

Kids Have Stress Too!®

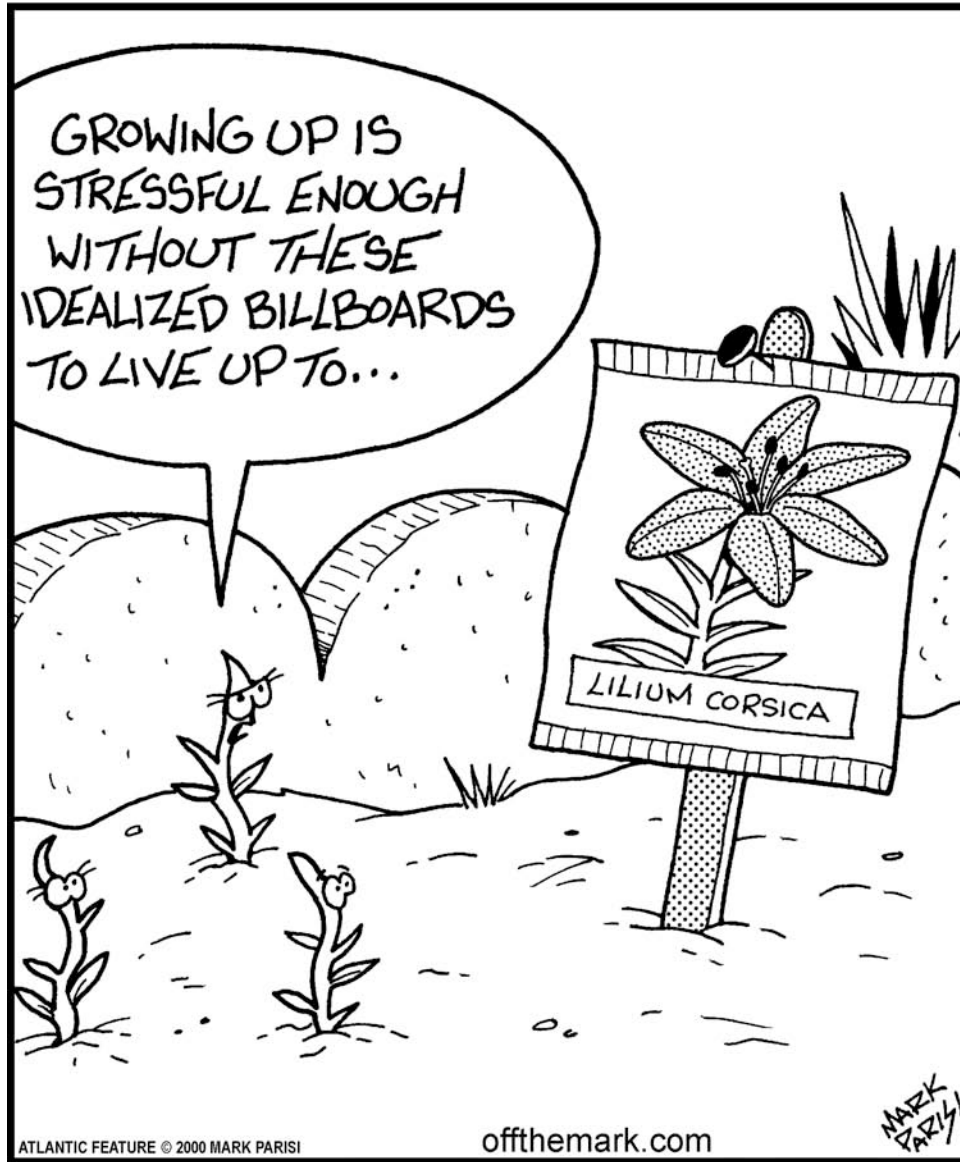
A Program of The Psychology Foundation of Canada



THE PSYCHOLOGY
FOUNDATION
OF CANADA

LA FONDATION
DE PSYCHOLOGIE
DU CANADA





The Psychology Foundation of Canada

National voluntary organization dedicated to helping families prevent and cope with the stresses of daily life

Our mission: Sharing sound psychological knowledge to better people's lives

Purpose of KHST! Program

- To support young children's social and emotional development
- To help practitioners help preschool children enhance their physical, mental, emotional and behavioural coping skills, thinking styles and other key abilities during the important window of opportunity of the preschool years



Background on Kids Have Stress Too!

