THE RESILIENT KID PODCAST

Season 4 – Episode 3

Future Proofing Your Kids_ What to do when stress strikes

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How do we practically help our kids when stressed strikes? When they get anxious, when they are worried about something. Well, today's podcast is all about giving them actual tools for the toolbox, practical ways that we can help them. Hello and welcome back to the resilient kid podcast with me, Ashley Costello, helping children, teens and families for over 25 years as a psychotherapist.

Hello and welcome back. So this is the second time that I've recorded this. Simply because as some of you who are in the Facebook group will know or if you follow me on the socials, we have a new puppy in the house and I got up very early yesterday. To record the podcast, I fed him, played with him, did the whole thing, and let him go to sleep before I started to record.

However, that was not enough for Paddy, our new Dalmatian puppy. So yeah, I think I got 20 minutes in and just gave up in the end and just thought, you know what? I might do this again tomorrow. So if you don't follow us on the socials and you want a bit of cuteness, absolutely do. And you can see updates of the teeny tiny, don't think he's going to be tiny for long, Paddy, the Dalmatian puppy.

So let's crack on about today. What is it, what can we do when our kids are really stressed? What can we do to prevent that stress practically? Okay, so deep breathing exercises. are the first thing that I would recommend. Now, we breathe every day, Ashley. Why would deep breathing be any different? Well, I'll tell you why.

Because if we think about where our anxiety starts off in our brain, and it absolutely does, when we talk about anxiety, that is a physical response to a worry or a threat in our brain. That's all, that's all anxiety is. So if we can calm that down, if we can really stop it quickly, then that won't produce stress, it won't kick off all the super fuel chemicals in our brain, like cortisol, all those stress hormones.

So if we can keep ourselves calm, so not to set off all of them, then, actually we're onto a winner. So breathing in through our nose out through our mouth is the quickest way to calm down that fight and flight area of our brain, our amygdala. So it isn't just a case of, oh, well, just breathe or just breathe deeper.

We have to do it with real intention. And I want you to just stop for a second, and I want you to do this with me and just notice how, your body starts to relax. How your mind starts to calm down. So, are you ready? In through the nose, out through the mouth.

In, out

and one more.

Now notice how, with each one, your body starts to relax more. Notice how your shoulders suddenly start to drop. You know, I do this a lot, and even this morning, just doing the podcast, I hadn't realised that I was a little bit tense because I'm waiting for Paddy, you know, to bark or to, I just noticed how the body starts to calm.

My voice has got calmer. Yeah, so even if we think we're not holding tension, which leads to stress, there's a really quick, easy way. Now, there's lots of exercises that I can show you, but that is the fundamental. In through the nose, out through the mouth. That's the quickest way to get to that part of our brain, as I said.

You can, when you breathe in through the nose. You can hold, so in, hold, out, hold. In, hold, out, hold. And in those holding spaces, it's a little bit apiece. If you notice doing this, there's a little bit apiece. Now every tip that I'm going to give you today is no different for you as it is for them. So you practice these for your, to keep you calm, to, to keep stress at bay and you can teach them.

Yes, of course, when I'm teaching kids, I do teach it a little bit different. So for little ones, I would say if you're going to do, and I'll do you some, I'll do you a little video series. So you, you can access that and I'll do for various different ages. But to give you an idea, if I'm talking to, you know 12 and below, I would say, well, primary, if I'm talking to primary, what I would say is breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth for your age.

So if you're five, five times. If you're 7, 7, 10, 10, yeah. If they're less than 5, do 5. Because the first couple will be messing about. And that's great. But so let's make sure they get a good few in. So, I will do some more on that. But just know that the reason that they're so effective, because we can go, okay, just breathe in through the nose, breathe out through the mouth.

Okay, but what I'm gonna, what I'm gonna share with you now is why, when we do that, what is happening in our body and how it really helps. So any real deep breathing exercises like that help to manage our stress because they activate the body's relaxation response. That's also known as our parasympathetic nervous system.

When we experience stress, our sympathetic nervous system goes into that fight and flight, which we talk about our fight and flight area of our brain. And as that triggers, there's lots and lots of responses in the body. And so, doing deep breathing exercises is a counter, it counter reacts to this. So, how does it do it?

