

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Johnson County:

Connecting, Mentoring, & Strengthening Youth Facing Adversity



Critical Skills: 3 Ways to Help Kids Beat Stress

Half of marriages end in divorce. Obesity rates have doubled for children and tripled for teens, in under 40 years. School shootings occur with increasing frequency. And nearly half of kids report having been bullied online.

Is it any wonder that the American Psychological Association says our youth, especially [teens, experience stress that rivals or surpasses what adults experience?](#)

Moderate stress is often healthy, but the effects of chronic or trauma-related stress can be devastating. Sufferers often experience increased risk of serious illness like heart disease or lung cancer, inhibited memory and concentration, and disturbed sleep, to name only a few common outcomes.

Is a youth you care about in danger of stress overload? Are you certain whether you can accurately tell? Or if they are, what you might do about it?

Trauma-informed care research shows that Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) such as abuse, neglect, parental separation, substance abuse, or mental illness measurably change how a child's brain develops. For instance, ACEs can inhibit the prefrontal cortex, a necessary part of the brain for impulse control and higher-level thinking. The more ACEs a person experiences, the more likely they are to experience debilitating brain changes. Next time you see a kid acting out, ask yourself—*What don't I know about what happened to them? How could their experiences be affecting their behavioral "choices" today?*

(Continued in *Critical Skills*, p. 2)

Our Mission:

We provide children facing adversity with strong and enduring, professionally supported one-to-one relationships that *change their lives for the better, forever.*

Our Vision:

All children achieve *success in life.*

Spring 2018 Issue

Critical Skills: Stress	1
Your BBBS Team.....	2
Research & Resources.....	3
Partner of Impact: 4-H ..	4
Thank You, Board!	4
Activities & Events.....	5
Stay Connected.....	6
Drug Abuse Prevention ..	6

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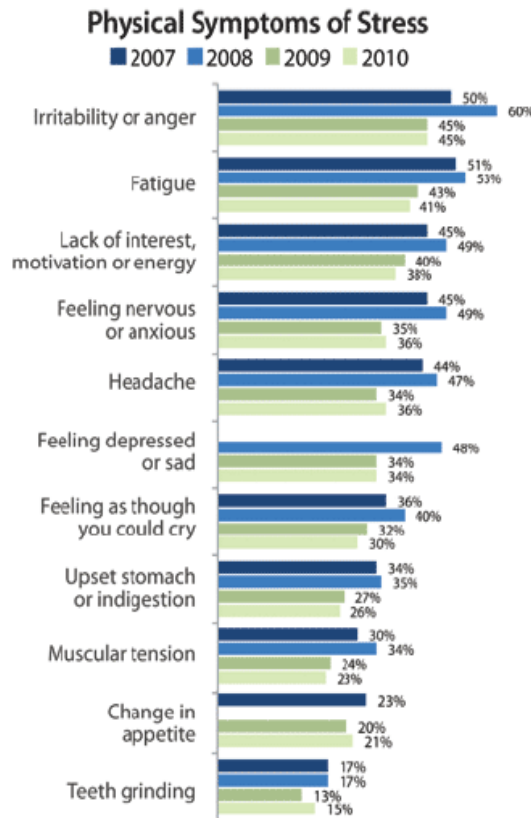
*Big Brothers Big Sisters of Johnson County is a United Way sponsored agency. Visit www.unitedwayjwc.org to learn more and become a supporter. Or support local youth directly through www.bbbsjc.org!

Critical Skills (continued from Page 1)

While we can never fully understand another person’s individual experience, there is good news.

“Safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments may help people reach their full potential by preventing early adverse experiences before they occur and protecting against poor outcomes for children who have already experienced adversity.”
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

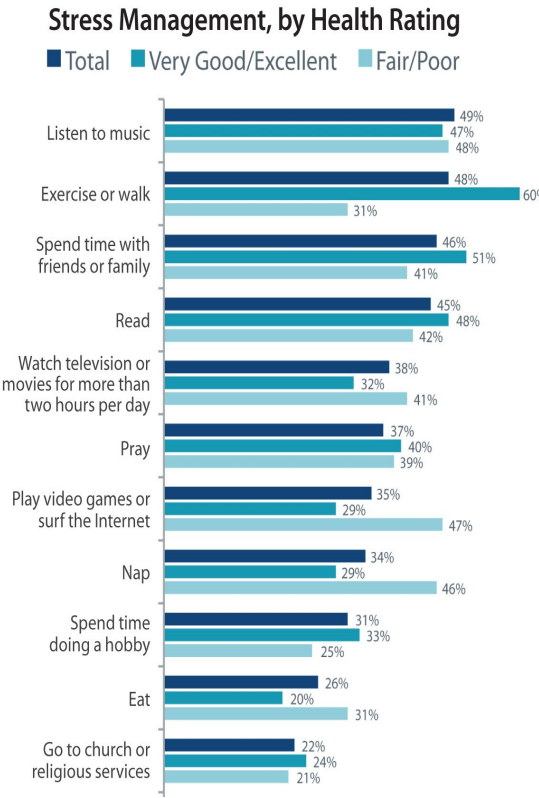
In other words, by being a consistent, positive person in a child’s life, you strengthen their resilience against adverse experience outcomes. Here are a few additional re-



Graphics Credit: American Psychological Association

Just 14% of youth say their parents’ stress doesn’t bother them.
-American Psychological Association

Do you know?... Does your Little know?...
... how to recognize stress?
... and healthy ways to cope?
Discuss these symptoms and stress-beating strategies!



search-based actions you can model and encourage in both yourself and the youth you care about to level up your positive impact even more:

1. Increase Self-Awareness: By growing awareness of our body-mind-emotion connection, we can show kids how to notice and take control of their own state. For example, if in a tense conversation we notice tight muscles, rapid, shallow breathing, or a racing heart, we can take several slow, deep breaths to calm our physical state, and thereby redirect our emotional state and reactions. Consider a recent conversation one of our Mentoring Specialists had with an 8th-grade Little:

Do you get stressed about school a lot? Yes. With tests especially.

What's helped with that? Breathing exercises.

What does that look like for you? Sitting still and thinking about breathing.

Practicing greater self-awareness is free and simple. You can begin by asking yourself throughout the day, “What am I feeling right now, physically? Mentally? Emotionally?” Then play around with various techniques — meditation, journaling, breathing, mindful walks, etc. — to see what helps you redirect your state. Share what you learn with your Little, and encourage them to benefit from growing their own self-awareness, through techniques that suit their unique personality and interests.

It's also great to share with youth that even potentially positive events — such as pregnancy of a family member, or a new activity beginning — often feel stressful.

2. Practice Kindness. Doing good for others can help reduce stress, improve well-being, and benefit one's own mental and emotional health. (That's why it feels good to be a Big Brother/Sister!) Empower youth to give thoughtful words, favors, small tokens, or time to people in their life. For example, you could help them think through a genuine, character-based compliment they would like to give a family member, friend, or educator. Note: like all these strategies, one size doesn't fit all. Sharing kind words could seem quite easy for some and nearly impossible for others. Help your Little find kindness strategies that are well-suited to their unique personality and comfort level.

Maybe they would like to make a card or gift, or do something considerate around the home, for a mom/mom figure or dad/dad figure this Mothers or Fathers Day. One mom shared recently that the snow globe her child and the child's Big Sister made for her was “one of the best gifts I've ever gotten.”

3. Get Active. Exercise is good not just for our physical health, but also our emotional and mental health. Even just 30 minutes a day of walking has been shown to help. So help your Little get active. Decide together on some active options they'd be willing to try. Walk or jog in the park. Toss a ball. Try disc golf or tennis. Or purchase a couple of \$3 passes to the University of Iowa Recreation & Wellness Center from BBBS and go rock-wall climbing. (Make sure their family is good with it first.) Go bike riding, mushroom hunting, flower picking... this is the best time of year to help them break sedentary winter habits and enjoy healthy living!

For more info on youth stress and how you can help, visit <http://kidshealth.org/en/teens/stress.html>, or one of the resources on the right!



A Little Sister gets active break dancing at Littles On Campus 2018, a BBBS@Iowa event. UI students—contact President Monica West at monwest@iastate.edu to learn how you can get involved!

