

HOME & CLASSROOM

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Wellness



BRIGHTSIDE UP

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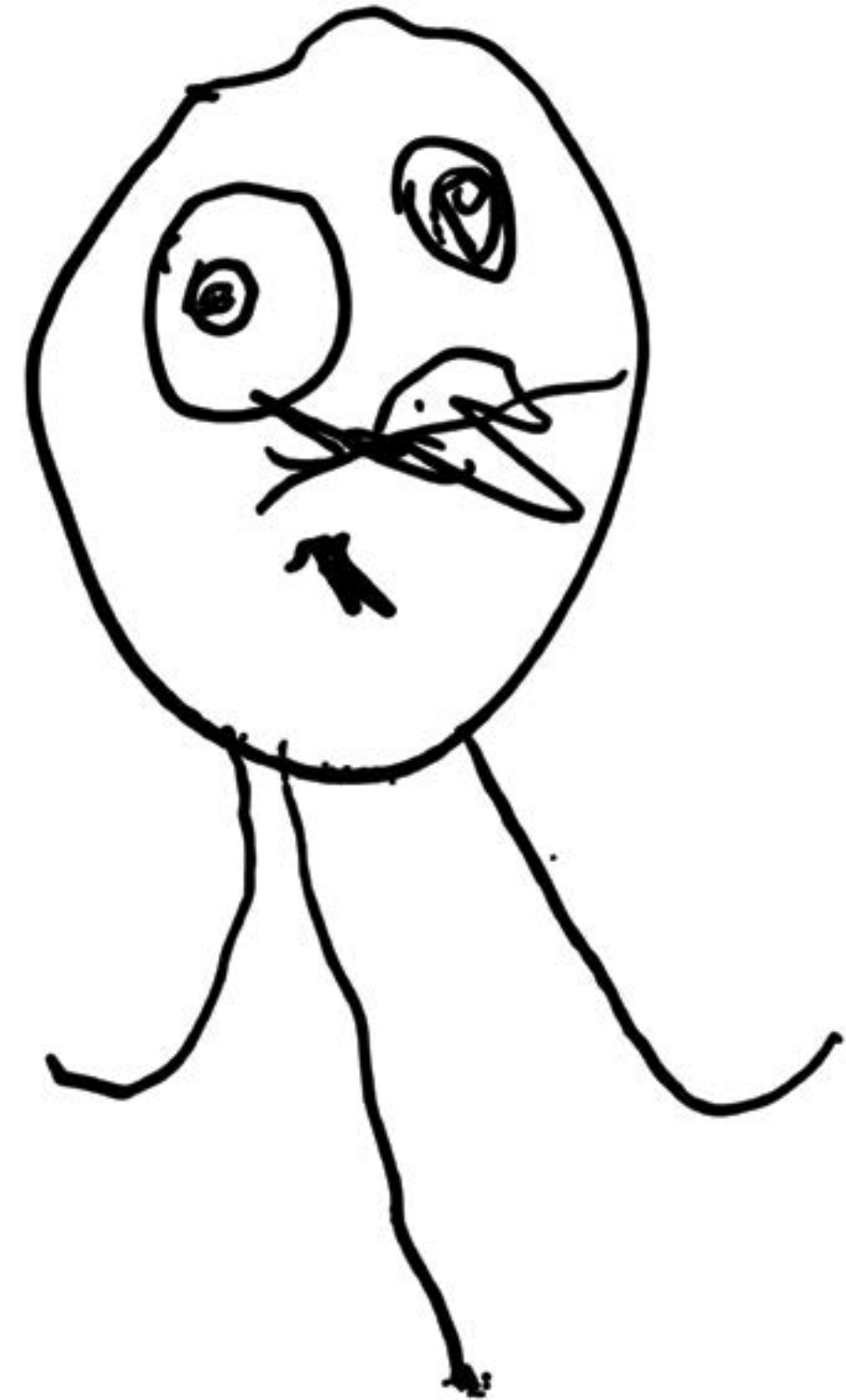
New and Noteworthy



HOME & CLASSROOM | A DAY IN THE LIFE
A companion podcast about daily interactions with children

We are thrilled to announce our new companion podcast A Day in the Life! Hannah and Rachel will continue hosting Home & Classroom, our original podcast featuring expert interviews on the topic of child development. A Day in the Life will offer episodes on the same overarching topic in a new format and will feature hosts, Kate and Lindsay, sharing your stories.

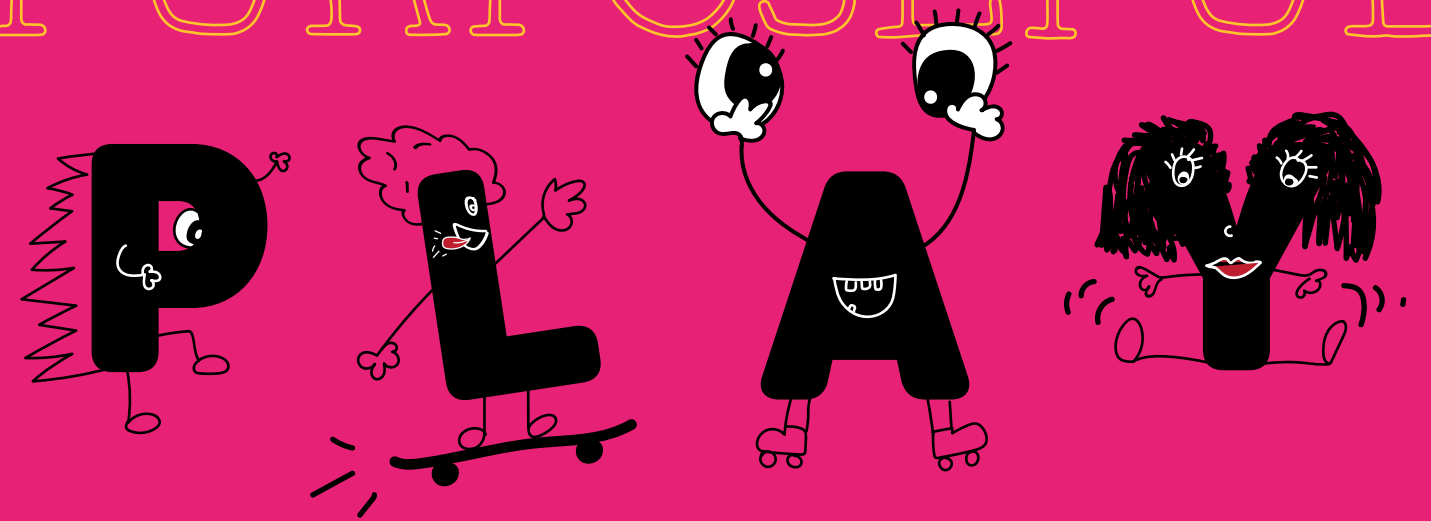
Email homeandclassroom@brightsideup.org to share your stories of the memorable moments you have with children. Tell us all about the times a child in your life has surprised you, challenged you, made you laugh, or made you cry. Join us for some fun, laughter, and meaningful conversation, as we discuss everyday life with children while gaining insight and sharing advice from the experts here at Brightside Up.



your
STORIES
our
COMMITMENT



SUPPORTING PURPOSEFUL



It is choice time in Ms. Johnson's classroom and the three year old children are busy making gingerbread people. After reading several stories with gingerbread characters Ms. Johnson noticed students recreating the stories in various classroom learning areas. Following a re-reading of the book *Gingerbread Baby* by Jan Brett, one of the group's favorites, she has purposefully planned for the children to have opportunities to recreate the story during their choice time through the addition of materials that are age appropriate.

Ms. Johnson has provided materials in the art area for creating houses (including milk cartons) for catching the "baby" and creating gingerbread people; playdough and gingerbread cutters for the children to create people in the manipulative area; baking props such as aprons, bakers hats, cookie sheets, and rolling pins in the dramatic play area; writing materials to incorporate sign making into the scenario; and assorted materials in both the block and the sensory tables for retelling several different gingerbread stories the children have been reading.

“Play can be a vehicle for children to discover new information and to make sense of new learning experiences.”

Children choose where they want to play during choice time. Ms. Johnson is not worried that children are bringing the playdough or other art materials into the dramatic play area to create gingerbread characters that they want to “cook” in the oven or that they carry those characters from the dramatic play area to the block area to

recreate scenes from the story. Children are actively exploring the materials and combining materials from a variety of learning areas to extend their knowledge and development through play.

Play is the work of young children birth to age eight and is an important vehicle in a child's development. Playing helps stimulate young children's brains and builds connections between nerve cells. Play allows opportunities for a child's language and communication skills to mature, for motor skill development, for the formation of positive relationships, and allows children to become involved in learning about their world.

The word “play” is misunderstood in the context of learning for young children. Often play is not seen as a learning experience. Play-based curriculum experiences provide children with hands-on experiences with materials and interactions with peers and adults. Experiences such as the one described above, gives them an opportunity to think symbolically while connecting ideas, feelings, and knowledge to build new understanding.

During their gingerbread play scenario, children were using negotiating skills as they decided who would build the houses and

who would create the characters, practiced vocabulary words from the story such as measuring terms and used language to communicate meaning as they interacted with peers and adults.



The above example demonstrates that learning through play is possible with the support of the adult as both a facilitator and an active participant. Ms. Johnson facilitated the play experience as she set up purposeful materials in learning areas and was flexible in how and where the materials were used by children. During play, Ms. Johnson joined in and followed the students' lead. She became an assistant baker in the dramatic play area, held a sign in the block area as a child taped it up, and helped make windows on a house in the art area while following the directions given by a child on how she should do it.

Educators need to provide purposeful play environments where learning activities and materials are planned and varied. Adults can provide supports to encourage play-based learning experiences which include uninterrupted time to play with peers each day, appropriate and purposefully planned learning areas with age appropriate materials, and engaging interactions with children as they develop play schemas.

Young children need to actively explore their world to help them make connections. Play can be a vehicle for children to discover new information and to make sense of new learning experiences. Infants engage in back and forth playful exchanges with adults when they play peek a boo, sing and dance together or coo back and forth. Toddlers like to engage in repetitive and active play. Prekindergarten students enjoy more sophisticated play that is appropriate for their age group. School age children, ages five through eight, can benefit from purposefully planned learning experiences throughout their day. ———

For more information about how to integrate play for children birth through age eight into the daily routine, read the Developmentally Appropriate Practice Brief (<https://bit.ly/DAPBrief>) number eight that highlights play. Members of the ECAC from the New York State Education Department, Office of Early Learning, New York Association for the Education of Young Children and the New York State Head Start Collaboration Office teamed up to develop a series of briefs that aim to support administrators and teachers in making decisions that will lead to higher quality early childhood programs with positive outcomes for children.