It reduces our heart rate, okay? It lowers our blood pressure. It calms our mind, because it goes directly to that fight and flight center. It relieves muscle tension. We felt that, didn't we? Just in that quick exercise, we felt that muscle tension just soften. And it also increases the blood flow. And oxygenates the tissues around, reducing not just tension, but muscles and also bringing more oxygen to those areas.

And with that, it oxygenates our bloodstream, which helps energy levels, helps our cognitive function. So helps us think more clearly, think better, think faster, and also really helps if we're tired or lethargic. So you can see when we say Just deep breathe is not just deep breathe. There is a whole catalogue of things that set off in the body that really help us.

And you can see the benefits of it. So you can, I'm going to come on to how you can practice that during the day in a moment. But what I would say to you is, you have to develop this skill just because you breathe every day unconsciously and You know, our body does it even when we're asleep. I want you to start implementing it because A, it prevents stress.

If you incorporate breathing exercises, then it not only prevents stress, it builds your resilience to stress. It also means that when stress does occur, you are better equipped.

And if you do this on a regular basis, this not only helps your physical health, but your mental health. Alright, so it really, I cannot, emphasize the benefits of this, of actually doing deep breathing exercises. They are immense. And we've been doing it for thousands of years.

You know, we, we talk about breath work now. We talk about, , in yoga, we've always done breathe work, but actually science is just catching up to the benefits, but we have done this, this kind of exercise for thousands of years.

Okay, so let's move on to Mindfulness and, and meditation. Now we have an expert on mindfulness coming up in May as one of our guest experts, Rachel, she's really, really good.

She takes us through a little mindfulness exercise actually on the podcast. And I think as part of our extra packages for subscribers, free subscribers might add to the podcast, which I'll tell you about at the end. We have used a soundbite of hers of a little exercise she takes us through. It's literally less than two minutes.

It's really, really good, really useful. So check that out in May. What I will say to you is we have

such busy lives at the moment, particularly I think parents, often women, that's not to be sexist, just I think women are more nurtured to be multitasking. And that is, you know, because naturally at a young age, we, you know nurtured to nurture others. And I think what happens is we multitask and actually we forget to be mindful.

We forget to be present because don't know about you, but you get up in the morning and you're, you know, you're thinking of the kids got new uniform. What's for breakfast. You then start to think, well, what, what I've ever took something out for tea. Then you start to think about work. Now we've got puppy in the mixed, you know, so there's lots of things.

Whereas I know my hubby, , he's really, really good. And if I said to him, Oh, what about this? He would get up, you know, he would do all that. However, he'd do it one at a time. I'm thinking all the things all at once. So, so I think as, as for me, particularly, I know I have to really cultivate, to think about one thing at once.

To have that present moment awareness. And so to do this, it is not about sitting up the side of a mountain Cross-legged Amin, you know, it is about focusing on one thing. That's what mindfulness is. It's focusing on one thing at a time. And there's lots of ways that you can do this. You know, there's lots of apps insight timer calm.

What's the other ones? There's, oh, Smiling Mind. That's a beautiful one for kids, by the way. Really, really lovely one for kids. I once had my school in Abu Dhabi. We, there was 2, 000 of us and we all signed up to Smiling Mind. So yeah, it was, it's lovely. So you can do lots of things like that, but the other thing that you can do is just stop and concentrate on that one thing that you're doing.

Instead of having those runaway thoughts. So after speaking to Rachel, cause we've already recorded the podcast for next month, I have started to make points in my day. So first thing in the morning, first coffee. Stop. Feel the cup in my hand. Smell the coffee. Feel the heat. That first taste. You know, really stopping and tasting that coffee.

Because I know, you know, sometimes that coffee's on the run because I'm busy. So my first coffee, it will be in a ta you know, in my Like reusable cop, but my travel one. So, you know, I'm gonna do that kind of thing. I might be in the car and, you know, concentrating on the driving, thinking which quite am I going to all that.

So I've stopped that and I've really. I might do that for the rest of the day, but that first one now is really about stopping and just enjoying it. And do you know what? It is the best coffee of the day now because I can taste it. Whereas before I was probably throwing it down my neck. So there's things like that, that you can do in the day, even if it is just putting the kettle on, be very mindful about putting the kettle on.

