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M any a parent is familiar with the notion that children do not come with instruction manuals. Since babies are not born with instruction manuals, the best way to raise children is open to interpretation, and interpretations often lead to theories on parenting.

One such theory is strength-based parenting, an approach that focuses on developing and nurturing a child’s character. Dr. Lea Waters, a Melbourne, Australia-based psychologist and author, has studied ways to improve interactions between parents and their children for decades.

Dr. Waters emphasizes the value of identifying and nurturing children’s character strengths, and the value that such efforts can have in regard to promoting children’s long-term happiness and achievements. In an article for Greater Good Magazine, Dr. Waters defined character strengths as those things that are personality-based and internal, including curiosity, courage, humor, and kindness. These character strengths work in conjunction with talents, which may include things like athletic ability, musical skills and problem-solving.

Strength-based parenting espouses the importance of cultivating kids’ character strengths as much as their talents. Dr. Waters notes that it would be hard to find anyone who made the most of their talents without also relying on their character strengths. For example, even the most gifted natural athletes need to draw on their work ethic in order to reach their full potential as athletes.

Dr. Waters’ research has led her to conclude that children and teenagers whose parents help them to identify and use their character strengths benefit from that assistance in myriad ways. Such children experience more positive emotions and flow, are more persistent, are more confident, and are more satisfied with their lives compared to children whose parents did not help them identify and use their character strengths. Dr. Waters’ research, published in 2018, also found that children whose parents took a strength-based approach to parenting earned better grades, were less stressed, more capable of coping with friendship issues, and more capable of coping with homework deadlines than children whose parents did not employ a strength-based approach to parenting.

Parenting is a big responsibility, and parents can explore various approaches to raising happy children to fulfill their responsibilities as parents. One such approach is strength-based parenting, which parents can explore on their own to decide if it’s an approach they want to pursue.

A parent’s job begins the moment a woman learns she is pregnant. Upon receiving such news, women typically make important changes to ensure the well-being of the fetuses growing inside them.

Once a child is born, the first few weeks with baby certainly can be a whirlwind. During this period, pediatricians note how important bonding with parents is for a baby’s development. Parents may be unaware that the touches, cuddles and feelings of safety and security provided by them help set a foundation for emotional well-being, which can last throughout their child’s life.

According to Jeff Simpson, Ph.D., adjunct professor of psychology at the University of Minnesota and an author of a study about childhood attachment, babies who were securely attached to their mothers by 12 months old (turning to her for comfort when exploring an unfamiliar place) were more likely to come out of an argument in their early 20s still feeling connected to their partners. Simpson surmises that the ability to trust, love and resolve conflict develops in part from how people are treated as infants.

Breastfeeding provides more than nutrition. The close contact during nursing helps the child to hear Mom’s heartbeat and gets skin-to-skin contact.

Make eye contact. Parents should keep eye contact with baby when engaging in feedings and other care. This helps the baby remember who their parents are and reassures them that their parents can be trusted.

Read baby’s messages. A child who wants to engage will make little noises, such as cooing or laughing sounds. He or she also may look relaxed and interested, while some may seek out their parents. React to these messages promptly.

Respond to cries. Parents can do their best to always respond to cries for attention as it helps the baby to feel safe. This is key during the first three months of the baby’s life. As the baby ages and has already developed a bond, parents can encourage more self-soothing.

Bonding is important for babies and parents. Developing a connection early on can provide a safe and nurturing environment that can set the course for the child to feel loved and supported throughout his or her lifetime.

The Australian parenting website Raising Children Network says repeated human contact like singing, cuddling, talking, touching, and gazing into each other’s eyes enables a newborn’s brain to release hormones that help his or her brain to grow. This, in turn, helps to develop memory, thought and language.

New parents may wonder what they can do to foster strong bonds with their babies. The following are some strategies to build those bonds.
What is attachment parenting?

Parents may subscribe to various parenting models as they look to bond with their children. One such approach is attachment parenting. Proponents of this type of parenting include the well-known pediatrician William Sears, M.D., an author who coined the term “attachment parenting.” Attachment parenting promotes methods that aim to build attachments between parent and infant by responsiveness and also through continuous bodily closeness and touch.

