

move slowly at first when using humor, particularly if you do not have a close relationship with your child.

*Monitor physical and emotional conditions.* Stress is greater when a child is hungry, tired, lonely, or angry. Use the acronym HALT—Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired—to remind yourself, your spouse, and others in the family that the underlying problem with the child's behavior might be one of these.<sup>50</sup> Some gifted children experience a reactive hypoglycemia—a need for body fuel—that causes them stress. They usually function well until mid- or late-morning. Then, suddenly, they are emotionally over-reactive, irritable, and experience intense stress. Once they have eaten, their functioning and stress levels are fine again for several hours. A healthy protein snack mid-morning and again at mid-afternoon often lessens the intensity of the child's reactions and helps her think more clearly.<sup>51</sup> Children who overindulge in caffeinated drinks or junk food high in sugar may overreact similarly. Parents know that children who are tired become stressed quickly, and a nap usually helps. As children grow older, identifying problems with the HALT acronym can help gifted children better attend to their own needs.

*Practice other coping strategies.* Different techniques work for different stresses. Giving children a number of coping strategies to choose from is helpful. If the stressful feelings involve anger and frustration, the child can hit a pillow, tear pages out of an old phone book or catalog, or hit a tennis ball repeatedly against a wall, using self-talk or “I-statements” toward the target of her anger. “I am angry with you for the way you tease me.” If the stress comes from sadness, a child may want to listen to a favorite music CD, go for a walk, or try some more active exercise like running or riding a bike. Find the outlets for healthy emotional expression that work in your family.

## The Alphabet of Resilience—The ABCDE Model

Most of our recommendations about stress management can be summarized in an ABCDE model, created by psychologist Martin Seligman and his colleagues.<sup>52</sup> Adopting and practicing these basic steps will decrease life stress and increase resilience.

**Adversity**            Recognize that we all experience events that push our buttons and cause us stress.

**Beliefs**             Understand that we have beliefs about ourselves and how the world works (self-talk) that run through our heads when

we are confronted with adversities. Identify these beliefs, because we are what we think. Think about why this happened. Ask yourself, was it me or not me? Is the situation permanent, or will it pass, hopefully soon? Will it undermine everything else in my life, or is it just disrupting this situation?

- Consequences** Explore what is likely to happen next. What is the worst possible outcome? The best? The most likely? How probable are each of these?
- Disputing** Challenge the beliefs, particularly those that are irrational and unreasonable. What is the evidence? Would a best friend view my beliefs, predictions, and reactions as realistic?
- Energizing** Take action after disputing the beliefs. Is this a situation that helped me learn anything useful?

### A Resilient Sense of Self Is Vital

Stress management, self-awareness, and interpersonal skills often determine whether a child will lead a successful and healthy life. Long-term studies with a wide range of people over a period of more than 50 years have documented that the way in which individuals handle stress predicts whether or not they will reach their potential.<sup>53</sup> In the same way that academic ability can be cultivated, so can many components of resilience and stress management.<sup>54</sup> Parents can nurture resilience by supporting the idea that it's okay to be different from the norm—or the idea that sometimes a gifted child is a square peg that can't be forced into a round hole.

Most gifted children with a strong and resilient sense of self can handle the stresses they encounter. Children build confidence and self-esteem when their independence, actions, problem-solving attempts, successes, *and* failures are affirmed. As children grow and mature, they experiment with behaviors and beliefs. Parents can expose children to varied points of view and encourage them to develop their own values, priorities, personal ideas, and beliefs. The goal is for children to have confidence that they can make good decisions and manage their personal lives, knowing they have the skills to do so. When parents encourage these skills—and when communication and respect exist—stress, emotional problems, and family disruptions are far less likely to interfere with children's resiliency.<sup>55</sup>

