

Childhood Stress

October 2008

Parenting *Rules!*

Being a parent takes a lot of energy and time. Many parents feel stressed by the daily pressures of parenting. In addition to job and household responsibilities, parents are often rushing around to meet the needs of their children. Doctor's appointments. Ballet lessons. Homework. Soccer practice. School projects. Girl Scouts. Baseball games. Art lessons. It's enough to make a parent emotionally and physically exhausted.

Children feel stress too! We often forget that our children may also be feeling the stress of this demanding schedule. Adults need to be aware that childhood comes with its own demands and pressure. Our highly competitive society often adds to a child's stress.

Would you recognize if your child was being affected by stress?

Here are some things to look for:

- ✓ Recurring headaches and/or stomach aches
- ✓ Trouble sleeping and/or nightmares
- ✓ Changes in eating habits
- ✓ Excessive crying and/or whining
- ✓ Aggressive or stubborn behavior
- ✓ Inability to control emotions
- ✓ Unwillingness to participate in school or after school activities



The following pages of this issue of *Parenting Rules* are full of tips to help your children and family deal with stress. Learn how to take action to reduce the amount of undue pressure and demands on your daily schedule.....

For more information on dealing with stress and anxiety, contact:

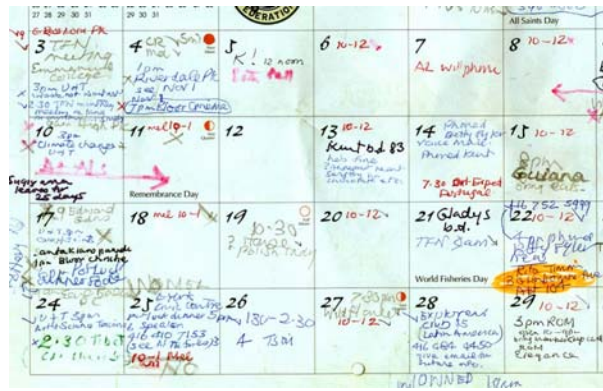
Mental Health Association of Rhode Island
500 Prospect Street Pawtucket, RI 02860
401-726-2285 www.mhari.org

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Over-scheduling....



After school activities such as Scouts, sports and karate lessons can be a great way for kids to develop a sense of self and learn to socialize. However, too many of these activities can lead to “over-scheduling stress”.

Be careful not to over-schedule.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recently released a report stating that unstructured playtime is an important part of childhood

development. Children need “free time” to become creative thinkers, discover their own interests, develop social skills and have time to relax.

Dr. David Elkind, psychologist and educator, says that children do not need to be in any organized activities before age 6 or 7. His rule of thumb is that children should be in no more than three activities and should only go for one hour to each one each week. He also believes that it is inappropriate for elementary school children to go to sports/art practices every day of the week.

Tips for avoiding over-scheduling your family:

- ⇒ If you are feeling stress from your family's hectic schedule, **it means you need to change the schedule.**
- ⇒ Leave lots of time in your schedule for “**family time**”. Be sure you have time to eat **dinner together, play games, talk and have fun.**
- ⇒ **Your child needs alone time** to daydream and learn to entertain him/herself.
- ⇒ **Limit the amount of activities** you sign your children up for. Keep Dr. Elkind's guidelines in mind.
- ⇒ Remember that your child's **activities should be for fun** and enrichment. Do not put pressure on your children to overachieve or “be the best”.
- ⇒ Make sure the activities your children participate in are **because they are interested in them** and not because you want them to.

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School Stress...

With standardized testing now being the rule by which we measure a student's academic success, many children are feeling the pressure of perfection. Even young children may experience fear of failure. In addition to the pressure to perform on these tests, government regulations are requiring teachers to give more homework than ever.



Parents can relieve some of this stress and help their children be happy, successful learners.

Here are some tips on helping your child be successful at school:

- Be sure your kids get **plenty of sleep** and a nutritious breakfast.
- **Don't over-schedule** your child's after school time. Be sure to leave plenty of time for homework and relaxation.
- Provide a **quiet place** without distractions to do homework.
- **Be available** to help your child study for tests or answer homework questions.
- **Identify your child's learning style** and help him/her to develop a way to study that will be to his/her advantage.
- **Teach your child to be organized.** Teaching them organizational skills, such as using folders, early on will help them to grow into organized adults.
- **Praise your child for successes!**
- **Keep in contact** with your child's teachers so that you will be informed immediately of any difficulties your child may be having.
- Help your child to set **realistic goals** for their age and abilities.
- If your child brings home a poor grade, calmly talk to him/her about what you can do **together** to make it better.
- Emphasize that "**doing their best**" is what's most important, not being perfect.

For more information of children's learning styles, visit:
<http://parentcenter.babycenter.com/child-learning-styles>

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Social Pressure....



When you ask any kid what is most important to them they will probably tell you that **popularity** is on the top of their list. All children want to “fit in” and be part of a group of friends. Your child’s social life can have a big influence on his/her academic success and general outlook. Children who feel accepted by peers tend to have higher self-esteem and do better in school. Feelings of being left out or rejected can lead many children to experience poor self-worth, depression and low motivation to do well in school.

How can parents help their kids develop social skills?

Ways you can help your children to develop good relationships with their peers are:

- ❖ Teach your children to treat others as they would like to be treated.
- ❖ Set a good example by being kind and respectful of others.
- ❖ Get to know the other parents at your child’s school.
- ❖ Let your child know that she/he does not need to be the most popular person in school, that having one or two good friends is more important.
- ❖ Encourage your child to invite his/her friend over and plan an activity, such a baking cookies or doing a craft.
- ❖ Sign your child up for an after school activity where he/she can meet kids with similar interests.
- ❖ Be available to listen to your child and his/her concerns and feelings.
- ❖ Don’t jump in to solve your children’s difficulties with friends. Talk with them about ways to solve the problem on their own.
- ❖ If you feel your child is being bullied at school, contact his/her teacher immediately.

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Resources for Parents....

Prevent Child Abuse Rhode Island

500 Prospect Street Pawtucket, RI 02860

401-728-7920

www.preventchildabuse-ri.org

Rhode Island Parent Information Network

175 Main Street Pawtucket, RI 02860

401-727-4144

www.ripin.org

Rhode Island Department of Education

255 Westminster Street Providence, RI 02903

401-222-4600

www.ride.ri.gov

www.hyper-parenting.com

www.kidshealth.org

www.teacherandfamilies.com

www.thesuccessfulparent.com

www.familiesonthego.org

ABOUT PARENTING RULES! E-NEWS...



Prevent Child Abuse
Rhode Island

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Please share this information with the
families in your programs. Thank you!