

Parenting 101: Your Child's Stress Is Your Stress

I don't think there's anyone who can raise my stress level the way my children can. Our children don't realize that we not only have our own anxiety, but we take on theirs as well. It's not the healthiest thing to do, but it comes with the territory of being a parent.

By

Leslie Rasmussen, Contributor

Contributor

I don't think there's anyone who can raise my stress level the way my children can. Our children don't realize that we not only have our own anxiety, but we take on theirs as well. It's not the healthiest thing to do, but it comes with the territory of being a parent.

When my boys started middle school, we got them a cell phone. We told them now that they were more independent, we needed to be able to get a hold of them at any time. The thing was that not only could we get a hold of them; they could get a hold of us. Any time. Which is not always a good thing. One day, I dropped my youngest son off at school and an hour later, he texted me that it was the worst day he had ever had and he wanted to come home. Of course immediately after that text, he had gone incommunicado, so I spent the next six hours stressing about what might have happened.

I began creating a whole world in my head about what was going on in that foreign land he called school. Was he being teased and bullied to

the point that he was afraid to leave the boys bathroom? Did he fail that math test he studied so hard for? Or did he get in a fight with his best friend and was feeling alone? Every scenario ran through my mind and I couldn't concentrate on my work or get anything done for the rest of the day. Finally, as I sat in the carpool line, I saw my son running over to my car. Was that a big smile I saw on his face? He jumped in the car and asked how my day had been. I was almost speechless as I stared at him in disbelief. Where was the freaked out boy that texted me that morning? I calmly ask him how his day had been and he said fine, as if it was any other day that we were talking about. I asked him about the text he sent me that morning. He'd almost forgotten about it, then remembered that for a few minutes he thought he left his math homework at home, but realized that he had just stuffed it at the bottom of his backpack, so everything was fine. The breath I had been holding all day long came rushing out of me as I told him that he could no longer text me unless it was an emergency or he was sick. He didn't understand what my problem was. In his eyes, he had experienced the bad moment, resolved it and went about his day. He had just transferred his anxiety to me.

Weeks went by and my son had stopped texting me from school. I wasn't sure if that was good or bad. Had he listened about not texting me from school unless he was sick or it was an emergency, or was he miserable and just hiding it from me? I began to stress again. Later that day when I picked my son up from school, he looked happy; I didn't see any strain on his face. I asked him how things had been going. Not just that day, but every day. He said things were fine, but the question made him nervous and he asked me why I was asking. He wanted to know if something was wrong at home. And there it was, my obvious stress over him made him stressed and now he doubted his own worry-free day. I told him things were fine, and in typical teenager fashion with their usual short-term memory loss, he was back to thinking about his own

life.

As parents, we will stress over our kids constantly, because their lives seem so fragile and we never know what will happen from one day to the next. It's our job as parents to not tell our kids when we are stressing over things, even if it's over them. Even at this point in my life, if stressful things happen, I call my parents. I vent to them, try to work through the issue and I'm sure transfer my anxiety to them. The circle of life, one generation stressing out the next.

Part of HuffPost Parenting. ©2020 Verizon Media. All rights reserved.