

Telltale signs of stress in young children

Doesn't respond to friendly caregiver overtures

Daydreams frequently

Has grave, solemn face; rarely smiles or laughs (check first for iron deficiency; see Honig & Oski, 1984)

Has frequent prolonged temper tantrums

Cries a great deal for months after entry into group care (even though caregivers have been gentle and responsive)

Acts sullen, defiant (says "I don't care" frequently when caregiver explains how misbehavior has hurt another)

Punishes self through slapping, head banging, or calling self bad names ("bad boy")

Is overly sensitive to mild criticism

Flinches if teacher or visiting adult approaches with caressing or reassuring gesture of outstretched arm

Reports proudly to teacher that he or she has hurt another child

Is overly vigilant about others' misdeeds, tattles, or jeers

Is highly demanding of adults although usually fairly self-sufficient

Bullies or scapegoats and may get other children to join in

Carries out repetitive, stereotyped play that may have destructive aspects

Clings to, shadows caregiver, although in group for months

Is unable to carry out sustained play with preschool peers

Has constant need to sleep although physically well

Is preoccupied with frightening images of monsters or other violent, threatening figures

Has dull, vacant expression, as if trying to ward off thinking about stressful trauma or tries to deny stressful feelings

Is hyperactive or restless, wanders around room, touches and disturbs toys and games, cannot settle into constructive play

Displays disturbed bodily functions, has trouble with feeding, constipation, or diarrhea, soils self frequently months after toilet training is completed

Has trembling of hands or facial twitches although apparently well

Talks compulsively about physical dangers and threats

Grinds teeth during naptime

Has rigid facial expressions from taut muscles

Displays loss of perceptual acuity

Displays reduced attentional capacity; even though caregiver is very clear in communicating, the child cannot focus well on activity or request

Stimulates self constantly (by prolonged thumb-sucking, masturbation, rocking body back and forth, or other such behaviors), which children normally do occasionally for self-comfort

Feels jittery

Stutters, uses disfluent speech, or refuses to talk in group (older preschooler)

Is clumsy on easy manual tasks due to muscular tensions

Frequently acts aggressively against others, even adults

Has nightmares