PARENTING TECHNIQUES—AGES 4-9

1. How Does Proactive Parenting Reduce Stress?
2. Creating Routines and Schedules
3. Household Responsibilities
4. Time for Bed: What to Do about Nightmares?
5. How Do I Handle Sibling Issues?
6. What is Respite Care and Why Do I Need It?
7. How Does Consistent Discipline of My Child Reduce Stress?
8. Mental Health of Your Child
9. Conclusion
10. Homework


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how does proactive parenting reduce stress?

RAISING CHILDREN CAN BE 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 4 to 9, and we will provide some tips for how to deal with stressful situations that may occur when parenting a young child. Some of these tips will be directly related to reducing your stress while others may be more general.
When your child was an infant, 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. If your child knows what to expect and can plan for it, this decreases the stress that he may experience during times of transition. If your child is experiencing less stress, you will as well.

For example, at bedtime, you can create a routine like this:

- Put away toys in room
- Take a bath
- Put on pajamas
- Brush teeth and go to the bathroom
- Get a drink of water
- Pick out a stuffed animal
- Read a story together
- Turn on bedtime music
- Lights out

By following this schedule every night, your child should begin to feel secure in transitioning to bedtime. Instead of crying when bedtime comes or trying to come up with ways to stay up longer, your child will have a clear understanding of his expected behavior. This will lower both your stress and his stress and make bedtime an easier transition.
When your child is between age 4 and age 9, it is time for her to start to share in the household responsibilities, albeit in a small way. Even as young as age 2, children can start to learn to put their toys away. By age 9, your child should be able to set and clear the table, take care of the family pet, and make his bed in the morning. Having your children do these kinds of household chores is important: it helps them feel like a part of the family and increases their feelings of competency and self worth. This will ultimately lead to less stress for you.

**Household chores at ages 4 to 6 (with some assistance):**
- Putting toys away
- Helping to make bed
- Cleaning up room
- Putting dirty laundry in hamper
- Putting clean clothes in dresser

**Household chores at ages 7 to 9 (with some assistance at age 7):**
- Setting the table
- Clearing the table
- Making bed and cleaning room
- Cleaning the sink in the bathroom
- Feeding the family pet
- Sorting and folding laundry
- Sweeping and dusting
- Helping to prepare lunches for school
When your child is in pre-school or grade school, having a bedtime routine decreases stress. Particularly if your child is having a hard time falling asleep or is waking up with nightmares, a bedtime schedule will help soothe him. One other tip is to have your child get to sleep earlier rather than later; she will be less tired and cranky at bedtime and this routine will go more smoothly.

This is also a common age for nightmares and night terrors to occur. We are all susceptible to having nightmares. Night terrors start around preschool age, but most people outgrow them. Your child may be screaming, thrashing, crying, and even appear awake, but will in the end return to sleep quickly and usually have no memory of the episode. The best thing to do in this situation is to keep the lights low and speak to your child in a soothing voice. Usually after 10 to 30 minutes, your child will return to sleep. While this can be upsetting for you, remember that these episodes are common for children of this age.
HAVING BROTHERS AND SISTERS CAN BE BOTH A BLESSING AND A STRUGGLE.

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.

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

Help your child prepare for a new baby ahead of time. Read your child books about being a big brother or sister, and spend time together with other people’s babies. Once the baby is born, carve out some special time to be alone with your older child. Never blame the baby if you can’t do something with your older child.

Don’t try to treat each child equally. Think about what is appropriate for each child given their age and level of development, and be fair when doing things with them.

Avoid comparing your kids to each other.

Remind your children of their family bond. For example, say, “Give your brother back his toy” instead of “Give Sam back his toy.”

It is often a good idea to let your children sort out their problems 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.

Keep their toys separate as much as possible. If they get into a squabble over a toy, make a rule like: the kid who touched the toy first gets it for another 5 minutes. Set a timer if you need to.

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.
RESpite care is child care that gives you a either a short or a long break from caring for your child. Respite care allows parents to de-stress, recharge, and come back to their children 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 ability 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.

There are many different types of respite care. It can be as simple as asking a friend or relative to watch your child, or it can involve taking your child to a respite or child care center. If you are going to use a respite or child care center, you will need to fill out paperwork and your child’s pediatrician may also need to fill out some forms. Additionally, you should ask for some references about the agency and interview some of the staff.
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. It may take energy and effort to discipline consistently, but it is worth it. When your child is responsible, safe and behaves well, both of 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 they are siblings.

Some tips for disciplining your child are:

1. Find a balanced approach to discipline, where misbehavior is punished but good behavior is continually positively reinforced.
2. 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.
3. Make sure that the punishment matches the negative behavior; never give a harsh punishment for a minor offense.
4. Time the punishment so that it happens immediately after the negative behavior, or as soon afterward as possible.
5. Be careful that you do not inadvertently reinforce negative behavior. For example, let’s say that your pre-schooler throws a tantrum in the store because you are not buying him something that he wants. Buying the item so that your child stops his tantrum reinforces your child’s negative behavior.
6. Be a strong role model. One of the most important ways your child will learn how to behave is by watching you.
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, genetics are only one factor. Keeping your child’s environment emotionally healthy and working at building his self-esteem will reduce his stress, which, in turn, will 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.
One of the best ways to decrease your stress as a parent is to proactively address parenting issues with your children. Following routines and schedules, sharing in household chores, and having bedtime rituals can be extremely helpful for 4- to 9-year-olds. Promoting the mental health of your child is 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 emotional well-being of your child?

3. What are some household responsibilities that your child already has?

4. Does your 4 to 9 year old child have a sibling and if so, what can you do to promote a positive relationship between your children?


