

## What to look for:

The following are common signs of chronic stress and distress in young children. Symptoms can vary depending on age, temperament, development, ability, and coping strategies. Although many of these behaviors are common, unexplained increases or decreases in any of them lasting two weeks or more are cause for concern.



- Increased frequency of sadness, crying, or upset.
- Added fears, worries, or avoidance of situations.
- Asking for more attention, reassurance, or physical contact than usual.
- Greater irritability, anger, and/or frustration.
- Trouble falling or staying asleep, and/or having bad dreams.
- Significant changes in diet, physical activity, or energy level.
- Wanting to be alone or being unwilling to interact with friends or family.
- Increased difficulty getting along with other children, friends, or family members.
- Struggling to adjust to preschool or other structured settings.
- Reporting frequent headaches, stomachaches, or not feeling “well.”
- Increased stubborn behaviors, and/or refusal to comply with requests.
- Backward slides in development (speech, toilet training, emotional expression).
- Repeated incidents that result in injuries (cuts, bruises, sprains, bones, or head trauma).



## Tips for how to respond:

Young children’s brains and abilities develop quickly. They depend on adults to provide safety, security, predictability, and care. Consistent support, coaching, clear expectations, and observing healthy behaviors from adults are particularly important at this age, as are opportunities to explore, problem-solve and make decisions on their own when safe and appropriate.

- Create and keep regular, predictable daily routines including exercise, meals, and bedtime.
- Communicate family values and set clear limits and expectations for behavior.
- Regularly discuss plans, being clear to inform what is happening and when.
- Give ample notice (5-10 minutes) when a change in activity is about to occur.
- Take time to discuss worries and concerns, and provide clear, developmentally appropriate explanations and support.
- Set aside regular time daily for care, connection, listening, and shared activities.
- Encourage creativity and play time to foster self-expression.
- Promote activities with peers, playmates, and friends.
- Allow choices regarding play activities, and other decisions when appropriate.
- Play together, including games, outdoor activities, dancing, singing, and crafting.
- Practice stress-relieving strategies together like breathing exercises and brain breaks.
- Seek support or guidance from family, friends, trusted adults, and classroom teachers.
- Speak to your pediatrician to discuss possible health problems, allergies, or other medical issues.
- Reach out to a mental health professional, community elder, or family support service if concerns persist.