



Maximize Love, Manage Stress



When you express love for your child and respond to their needs, you teach them that they can count on you. Create loving experiences and ways to avoid and cope with stress using your own ideas or choosing from the list of suggestions below. Select activities that best correspond with your child's current stage of development. Any activity may be counted repeatedly.

1. Cuddle with your child while reading.
2. Encourage your child with words when he tries something new.
3. Respond to your child verbally, even if she cannot talk yet.
4. Routines can be comforting to a child. Make reading before bath or bedtime a routine.
5. Go on a walk outside with your child to help naturally relieve stress.
6. Give your child hugs and smiles and spend happy times together.
7. Model the use of words such as please, thank you, and excuse me. Your child will learn to use these words too.
8. Praise your child when she does something well.
9. Practice skipping with your child. Physical activity releases endorphins and relieves stress.
10. If your child gets distracted while you are reading a story together, go with the distraction instead of trying to be in control.
11. Children learn best when they feel happy, secure, and loved. Whenever you give your child a hug or a kiss, you are giving him a great foundation for learning.
12. Bedtime should follow a schedule; for example, bath, teeth brushing, bedtime story, night light, kiss goodnight, and sleep. A consistent schedule helps children learn to go to sleep by themselves.
13. Have your child hide under the covers of your bed. Play a game where you pretend you don't know what that lump is under the covers. Could it be a sack of potatoes? The game ends when you throw back the covers, hug your child, and say, "It's you!"
14. Check out a nursery rhyme picture book from the library. Read it to your child while rocking her on your lap.
15. Don't worry if you don't finish a book. Interacting with your child and having fun is more important than reading everything word for word.
16. Bounce your child gently on your lap as you recite a favorite nursery rhyme such as *Pop Goes the Weasel*.
17. Give your child a back rub. Let her give you one.
18. Trace letter or number shapes on your child's back. Let him guess what they are.
19. At your child's bath time, play the shell game on the edge of the tub, hiding a small toy under one of three hollow objects, such as plastic eggs separated in half. Slide the eggs around without lifting them and stop. Have your child guess which egg the toy is under.
20. When a deadline is coming up (bedtime, bath time, etc.), set a timer that your child can see. As you set the timer, say, "When this goes off, it will be time to pick up your toys and get ready for bed."
21. Hug your child and tell her how much you love her (past the sun, to the moon, more than a giant box of chocolate candy).
22. If your child is nervous about an upcoming doctor or dentist visit, talk to him about it, telling him what to expect.
23. Make block towers with your child and take turns knocking down each other's towers. Say, "There goes your tower! Crash!"
24. Make up jokes to tell each other. See who can laugh the silliest.
25. Think of something kind you and your child can do for or say to another family member.

26. Respond to your child's signals. Knowing you're paying attention lets her know you care.

27. Predictability can be comforting. Start with a wake up song every morning.

28. Attend a story time at your library. You may find comfort or joy interacting with others who have children around the same age as your own.

29. Plastic bath time books are fun and may help soothe or distract your child if she is fussy in the bath.

30. At the end of a long, exhausting day, lie down on the floor with your child, surrounded by books, and just explore them and look at them together quietly.

31. Bring a few board books with you when you go on a shopping trip to occupy your child and minimize your stress.

32. Read stories or sing songs during mealtimes or to gather everyone around the table for mealtimes. This will ease transitions and possibly give your child something to focus on besides the food he may refuse to eat.

33. At the doctor's or dentist's office, read or sing a song with your child through the scary parts of the exam.

34. Simply smiling at your child and encouraging her through facial expressions can reassure her that you love her no matter what.

35. Encourage your child to be great every day!

36. Make up funny songs in the car while you are driving to and from errands with your child.

37. Hug your child while counting to 20 with him. This is called a peace hug! It works wonders in reducing stress!

38. When you encounter a word you think your child doesn't know, talk about it. This will help him learn new concepts and prevent him from feeling frustrated if he is ever at a loss for words.

39. Sit down together and have your child help "write" a letter or email to a family member/friend each month. Talk about what you want to say and ask.

40. Focus on two or three activities you always do with your child each day. Switch the order every so often to introduce the concept of adaptability. This will make adjusting to change easier.

41. Play school with your child! Grab some stuffed animals/dolls/siblings and practice raising hands and sharing with others.

42. Make sure your child has space to play. Environments that encourage creativity help your child feel free to communicate and use his imagination.

43. Share with your child—trade toys. Eventually, she will want to share with you/others.

44. Think about your own actions as a model for your child. After a hard day, you could come home and slam down your purse or briefcase, or you could take a deep breath and set everything down gently.

45. Use non-verbal praise signals like clapping or a thumbs up with your child to show you're proud of him.

46. Ask your child to "help" with the dishes, laundry, etc. While she might not always do it correctly, she is learning cooperation.

47. Introduce new activities/concepts slowly. Getting involved is great, but give your child a chance to adjust to one activity at a time before adding something new to his routine.