KHST! was developed by the Psychology Foundation of Canada and Public Health practitioners in response to a need to equip parents and caregivers with knowledge and skills about children and stress.



Goals of Training

- To learn more about why stress is an issue
- To develop an understanding of, and comfort with, stress management skills for children in the early learning environment

Today's agenda

- Reducing Stress: Developmental Considerations
- The Physiology of Stress
- Key Concepts
- Stress Stoplight
- The Toolbox Activities

Why focus on kids and stress?

Stress is a normal part of everyday life – but too much stress can:

- make it more difficult for children to concentrate, to learn and to get along with others
- have a profound affect on children's health
- interfere with children's ability to focus, think and learn.

Research says that up to 90 % of illnesses are related to stress

Rationale for the program

“A child’s ability to cope with stress in the early years has consequences for physical and emotional health throughout life”.

National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2005)

Why focus on the early learning environment?

- Early experiences of young children form the foundation for later social and emotional development
- Each environment they spend time in has a powerful impact
- **You** can make a difference! Stable, responsive, nurturing relationships provide lifelong benefits for learning, development and health

Aims of the program

To empower children to:

- be able to recognize their own feelings of stress
- choose and apply a stress-reduction tool with assistance
- feel the positive result of being capable of doing something to effect change.

By using KHST! in your setting

You will help children to:

- gain a sense of control
- learn how to relax
- develop a “can-do attitude
- build capacity for self-regulation



Feedback from those who have used KHST!

“If all educators of young children were aware of and implemented KHST! consistently in their programs, children would have a strong basis for self awareness, self-regulation, emotional literacy and social competence.”

Jan Blaxall, Faculty of Early Childhood Education, Fanshawe College, ON

Stress 101

- Stress is the way our body responds to the demands that are placed upon us by the environment, our relationships and our perceptions, and the way we interpret those demands.
- What creates stress is not so much the event as the way in which we react to it.



Stress 101

- Stress is normal
- Stress is part of daily life
- Stress can be traumatic or toxic if it overwhelms our ability to cope
- The way we respond to stress is not fixed, but can be influenced by learning stress-management and coping strategies

Let's talk about Stress

In pairs, share with your partner some minor thing that has caused you stress in the last two weeks.

- Why was it stressful?
- How did you feel physically?
- How did you deal with it?

Reducing Stress: Developmental Considerations

Key aspects of child development that relate to stress

- Social-emotional development
- Attachment
- Self-regulation
- Temperament
- Gender differences
- Self-esteem
- Resilience



Social-emotional development

Core features of emotional development include the ability to:

- identify and understand one's own feelings
- accurately read and understand emotional states in others
- manage strong emotions and express them in a constructive manner
- regulate one's own behaviour
- establish empathy for others
- establish and sustain relationships.

Attachment

- Attachment refers to the degree of trust or security that children develop with their caregivers
- Attachment is affected by:
 - responsiveness of parent/caregiver
 - “goodness of fit”

Self-regulation

- The ability to manage thoughts, feelings, needs
- Operates over several domains, including biological, emotional, cognitive and social



Temperament

- A set of traits we are born with that influence how our personalities develop
- Besides personality, also has physiological components, such as sensitivity, activity level, adaptability, etc.
- An important factor in determining kids' responses to stress
- Caregivers can have a positive impact by sensitively supporting all children to adapt successfully to different situations in the early learning environment.

