

Behaviours that may indicate a child is attempting to cope with stresses

1. Crying and / or Tearfulness

This is a strong indicator if the crying response is an overreaction to something that has occurred or there appears to be no direct reason for the expression of these emotions.

2. Sleep Problems

This is often more obvious to parents than caregivers, however, if the child is unable to settle when he/she previously did so, or is restless and/or dreaming more than usual, then it is more than likely the child is responding to some form of stress in his/her life.

3. Regression to an Earlier Developmental Stage

Such regression can be observed when a caregiver notices that a child who has not needed his/her comfort toy expresses a strong need for it, or a child will wet the bed when he/she has been dry for a long period of time. The key to this type of behaviour is that child has shown some developmental progress and reverts to an earlier behaviour. For example, you would only be concerned that thumb sucking behaviour is an indicator of stress if the child had not sucked his/her thumbs for a long period. If the child has always sucked his/her thumb then this behaviour does not indicate anything unusual.

4. Inconsistent Aggression

The caregiver will observe that the aggression displayed by the child is inconsistent and will usually be displayed when the child perceives he/she is being placed under additional pressure.

5. Noncompliance

Children under stress will often find it difficult to comply to a variety of instructions that are common place in the group care environment. They often interpret expectations of compliance as rejection. The child may feel that expectations to comply are a reflection of a lack of respect or understanding for the feelings they are having (even if that person is unaware of what is going on!)

6. Increased Tantrums

Tantrums will be an indicator of short term stress only when the child has never displayed them before or if the frequency of this type of behaviour increases dramatically.

7. Withdrawal from the Group

This behaviour is often an indicator that the child is attempting to cope with extra stress in his/her life by conserving his/her emotional energy.

8. General Irritability

If the child is more irritable than usual or quick to take offence to approaches by caregivers or peers, you can probably hypothesise that the child is being placed under short term stress.

9. Increased Need for Physical Contact and/or Proximity with Caregivers

Children placed under stress will often seek security and reassurance by attempting to be close to the caregiver.

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