

Children and Stress

From "An Allowance is Not a Bribe" by Allan M. Gonsler, LMHP, CMSW

In the past six months, I have heard more and more from parents regarding "stress in children." The difficulty parents face with labeling tensions, disruptions and anxieties in their children's lives as "stress" is that they fail to differentiate between tensions which are normal and appropriate and those that are not. "Normal" tensions and anxieties are school, peer competition and pressure and pre-adolescence. Divorce, death or a relocation of the family are experiences in a child's life which are not "normal."

Parents must learn to recognize both types of stress in their children's lives. They can offer advice on how to handle a stressful situation, but it is important for children to be able to resolve the conflict themselves. Too often I see parents assume responsibility for the resolution of the tensions and anxieties their children face. It is certainly difficult for parents to sit back and watch children suffer and be in pain, but the reality is that children need to experience those feelings as part of the development of their lives.

When is the time for parents to become concerned about stress in their children? When there is excessive and fixated recurring behavior that seems to be getting progressively worse. This can include bed wetting, stomach aches and aggressive behaviors. At this time parents can take a more active role. However, as a general rule children should be allowed to resolve the stress in their own lives.