Or if you're chopping vegetables, like cooking for me is a bit of therapy. You know, I am. And just doing that,

concentrating on what I'm doing, rather than thinking about five other things. So that is, is being mindful. It is a form of meditation. To stop and just concentrate,

we do jigsaws in our house.

And I've said this before, we're not massive jigsaw family, but whenever there's times of stress, we've got exams going on and we'll get a jigsaw out.

And what I have noticed is and for those of you don't know, if you get like a jigsaw and you've got the room, so we've got. So we've got a big table in our dining room, so we put it at the end, so we can still sit around, but at the end is the jigsaw.

And so that when people are walking past, they'll get kind of drawn in and they'll do a couple of pieces and then they'll carry on. And it's just that moment of stopping, stopping anything else, whether it's exams, whether it's, you know, revision even going to do the washing machine, whatever it is, they just stop for a few minutes and just do that.

And it's a really good way. Of pausing through the day and, but without me saying, right, I think you need to stop revising. I think you need, I think this, I think just, they just do it. It's, it's like a little magnet and it just draws them in. And what I've noticed is that my hubby is particularly invested now.

So he will. Before he goes to bed, do some when he's on his lunch from work, because he works from home most, most days of the week, he will have his lunch and then he will do a little bit more. And I wasn't expecting that. I was expecting the kids to do it and I was expecting he might do a little bit but he's really getting drawn in.

So much so that he bought two more jigsaws the other day. So I think, you know, for us it's, it's a really good way of just pressing that pass. button. So think about how you can do that in your, you know, for your family. How can you press that pause button?

Okay, the next like little technique I want to show you is muscle relaxation. And I will do a video on this for you, but to describe it, if you've done yoga, they often do this at the beginning or at the end. And it is literally how we systematically tense muscles and then release them. So you might start at your toes and work up.

You might start at your head and work down. So you will, Tense kind of your feet and all the muscles in your feet and hold and then let them go. And then you work up. So you might tense kind of your calfs and your feet and then let go. And really what it does is just promotes in our bodies that relief it put, it really helps with that parasympathetic nervous system.

Because you've, you've tensed and released and when we. release, we always release more than we did before. So we, we are left much more relaxed. But I'll do

you again in the video series for a little bit more information, a little bit more what's the word? Detail. That's all, detail. So yeah, so really, you know, that's a nice easy one to do in bed to just promote kind of sleep.

And I will, I'll do you a specific exercise for that as well.

Physical activity. So physical activity is huge. And I notice if I've been more sedentary in my day and I've not been physical, I notice myself because I don't sleep as well. And. I'm not, I'm not as calm. I'm not as relaxed if I haven't done something.

So why is it so good? Let me tell you.

So, and this, by the way, doesn't matter if you're walking, you're jogging, you're going to the gym, you're doing a class. You're doing, you know, it doesn't matter what it is, but it really helps because not only does it release tension and boost our overall mental well-being, but it disperses those stress hormones that we were talking about earlier, those super super fuel hormones, I call it with the kids, around cortisol, things like that.

And it, it. disperses them through the body.

Now, because our lifestyle has changed somewhat, and we used to, so, you know, when I was at school, God, I sound so old. So when I was at school, you got home and the first thing you'd want to do is get out and play with your mates. Yeah, you get out and In the garden or call around at your friends or, you know, you go to the park, things like that.

We don't do that as much now for whatever reasons, we just don't.

So what's happening is when kids get stressed, these super fuel stress hormones are being released and it sits in their tummy. And there is research to tell us actually physically hurts them. It physically hurts them and it's, that is not surprising to me because you think how many times when they're worried about something, they'll go, I've got tummy ache.

They don't say to you, I am worried often, do they? They'll say, I've got tummy ache. I've got stomach ache.

And you'll go, oh, you'll be okay in a minute. Of course we do. We dismiss it because we think, oh, they're maybe just worried about something, but it'll go in a minute. It causes them physical pain. So physical activity.

Really, really helps disperse that so if they are worried, you know, if you are lucky enough to be able to walk to school with your kids, take a longer route home. If you're lucky enough to live near a park, go to a park, let them climb. Yeah, let them climb. Let them run around a little bit. But giving them that physical activity really helps disperse it.

