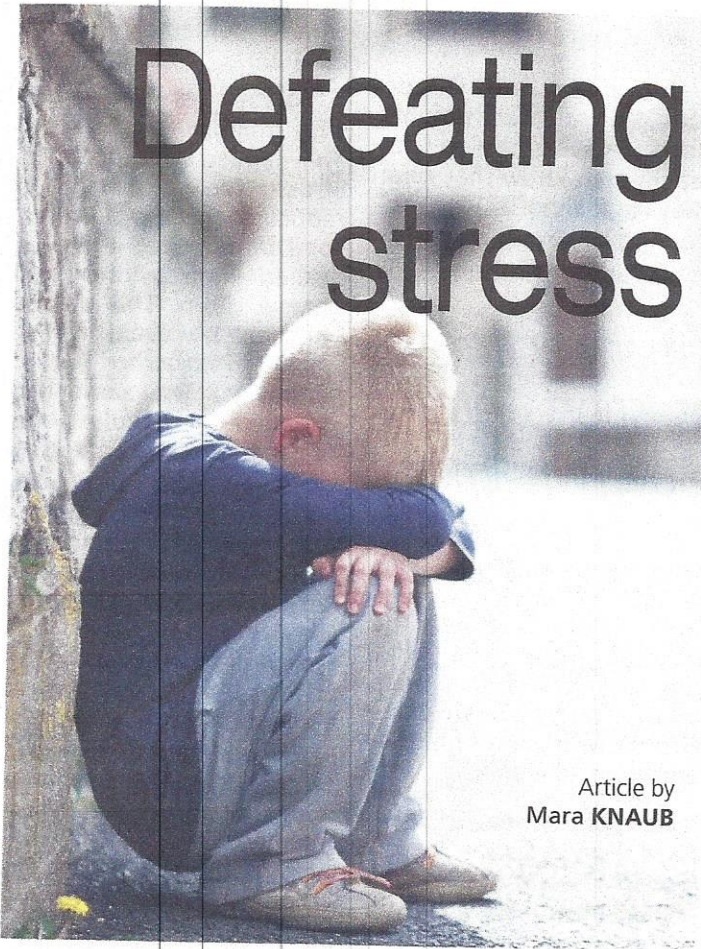


Defeating stress



Article by
Mara **KNAUB**

Kids under stress? Some might be quick to say that kids don't have stress. After all, they only have to deal with school and playtime, right?

Wrong! Kids do experience stress, and it's up to their parents and caregivers to teach them ways to handle it.

What stresses a child? A preschooler might suffer from separation anxiety. As they get older, they might start to feel pressure to fit in and do well academically.

Some kids have so many activities – homework, classes, sports, etc. – that they become overwhelmed.

Stress is also contagious, according to Dr. Tanya R. Sorrell, psychiatric nurse practitioner at the Yuma Mental Health and Wellness Center.

If they hear adults arguing or talking about their worries, they will pick up on it.

Situations such as the illness of a relative, the death of a loved one or a divorce, even if amicable, cause stress to children.

World news might also be disturbing. "They might worry about the future, about shootings in the news. Be careful what you let them see. Sometimes the 5:30 news is too overwhelming," Sorrell noted.

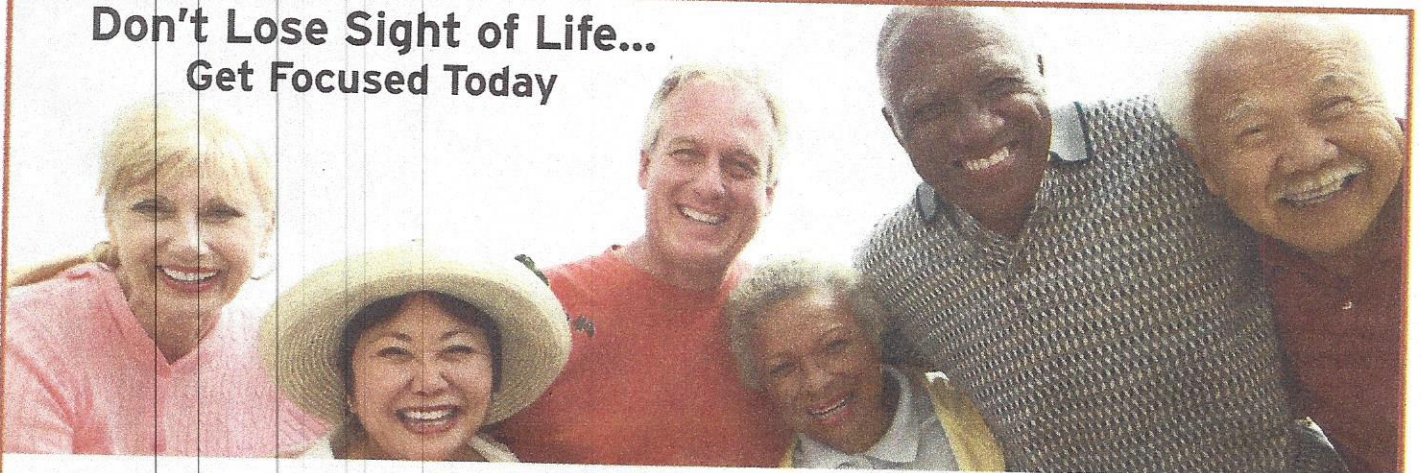
How do you know a child is stressed out? The signs of stress depend on the stage of childhood. Sorrell noted that a preschooler might experience a change in appetite, be afraid to be alone or cry uncontrollably and not be able to be consoled.

