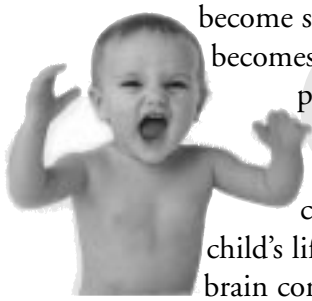
Health Update: **Helping children handle stress**

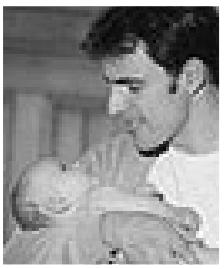
As we all know, Hurricane Floyd with its accompanying flooding has put many North Carolina parents and children under a great deal of stress. In addition to natural disasters, family changes such as moving, birth of a sibling, death, divorce, separation, violence and a new job can also be highly stressful events. When young children become stressed and their usually predictable world becomes unpredictable, parents and caregivers need to provide as much comfort, reassurance and stability as they can.



Adults can teach children ways to calm down. Research is showing that a child's lifelong reaction to stress is built into his brain connections formed during the early years of life. The ways adults help children cope with stress has lasting effects.

Signs of Distress:

- Being easily upset; loud, frequent crying.
- Behaviors like hair pulling, head banging, rocking, excessive fidgeting or whining.
- Regressive behaviors - bed wetting, toileting accidents, clinginess, wanting to be held.
- More than usual separation anxiety.
- Fear of the dark.
- Fear of being abandoned.
- Sleep problems.
- Anger and aggression.
- Being mean to other children or pets.
- Eating too much or too little.



Ways to Help your Child Handle Stress:

- Tell him you can see that he's upset.
- Talk with her about her feelings.
- Let him use a pacifier, thumb, blanket or night light for comfort.
- Let her know about a change in routine before it happens.
- When she makes mistakes, doesn't make a big fuss.
- Consider lowering the noise level.
- Pound pillows to let out bad feelings.
- Run, stretch, dance or sing together, play outdoors.
- Hold him lovingly.
- Read books together.
- Have routines.

When you show your child lots of love and attention, he'll recover from stress more quickly.

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