



Stop stressing the kids!

And find your own piece of mind in the process

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Stop all the rushing, the stressing, the screaming.

Hyper active lives are taking a toll on families. Kids are missing out on an essential life ingredient - relaxed downtime, says Dr. Charlotte Reznick.

"When every member of the family is busy doing a separate activity, individual members may be getting enriched, but the family experience as a whole is diminished," says the psychologist and author.

Parents work, kids do scheduled activities – there's little family time without pressure," says Reznick. "Even on weekends, instead of Saturday morning being a leisurely fun time - lounging around in PJs, hanging out around the breakfast table being silly with each other - everyone is rushing in all directions.

"One parent is taking the son to a soccer game, the other parent the daughter to her swim meet, then there's art class, baseball practice, play rehearsal, karate,

extra tutoring, dance, and more!"

Adds Reznick: "By the time the family meets up for dinner, everyone's exhausted and irritable."

The child educator is not bashing creative and athletic pursuits. "It's the amount and intensity that become overwhelming."

All the rushing makes for short fuses – and short tempers. "When parents are reduced to yelling at their child to get compliance, behaving just like a child who is throwing a tantrum to get his or her way, they lower self-esteem by sacrificing adult standing in their own eyes as well as losing respect and in the eyes of their child," says Dr. Carl Pickhardt.

Although tantrums command attention and may force agreement, you don't want your kids throwing tantrums, so you have to outgrow the temptation to throw one too, says Pickhardt, author of *Stop the Screaming*.

"While parents think they are showing they are serious about what they are saying, they are really just showing helpless desperation at not getting their way," he says.

Instead of clamour, use calmness, says Pickhardt, of carlpickhardt.com. Speak softly.

Kids also thrive on patience, listening and love, says Reznick, who adds that stress on children and teens is worsening every year.

"We're in the information age and that means there's an exponential increase in what kids are learning in school and in the amount of stimulation coming at them from the outside than was true a generation ago."

The problem is that stress-relieving activities - reading books, taking walks, hot baths, watching the sunset, meditation, and other nonelectric or digital activities - are not even part of most kids' experience anymore, says Reznick, of imageryforkids.com.

"There are so many more social interaction opportunities in our computer age, but not all of them promote meaningful connection - which is another potential outlet for stress," she says, adding that there's more stress and anxiety for kids today, and fewer ways to work through it.

What kids need from parents

The world according to Dr. Charlotte Reznick: Here's what kids most want and need from their parents. Practice these important elements for healthier, happier children and a thriving family:

Patience. Things take time! "Parents get impatient when they expect kids to do things the way they want them done or think they should be done - e.g., faster, more skillfully, in a different style, like other kids do it, like they learned how, etc." says Reznick. "Remind yourself that your child is exactly where she needs to be, and is doing things exactly the way she needs to do them given her unique temperament."

Understanding. "Childhood is a profound and challenging time, yet we quickly forget what it's like to be a kid," says Reznick. She recommends asking yourself these questions: How did I feel at that age? Did I behave in a similar way? What could my parents have said or done differently that would have really helped me? "By understanding how he feels and why he does what he does, you can become the true coach on his life team," she adds.

Listening. Parents are so used to telling kids what to do or relaying practical information that they don't spend a lot of time letting kids talk. "Cars are great places for conversations. So are waiting rooms in the dentist or doctor's office. Best of all, before bed." For uncommunicative kids, ask an open-ended question like "what happened at school today that was interesting?" Or ask her opinion about a world event. "Most important, don't talk. Just listen."

Soft voices. If you think yelling a command would make your child hear you better, think again. "Children hear your anger and may not even hear what you are trying to say. Many children have told me that when their parents speak softly, it makes them want to listen and pay attention."

Structure. Having rules and routines actually makes kids feel happier and more secure. It's your job to set boundaries and help kids make their own judgments about everything. Another aspect to structure is rituals. "If you turn events into rituals - the bedtime story at night, or the share-a-joke time at dinner - it makes structure enjoyable and kids look forward to these regular times in their day."

Love. Don't assume because you love your child, your child feels loved. "Children often internalize your reactions (e.g., anger) or emotions (e.g., depression) and think they are the cause of them," she says, adding that it's essential to tell and show your child on a regular basis how much you love her. "Teenagers, by the way, are not too old to hug and kiss."

Role models. Kids do what you do, not what you say. "Have a balanced life, good relationships, and a solid work ethic. Be healthy and emotionally aware. Be kind, generous and honest," says Reznick. "Whatever traits you hope your child grows up with are the ones you need to be modeling yourself - right now - as he's maturing and incorporating everything you do."

Family and extended family. You are not enough – kids benefit from loving and being loved by other family members. "If you don't have family nearby, give her an opportunity to spend alone time with adult friends or neighbours," she says. "As kids grow up, they discover that a friend's mom is easier to talk to about being bullied than you are, or that an uncle has some great advice about dating or competing in sports."

Consistency. Consistency builds trust. Kids want and need to know that if you say you'll do something, you'll follow through. "When a child feels he can count on you, he will model that kind of behaviour with his peers - and as an adult. You don't have to be rigid to be consistent."

Freedom connected to responsibility. Kids can't learn responsible behaviour until they are made accountable. "You need to allow kids to try things as long as they understand the ground rules - and the consequences. For example, you can tell a young child he can go the store with just a friend (freedom) as long as he is home in one hour and brings back the change (responsibility)," she says. "Every time you allow your child to succeed, it reinforces his desire to be responsible - so he can get more freedom."

'Balloon breath'

Turn the stress down with a simple meditative technique called "the balloon breath." Learn how and then teach it to your children, suggests Dr. Charlotte Reznick. "Balloon breath is great way for everyone to become centred and calm so you can respond rather than react to a situation."

Here's how to do it: "Imagine a deflated balloon in your belly - about two to three inches below your navel. Slowly breathe into it to a count of 1...2...3... and feel that lower belly expand and flatten as you slowly breathe out to a count of 1...2...3..."

Start with three breaths and work your way up to a minute. Next try to reach three minutes. "Like all skills, it takes a bit of practice. So keep at it."

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