

## Stress busters

**It's one of those days.** *Your alarm didn't go off so you had to rush to get ready in the morning before parents and children came, the kids were dawdling and almost missed the school bus, Johanna's mother forgot the diapers again, someone spilled the milk at breakfast, Samuel put crayon marks on the wall, it's raining and all the children are cranky and whining, and now a toddler is screaming because someone took his toy. Your heart beats faster, your shoulders and neck muscles get tighter, and you hear your voice getting louder. It's a day of major stress.*

### What can you do?

- A. Grin and bear it.
- B. Call parents to come and take their children home. NOW!
- C. Try some stress busters to calm down.

"C" is clearly the best answer for a stressful day.

Try some of these stress buster ideas to see what works for you.

### Go for a walk

Fresh air and exercise are good for you and the children for easing stress. It doesn't have to be a sunny day to take a walk with the children. Tell parents ahead of time that the children will be going outside every day. They should bring coats, hats, boots, etc. to dress children for the weather. If the children's chatter and whining are stressful to you, tell them you're going on a listening walk. Everyone needs to be very quiet to listen for things outside and you can take a few moments to enjoy the quiet. At the end of the walk, ask them what they heard.

### Sit back and enjoy a glass of water

Take a few minutes to pour yourself a glass of water. Add ice and a wedge of lemon if you like, and drink it slowly. A cool, refreshing drink may be just what you need to calm down and get back on track again.

### More muscle tensing

Find a quiet place to sit or lie down and close your eyes. Begin at the top of your body, tense your face muscles, hold for three seconds, then release. Move down and tense your neck muscles, hold, and release, then do your shoulders, and on down the body until you get to your toes.

## Deep breathing

Sit down, close your eyes, and take some deep breaths to relax. As you breathe in, make your muscles tense. Relax your muscles as you breathe out. The children may want to join you for these deep breathing exercises.

## Take a fantasy vacation

Relax in a chair with both feet on the ground. Close your eyes. Think about going away to a place you enjoy, such as a mountain meadow, a sunny beach, a beautiful garden, a cabin in the woods, etc. Relax there. Enjoy the feel of the sun, the fresh breeze, the soft grass or the sand under your feet. Enjoy the sounds of the wind, birds chirping, or the waves on the beach. You may want to pick flowers, walk in the waves, or gather shells. Enjoy your vacation for 10 to 15 minutes, then slowly return. It's a great place to visit whenever you need to relax.

## Be honest and talk about it

It's OK to talk with the children and tell them you're feeling stressed or angry. It's good for them to hear that children and adults can have bad days. You may want to say something like, "I'm having a hard day today. You can help me by letting me sit quietly for a few minutes."

## Find laughter

Finding things that make you laugh can quickly ease a stressful situation. Look beyond the mess to see some humor in life. You may want to get the children thinking about silly words or read a funny book to get everyone laughing and ease the stress.

## Sand and water play

Sensory activities, like sand, water, and play dough, are very calming for children and adults. The next time you're feeling stressed, get out some play dough to squeeze and pound. Lay an old shower curtain on the floor and set a pan of water or sand on it with some plastic cups. Pour and let them gently run through your fingers to calm your day. The children will want to join you in this calming activity for everyone.

## Be flexible

Sometimes we create more stress for ourselves by wanting things too neat, too perfect, or too organized. Think about what's most important during the day and focus on that. The world won't come to an end if you do the art activity tomorrow. The sun will still come up in the morning if you take the children outside for extra play time instead of another activity you had planned. Stop to smell the flowers, watch an airplane in the sky, or a bird building a nest.

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### Caution

When offering water play of any kind, constant supervision at an arm's length away or closer is needed. Young children can drown quickly (within thirty seconds) and in very shallow water (two inches). Mop up spills promptly to prevent slipping and falls.

To prevent the spread of disease water tables, basins, and other containers used for water play should be emptied immediately after use. Table liners and containers should be washed and sanitized daily. Children should wash their hands before and after water play.

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