



### **Childhood stress—what parents can do**

All families experience stress or crisis at some time or another. Natural disasters, death, divorce, illness, and financial hardships sometimes are especially difficult to deal with when you have young children. The following suggestions may help.

#### **Take care of yourself**

Stressful times can bring major changes in life. Just when you most need to relax, you feel so many demands that you think you can't take the time. You may be so used to physical work and mental tension that you are unable to sleep. The key to successful relaxation is that it be enjoyable and easy. You also must feel that it's OK to relax. It is!

In order for you to perform well under pressure, your mind and body must have time for renewal. Take 20 minutes a day for a restful activity—you might walk, lose yourself in a book, draw mental pictures, or just sit comfortably in uninterrupted quiet. When you feel fatigued, give in to the need to sleep. Even though you think you can't stop in the middle of work—you should stop. Forcing yourself to continue when the body needs to sleep can lead to insomnia.

#### **Don't be afraid to ask for help**

Someone else may need your help later on. You'll be in a better position to offer help to them if you can reach out for help now. Most communities have resources to provide your family with food, clothing, shelter, counseling, job referral, and training. Friends and relatives can be a big support, if you let them know what you need. Children begin to relax and feel secure when they sense an easing of tension in their parents.

#### **Spend time each day with your child**

You have a tremendous influence on the growth and development of your child. Even if everything else is falling apart around you, find time to spend at least a few minutes each day with your child. A few loving words, a hug, and a kiss can work wonders. Be consistent in what you ask your child to do. Children have little control over life. They need to know that you are predictable and that they can depend on you. Children can settle down after a crisis more easily if you establish some daily routines as quickly as possible. Even though the routine is not the same as before, it's good to find a regular time for meals and bedtime.

#### **Get to know your child's teacher or caregiver**

Share information about the family and daily routines with your child's teacher or caregiver. Let this person know what difficulties and problems your child is facing. This will help a teacher or caregiver know how to help your child in daily tasks and in learning new skills and behaviors.

### **Ease the transition from home to school**

Children will feel more comfortable and secure at care centers and schools if small reminders of their child care or school life are placed in the home. Perhaps you can hang some pictures your child drew at school. You might take some snapshots of your child's classmates and teachers and display them at home. Ask your child's teacher if he or she could bring a favorite toy or familiar object from home to school.

[Adapted From Iowa Cooperative Extension by Chuck Hill, Extension Specialist—4H and Development]