As parents and caretakers, adults often view the world of children and adolescents as happy and carefree. But children, and even very young children, worry and feel stress to some degree.

WHAT IS STRESS?
Stress is the result of demands and the ability to meet those demands. Children can feel overwhelmed at times. Toddlers may feel overwhelmed when separated from parents. School-aged children may feel overwhelmed while preparing for exams. A nervous stomach, sweaty palms and tense shoulders may be symptoms adults remember when they think of feelings they once experienced while taking exams. As children get older, academic and social pressures create stress. Parents can also cause stress in children's lives. High-achieving parents may expect the same level of achievement from their children. Those children who lack their parents' motivation or capabilities may feel frustrated and become stressed.

SOME OF THE CAUSES OF STRESS IN CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS
Changes in lifestyle and disruptions in the normal routine of people in all age groups can bring about stress. For children and adolescents some of the causes include:

• Changing schools
• Problems with peers
• Injuries or severe illness
• Recent move to a new home
• Loss of anything valuable to the child
• Parents' divorce, separation or marital conflict
• Inadequate physical resources-food, clothing, shelter, etc.
• Recent death of a loved one-parent, grandparent, sibling, friend
• Constant fatigue brought about by inadequate rest, sleep or recreation
• Regular conflict between your child and another family member, close friend or school teacher

SIGNS OF STRESS IN CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS
A certain amount of stress is normal and not always bad. Unfortunately, children are becoming stressed at younger and younger ages today. Stress varies from child to child, and how much stress one can easily handle varies, too. Sometimes stress can push a child on to greater achievement. But excessive stress can be self-defeating. Signs of too much stress in a child's or adolescent's life include the following:
WHAT PARENTS CAN DO
Promoting a stress-free lifestyle can help children feel competent and self-confident, traits that inspire success in life and in learning. The biggest stress reducer for children is good parenting. Children can become resilient and acquire the skills to bounce back from stressful situations. Parents can help create resiliency in children by taking the following steps:\textsuperscript{5,6}

- Be sensitive to the child's feelings and let him/her know that you recognize that he/she has a problem.
- Be prepared to protect the child from the stressor.
- Show signs of affection such as hugs and more hugs.
- Spend time with your child to foster a healthy and supportive family relationship.
- Learn and teach the child anger management and conflict resolution skills.
- Include laughter, fun, meditation and exercise in the child's daily life.
- Encourage and praise the child for things he/she does well.
- Put as much order and consistency in the child's life as possible.
- Have realistic expectations for your child.
- Reassure the child that all kids have pressures and fears and he/she is not alone.
- Let your child express his/her feelings.
- Provide a spiritual or religious base for the child.
- Use non-punitive methods of discipline.
- Help the child build friendships that support him/her.
- Encourage healthy patterns of eating and sleeping.
- Teach relaxation and meditation techniques.
- Encourage daily physical activity.

Signs of stress in children should be taken seriously, because stress can lead to problems in school and affect a child's social and cognitive development.

References