



Tim A. Hire, County Superintendent of Schools



IF LIFE WAS A CUPCAKE

What would yours taste like?



Lavender represents your practice of self-care and relaxation. Lemon represents uplifted spirits and having a zest for life.

Would you be a dark chocolate mint cupcake?

Life may feel bittersweet, and you have emotional depth, but loved ones and positivity are the minty freshness of your life.

Would you be a cookie dough cupcake?

Life is playful, sweet, and at times a little messy. Although life may crumble at times you focus on goodness, family, and friends to keep you whole.

Or would you be a berry blast cupcake?

Fueled by life and energized with joy. You seek adventure, dance to the music, and sing life's songs!

Whichever the flavor, embrace it, and enjoy every bite life offers!



Alexander Fernandez

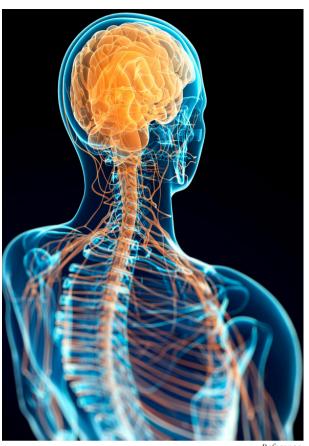
TABLE OF CONTENTS

- What is the Vagus Nerve?
- 3 Mindful Gardening
- 4 Healing through Literature
- 5 Student Motivation
- 5 Nature Walking
- 7 Growing Together
- 8 White Noise
- 9 Mindless Habits
- 10 Negative Thinking
- 11 Impact on Our Youth
- 12 Glitter Jar
- 13 Importance of Friendships
- 14 Cycle Your Stress Away
- 15 Enjoying the Great Outdoors
- 16 Walk it Out!
- 17 Strengthen Family Bonds

What is the Vagus Verve?

The vagus nerve is the longest in the body and the only nerve connected to every organ. It is a paired nerve, meaning there is a right and left vagus nerve. Each nerve emerges from the medulla oblongata at the base of the brainstem and descends through the neck, thorax, and abdomen.

The vagus nerve is considered a single nerve traveling bilaterally. It powers our parasympathetic nervous system, or the "rest and digest system." This system allows us to maintain a good mood, regulate our emotions, and relax the body after periods of stress or danger that activate our sympathetic "fight or flight" responses.



Reference: The Holistic Psychologist. (n.d.). Vagus Nerve: A Path to Healing. https://theholisticpsychologist.com/vagus nerve a path-to-healing/

Vagus Nerve Dysregulation: How is it harmful?

Vagal nerve dysfunction has profound negative physical effects on the body, such as digestive issues, respiratory problems, autonomic imbalances, chronic inflammation, and sleep disturbances. A dysregulated vagus nerve also influences our mental and emotional health, including depression and anxiety. A dysregulated system triggers our fight-or-flight response and sends signals to our brain that we're in danger, even when we are not.

Strengthen your Vagal Tone:

Humming. The vibrations trigger a relaxation response.

Gargling. You'll know it's working when a tear response occurs in your eye.

Breathwork. Deep, slow breaths from the belly. You'll feel euphoric and relaxed afterward.

Aromatherapy. Use essential oils such as lavender and bergamot.

Laughter. Laughter releases various neurotransmitters. Laugh hard and often!

This video provides a guided Vagus Nerve Massage: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9uZ1rnKF5DU



HOW PLANTING SEEDS CAN NURTURE WELL-BEING

Mindfulness is a mental state achieved by focusing on the present moment while calmly acknowledging and accepting one's feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations, used as a therapeutic technique. As we practice being fully present in the garden, we'll also become more aware of how it changes over time. As many of us have difficulty coping with change, regularly noting how often and certain it happens in nature may help us become more accepting of it in other areas of life.

What Do I Need to Begin Mindful Gardening?

