

FAMILY FOUNDATIONS

GUIDE TO HAVING A HEALTHIER FAMILY

Stress in parents and caregivers: 5 ways to protect your well-being



While parenting and caregiving is deeply rewarding, it can also be very stressful. From balancing endless responsibilities to managing the emotional demands of loved ones, it's easy to feel overwhelmed and as a result, experience mental health challenges.

In this 4-part blog series we're calling, **Family Foundations: How to Build a Stronger, Healthier Home**, we will:

- Examine some common causes of stress and anxiety.
- Explore the stress cycle and why it's important to complete it.
- Review parenting styles and how they affect children.
- Highlight 3 habits of healthy families.

We hope by providing practical tools and insights, you'll be better equipped to navigate challenges and foster well-being for yourself and your family.

Rogers Behavioral Health's [Nicholas Mahoney](#), DO, psychiatrist and program medical director of OCD, Anxiety, and Depression Adult Residential Care, gets us started with an advisory from the Surgeon General and what parents and caregivers can do to protect their well-being.

What is the Surgeon General's advisory about parents and caregivers?

Recently, the Surgeon General released an advisory about the mental health and well-being of parents and caregivers. Put simply, they're more likely to suffer from high levels of stress compared to other adults. That can have a negative impact on their mental health which can lead to challenges, like depression and anxiety. It's important to increase awareness of this issue and begin conversations about how to better address this.

Why do parents/caregivers seem to face more stress these days?


There are many factors today contributing to the stress parents and caregivers experience.

Technology: One stressor that I find more relevant today than in the past is technology and its influence on our lives. It can feel challenging to keep up with what children use in their social life or at school. The stress of social media alone can significantly affect our emotions.

Economic and financial strain. Providing the necessary resources for our families can add to our daily stress.

Time. It's another resource that may always seem limited. Often, it may feel like there are more demands in our lives than there is time in the day.

Responsibility for another's well-being. Being the primary person overseeing the safety and well-being of another person is a stressor that changes



throughout the life of a child. When children are young, they're highly dependent on a parent's care — from nutrition and hygiene to general health and safety. This can cause stress. As children grow, they're more independent, but that also presents challenges of its own. It becomes harder to regulate aspects of children's lives which can lead to feelings of helplessness. In addition to the responsibilities of raising children, parents are also trying to balance their own lives. All of this can easily become overwhelming.

How can these stressors impact the mental health and well-being of parents/caregivers?

High levels of stress due to the factors mentioned above can lead to a variety of mental health challenges, including depression and anxiety.

Symptoms to watch for are:

- Lower energy.
- Decreased motivation.
- Difficulty completing tasks.
- Less enjoyment in activities.
- Racing thoughts, including catastrophizing.
- Trouble sleeping.
- Changes in eating habits.

How can the stress and anxiety of a parent/caregiver impact children?

When struggling with stress and anxiety, it may become difficult to get everything done. Fewer items on the to-do list may get checked off each day as stress builds.

Parents also serve as the primary model for their children. Stress and anxiety can flow from person to person. When a parent/caregiver is struggling, that can influence the overall well-being of the family, causing children to also feel increased stress and anxiety.

How can parents/caregivers guard themselves against too much stress?

I have five suggestions for how parents and caregivers can preserve their well-being and reduce stress, including prioritizing basic aspects of good health:

1. Get adequate [sleep](#).
2. Eat a [healthy diet](#). Our bodies get the energy they need every day from sleep and what we eat. Staying physically healthy can help with mental health.
3. Establish social connections. [Loneliness](#) can further increase stress, anxiety, and depression. It can be helpful to have someone to connect with or reach out to when times are hard.
4. Practice relaxation techniques, like [mindfulness](#), deep breathing, or yoga which can lower the feelings of stress and help prevent the buildup of anxiety.
5. Reach out for professional help. A mental health professional can be a great guide in helping you manage stress and anxiety.