CHILDREN are uniquely known for their curiosity and ability to try new things without expectations. These innate traits combined with children’s willingness to be fully present in the moment enhances their ability to connect to themselves and to others. It is almost as if mindfulness was created by children. Nurturing the connection between the body and mind helps us learn our inner world, so that we can navigate the outer world. For children, their outer world typically consists of home and school. The transition between these two worlds is an opportunity to pause and give children a moment to breathe.

The breath is always available to us and is the foundation for teaching mindfulness. Studies have shown that mindful breathing techniques activate the parasympathetic nervous system, informally known as the system responsible for “rest and digest.” Reducing the sympathetic nervous system response, otherwise referred to as “fight or flight,” enhances our ability to return to the present moment. Often our minds control how we feel, and this affects our emotional state. Instead, we can use the breath to train our mind how to feel. In my own practice, as I bring my awareness to the breath and sit with what is challenging, I cultivate the ability to act skillfully. A consistent practice shifts the tendency to react rather than respond mindfully.

A child’s reaction is a response to their environment combined with temperament. Some children find it easier to respond mindfully than others depending on their past experiences and temperament. In a child’s world the

transition from home to school can activate strong emotions. Children enter the classroom with a range of emotions that are carried with them throughout the day. Dr. Marc Brackett developed a mood meter that qualifies emotions as ranging from high energy to low energy and high pleasantness to low pleasantness. Depending on the combination that day or just 5 minutes before entering the room our mood can affect the ability to learn, sustain healthy relationships and interact with others.

Circle time, a common daily classroom routine is a wonderful opportunity to pause, reconnect and shift gears if necessary. Circle time is often held throughout the day for whole-group activities such as a morning meeting or read-aloud. Mindfulness is a practice and therefore something we need to do often in order to strengthen it. Incorporating just a few minutes of present moment awareness during circle time can decrease stress responses and strengthen the classroom community.

Here is a breathing practice you might want to try during your next circle time or help transition from school to home:

Balloon Breath

Find your seat in a chair or on the floor. Reach into your pocket and “take out your balloon.” Gently place your hands on your tummy. Breathe in through the nose and fill the tummy up like a balloon, breath out through the mouth and slowly let the air out of the balloon. Feel the belly fill and full under your hands. Do these 3-5 times and put your “balloon” back into your pocket for later. It will always be there when you need it.

Tell Me About It

by Irina Cardoso

The Language of Compassion

Teachers, caregivers and parents enjoy spending time with children; however continually thinking in the moment, considering other's perspectives, and staying centered is hard work. All of this to set a good example for our children.

In my experience, the stress of the profession can harm relationships with co-workers, administrators, and at home family members. The way we respond to conflicting points of view can unveil whether our relationships will grow. One of the baseline components of human relationships is communication. Communication skills are directly related to career success, academic success, and overall well-being.

I have recently been thinking about non-violent communication or NVC, as a tool to bridge building in adult interactions as well as interactions with children. NVC is one of the tools in what is known today as restorative practices. Some studies have shown that by employing non-violent communication techniques in schools, aggressive behaviors have significantly decreased. Some studies point at the relevance of an internal change that starts with teachers increasing their competency with said strategies.

I find that NVC is effective because it presents a framework that is easily applicable in every context of communication. It is a language process consisting of a 4 step structure:

1. Observation: "You are raising your voice."
2. Feelings: "I feel afraid."
3. Needs: "And I need a break from this conversation."
4. Requests: "Can we come back to it later?"

Observation

This is one of the concepts that is most interesting to me regarding NVC, because it emphasizes a neutral space in human interaction. The Indian philosopher Krshnamurtii, famously said: "Observation without evaluation is the highest form of human intelligence." A conflicted conversation with my child about chores will typically involve me saying: "You always forget to hang your backpack after school." If instead of blaming, I would said: "I noticed that your backpack is on the living room floor." I would have achieved observation without evaluation. I am not talking about my child's actions, but rather using "I" statements.

Feelings

When communicating in this model, we thread our feelings in relation with what we observe. Often, we confuse feelings with our interpretation of what others are thinking or doing, and that sets us on a path of allocating our responsibility to others. NVC is a mindfulness and awareness practice of experiencing the here and now. Taking into account what we feel by scanning our body sensations and expressing them as clearly as possible. To relate the observation to my feelings on the backpack episode; I would continue by communicating: "I noticed that your backpack is on the living room floor, and I feel frustrated to see it there."

Needs

NVC shares similar assumptions with human development theories and humanistic and community psychology. It states that all humans possess a basic set of needs, and that by experiencing those needs being met, we become happier, healthier and open to growth and learning. NVC places emphasis on finding out the needs of all involved in a conflicting situation, not focusing on what others have done or said, rather on what our needs are. Bringing back the backpack on the living room floor, to communicate compassionately I would follow my observation and feeling statement with: "I noticed that your backpack is on the living room floor, and I feel frustrated because I need to know that you hear me."

Requests

In the context of a teacher or a family's relationship with children, we often get stuck on demanding that things are done the way we wish. When we consider our needs and pause to explore how to communicate them,

we open doors for mutual understanding and relationship growth. To the siblings in my house I tend to say: "You can ask your brother or sister to do so and so, but you can't make them do it." If I were to request instead of demand in the backpack scenario, I would complete the interaction by: "I noticed that your backpack is on the living room floor, and I feel frustrated because I need to know that you hear me. Please hang the backpack in the front porch. Thank you." I would add the thank you because my needs are potentially being met at this moment and I am grateful for that.

Non-violent communication is not a new tool, but it is as relevant as ever today. Although the basic model is simple, by using it in everyday interactions, relationships and communities can flourish. When receiving with compassion it pays to stay curious, ask questions, rather than draw conclusions based on interpretations. Using NVC doesn't mean we should agree with each other all the time, but it compels us to listen and therefore learn from each other more readily.

Resources:

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MOOD
BOOSTING
Power of Food

by Maggie Hartig, RD

Now more than ever the world is experiencing extremely high levels of stress and anxiety. During times of uncertainty we look for ways to feel better and for many of us that relief is through food. It's no surprise that there's a strong link between stress and our diet. In fact, eating balanced, nutrient-rich foods can help improve our mood, increase energy levels, strengthen our immune system, and help us think more clearly. When we're overly stressed our digestive system may not function as well, and the hormones that regulate our feelings of hunger and fullness are altered. The longer our body stays in a stressed state the more the stress hormone cortisol is released (think 'Fight or Flight response'). As more cortisol is released the risk for depression, poor sleep quality, and weight gain or weight loss increases. This does not mean that those that eat healthier are less stressed, but following the tips below can improve complications and symptoms.

STRESS-RELIEVING FOODS TO EAT

Complex carbohydrates

Your brain needs sugar (glucose) to function. The primary source of glucose comes from carbohydrates. Complex carbohydrates, such as whole grains, fruits, and vegetables are digested much slower than refined and processed foods due to their high fiber content. Since they are digested slower, you feel full longer, and it helps prevent blood sugar levels from spiking and crashing, meaning you're less likely to crave a sugary energy fix. Complex carbohydrates can enhance the brain's serotonin production, the "feel-good" hormone, which helps us feel more relaxed. Coincidentally, low serotonin is also linked to anxiety, depression, and poor sleep, so balancing this hormone is especially important for managing stress. Consider switching white rice for brown rice, farro, or quinoa. There are numerous varieties of whole grain breads, pastas, and cereals to try, just be careful to check the food label. Some products may be enriched which means they aren't a whole-grain, and/or may contain added sugars.

Fruits and vegetables

Fruits and vegetables are not only good sources of complex carbohydrates, they also contain essential nutrients and antioxidants that can help

control stress and strengthen immune function. In general it's important to eat a variety of fruits and vegetables, but for managing stress, try to focus on eating foods high in vitamins B, C, and magnesium.

B-Vitamins can be found in most foods: grains, eggs, dairy products, beans, lentils, nuts and seeds, fruits, leafy greens (ex. Spinach), fish, and lean meat. In addition to being essential for metabolism, heart and brain health, they help improve our mood and symptoms of stress by controlling high levels of inflammation which can damage our heart and brain.⁶

Vitamin C is a powerful antioxidant that has been shown to reduce anxiety and stress while also improving mood and fatigue. Citrus fruits (ex. Grapefruit and oranges), tomatoes, sweet peppers, kiwi, strawberries, and cantaloupe are all excellent sources of vitamin C.

Magnesium is mineral found in nuts (Especially Brazil nuts), beans, lentils, whole grains, and leafy greens. It plays a role in muscle relaxation, and is essential for hormone and energy production which reduces anxiety.

Omega-3 fatty acids

Not all fat is harmful, in fact your body needs certain fats to function normally. These 'healthy' fats are known as essential fatty acids and we have to get them from our diet. Omega-3 fatty acids (EPA and DHA) in particular are extremely important for blood circulation, brain, heart, and lung function. It also plays an important role in reducing inflammation, and raising serotonin levels. Recent studies have found a strong connection between omega-3 fatty acids and protection for and against depression.³ The best sources are from oily fish such as salmon, sardines, and tuna, but nuts and seeds are also excellent sources. Foods such as omega-3-enriched eggs, and meats and dairy products from grass-fed animals are also options, but the amount of omega-3 varies in these products. Canola oil is another popular source of omega-3. Try adding flaxseed, chia seed, or pumpkin seeds to smoothies, oatmeal or homemade baked goods. Snack on walnuts during the day or consider giving fish a try.

Dark chocolate

Dark chocolate (cacao) is particularly high in flavonoids which are powerful antioxidants. Research suggests that dark chocolate of at least 70% cacao can improve our mood, reduce inflammation, and boost brain and heart health.⁵ Now, this isn't an excuse to over-indulge in chocolate, and more research is needed but it's encouraging to know that even a small amount can make a difference. Try dark chocolate covered blueberries or strawberries for an added boost of stress-relieving nutrients.

It's also important to drink plenty of water and avoid skipping meals. Eating regularly helps keep blood sugar levels from dropping too low which could leave you feeling cranky or sluggish.