The beauty of Mindful Gardening is that the focus is not on maximizing a harvest but on intentionally practicing slowing down and coming into the present moment. Whether indoor or outdoor, containers or raised beds, the principles of Mindful Gardening apply to both, and the practice of Mindful Gardening can be carried out in either environment.

There Are 5 Simple Techniques to Mindful Gardening

Hearing: As you enter the garden to begin Mindful Gardening, slow down and listen for a minute or two. Take a seat and close your eyes, putting all your attention towards Hearing. For 2-3 minutes, count how many unique sounds you can hear.

Touch: After a few minutes of simply listening, turn your attention to Touch. Spend a few minutes walking through the garden barefoot, feeling the earth beneath your feet. Please make your way over to one of your plants and run your hands through the soil at its base. What does it feel like?

Smell: Releasing the soil from your hands, turn your attention to the plant before you. Gently rub its leaves between your fingers. What do you smell? Move your face close to within an inch or two of the plant, close your eyes, and take as deep of a breath as you can.

Sight: Focus on the plant before you as you open your eyes. With so much to see throughout the garden, take this opportunity to zoom into the details of the plant in front of you. What colors do you notice? What subtleties do you see with its veins and leaf textures? Are any bugs hiding beneath the leaves or at the base of the plant in the soil?

Taste: Allow yourself to activate your sense of taste by tasting the plant (if it's edible!). Pull off a leaf, flower, or fruit, and slowly enjoy its flavor. Make your way to another plant to repeat the process and notice the difference between the two. What was pleasing about the taste? What was surprising?



Practicing mindfulness while gardening has many benefits for your well-being. To learn more about the benefits, click here:





HEALING THROUGH LITERATURE

Morgan Goodin

Our lives nowadays can be very chaotic. On a single day we can feel stressed, worried, happy, lonely, and overwhelmed. We can do many things to cope with these emotions, and one of those ways is through reading. *Bibliotherapy* can be used as a form of escape from our hectic daily lives and assist us in navigating life's challenges and improving our mental well-being. Diving into a good book is comforting and therapeutic to soothe our minds. Below are four areas to heal and grow with literature.

BUILD EMPATHY

Reading is a remarkable way to foster compassion and understanding. Reading about characters with diverse backgrounds and experiences allows us to walk in their shoes momentarily. This experience can be transformative and help us nurture empathy by broadening our perspective. Example: "**To Kill a Mockingbird**" by Harper Lee: A coming-of-age novel about lost innocence, injustice, and poverty that tells the story of the Finch family and their awakening to prejudice in their community.

STRESSED?

Science fiction is a very popular book genre for escapism. Tales of other worlds are often portrayed as relaxing. Pick a book that illustrates magical, dreamlike worlds for a chance to escape reality. Example: "*The Lord of the Rings*" series by J.R.R. Tolkien: A fantasy novel about the war of the peoples of the fantasy world Middle-earth against a dark lord.

SELF-IMPROVEMENT

Books are also powerful tools for encouraging us to be our best selves. Personal development books provide strategies, insight, and guidance through various situations that motivate us to make positive life changes. These books are handy because they range from therapeutic topics to business and finances or even personal self-improvement at home. Example: "Self-Compassion" by Kristin Neff: Dr. Neff discusses the ineffectiveness of self-criticism and teaches how to turn compassion inward to heal the wounds of the

SELF HEALING

Books can promote healing through validation. Reading about someone else's experiences can create a sense of catharsis, especially when it mirrors our experiences. They can provide us with hope, encouragement, and emotional support through our challenges. This experience can be created through reading memoirs and fiction books. Example: "The Bell Jar" by Sylvia Plath: A realistic exploration of mental health and the journey of a young woman struggling with depression and societal pressures.



Increasing Student Motivation

Being a parent or an educator is very rewarding, though it can come with some challenges. For instance, learning how to motivate students can take time and effort. Maintaining student motivation is important as it allows students to create positive habits and set and achieve goals throughout their youth development and into adulthood.

