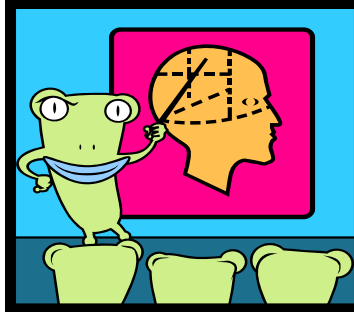


## STRESS AND BRAIN DEVELOPMENT



**STRESS** is the body's response to different types of pressures in our environment. Stress can result from both a positive or negative experience and can be acute or chronic in nature. The body responds to stress through the fight or flight response which releases stress hormones (adrenaline and cortisol) into the body so it can respond quickly to the external demand. While the stress response system in certain situations is needed to help with a quick response, ongoing stress is detrimental. Children are impacted by stress even before they are born by the mother's stress hormones. Stress changes or inhibits brain development in multiple key areas of the brain which negatively impact memory, attention, problem solving, conflict resolution, social skills, emotional regulation, the ability to experience empathy, and self-esteem. Children will also experience ongoing hypervigilance which is the experience of everything in the environment being a constant threat to safety. Chronic stress also predisposes individuals to heart disease, diabetes, liver disease, cancer, poor immune system functioning, eating and digestive disorders, high blood pressure, chronic fatigue, headaches, etc. While it is impossible to shield children from all stress it is important to provide them with strategies to cope with it and to help them develop their own stress-regulating systems.

### COMMON QUESTIONS

- *What is the difference between acute and chronic stress? How does each affect a child's development?*
- *How does chronic stress impact long-term health and wellbeing?*
- *How does stress affect my child's developing brain?*
- *Can stress lead to bullying behavior?*
- *Do my parenting strategies increase or decrease my child's stress level?*
- *How does my stress level impact my child?*
- *How do I manage my stress in responding to my child?*
- *How long should I let my child cry?*
- *What are the different types of types of tempers and how do I effectively respond to each?*
- *How do I know if my child is distressed versus trying to manipulate me?*
- *What can I do to help my child cope with stress?*
- *How do I help my child develop their own stress-regulating system?*
- *What can I do to help foster healthy brain development in my child?*