

Could This Be Your Student?

Brad is a 16 year old who lives on a farm west of town. He's normally an easy going guy who loves to be in the middle of anything that's happening. Although Brad isn't a scholar he does well in his classes. But this year something is different. Brad hasn't been turning in his assignments. He's very moody and has even been in a couple of fights after school. What's going on with Brad?

Tiffany is 9 years old and her parents run the local cafe. It's usually a gathering spot for Tiffany and her friends after school. She's a bubbly, popular kid. The teachers can always count on her to participate in class discussions. Lately Tiffany has been going straight home after school. She cries easily over any little problem at school and doesn't speak up at all in class. What's the matter with Tiffany?

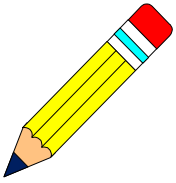
What's Causing The Stress

Brad and Tiffany may be behaving the way they are for a variety of reasons. Stress is a normal part of life and growing up. Kids all have unique personalities and they react to stress in their own, unpredictable ways. However, this year many families are facing stressful circumstances beyond what is normal in their lives.

This past year Iowa farm families experienced extremely low farm commodity prices while costs to produce crops and livestock stayed high. This, coupled with several years of weather related losses due to floods and extreme heat, creates difficult times resulting in lost incomes, high bills, stress and uncertainty for many families.

The economic effect doesn't stop on the farm. If farm families don't have income to spend, they don't buy seed, fertilizer or parts from the local supply business and they won't be selling a crop in the fall. They must often pick up additional work outside of their community taking inputs away from the local community. No money in the bank means they don't shop at the stores on main street, eat at the restaurants, or go to the movies. In turn, these businesses have lower sales which means less income. The cycle continues for families up and down the town streets and the country roads.

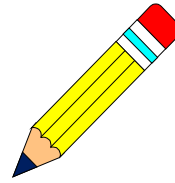
Financial concerns create stress on the whole family. Kids become anxious and upset when their family has a loss of income. They may hear their parents talking and arguing about money matters and see their stress. The kids will also react to that stress. It's important you realize that **you can make a difference**. No, you cannot change the conditions that the kids must deal with at home. But you can offer them a safe and accepting place to be while they are at school.



How You Know

Recognizing stress reactions in kids is not always easy. However, changes in behavior and personality are good clues that something is going on.

- Tired
trouble sleeping
- Fearful
afraid of things, not wanting to take risks
- Weight change
poor appetite or overeating
- Regression
reverting to immature behaviors
- Withdrawn behavior
sadness, crying
- Aggressive behavior
anger, hostility, blowups or temper
- Extreme compliance
wanting to please everyone
- Nervous habits
stuttering, nail biting, tics
- More illness
headaches, stomachaches
- Extremes of clothing
attention getting action
- Dull, dazed look
tendency to daydream, be far away



How You Can Help

Kids who are living in stressful situations at home, come to school with a load of worry. Here are some ways for you to be an active, guiding teacher.

- Greet each child warmly every day.
- Provide structure and a predictable routine.
- Be aware of nonverbal behaviors.
- Avoid putting a child in high pressure situations.
- Be emotionally and physically available for a child.
- Put yourself in the shoes of a child and remember what it was like to be his/her age.
- Eliminate stressful situations in your classroom.
- Model appropriate behavior for dealing with stress.
- Create situations in which a child can share feelings.
- Allow for developmental regression and individual differences.
- Provide open-ended activities that involve no possibility of failure.
- Value each child. What you say or don't say has a tremendous impact on a child.

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