Now, classes are great. If you can afford classes and you know, you're, they're doing gymnastics or dance or football or whatever, that's fab. But be aware of over scheduling your kids as well. A trip to the park is just as good. Now, it's not for us if we need an extra bit of time to finish work, but a trip to the park is just as good.

Do not overschedule your kids because you will go into the other realm where they will get stressed because they are doing too much. Where is their downtime? And downtime isn't always TV and iPads or computer games. because their mind is not resting at that point. Their mind is being stimulated. So for me, we often talk about downtime as TV or games, and there's absolutely nothing wrong with them having those.

But don't fool, don't be fooled into thinking that that's them resting because it's not. It is a very clever way of stimulating our brain. And you and I might sit on the couch, watch Netflix and think, oh yeah, I just needed that at the end of the day. And that's okay because we're adults and our brains are developed, but just be aware.

So it doesn't matter if it's, you know for the younger ones, Lego, things like that. But same with teens, you know, they're scrolling through. Tick tock. Great. That's it. There's nothing wrong with that, but be aware that is not downtime because there is, it is, the brain is being stimulated in so many ways with the lights, with the content, with the kicking off the emotions with particularly with tick tock, you know, that comparisonitis starts to, to come in. So yeah, so physical activity is really important for, for every age group. And as I say, it doesn't matter if you're walking or you're going to the gym. Do something that is physical to disperse those stress hormones. Because the more they build, the more stressed that they get.

So do we okay, journaling. So journaling has research says that it is a really, really good therapeutic tool for processing our emotions, processing what we're worried about, processing what we're going through, but also not only does it reduce stress, but also, we gain clarity around it, which is just amazing.

So how would I do this? How I recommend this with kids is if they're small, you can get them to draw or write three things, you know, sometimes it could be a gratitude journal. So three things that you're grateful for every day. And you'd be surprised the difference that makes, especially if you're, if you feel like your kid's getting a little bit entitled.

We all do it. All of us. You know, but it's a really good way of just, again, being mindful, bringing them back to what they have rather than what they don't have. So you could do it that way. Or three things that you're concerned about. And, and what that does is get it out of their mind. So it's not running on a loop and it shows them as well.

If they do this on a regular basis, how far they've come, which is really good. Now for teens, those that get into journaling find so such big benefits for themselves. So what I would say to you is if you can get your teen to journal, amazing. There is bullet journaling. That's really cool. Um, you know, there's lots of kind of things out there, but it doesn't have to be fancy.

It can literally be, write down your thoughts. I mean, you know, I grew up with Adrian Mulls, the diary of a, what was it called? Not the diary of a CEO. Adrian Mulls. 13 and a half. And, and he used to write in his diary every day. He used to write about his mom. He used to write, you know, what had gone on during the day, when he'd been bullied, all that kind of thing.

And it just really gets out of their head and helps get clarity. but physically their stress levels will reduce. So, you know, it's a really good benefit. And I find that if I, you can tell when I'm stressed because I will start journaling, I don't do it every day. But I will write stuff down and sometimes it ends in a to do list.

Sometimes it is just get out and I might not open it again. And sometimes it really helps We work out why, how I felt about something, or what was behind that for me. And I, I feel that's, you know, really just beneficial, even if it's just three lines. So, you know, really think about encouraging them to journal.

It's a, it's a really, you know, time tested way of helping. And then kind of lastly.

The last kind of recommendation I would say that really helps stress is setting boundaries. So saying no to activities or commitments that we might have made that cause unnecessary stress. Really, I can't emphasize how important it is because It's, well, it is an act of self-care, isn't it?

And we need to know our own needs, our own limits. And actually, it's a really good way of modelling and practicing that for our kids. And have conversations about boundaries. I have conversations about boundaries all the time. With my kids and it might be boundaries with their friends. It might be how their friends behave in my house.

My house, our house, sorry. It might be around the importance of saying no, you know, particularly if friends are asking something they know they shouldn't ask, are they. You know, so, so for instance, my elder, she has a little part time job. She's got exams this week and she was asked to go in and do an extra shift.

And she was like, oh no, you know, because a, she wants the money. Cause she does, she's a teen and they spend it. To her boss had asked her, it wasn't like just somebody else had asked her to swap a shift and she was just, she was literally like, oh no, but I've got to say, yeah, absolutely. You can say no, and giving her that permission to say no.