PARENTS



As a parent, helping students create goals for themselves and offering incentives when achieving their goals can increase student motivation. Rewards and incentives do not need to have a monetary value; experiences and activities you can create together allow students to increase motivation.



TEACHERS ...

As an educator, you can encourage students and use positive reinforcement and approval in the classroom to increase student motivation. Student motivation correlates with students feeling respected and heard. Recognizing students' progress and contributions can help increase engagement and motivation.

Fun Activities to increase student motivation:

- Give them a desk pet: Create a point system to exchange points for food/accessories for their pet to increase motivation to work hard and receive rewards.
- Create a vision board: Use magazines, glue, and stickers to cut and paste items to create a goal and stay on track to achieve their goals.
- Encourage evaluations: Create self-evaluations so students can reflect on their inputs and set goals to increase their motivation.



CATURE WALKING What is Nature Walking?

Nature walking is a recreational activity that involves walking in natural environments such as forests, mountains, and parks and observing the plants, animals, and other aspects of the environment. It is a great way to connect with nature, relax, and improve mental and physical health.

Nature walks are particularly good for kids. They provide a space for children to explore their world in a safe and structured way while also offering the opportunity for freedom and self-guided discovery. Nature walks can also help children develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Suggested Nature Walk Activities

When you go for a walk in nature, several fun activities can make your walk more exciting and enriching by practicing the following.

- 1. Notice Look at the trees, plants, sky, and everything around you.
- 2.**Feel** the solid ground beneath you. Connect with the earth and feel how it feels solid.
- 3.**Listen** to the sounds of nature. Close your eyes and open your ears. Listen carefully.
- 4. **Move Slowly** Appreciate the environment and its surroundings and embrace the feeling of the air.
- 5.**Explore** different textures. Feel the rough bark on the trees and touch fragile flower petals.
- 6.**Find a quiet spot** to sit and ponder: sitting in silence has proven beneficial to physical and mental health.



Gardening helps ground us by getting us off the screens and out of our busy heads. Gardening has been shown to benefit both parents and their children. This article will review the benefits of gardening as a family. It will also include local nurseries located here in Tulare County.

Benefits of Gardening

Gardening can help build self-esteem, reduce stress, promote family time, and is a good form of exercise. Growing and eating your fruits and vegetables can positively impact your diet, lighten moods, and lower anxiety levels. It can also help bring people together and strengthen social connections. Gardening is a great way to educate children about vegetables/fruits and their origins.

When is the perfect time to start gardening?

Most plants prefer warm weather temperatures, whether flowers, fruits, or vegetables. It is important to make sure that the dangers of frost have passed. The recommended time is mid-spring, when starting a garden can be a perfect activity to help introduce Earth Day!

How do you get started? Here are some basic steps to help grow a garden for you and your family:

- 1) Consider what you want to plant. Decide what your interests are. Multiple plants between various flowers, fruits, and vegetables are great options.
- 2) Find your personalized garden spot. Your plants must get an average of six to eight hours of sunlight daily. Decide if you'll be planting in pots or on the ground.
- **3)** Next, clear the ground of any weeds in the area. When preparing your soil, you should add a layer of compost.
- **4)** Start planting. Transfer your plants to your desired area.
- **5)** Watering is critical! Keep up with your plants by planning to water them daily.



Nancy Gomez and Kendall Hadfield

~WHITE NOISE~

Is it a trend, or are there benefits?

White noise is the new trend when it comes to sleeping. People are encouraged to put white noise on for babies while they sleep, and now adults are encouraged to do the same. The question we should ask is, what does this do for our minds?

What's Happening When You Listen to White Noise?





According to studies, the use of white noise to improve sleep is not recommended (Reidy, 2021). Our brain needs time to stop functioning during sleep, and it can't do that if there is constant noise. White noise (sound of ocean waves, nature, etc.) can help the mind and body relax, leading to sleep. Using the white noise machine for only the first few minutes of your resting state is best, allowing the brain to go into deep sleep. There has been research to show that white noise does have a use in your life outside of sleep.