Components of attachment parenting include bonding with the baby before and directly after birth, breastfeeding, bedding close to the child, and wearing the baby as much as possible.

Attachment parenting may have evolved from anthropological studies of indigenous childrearing practices.

Proponents of attachment parenting also advocate against childcare for more than 20 hours a week for babies younger than 30 months old, says WebMD. At this early developmental stage, the nearly constant presence of a parent is recommended.

One potentially controversial aspect of attachment parenting is co-sleeping. The American Academy of Pediatrics advises against sleeping with a young child in the same bed, as it may increase the risk for SIDS. However, workarounds, including having a baby in a separate cradle or co-sleeper very close to a parent’s bed so children can be touched and soothed through the night, are options.

Expecting parents who want to learn more about the philosophy behind attachment parenting and its techniques can visit www.attachmentparenting.org.

6 ways to prevent falls around the house

Despite all of the potential hazards around a house — from electrical issues to fire hazards to carbon monoxide — the National Home Security Alliance says that falls are the leading cause of death due to home accidents. Falls are responsible for one-third of all home-related fatalities. Although seniors are the group most affected by falls, these types of accidents can affect anyone.

A broken bone may be a minor inconvenience for young people, but fractures are much more serious for the elderly. As a result, seniors must take measures to protect themselves against falls. These steps can minimize risk at home.

1. **Remove tripping hazards.** Examine rooms and hallways for potential hazards, such as slippery throw rugs, floorboards that stick up, loose carpeting, or furniture that blocks walking paths. Remedy these hazards as soon as possible. Address loose floorboards and/or place nonslip materials beneath rugs.

2. **Install grab bars or railings.** Install grab bars in certain locations for extra stability or where someone may need leverage getting up from a seated position. They are particularly helpful near toilets and bathtubs and in stairways and hallways.

3. **Stick to sensible shoes.** Sensible shoes fit properly and have sturdy, nonskid soles. Avoid walking around in slippers or even in stocking feet, which are much more slippery.

4. **Store items within reach.** Store items that are used frequently, such as dishes, in easily accessible cabinets and other locations. This prevents having to climb or reach for them.

5. **Install more lighting.** Poor visibility can contribute to falls. Lighting in hallways, stairways, bathrooms, and bedrooms — even if it is a small night light — can be enough to light the way.

6. **Reinforce your home’s exterior.** Falls do not only occur inside. Inspect the perimeter of a property for uneven turf, holes or cracked or uneven patches of walkways. Make sure lighting is working at entryways, and check that exterior handrails are secure. Falls can cause serious injury or death, particularly for aging men and women. Simple fixes around the house can make things more secure and reduce the risk for falls.

Many parents aspire to develop close emotional bonds with their children. Children who understand that their parents are nearby and will respond to their needs effectively begin to develop trust in those around them. This nurturing can extend to being well-rounded and emotionally secure into adulthood.

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Personal safety tips to live by

The fight or flight mechanism is an important tool in safeguarding well-being, but there is much more a person can do than relying strictly on gut reaction. Taking personal safety seriously means having a realistic view of the potential dangers in the world, and employing various strategies that promote safety.

- Move to a public place. If you think you are being followed, either on foot or in the car, go to a public place or a police station.
- Don’t overshare on social media. People have a tendency to throw caution to the wind on social media, revealing personal details they likely wouldn’t share in other settings. Posting you are out of the house or away on vacation is an invitation for trouble.
- Avoid isolated places. Waiting for a bus, taxi, ride share, or even to meet another friend in a place without a lot of people around can put you at risk. It’s better to wait inside of a store or a building with others, if possible.
- Check visitors first. Whether at home or in a hotel while traveling, confirm who is knocking on the door before opening it. If someone states they are from a particular business or service, ask for identification. Call the front desk of a hotel to confirm identities and purposes.
- Watch your drink. Never leave a drink unattended in a public restaurant or bar, as something can be slipped into it. Similarly, don’t accept a drink you didn’t see being poured.

