

### Relationships: Making Choices

“What should we do about this?” Bill hands Sandy a flier about the first grade soccer team. Sandy sighs. “You know, I don’t really want to give up another night at home. But maybe if we take Evan right from child care to soccer and I bring the baby home and come back later to get you ...”

Young families want to do what’s best for their children. Jobs and child care already keep families apart much of every day and limit leisure time. Choosing how your hours together are spent helps your family understand its values and become stronger. Some activities don’t accomplish much for your child but they do make life more hectic. You can choose.

- Limit organized activities for young children.
- Ask yourself, “Will my child benefit from this activity, or is it for me?”
- Consider activities your family can do together.
- Do what is right for your family, not what everyone else is doing.

### Resource Management

Sara dreads another week of rushing to child care, work, and home just in time for the chaos of supper and bedtime. Even with Dan’s extra late-shift job they aren’t keeping up with the bills. And there’s no time to talk about it!

The most common complaints of young families revolve around not having enough money and not having enough time. Many families need two paychecks to make ends meet. When both adults work outside the home, the time available to meet family needs is even shorter.

There is no magic formula for managing either time or money. To be successful in managing your life:

- Set priorities. Agree on what things are most important in your life right now, and where you want to be in a year, five years, or 10 years down the road.

- Use your goals and priorities to make decisions about the use of money and time. If a proposed commitment is not consistent with your goals, do not accept it.
- Try to plan ahead for spending money and time (See *Using What You Have to Get What You Want*, Pm 1660h).
- Be realistic about what you can and cannot do. Plan for the interruptions that will occur with young children. Allow a cushion for unexpected expenditures. (See the series, *Money Mechanics*.)
- Start now to take charge of your retirement. There is every indication that Social Security will be decidedly different in 30 to 40 years, when you are ready to retire. Regular savings, as little as \$10 a month, begun when you are 25 will result in a larger retirement nest egg than a much larger amount saved when you are 50.

### Eat Well, Be Well

Sensible eating can help you and your children feel good physically and mentally. The good news is that good eating is simple.

You and your children need the same foods, but your child’s portions may be smaller than yours. Each day offer the following foods.

- 6 grain products (bread, muffins, bagels, cereal, rice, macaroni, etc.)
- 3 vegetables (potatoes, carrots, green beans, salads, vegetable juice, etc.)
- 2 fruits (juice, grapes, oranges, strawberries, whatever is in season)
- 3 dairy products (milk, yogurt, pudding, cheese)
- 2-3 meats or other protein-rich foods (chicken, beef, pork, fish, eggs, baked beans, etc.)
- Eat sweets occasionally, not every day.

Reduce stress-overeating by controlling the choices of foods in your home. If you don’t want your child (or yourself) to eat cookies, chips, or pop, don’t have them in the house. Keep a snack box filled with healthful choices such as whole grain crackers,

dried fruits, unsweetened cereal, pudding cups, grapes, baby carrots, cheese cubes, fruit cups, mini-bagels, and boxes of vegetable or fruit juice.

Reduce stress at mealtime by dividing eating responsibility between you and your child. Your responsibility is to provide nourishing food *at regular times*. Your child’s responsibility is to decide whether to eat and how much to eat. Ignore picky eating while offering *only healthful food choices*. Without competition from sweet foods, children will eat fruits, vegetables, and other wholesome foods.

### Stress and conflict

An overload of daily demands, or times of real crisis can result in lots of tension in your family. Learning ways to respond to conflicts between you and your spouse or others who share your responsibilities is a resource for taking charge in a stressful time.

- Make a quiet time to talk. Conflicts can’t be resolved on the run.
- Ask each other’s opinions. In a partnership two heads are better than one.
- Let family members know that you understand the stress they are under.
- Work on listening and on being clear about how you are feeling.
- Try to work on one goal at a time. What do you want to do or change?
- Look for humor every day.
- Show appreciation to the people you care about every day.

### Look for More Information

*How to Get Your Kid to Eat*, by Ellyn Satter. Bull Publishing Co., 1987

From your local extension office:

- Pm-1264, *Simple Snacks for Kids*
- H&G 252, *The Food Guide Pyramid*, (\$.50)
- Pm 1404a-f, *Balancing Work and Family*
- Pm 1637- 1641, *Divorce Matters*
- Pm 1660a, *All about Stress*
- Pm 1660h, *Using What You Have to Get What You Want*
- Pm 1660f, *Helping Children Manage Stress*
- Pm 1452 - 1462, *Money Mechanics*

# STRESS

aking Charge

## Sources of stress:

- Job and family roles
- Making ends meet
- Job insecurity
- Finding affordable housing
- Learning to parent
- Parenting alone
- Finding child care
- Children's illness or school problems
- Loss of leisure time
- Couple conflict
- Relationships with parents

File: Family life 3

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*Robyn is getting a promotion at work! The extra money will help her husband Tim finish his training program. But more weekend and evening work will mean even less time to spend with six-year-old Janie and Pete who's just four. It's been weeks since they all ate together and even longer since they planned something fun to do.*

Your young family is pushed and pulled between the hard work you do to develop job skills and make ends meet and the time and effort it takes to invest in your marriage and children. Salaries may barely cover living expenses. You and your spouse may hold several jobs. Sometimes it feels like there are just too many things happening at once.

Your family has strengths too. Your relationships, your health, how you solve problems, and what's important to you are resources that can help you take charge even when there is lots of stress in your life. Every family can make some choices about living and working together today while investing in the future.

## Managing Stress in Young Families

**R**elationships: With Each Other  
*It's Saturday morning, a day Jenny and Pete used to enjoy. Instead they feel irritable and cramped in their small apartment. Two pre-schoolers take a lot of time and space. With their parents living across the country, Jenny and Pete feel isolated and lonely.*

Work and parenting don't leave much extra time and energy for young families. When grandparents or other family members live far away, you may feel like there is no one to give support. The relationship you build with your spouse and the friendships you develop with others are extremely important for helping you manage the ups and downs of daily life. A circle of strong positive relationships is one of your best resources for taking charge of stress.

- Invite another family with children to exchange child care or share some evenings together.
- Keep long-distance family relationships strong with letters and calls.
- Participate in a religious community or another intergenerational family group. Children need to be surrounded by other caring adults, and you will find support from other families with similar values and beliefs.
- Invite an older person in your neighborhood to share a simple meal or work on a project together. The mutual benefits are rich.
- Make time to be a couple. Save a little time each day just for the two of you; a few minutes to talk after the children are in bed or an early breakfast. Plan something fun together at least once a month.

### Relationships: With Your Parents

*Karen slams down the receiver in frustration. "Why are Mom and Dad always so busy? All my friends' parents baby-sit. I don't ask much. They don't understand how hard it is to be a single mom."*

Conflict builds in families if people don't talk together about what they need and feel. Parenting alone is especially stressful because there is no one to share your day-to-day frustrations, or to help with all the work. (See *Divorce Matters*, Pm 1637-1641.) Today's grandparents are likely to be working or caring for other family members. They also may be worried about interfering with your parenting.

- Ask your parent(s) to have a talk with you about how much time they are able to spend with your children.
- Think about how you could help your parent or grandparent in return for some needed relief from child care.
- Look for ways to help your children enjoy their grandparents.
- Get to know other older people in your community. Children and parents both need the support of continuing generations.