

### WHAT DOES RELATIONSHIP SCIENCE TELL US ABOUT STRESS AND COPING?

There is a wealth of scientific evidence that shows that stress has a damaging effect on close relationships. In particular, economic uncertainty, increased parenting demands, and decreases in leisure activities can create a negative relational environment.

### IS THERE ANY GOOD NEWS?

Yes! There are multiple ways that couples, parents, and teens can cope that aren't expensive or require special equipment.

### FOR COUPLES

**Engage in novel activities** is a good way to increase relationship quality. Attend virtual concerts together, bake a cake, exercise together instead of alone, play new board games. These activities do not have to be elaborate as long as they are new to you and your partner.

**Talk.** Simple enough, right? But this isn't just everyday small talk. Asking deep and thought-provoking questions not only increases intimacy but it also passes the time and distracts from outside stress. To get this right, try this list of [questions](#).

**Plan for the future.** One of the best strategies for maintaining romantic relationships is providing assurances about the future. Such assurances communicate commitment to your partner and provide something to look forward to in the future. One of the simplest assurances partners can

provide is planning future vacations or trips. Rather than dwelling on a recently cancelled vacation, start planning your next one. Research shows that anticipating events can provide nearly as much pleasure as the event itself.

### FOR PARENTS

**Recognize your own feelings.** In frustrating situations, noticing your own feelings is very important. Take a minute to pause (deep breaths) and think about what you are feeling and what your child is trying to communicate—before responding.

**Acknowledge your child's emotions.** Acknowledging that your child is sad or upset, and that it is okay to feel that way, helps them to label and understand their own emotions. This can be done with simple statements such as, "I can see you are sad because we cannot visit grandma."

**Reassure and comfort.** It is especially crucial to offer comfort, reassurance, and regulation when children are upset or worried. Children feel secure and safe when they can trust that someone is there for them when they are distressed or uncertain. With young children, you can say, "I know that you are sad that we cannot visit grandma right now, but why don't we call (or video chat) her until we can visit her again!" Letting them know what to expect and providing comfort can be reassuring.

**Self-care!** Parenting is not a race or time for perfection, so remember to be kind to yourself, and take time for activities that will help you to manage stress and stay healthy.



## FOR TEENS

**Adjust expectations and goals** when stressed. Teens often place a lot of pressure on themselves to do well for their parents, so having parents relieve some of that pressure could be helpful. Parents and teens can talk about what teens are struggling with and work together to figure out how to address challenges and make reasonable goals.

**Connect with friends.** Give teens space to connect with their friends (e.g., talking on the phone, video chatting). This can also allow teens to turn to an important support system during times of stress.

**Celebrate milestones.** Consider organizing a parade of graduates in the local community with families driving their graduates around in a decorated car, decorating the house to let people know about the big milestone, or asking for video messages from family and friends with congratulatory messages.

## ONLINE RESOURCES

[nytimes.com/2015/01/11/style/36-questions-that-lead-to-love.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/11/style/36-questions-that-lead-to-love.html)

[zerotothree.org/resources/338-managing-your-own-emotions-the-key-to-positive-effective-parenting](https://zerotothree.org/resources/338-managing-your-own-emotions-the-key-to-positive-effective-parenting)

[kidshealth.org/en/teens/stress.html](https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/stress.html)

## EVIDENCE BASE (SELECTED)

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