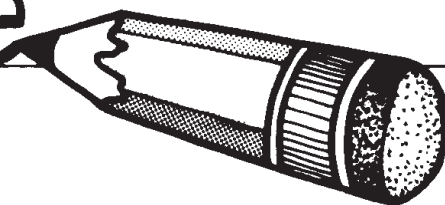


Parenting Pipeline



*A newsletter for parents of sixth-grade children
from the North Dakota State University Extension Service*



Choices

Your child has roughly 80 hours a week to do things. Subtract 50 hours for school, homework and chores. This leaves only 30 hours for everything else.

Parents need to guide children to participate in a variety of activities. Listen to your child's expression of interest and watch her participate in activities. This can help you determine the activities to emphasize and which should be discontinued.

Sometimes parents push achievement in scholarship, athletics or music too much. The activity then becomes so serious it is not fun. Children need to enjoy the activities.

When deciding what activities to become involved in, discuss these questions with your child:

- What do you like to do?
- Will this activity develop one of your interests?
- Will participating in this activity allow development of some leadership skills? These skills include communication and working as a team member.
- Can this activity foster healthy self-esteem? Sometimes activities can foster healthy self-esteem, but leaders, coaches or other participants can change the experience into a negative one. Think about your child's potential reaction to the activity.
- What equipment is required, and what are the financial costs? If your child wants piano lessons but you don't own a piano, is it possible to rent or borrow? Sometimes some creative solutions can be used. Remember that a child is exploring interests now and may not want to continue to expand this interest in the future.
- What is a realistic goal for you if you participate in the activity?
- How can you achieve this goal? What can I do to help?

Show interest in the activities of your child. This helps maintain the child's participation. However, parents should never get more emotionally involved in the activity than the kids do or emphasize competition more than the value of participation and learning.

Sometimes your child may not be selected to be on the team or in the play or to take part in some activity. You may be unsure how to help her handle such disappointments. Acknowledge the child's feelings. Express your feelings. For instance, tell your child that it took courage to try out and that you feel proud of her for having done so. Discuss other interests, pursue other things the child can do and help her set realistic goals. If you are positive about her disappointment, your child's self-esteem and confidence will become stronger.

Children and Stress

Adults often reflect on their childhoods as the “good old days” when worries were few. Try to remember every aspect of your childhood. No doubt you can recall several stressful periods in your life or your family life.

As your child works to build skills and friendships, he will experience stress in many situations. When you pass his concerns off as unimportant, you send a message that his needs are not important. Recognize and affirm your child’s concerns. A few minutes of discussion is often all that is needed.

Stress is very real to children, although they often are unaware of what to do with all these concerns and thoughts. They need help managing the overload in their own ways. Avoid comparing how children respond to stress. Guide them toward understanding what is happening to them and how to manage their feelings and concerns.

Symptoms of stress are often noticed in extreme behavior changes. For example, your child may become very restless, irritable and unable to concentrate, or she may become very withdrawn from routine activities and display a loss of interest in activities. Other symptoms might include:

- Excessive sleeping or insomnia
- Increase or decrease in appetite
- Sudden weight gain or loss
- Hyperactivity or apathy and withdrawal
- Self-destructive behavior, defiance, destructiveness of property
- Nervous behavior such as nail biting, teeth grinding
- Escape behavior such as running away or immersion in TV, studies or chemicals
- Physical symptoms such as headaches, stomach-aches, variety of complaints
- Prolonged and persistent temper tantrums
- Explosive crying
- Loss of sense of joy
- Frequent nightmares.

Helping Your Child

Assist your child in minimizing the stress in his life and maximizing his self-esteem. Find the strategies that best suit you, your child and your family. Begin working on your own methods of coping as well. Your coping strategies are often mirrored by your children. When you are in control, your family will function more smoothly. When you are stressed out, your family will likely feel the impact of that stress.

Listen. Children need to unload their feelings. They do not always want advice. They want an empathetic ear! Simply reflecting what you hear is a first step. Try, “I can see that is really bothering you... It hurts when a friend says bad things about you, doesn’t it... I bet you felt embarrassed

when that happened...” These reflective statements do not make problems go away, and they do not solve things. This type of discussion will help your child sort out exactly what it is that is bothering her. Often she will come up with her own solution, which is better than any advice you could give. This method is very important in raising children capable of solving their problems. And your children will learn that you are always there to support them instead of only judging them.

Observe. Watch closely for hidden signs of stress. Engage your child in conversation about this.

Accept negative feelings. Accept the fact that your child will have negative experiences and feelings and that you need not do something to “fix it.” Your child needs you to listen and reflect at this time. Allow time for her to cool down, and show confidence in her. This will allow you to guide her into positive problem solving.

Re-evaluate your expectations for your child. Are they realistic? Prioritize activities, and help eliminate unnecessary stress. Is your child overscheduled?

Check your child’s health. Examine food and sleep habits as well as medical needs.

Praise and encourage your child often. Avoid nagging blaming, criticizing and threatening.

Set a good example yourself.

Help your child to see stress as a challenge.

Spend relaxed time with your child. Avoid over-scheduling your child. Children need quiet or relaxing times as well as their activities.

Engage help of teachers, counselors, doctors or other trained professionals.

This newsletter is published for North Dakota families with sixth-graders by the NDSU Extension Service and distributed through your county extension office. See your extension agent for more parenting information and other nutrition, youth and family programs.