

STRESS AND TEMPERAMENT

OBSERVE your stress levels. Take note of how small frustrations register in your body. Remember – stress is cumulative. “Blow outs” do not occur in a vacuum. Acknowledging a minor stressor will help you plan for activities which decrease stress and prevent “blow-outs”.

IDENTIFY soothing behaviors. Soothing behaviors might be physical and repetitive such as walking, dancing or rocking. Some adults and children find physical space and/or emotional space soothing. Others respond to a sensory activity such as a hot bath, painting or listening to music.

UNDERSTAND temperament. You will be more prepared to connect with your child if you comprehend, for example, why a child who is sensitive to noisy situations shows symptoms of stress. Armed with the knowledge of temperament you can work with your child to reduce power struggles as well as stress levels.

REFLECT upon “goodness of fit”. While it is painful to admit the ways in which you and your child do not fit well, it can also be liberating. No fit is perfect. When you are honest about the areas where it is difficult to connect with your child, you can parent in a way that reduces stress and models both self-respect as well as respect for your child.

RECOGNIZE the “trigger traits” for you and your child. What are the two temperamental traits most likely to cause anxiety and stress? If you are a very persistent adult it may be especially important that you have time without interruption.

EVALUATE your child’s behavior. Is s/he exhibiting symptoms of stress either through regressive or aggressive behaviors? Regressive behaviors include fearfulness, self-loathing, or separation anxiety. Aggressive behaviors include rudeness, refusing to cooperate and physical conflict with peers.

HUMOR yourself and your children. Be silly. A ridiculous response helps both you and your children reframe your struggle. Have “whining contests”, watch silly movies, make fun of yourself – release those endorphins!