



# **House of Protection's Stress & Coping Toolkit for Parents**

*Equipping Parents with Practical Tools to Help their Children*



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## INTRODUCTION

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As adults, we spend a lifetime learning how to navigate stress, often struggling to manage it well. We feel the weight of chronic pressure and see how it affects our mental, emotional, and physical health. Sadly, our children are facing their own stressors too—long before they have the skills to handle them.

For more than 20 years, House of Protection, Inc. has partnered with parents to strengthen and support their families. This toolkit was created to equip parents with practical tools to help their children and teens learn how to manage stress more effectively.

If you missed our ***Helping Children Thrive: Practical Stress and Coping Skills for Any Age*** workshop you can view it at <https://youtu.be/ve-csCvgRT8?si=NMIwQEPtBKG0OdYF> or by scanning the QR Code.

In this workshop, our CEO and Founder, Suzanne Marcellus, was joined by Dr. Josya Charles, Mrs. Marcella Holness and Minister Natasha Dickens. Dr. Charles, MD, is a board-certified Family Medicine physician as well as a love and dating coach who helps single professional women date with purpose so they can meet their husband. Mrs. Holness is Higher Education Leader and President of Village Builders, a full-service construction firm she founded. Under her leadership, the firm provides end-to-end building solutions for residential and commercial clients, reflecting her entrepreneurial vision and her dedication to building lasting value. Min. Dickens is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor (LMHC), a licensed minister with the United Pentecostal Church International (UPCI), and an author. Guided by her faith, she is committed to equipping families with practical tools that inspire resilience, hope, and healthy development.





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## WHAT IS STRESS?

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*Stress is the body's reaction to a threat, challenge, or any physical or psychological barrier.* It can make a person feel overwhelmed or unable to cope with mental or emotional pressure. Children experience different stressors at every stage of development. Sometimes adults dismiss these stressors as small or insignificant because they compare their child's concerns to their own. For example, a high school student may feel intense pressure while preparing for an exam or choosing a college. A middle schooler may worry about fitting in with peers. An elementary-age child may feel stressed if they believe they aren't as smart as a classmate because of a lower grade. Meanwhile, you as the parent may be stressed about paying bills and providing for your family. When we weigh these situations side-by-side, it becomes easy to minimize a child's emotions. But the truth is, our bodies do not distinguish between "big" and "small" stressors. At any age, we respond to what we *perceive* as stressful. Knowing this, it is essential for parents to validate their children's feelings and create a safe space for them to talk. When children trust that we will listen and guide them toward healthy solutions, they are more likely to share rather than hide what they are experiencing.

Below are a few warning signs that your child may be struggling to manage stress effectively.

- Frequent headaches or stomachaches.
- Has major changes in eating or sleeping.
- Increase in irritability or anger.
- Withdrawing from family or friends.
- Loss of interest in favorite activities.
- Difficulty concentrating.
- Declining school performance.
- Increase in crying or sadness.
- Excessive worry or fear.
- Perfectionism or fear of failure.
- Spending significantly more time on screens.
- Talking negatively about themselves.
- Changes in behavior at home or school
- Experiences persistent sadness or anxiety for several weeks.
- Avoids school or social situations because of fear.
- Expresses hopelessness.
- Talks about hurting themselves or others.
- Experiences panic attacks.
- Has significant behavioral changes.
- Intense emotional reactions or meltdowns over seemingly "small issues".

**If these symptoms become severe, continue over time, or include any thoughts of self-harm, seek professional help right away. Your pediatrician should be your first point of contact; he or she can determine whether your child needs support from a therapist, psychologist, or psychiatrist. If your child is experiencing suicidal thoughts or a mental health crisis, contact the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline by calling or texting 988.**



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## FAMILY CONVERSATION STARTERS

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Here are a few suggestions, to encourage healthier communication with your child(ren).

Instead of asking: "How was school?" or "How was your day?"

Try asking:

- What made you smile today?
- Was anything hard today?
- What is the hardest thing about school?
- What challenged you today?
- What are you worried about?
- What made you proud today?
- How can I support you this week?
- What do you wish adults understood?
- What is one thing you're thankful for today?
- What makes you feel better when you're upset?
- Was anyone kind to you today?
- Were you kind to anyone today?
- Did anything make you uncomfortable today? How did you handle it?
- When you make a mistake, are you able to repair things so that you end up feeling ok? What is the hardest part of repairing things?
- What is the best way for me to help you when you feel grumpy?

