Family Resource Assistance
Our Family Resource Liaisons are master’s level clinicians who are available to help individuals and families navigate the mental healthcare system by providing contact information for mental health resources in your community.

Family Resource Liaisons are available by phone at 720-777-4978, Monday - Friday, 8 a.m. - 6 p.m.

Additional Resources
The Relaxation & Stress Reduction Workbook, by Martha Davis, Elizabeth Robbins Eshelman, and Matthew McKay

Free Apps:
- Breathe2relax: abdominal breathing and stress management
- I-CBT: help with sleep
- Calm: relaxation techniques
- MeditationOasis.com: meditations for a range of problems, such as sleep and anxiety

Stress Management for Parents

Stress is a part of our lives. Most of us experience times when we feel we are at the limit of our ability to cope. Having a child who is ill presents unique challenges.

To get through the tough times, we need to make sure we have the skills to cope successfully. The stress management tools described in this brochure can add to your “coping toolkit.”
Common Stressors for Parents
- Worry about your child’s illness and treatments
- Guilt about your child’s illness
- Disruption of family routines
- Balancing the demands of work, medical appointments, and hospitalizations
- Attending to the needs of all of your children when your child who is ill requires much of your time
- Less time to spend with a partner
- Less time for recreational and social activities
- Challenges in looking after your own health and well-being
- Separation of family members
- Financial and health concerns

Common Responses to Stress
- Sleep problems (trouble falling asleep, waking up at night, not getting enough sleep)
- Feeling tired, low energy
- Stomachaches, headaches, and other physical symptoms
- Changes in appetite
- Increased worries and nervousness
- Irritability, moodiness
- Getting into arguments more often
- Distraction, difficulties paying attention

How to Manage
Identify your responses to stress: We feel stressed whenever we face challenges that appear beyond our ability to cope. Our bodies have a specific way of responding to stress called the “fight or flight” response, which can include the following:
- **Physical**: increased muscle tightness, fast heart rate, shallow and fast breathing, sweating, cold hands
- **Mental**: narrowed attention, increased worry

Bubble: Identifying how your body responds to stress can help you become more aware of when you are starting to feel stressed. Developing this awareness can help you notice stress early on, when it may be easier to manage, and help you let go of body tension.

Focus your attention on your environment. Start with noticing things you hear and see (cars going by outside, the breeze blowing in the trees, the TV in the background).
- Shift the focus of your attention to your body and your physical sensations (tension in the back, sensation of the back of the thighs against the chair).
- Shift your attention back and forth between your environment and your body (I am aware of tension in my shoulders, the sounds of others talking).

Practice this exercise in free moments during the day to help become more aware of your body responses and to help yourself attend to what is happening in the “here and now.”

Engage in stress-reducing habits:
- Healthy eating: Eat breakfast, regular meals, and healthy snacks.
- Regular sleep: Aim for seven to nine hours per night, and try to keep a consistent schedule on weekdays and weekends.
- Exercise: Get active three to five times per week for 30 minutes; walking is good exercise.

Spend time doing activities you enjoy: reading, movies, hobbies, talking to a friend, or whatever you like to do.

Identify the difference between **controllable and uncontrollable stressors.** Each requires a different response.
- **Controllable** stressors are those that we know about and can plan for. Oftentimes we know what situations are the most stressful for us. Thinking ahead about these situations and planning ways to manage them may help reduce stress. An “information seeking” approach to controllable stressors allows us to plan ways to manage our response and we may feel less distress when dealing with the actual stressor. This strategy can also help increase our self-confidence for facing future stressors.
- **Uncontrollable** stressors are those over which we have no control. Become aware of your stress response and ways you can manage it both mentally and physically (thinking about it differently, taking deep breaths, or engaging other ways to relax the body).

Pay special attention to negative thinking (“I can’t handle this”) or thinking the worst (“This is just going to get worse and worse”). When we think the worst we often feel overwhelmed, and our stress increases. Consider other ways to view the situation, such as “I need to take a deep breath and figure out the steps I can take to manage this situation.” Changing the way we think about a stressful situation can go a long way toward reducing stress.

Use simple **problem-solving strategies:**
- State the problem.
- Brainstorm solutions.
- Choose a strategy.
- Try it out.
- Change strategy based on results.

Learn stress reduction techniques:
- **Deep breathing** (sometimes a few deep breaths can really help!)
- **Muscle relaxation** (tense and relax muscles throughout your body)
- **Imagery** (Imagine yourself in a favorite place doing something you really like to do)
- **Yoga**
- **Meditation**
- **Talking about the situation with someone you trust**