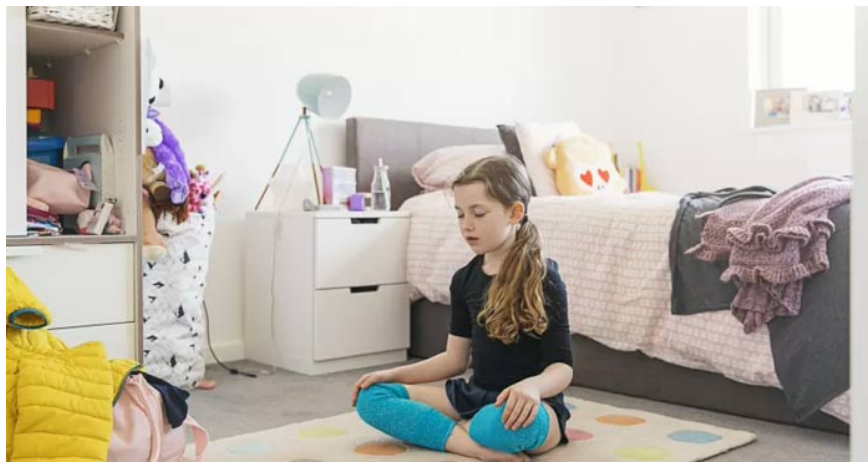


# Simple but effective ways to reduce stress for children

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No matter how happy our childhoods were, we all remember times when we were really anxious or just plain stressed out. Parents can't protect their children from dealing with stress, but we can teach them some self-care strategies to make it easier to cope with negative emotions. Even better, knowing some self-care activities they can rely on can give them the tools they need to manage stress as adults.

Here are some simple but effective strategies to help children feel calmer and better prepared to deal with whatever stress life throws at them. These strategies work for all ages, from toddlers to teens.

## Take a deep breath

It may sound simple, but the way we breathe can make a real difference in how we feel. When children are stressed, they sometimes take quick, shallow breaths instead of deeper ones. Making the conscious choice to take deep breaths can help them relax and recover.

1. For young children, talk about belly breathing instead of chest breathing. Don't worry about counting breaths.
2. Older children and teens can inhale for four seconds, hold their breath for seven seconds, and exhale slowly for eight seconds.

3. You can ask children of any age to take four deep breaths when they start to feel anxious or overwhelmed.

## **Eat or drink healthy foods**

Food as a stress reliever isn't a pattern anyone wants to encourage, but if your child is a glutton, they'll be hungry without even realizing it. Taking a minute to drink a glass of milk or an apple can make the problem much more manageable.

When your child starts to feel stressed or you notice that they seem overwhelmed, they can learn to ask themselves when was the last time they ate or drank something. This is a useful skill for all ages.



## **Listen to what children say**

Mindfulness is not something that everyone can do right away, even as adults, but you can simplify it and turn it into a game for young children.

Sit down and close your eyes. Listen to what you hear around you. Listen to the birds, the sounds in your house, other people's voices, everything.

If your mind wanders, acknowledge it but don't be hard on yourself. This is normal and takes practice to keep your mind on track.

After a minute or two, open your eyes. How many times did you think about something other than what you heard?



## Write or color

Creativity is a great self-care activity for children of all ages and there are so many ways to do it. The right activity depends entirely on the age and interests of the child, but it should be a quiet, creative activity that the child really enjoys.

1. Younger children can color in a coloring book or on a blank sheet of paper. It doesn't have to be a super messy art project; this is something they can do on their own.
2. Older children can draw or color in a sketchbook or just have fun in a coloring book.
3. Children who can write may enjoy keeping a diary or writing stories.

## Organize a dance party

Music is a great way to relieve stress, and getting your body moving can help too. Turn on some music and start dancing. This can be a family activity, but it doesn't have to be. Sometimes kids feel self-conscious about dancing, so they may prefer to dance in their bedroom or away from everyone.

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