Maintaining personal safety is something that requires forethought and practice.

Prevent injuries with ladder safety

The right ladder makes a job safer, as it prevents the user from having to stand on the top rung or step, which can throw off DIYers’ balance. Ladders come in various sizes and types, from step to straight to combination. Do not exceed the maximum load rating of a ladder. When calculating, include the weight of the person or persons who will use the ladder and any tools and equipment he or she may carry on the ladder during a job.

Choose the right size

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Keep it steady

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration advises against shifting or moving a ladder while a person or equipment is on the ladder. Use the ladder only on a stable and level surface, unless it has been secured to prevent displacement. The proper angle for setting up a ladder can help keep it steady. The base of the ladder should be at one-quarter of the working length of the ladder from the wall or other vertical surface, says OSHA.

Climb carefully

Never use a ladder if you are feeling dizzy, tired or impaired, as such feelings can cause accidents. Be sure to place a ladder where the climb will not be impeded by electrical wires, obstacles or even wind and other weather conditions. The National Safety Council recommends wearing slip-resistant shoes with clean soles for maximum traction. Always grip the rungs and climb the ladder while facing it, all the while maintaining three points of contact with the ladder (two hands and one foot or two feet and one hand). Hang tools from a tool belt while climbing or have them handed up to you after you’ve safely reached your height.

Be smart

Do not overreach while on a ladder. Go slowly when ascending or descending, being deliberate where hands and feet are placed. Avoid distractions while working on ladders to further reduce the risk of balanced-related accidents. Ladders are an important tool around the house. Safety is key when climbing to new heights.
How parents can diminish their stress

Juggling responsibilities to work and family can sometimes make parents feel a little overwhelmed. That feeling of being stretched thin can contribute to stress, which many parents acknowledge is part of their daily lives.

Stress isn’t always caused by life-changing events. In fact, a recent study of 2,000 parents in the United Kingdom found that the daily worries of bed time, getting homework finished, weekly food shopping, and meal times were parents’ biggest stress triggers.

The research, conducted by BPme, a new app that allows customers to pay for their fuel without leaving their car, said the average parent felt stressed six times a day. Data from a 2015 Pew Research Study indicates 15 percent of American parents say their job as a parent is stressful all the time, while an additional 18 percent say parenting is tiring most of the time. Ten percent indicated being a parent is stressful all of the time, while 15 percent said it is most of the time. Ten percent indicated being a parent is stressful all of the time, while 15 percent said it is most of the time. The younger the age of the children at home, the more stress many parents say they face.

It is well documented that stress can have various negative physical and psychological symptoms, which put stress sufferers’ overall health at risk. Parents can curtail stress by instituting some lifestyle changes and employing other management techniques.

Don’t take work stress home. It’s easy to bring home work-related problems, which can then combine with issues at home. Try to talk to a coworker or a spouse before leaving work to diffuse tricky situations so they can be left at work.

Increase quality family time. Take a break from the extracurricular activities, volunteer responsibilities and the other tasks that pull families in different directions. Slow down and schedule fun activities that foster parent-child relationships, such as game nights or family movie nights.

Seek professional help. Parents who are having difficulty coping can enlist the services of trained mental health professionals, advises Psychology Today. These therapists can offer helpful strategies for coping with life’s challenges. 

Stick to a routine. Keeping kids on routine schedules enables parents to know which moments of the day they can get a break to rest and recharge.

Ask for help. Do not be a martyr or attempt to be a superhero. Parents who need help should reach out for assistance, especially if it’s to tame stress. Doing so is in the best interest of the entire family.

Stress is something many parents face, but it can be overcome.

How parents can find the right pediatrician for their children

Expecting parents must make a host of important decisions before their children enter the world. Finding the right pediatrician is one of the decisions that expecting parents, especially those who are expecting their first child, may find challenging.

The American Academy of Pediatrics notes that pediatricians have special training in the health and illnesses of children from birth through adolescence and into the young adult years. In many instances, parents trust the same pediatricians to look after their children’s health for years on end, making the choice of pediatrician a highly important one.

