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Reducing Stress in Our Homes

Traumatologists frequently use the words “toxic stress” to describe what prolonged adversity and its subsequent impact does to the brain, especially the developing brain.



▲ Ingrid Slikkers

This can significantly negatively impact a child without adult support around them. Knowing this, I can't help but wonder about the amount of stress in our homes currently and over the last few months. Words such as “fear” and “confusion” and even “conflict” seem to rise frequently.

I question what our children are hearing. Do I show unhealthy fear? How judgmental are my words? Are our youngest ones confused because we are having arguments with or talking about family members negatively? Could it be that our teens are even more impacted as they, too, try to understand what is valid, truth, science, and what they should believe or how they can respond?

I pause, knowing that children will respond to things around them based on how their care provider is responding. Particularly in the world of working within traumatic situations with children, this is called “co-regulation.” I question, “Where is my regulation?”

Let's make time to talk with our kids. Ask them what are their friends talking about. Create an environment in your home that feels safe to talk about *all* of it,

whatever that might be, even masks and vaccines! Ask them if they have any questions about what they have heard you talk about.

Tune in to their feelings; talk about how you are feeling *and* ways you are trying to cope. Remember, throughout the discussion time, children develop their self-regulation from the co-regulation that you provide. Acknowledge the responses, thoughts and reactions kids have, and don't be surprised if they think differently that you! Obviously, assure that all conversations are within the child's developmental level.

Discuss practical ways of choosing to be like Jesus in hard and confusing times. We might have to even venture into topics of why others, who are also Christians, love Jesus and pray every day, might not be viewing or responding to the world like our family believes we should.

Use a calm and reassuring voice and tone. It is okay not to have all the answers but assuring them that you are in this together and that you will do your best to protect them is key. Remind them that, even if there are differences of opinion, there are people in their surroundings who genuinely care and want to help them in addition to you.

Although there is stress all around us—and we do indeed live in stressful times, our homes need to be the sanctuaries God intended them to be. Ask the Holy Spirit to make you aware of when these conversations need to happen and remember the all-important eye contact and safe physical touch—those vitally important connections that are needed during hard times! ■

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