



# Stress Management for Infants and Toddlers

Like all humans, infants and toddlers experience stress. An infant's stress may be related to feeling their parent's stress, or to a need, like the need to be fed or interacted with. Children are not born knowing how to manage stress. They have to learn this from their parents.

Here are a few things you can try to help your little one learn how to manage stress:

## *Respond:*

- Practice responding rather than reacting to your child's difficult emotions. And it does take practice. Reaction often looks like the parent matching or exceeding the child's difficult behavior. This will only fuel the situation. It is our job as parents to respond to a child's stress, in calm and supportive ways. Doing this helps them to learn healthy ways to manage stress.



## *Pay Attention:*

- Throughout the day, check-in with your infant and toddler. See what they are communicating to you. Is it contentment? Discomfort? Do they want to play? Crying and tantrums are usually a baby's last resort. When you can figure out what your baby needs, and respond before the tears start, your baby can keep the stress response at bay.



## *Hold and Hug:*

- Nurturing touch is one of the best ways to support ourselves and our little ones to manage stress. Hugs, massage, and skin to skin contact all help to release the chemicals in our body that help us feel safe, relaxed, and loved. Don't wait until stressful times. Offer nurturing touch to your infant often. Hug your toddler throughout the day when they are happy, sad, and sometimes just because.



References: Cerinio, Erica. (2018, April 10). Healthline. *What are the Benefits of Hugging*. <https://www.healthline.com/health/hugging-benefits>; Schwarz, Nicole. (N.D.). *Do You React or Respond to Your Kids*. <https://imperfectfamilies.com/do-you-react-or-respond-to-your-kids/>; *Ages and Stages: Stress – and Stress Reduction from the Start*. (N.D.). <https://www.first5la.org/parenting/articles/ages-and-stages-stress-and-stress-reduction-from-the-start/>.