“Fruits and vegetables... contain essential nutrients and antioxidants that can help control stress and strengthen immune function.”

TRY TO LIMIT OR AVOID

Foods (and drinks) high in fat and sugar

We tend to crave processed, sugary, and high-fat foods when we're stressed. While these go-to 'comfort foods' can offer short-term energy and relief, you'll end up feeling worse in the long-run. Sugary foods and drinks cause your blood sugar to spike up rapidly and crash soon after, making you feel irritable, and craving more. Regularly consuming these types of foods can be harmful to your overall health by increasing risks for obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease. Recent studies also suggest a potential link between a diet high in saturated fat and increased risk for depression.³

Caffeine

Caffeine is a stimulant found in coffee, tea, soft drinks, energy drinks, and chocolate. While caffeine does boost your mood and increase alertness, consuming large quantities of caffeine can actually reduce the body's ability to combat stress. This is because it increases the release of cortisol which further contributes to nervousness, nausea, rapid-heart rate, headaches, and insomnia. Caffeine can also deplete nutrients needed for energy production such as magnesium and B-vitamins. One (8oz) cup of brewed coffee is about 80-100mg of caffeine, one (8oz) cup of tea is 30-50mg, and one (12oz) soft drink can vary widely between 30-90mg. Some over-the-counter medicines also contain significant amounts of caffeine. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) says healthy adults can

have up to 400mg of caffeine a day (4-5 cups coffee) without having adverse health effects. Consider trying decaffeinated drinks or caffeine-free herbal teas at night, and be mindful of how much caffeine you consume throughout the day. Cut back gradually to reduce risks of withdrawal symptoms.

Alcohol

Another common outlet for stress relief is alcohol. Alcohol is a depressant, which means that it slows down brain and body functions. Similar to the other items on this list, initially it provides a calming effect that can alleviate feelings of stress, but after a while it can increase complications such as poor sleep, depression, and anxiety. Alcoholic drinks add extra calories and sugar to your diet that can add up quickly. On average one regular (12oz) beer contains 150 calories, and 120-130 calories for one (5oz) glass of wine. In addition, you're more likely to feel hungrier and give in to cravings for higher fat foods. Heavy drinking regularly can also lead to serious health complications and possibly addiction. If you or someone you know is having trouble cutting back on alcohol intake, talk with a health-care provider about options for help.



EXPLORE OTHER WAYS TO CHEER UP THAT DON'T INCLUDE FOOD

Physical activity. Go for a walk, take a stretch break, do yoga, or dance around the house. Do what's best for you and your body.

Sunshine, fresh air, and the outdoors. Never underestimate the power of nature!

Getting a good night's sleep and/or taking a nap. Trouble sleeping is often the first sign of increasing anxiety, and the first to be forfeited in our daily lives. Reminder that it's ok to rest.

Meditation, guided imagery, or breathing exercises. Pause, take a few deep breaths, and regroup your thoughts.

Listen to music.

Find someone to talk to who will listen.

Do something you enjoy. Play a game, draw, read a book, garden, spend time with a pet, rearrange your space, etc., anything that makes you smile and/or laugh.

Maggie Hartig RD, CDN, CLC is a Growth and Nutrition Educator at Brightside Up Inc.

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Braided Funding for Fiscal Health

by Patty Persell, New York State Head Start Collaboration Director | NYS Council on Children and Families

Just like eating only one food would not be a healthy diet for a person, neither is funding an early care and education program with just one funding source. While it's common knowledge that children need high-quality early care and education experiences, it is less common that providing such programming relies on multiple funding sources or streams. Braided funding involves coordinating two or more funding sources with careful accounting of how every dollar from each funding source is spent. The term 'braiding' is used because multiple funding sources are brought together and braided to pay for the early care and education program and then are carefully pulled apart to assure there is no duplicate funding of service costs and that each funding source is charged its fair share of program costs.

If you don't feel comfortable braiding the funding streams yourself, you can explore partnering with other local agencies that receive other funding sources and discuss partnering with them to be stronger fiscally.

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored that one funding stream (i.e. parent pay only) for early care and education programs may not be sufficient to ensure program sustainability. You know the expression, it's not good to put all your eggs in one basket? We have seen with this pandemic that when a program relies on only one funding stream to support their program, and that funding is suddenly lost, the program may struggle to stay afloat.

As we navigate the new normal due to the pandemic, we will likely look different. We may never deliver early childhood services in the same way we did before COVID-19. It has changed our lives forever and made us aware of the importance of more effectively leveraging funds by braiding to deliver more comprehensive and high-quality programming. There are many different funding sources available to support early care and education settings:

- Parent pay (parents pay for their child to attend the program)
- Federal funding (Head Start, Early Head Start, other federal grants, USDA/CACFP)
- State funding (child care subsidies, state-funded prekindergarten, preschool special education)
- Grants (federal, state, local, private grants)
- Philanthropy (foundations, private donors, businesses, etc.)
- Fundraising and capital campaigns (Go Fund Me and other fundraising efforts)
- Private businesses (that pay for onsite or nearby child care for their employees)

Braiding funds requires significant effort to create the systems for tracking how the different funding sources are used. Braiding funds requires a clear understanding of the eligibility of each child and the services that will be provided. In allocating expenses to funding sources, the program is creating an alternative to time and effort reporting. To be successful, a program that braids funds must develop tracking systems that allow you to account for

how every dollar spent, including things such as personnel time and supplies. If you are using any federal or state funding sources, you will most likely need detailed time and effort reporting by all personnel.

Fiscal Tracking systems include the following:

- Eligibility of the children and families you are serving (age, address, special needs etc.)
- Decisions regarding eligibility, services to be provided, and funding sources that will pay for the classroom's expenses
- Time and effort reporting for staff tied to the allowable activities of each funding source
- Cost allocation plan for each funding stream (how each dollar is used) including staffing, materials, space, equipment, vehicles etc.
- Expense logs
- Anything else you, your funders, your auditor, and your fiscal staff identify as necessary
-

Track the eligibility of all participants in your program for all funding sources. If you have multiple funding sources covering all the children in your program, it is critical to assess the eligibility of every child served for every funding source.

A fiscally healthy program that utilizes more than one funding source will remain viable even in the event one of the funding streams is no longer available in the future.

RESOURCES

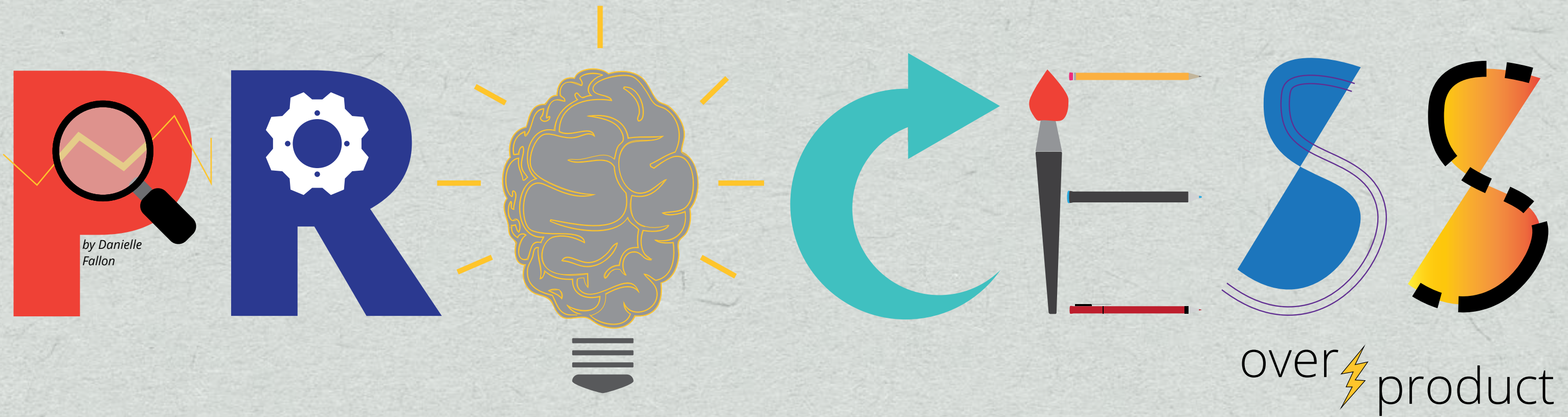
For much more detail, please go to the full How to Guide: Blending & Braiding Funds to Support Early Childhood Education Programs at bit.ly/BlendedFunding

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

Starting in summer 2020, there will be a funding opportunity from the federal Office of Head Start to expand the number of Early Head Start and Early Head Start Child Care Partnership (EHSCCP) funded enrollments. If you are interested in enhancing your child care program (center, family child care or group family child care), you might want to join an Early Head Start Child Care Partnership. Let your local Head Start and Early Head Start programs know you are interested. Here is a link to the Head Start locator: bit.ly/HeadStartPartner

You can watch 5 webinars on how to prepare to join an Early Head Start Child Care Partnership:

5 NY specific webinars about how to set up an EHSCCP. bit.ly/HeadStartWebinars
You can view a prior EHSCCP application (called a FOA) so you can see what to expect in this summer's application; click here for a past FOA. bit.ly/PastFOA



by Danielle Fallon

The creation of a piece of art has the ability to be much more than its end product. The creation process itself is significant. The beauty of creating art is the natural progression of discovery. It not only involves many subjective decisions but also allows a space for mindful focus. However, society has created structures that place a higher value on results rather than the journey it took to get there, especially for young children. When left to their own devices, a child who begins creating is allowed to answer questions such as: What material should I use? A crayon? Paint? Should I use blank or lined paper? There is a beautiful and tactile opportunity to focus their attention on actions, how color is being placed, the movement their hands make, and what they are thinking during this whole process.

Abstract art is a beautiful way to encourage and practice this experience. Picking up a paint brush, choosing colors, and pouring your thoughts, day, or emotions onto a

canvas or piece of paper is just as important as successfully drawing an anatomically correct animal or human. This idea, to honor the process, becomes vital for children. On a day to day basis, inside and outside of a school setting, children are faced with tallying off accomplishments, finished products, or completed tasks and redoing them in the event that it was not correct. Creating art can become a space where children (and adults) can learn to embrace the creativity that lives within them and provide an outlet to work through a bad day or heightened emotion. When there are no set rules or desired end product it gives them the freedom to decide for themselves when the artwork is complete.

