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Managing Stress:

Why stress matters

Parenting brings joy, purpose and connection — but it can also feel overwhelming at times. Stress is a natural response to pressure, change or uncertainty. When stress builds up, it can affect your energy, mood, sleep, and confidence.

Looking after your wellbeing helps you stay calm, connected and emotionally available for your child — a key foundation of strong attachment and resilience.

Understanding your stress triggers

Common stress triggers include:

- Feeling stretched between work, family and household pressures
- Lack of sleep or rest
- Worries about finances, childcare or family routines
- Behaviour challenges or emotional moments with your child
- Adjustments linked to military life (postings, absences, routines)

Taking a moment to recognise what is triggering stress is the first step towards regaining control.

Simple ways to reduce stress day-to-day

Pause and breathe

A few slow breaths can interrupt the stress response and help your body settle.
Try: In for 4 seconds, hold for 2, out for 6.

Reset your expectations

Not every day has to be perfect. Focus on "good enough" — warm connection, safety, and small moments of calm.

Build small routines that support you

Regular meals, movement, rest and outdoor time help regulate stress hormones and improve emotional balance.

Stay connected

Talking to someone you trust, like another parent, a friend, nursery staff or a family member — reduces stress and builds resilience.

Look after your body

Hydration, balanced food and short bursts of activity all help stabilise your nervous system.

Take a micro-break

Even 2–3 minutes of stepping away, stretching or breathing can help reset your emotions before returning to your child.

Helping your child during stressful moments

Children often mirror how we feel. When you are calm, they feel safer and more secure.

- Use simple, reassuring phrases: "You're safe, I'm here."
- Keep your voice slow and steady
- Offer calm activities: drawing, reading, slow breathing, sensory play
- Keep transitions predictable when possible — routine helps children feel anchored

Secure, predictable caregiving helps children build their own "I CAN" and "I AM" resilience skills (confidence, problem-solving, and self-control).

When stress feels harder to manage

It's OK to ask for support. You're not expected to manage everything alone.

Reach out if you notice:

- Persistent worry or irritability
- Feeling overwhelmed most days
- Difficulty sleeping or relaxing
- A sense of "running on empty"

Talking early can prevent stress from becoming burnout.

Where to find support

RAFAKidz nurseries and the wider RAF community networks are here to help:

- Talk to your child's Key Worker or Military Champion for support and signposting
- Join RAFAKidz Resilience Sessions — free, expert-led webinars designed to strengthen your wellbeing and parenting confidence
- Access RAFAKidz Resilience Resources — easy-to-use articles, tools and recordings for early years parents
- Local support services through station HIVE or community hubs
- Speak with your GP or Health Visitor if you are worried about your wellbeing

You're doing better than you think

Parenting doesn't come with a handbook, and there's no "perfect" way to do it. Every day, you're making choices, showing up, and doing your best — even on days that feel tough. Stress can make it hard to see the positives, but they're there, even in the small moments.

You're doing better than you think when you:

- Take a breath before responding
- Offer comfort, even when you're tired
- Keep going, even on low-energy days
- Notice your child's needs and try to meet them
- Pause to reset when things feel overwhelming

These are all signs of a caring, attuned parent — the kind who helps children feel safe, loved, and ready to grow.

Need further support? Visit rafakidz.org.uk