Some of the questions were taken from [280 Family Conversation Starters: Deep Questions Kids & Teens Actually Answer](http://www.peacefulparenthappykids.com/read/family-discussions) (www.peacefulparenthappykids.com/read/family-discussions), more questions can be found on their website.



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## DAILY COPING SKILLS YOU CAN TEACH YOUR CHILDREN

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### **Ages 5–8**

- ✓ Practice belly breathing
- ✓ Read a favorite book
- ✓ Draw or color feelings
- ✓ Go outside and play
- ✓ Give a hug
- ✓ Pray together
- ✓ Listen to calming music
- ✓ Use a feelings chart

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### **Ages 9–12**

- ✓ Write in a journal
- ✓ Pray and meditate on scripture (See Scripture List)
- ✓ Exercise for 30 minutes
- ✓ Practice gratitude
- ✓ Talk with a trusted adult
- ✓ Limit screen time
- ✓ Deep breathing
- ✓ Positive self-talk
- ✓ Spend time with friends

### **JOURNALING PROMPTS**

Draw what made you happy today.  
What made you feel brave?  
Who helped you today?  
What are you thankful for?

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### **Teens**

- ✓ Exercise regularly
- ✓ Journal thoughts
- ✓ Pray and meditate on scripture (See Scripture List)
- ✓ Listen to uplifting music
- ✓ Take breaks from social media
- ✓ Get enough sleep
- ✓ Talk to someone you trust
- ✓ Practice time management

### **JOURNALING PROMPTS**

What is causing me stress?  
What can I control?  
What do I need today?  
Who can I ask for help?  
What is one small step I can take?



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## DAILY COPING SKILLS YOU CAN TEACH YOUR COLLEGE STUDENT

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- ✓ Build a weekly schedule
- ✓ Journal thoughts (Identify source of stress)
- ✓ Pray and meditate on scripture (See Scripture List)
- ✓ Prioritize sleep
- ✓ Stay connected with family
- ✓ Find a campus community
- ✓ Use counseling services if needed
- ✓ Exercise
- ✓ Eat balanced meals
- ✓ Ask for help early
- ✓ Deep Breathing
- ✓ Breaks from electronic devices/social media/news
- ✓ Utilize a stress ball if needed
- ✓ Short walks outside
- ✓ Drink a cup of warm lavender or chamomile tea
- ✓ Get a massage
- ✓ Aromatherapy (inhaling essential oils or diluting them to massage on skin)
- ✓ Take a warm shower to relax
- ✓ Take a cold shower for a mental reset
- ✓ Listen to calming music



## CALMING TECHNIQUES FOR ALL AGES

The **5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Exercise** was developed by behavioral therapist Betty Alice Erickson in 1973. This can help calm anxious thoughts and bring attention back to the present. You can do this together with your younger children and teach your older children to do this as often as necessary.

Find:

- 5 things you can see and say out loud “I see...”, while breathing slowly and deeply.
- 4 things you can touch- be intentional about touching these 4 things and say out loud “I feel...” while breathing slowly and deeply.
- 3 things you can hear and say out loud “I hear...” while breathing slowly and deeply.
- 2 things you can smell and say out loud “I smell...” while breathing slowly and deeply.
- 1 thing you can taste and say out loud “I taste...” while breathing slowly and deeply.

Dr. Daniel Amen recommends the following **Deep Breathing Exercise**:

1. Breathe slowly and deeply from your diaphragm.
2. Inhale for 4 seconds, hold it for 1 second.
3. Exhale for 8 seconds, hold it for 1 second.

# Diaphragmatic Breathing

Breathe deep. Feel calm. You've got this! 

Diaphragmatic breathing helps your body relax by using your belly (diaphragm) to take slow, deep breaths.

**1 GET COMFY**  
Sit or lie down in a comfy position.  
  
One hand on your chest, one hand on your belly.

**2 BREATHE IN**  
Breathe in slowly through your nose for 4 seconds.  
  
Feel your belly rise up. Your chest stays calm.

**3 BREATHE OUT**  
Breathe out slowly through your mouth for 6 seconds.  
  
Feel your belly go down. Let all the stress out.

**4 REPEAT**  
Keep going! Breathe in and out slowly.  
  
Try 5–10 deep breaths. You're doing great!

**WHY IT HELPS**  
  
Calms your mind  
  
Reduces stress  
  
Helps you feel better

 Practice every day. Deep breaths help you stay calm, focused, and in control! 

