**Helping your Child “De-Stress”**

**By, Dr. Stephanie Kutin**

**We all feel *STRESS* at one time or another. It is important to teach children how to identify and manage feelings of stress so that it does not negatively impact on their health, learning, and relationships.**

**Physical Signals:**

* **Butterflies in the stomach**
* **Tensed jaw**
* **Sweaty palms**
* **Clenched fists**
* **Shallow breathing**
* **Difficulty attending**

**It is good to teach children specific *relaxation methods* in order to become calm.**

**\*Here is one strategy you can practice with your child in a quiet and private place. With practice, the hope is that your child can use this strategy in school or any other location during moments of stress.**

* **Take a slow, deep breath in through your nose.**
* **Hold your breath and count to three in your head at a slow rate.**
* **As you slowly exhale through your mouth, think or say to yourself, “I am okay. I am relaxing. I feel good”.**
* **Follow these steps three times in a row and repeat until you feel more at ease.**

**\* Another useful strategy is called “*visualization*”.**

* **Think of a place where you feel happy and relaxed.**
* **Close your eyes, relax your body, and picture that happy place.**
* **Imagine you are there right now. It can be somewhere you have been or would like to go.**
* **Use each of your five senses to describe what you are experiencing. What do you see? What do you smell? What do you hear? Think about what you can touch or taste.**
* **Reinforce that this is a safe and happy place where your mind can “go on vacation” when you are feeling stressed.**

**In stressful situations, we often have negative thoughts that replay in our minds. These are called “automatic thoughts”. It is important to teach children to be aware of these negative automatic thoughts and to insert new and more positive thoughts into their minds. This is called: *Positive Self-Talk*.**

**Example: Negative Automatic Thoughts:**

* **This is hard!**
* **I can’t do this!**
* **I want to get out of here!**
* **No one likes me!**

**Example: Positive Automatic Thoughts:**

* **This is hard, but I can handle it.**
* **I can do this. I just need to try.**
* **I will get through this. These feelings will pass.**
* **I am a nice and fun person. I will ask someone to play.**
* **I don’t like it, but I can deal with it!**

**Relaxation methods and positive self-talk require practice. With time, these strategies can help your child “De-Stress” and experience a sense of improved well-being.**