A great way to embolden this experience is implementing what my family members did for me as a young child. Instead of being handed a coloring book, I was often given crayons and a paper plate at the dining room table. When this happened

at the young age of three and four, I had the freedom to make whatever came to my mind and the best part was, it still ended up on the fridge. The value of this paper plate drawing was seen as equivalent to all of the other drawings in which I colored inside the lines, drew a person with correct facial features, or used the colors that reflect reality. Living and encouraging a creative life allows for innovation and can create decision makers; and provide children with a space to go to when they need to get an emotion or thought out of their system in a healthy and inspired way.

About the author

I am an abstract artist from Long Island and the owner of Embracing Obsession. I created this web page and art collection as a way to express my thoughts. For me abstraction is the telling of my mind. My thoughts have troubled me for as long as I can remember, the bursts of color, energy and movement in my paintings are meant to be a dream-like space for my thoughts. The conversations within my painting's say everything more concisely than I ever could.

- Danielle Fallon



Intuitive Eating

Connecting Your Mind & Body

by Megan Morrow, RDN

As a registered dietitian, I am often asked questions about nutrition and wellness. However, the most frequent ones are “What diet is best?” or “How can I lose weight?” These are some of the easiest to answer, though it often isn’t the sort of answer that people hope for. The simple truth is, there’s no secret diet or magic way to lose weight quickly.

So, what can you trust? **Your intuition.** It is something that really shouldn’t fail you. Intuitive Eating is a self-care framework put forth by Evelyn Tribole and Elyse Resch, both well-respected registered dietitians. This way of thinking is more than just a belief. It is an evidence-based practice with over 100 studies to date.²

Being an intuitive eater allows us to connect our minds with our bodies by being aware of and honoring both our physical and mental health. Evelyn and Elyse state that you have to work to reacquaint yourself with your intuitive signals. These signals are hunger, taste, preference, and satiety.² The two co-wrote a book, *Intuitive Eating: A Revolutionary Program that Works*, in which they discuss the ten principles of intuitive eating – they are rejecting the diet mentality, honoring your hunger, making peace with food, challenging the food police, feeling your fullness, discovering the satisfaction factor, coping with your emotions without using food, respecting your body, exercise – feel the difference, and lastly, honor your health with gentle nutrition.²

Intuitive eating is, of course, easier said than done. It certainly isn't a quick fix. Practice with listening to your body while asking questions like: How does this food make me feel? Am I still hungry? Am I full? What am I craving? Once you understand your body's signals, you might find that you respond better by eating more fruits and vegetables, whole grains, nuts, lentils, and other lean proteins that are packed with health benefits. With intuitive eating you make use of knowledge you have about the health benefits of certain foods, while combining that with how those foods make you feel. Remember to be mindful of the types of foods you are consuming as well to ensure that you are getting the proper nutrients and that your diet, the foods you're eating, are balanced.

Intuitive eating also allows us to listen to and honor our body's cravings. All foods should be treated equal so that when we are craving something, we honor our body (and intuition) with said food. If a food has a negative connotation to it, we might feel bad after we eat it. For me, I know that eating a lot of fruits and vegetables makes me feel great, but at the same time I know that having a piece of chocolate at the end of the night brings me just as much joy. One food isn't "good" while the other is "bad", both have their place within this way of eating.

Intuitive eating allows food choices to be struggle-free, stress free, and most importantly, it's healthy for your mind and body. Intuitive eating has also been associated with mindful eating. The Center for Mindful Eating states that mindfulness in eating includes:

- Allowing yourself to become aware of the positive and nurturing opportunities that are available through food preparation and consumption, by respecting your own inner wisdom.²
- Choosing to eat food that is both pleasing to you and nourishing to your body, by using all of your sense to explore, savor, and taste.²
- Acknowledging responses to food (likes, neutral, or dislikes), without judgment.²
- Learning to be aware of physical hunger and satiety cues to guide your decision to begin eating and to stop eating.²

With the understanding of intuitive and mindful eating, I encourage you to reflect on how you feel after a meal or snack. Maybe the breakfast you are having every morning doesn't give you the satisfaction and joy you desire or maybe that fat-free snack bar doesn't even taste good. Take a pause, listen, and reflect. A popular statement that sums this up perfectly is, "your breakfast is there for you, you should be there for your breakfast." Very simply stated, but I always remember that when I'm rushing and trying to finish up a meal or snack to get to my next task. ***Our food is there for us; slow down, enjoy it, and be present.***

Peace. Love. Food.

- 1) Sifferlin, Alexandra. (2017). "The Weight Loss Trap: Why Your Diet Isn't Working." *Time*. Vol. 189. No. 21.
- 2) Tribole, E., & Resch, E. (2012). *Intuitive Eating: A Revolutionary Program That Works*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin.

MMM

mindful moment

with Kim Polstein, LMSW

IMPORTANCE OF PAUSING

Hello Brightsiders,

Slowly incorporating mindfulness into your daily life enhances your overall mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing. As we turn our attention to the topic of wellness in this issue, I felt it was necessary to write to you all about the importance of pausing. The year 2020 has given each of us a great challenge and while I am a firm believer in self-reflection and growth, there is also great value in pausing.

Today's Mindful Moment is more of a permission slip to all the hard-working individuals in our community striving each day to provide high quality care for children. Whether you're a parent, provider, or both; caring for children is a highly rewarding, yet often exhausting job that is vital for our society. Rather than using this "pause" to reflect and move forward in your own personal growth (don't worry, I will teach you how to do that in a later issue), I'd like to take a true pause in hopes that you can practice gentle kindness toward yourself.

As a community, we are still experiencing a global public health crisis, the aftermath of which we will be handling for the foreseeable future, we are watching and participating in the fight for equity in our communities, and we are dealing with countless other stressors, all while taking the best care of our children.

Today, we pause.

Today and every day, I hope you know you are essential. You are important. You add value to the world. You are loved. Above all I hope you know, you are enough.

As you move through your day today, practice gentle kindness toward yourself by repeating, in your head or out loud, the phrase "I am enough." "I am enough. I am enough. I am enough."

Until next time,
Kim

EXPRESSING EMOTION

by Colleen
Sterling, M.Ed

How do you express your feelings? How are you teaching your child or classroom to express their feelings? Emotional literacy is a popular buzz word in the early childhood field, and is a complex skill to develop. First we have our own emotional literacy to focus on. How am I feeling and how do I manage this? The second part is recognizing the emotions in others and responding appropriately. Understanding your own feelings and the feelings of others can be tricky. For example, people can show outward behaviors that we interpret as mad, but really they are scared. Social worker and researcher, Brené Brown, explains that "if you can't articulate, identify, and name an emotion, you can't move through it."

We all want to be heard and understood by the important people in our lives. Labeling our emotions is the first step in identifying how we feel. We want to help children to build their vocabulary beyond just happy, sad, and mad. Let's not forget about embarrassed, scared, overwhelmed, surprised, anxious, frustrated, and so many more.

Children's literature is one way to purposefully teach your child about emotions. Books are a way for children to practice reflecting on their own emotions and practice perspective taking with the guidance of an adult. It starts with infancy, there are many excellent board books with photos of babies and young children expressing various emotions. Describe how the face looks during various emotions has well. For example 'I think this child is sad, because their mouth is pulled down, and their eyes are looking down. I also see ice cream on the ground. I wonder if she is sad because her ice cream fell on the ground and she can no longer eat it.' Describing the facial features and body language will help children to recognize emotions in other people.

After identifying our emotions, we then have to express them in appropriate ways. This takes lots of practice, and most of the practice should happen before our big emotions take over. As an adult have you ever been so angry or overwhelmed that you lost your words to express yourself. Now think of a toddler or a preschooler with less vocabulary and experience with coping. Their reactions to big feelings is often through their behaviors; crying, throwing toys, or hiding under a table. There are many children's books that help children think about appropriate ways of expressing their emotions and conflict resolution. Maybe your child is sad that another child got to the dump truck before they did. How can we solve this problem; ask if the other child will share and play together, let the child use the truck next, or will the child trade the toy for a different truck.

See the list below for some recommendations. And remember, your local library is always an excellent resource.

Children are learning to recognize, label, and express their emotions appropriately. It is important for children to feel heard and understood. It is also important that we model coping for children and teach them developmentally appropriate ways to express their emotions. Children benefit from open discussions and practice with labeling emotions and how to cope. Your emotions are never wrong, but we do need to express them in developmentally appropriate and healthy ways. Children's literature is an excellent way to introduce and discuss emotions and it can start at birth.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The recommended books below and more visit the book nook webpage with the NY State Pyramid Model initiative at bit.ly/ECACBookNook

FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS

- Bloom, Suzanne (2005); *A Splendid Friend Indeed*
- Flowerpot Press (2017); *Baby's Day*
- Verdick, Elizabeth & Heinlien, Marieka series:
 - Words Are Not for Hurting
 - Hands Are Not for Hitting
 - Teeth Are Not for Biting

FOR PRESCHOOLERS

- Ghosh-Ippen, Chandrea (2017); *Once I Was Very Scared*
- Parr, Todd (2000); *The Feelings Book*
- Bang, Molly (2015); *When Sophie's Feelings Are Really, Really Hurt*

HARVEST from the GARDEN

Hands in soil, heart is glad,
Depression's foil, goodbye sad.
Bountiful fall harvest, the promise of winter ahead and spring to follow.
Garlic cloves ready to bury, like tulip bulbs, in the cooling soil.
Hope that in spring the bulbs will sprout.
Leaves pile high on the garlic bed to protect it from harsh frost heaves.
Take in the wonder of the moment.
Finish spinach seed sowing.
Nothing constant, change ongoing.

What's being harvested from the garden, the farm?
Sunflower seeds spiral around the flower head with charm.
Watermelon seeds dot – immature white and viable brown in the sweet juicy flesh.
Corn on the cob kernels packed in narrow rows.
Kale, some frilly, some flat, fan out,
Even tastier after a hard frost.
Okra pods sliced to thicken the soup reveal a spoke pattern, tiny spheres inside.
Cabbage stem strong, veins splayed wide.
Squash seeds, tan teardrops, nestled side by side.

Beets and carrots pulled up by their leaves, shoulders toughened by sun, rain and wind.
Earth-protected roots tender, thin skinned.
Seed pods from flowering stalks dry, ready to harvest or
To leave in the field to self-sew when nature indicates the time is right.
Crack dry beans out of hard pods. Will they boil for dinner or start next year's crop?
Some speckled some solid, in many different shades.
Diverse in beauty. Each variety has its praise.
It's all in how we look at it, something familiar or something foreign.
Diversity of life is never boring.