To provide much needed support and offer strategies for maintaining well-being, Rogers' Community Learning and Engagement and WISE team offers the [Parent and Caregiver Resource Guide](#), a free, fillable PDF for anyone to use anytime, anywhere.

“Stress and anxiety can flow from person to person.”

4 types of parenting styles and why it matters when raising children



Parenting is one of life's greatest privileges and responsibilities. Have you ever wondered how your parenting style is contributing to your child's development and future success? How we parent doesn't just shape their behavior. It can also affect how they handle relationships, navigate challenges, and see themselves and the world. Understanding your style can be the first step toward a healthier family.

In this third installment of our blog series, Family Foundations: How to Build a Stronger, Healthier Home, Dr. Peggy Scallon, MD, DFAPA, DFAACAP, psychiatrist, chief medical officer of Rogers Behavioral Health in Oconomowoc and medical director of Focus Depression Recovery Adolescent Residential Care at Rogers in Oconomowoc discusses the four parenting styles and their impact on children's development.

What are the four parenting styles?

Based on work by developmental psychologist Diane Baumrind, PhD, researchers have identified four common parenting styles:

- Authoritative
- Permissive
- Authoritarian
- Uninvolved

Parents should keep in mind that most of the time, they'll want to guide their children toward healthy adulthood by maintaining high warmth and high expectations. They should strive to have warm, close relationships with their children while holding them accountable for gaining the skills they need. Parents are the most important teachers their children will have.

What is the authoritative style and how does it impact kids?

Authoritative parents generally:

- Communicate well with their children.
- Have clear rules and consequences.
- Recognize that upholding expectations is difficult at times, like setting limits on screen use, which is important, though often not popular.
- Don't feel the need to always be "liked" by their child.
- Validate a child's feelings while also making it clear the adults are in charge.
- Show warmth and affection.
- Use positive discipline strategies, like praise and reward systems to reinforce good behavior.
- Prioritize and enjoy spending time with the family. Pursue interests together.

Children of authoritative parents generally:

- Feel loved and supported.
- Have a sense of belonging.
- Understand that they may make mistakes.
- Are held accountable for their actions, like managing their responsibilities.
- Are more confident and happier.
- Have better social skills.
- Tend to have higher academic achievement.
- Are more self-reliant.

What is the authoritarian style and how does it impact kids?

Authoritarian parents generally:

- Exert control through yelling, coercion, and criticism.
- Stress and demand obedience above everything.
- Have unclear and inconsistent rules.
- Give harsh and arbitrary consequences.
- Don't make their child a priority.
- Don't engage in positive activities with their child.

Children of authoritarian parents generally:

- Comply out of fear.
- Are afraid to make mistakes because of harsh punishment or criticism.
- Don't turn to their parents for guidance when something goes wrong.
- Often feel angry.
- Haven't internalized a sense of being loved and valued.
- Tend to be more distant and rebellious because they haven't banked positive experiences or memories.
- Have low self-esteem.
- Don't have their own sense of right and wrong.
- Act out when they leave home. They haven't had to make many decisions on how to navigate life because their decisions were made for them.

What is the permissive style and how does it impact kids?

Permissive parents generally:

- Set rules but don't consistently enforce them.
- Rarely step in to redirect the child's behavior unless there's a serious problem.
- Believe their kids can do no wrong.
- adopt more of a friend than a parent role.
- Shield their kids from the consequences of their actions.
- Undermine other authority figures, such as school staff.

“We feel better when we’re productive. Doing less always makes children feel worse.”

- Don't put much effort into discouraging poor choices or bad behavior.
- Don't set limits on screen use.

Children of permissive parents generally:

- Hold a lot of power and expect that parents will get them out of jams.
- Could be described as entitled.
- Often end up feeling angry and frustrated because they're navigating a world where their expectations don't match what is happening to them.
- Struggle with managing their emotions.
- Tend to be more anxious.
- Are less socially successful, which ultimately leads to low self-esteem and unhappiness.