Gender differences

- Inherent differences in boy's and girls brains present from birth – genetics, not just hormones
- Has implications for how girls and boys process emotion – boys tend to be less interested than girls in talking about feelings

Self esteem

- the way we interact with children on a daily basis influences the picture that they construct of themselves
- receiving positive feedback helps children to internalize positive thoughts about themselves and build self-esteem
- is built on realistic feedback and praise for effort and achievement



Resilience

- the ability to address and overcome adversity and daily challenges
- factors associated with resilience include positive stress management, relationships, community, culture, physical environment and thinking styles
- thinking style plays a ***critical*** role in resilience

The Physiology of Stress

Positive Stress

Positive Stress – just a little is enough to be:

- Energizing
- Motivating
- Stimulating
- Sufficiently challenging
- Performance enhancing
- Helpful in facing physical danger

Tolerable Stress

- Stress responses that could effect brain structure but generally happen for briefer periods of time, allowing time for the brain to recover
- Can be triggered by unhappy or difficult experiences or events

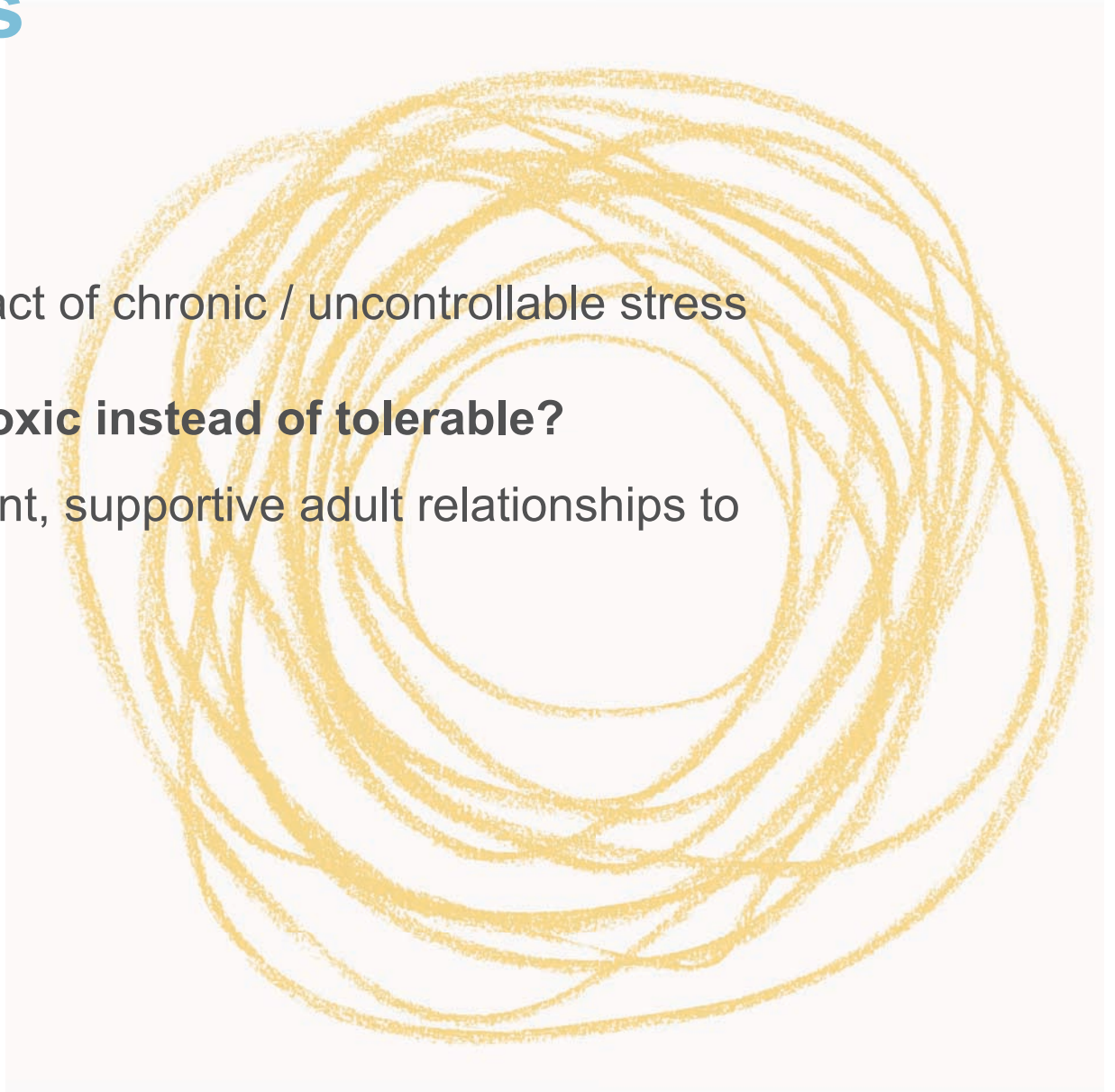
Toxic stress

Toxic stress

- can result from impact of chronic / uncontrollable stress

What makes stress toxic instead of tolerable?

