



What is stress? In simple terms, stress happens when the demands on us are greater than our ability to cope.

Your child may feel stress when facing a situation before they are ready to handle it. Young children can also feel stress when their senses are overwhelmed, such as:



- I am being rushed
- Something unexpected is happening
- I'm hungry
- I'm tired and overstimulated
- I have to wait my turn
- Other people are yelling or fighting
- I get too much praise and attention
- No one is paying attention to me
- I need to stop doing something I enjoy

What happens in your child's body during a stress response?

The emotional part of your child's brain reacts by sounding an alarm and sending a rush of hormones through their body. One of the hormones is called adrenaline. Adrenaline acts to increase blood pressure and heart rate, in order to prepare the body to run or protect itself. It can also make your child feel agitated and irritable. Of course, your child will likely have no idea what is activating their stress response; they just feel uncomfortable – and want relief!

How stress feels in my body, and things I might do:

- My tummy hurts
- My muscles feel tight
- I don't feel like eating
- I feel fidgety and squirmy
- I need more help with nap time
- I like doing the same things over and over
- I want to hold on to you
- I want to be the boss
- I want to hide



Each child is unique in what they find stressful, and how well they can cope in the moment. Hunger, fatigue or overstimulation can play a big part. Learning and developmental differences, physical and mental health issues, sensory needs and impairments or previous stressful experiences also impact how a child responds to stress.

The good news is that young brains are constantly learning and growing, and little bodies are built to manage some stress occasionally. In fact, even positive experiences can be stressful, like the first day of preschool or the arrival of a new sibling.

Learning to cope with temporary, low to moderate stress is an important part of growing up and building self-confidence.