From seed to seedling, stem, root, leaf, flower and fruit.
Every part with a purpose, no part moot.
Each plant adapts, making the best of what is,
Alone, unable to change much of the surroundings.
As the gardener, I help or hinder the harvest.
I've heard what a garden needs every day... is a gardener's shadow.
When I observe each variety's diverse set of needs,
Then act to promote maximum growth,
I support thriving life and ironically flourish myself, a benefit for both.

by Bonnie Schultz, RD



Good Grief



GUIDING CHILDREN THROUGH GRIEF

by Barbara Mitchell, LMHC

Children's minds are concrete. They think in a physical, literal sense; if it is in front of them or if they can experience it, they have the greatest potential for understanding.

Children are just beginning to build the brain structures that give adults the ability to think abstractly. Thinking in the abstract requires holding a middle ground or an in-between space using symbolism and representations in place of the concrete. Adults do this primarily with language (a symbol) and children do this with toys or objects in place of words.

Loss is the absence of a meaningful something. Death is the opposite of being, and therefore cannot be in front of them. Children cannot learn about death through experience the way they can learn to balance through repeated experiences of falling or rebalancing their bodies when they trip. This lack of ability to experience or see what death is provokes a challenge for many children and therefore the adults in their lives.

In death the concrete and the abstract collide crudely, forcing children to ask questions beyond the bounds of their cognitive ability.

What happened to them?
Did they break?
Where did they go?
When will they be back?
Will you die?
Will I die?
What is death?
Why did they die?

It also brings about feelings such as sadness, longing (or missing), fear, uncertainty, and takes them out of the present moment into wondering when, why, and how. The new experience of losing someone introduces them for the first time to the concept of life and death, and time.

When children are asked to move beyond their current abilities and skills, (for more on this, Google Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development) they need the presence of someone with knowledge above their own who can supportively engage with them. Adults can support children in order to bridge the gap between their current understanding and new information so that they can incorporate both into a more complete understanding.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR ADULTS?

Talking about and experiencing feelings that we ourselves try to avoid or might not have fully incorporated into our own understanding. Children need someone who is further ahead on the journey to guide them. Taking some time to grieve and integrate your own losses and their impact on you is the first step in helping children to grieve. For some losses in life this means we will be processing our own grief and helping a child grieve at the same time.

How then does an adult with access to symbolic language help a child with primarily concrete thinking move between the concrete and the abstract? There is no right way to grieve and integrate loss into one's life, but based on child development, we can follow these guidelines.

TELL A STORY

Part of the pain of loss is that it is incomprehensible to the brain and it does not make sense. This is why we struggle to accept it and why it takes a while for it to become part of our reality. Explaining what happened through a simple story of first, then, next can help children begin to add the information to their schema. As they grow older, the way the story is told, and its complexity will grow with their comprehension.

Use other stories to assist you as you talk about grief and death, such as: *Tear Soup: A Recipe For*

Healing After Loss by Pat Schwiebert; *The Invisible String* by Patrice Karst; and *The Memory Box, A Book About Grief* by Joanna Rowland.

NAME THE FEELINGS

Death is the state of the loved one who we have lost, grief is what we feel about it, and loss is how we experience it.

Labeling the feelings we have and that children might have (including moments of positive emotions) helps name their experience which allows them to build that bridge between the concrete and the abstract. It is important to convey permission and acceptance of the feelings while labeling them. When we label our feelings, our brain has a better sense of where to organize that information in order to connect it with memories, body sensations, and our sense of self in order to integrate understanding of the loss into our personality. The goal is to grieve the loss, and then integrate the loss into our life story.

DO SOMETHING WITH THOSE FEELINGS

Help bring abstract feelings into the concrete. Connect the ways we experience emotions in our bodies. For example when we feel sad we might feel heavy in our chest or stomach. Have a conversation about where we feel those feelings as you are naming them.

Maybe they are angry their loved one has left them. Where do they feel it? Does it make their hands clench into fists, do they feel their heart pound in their chest, do they feel tension in their head and do tears come up?

Do activities that support processing feelings. What does it mean to miss someone? Children can draw memories of their loved one on paper and put them in a memory box. This helps them to have a literal place where their memories exist. This memory box can include pictures, moments, words, whatever feels emotionally significant. They can take the contents out of the boxes any time they need to in order to remember or feel connected to their loved one.

SUPPORT THEIR PLAY

Children process through play by being able to see and observe their internal world. They make their thoughts, feelings, concerns, and problems come alive in play through toys, which they can then manipulate. They can rehearse and review scenarios in their play, the same way adults will talk or think through an issue or scenario, allowing them to process through a problem.

You can support their play in the following ways:

1) Avoid interrupting their play with your own feelings. If their play is making you uncomfortable, it is likely that your discomfort is more about your own feelings around the subject than theirs. They need room to explore all of their feelings whether or not it makes us uncomfortable. Their feelings do not go away if we convey disapproval, they only learn to hide them from us.

2) You can narrate what you see happening in an unobtrusive way. This requires first observing and then speaking. It is important to avoid assuming what you are seeing in their play, truly take an observer's stance. By narrating, you apply a language or symbolic label that assists their brain in organizing and integrating their thoughts and feelings and expands their capacity.

3) Provide facts when necessary. If for example, you are seeing repetitive play and you notice a gap in their knowledge about the story (maybe the play stops in the same place over and over) they may be trying to work out or comprehend what happened between that moment and how they are feeling now, or how their loved one is missing. You can prompt them and say what happened next according to the story. Make sure to be appropriate in your explanation by avoiding unnecessary or inappropriate details for their age, instead provide information that connects their understanding between the event and the child's current experience.

HAVE SELF-COMPASSION

There is no right way to grieve and there is no easy way to grieve. Grieving a loss and integrating that loss into one's life is a process that one never truly finishes. The best thing we can do for children is to assure them that they will not be alone in that process, and that their process is welcomed and accepted.

RESOURCES FOR HELPING ADULTS TALK ABOUT DEATH AND GRIEF WITH CHILDREN

Website: The Sharing Place - Grief Support for Children | www.thesharingplace.org

Podcast: NPR Life Kit - Be Honest And Concrete: Tips For Talking To Kids About Death

Video: Sesame Street: Tool Kit – Grief www.sesamestreet.org/toolkits/grief

Activity: Brightside Up Tip Card: Good Grief

TAKING CARE
through
HEAVY
CONVERSATIONS

by Sara Baldwin

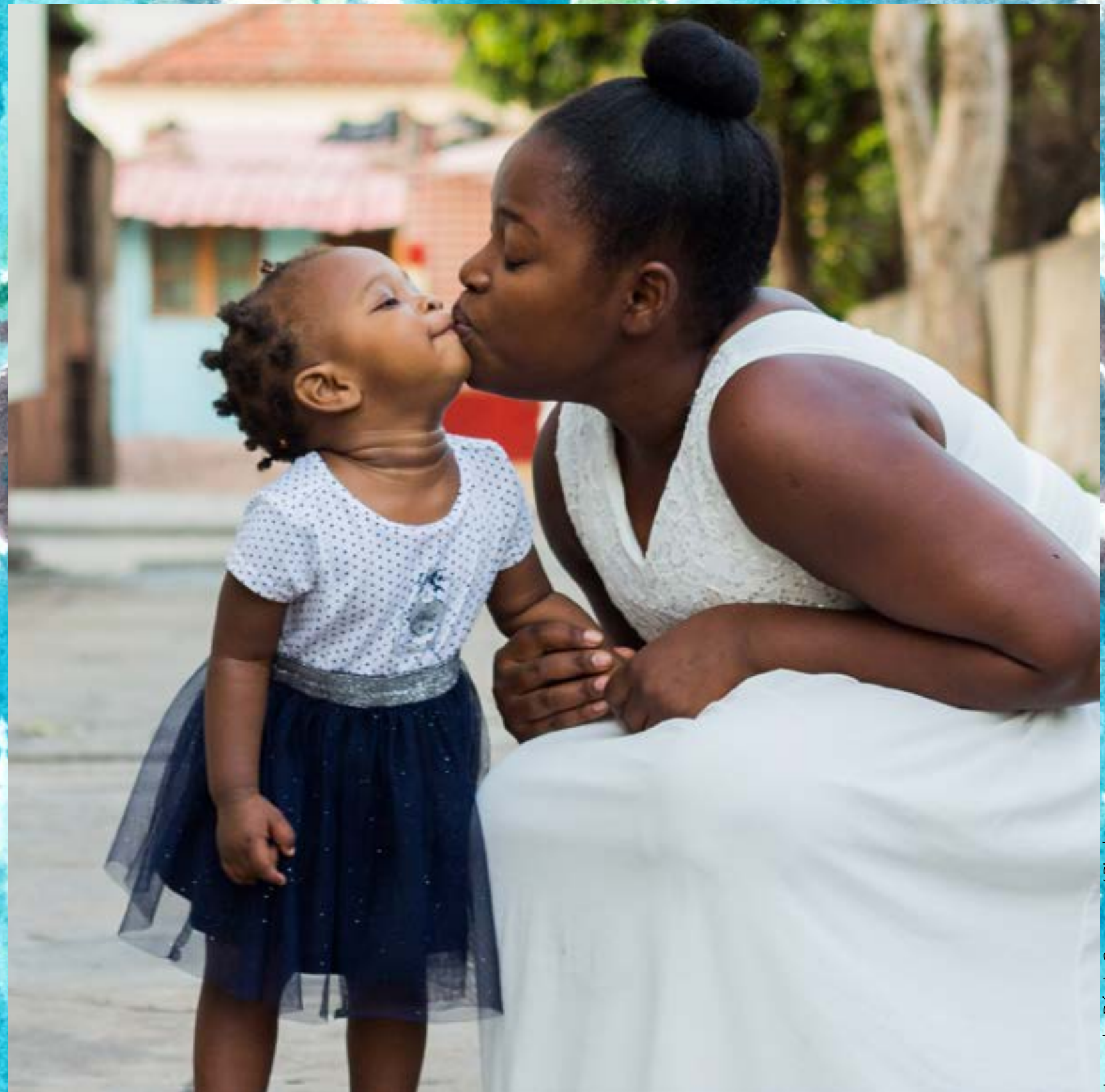


Image by Dercio Comuana / Pixabay

James Baldwin said, “Children have never been very good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them”. Stephen Sondheim said, “Careful the things you say, children will listen”. American culture is filled with references like these. Parents and caregivers of young children will likely relate to this sentiment, and can attest to children having their own unique, independent agenda. Children are paying attention to our words and actions even when we do not think they are. We often see them reflect our words and actions back to us like little mirrors. Similarly, they may reflect messages from their communities, the media and pop culture.