This might be okay for grandparents who see kids occasionally and enjoy spoiling them with an ice cream cone too close to dinner, but for parents or caretakers, it's not recommended to set up your child to think they can do what they want and will not be held accountable.

What is the uninvolved parenting style and how does it impact kids?

Uninvolved parents generally:

- Tend to have little knowledge of what or how their kids are doing.
- Don't give much in the way of guidance, nurturing, or attention.
- Are minimally engaged.
- Don't set rules or enforce them.

Children of uninvolved parents generally:

- Feel "empty."
- Have low-self-esteem.
- Struggle academically and socially.
- Are unsure they're loved or cared for.
- Don't know how to solve problems or make decisions.

What is the recommended style and why?

Researchers say while parents occasionally demonstrate traits from each style, they should strive toward high warmth and high expectations with the goal of raising happier, healthier children who are equipped to face real-world challenges.

Experts consider authoritative parenting to be the most developmentally healthy and effective parenting style. Research has found kids who have authoritative parents are most likely to become confident, responsible adults who feel comfortable self-advocating and expressing their opinions and feelings.

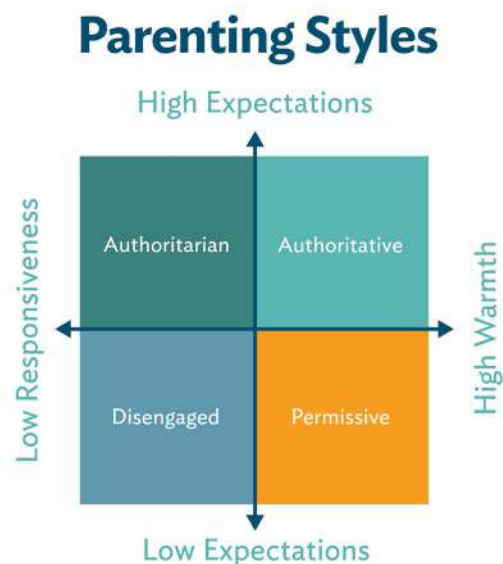
What about when kids have mental health challenges?

Parents who have kids with mental health challenges can sometimes think, "They're suffering. Maybe I should drop the expectations and let them be." But we know that when people are not productive or active, they feel worse.

It's normal for parents to want to shield their child from discomfort or accommodate them in some way, but we should always support and maintain

the expectation that they function at an age-appropriate level. Sometimes professional help is needed when this gets off track and kids start falling behind. In the post-COVID world, this is proving to be a more common problem. Children and teens became more isolated, and expectations were unclear for important years of their development. More than ever, it's important to help kids get back on track to gain skills necessary for adulthood.

We use [behavioral activation](#) in treatment which teaches that we feel better when we're productive, accountable, physically active, responsible, and have successful relationships. Being active and engaged improves mood, and we shouldn't drop expectations when children are depressed or anxious. In fact, doing less, not meeting responsibilities, and becoming more isolated always makes children feel worse. If this is hard to navigate, please seek professional help.



8 strategies for completing the stress cycle



Are your neck and shoulders tense? Feeling anxious and irritable? Chances are it's due to stress, which can be defined as the body's nonspecific response to any demand – pleasant or unpleasant. Stress can take a serious toll on our minds and bodies if we don't deal with how it impacts us daily.

In part one of our Family Foundations: How to Build a Stronger, Healthier Home series, Rogers' Dr. Nicholas Mahoney reviewed the Surgeon General's advisory about the high levels of stress for parents and caregivers and gave five ways to protect mental health.

In today's blog, Rogers' Emily Jonesberg, MSW, LCSW, program manager for [Community Learning and Engagement](#) and [WISE](#) shares strategies for completing the stress cycle and explains why it's important to our overall well-being.

What does it mean to complete the stress cycle?

I've found two books to be helpful resources on the topic: *Burnout: The Secret of Unlocking the Stress Cycle* and *My Grandmother's Hands*:

Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies.

