



How to talk with your child about stress

As you know, the District is facing budget reductions along with a review of the District's facilities. The District's Facilities Study Team will be presenting their recommendations to the Board on Tuesday, January 26. Your child(ren) may have many questions during this time. We have asked staff not to discuss the recommendations for school consolidations and/or closures with students. We respect that you would like to be the one speaking with your children. The Board will be taking a lot of input from students, staff and parents before they are expected to vote on the recommendations at their February 16, 2010 Board meeting.

We know that budget reductions and school consolidation and/or closings will impact all programs across the District. This time of uncertainty can cause stress for all, especially children. I know that by working together, we will come up with solutions that best support our students.

The following are some suggestions, created by Iowa State University, that are helpful in helping adults work with children in managing stressful situations. We encourage parents/guardians to review these suggestions and enter into some dialogue with your child(ren) about the possibility of school closures and/or consolidations.

Coping with Stress

The following ideas show specific things you can do, or help your children do, to manage stress.

- Help your children talk about what is bothering them. Don't force them to talk, but offer opportunities; bedtime or car trips are good times for this. Instead of asking, "What's wrong?" ask questions such as, "How are things going at school with your teacher?" Do not criticize what your children say or they will learn not to tell you things that bother them.
- Spend special one-to-one time. Find hobbies or other activities that you can do alone with your child. This allows for time to talk as well as time for having fun together.
- Teach ways of handling difficult situations. Talk through and role play with your children how they can handle a stressful situation.
- Tell stories about dealing with stress. For example, if your child is afraid of a new situation, tell a story about how you once felt in a similar situation and what you did to cope, or find a library book that shows a child coping successfully with stress.
- Be a role model for your children in handling your own stress in a healthy way. If your children see you talking to others about problems, taking time to relax, and living a healthy lifestyle, your example is likely to rub off – they model what they see. Whether your child is feeling stress from a normal everyday stressor or from something out of the ordinary, you can help him or her cope with stress reactions. Life brings stress. It's how you handle it that makes all the difference. Whether your children hold their stress in or show stress by misbehaving, you can show them effective stress management techniques.

When children experience stressful situations, you will often observe changes in their behavior. The following are some things to watch for that are indicative of stress in children:

- Increased activity level
- Decreased concentration and attention
- Increased irritability
- Withdrawal
- Angry outbursts
- Aggression
- Increased physical complaints (e.g., headaches, stomachaches, aches and pains)
- Changes in school performance
- Changes in appetite
- Lack of interest in usual activities, including interest in playing with friends
- Regressive behaviors in your children (e.g., baby talk, bedwetting, tantrums)