

The Parent and Family Engagement Connection

Home & School

"Together We Can Make a Difference"



The Parent and Family Engagement Statewide Initiative

2022 has been another year of change for us all, including the Parent and Family Engagement Statewide Initiative. The PFE team has seen several changes over the last year including the retirement of two very special people, Terri Stafford, and Skip Forsyth. Terri and Skip leave behind a legacy in the field of Parent and Family Engagement but they have blazed a path for those of us who follow to keep the vision of true family and school partnerships alive. The Statewide Initiative has several new faces and will be adding even more in the months to come. Please know that the PFE team is here for parents, families, community, teachers, and all school staff. If we can ever be of any service to you or your school please reach out to us, and we will be glad to help.

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His Tank Was Empty



The whole world paused this morning.

Do you know why? Because an 8 year old's tank was empty.

The boys had already started their school day at their desks, and I was preparing to leave for work when I noticed my littlest standing in the bathroom wiping his face.

I paused at the door and asked if he was okay. He looked up with tears silently dripping and shook his head. When I questioned if something happened, again he shook his head.

So I sat on the side of the tub and pulled him in my lap. I told him sometimes our heart tanks feel empty and need to be refilled.

He cried into my chest, and I held him tight. I asked if he could feel my love filling him up? A nod, and tears stopped...I waited a minute...‘Has it reached your toes yet?’ He shook his head no...‘Okay man. We will take as long as you need. Work doesn’t matter right now. School isn’t important either. This right here, is the most important thing today, okay? Filling you back to the top. Is that good?’ *nods* One more minute...Is your heart full of mama’s love now?’ ‘Yeah...’ I look in his eyes. ‘I see it shining there, you’re filled to the top, and you’re smiling!’

You may not be 8— you may be 28, 38, 48 or whatever—but ALL of us run on empty just like he did. His weekend was so busy and so full and his soul was just dry!!!

We all have to pause, and take a moment to refill with the good things. Song, laughter, friends, hugs. Refill your empty, or you’ll find those emotions (tears, anger, snappy words) overflowing with no reason why.

Take a moment. Refill. It’s the most important part of your day!

Misty Starr Whittington Robertson

How to Prevent Your Kids from Losing What They Learned in School During Summer Vacation

Summer break is typically a time for kids to kick back, indulge in a little extra screen time, play outside, and embrace the kind of freedom that only comes with being young and having zero responsibilities. However, all of this free time can lead to the summer slide, a regression in academic proficiency due to summer break, and experts warn it is hindering kids' progress when they head back to school.

Who Is at Risk?

Younger children are prone to the most learning loss because they're at a crucial stage in their development. "In general, kids learn a lot more in kindergarten, first grade, and second grade than kids in middle school or high school, because learning follows a curve where it's accelerated early in life and then plateaus," says James Kim, Ed.D., an assistant professor of education at Harvard University. "Things like decoding, letter knowledge, and word reading skills are very susceptible to decay without frequent practice, as are math facts like addition and subtraction." Children from low-income families are also disproportionately affected by the summer slide, in ways that can affect them years into their education. In fact, [research cited by Kim](#) shows that more than half of the gap in reading scores between low-income 9th graders and their middle-income peers could be attributed to differences in summer learning accumulated between first and fifth grade.



What Can Parents Do to Help?

The good news is that basic skills aren't hard to maintain over the off-season! There are a number of ways to keep kids engaged in reading and math over the summer:

⇒ Let kids read what they want.

Children won't gain as much from summer reading if they aren't truly enjoying it. Kids should have access to a wide variety of books that they enjoy reading and are fully able to comprehend. Nearly 60 percent of children ages 6 to 17 say they love or like reading books for fun a lot, and 52 percent think it's extremely or very important.

To get started, check out this year's Scholastic Read-a-Palooza Summer Reading Challenge, a free, educational program in which kids can enter reading minutes online to unlock exclusive digital rewards and help donate books to kids in need across the country. Ask your child's teacher or local librarian if they're participating — if not, you can register your child individually.

⇒ Get out of the house.

Experts have found that novelty stimulates the brain and promotes learning. Visiting a historic site or even simply reading together at the park can help your child get more excited about reading and learning. You can also visit a certain location inspired by the books you read together: For instance, read [Hidden Figures](#), the inspiring true story about four black female mathematicians who helped NASA launch astronauts into space, and then check out a planetarium, bringing up topics covered in the book. This helps reinforce what kids are learning from books in a real-world setting.

⇒ Use your imagination.

