

A Shower of Emotions
Dealing with Moisture Stress

Understanding How Children Respond to Stress and Anger

Children and Moisture Stress

Children, especially young children, may experience a “shower of emotions” when faced with stress due to flooding or other moisture problems. These emotions may include fear, anxiety, discouragement, isolation and even anger. Such emotions may last over time and are best dealt with by kindness and understanding on the part of parents and other adults.

Children who express emotional strain due to moisture problems may be responding to at least three sources of stress. First, they may be dealing with a sudden and unexpected upheaval caused by flooding or excessive moisture. Second, they may have to cope with weeks or months of continuing family disturbance in routine because of repairs, financial problems and the like. Third, they may be responding to increased patterns of stress and difficulty felt by parents that change the family’s routines and emotional atmosphere.

The feelings and emotional reactions expressed by children under stress should be expected and are normal. Children are especially anxious when they do not understand what is happening in the family or to their environment. Adults should be sensitive to this reality and reassure children.

Emotional Reactions of Children

Children may experience changes in family routine or the disappearance of particular toys or family items (due to moisture issues) as a loss. It is not unusual for children to be concerned about and even grieve such losses. Elements of grief and loss are outlined in the figure below. Some common components of children’s emotional reactions may include:

- **Shock** — May not believe the problems are really happening.
- **Physical Symptoms** — May experience headaches or stomach problems.
- **Anger** — May focus on their own needs, or be angry at parents or others who are responding to stress.
- **Guilt** — May worry that they have contributed to problems in some way.
- **Fear** — May wonder what will happen or fear being alone.
- **Sadness** — May show decrease in activity and tendency to withdraw.



Your Child and his/her experiences

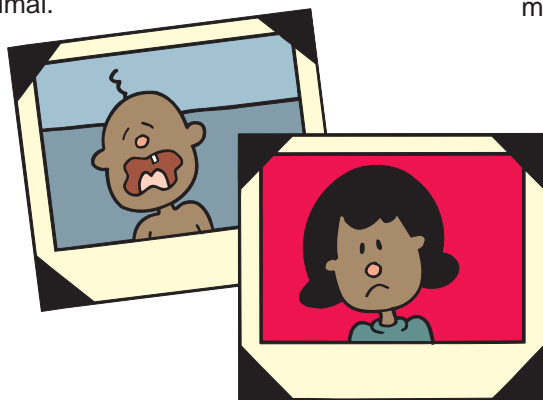
Shock and Denial	Anger	Depression and Detachment	Dialogue and Bargaining	Acceptance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoidance • Confusion • Fear • Numbness • Blame 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frustration • Anxiety • Irritation • Shame • Embarrassment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overwhelmed • Blahs • Lack of energy • Helplessness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reaching out to others • Desire to tell own story • Struggle to find meaning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring options • A new plan is in place



Symptoms of Child Stress

Children may express stress differently according to age, maturity level and previous experience. Adults should pay attention to the following symptoms and behaviors that children may exhibit due to stress.

- **Crying and whining** — Children may become upset easily, cry frequently or unexpectedly, and whine.
- **Aggression** — Children may feel out of control and become angry. They may yell, threaten, hit, kick or throw things, even without reason.
- **Sleep problems** — Children may be afraid of sleeping alone or being left, and thus may have difficulty going to bed or napping. They may wake often and have troubled sleep or nightmares. They may want to sleep with parents or other people.
- **Fear of being alone** — Children may fear being alone or separated from loved ones. They may refuse to go to school or child care, and may want to stay close to the parent or in the parent's sight. They may feel neglect due to the adults around them being busy or stressed.
- **Regressive behaviors** — Children may exhibit behaviors they did while younger, such as thumb sucking, clinging to adults, wetting the bed, etc. This pattern tends to indicate anxiety or insecurity.
- **Illness** — Children may be physically affected by stress and may exhibit nausea, vomiting, headaches, stomach problems, fever or other symptoms of physical illness.
- **Withdrawal or restlessness** — Children may become quiet and withdrawn, or may become more active and restless than usual. Changes in a child's normal behavior pattern should be watched carefully.
- **Feelings of loss** — Children may express sadness or grief due to loss of a favorite toy, blanket or animal.



Tips for Handling Child Anger

Anger and frustration are common responses to the experience of stress. These responses are often more common among children because they may not have an understanding of how to take greater control of their feelings or circumstances. Children may express anger when feeling confused or out of control. By expressing anger, children show a desire for some attention to themselves and their feelings of having lost control. Handling anger in children will vary according to the child's age and maturity, but tips include:

- **Avoid expressing anger yourself.** This will only tend to increase the negative emotion in both you and your child. Respond to the child in a firm but calm manner.
- **Acknowledge your child's feelings and suggest a more appropriate response.** Children need to know their feelings are recognized, and then parents should suggest a better way of handling a concern.
- **Give the child an opportunity to "cool down."** You may send the child to a specific place to calm down before discussing the child's feelings and actions.
- **Discuss ways to get control.** Help the child think of ways to lessen anger, such as listening to music or playing a sport.