According to another study, white noise has increased memory performance and improved speech recognition in children, especially those who struggle with attentiveness. (Angwin, 2017) Instead of using sound machines solely for sleep, use them differently. Set them up while your children do homework or different activities at home. Use them at work if you struggle to focus or while your older children study. White noise will help you increase your focus and take away some of the distractions. So move your sound machines from the bedroom to your living room, office, or kitchen!

Source

Riedy, S. M., Smith, M. G., Rocha, S., & Basner, M. (2021). Noise as a sleep aid: A systematic review. Sleep Medicine Reviews, 55, 101385.

Angwin, A. J., Wilson, W. J., Arnott, W. L., Signorini, A., Barry, R. J., & Copland, D. A. (2017). White noise enhances new-word learning in healthy adults. Scientific reports, 7(1), 13045.

MINDLESS HABITS

Recently, more people have taken an interest in the idea of mindfulness. Mindfulness is being aware of your present moment. Though it sounds simple, many people struggle to become mindful, especially in today's fast-paced world. It is easy to forget to be aware. We become so invested in our regular routines of work, school, and whatever else is relevant to each person. Daily routines can turn into mindless habits. Not only that, but it is more accessible now than ever to distract our minds from the present moment, considering how easily accessible the world is in our hands. Constant access to the internet, social media, games, music, and much more have made boredom a rare feeling.

There are many benefits to implementing mindfulness into our daily routines. Especially in our American culture, we constantly stay busy and are often overstimulated, robbing ourselves of enjoying the present moment. As humans, it is common for us to dwell on the past and worry about the future. We don't often spend our time appreciating the presence, even if it is talked about often. Mindfulness benefits life in many ways. It allows focusing on what is at hand. It allows one to feel more in tune with one's mind and body. Mindfulness can help identify emotions. It is also known to decrease stress, improve an attitude of gratitude, and allow for a more coherent thought process.

Daily, we walk, bathe, eat, drive, and more. Even in these simple routines, we can implement mindfulness by paying attention to our senses and thoughts. Focusing on our senses allows us to feel truly present, which is why some people use it as grounding work to help anxiety. Mindfulness is a skill that can continuously improve. I encourage the readers of this to implement mindfulness into something simple like eating. While eating, keep away from external distractions and focus on the food in front of you. How does it look? Feel? Smell? Taste? Sound? Paying attention to the details will keep you grounded in the moment, and just like that, you will have already become more connected to what is happening in your life in the here and now.

NEGATIVE THINKING GOT YOU DOWN?



High levels of negativity affect more than just emotional health. Research shows that pessimism (negative thinking) increases the likelihood of brain decline, cardiovascular, and digestive issues, and slower recovery from illnesses (Maloney, 2023). Positive thinking and self-talk alone can strengthen the immune system and maintain equilibrium throughout the body (Chu et al., 2022). The benefits of thinking positively include a better quality of life, lower rates of depression, higher energy levels, longer life spans, faster recovery from illnesses, and enhanced coping skills (Legg & Santos-Longhurst, 2019). Here are a few simple ways to reduce pessimistic thinking habits.

TIPS TO STRENGTHEN YOUR OUTLOOK ON LIFE



- 1. Smiling is a simple yet powerful way to boost your mood and manage stress as the brain releases "feel good" hormones when you smile.
- 2. Practice and express gratitude at least once daily (e.g., thanking a coworker for helping you with a project).
- 3. Connect with positive people. Their positivity and good habits will influence you to do the same.
- 4. Practice positive self-talk.
- 5. Identify your areas of negativity (e.g., ask a friend, coworker, or spouse for some insight).
- 6. Eating nutritious foods (veggies, fruits, and proteins) can fuel the body and mind with good vitamins and nutrients needed for mood stability.
- 7. Write down all the facts! When stressed, overwhelmed, or thinking negatively, write out all the ways to manage the stressor(s). Look at what is in your control and what is not. Focus on what you can do to manage the stressor by writing out a simple to-do list.