Kids who use their imagination are also expanding their vocabularies and experimenting with new concepts. Even though it may not seem like they're directly "learning" when they're crafting their own superhero capes with a superhero starter kit or dreaming up complex chain reactions with educational LEGO sets, they're still calling on familiar skills and developing new ones. You could even play "theater" and put on a show inspired by all of the great summer books you're reading together.

Taken in part from: <https://www.scholastic.com/parents/books-and-reading/raise-a-reader-blog/summer-slide.html>

Mental Health Tips for Parents

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, children and teens have been struggling with more anxiety and depression.

But many parents and caregivers are struggling too – and to be there for their child, they need to take care of their own mental health.

1. Focus on your relationship with your child – and don't worry about the other stuff.

Your family is going through a stressful time, and as a parent, you may feel like you need to keep everything together, from school to work to sports to meal planning. But it's impossible not to let something slide. So focus on what's most important: your child's well-being, and their connection with you.

In other words, if your child is having a hard time at school this year, don't worry so much about their grades. Focus, instead, on their mental health and well-being. Youth will actually perform better in school when there is less achievement-focused pressure. Give yourself a break and check the school grading app only once per week, and do it with your child. If you notice surprising grades, use this as an opportunity to connect with your kids and problem solve with the school to identify more supports. Look for clues that they may be struggling with depression or anxiety.

2. Give yourself permission to do a "good enough" job as a parent.

Recognize that your "best" right now may be different from prior expectations for yourself, whether that's your child's screen time or your family meal-planning. That's okay. Use this moment in time to model how important it is to be balanced. Be aware of not setting unrealistic goals for yourself or your child.

3. Stop the comparisons.

Every family's journey during this pandemic has been unique. Don't compare your family's experience to anyone else's, and don't measure yourself as a parent against anyone else. Have compassion for yourself.

4. Forget "should."

Instead of thinking about how social media or other influences say you "should" be, focus on the kind of parent you would *like* to be. This simple shift in mindset can cut through the noise and foster a relationship to your child at a much deeper level.

5. When stress is getting the better of you, pause.

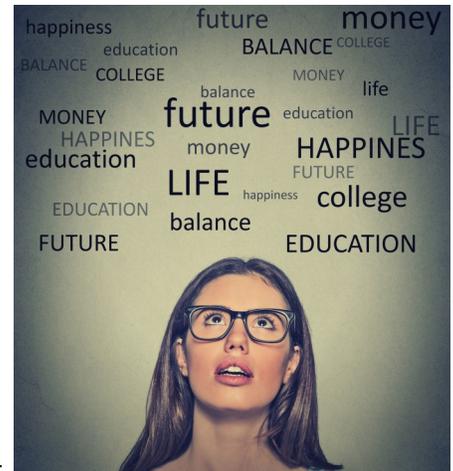
If you are in a situation where you might react to your child with intensity or hostility, pause. Take a breath, and go to a separate space until you can react with control.

To help, try asking:

- What would I tell someone else in this situation? Would I tell them to respond the way I'm about to respond?
- What is the rule that says I need to respond this way? Where did it come from? Am I interested in changing it?

Remember: An intense or hostile reaction will never help. It could, however, hurt your connection with your child. Unless your child is in danger, your best reaction may be no reaction.

Used in part: <https://www.connecticutchildrens.org/behavioral-health/mental-health-tips-for-parents/>



The Most Sought After Degrees

1. Computer and Information Sciences.
2. Nursing and Nursing Administration.
3. Pharmaceutical Sciences and Administration.
4. Human Resources Management and Services.
5. Electrical and Electronics Engineering.
6. Mechanical Engineering.
7. Biology.
8. Health Information or Medical Records Technology.

Deciding on a degree can be daunting before going to college. However, if you start early, this may save you money and time in the future. There are many resources available to you.

If you have not taken the free career test yet, it is highly encouraged. This will give you a starting point to narrow down your chosen field or gain more information in an area you think you may want to study in college. Whatever you do, make sure you also take your time and research the career or careers you may be interested in. It is advantageous to check out the growth rate and salary as well when doing this.

Taken in part: <https://www.yourfreecareertest.com/top-10-tips-for-college-bound-high-school-students/>

Summer Meal Programs Help Children Stay Healthy, Active

Every summer, no-cost meals are available for children 18 and younger and enrolled students with disabilities up to age 21 in low-income areas. Federally funded Summer Meal Programs make it possible for food banks, schools, and other nonprofits to serve these meals in a supervised and welcoming setting. The Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) oversees the federal programs in Texas for sponsors serving meals and encourages families to access this source of good nutrition when school cafeterias are closed for summer.

