

# De-stressing in a stressful world

by Garrick Conner

**I**t's no secret that children today are growing up way too fast — much faster, in fact, than the generations before them. This fact is evidenced by earlier onset of puberty, particularly in girls, and by the kinds of things that worry our children.

In a recent article for *Christian Broadcasting Network*, family therapist Linda Mintle wrote that children today worry about not only the usual issues of health, school and personal harm, but also more global issues like war, money and disasters. My experience as a minister and marriage and family therapist confirms her findings.

Anxiety is a very real issue with people of all ages and life stages, even for children. And it's no wonder, as they are exposed to a barrage of messages and psychosocial stressors in today's fast-paced culture. It is difficult to be a child in our hectic and frenzied world!

From behind the veil of pop culture and social media, our children are crying out to the adults in their lives, begging us to slow down and pay attention to them. In her article, Mintle wrote, "When you ask children what they would like to change the most in their lives, the answer is frequently

to have parents who are less stressed and tired." Indeed, our children not only notice the frantic lifestyles we keep, but they follow our example and take on issues that should be reserved just for adults.

Parents can help their children in several key ways with regard to stress:

## RECOGNIZE AND MANAGE THE STRESS IN YOUR OWN LIFE

Acknowledge the amount of stress you take on. Whether it's family conflict, work-related matters, financial problems or something else entirely, examine your own life and work to appropriately manage stress. As a Christian, you can turn to your relationship with God as the starting point for sorting out your feelings and know that He cares for you.

There are many stressors in life over which you have very little control. However, there are other stressors that you allow unintentionally to eat away at your quality of life, especially the quality of the relationship you have with your children. Rectifying the stress in your own life may mean drawing some clear lines and saying no to some really good things. Nowhere is this issue more evident than in the lives of working moms who need to work in order to make ends meet financially; yet they also want to be involved in their children's schools, field trips, church and extracurricular activities.

For many moms, the popular social media site Pinterest has created a whole new level of need to keep up a superhero image. Whether it's preparing healthy meals or being a resident creative expert who can whip out life-changing crafts in a moment's notice, many mothers have bought into the notion that they could and should do everything with excellence. Of course, the trouble is that time is a precious commodity to be used wisely. Often that starts by setting more realistic personal expectations.

## SET HEALTHY PERSONAL BOUNDARIES WITH YOUR CHILDREN

The most important thing parents can do for their children is to focus on the quality of their marital relationship. For single parents, this is a moot point. However, single parents must be extra vigilant about the tendency to lean on their children for emotional support they would ideally be receiving from their significant other.

When you confide in your children about grown-up issues, you place them in the impossible position of knowing about your stressors but having little or no capacity or authority to make things better. If you have no spouse (or have an emotionally unavailable spouse), find a same-gender friend who can be a sounding board for you. If you need a deeper level of support, consider seeing a pastor or counselor in your church or community to help sort out your problems.

## SET LIMITS ON YOUR CHILDREN'S TECHNOLOGY USE

This includes TV, video games, Internet and social media. Regardless of their age, children and teens need to be active. For that matter, so do you! When we get sucked in by technology and all its time-wasting gadgets, we automatically expose ourselves to more and more layers of messages, and we deprive ourselves of the time we need to effectively de-stress.

Whether it's the latest Facebook game, the most popular reality TV show or the constantly evolving online world, setting — and enforcing — healthy limits can help keep your children from being unnecessarily exposed to frequent and often subtle messages that create stress.

It's equally important to set limits on your own technology use as well. Children are smart. They know when you're more interested in your phone or computer. At my house cell phones are strictly prohibited from the dinner table, and homework is first priority.

## ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILDREN TO BE CHILDREN

When sports and extracurricular activities become more of a stress than a stress relief, consider cutting back on something. Having two children myself, I see the way many parents and coaches approach youth sports — with the no-holds-barred strategy that seems to forget that most of us aren't raising the next superstar.

Be intentional about having fun together as a family, and don't downplay the simple things. Play games as a family. Exercise together. Bake cookies. Laugh together. Make the very most of the time God gives you.

## PRAY AND PRAISE GOD AS A FAMILY

There's always going to be stress in your life. Like so many people in the Bible, you will grow stronger in your faith and more dependent on God as a result of life's challenges and struggles.

Take time to pray for situations that create stress. You don't have to be too specific, especially about adult-related issues. Maybe you can just

tell your children: "I need you to pray for a relationship problem I have with a co-worker." Or maybe it's something more tangible: "We need another car. Let's pray that God will provide one for us." Your goal is not to artificially insulate your children from the reality of stress in life, but rather to teach them to put it in proper perspective. Don't forget to praise God for answered prayers and for just being so awesome and caring. Teach your children to praise Him no matter what.

Take some time to honestly assess how you and your children are currently experiencing and coping with stress. Work with your family to identify a key Bible verse that reminds you not to worry and stress, but rather to trust God with troubles big and small. Come what may, He's still got the whole world in His hands.



*Garrick Conner is discipleship pastor at Park Hill Baptist Church in North Little Rock. He and his wife, Michelle, have two children, Jackson and Caroline. You can find more of his writings at [www.garrickdconner.com](http://www.garrickdconner.com).*

### THE TECH-SAFE HOME


**A two-hour program for parents on the dangers and defenses of 21st century technology!**  
*A companion program is available for youth*

**Contact Buddy Knight at  
KNIGHTS' QUEST  
MINISTRIES**  
to learn more and to equip your church in this critical area!

*"I can recommend it without reservation"*  
— Dr. Richard Ross, SWBTS.

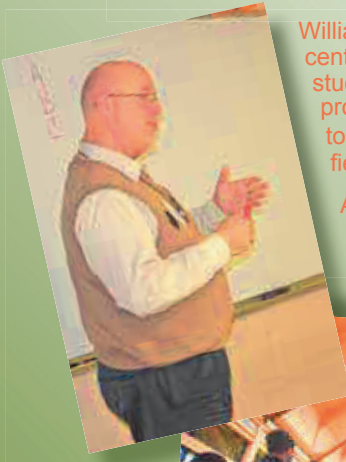
[www.knightsquest.org](http://www.knightsquest.org) [info@knightsquest.org](mailto:info@knightsquest.org) 817-715-4074






## WILLIAMS

BAPTIST COLLEGE



Williams makes college a Christ-centered experience. With a 13-to-1 student-to-teacher ratio, WBC provides a nurturing environment to help prepare you for your chosen field.

At Williams, you earn more than a degree. You are academically, socially and spiritually equipped for the journey of life.



Walnut Ridge,  
Arkansas  
[www.williamsbaptistcollege.com](http://www.williamsbaptistcollege.com)