An elementary-age child might complain of stomach

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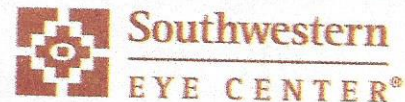
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aches or headaches or avoid trying to go to school by saying they're too sick.

"The way children handle stress is as different as the way they play during recess," said Troy Love, director of Courageous Journeys Counseling and Consulting Services in Yuma. "Some become aggressive. Others become very quiet and withdrawn. Others begin to cry."

Love noted that signs of stress include withdrawing, reverting back to old behaviors, such as wetting the bed, sucking a thumb, etc., increased aggression, suddenly losing interest in things that used to be fun, or doing poorly in school.

When upset, some kids take it out on themselves, banging their heads or hitting or biting themselves.

"The idea that kids would

do things to try to harm themselves may be shocking to parents," states Kid-Health.org. "But for some kids, feelings of stress, frustration, helplessness, hurt or anger can be overwhelming. And without a way to express or release

Some kids have so many activities - homework, classes, sports, etc. - that they become overwhelmed.

the feelings, a kid may feel like a volcano ready to erupt — or at least let off steam."

On the other hand, Love added, signs of a well-adjusted child include displaying a sense of confidence, doing their best on tasks and assignments, the ability to make friends and the ability to play appropriately.

What parents can do

One of the most important things that parents and caregivers can do is to let children know that what they're feeling is OK, according to Love.

"We live in a culture that

to say Voldemort's name out loud.

"So they reverted to 'He who must not be named.' This added to the foreboding feeling instead of reducing the fear. Professor Dumbledore, however, called him by his real name - Tom. This helped him not be afraid, for he called Tom who he really was. The same can be said for handling our emotions," Love said.

"When we attempt to deny them, stuff them or hide them, they don't go away — they become worse. But when we call them what they are — anger, sadness or fear — we gain power over them and can work through them."

To help children who are struggling, "spend time with them, validate their feelings. Help them express their feelings through talking, drawing, playing,

shuts down emotions. This is less effective. What is more helpful is to help the children name what they are feeling and then help them find constructive ways to work through their emotions," he said.

He pointed to JK Rowling's Harry Potter series, noting that most of the wizarding world was afraid

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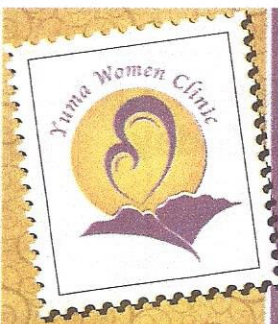


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painting, building things. Provide reassurance and comfort.

Encourage them. Help them discover ways that they can work through their feelings," Love added.

Stress is often caused by lack of consistency, Sorrell noted.

"Help a child get on a schedule and help them learn time management," she said.

Just like school, kids should have a schedule at home: a time to get up, play, do homework, eat and sleep.

Once a child gets home from school, don't send them straight to homework. Give them at least half an hour for physical activity to "let them burn off some energy," Sorrell said.

Also, make sure they get the proper amount of sleep. For children in kin-

dergarten through fourth grade, sleep time should be between 7:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., she noted.

Adults can also reduce a child's stress by helping them prepare for an upcoming situation, such as a doctor's appointment or the start of school. Talk to

– to help them deal with stress. "Studies show meditating and deep breathing helps," Sorrell noted.

Also, help them identify safe people, for example, going to the teacher if they're feeling too anxious.

Is a child having trouble fitting in? Expose him or

not win, but you gave it your all," she said.

Losing a pet is stressful and one of the first times a child might experience loss.

"Have a ceremony and bury it. Encourage children to talk about their feelings. It's natural to be sad. Help them recognize it's a part of life. and we'll miss them. Have them draw or color pictures. 'This is when we went to the dog park or the day we played Frisbee,'" suggested Sorrell.

But in all situations; recognize that each child is different and a different approach might be needed. "See what works best for each," she noted.

For help in finding resources for your child, consult your doctor or the counselors and teachers at school.

For more tips, go to <http://kidshealth.org>.

When upset, some kids take it out on themselves...

the child about what will happen.

Two weeks before school starts, get them used to going to bed on time and getting up on time.

"Keep the routine on the weekdays and maybe give them an extra hour on the weekends," Sorrell said.

Children can also be taught relaxation exercises – taking deep breaths, counting to 10

her to different types of activities. It's up to the parents to recognize what activities they enjoy.

"Take them to a dance class, to a gym, to a sports game. The library has book clubs. It can take work to find out what they're interested in," Sorrell said.

Let children learn from their mistakes and to problem-solve. "You won't always be first. The goal is to actually try, you might

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