48. Toddlers gain satisfaction and confidence as they master new skills. Reassure your child as she tries to figure things out.

49. Don't always explain. Sometimes just being near your child/comforting him means more than words can say.

50. Offer limited choices to your child, such as, "Do you want to brush your teeth before or after you wash your face?" This helps your child feel like she has a say in the decision.

51. Find positive ways to give directions. Try saying, "Everyone who washed their hands can sit down to eat!" instead of commanding, "Wash your hands!"

52. Set time limits and give a warning to your child: "What would you like to do before we leave in five minutes?" or "You may do this much, and we will finish the rest at home."

53. When asking your child to do something, use a polite tone and do not end your instructions with "okay?" or "alright?" This will reinforce your authority.

54. Your child can get overwhelmed but so can you! Take a few seconds to calm yourself (deep breath, words of encouragement) and then address your child's needs.

55. Children love to know they're important to you. Address your child to let him know you see what he's doing. "I saw you put your truck away. Thank you for cleaning up!"

56. Validate your child's feelings! Let her know a loud noise might be scary, but you'll be there to comfort her.

57. Social support is important. If a friend or family member can't be there, let your child know, "I told your uncle about what you did. He's so proud of you!"

58. Let your child be a pretend hair stylist. Allow her to brush your hair and add clips or bows.

59. Go outside and spread a blanket on the ground. Lie on the blanket next to your child and watch the sky together. Look for clouds, birds, airplanes, and butterflies. Hug your child and say, "I love you more than the sky is big!"

60. If your child is upset because it's time to leave, you can acknowledge and name his feelings in a sympathetic way. "I know you were having fun on the swings and the slide. You wish we could stay. You feel mad." This lets your child know that you understand him.

61. Try using music to help change the mood of your child or yourself when you are feeling stressed. Your library has a large collection of children's music that includes both calming lullabies and fun sing along songs. Take a dance break before moving to the next activity!

62. Babies love peek-a-boo and other simple games, but when they have had enough, they will look away from your eye contact. Use this signal to change the game into something calming, such as singing or humming softly.

63. Accept offers of help from family and friends. Arrange "kid swap" mornings where you and another parent take turns giving the other some time alone for rest or errands. Greet your child with enthusiasm and kisses when you return!

64. Many babies fuss in the evening during meal preparation time. Plan ahead by using a slow cooker or prepping ingredients during baby's nap time. Give toddlers tasks like counting napkins or drawing a picture of the foods you are preparing.

65. Protect your child's naptime and bedtimes. These routines and plenty of rest help children manage their moods and stress which helps their caregivers to have less stress! Brain and body growth also occur during sleep.

66. Learn a lullaby with loving words and phrases. Hearing these words repeated will help your child develop the security needed to confidently explore the world each day. A favorite example is *You Are My Sunshine*.

67. If all of your child's physical needs are met but he is still fussy, try doing something unexpected! Pretending to sneeze, giving tickles, making funny faces, and blowing raspberries on his tummy are silly and fun ways to cheer you both.

68. Fresh air and exercise are great ways to manage stress. Try to find another parent to walk with you and help you discuss some of your feelings. When you feel heard and understood, you can respond more calmly to your child and other family members.

69. Blowing bubbles and water play are great ways to enjoy the outdoors with young children who may be acting fussy. If weather prohibits, try a daytime fun bath with lots of toys and splashing. Frozen treats and other messy foods can be enjoyed in the tub, too, for easy cleanup!

70. Let your child know about upcoming changes in her routine. Tell her what's going to happen today: "I'm picking you up right after nap today." Let her know what's happening next: "After breakfast, we'll get you dressed." Give cues: "We'll start putting the blocks away in a few minutes." And give her the opportunity to do things for herself: "Do you want to put your socks on by yourself?"

71. Create a special ritual for you and your child—something that can be done every day; for example, let your child choose and read one book with you at bedtime.

72. Make and eat meals with your child whenever possible. If time is limited, look for simple meals that require very little preparation or grab a healthy snack, such as an apple, sit for a few minutes, and chat with your child.

73. Turn off technology when you spend time with your child. Try not to text, answer calls, scroll through social media, or watch television.

74. Display your child's writing or artwork in a special place. Hang his work on the refrigerator, a bedroom door, or a cork board. Tape it to a bathroom mirror or tile or scan it and send it to his grandparents. You will be telling your child that his artwork or scribbles are important and worthy of being shared.

75. When a baby coos, respond to her through a give-and-take conversation by cooing and smiling back.

76. Bring your child to story time at your library! Children often see starting kindergarten as an extension of library "classes." Children who have positive, happy experiences at their library often approach school with a positive attitude, ready to learn.

77. Commit to read every day. Make book time part of your baby's daily routine.

78. Keep it simple! If you are reading to an infant, try to choose books that are sturdy, short, and have simple, colorful pictures.

79. Create family traditions at mealtimes, such as a song that you always sing or a game like *I Spy* that you always play.