

Children and Stress

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As the 4-H Youth Development Agent in Oconee County, I have many opportunities to work with really great kids.

One thing I have discovered, is that kids who are involved in 4-H are involved in about four other clubs or groups as well. It continues to amaze me the time these youth devote to extra-curricular activities and the stress they place on themselves to excel in every aspect of their lives. Almost to the point that they push themselves too hard.

I know this desire to succeed is not unique to 4-H youth. I also see it in athletes, musicians, and honor students. While the individual interests of these youth may differ, the affect this pressure is the same for everyone, increased stress levels.

Children feel pressure from a variety of sources. Pressure may be self-imposed, from parents, from teachers and peers, and from society. In most cases, children are successfully able to respond to and adapt to these pressures. But as with most things, some are better able to handle this than others and for younger children, their commitment and stress levels are strongly influenced by adults.

While stress is certainly a natural part of growing up – and of life in general – adults need to keep a watchful eye on children and intervene if they sense that something is undermining a child's well-being. Some signs to watch for are:

- Development of physical symptoms such as headaches or restlessness
- Signs of depression and fatigue
- Falling grades and a decreased interest in activities that were once very important
- Antisocial behavior such as lying and not wanting to hang out with friends

If your child exhibits any of these signs, try to help him or her evaluate the activities that are causing the stress. If your child has too little free time, suggest a schedule change to make time for play and activity – children will be more likely to drop an activity if they know they have parental support.

Spend some time with your child every day. Keep lines of communication open and encourage your children to share their feelings about their day. If a parent's schedule is too hectic, it may cause a child to be stressed or nervous. Finally, when a more serious problem is present, your family doctor may be able to recommend additional help.

For more information about the 4-H program or other youth development issues, contact the Oconee County Cooperative Extension Office at (706) 769-3946 or stop by our office located behind the Oconee County Courthouse.