The world shook upon learning of the murder of George Floyd. Mid-global pandemic, a Black man was murdered in the street by a police officer. Video footage of Mr. Floyd’s horrific death took social media by storm on the heels of the murders of Ahmed Arbury and Breonna Taylor. Across the United States and the world, adults were talking about it, and children were listening. Although not by any means new, racial injustice came to the forefront of the media. To some, this felt new and confusing. To the majority of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) families, addressing racial injustice with children is commonplace. Many BIPOC families discuss race earlier and more frequently than white families, as a means of survival. Institutional racism and injustice make for an uneven playing field, and some children learn very early that others might stereotype or even hate them because of the way they look.

How can we care for ourselves and our children in a world that feels so heavy? How do we address children’s questions about race and differences? At what age should we begin to address these issues? These are questions I’ve fielded from many parents and child care providers. From my perspective, opening up a dialogue with children is an excellent starting point. Many adults feel concerned they might say the “wrong” thing. It’s likely that you will say the wrong thing. I have thought and said many

wrong things. We are all human, we all have bias. Accepting this fact can be a step toward progress, and the important thing is to not let the discomfort deter you from having important conversations. Perfection is not the goal. Learning and continuously evolving is the goal, and learning and making mistakes alongside children is an excellent way to model humility and personal growth.

It can be helpful to take stock of your lens and perspective, and that of your child or children in your care. How do you exist in the world, and how does the world respond to your existence? For example, I am a white woman, and therefore have not experienced racial oppression. As

“Keeping lines of communication open within your family or classroom environment and approaching differences with respect and curiosity is an excellent step. Seeking out ways to get involved in your community to take action against injustice or promote equity is a wonderful way to bring people together for learning.”

fluent as I strive to become in equity issues, it is my responsibility to listen to and believe individuals who are oppressed by a system which caters to someone who looks like me. The appropriate age to address race and differences with children is from birth – infants as young as three months old begin to show preference for their own race, if they are only exposed to one race (Kelly, et.al., 2005). From an extremely young age, children of different races walk through life differently. Black children are statistically more likely to be disciplined for the same behavior as white children, and are often treated as older than their chronological age (Goff, et.al., 2014). This isn’t to say that white children are not susceptible to inequities such as poverty, but racial injustices are

systemic and exist across socio economic lines in the US.

Children are observant, so it should come as no surprise that they notice skin tone and other differences. For most individuals, it is cognitively impossible not to. The notion of treating everyone the same, or “color-blindness” as it’s commonly called sounds nice in theory, but is highly problematic. Answering a child’s questions about differences, and asking them about what they notice can help assign positive messages around people who look different from them. If these differences are not addressed, society and the media will fill in the gaps, and those messages might not be positive. If a child comes to

you with an incorrect, negative or problematic message about a marginalized group, try to think of it as an opportunity for open conversation and learning. Children, like all human beings can’t be expected to know what they don’t know. Try to normalize learning new information and doing better as a result.

Looking at your home and child care environment in order to ensure that a wide range of diversity is represented is critical. White, cis gender children

with heterosexual parents are more likely to see themselves represented in books, toys and the media. Adding books, pictures and other visuals depicting individuals and families with different skin tones, ethnicities, abilities, genders and ages to your environment is a wonderful starting point. All children should have the opportunity to see people who look like them depicted as main characters, representing their childhood life experiences and empowering them to see a wide range of possibility for their futures. It’s important that these depictions include individuals and families doing every day activities in order to combat stereotypes. Including celebrations of traditions and holidays is good, but if those are the only representations of cultural diversity we

are missing a critical opportunity to share what’s commonly called “deep culture”: representations of multi-dimensional people engaging with the world around them. Looking for representation in your home or classroom can be a way to engage children in group activity, as well as an opportunity to ask open-ended questions.

As adults, there are parts of ourselves that may be visible to others, and parts that may be invisible. This is true of children as well. Fostering an environment of acknowledgement and love of differences is critical while children learn about and discover their self-identity and intersections of identities. Children look to us as adults to figure out how to engage with the world around them, which can feel challenging when learning about injustice and equity is a lifelong process. Some people want to share their stories and some don’t. For many, reliving injustice or trauma can be painful, harmful, and re-traumatizing. Keeping lines of communication open within your family or classroom environment and approaching differences with respect and curiosity is an excellent step. Seeking out ways to get involved in your community to take action against injustice or promote equity is a wonderful way to bring people together for learning.

It’s our responsibility as parents and caregivers to not only protect children by creating a safer environment of acceptance and love within our communities, but also to teach them to accept, listen to and respect the experiences of those who look different from them.

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Let's Talk About

Skin Color



In 2018, in Shann Acevedo and Molly Collier's three year old classroom in Atlanta, Georgia, amazing things transpired simply from the teachers observing that the children were noticing each other's skin color and questioning why each of their skin color was different.

Believing in an emergent curriculum, they decided to dive deeper into what became **The Skin Project**. *Why is our skin different? Why is some skin light? Why is some skin dark?*



To dive deeper into important vocabulary that they knew would be essential to the project, as friends gathered in a meeting time on the rug, Shann and Molly asked children to look at their arms. Hold them up. Study them. Compare it to the friend next to you. Is your skin lighter? Is it darker? How is it the same? How is it different? Through this deeper conversation, children were learning that while we do have some similarities, and that is great, we also have some differences, and that is just as amazing.

During snack time, Shann and Molly passed out M and M's. Yum! They all shared what color their M and M's were: red, orange, green, blue, yellow, and brown. Aren't those all amazing colors? Let's bite into one! The insides were all the same and they were delicious. Shann and Molly used this as a reminder to the children. We can have a lot of similarities and differences in the way we look on the outside, but on the inside we can all choose to be kind.



On another day, Shann and Molly brought in brown and white eggs. They, too, were different on the outside, but when they cracked the eggs open, they were the same on the inside.

David noticed, "They are different colors."
Hazel observed, "One is brown and one is white."
Claire said, "They both have eggs on the inside."
Cade stated, "They are both pointy."
Sam thought, "They are both oval."

It was now time to learn, why is our skin different colors?"



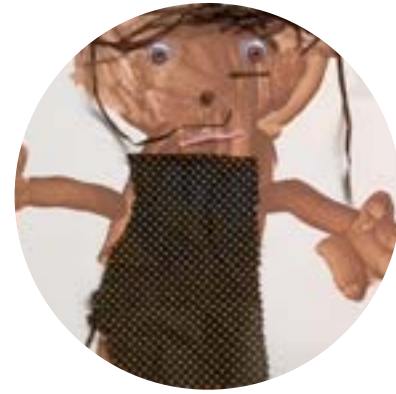
After reading Katie Kissinger's book, All the Colors We Are, the class learned that our skin color is our skin color because of our family or ancestors, the sun, and melanin. Knowing that understanding one's own identity was important to understanding others' identities as well, Shann and Molly read The Colors of Us by Karen Katz, and then gathered materials for children to each make their own paint that matched their skin color. After studying paint chips and completing some fun color mixing, each child now had their own paint color. They named their color and then started on their self-portraits. Their self-named colors included:

- Cinnamon
- Mojave Sunset
- Buttery Pink
- Tan Sugar Cookie
- Catarina
- Cozy Chair
- Absorb Orange
- Pochilla
- Sweetie
- Suplee Chase Brown
- Brown Diaper
- Pink Pink
- Beige



The final result was amazing. Their self-portraits were perfect. As the self-portraits found a place on the classroom walls, Shann and Molly noticed that their sense of community strengthened, and all the friends showed more empathy for each other. What was realized? Skin color should be talked about, not shushed. Teaching children to embrace and understand their own differences helps them to understand and embrace others differences. If we teach children to talk about differences, and become comfortable with differences, we are on the right path to treating everyone with kindness.





When children are immersed in the conversation of skin color, it helps their comfort level of talking about differences. I wonder if we all talked about and celebrated our differences more often it would become habit and more natural leading toward an acceptance of others. We can hope. We just need to talk about it; they are never too young.

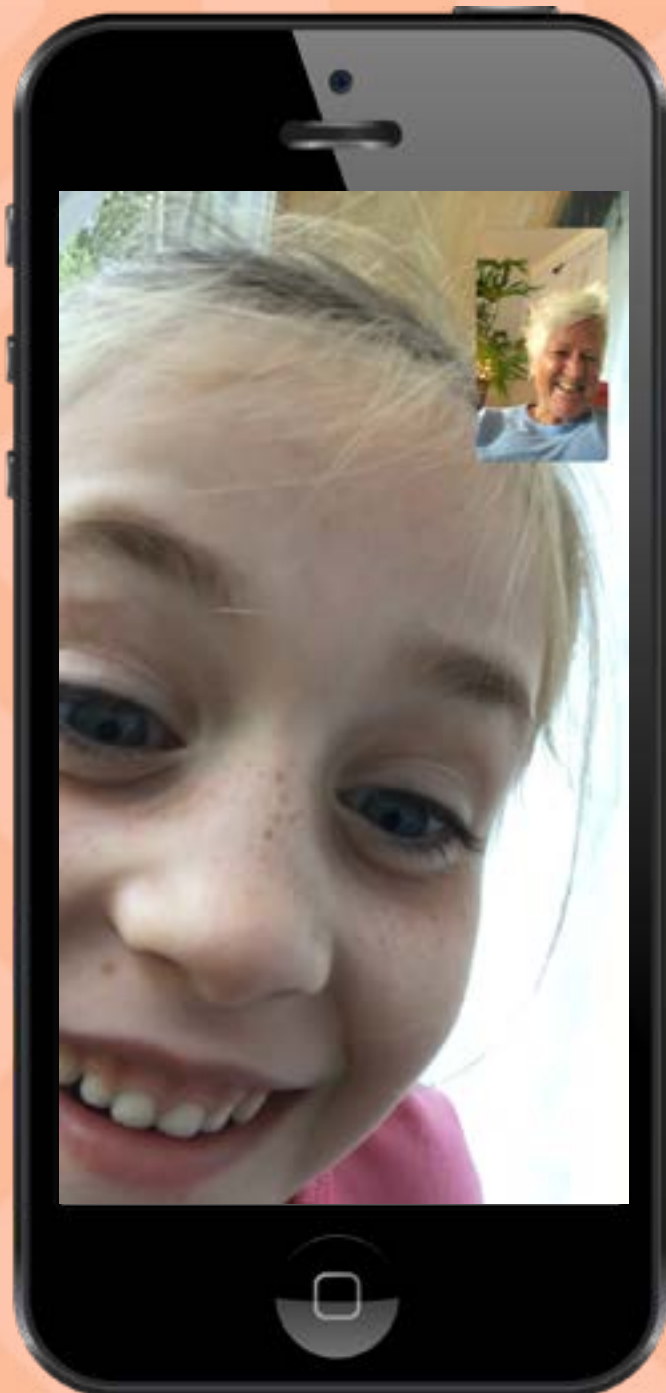
DEBBIE MARKLAND BIO

I am a preschool teacher in Dunwoody, GA at Saint Luke's Little Saints Preschool and an educational consultant for Learn As You Play - a website for parents and teachers of preschoolers that offers ideas, activities, courses, and a membership to aid in kindergarten readiness through play.