Research & Resources:

Follow on social media or through e-newsletter subscriptions to become a better-informed mentor, parent/guardian, and/or youth advocate!

MENTOR, mentoring.org
“Longer-term mentoring relationships are consistently associated with more benefits to youth than shorter-term relationships.”
[-4th edition of the Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring](#)

Youth Service America, ysa.org. Inspiration to help youth change the world.

TEDTalk, ted.com “[How childhood trauma affects health across a lifetime.](#)”
Nadine Burke Harris

Make a Difference!

If you care about your community...
... **YOU could be a great mentor, short-term volunteer, or financial supporter!**
Experience not required. Ongoing support provided.
Learn more now at www.bbbsjc.org!

Spring 2018 Partner of Impact: 4-H of Johnson County!

THANK YOU, Board!

The following volunteer Board Members help local kids facing adversity through their time, donations, community connections, advocacy, and more.

A **BIG** Thank You to our 2018 Board Members!!!

H. Scott Asay, U of I Tippie College of Business

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Hills Bank and Trust

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Laurie Walters, Oral B

Karissa Wikert,
Hills Bank and Trust

"I think this has been one of the best things that he's gotten involved in. It's had such a positive impact on him."

-Holly, guardian for an 8th grade Little Brother

"Noble Knights. Best club ever! Obviously."

-Darya, 8th-grade Little Sister

"I'm definitely likely to get to at least three 4-H/BBBS club events this year. They're really fun!"

-Isolina, 8th-grade Little Sister

Because of raving testimonials like these, 4-H of Johnson County has earned its place as this quarter's BBBS Partner of Impact!

4-H has been a leader in positive youth development in Johnson County since the 1970s, when it first partnered with the PALs program to help

4-H PLEDGE

I pledge my **HEAD** to clearer thinking,
my **HEART** to greater loyalty,
my **HANDS** to larger service,
and my **HEALTH** to better living,
for my club, my community,
my country, and my world.



Little Sister Darya, below, plays "Shark Attack" with her Big Sister Alexis and other members of the 4-H/BBBS partnership afterschool club, Noble Knights.





Little Brother Matthew discovers unconventional ways to power an MP3 player at March's Family Science Night, one of 6 Family Events 4-H & BBBS host throughout each year.

form Big Brothers Big Sisters. 4-H is a collection of educational programming that prioritizes STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math), Communication and The Arts, Citizenship and Leadership, and Healthy Living.

"4-H is built on a club model," says veteran 4-H Specialist Janet Martin. "Youth working together with adults. Youth-adult partnerships are 1 of the core beliefs in 4-H."

During the 2016-17 year, the adult staff and volunteers of 4-H helped serve 4,700 youth with Youth Development programming in Johnson County; that includes 4-H Clubs, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Pick a Better Snack Nutrition Education, 4-H Afterschool, 4-H on Wheels, and Clover University during the summer.

Both 4-H and Big Brothers Big Sisters of Johnson County are part of Iowa State University Extension & Outreach, headquartered next to the fairgrounds in Iowa City. Our shared mission of positive outcomes for youth have led to many unique opportunities for local kids, including at least monthly 4-H/BBBS club meetings where Bigs and Littles learn and have fun. Some recent favorites have been Health Night, Science Night, Service Night, and countless more.

4-H is also instrumental in the success of BBBS's "Big Little Talks". These opportunities allow new and veteran volunteer mentors to connect and support each other through common challenges. 4-H sets up engaging activities for youth during these evenings, so BBBS staff and Bigs can focus on idea-sharing and problem-solving together. The arrangement is part of a grant from the Office of Juvenile Justice through the National 4-H Council to support positive long-term outcomes for youth.

BBBS and 4-H also partner together in a unique afterschool club that combines the 1-to-1 mentor-mentee model with a 4-H club approach. 30 junior high youth and volunteer mentors grow in life skills while having fun together with hands-on activities as part of the Noble Knights afterschool club at North Central Jr High.

"Can I stay at Noble Knights forever?" asked one 8th-grade youth about to graduate out of the club, upon returning from a recent field trip to AirFX in Hiawatha where students challenged themselves to stretch their comfort zones and enjoy Healthy Living .

