE CARE IS ANY KIND OF CHILD CARE THAT A PARENT USES WHEN THEY ARE AT WORK OR WHEN THEY JUST NEED A BREAK FROM CARING FOR THEIR CHILDREN.

All parents need some time away from caring for their children so that they can de-stress, re-charge, and come back refreshed and excited

about parenting. Parents with psychiatric disabilities can especially benefit from respite care. There are times when your symptoms may get in the way of your being able to focus on caring for your child/children. Respite care will give you the time that you need to decrease your stress level, deal with your symptoms and seek help or support if you need it.

Do you still need respite care when your children are ages 10 to 13? Most child development experts agree that starting around age 11 or 12, children can be left alone during the day for short periods of time.⁸ You should use this as a guide. If your child is 11 or 12 and you need a short break and you will be close by, it is most likely safe to leave her for a brief period. If you are going further away, will be gone longer, or if there are younger siblings involved, you may still need respite care. This can be in the form of a friend or relative watching your child or it can be at a respite or child care agency.



how does consistent discipline of my child reduce stress?



Disciplining your child is one of the most important things you can do to help her mature. Appropriate discipline teaches responsibility, protects your child from dangerous situations, and demonstrates socially acceptable ways to behave. When your child is responsible, safe and behaves well, you will experience less stress.

Disciplining children is a controversial topic. There is no one right way to discipline a child. Every child is unique and responds to different methods of discipline in his or her own way. What works for one child, may not work for another, even when children are siblings.⁹

Some tips for disciplining your child are:¹⁰

- Find a balanced approach to discipline, where misbehavior is punished, and good behavior is continually positively reinforced.
- Explain the rules to your child clearly, describe the consequences of not following the rules and then be consistent about discipline if your child breaks the rules.
- Make sure that the punishment matches the negative behavior; never give a harsh punishment for a minor offense.
- Time the punishment so that it happens immediately after the negative behavior, or as soon afterward as possible.
- Be careful that you do not inadvertently reinforce negative behavior.
- Be a strong role model. One of the most important ways your child will learn how to behave is by watching you.



mental health of your child

AS A PARENT WITH A PSYCHIATRIC DISABILITY, YOU MAY BE CONCERNED THAT YOUR CHILD MAY ALSO SHOW SIGNS OF A PSYCHIATRIC DISABILITY.

While your child may have a greater chance of developing a psychiatric disability because of his genetic inheritance, remember that genetics are only one factor.¹¹ Keeping your child's environment emotionally healthy and working at building his self-esteem will reduce his stress, which will in turn reduce your stress.

An emotionally healthy environment that builds self-esteem is one where...

- **Kids are praised and encouraged.**
- **Kids are listened to and respected.**
- **Kids feel safe, secure and loved unconditionally.**
- **Kids are given guidance and discipline when necessary.¹²**



conclusion



One of the best ways to decrease your stress is to proactively address parenting issues with your children. Following routines and schedules for activities and homework, sharing in household chores, preparing nutritious meals and exercising together can be extremely helpful. Promoting the physical and mental health of your child and beginning to respect his privacy needs are also important. Anything that you can do ahead of time to ease transitions for your children or help them through difficult situations will reduce stress and will result in better emotional health for you and your family.

homework

- 1. What does proactive parenting mean to you?**
- 2. What are some things you can do to promote the physical and emotional well-being of your child?**
- 3. What does an emotionally healthy home environment look like to you?**
- 4. What are some activities that you can do with your child?**

endnotes

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