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## Family Focus

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less anxious, and better able to accept others' limitations. For example, it is natural to run out of time, energy, and motivation occasionally. We are also limited by our ability levels and by our personality construct (for example, true introverts will not be able to sustain a highly social existence).

Can you acknowledge that you can't perform math beyond middle school level (like me)? Can you be okay with rarely getting everything done that you had hoped? Can you overeat occasionally without guilt and shame? Can you accept that some people are highly skilled in areas that you would like to be, but are not? Can you say no to requests without feeling bad about yourself?

Modeling imperfection to our children is a good thing. When we readily admit our own deficiencies, we are letting them know that we can more easily tolerate theirs as well. And we are helping them learn to do the same with themselves and others. It is important to note that adjusting our expectations of ourselves does not mean abandoning goals for self-improvement. It is always positive to challenge ourselves to do better, but it helps to first have a solid baseline of self-acceptance in place.

Adjusting your expectations for others is especially crucial with children. If your expectations are not in sync with your child's abilities or motivational level, you may tend to express criticism and frustration. Your child, and your relationship with him, will not flourish this way; rather, he needs encouragement and understanding. Once he has acceptance and support, he will be better able to tackle new challenges.

There's an expression, "If Momma ain't happy ain't no one happy," and we can certainly include "Poppa" in this too. Children are highly susceptible to parents' stress levels. It is rare to see highly anxious parents with a very placid child. Children are shaped by their environment, so it is important for parents to not only teach them coping skills, but to model them as well.

Ways to help our children be physically and emotionally healthy with lowered stress levels have already been drilled into our heads: the importance of sufficient sleep, exercise, relaxation, social interaction, healthy eating habits, time management skills, and limited media and screen exposure. In addition, we recognize the necessity for a healthy family system with mutual cooperation, respect, and open communication. This is a huge agenda, to be sure.

While many parents are busy figuring out ways to help our children flourish, we may not be applying the same criteria to ourselves. And just like second-hand smoke, second-hand stress can be harmful to our children.

Here are some additional ways to reduce stress that aren't always highlighted:

Adjust your expectations of yourself and others

This is one of the main stressors I see among parents in our community. Those who are able to accept their own limitations are usually happier,

### Lighten Up

Those who can laugh at themselves easily have a huge advantage. If we are able to do this, we can take in stride some of the inevitable mistakes we make, and at the same time show our children a way to handle their own mistakes. Hopefully, parents and children can apply this with each other as well, and not pounce when we catch the other making mistakes. Seeing humor in situations and not taking ourselves too seriously allows us to lower the potential stressfulness of our missteps.

### Be Realistic

This is related to reducing expectations. Do we really think our children are going to routinely jump up to help with dishes or laundry without being asked? Or that they will readily comply when they are asked? Do we expect our smart but unmotivated child to get A's? If you have yelled at your child, should she be able to get over it quickly? And if she holds onto a grudge, do you say she is being too sensitive? (This is a complaint I hear frequently in my practice.)

We still want to enforce certain rules and expectations, but with a lighter approach. Most children balk at being ordered around, scolded, and criticized. Figuring out how best to gain cooperation from your child is every parent's task. Some recent Family Focus columns have addressed this issue. When we are able to view our children realistically, we can increase our level of tolerance and decrease our level of stress - a huge benefit for the entire family.

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