On behalf of all the youth they work with, their families, and our community—
THANK YOU 4-H, for being partners of impact!

Watch video of 4-H/Big Brothers Big Sisters impact in action at www.bbbsjc.org, or check out Big Brothers Big Sisters of Johnson County on Facebook & Twitter!

Spring Activity Ideas:

- ◇ Hike, bike, use playgrounds, chalk sidewalks: get active!
- ◇ Spring showers cramping your plans? Make stress balls with slime—even glow-in-the-dark slime! (YouTube it)
- ◇ Prep gloves, bags, and a good playlist, then pick up trash together in a neighborhood park!

Free 4-H/BBBS Club

Match Events:

- ◇ Family Art Night
ISU Extension Office
Wed 5/9, 6-7:30 pm
- ◇ Outdoor Movie Night:
"The Incredibles"
Popcorn included
4-H Fairgrounds, Barn 3
Fri 5/11, 8:30/Dusk

Big & Little Talks:

(Only for new matches & anniversaries)

Wednesday 5/16 6-7:30 pm

Thursday 6/14 6-7:30 pm

Enjoy snacks,
hands-on 4-H activities,
& exchange ideas
with other Bigs to
help your match flourish!

About Big Brothers Big Sisters of Johnson County

By partnering with parents/guardians, volunteers, and others in the community we help each child in our program achieve:

- Higher aspirations
- Greater confidence
- Better relationships
 - Avoidance of risky behaviors
- Educational success

Learn about our impact at:
www.bbbsjc.org/impact

Stay Connected

- **Facebook:** Like & follow Big Brothers Big Sisters of Johnson County
- **Twitter:** Follow BBBS of Johnson Co. @BBBSmentoring
- **Favorite**
www.bbbsjc.org

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Drug Abuse Prevention: Get Smart

By Jill Kromminga, Secondary School Based Specialist



I often (and only half-jokingly) tell the junior high and high school students I see that I am not smart enough to go to their school. Usually I am referring to their schedules: A day, B day, different schedule on Thursdays. Yikes! But there are a lot of other things I've been noticing I am not sure I would have been smart enough to figure out as a tween or teenager.

For example, I recently attended a conference organized by The Iowa Alliance for Drug Endangered Children. One of the speakers discussed how, in Colorado, where recreational marijuana use is legal, advertisers target their ads to entice young users. He showed an example of a marijuana dispensary with Sesame Street characters painted on the side of the building. Another example: an ad for marijuana in a publication for high school students. Would I have been smart enough to understand the profit motive behind these ads, at a young age?

There is also e-cigarette advertising aimed at teens. An increasingly popular e-cigarette called JUUL is shaped like a USB flash drive. Would I have been smart enough to know that even though using this device might be less harmful to my lungs, I am still getting a big hit of nicotine that could impede brain development and cause addiction?

I could write a lot more about the many things I don't feel smart enough about. My conclusion, of sorts, is that my job as a mentor and a professional who works with mentors is to find out the information. If you want to learn this information also, visit the websites below. I am also going to ask questions of the young people I know. Because I already know they are smart.

A website to look at with a teen/child:

<https://teens.drugabuse.gov/>

Information on the group
Smart Approach to Marijuana (SAM):

<https://learnaboutsam.org/>

Information for e-cigarettes:

<https://e-cigarettes.surgeongeneral.gov/resources.html>

Please let me, Jill Kromminga, know at Jill@bbbsjc.org if you have any comments or questions about the above information. Or contact any of the staff of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Johnson County.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Johnson County has been the grateful participant/recipient of a grant from the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH). This grant primarily funds our Secondary School Based Mentoring Program; our in-school mentoring program for junior high and early high school students. Drug abuse/misuse prevention is one of the goals of this grant.

Supporters like you raised \$122,973 at Bowl For Kids' Sake 2018, to give the gift of life-changing friendships for kids facing unique challenges. That is funding 9,500+ hours of life-changing mentoring for local youth.

THANK YOU !!!

Save The Date, Bowl For Kids' Sake 2019: (tentatively) the last weekend in February! Send us your ideas for fun themes! :-D