

# How to Lower Your Stress

by Rick Hanson, Ph.D.

*“I’ve got a two-year-old plus a newborn and I was telling my own mom how stressed out I was. She interrupted and said, “That’s just parenting, you may as well get used to it.” Then she changed the subject, as if she were passing down some unwritten rule of parenthood: I suffered, and so should you.”*

To us, that view makes no sense. Nurturing yourself is what enables you to be at your best for your children. Further, parenting is not a hobby you picked up for fun. You work hard for the sake of your children and family, and that entitles you to respect, care – and stress relief.

**Here are 10 key ways a parent can lower their stress level and start feeling immediately better.**

And most of them are pretty applicable to partners and children, too!

1. Remember that your inner experience matters in its own right, plus nurturing yourself is the absolute foundation of caring for your children.
2. The accumulation of moments of stress makes a world of difference, so do small things throughout the day to keep your stress meter out of the “red zone.”
3. More fundamentally, systematically focus on letting go of stress in your body, mental images, emotions, desires, and thoughts.
4. In particular, try to let go of unrealistic expectations about the sort of parent you are “supposed” to be.
5. Even more deeply, reflect on how your childhood is increasing your stress today (like intensifying your emotional reactions); bring compassion to the young parts of yourself; try to sort apart the intensified “young” reactions from the more moderate, here-and-now ones; try to let go of the deepest level of your distress, like making sure you get the tip of the dandelion’s root to prevent it from growing back.
6. Try to accept your inner experience for what it is, so you don’t add further stress to whatever your experience might be. There is nothing shameful about whatever arises unbidden in the mind: accepting it is not the same as acting on it.
7. Let positive experiences sink deeply into your emotional memory banks, soothing and even dislodging negative ones.
8. Overall, be active in your own mind, ultimately in charge of it, like the skillful rider of a high-spirited horse.
9. Commit to daily practices – like journaling, meditation, walks, music, or art – that nurture you and deepen your capacity to stand apart from the inevitable, endless ups and downs of your inner and outer worlds.
10. If it’s meaningful for you to do so, nourish within yourself and draw on a spiritual awareness.

*This is an article adapted from the book [Mother Nurture](#) (2002) by Rick Hanson, Ph.D., Jan Hanson, M.S. and Ricki Pollycove, M.D.*