



Children's Stress & the Heart-Brain Connection

By Shelley Davidow

As parents we all want our kids to become smart, well-adjusted people. Often we think that means our kids need to get good grades so they can be successful in the world and ultimately happy. But sometimes we inadvertently stress our kids to the limit in our desire for their 'success.'

Recent research by the HeartMath Institute in California tells us that sustained feelings of joy and gratitude in our children's hearts can enhance their cognition. And one can't sustain those feelings in the middle of stress.

When children feel happy, their heart rhythms tend to become more ordered. Ordered heart rhythms affect brain function and improve it. So, positive emotional states in our kids lead to enhanced brain function.

As parents we can help our kids stay positive and unstressed by how we behave. We can put them at a distinct advantage by making sure they have lots of love, understanding, firm boundaries and joy.

Sure, stress is out there, but there's a lot we can do as parents to stop it from having negative effects on our kids. One of the main things we can do is avoid getting stressed out ourselves. For example, my philosophy is a kind of emotional pragmatism: if a child is 'losing it', it's our responsibility to not lose it too. If there's a meltdown, a temper tantrum, a crying fit - maintaining our own balance and emotional stability is essential.

Never stoop to the level of the fray, I tell myself as both a parent and as a teacher. In order to have a positive effect on our kids' heart rhythms, we need to be mindful rather than reactive in our responses. That way, we put our kids at a distinct advantage by minimising stress.

Stressed kids can be disadvantaged. No one can think properly when stressed, because stress causes the body to get ready for fight-or-flight. Blood flows away from the brain to the limbs in response to fear. The stress-response was wisely designed to get our prehistoric ancestors away from danger, but these days, we still have the same physical

reaction to stressful situations even if they aren't immediately life-threatening. Kids who are distressed about school, or friends, or upcoming tests or what to wear, need loving support.

Regardless of the issue, if we as parents maintain a calm demeanour, and focus on the state of our own hearts, we're actually encouraging optimum brain function in our children. In our never-ending quest to do what's best for them, we sometimes forget the essentials: what happens in our children's hearts influences the brain's electrical activity. Feeling happy and loved and unstressed makes children smarter. Imagine that.

About Shelley Davidow

Shelley is the author of Raising Stress-Proof Kids. Shelley is a teacher, an author and a trained facilitator in Restorative Practice. She runs workshops nationally and internationally on the impact and management of stress at home, in the workplace and in the classroom.

More Information

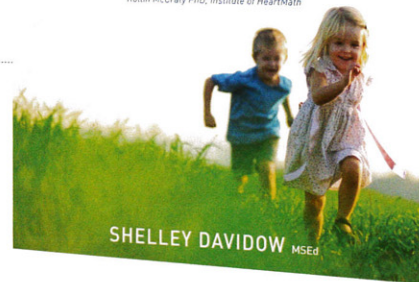
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Raising Stress-Proof Kids

Authors: Shelley Davidow MEd

Raising Stress-Proof Kids provides a practical and helpful expose on the stresses that educational organisations and outdated parenting practices place on kids.

It adopts the view restorative discipline that focuses on the notion that misconduct is violation of people and relationships. Restorative practices seek to heal and put things right.

This is a highly recommended book for parents and teachers. It is written in easy to follow text and incorporates questions, summaries and charts.

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