Completing the stress cycle means intentionally addressing and releasing the physical effects of stress on our bodies. This is different from managing the stressor, or source of the stress. Oftentimes, we need to work through the stress our bodies accumulate after a challenging situation or interaction first. Only then can we approach the root cause from a more emotionally grounded place.

Why is completing the stress cycle important?

When we're feeling stressed, our bodies are responding to some sort of trigger. We're typically feeling unsafe in some way. It doesn't necessarily mean that we're literally feeling physically unsafe in the moment, but something is keeping our body in that state of elevated awareness and activating the fight, flight, or freeze response. Fight could look like being irritated or feeling frustrated. Flight could be feeling worried and anxious. Freeze could be feeling a sense of being numb or paralyzed.

The literature is saying it's critical for us to complete the stress cycle as soon as we can for several reasons:

- **It helps our bodies reregulate.** When we're in a constant state of feeling some level of stress, our bodies are focused on the fight, flight, or freeze response and they're unable to tend to all the other pieces of our well-being, like our heart rates and breathing.
- **It prevents the effects of hanging onto stress long term,** which can create challenges to our physical and mental well-being.
- **It takes time to feel the positive effects of completing the stress cycle** once we become more intentional about it.
- **It leads to things like burnout and compassion fatigue,** which is our ability to care for others. We're not in a grounded state of mind and unable to use our skills and be our best selves. We're much more likely to pull up stereotypes we've received over time and perpetuate them when we're interacting with others because we're not in a place of wellness.

“Completing the stress cycle means intentionally addressing and releasing the physical effects of stress on our bodies.”

I've read about animals shaking off stress and have seen that in my own dog. After she's had a stressful encounter with another dog or she's been in a high-stress environment, she literally does a shake off. Lots of animals do this as their way of completing the stress cycle. They're literally shaking the energy off to regroup themselves. Humans do this sometimes when they've come out of surgery or sometimes, after a really stressful situation, our bodies shake as a natural response to release the stress.

What can we do to complete the stress cycle?

There are several ways we can complete the stress cycle:

- **Move.** Get between 20 and 60 minutes of physical movement every day.
- **Release.** Tense and release your muscles, one at a time while lying down. Tense each muscle independently for ten seconds, going from your feet up to your head. Imagine yourself working through the stress. Pay particular attention to where you hold your stress.
- **Breathe.** Take really slow, deep breaths in through your nose and exhale through your mouth.
- **Talk to people.** Positive social interactions prove to us that the world is safe.
- **Laugh.** Deep belly laughs are especially helpful.
- **Connect with a loved one.**
- **Do something creative.**
- **Cry.**

There's healing power in completing a stress cycle in community with others through dance or singing. Besides releasing stress, it has the added benefit of creating stronger bonds in a collective group.

So often we hear things like, "It's okay. Just let it go and keep going." Telling ourselves that does not work for our bodies which need some sort of physical release every single day.

We often think of stress as being external, like, someone else's demands, a screaming child, or a traumatic event. It's important to also remember there can also be internal stressors, like when we're beating ourselves up because we didn't meet our own expectations, or we have a lot of negative self-talk.

3 habits of healthy families



Picture this: It's a typical and chaotic weekday evening. Kids are hunched over their homework while worrying about their relationships at school. Parents and caregivers are juggling work emails, prepping dinner, and stewing about a tense conversation with a colleague from earlier in the day. Sound familiar?

Stress is common, but it doesn't have to define your family life. Everyday tension can weigh heavily on children and adults alike, but small, intentional habits can benefit everyone's well-being.

In this final blog in our series, *Family Foundations: How to Build a Stronger, Healthier Home*, Rogers Behavioral Health's Nicholas Mahoney, DO, psychiatrist and program medical director of OCD, Anxiety, and Depression Adult Residential Care, shares insights on:

- What defines a healthy vs. unhealthy family.
- Three key habits that strengthen families.
- How Rogers partners with families to support emotional well-being.

How would you define a healthy family vs an unhealthy one?

There are several key differences between a healthy and unhealthy family.

