

5 Things we should learn from children

Let go and have fun!
It's a great way to
beat stress

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You sigh as you contemplate the day ahead. In your battle against stress you have made some big changes in your life. You have prioritised your health, are following a balanced eating plan, have organised your time better and even joined the gym. You are doing everything right, yet why do you still feel the weight of the world on your shoulders?

Unfortunately there is a catch-22 here, as exercise, healthy eating and finding balance are difficult to do when

you are feeling stressed and anxious. To make these changes in your life without joy makes them just another burden. They become the “right” things to do, chores hanging over your head – they become “Should Do’s” rather than “Want To’s”.

The good news is that the solution is right in front of you. Take a new look at how small children take on the world. Journey down memory lane to when you were as small and innocent. What did you do then that you can apply now to help bring more joy and less stress to your life?

A favourite anecdote comes from Robin Sharma, Success Coach and author. He tells of how, when he dropped off his young son at a friend’s house, he asked the boys what they planned to do that day. They looked at him incredulously, as the answer was so obvious to them. They were going to play.

As adults we believe we have to stop playing once we grow up and have responsibilities. But being responsible should not mean an absence of enjoyment. So how can we put joy back on the agenda?

Get active

Remember what fun it was to ride your bike down the driveway, splash around in a paddling pool, run through the sprinklers and chase each other across the playground? Exercise wasn’t the chore it so often becomes for us as adults – it was fun! Do you remember when throwing, kicking or hitting a ball around was the highlight of the day, long before team games became all about winning? Ball games were fun and were about playing with friends. Find a way to bring the fun back into your exercising. How about looking into joining a social sports club, swimming, dancing, cycling with friends or doing whatever activity you loved as a child?

Playing with pets is something else that small children do with gusto. There is a lot of physical love, as well as rough and tumble at times, but just watch the joy in a small child’s face when playing with a pet. Not only does loving a pet make you feel happier, research has found that stroking a pet calms you down and reduces blood pressure. So go on, make some time to cuddle your pets. Or adopt a dog from the SPCA – an excellent and enjoyable reason to take family walks in the park.

How often do you really get down and play with your children? Not just watch but get involved in their games? Become the villain to your child’s superhero; get stuck into moulding

playdough, building Lego, kicking a ball around, or joining in a tea party. Playing with your children can be both a physical and creative bonding time.

Daydream

Remember the time you would spend as a small child making up stories in your head and playing games with imaginary characters? You knew exactly what you wanted to be when you grew up because you pictured it so clearly. Daydreaming is not idling away your time, but a useful means of stress relief. Let your inner child run wild as you use visualisation, guided imagery or just take time out to imagine.

Sing

How often do you sing? Notice how children sing to themselves without any self-consciousness. They do this naturally because it makes them feel happy. Even if you know you’ll never get past the judges on *Idols*, sing along to your favourite songs when in the car and feel your mood lift.

Get creative

Remember those works of art that you would proudly take home to mom? We encourage children to explore their creativity through drawing, colouring in and painting. As adults many of us believe we aren’t artistic or creative but as children we didn’t care. We loved art because it was absorbing and fun. What is your creative outlet now that you are a responsible parent? Do you paint or take photographs, write in a journal, bake, make jewellery or do scrapbooking? If not, find something that you love because being creative is a huge stress reliever.

Laugh

One major factor of stress in this world is that laughter is missing in many adult lives. We are all born with the great gift of laughter. Children and babies laugh spontaneously – they don’t need

a joke or reason to laugh, they just do. Research shows that a young child can laugh anything from 300 to 500 times a day, whilst adults only laugh 5 to 15 times a day! What makes you laugh? Recall those times when you were truly happy and chances are there was laughter involved. Connect with those things and people that make you laugh, watch funny movies, read comics, join a laughter yoga class – do what it takes to bring more laughter into your life. Perhaps more importantly, give yourself permission to laugh. So many of us believe we must be serious and that giggling with friends is for teenagers.

Where there is laughter there is less space for stress. Doing the right things to keep healthy and balanced then become a joy rather than a burden.

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We must let our children be our role models. We need to reconnect with the little child in ourselves, before she was conditioned to quieten her laughter and dampen her playfulness. Hook out from her the fun of playing games and being active, of creating and dreaming. Laugh for no reason at all and begin to build your reserves. In the tug-of-war between happiness and stress, happiness can be victorious, if we just let it. ■