**Strategies Parents and Counselors Use to Help Children Work Through Stress**

**Visualize a quiet place**.. Ask your child to close their eyes and picture a calm, peaceful place. Then, gently guide them to slowly start to build up a picture of how it looks, smells, and feels to be there. **Lower, Middle, Upper**

**Drink water**. Dehydration has been [linked to a reduction in mental performance](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00039896.1988.9934367). Pour your child a tall glass of cold water and have them sip it slowly. You can try this with them, and observe the calming effect this has on your own nervous system.

**Lower, Middle, Upper**

**Sing out loud**. The physical act of singing out loud, even if it is off key, has been shown to release endorphins, the “feel good” chemical in the brain. **Lower**

**Do the “Downward Facing Dog” pose**.Helps reset the autonomic nervous system, the yoga pose known as Downward Facing Dog in particular has the added benefit of activating several muscles in the arms, legs, and core. This stretch helps muscles begin to burn additional blood glucose that is made available by the body’s fight or flight response. **Middle, Upper**

**Paint/Draw/ or Color it out**. Not only does painting give the brain something to focus on other than the stressor, but participating in [visual arts has been linked to resilience to stress in general](http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0101035#abstract0). If the thought of dragging out the tempera gives *you* stress, have your child try “painting” with shaving cream on a plastic shower curtain in the yard. Not only is clean up a breeze, but your child will smell great when they are finished.

**Lower, Middle, Upper**

**Count backwards from 100 or Count to 5.** Not only does counting give your child a chance to focus on something other than what is bothering them, counting backwards offers an added concentration challenge without overwhelming their brain. Just when it seems as though they “can’t take it anymore”, have your child close their eyes and count to five. **Lower**

**Talk it out**. For children who are able to verbalize their feelings, talking about what is bothering them gives them a chance to let you know what is going on while processing it for themselves. The trick is to resist the urge to “fix” the problem. Your child needs you to listen and ask appropriate questions, not offer unsolicited advice.

**Lower, Middle, Upper**

**Give or get a bear hug**. Hugging allows your body to produce oxytocin, a naturally occurring hormone in your body necessary for immune system function. Not only does a 20 second hug [reduce blood pressure, increase feelings of well-being, and reduce the harmful physical effects of stress](http://health.usnews.com/health-news/health-wellness/articles/2016-02-03/the-health-benefits-of-hugging), both you and your child will reap the benefits!

**Lower, Middle, Upper**

**Walk or Run**. A walk in nature has been proven to improve cognition and reduce stress. A 15 minute walk in nature works can be just what your child needs. Running has been shown to reduce stress, and can sometimes be more effective than a trip to the therapist’s office. Going for a 10 minute jog can not only affect your child’s mood immediately, its effects on their ability to cope with stress can last for several hours afterward.**Lower, Middle, Upper**

**Squish some putty and play with a fidget**. When a child plays with putty, the brain’s electrical impulses begin firing away from the areas associated with stress. Fidgets can help calm the mind when they are not sure of what to do or how they feel. **Lower, Middle, Upper**

**Write it out**. For older children, journaling, or writing their feelings down can have a profound effect on their mood, especially if they can do so without the fear of having it read. Give your child a notebook to keep in a safe place, and allow them to write about how they feel, assuring them you will not read it unless they ask you to. Journaling has been linked to [better performance in the classroom](http://jme.sagepub.com/content/early/2011/12/12/1052562911430062.abstract) as well as a reduction of stress outside of learning environments. Having a separate notebook only for things your child is grateful for will give them the freedom to keep their journaling activities separate.

**Lower, Middle, Upper**

**Name your emotion**. Often when children become overwhelmed, it is because they have difficulty identifying the negative thoughts they are having. Whether your child is quick to anger, panic, or obsess to ensure things are perfect, ask them to give this feeling a name, and help them talk back to it. For instance, by asking your child, “is Mr. Perfect bothering you again?” you can work together to help them challenge their perfectionism, rather than fight them over it. **Lower, Middle, Upper**

**Calm Down Space** Having a designated “Calm Down Space” in your home gives children an opportunity to retreat when they feel out of control and rejoin the group when they need to. It is important to make this space comfortable so your child wants to visit it when they are in need of a self-imposed “time out”. **Lower**

**Play music**. Music has a profound effect on mood, sleep, stress, and anxiety. Use a variety of musical styles to set the tone in your home, car, or your child’s room.Have a dance party. Adding a physical component to your musical enjoyment gets your kids moving and is a fun way to be active. **Lower, Middle, Upper**

**Do a yell into a pillow.** Sometimes all of your child’s emotions are simply too much to contain in their body. Have them stand with their feet shoulder width apart and imagine their feelings boiling up from their toes through their legs and body, and out of their mouths. They don’t have to yell words, or even maintain a certain pitch, just whatever comes out that feels good to them.**Lower, Middle, Upper**

**Plan a fun activity**. When you are in an anxious moment, it can seem as though the walls are closing in and the world will come to an end. Some children need to focus on what is ahead of them in order to reset their internal dialog. Plan something fun to do as a family, and let your child have a say in it. Any topic that will get them focused on a future something to look forward to can be helpful.**Lower, Middle, Upper**

**Make a Fort**- Creating and having a hiding comfortable space can give them freedom to talk or explore more options **Lower**

**Play a Game-** Connect Four, Chess, Emoji Uno or any fun two or more person game. Allowing them to play and win some can begin to create peace and confidence in a stressful situation. **Lower, Middle, Upper**

**Get Under a Weighted Blanket**- Helps to relieve anxiety and stress in the body by simulating a wrap of heavy love and hugs. **Lower, Middle, Upper**