On June 1, meal sites will begin opening in communities across Texas. Families have the following three tools they can use from June 1- August 30, to find a meal site:

- ✓ Dial 211 to speak to a live operator
- ✓ Visit www.SummerFood.org for an interactive site locator map
- ✓ Text FOOD to 304-304

In addition to finding a site, it is important for families to use these tools frequently to confirm dates, times, and get more information about how meals will be served. Families are encouraged to call, text, or go online and connect with meal sites throughout the summer to access healthy meals for young Texans.

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Ways to Know if Your Kid Is Ready to Be Home Alone

Many parents are faced with the dilemma of at what age can children stay home alone, especially during after-school hours or the summertime. Before you consider leaving your child without supervision, be sure they are reasonably mature, able to take care of themselves, and completely prepared for emergency situations. Set ground rules, review basic safety guidelines, and establish routines that are designed to keep your child healthy and safe.

1. Do they consistently follow all household rules (especially safety rules)?

How about rules regarding screen time and Internet safety? If so, you could probably reasonably expect them to do the same in your absence. If the answer is no, then staying home alone is out of the question.

2. Does being home alone scare them in any way?

Some kids are still scared to be left alone, and you don't want to put them in that situation unnecessarily. A friend of mine left her son home alone—at his request—and when she came back 20 minutes later, he was hiding behind the kitchen counter. He realized he wasn't quite ready to be home alone yet! Ask some questions in a way that gives your kids the freedom to be honest without feeling embarrassed and be sure to honor their feelings.

3. Will they be responsible for only themselves or for younger siblings as well?

A good rule of thumb here: If you are confident enough in your kids' level of responsibility to allow them to take babysitting jobs with other families, then they may be able to care for their younger siblings. However, sibling dynamics often make this impossible. In other words, if your 11-year-old and your 8-year-old still bicker and fight to the death, one shouldn't be left to care for the other.

4. Do you have a backup system that exists for them in case of an emergency?

You'll be more comfortable with the idea of leaving children home alone if there is someone nearby they can reach in a minute. Calling mom or dad on the cell phone is a good alternative, but there are some situations that may call for more immediate, hands-on adult help. Is there a trusted neighbor next door who would help bandage a cut or assist in some other way if needed? If so, you may be ready to give your child a trial run.

5. How do your children handle brief periods of self-supervision?

After laying out the rules, let your child stay home while you make a run to the bank or the grocery store. If several of these short-term attempts at self-supervision go off without a hitch, you may be ready to extend the period of time your child is home alone.

Taken in part from: <https://www.imom.com/home-alone-rules-state/>

Be open-minded, assertive, and transparent.

Expect the same from others.

Don't worry about how others perceive you.

Instead worry about achieving your goals.

For this is the only thing in your control.

Bijal Shah



How to Raise a Reader

Tips for getting your kids hooked on books -- ebooks or the paper kind.

Kids become lifelong readers for all kinds of reasons. Sometimes there's one key book that captures a kid's imagination. Other times, a teacher assigns a great book that sparks a hunger for more big ideas and fine writing. Or a librarian puts the right book in a kid's hands just when they need it. Or kids see parents, caregivers, or siblings read for pleasure. Here are our best tips for nurturing a love of reading that can last a lifetime:



Read to little kids and big kids.

It's cozy reading to little ones on your lap, cuddling next to you, or falling asleep in bed as you enjoy picture books together. Children will remember the closeness as well as the story. And many kids still enjoy [read-alouds](#) well after they learn to read on their own. They benefit from hearing the rhythm of the language, learning correct pronunciation, asking questions, and getting to relax and just take in the story.

Pick books about the things your reader loves.

If they're wild about vehicles, find [books about cars, trucks, and trains](#). If your reader craves [superheroes](#), [princesses](#), or [ghosts](#), find books with those characters. Librarians, booksellers, and Internet searches will help you discover books on any favorite topic.

Feed kids funny stories.

Humor is a great pathway to book loving. Some parents wrestle with letting their children read [Captain Underpants](#), or [Diary of a Wimpy Kid](#), or other [funny books for kids](#) that feature youngsters getting in trouble. Talk with your kids about the content, but keep in mind that kids eat these books up not because they want to imitate the characters' behavior -- they just enjoy trying it on for size while reading the story.

Used in part from an article at: <https://www.common sense media.org/articles/how-to-raise-a-reader>

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<p>The Parent and Family Engagement Connection is posted on our website four times a year for parents and educators of Texas. This newsletter is available in Spanish, Vietnamese, German, Tagalog and Korean.</p>	
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