MAKE AN IMPACT ON OUR YOUTH!

Parents, educators, neighbors, and community leaders significantly impact the future of youths. Actions and words are the tools we have to motivate our youth to live productive, positive, and healthy lifestyles. How can you impact those youth who seem lost or perhaps leading a risky lifestyle (substance use, self-harming behaviors, gang involvement)?

Strategies for Impact



1. Mentorship and Positive Role Models:

Pair youth with positive adult mentors who can provide guidance, support, and encouragement. Connect them with successful individuals who have overcome similar challenges and can serve as positive role models.

2. Alternative Programs and Opportunities:

Provide alternative activities and programs that offer constructive outlets for their energy and talents, such as sports teams, arts programs, vocational training, or community service projects. Offer educational opportunities, including tutoring, GED programs, or vocational training, to help them acquire skills and pursue future goals.

3. Counseling and Support Services:

Offer individual and group counseling to address underlying issues such as trauma, substance abuse, family conflict, or mental health challenges.

Provide access to support services such as housing assistance, food security programs, healthcare, and legal aid to address their basic needs and stabilize their lives.

4. Family and Community Engagement:

Engage families and caregivers by offering parenting support, family therapy, and conflict resolution training. Involve the broader community, including churches, community centers, youth organizations, and local businesses, in providing support and opportunities for teenagers.

5. Restorative Justice and Conflict Resolution:

Implement restorative justice practices that focus on repairing harm, promoting accountability, and facilitating healing for victims and offenders. Provide conflict resolution training to help teenagers develop non-violent ways of resolving conflicts and managing anger.

6. Collaborative Efforts and Partnerships:

Collaborate with law enforcement, schools, social service agencies, and community organizations to coordinate efforts and provide wraparound support for teenagers. Build partnerships with businesses, employers, and community leaders to create opportunities for teenagers to gain employment, access resources, and contribute positively to society.

Communities can support youth and provide them with a path toward a brighter and more promising future by implementing these strategies in a coordinated and compassionate manner.



GLITTER JAR

Teach kids how to manage their feelings with a glitter jar.

The natural fight, flight, or freeze response is activated when kids feel stressed, sad, or angry. A glitter jar can help kids calm down and regain control as they watch the glitter swirl to the bottom of the jar. With just a flip of the jar, kids can stop, think, breathe, and relax. Glitter jars are easy to make and can be used anywhere!







Materials Needed

- 16-ounce glass mason jar with a lid or plastic bottle
- ½ cup of glitter glue or clear glue
- · Warm distilled water
- Hot glue gun (optional)
- · 1-2 teaspoons of fine and chunky glitter

Instructions

- 1. Pour 1/2 cup of distilled water into the jar. Why distilled water? Unlike tap water, warm distilled water contains no contaminants or minerals and will help keep your glitter jars mold-free.
- 2. Invite kids to pour 1/2 cup of glitter or clear glue into the jar. It will take about 2 minutes for the glitter to settle.
- 3. Add 1-2 teaspoons of fine and chunky glitter to the jar.
- 4. Fill up the remainder of the jar with distilled water
- 5. If desired, the lid of the jar can be glued using a hot glue gun.
- 6. Shake the jar well to distribute the glitter.
- 7. Your DIY glitter jar is complete!





HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO HAVE FRIENDS?

Friends often serve as the secondary family we choose to have. Finding the right friends to share your life with is important because they usually influence your life in the best and worst times. Here are some things to consider when choosing a friend:

- Do you have a shared interest(s) (i.e., movies, video games, music, yoga, photography, etc.)?
- Are social activities pleasant with this person (group projects, school rallies, school dances)?
- Does this person practice good listening skills, and are you a good listener to them?
- Are you able to be genuine? If a person seems dishonest about their interests and feelings, it makes it challenging for others to establish a meaningful friendship.

