
Understanding your child's signs of stress

Understanding a child's behaviour is not always easy. As a parent we automatically think of our child's basic needs and address those— hunger, thirst, sadness, pain, or exhaustion, but there are a lot of other things that could be causing a child to have behaviours. When children get stressed, they may hurt themselves, hurt others, break things, withdraw, do the same thing over and over, or just do things they know others don't like.

Knowing the difference between a child 'misbehaving' and a child feeling stressed is key to knowing what to do. Many children may have behaviours because they don't understand how they feel or know what to do... So, it's up to us to help guide them towards understanding. There are things that can pile up, eventually causing your child to act out their stress, or a stressor can come on suddenly. Once an adult can identify a child's stressors, they can help by reducing these and teaching them how to identify them on their own.

Triggers could be anything from:

- Sensory sensitivities (e.g. noises, temperature, smells, tastes, lighting, and touch sensitivities)
- Demands (e.g. doing housework, brushing teeth, picking up toys)
- Transitions (i.e. moving from one activity to another)
- Changes in plans or not knowing what the schedule is
- Being told 'no' or not getting what they want
- Having too many or too few choices
- Being bored or having too much going on
- Not getting enough attention