Note: Image generated using ChatGPT from the prompt 'create a picture of diaphragmatic breathing for children'.

Phone: (954) 562-6776 • Email: [wecare@houseofprotection.org](mailto:wecare@houseofprotection.org) • [www.houseofprotection.org](http://www.houseofprotection.org) • EIN: 54-2153146

*A Refuge of Hope, Healing, and Transformation for Children and Families*





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## SCRIPTURES TO CALM THE HEART AND MIND

(Scriptures are taken from the CSB translation.)

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**When situations are challenging and don't always make sense, PEACE says trust in God's sovereignty, trust His plan for your life and ask Him to reveal it to you.**

*We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.*  
- Romans 8:28

*You will keep the mind that is dependent on you in perfect peace, for it is trusting in you. <sup>4</sup>Trust in the Lord forever, because in the Lord, the Lord himself, is an everlasting rock!- Isaiah 26:3-4*

*A person's heart plans his way, but the Lord determines his steps.- Proverbs 16:9*

*Let your eyes look forward; fix your gaze straight ahead. <sup>26</sup>Carefully consider the path for your feet, and all your ways will be established. <sup>27</sup>Don't turn to the right or to the left; keep your feet away from evil.- Proverbs 4:25-27*

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding; <sup>6</sup>in all your ways know him, and he will make your paths straight. <sup>7</sup>Don't be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil.- Proverbs 3:5-7*

*Answer me quickly, Lord; my spirit fails. Don't hide your face from me, or I will be like those going down to the Pit. <sup>8</sup>Let me experience your faithful love in the morning, for I trust in you. Reveal to me the way I should go because I appeal to you. <sup>9</sup>Rescue me from my enemies, Lord; I come to you for protection. - Psalm 143:7-9*

**When you feel overwhelmed, fearful and weak, PEACE says God is with You, you don't have to be afraid, He is your safety, your guide and your strength.**

*Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will help you; I will hold on to you with my righteous right hand.- Isaiah 41:10*

*The Lord is my shepherd; I have what I need. <sup>2</sup>He lets me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside quiet waters. <sup>3</sup>He renews my life; he leads me along the right paths for his name's sake. <sup>4</sup>Even when I go through the darkest valley, I fear no danger, for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me. - Psalm 23:1-4*

**When anxiety feels like a weighted jacket, remember encouraging words spoken to you and speak good things about yourself and your future. HUMILITY says, tell Jesus about all of your cares and leave them in His care; He will be your comfort and joy.**

*Anxiety in a person's heart weighs it down, but a good word cheers it up.- Proverbs 12:25*

*Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you at the proper time, <sup>7</sup>casting all your cares on him, because he cares about you.- 1 Peter 5:6-7*

*If I say, "My foot is slipping," your faithful love will support me, Lord. <sup>19</sup>When I am filled with cares, your comfort brings me joy.- Psalm 94:18-19*





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## SCRIPTURES TO CALM THE HEART AND MIND

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### JESUS SAID...

<sup>25</sup> “Therefore I tell you: Don’t worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Isn’t life more than food and the body more than clothing? <sup>26</sup> Consider the birds of the sky: They don’t sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren’t you worth more than they? <sup>27</sup> Can any of you add one moment to his life span<sup>[a]</sup> by worrying? <sup>28</sup> And why do you worry about clothes? Observe how the wildflowers of the field grow: They don’t labor or spin thread. <sup>29</sup> Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was adorned like one of these. <sup>30</sup> If that’s how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, won’t he do much more for you—you of little faith? <sup>31</sup> So don’t worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ <sup>32</sup> For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. <sup>33</sup> But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you. <sup>34</sup> Therefore don’t worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.- Matthew 6:25-34

The Apostle Paul teaches us what to do with our stressors in Philippians 4:6-8.

<sup>6</sup> Don’t worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is **true**, whatever is **honorable**, whatever is **just**, whatever is **pure**, whatever is **lovely**, whatever is **commendable**—if there is any **moral excellence** and if there is anything **praiseworthy**— **dwell on these things**.

**STEP 1** - Instead of worrying, talk to God about each concern (stressor).

**STEP 2** - Thank Him for who He is and what He can do.

**STEP 3** - Ask Him, in faith, for what you need.

**STEP 4** - Be confident that His Peace will protect your heart and mind in Christ Jesus.

**STEP 5** - Take control of negative thought cycles by intentionally replacing them with positive & uplifting thoughts.