- absence of consistent, supportive adult relationships to help child cope



The Stress Response

- Body's response to any demand placed on it
- Fight or flight (freeze – stress can immobilize)
- Brings on chemical and hormonal changes
- Initial adrenaline surge followed by elevated cortisol levels

Adrenaline

- Triggers the “fight or flight” response
- Fast acting hormone that prepares body for quick response
- Causes physical changes:
 - Increased heart rate, blood pressure, muscle tension
 - Energy surge
- Adrenaline acts and dissipates quickly

Cortisol

- Released after adrenaline
- Can stay in body for minutes or hours, and in severe situations, for days
- Keeps the body 'on alert'



Long Term Effects of Elevated Cortisol on Children

Children with prolonged elevated cortisol levels may:

- get sick more often
- be more accident prone
- have memory problems
- have difficulties socializing with peers
- lowered school performance

Perception and Stress

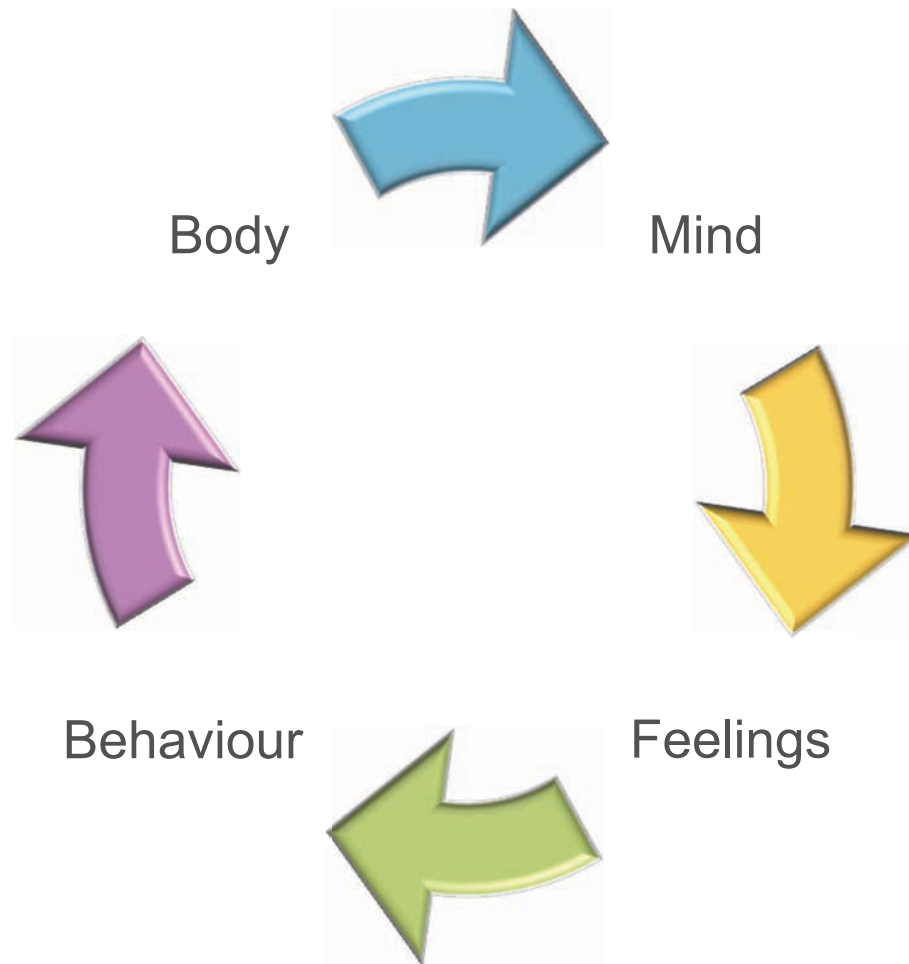
- What creates stress is not so much the event as the way in which we react to it
- Children's perception of their ability to cope – catastrophic thinking



Stressors in Children

1. Stressors – what are they?
2. Signs and symptoms of stress
3. Strategies that kids use on their own
4. Strategies that practitioners can use

Body/Mind/Feelings Connection



Putting feelings into words – Why it matters:

- translating an emotional experience into words – either by talking or writing – alters the way we experience those feelings
- produces therapeutic effects on the brain – by talking about it, we reduce our physical reactions to stress



Key Concepts of KHST!