Technology & Grandparents

by Lauren Cohen, Creative Director of The Wonder Room



The best and most genuine interactions between grandparents and young children come from casual and frequent contact. Even grandparents and children who don't see each other often can have wonderful relationships if, when they do interact, their connection is genuine and informal. Many family occasions, however, don't lend themselves naturally to these connective experiences. I'm thinking of formal events that ask a child to "sit still, dress up, keep quiet and remember your manners." During the past months, when we have been socially distant with lots of new rules about the ways and the frequency with which we can interact, the regular ways that children and grandparents interact most naturally have been interrupted. Phone calls, Facetime and Zoom have become our new tools for connection. These formal methods of interaction don't always suit a young child's expectations or attention.

In the past, technological communication has been characterized by a rigid back and forth order. You speak, I speak. You send an email and I respond. Orderly rules and etiquette usually govern these online interactions. I'm going to argue for a moment that we need new rules, not only because our in-person interaction has been severely and suddenly limited, but also because technology has changed. The ways children, teens and young adults interact via audio and video are much different from the ways of their grandparents. Now more than ever, it is worth an active effort on the part of our older generation if they want to ensure that they keep and even strengthen the attachments they have with their grandchildren. In the past, the cost of a long distance call made aimless

minutes "doing nothing" a waste of time and money. But "doing nothing" is the way many young children interact best! It can feel slow to the grown up, but give it a try. By bending the rules and trying new things, we may find that we can be even more adaptable to a real and loving connection. Simply let the child show you things. Wait the few minutes while she goes into the other room, gets distracted and finds something neat to show you. Neither party needs to be glued to the screen. Kids watch grownups, grownups watch kids – it's free! Just as with in-person interactions, you don't need to be 100% attentive the whole time – just available.

Watch me jump!
Are those berries ripe?
Look at my tower!
Did you know that the scary monster is going to the picnic but the dog princess is gonna get there first and make a tunnel for them?

Send a text and see if your child is available. Then open up Zoom or Facetime while you are cooking dinner. You don't need to speak the whole time – or maybe not even at all. You are just there working and the child is playing. Maybe you'll talk some. Maybe not so much. It's a natural way to connect. The easiest way to maintain a good connection is to start with the child. Listen and watch. That's my best advice. But if you are looking for something with a little more structure – something grandparent-initiated, here are a few ideas to get you started:

1. Bring your phone outside. Flip your screen view and talk about the things you see. Do you have a garden or wildlife? Can you make up a story about the birds or the chipmunks? Do you hear any interesting sounds?

2. Make a video. Do you get really beautiful sunsets? Is there a squirrel constantly climbing on the birdfeeder? Did you see something interesting on your walk? Make a short video (it can be a few seconds or a few minutes) and send it along. It can be watched at any time, as many times as your child wants. There's an app called Marco Polo that is perfect for these back-and-forth videos.

3. Share Screen in Zoom is a great tool! You can open up photos on your computer (family photos or photos of favorite pages from book – like search and find pictures) and play I Spy or talk about things you've done together.

4. Make silly faces at each other. Can you copy each other's expressions? Make up situations and make faces to match the feelings you'd have in each one. What if you had a great big ice cream cone? What if it fell? What if three giraffes walked down the street?

5. Read a story or sing a song. Read a favorite book aloud. You can even make a recording of it to be replayed at naptime and bedtime.

6. Draw together or play with the same toy. Is there something that is in both homes? Maybe Legos, markers, or looking through magazines for nice pictures to use in a collage.

Following your child's interest and attention is the best way to engage meaningfully. Mutual love and shared experience build connection. Try some new tools and break down some old fashioned barriers. Even now, you and your child can ensure that physical distance has no bearing on the emotional bonds we create between generations.



T-Rex by Quinn, age 4.5



Morgan



IMAGE BY ARUN KUMAR FROM PIXABAY

by Kathleen Harland

If you are familiar with Judith Viorst's classic children's book, *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*, you know the main character is a young boy named Alexander who is having a bad day. From the moment he wakes up with gum in his hair to his bedtime when the family cat chooses to sleep with his brother, then his Mickey Mouse night light burned out, all with a day full of mishaps in between. Some days can seem like that for any of us with one bad thing leading to another. If enough small things go wrong they can seem to create a bit of an avalanche and all of a sudden everything feels wrong. The book ends with Alexander's mom assuring him that, "Some days are like that." She lets him know that he's not alone and that we all have days like this once in a while.

For parents and caregivers of toddlers, these "bad days" may seem to appear out of nowhere. So while you are observing and hoping "to get to the bottom of this" you likely are also trying to figure out ways to pre-emptively stop the avalanche. Helping your child to "re-set" and change their perspective may be easier than you think. Here are five suggestions on the following page worth trying when a tough day seems to be unfolding for your child. And remember the words of Alexander's mother, "Some days are like that." Handling them together is certainly a step in the right direction.

Hit the reset button on that terrible day

1. Listening to a child's favorite song is a good approach for several reasons. The song itself is likely to lift spirits and the movement that is usually coupled with toddlers enjoying music can also help reset their outlook. It feels good to be up and moving and singing loud and proud. You may feel the effects as well.
2. Baths and water tables or water bins are old time favorites for successful re-sets. Water play can be a relaxing, engaging, almost mesmerizing experience. Be sure to provide materials for filling, pouring, cascading, stirring, floating, squeezing, scrubbing, and dropping. There are endless exploration opportunities with water and open-ended play accessories.
3. Nature walks are another wonderful way to help your toddler stop the avalanche. Not only does the fresh air seem to do everyone some good but there is so much to see and explore. Giving a bag or bucket to collect special finds like colorful leaves or a smooth rock can add to the fun and focus.
4. Hugs and snuggles can be good resets for all ages. A hug or snuggle moment lets a child know that you see that they're upset, you're there for them, and they are loved. Having books close at hand provides great opportunities for a child to get cozy in your lap to share a book together.
5. Deep breathing is a very helpful "re-setting tool" for grown-ups and children alike. Two of my favorite ways to encourage deep breathing are bubbles and bean bags. Letting children blow the bubbles will build in the full, deep breaths that calm and regulate. Asking your child to lie on their back with a bean bag on their stomach is a great way too. It's calming to watch the bean bag rise with a deep, slow, full breath and lower with a full exhale, again and again.



WHEN

SELF-CARE

ISN'T

ENOUGH

by Kimberly Polstein, LMSW

Self-care is essential

for your overall mental and physical health, as is community care. These two concepts are deeply connected, and we need them both.

The COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Pandemic has affected every person in our country in some way or another. Whether directly impacted by the virus or impacted by the safety precautions and restrictions put in place as a preventative health care method, it is safe to say that stress levels are high and the lasting effects of the pandemic on overall health and mental health are still unknown.

Self-care is deliberate action taken by a person to preserve or improve their health. This may focus on physical health, mental health, or spiritual health. So, while self-care might include a yoga class, wine night with your girlfriends or the newest bath bombs from LUSH, it is important to understand that true self-care is more comprehensive. At its most effective, self-care is intentionally planned across multiple aspects of your life, not simply focused on relaxation techniques. Self-care is proactive and reactive, meaning you are proactively taking steps to increase your overall mental and physical health; however, you should also plan for ways to cope with the inevitable, unplanned life stressors. Strong self-care can include things like boundary setting, wellness visits with your primary care physician, and budgeting.

Self-care is vital to our health. Ultimately taking care of our health and wellness is our responsibility, however, there seems to be an increasing pressure on folks to practice strong self-care with little to no guidance, in a society that values individualism. When self-care isn't enough, we turn to community care.

A community is most commonly defined as a group of people living in the same place or having characteristics in common. However, community is also defined as a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests and goals. Therefore, whether you engage in community care via the community in which you live, or, engage with those who share your in-

terests, you can support your own health, and the health of others, by being around people. Community care then, is the collective practice of taking care of people together.

Nakita Valerio defines community care as “people committed to leveraging their privilege to be there for one another in various ways.” This may mean that you, as an individual, sacrifice a bit to help someone else, or you as the individual ask the group for the support you need rather than struggling to make it on your own. Community care places the responsibility of compassion on the group rather than the individual. Eventually, everyone in their lifetime will need someone else to care for them, whether it's physically, emotionally, financially or spiritually, we all need help sometimes. Community care creates a culture shift that allows us as individuals to rely on our communities for this support, and in return our community members can rely on us.

Community care can look like a lot of different things. It can be as simple as reaching out to family/friends via text message to check in on someone or ask for a check in on yourself. It can be someone coming over to help you with chores while your children are home from school. Or, it could be you volunteering your time in your community to help support causes that are important to you. Community care might look like reaching out to others or supporting others financially at times. Community care focuses on sustained, interpersonal acts of kindness. Just like self-care, these communal acts can and should be prioritized and can be planned for. Just like self-care, community care is proactive and reactive.

Remember that your community may be the neighborhood in which you live, but it can also be broader sense of community. For example, you as a member of Brightside Up, receiving a Home and Classroom Magazine, or as a parent or provider in our region, are a member of the Brightside Up community! During the COVID-19 shut down, our community showed up strong. Providers remained open to children and families so that essential

workers could have safe child care. Providers cared for each other and their community to keep their programs safe and fully functioning during that time, despite the stress that it may have caused. They were able to sacrifice a bit of their comfort and security for the greater good of the community. That is community care.