And then I think one of her friends had asked us to swap as well. So she didn't want to let her boss down, but then a friend had asked her to to do another shift. And I just said, you know, you've got a, you've got a perfect excuse, but you don't need one. You can just say, no, that's about looking after yourself.

Cause she would do a late shift. She's going to be tired the next day. It's going to take time out of revision, you know, and she wants to be at her best this week when she's got exams. So setting boundaries for ourselves. As, as the parent is really important. And can I just say to you, and I, I heard this the other day and I was blown away by it.

I am really massive into, if you say no, you stay to no. Okay. You stick to no, because it makes our kids feel safe when we do. What I hadn't kind of appreciated before was that. If we say no, and then change our mind,

they then can't trust us as much. Now, I don't know about you, but I want my kids to know I'm in their corner. Like, I've got their back all the time. That if something happens, they phone me. And it doesn't matter what it is, we'll sort out the details later, but you ring me first. If me saying yes after a no undermines that trust, who are they going to call?

Who are they gonna call? And so it's really important and actually I've started using this for myself as well. So I'm trying to get into a bit more exercise a bit more healthy eating, things like that. And I have started to use this with myself. So if I've made a, if I thought I'm going to dip in the cold pod, or I'm going to eat healthily today, if I go back on that, I am breaking that trust with myself.

So my brain is thinking, well, you said you'd do that, but you haven't. So the next time I say I'm going to do it, you probably won't. And it is about that trust. I hadn't realized that before, when we talk about boundaries and we talk about saying no, and then we change our mind. So think about that around when we say no to our kids, you know, can I have extra time on the iPad?

No. And then you say, yeah. Now, I'm not saying you can't be flexible, but nine times out of ten that no asked to mean no if we want them to trust us, if we want to be their first port of call. And also, it's really important that we model setting boundaries for the kids. Okay, so when do we, when do we use, when can we put these into practice?

So, A, what I would say is, it's really important that we practice. Okay. When we practice deep breathing, when we do let's think about the ones that we've just, we've gone through, have a bit of a recap. So we have deep breathing exercises. And again, I'm going to do a little video series on some of these.

So we have deep breathing exercises, that being mindful of what we're doing in a day, just stopping and pausing every day. Okay. for a little minute, concentrating on what you're doing. Even if it's only 30 seconds, you are putting stuff in the bank so that when you're stressed, you can draw down on it. You can do stuff like muscle relaxation, last thing at night.

And also think about as well, that mindfulness, you know, you can use apps for guided imagery, things like that. Physical activity, journaling. Setting boundaries. All right, really, really important for our physical and mental health, but we need to

practice them. All right. It's not just at times of stress, because what happens is if you go.

If your child is stressed, or your team is stressed, or do you deep breathing exercises, you're likely to get the look, the eye roll, and be shouted at, or even hit in some cases. So, get, getting them to practice really helps them to build that up ready. Also, it will be something that they will naturally turn to.

if you, you know, have integrated it. So how can we, particularly teens, I think, how do we get them to follow some of these? Well, what I would say is get them to pick one for now. Okay. Even if it, you know, pick the breathing exercise or pick the journaling, but pick one and get them, encourage them to do it on a regular basis.

Okay. You can do first thing in the morning before you get out of bed. You could practice those deep breathing, you know, closing the eyes, taking that slow, deep breath in through the nose, out through the mouth, focusing on those sensations, focusing on how your body feels, you know, that's kind of breathing and mindfulness in one.

Any breaks that you've got, whether it's from, you know, particularly if it's teens, if it's teens, if it's studying breaks, if it's you know, walking home, things like that. before bed, winding down as you get back into bed, just really winding down a little bit

put it in with something else. So this is called skill stacking. And so for instance, now my skill stack is I already have a coffee first thing in the morning. That's my thing. So I have now added it to that because now it's easy. And there's a trigger to my brain that when I do that, this is what I'm going to do when I have that first coffee.

This is what I'm going to do. So it's skill stacking. So kind of turn the alarm off, do it before you get out of bed. That is skill stacking. It really helps incorporate it into your day. Okay. So you can integrate it into other things, like when you go for a walk, you could do some free breathing as well, or, you know, even if it's listening to music, but just stop and don't do anything else, really listen to the music and incorporating it into things that you do every day.