BENEFITS OF FRIENDS

- Friends promote happiness and reduce stress.
- Friends can be an additional person in your support system.
- Friends can boost confidence and a sense of belonging.
- Friends can provide helpful pushes toward personal growth.

HELPFUL VS. UNHELPFUL FRIENDSHIPS

Helpful

- Understanding
- Good listeners
- Non-judgmental
- Forgiving

Unhelpful

- Dismissive
- Disrespectful
- Dishonest
- Critical





Cycle Your

Stress Away

Starting to cycle as a hobby can be enjoyable and beneficial for your health and well-being. Cycling isn't just about getting from point A to point B; it's about the freedom of the open road, the wind in your hair, and the sense of accomplishment with every pedal. The benefits of cycling are diverse. Not only does it provide a cardiovascular workout, but it also strengthens muscles and enhances overall mental wellbeing. Say goodbye to stress and hello to a natural mood boost as you immerse yourself in the rhythmic motion of pedaling.

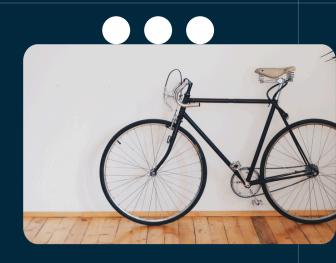
Habits to Practice

Focus: When cycling, focus on the physical sensations of pedaling and the sounds of your surroundings. This helps shift your focus away from distractions and worries about the past or future.

Breath: Paying attention to your breath while cycling can help anchor you in the present moment. Synchronizing your breathing with your pedaling rhythm can cultivate a sense of calm and relaxation.

Letting Go of Thoughts: As you focus on the physical sensations and sensory, you may find it easier to let go of racing thoughts. This can create space for a calmer and more peaceful state of mind.

Connection to Nature: Spending time in nature has numerous mindfulness benefits, including reducing stress and promoting a sense of well-being.



How to get started

- 1. **Get yourself a bike!** You can purchase one from your local sports store, borrow one from someone you know, or rent one from your local bike shop.
- 2. Invest in safety gear:
 helmet, padded shorts,
 reflective clothing, gloves,
 and lights. First and foremost,
 make sure you have a
 helmet!
- 3. Start slowly and practice learning basic skills. Begin with short rides. Learn ways to brake, shift gears, and maintain balance.
- 4. **Stay hydrated**. Enjoy the rides.

Reference: https://socalcycling.com

Trjoying

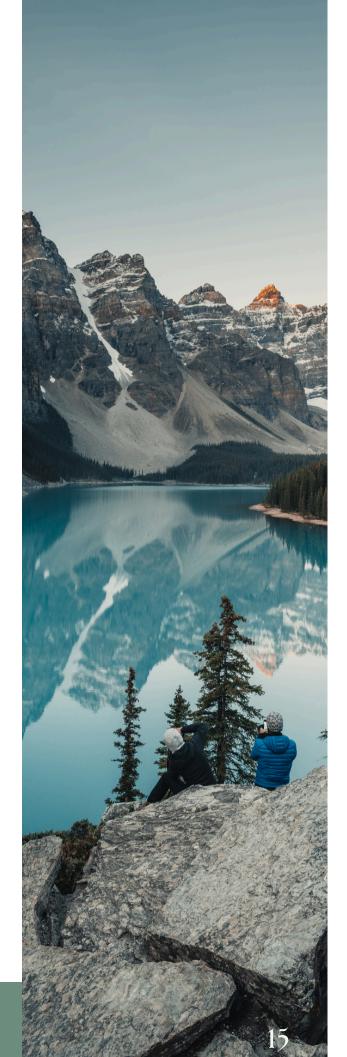
The Great Outdoors

Outdoor activities provide children with opportunities for physical exercise, fostering a healthy lifestyle from an early age. Regular physical activity has been linked to the release of endorphins, often referred to as "feel-good" hormones, which play a crucial role in reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Additionally, exposure to natural light helps regulate sleep patterns, contributing to better overall mental health.