Healthy family

Open communication, especially around emotions
Members feel safe and secure
Mistakes met with forgiveness

Unhealthy family

Fear of expressing emotions
Members feel more isolated
Mistakes met with judgement

How does an “unhealthy” family affect its members?

When family members feel like they can't share their emotions, they can build up over time, causing distress. Emotions within a family are also highly contagious, easily rippling through the household and creating a tense environment for everyone.

“Unhealthy patterns can cause tension to escalate.”

Additionally, poorly defined rules and expectations can affect family dynamics. For example, if chores are unclear or inconsistently enforced, kids can feel frustrated, which can spill over to the parents or caregivers.

Unhealthy patterns can lead to escalating tension between family members. Over time, emotional detachment can create physical isolation. This separation not only adds to the underlying problem, but it also makes it more challenging to address it.

What are characteristics of a healthy family?

Healthy families have three things in common. They:

1. Allow a safe and secure space to talk.

A non-judgmental and respectful environment can help others feel comfortable sharing how they're feeling and what they may be struggling with.

Tips for how to do this:

- Practice active listening by giving full attention to what the other person is saying, asking open-ended questions, and reflecting on what is being said. Conversations can start with questions as simple as, “How are you feeling?” or “What's on your mind?”
- To keep the focus on the conversation, use a quiet environment where everyone feels comfortable and is free from distraction.

2. Set healthy family boundaries. Rules should be well-defined and age appropriate. They should be consistently enforced, and the consequences should be fitting for the action.

Tips for how to do this:

- When making a rule, provide clear information on the specific expectations, what to expect if the rule is not followed, and an explanation of why the rule is helpful or needed.

3. Forgiveness. We all make mistakes. Inappropriate behavior leads to consequences and a healthy family doesn't hold grudges. Mistakes should also be approached as a learning experience for a person to learn and grow.

Tips for how to do this:

- When a rule is not followed, talk through the situation. Discuss specific examples where the behavior defied the rule or expectation. Promote open communication for the person to brainstorm what they could do differently the next time a similar situation arises.
- The consequence should be enforced consistently each time the rule is not followed. There may be difficult emotions, such as anger or frustration. However, by practicing forgiveness, it helps everyone move forward and reinforces that the situation doesn't change the bond between those involved.

What would you say to a parent or caregiver who wants to make change but feels stuck or overwhelmed?

If someone is feeling stuck, overwhelmed, or unsure how to move forward, you're not alone. Many feel the same way. In many situations, my recommendations are not the easiest to follow. Also, when certain habits become the norm, it can be hard to break the cycle. It can be helpful to reach out to a mental health professional.

The first step is acknowledging that there is a problem. Recognizing that there are issues

“Repeated practice of healthy changes will gradually create a new family dynamic.”

opens the door for changes to occur. In the same way bad habits can form, the repeated practice of healthy behavioral changes will gradually create a new dynamic. Just remember, change takes time and consistency. Try to appreciate the small changes that are being made in the process.

Building healthy families at Rogers

At Rogers, we understand the important role families play in supporting each member's mental health. That's why we work hard to incorporate family members as part of the treatment process. Through family sessions, the person receiving treatment and their loved ones along with a member of the clinical team come together to build insight into the unhealthy patterns, practice effective communication, and discuss strategies to help develop new, healthy habits.

Our compassionate care teams teach families how to be more emotionally healthy and by working together, we help families create a stronger foundation for lasting well-being.

In my time working at Rogers, I've seen relationships within families develop, repair, and strengthen through our commitment to this work. I've witnessed changes behave like a domino effect of not just improving the mental health of the person receiving our care but also producing healing in the lives of the other family members.

How Rogers can help

Every person – and family – has the potential to grow stronger. If you're feeling stuck, you're not alone. Reach out to Rogers Behavioral Health to learn how we can support your journey toward a full and connected life.

Rogers offers “Parenting with Purpose,” a new weekly outpatient group offered virtually in Wisconsin, where parents can gain skills to help manage stress, mental health concerns, and much more. Call **833-603-0212** for more information.

