

# Army Reserve Child, Youth & School Services

*CYSS Mission: To support readiness and quality of life by reducing the conflict between military mission requirements and parental responsibilities*

## SPECTRUM AND SIGNS OF STRESS FOR KIDS

While some stress in life is normal and even healthy, kids today seem to be confronted with a myriad of experiences that can create tension and make coping with life a challenge. Common examples of these stressors include: lack of basic needs (food, clothing, and shelter), divorce, death, illness, incarceration, foster care placement, family substance abuse, domestic violence, extended separation from a parent or loved one, or physical, sexual, emotional abuse.

### SPECTRUM OF STRESSORS

Ordinary  Severe

- At the ordinary end of the spectrum are events which occur to most children in our society and for which there are fairly well-defined coping patterns.
- A short distance along the spectrum are the stresses which occur when children have only one parent in the home or when they live in multiple parent, multiple dwelling households.
- Toward the severe end of the spectrum are stresses caused by extended separation of children from their parents or siblings.
- At the severe end of the spectrum are those stresses that are long lasting and require kids to make major behavioral, emotional, and/or personality adaptations in order to survive.



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This information has been provided by Army Reserve Child, Youth & School Services.  
For more information on resources and programs, please visit:  
[WWW.ARFP.ORG/CYSS](http://WWW.ARFP.ORG/CYSS)

Fort Family Outreach & Support Center assistance is available 24/7  
at 866-345-8248 and/or [WWW.ARFP.ORG](http://WWW.ARFP.ORG)



**SIGNS OF STRESS**

	BEHAVIORS	REACTIONS	COMMUNICATIONS	INTERACTIONS
INFANTS TO 5 YEARS	Fussiness; uncharacteristic crying; neediness; generalized fear; heightened arousal and confusion	Helplessness; passivity; avoidance of stress related reminders; exaggerated startle response; regressive symptoms; somatic symptoms; sleep disturbances; nightmares	Cognitive confusion; difficulty talking about stressors; lack of verbalization; trouble identifying feelings; unable to understand events; anxieties about change/loss	Clinging; separation fears; grief related to abandonment by caregivers
6 TO 11 YEARS	Spacey; distracted; changes in behavior, moody, personality; regressive behavior; aggressive behavior; angry outbursts	Reminders trigger disturbing feelings; responsibility; guilt; safety concerns; preoccupation; obvious anxiety; general fearfulness; somatic symptoms; sleep disturbances; nightmares	Confusion and inadequate understanding of events; magical explanations to fill in gaps of understanding; withdrawn; quiet	Worry and concern for others; separation anxiety; repetitious traumatic play and retelling of events; loss of ability to concentrate; school avoidance; loss of interest in activities
12 TO 18 YEARS	Self conscious; sadness; depression; stress driven risk-taking and acting out; recklessness; substance use/abuse	Efforts to distance from feelings; wish for revenge and action- oriented responses; life threatening re-enactment; decline in school performance; sleep and eating disturbances	Increased self-focus; social withdrawal; avoidance	Flight into driven activity/involvement with others OR retreat in order to manage inner turmoil; rebellion at home and school; abrupt shift in relationships

Information adapted from *Helping Children Cope with Stress* (1984) by Avis Brenner; Operation: Military Kids *Ready, Set, Go! Training Manual* (2010) by 4-H Army Youth Development Project; and Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration National Mental Health Center.



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