Nature has a calming effect on the mind, helping to alleviate stress and anxiety. Green spaces and outdoor environments offer a break from the demands and pressures of academic life. Studies have shown that spending time in nature can enhance cognitive function and attention, improving children's concentration and academic performance.

Outdoor activities offer valuable opportunities for social interaction and teamwork. Whether through team sports, group games, or simply playing together in a park, children learn essential social skills such as communication, cooperation, and conflict resolution. These interactions contribute to the development of emotional intelligence and resilience.



WALK IT OUT!

The Benefits of Going for a Walk

Walking has many benefits when it comes to improving mental wellbeing. Stress, worries, and big emotions can be hard to overcome; however, fun hobbies/ activities can help!
Walking can be practiced in the winter, spring, or summertime. The cold weather can stimulate your concentration during winter because of the dense cold air entering the lungs. During spring, enjoy the warm sunbeams on your skin, the smell of flowers along the trail bloom, and the chirps of the birds flying around. During summer, the days are longer, so you can walk early in the morning and evening.



Walking benefits your mental well-being and incorporating a little touch of your favorite things can make it more fun.

- Packing your favorite snacks.
- Have a playlist of your favorite music ready to go.
- Walk to a destination, like a park.
- Find audible books that can expand your knowledge on a topic you are interested in.

Walking offers an excellent opportunity to strengthen social connections and nurture meaningful relationships. By inviting friends or family members to accompany you on walks, you create a space for quality time and engaging conversations.



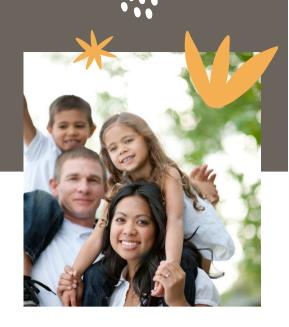




STRENGTHEN FAMILY BONDS

It is important to nurture and maintain strong family bonds. Practice being kinder, more forgiving, more appreciative and grateful, more willing to speak up and to listen, and above all, being present for each other.

Here are a few practices to strengthen family bonds:



Give Grace

We experience many stressful times throughout the day and can become triggered. There is no such thing as a "perfect parent." We overreact and say or do things that we wish we hadn't. Life is about learning, and one of the most important things we can learn is to accept our imperfections as parents.

Breathe

You can practice mindful breathing when you're feeling frustrated or overwhelmed. Having fun with bubbles is a great way to help kids and adults understand deep breathing. Breathe deeply and feel your sensations as you breathe out fully while blowing bubbles.

Express Gratitude

Intentionally expressing gratitude can go a long way. Words of appreciation can change the home's mood from frustrated to grateful. Minor tasks such as cleaning up their toys, getting ready on time, or helping unload the graceries are all opportunities for a parent to acknowledge a child's efforts.

Cultivating Resilience

Resilience is the ability to bounce back from challenges stronger than before. Families can cultivate resilience by nurturing a supportive and understanding environment. Encourage open communication, active listening, and validating each other's feelings. Facing challenges strengthens our bonds and builds resilience in children and adults alike.

Kindness

Practicing kindness is an important part of building resilience in children. Have everyone sit in a circle with their legs stretched out in front of them. Pick someone to go first. He or she will pick someone else in the circle to compliment. Encourage compliments to be meaningful rather than physical appearance. Once you've received a compliment, pull your legs in (crisscross applesauce style) so everyone knows you've received one already. Keep going around the circle until everyone has received praise.

Life's challenges can consume us, so building a solid presence within ourselves and our families is essential. By remembering everyone is doing their best, we are laying a foundation for a loving, connected family.





BHS NEWSLETTER

THANK YOU FOR READING!



SPECIAL THANKS TO

BHS INTERNS
NAYIRAH DOSU
ANNA ISAIS, GRANT COORDINATOR
ROSIE RINCON HERNANDEZ, EDD, LCSW, PPSC