Is really, you know, really good and I've got a friend who's a PT instructor and Joe Nights and she's, she's brilliant rip the funniest, funniest woman I've ever met, but absolutely brilliant. But she's around, you know, she talks very much around. Common sense things like it doesn't have to be this elaborate thing.

So one of hers is always have a glass by the sink so that when you ever go to the sink, fill it up, drink water, put it back there because you've already had a glass of water and you are only going to wash your hands. So just think about how you can incorporate it every day like that and, and do that skill stacking.

None of these that I've give you takes a lot of time or effort, to be fair. Even if we've only got a few minutes to focus on something like deep breathing or journaling, it has massive, significant effects for reducing stress. It helps improve our focus and our overall well-being. That's not just emotionally, but physically.

You don't have to wait for stressful moments to do this. You absolutely can. If you feel stressed, or anxious, or overwhelmed, take a moment, take a moment to pause. Encourage the kids to take that moment to pause.

If you're facing something challenging, if you've got an interview for a new job, if you're feeling pressure, because you've got so much to do at home. Take that moment. Because it will really help you regain control and perspective. And what better model for our kids to say, I just need a minute. I just need to take time out.

I can feel very overwhelmed at the minute, so I'm just going to take a moment. I'm going to do some deep breathing. I'm just going to stop and take a mindful brew; however it is.

These sound very, very simple and that is because they are. They're simple to carry out. They're simple to do. Do not underestimate the power of these kind of activities on your stress levels.

It is huge. And have a little play around with them. Look at different times of what works best for you. Is that first thing in the morning? I tend to is it called front load? Where I tend to do more in the morning because by the time, by the time, A, it sets me up for my day. It sets me up for, because I will do kind of a little bit of meditation, I'll deep breathe in before I have a busy day.

So today I am slammed. So I get up early so that I can get everything done and sorted before I do client work. So that sets me up for the day. But it also means that I have done it. And because at night time, I'm tired by that point. I do just want to sit on the couch for Netflix or, or, you know, Relax.

So front load in your day helps. It doesn't only set you up, but you know, it's already done. And it just builds that stress resistance for the day. So on to our exciting news, the lovely Chantelle, who if you're a regular listener knows my, she's my VA and she's brilliant. I said, I wanted to produce some assets for the podcast and when you upload onto Spotify and stuff, it doesn't have the ability to be able to do that.

So she has created on our website a little thing and you just sign up for it. Doesn't cost you anything. You sign up as a podcast subscriber through the through the platform that I have. And I'll share this on the socials later today. And what happens, you sign up on there and you get access to other stuff that if you just listen on Spotify you wouldn't get.

So what happens is you, so for instance on here you'll get a little PDF. You will get, with the highlights on, you will also get the video series I'm going to do. And they're going to be sharp, sharp videos that will just take you through some of these practices. How amazing is that? So every week, When the podcast comes out, you'll get extra content.

Now, it'll all be there, sat there, for you to access whenever you want. So you can come back to it whenever you want. When we've got guests, and the month of May is going to be all guests. When we've got guests, you're going to be able to have a PDF with their takeaway messages. How cool is that? The transcript is also there.

So I don't know if you know that every time, we do a podcast, because we want to be inclusive and actually, I was having a great conversation last night around this because we want to be inclusive, we will do a transcript. You can watch it on YouTube. You can listen to it on, on podcast. I was going to say audio, but of course it's audio.

You can listen to it on Spotify. Or wherever you get your stuff, so sign up and you get all the things that are there for you. Of course we want you to have them. And, you can you've also got my contact details there. So if you want to go, what about this? What about that? Or can you cover this? Can you cover that?

I'll answer, I will answer. Nobody else, me. If you write to Ashley at the resilient kid, it's only me that gets it. I'm the one who replies. So yeah, very exciting news. We wanted to give you a little bit extra. The podcast is, is starting to get bigger and bigger, and we just want to make sure that we've got it PS, let me know what you think about the new music, right?

That's me out. Have an amazing day, whatever day this you're listening to this on sign up for the podcast subscribers. So you can get all the extra booty there. And. Yeah, lots of love from my family to yours. And look out for the new puppy on the socials. Bye for now.