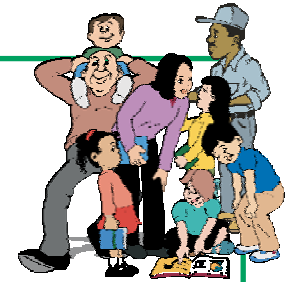




4-H for Families



“4-H Helps Youth Learn Skills to Cope with Stress”

Stress is a life event or situation that causes imbalance in a child’s life. An unhealthy response to stress occurs when the demands of the stressor exceeds the child’s coping ability. Stress shows itself in children in complaints about stomach aches, nervousness, trouble sleeping, anger and infections.

Just as children’s reactions are different, so are their coping strategies. Children can cope with stress through tears or tantrums or by retreating from unpleasant situations. They can be masterful at considering options, finding compromising solutions, or finding substitute comfort. A child’s thinking is usually not fully developed enough to think of options or think about the results of possible actions. Children who live in supportive environments and develop a range of coping strategies become more resilient. Resiliency is the ability to bounce back from stress and crisis. Many children do not have a supportive environment and do not learn to cope with stress.

Skills that youth need to be able to cope with stress are also skills they can develop in 4-H. Let’s look at some of the factors that support children:

- A healthy relationship with at least one parent or close adult. As parents and leaders work with children on projects, relationships are developed.
- Well-developed social skills. 4-H Clubs give children the ability to work in groups and develop social skills.
- Well-developed problem-solving skills. Projects and activities such as the judging contest, “You Be a Shopper,” are designed to enhance

- problem-solving.
- Ability to act independently. “Learning by doing” is a theme of 4-H.
- At least one coping strategy. As youth work in groups and on projects, they will have the opportunity to develop coping strategies.
- A sense of positive self-esteem and personal responsibility. 4-H gives members a chance to receive recognition as they enhance skills. Enhancing skills supports positive self-esteem.
- Ability to focus attention. 4-H provides a hands on, interactive approach to learning. 4-H works with the ancient Chinese proverb, “*I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.*”
- Special interests and hobbies. 4-H is an excellent opportunity to explore areas that may become special interests such as woodworking, baking, and gardening.

As adults work with kids through 4-H clubs and projects, they need to make sure not to add to children’s stress by expecting them to act in adult ways. Club leaders and parents can praise, be positive, seek positive solutions and teach honesty and fairness. Through the 4-H program, we can help children learn to like themselves, to be patient and give lots of love and encouragement. As we challenge youth to be involved and develop skills, they also gain the ability to make good decisions. This ability will be important to deal with stress both now and in the future.

For more information check out NF98-387 (NF 387) – “Children and Stress” at your local Extension Office.

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4-H Club/Family Discussion Topics:

- When you have a problem how do you solve it?
- How did you feel after you solved a problem?
- What is your favorite stress relieving activity? Why does it work for you?
- Talk about things that cause you stress that you have no control over. What can you do to alleviate some of these stressors?

Examples of 4-H Projects and/or Activities that Teach Coping with Stress and Crisis:

- “Theater Arts”
- “The Child Development Series”
- Posters
- The Sitter
- Health Series

This information, based on Family Strengths research by Dr. John DeFrain, was prepared by Myrna DeBois, UNL Extension Educator; Ann Fenton, UNL Extension Educator; Vickie L. Greve, UNL Extension 4-H Youth Specialist; Lisa Kaslon, 4-H Youth Assistant; Sandy Preston, UNL Extension Educator; and, Amy Topp, UNL Extension Educator.



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The 4-H Youth Development program abides with the nondiscrimination policies of the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and the United States Department of Agriculture.