Our community came out in full force with the support of the CARES funding that allowed Brightside Up to purchase and supply PPE, cleaning supplies and other necessities to our providers in order to help them maintain safe practices in their programs. Those supply pantry days were incredible to witness. Providers lined up in their cars all the way down Broadway. From a safe distance we were able to provide supplies and hear all our providers' stories about working during a pandemic. That is community care.

Community care removes some of the individual pressures of self-care and allows us as human beings to reconnect

with our social instincts. It may take some time to get used to the feeling of relying on others for support and feeling strong for doing so. So often we've been conditioned to believe that if we can't make it on our own, we're not strong enough, but actually we are much stronger together.

Self-care is primarily focused on acts of compassion and proactive wellness toward the self. While this is vital to one's health, it is not enough when someone is faced with systemic issues like racism, ableism, sexism etc., or struggles with self-compassion. That's where community care can come into play, and while community care won't necessarily solve these structural oppressive concerns, it does help to mitigate some of the adverse effects by allowing people who share community to come together around these issues. Nakita Valerio states “Community care is a better steppingstone toward justice” than self-care alone.

They were able to sacrifice a bit of their comfort and security for the greater good of the community. That is community care.

Here are some tips on creating a self-care practice and integrate more community care into your life.

Self-care is strongest when it is made a priority in your life. Self-care is proactive as well as reactive. This means you will begin or continue to plan time for yourself to prevent stress and plan for your best response to stress. There are many ways to do this. You might consider making a self-care plan (see Home and Classroom, Issue 1 Mindful Moment article for more on planning) and visit/update that plan often.

In order to decide what will be included in your plan, spend some time thinking about the major stressors to your overall mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing. Some areas you might explore are: finances, physical

health (medical concerns, diet, exercise plan, hydration etc.) social connections, relationships, mental health, personal goals etc.

Once you identify where your major stressors are you can make a plan that both responds to some of those stressors, as well as proactively protects your health by including many things that you enjoy doing or that keep you well. For example, if you love music, prioritize making time for concerts, playing with friends, listening to new music, etc. Staying hydrated is vital to our overall health, consider adding a water goal to your self-care plan. Include phone calls with loved ones, or a list of supportive people in your life that will be there for you when life feels overwhelming. Include a physical movement goal as well as something you enjoy that stimulates your mind. And of course, my favorite, something for your spirit. This could be anything that makes your heart happy and brings a smile to your face.

The best part of self-care is that it's something just for you, and it does not have to cost a lot. Community care may now also begin to be prioritized in your life, start small and begin to grow your social circle. Remember, this should also be done proactively with steps so that you are able to build community without feeling overwhelmed. Community can be live in person or built virtually. There are multiple apps to help build virtual communities, for example, the WhatsApp messaging app is an encrypted app that affords users the privacy needed to engage in community care while feeling safe.

Community care can occur in the workplace as well. Many agencies have embraced the self-care movement by implementing policies and practices relating to employee wellness. Some agencies offer yoga classes, childcare, counseling sessions, and wellness days. Some agencies are beginning to push into the community care space by creating environments where coworkers can trust and support one another. A community care culture in a workplace might offer support groups, time during staff meetings for certain issues to be raised and discussed, bringing awareness to those issues on the company website/social media platform etc.

Some simple steps for getting started building community (and therefore community care) are investing in your relationships, greeting people on the street, reaching out to friends/family/community members who are struggling, asking for help, getting to know your neighbors. You can also start taking steps to volunteer in your com-

munity. Visit local community organizations, churches, schools, animal shelters etc. and ask about ways you can become more involved. Consider donating time or financial aid to organizations who support communities in crisis. Help connect people who are out of work if you know of job openings. Jobs strengthen individuals, families and communities. Lend a hand to someone in need.

Whether it is self-care, community care; or both, taking small steps to preserve and improve your health is vital not only for your survival but our survival as a society. Start small and take steps to grow your self-care practice and social network.



Building the practice with your children

Whether it's in the classroom or at home building self-care and community care practices with children is a wonderful way to engage with them around health and wellness. For most young children, self-care begins within the relationship they have with a parent or caregiver, as young children are not capable of caring solely for themselves. You can teach your child some simple ways to help themselves in times of stress though.

Consider including your child in practicing some items from your own self-care plan to get started. For example, if you are looking to proactively manage your stress level by beginning a meditation practice, include your child in this practice. An infant can be held close to your chest while you practice taking deep breaths, a toddler and preschooler may sit with you for short periods of a meditation. You may even seek out children's guided meditation and practice together. When you notice your child's stress level rising you can model the reactive side of self-care by saying something like "I see your body getting tense, remember our plan, lets breathe together for a moment."

Since children rely on the adults in their lives to care for them, we can begin to plant the seeds for self-care, but young children will thrive with community care. Teaching young children skills to work together, collaborate, disagree, share (ideas and materials), lay the foundation for community care as these actions help to break down individualistic ideas and foster teamwork.

Here are some simple tips on beginning to foster community in your classroom or at home with your children. First, use children's names often, rather than speaking to the whole group all at once or calling attention by saying "boys and girls!" Use respectful signals to model how to get attention from other students without shouting or suddenly turning lights down. You might use a chime or ask 2-3 children to each gather a few more friends to quietly gather. Establish rules for home or the classroom with children. Ask for their input and when you all agree on the rules, sign off on those rules either by signing your name or using handprint signatures.

Refer to these rules and encourage children to hold each other accountable, as well as encourage children to help each other solve problems. When disagreements occur, resist the urge to solve the problem and help children to negotiate together.

As children begin to learn that they can rely on each other and adults for help, and feel good by helping others, their community begins to grow. With a strong community, and healthy, happy caregivers, our children will live life well.



Image by Cheryl Holt from Pixabay

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GARDENING at VICTORY CHILD CARE

Victory Reidy, Ed. M, Founder /
Director of Victory Child Care



When Hannah Wise, RDN, Eat Well Play Hard & Farm to Preschool Coordinator first reached out to us about the Farm to Preschool program, we knew that it would be a great fit for Victory Child Care, Inc. Each spring we have a whole curriculum on lifecycles, including the lifecycle of plants. Every year we create gardens in the classroom and grow sprouts in bags, seeds in small cups, and observe their growth. Participating in the Farm to Preschool program allowed us to enrich this curriculum and make it more impactful for our children. We said YES! right away and were so excited to get to work on this project with our favorite community partner, Brightside Up. We had made plans for this program before COVID-19 turned everything on its head. We thought for sure that this fantastic program would have to wait until next year because of potential challenges in implementing a program with so many children still at home. That's when Hannah came to us with a

flexible plan and we have had our garden planted since the middle of June.

It is no surprise that Brightside Up has been great to work with; Hannah and her team came over to help build the garden beds and then it was time to plant. Not only was this a project that our preschool and pre-kindergarten children took part in, but our toddler and infant children also came out to watch the fun and learning. The garden beds have transformed our outside courtyard, which can be seen from our hallway and all our classrooms, into a place for learning. It is something that the children are excited to check on as they enter school. Since COVID-19, parents have been dropping off at the door which has been hard for some children, but the garden beds have excited them and given them something to look forward to as soon as they step in the center.

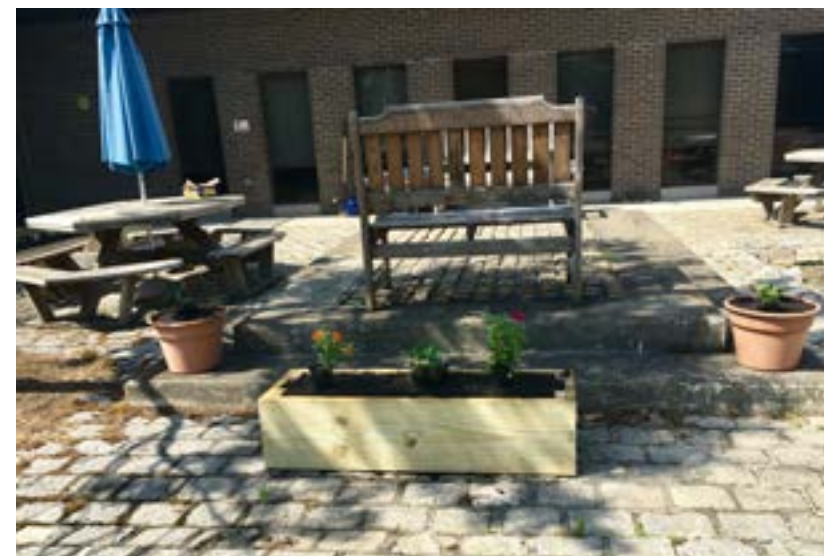
Everyday groups of children go outside and water the plants, measure the growth, check the soil and are eagerly waiting for harvest time. As a center in downtown Albany, we have children that come from very diverse homes. Some live in apartments where there is no space for an outdoor garden so this is their first time getting to grow plants outside! Not only are they learning about the lifecycle and growth of plants in a very powerful way, but they are also seeing how gardens can affect the greater world around them. Birds and bees are being attracted, worms are found in the soil and so the teachers are given the opportunity to talk about things like the work of the worm and how birds and bees help to pollinate plants and spread seeds to other places. The garden beds have grown our curriculum to places it could not have gone with our indoor gardens.

The garden beds are just the beginning. This program includes a whole curriculum on wellness and healthy eating, with the vegetables we are growing at the center of our learning. Included in our discussions of healthy eating, we will be using recipes that we can make with the vegetables we are growing, and how we can positively contribute to our environment when we grow plants. We had our first ever Zoom learning for the children, it was quite exciting for them and us.



Part of the program includes a farmers' market where the community can access free food. We are so excited to help our neighbors receive fresh vegetables to eat at home. The Palace Theater is partnering with this program and we will have this Market under their marquee, what an amazing spot to hold the market! With this farmer's market we will talk about why giving back to our community is important, as well as continue the learning of healthy eating at home.

The learning from our garden beds is endless; the children look forward to the daily care it takes to help the plants grow, observing the changes in the plants and look forward to harvest day! This is such a wonderful project, a project that will continue at Club Fed Child Care Center for many years to come.



A world



where
all

children

are

understood

