

Young Children (ages 2 to 6)

Parenting a child who has experienced a lot of stress can be a difficult task. Young children often can't tell us how they feel. One way they cope with stress is through behaviors. Learning to see the signs of stress and respond to them in a positive way helps children process their feelings in a safe way.

Symptom	Explanation	Common Signs
<p><u>Regression</u></p> 	<p>Stressful events can make children feel powerless. Children may regress or take comfort in more “baby-like” behaviors.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thumb sucking • Asking for a bottle • Bed-wetting • Not interested in playing or usual activities
<p><u>Fear, Anxiety</u></p> 	<p>Fearful and anxious behaviors may develop when physical reactions to being unsafe or highly stressed continue even when the stressful event or situation is over.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy startling, inconsolable crying, or incessant whining • Headaches or stomach aches in the absence of an illness • Being scared of going to bed, darkness, loud noises or certain places • Nightmares
<p><u>Clinginess</u></p> 	<p>When children cannot predict or control stressful events or when people in their lives leave, they may feel unsafe or insecure.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being very “clingy” or “attached” to you, a stuffed toy, a baby blanket or another “lovie” • Showing “separation anxiety” 
<p><u>Temper Tantrums</u></p> 	<p>Children who have been in stressful or scary situations often have difficulty controlling their emotions and act impulsively. They may have more intense emotional reactions or suddenly fall apart, emotionally.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a sudden, intense tantrum in reaction to a minor frustration • Destroy toys they are frustrated with; suddenly aggressive with other children • Severe irritability or outbursts of anger
<p><u>Avoidance</u></p> 	<p>Children who have been frightened or anxious in certain past situations may try to avoid being hurt again by distancing themselves from anything or anyone related to the scary event (“trigger”).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refuses to do certain activities, go to certain places connected with scary thing or event. • May not reach out for comfort if hurt or scared, may not show emotions • Will not engage in “fun” activities or with others connected with “trigger”
<p><u>“Off” Play</u></p> 	<p>Children may engage in repetitive or reckless play, or play out a stressful or scary event, as a way to manage their anxiety and control their emotions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Throwing or banging toys together • Building a tower and repeatedly knocking it over • Making toys behave aggressively