1. Early Childhood Practitioners, parents and caregivers can help children learn ways to manage stress.
2. There are signs and symptoms of too much stress.
3. Relaxation strategies can reduce a child's reaction to stress.
4. With help, children can learn to solve problems.
5. Children who can recognize, acknowledge and express their feelings appropriately, cope better with stress.
6. There are some simple ways to create a less stressful environment for children.
7. When children speak harshly or critically to themselves, they create more stress. Using their positive voice can lower stress.
8. Physical activity is a proven strategy for coping with stress and promoting self-regulation.

Stress Stoplight

Provides a familiar image that helps us to explain to young children the three stages of stress reduction:

Red Light: STOP – “Red Alert” for recognizing stress symptoms

Yellow Light: CHANGE – Dealing with the stress and using tools in their toolbox

Green Light: GO – feeling that stress is alleviated. Feeling better, increased energy, well-being, more relaxed, in control and ready to go



Strategies for reducing stress

- Prevention Strategies
- Symptom Reduction
- Problem Solving
- Adaptation Response



Toolbox Activities

1. Things That Upset or Stress a Child
2. Stop! Look! Listen!
3. Quick Ways to Relax
4. The “What If?” Game
5. Problem Solving: Teaching Children the Steps
6. A Child’s Life in the Early Childhood Program
7. Taking Care of Me
8. Talking Nicely to Myself
9. Fun and Easy Ways to Get Moving

Stress Strategies: Prevention

- Recognize stresses in the environment
- Recognize signs of stress in the child: mind, body, feelings, behaviour
- Self care: sleep, nutrition, physical activity, loving relationships
- Toolbox activities 1,2 & 6

Stress Strategies: Symptom Reduction

- Includes ways to calm the body and mind
- Helps us move from a highly emotional state to a rational one
- Use activities like deep breathing and stretching
- Toolbox activities 3, 7 and 9

Stress Strategies: Problem Solving

- Problems create stress and resolving problems reduces stress.
- Learning to problem solve gives children a tool to gain some emotional control, to know they have choices and to help effect positive outcomes.
- Toolbox activities 4 & 5

Stress Strategies: Adaptation

- Minimizes the impact of a stressor that can't be avoided
 - perception and stress – putting stressors in perspective
 - using the Positive Voice
 - imagination and relaxation
- Toolbox activities 7 & 8



Toolbox Activity demonstrations

- 5 minutes to prepare
- In small groups, discuss ways you could apply this activity to your setting
- Group sharing

Helping children learn KHST! strategies

- Draw links to familiar concepts
- Consider developmental stages
- Make believe
- Repetition
- Help children find solutions
- Role model
- Plan
- Integrate



Congrats on doing what you can for kids ...what about their parents?

- The ideas in the program can be used with parents as well:
 - through toolbox activities
 - Sharing the parent booklet
 - Parent workshops, newsletters, website content
- Other information for parents: what would be most useful to you?

Sites with more to offer

- Centre of Excellence for Early Child Development
www.excellence-earlychildhood.ca
- Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development
www.child-encyclopedia.com
- Offord Centre for Child Studies
www.offordcentre.com
- Canadian Child Care Federation
www.cccf-fcsge.ca
- A Place of Our Own
<http://aplaceofourown.org>
- Reaching In Reaching Out
www.reachinginreachingout.com

Related programs from the Psychology Foundation –

Parenting for Life: award-winning Canadian public education program to promote positive parenting skills and the well-being of families

Booklets: Kids Can Cope: Parenting resilient children at home and at school; Kids Have Stress Too! Ideas, tips and strategies for parents of preschoolers

Want more information?

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www.kidshavestresstoo.org