In recognition of that importance, the AAP facilitates the process of finding board-certified pediatricians via the “Find a Pediatrician” tool on the HealthyChildren.org website. Similarly, the Canadian Paediatric Society, via the website CaringForKids.cps.ca, provides links to various organizations that can help parents find pediatricians for their children.

The AAP recommends that expecting parents interview pediatricians to learn more about them. Pediatricians are accustomed to such interviews and will likely be happy to schedule visits with expecting parents (or parents who are looking for new pediatricians to care for their children). During such meetings, the AAP advises parents to ask the following questions.

- Which medical school did the pediatrician attend and where did he or she undergo postgraduate or residency training?
- What are the pediatrician’s current hospital appointments? This is an important question as it can indicate which hospital a child would be admitted to in the event that the youngster had to be hospitalized. Parents may prefer certain hospitals and may want to find a pediatrician who is affiliated with those preferences.
- Where is the pediatrician’s office located? Parents who rely on public transportation should determine if a pediatrician’s office is accessible by bus or train. Many parents also prefer pediatricians who are local, as that can make doctor’s visits more convenient, especially in the case of sick visits.
- Is this a group practice? If so, how often will my child see our preferred pediatrician? And who covers for the pediatrician if he or she is unable to see people?
- What are the short notice visitation policies? These policies will indicate how accessible a pediatrician is when children develop spur-of-the-moment issues like colds, sore throats, etc. Many parents prefer practices that have daily walk-in hours.
- Which insurance does the practice accept?

When interviewing pediatricians, parents should not hesitate to ask any questions they have. A good pediatrician will welcome all questions and patiently answer each one.
Addressing the childhood obesity epidemic

Obesity is a health epidemic that does not discriminate based on age, gender or ethnicity. While obesity poses a serious health risk for everyone, children who are obese may be setting themselves up for a lifetime of medical problems.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says childhood obesity is a serious problem in the United States. According to the CDC National Center for Health Statistics, 18.5 percent of children and adolescents are considered obese, which equates to around 13.7 million youth. In Canada, obesity rates among youth have nearly tripled in the last 30 years, as noted by the Government of Canada. Children who are overweight or obese are at a higher risk of developing a range of health problems, including type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, sleep apnea, and bone and joint problems.

Females may miss or experience abnormal menstrual cycles. Childhood obesity is not just an issue in North America, as it has even reached epidemic levels in developing countries.

Childhood obesity has become the most chronic disease of childhood, states the Obesity Action Coalition. Although the causes of obesity are widespread, certain risk factors are major contributors. Some causes can include:

- heredity;
- lack of physical activity;
- dietary patterns, such as poor portion control;
- socioeconomic status; and
- eating more meals out than at home.

The CDC defines obesity as a body mass index, or BMI, at or above the 95th percentile of the CDC’s sex-specific BMI-for-age growth charts. Treating obesity begins with changing behaviors. The following lifestyle changes may be effective.

Place a greater emphasis on daily physical activity. Eschewing devices for physical activity can help children get off the couch and lose weight.

Change dietary habits. Entire families may need to change some of their dietary habits, such as poor food choices and lack of portion control, to help obese youngsters lose weight. Focus on consuming fewer calories each day while increasing nutrient intake if previous diets were low on fruits and vegetables.

Help kids change their behaviors. Children also may need to modify behaviors if they routinely turn to food for stress relief or to quell boredom. Parents can help set positive examples about healthy eating and exercise by incorporating healthy habits into their daily routines and encouraging kids to join in.

Obesity is prevalent among children, but it can be overcome with diligence on the part of parents and youngsters.
How parents can help address bullying

Bullying is a global issue that affects children every day. A 2018 study from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics found that nearly one-third of teens worldwide had recently experienced bullying. Even more troubling is that the same study found that, in countries where children reported the highest incidences of bullying, 65 percent of girls and 62 percent of boys reported bullying.

Preventing bullying is a community-wide responsibility. Parents can do their part by taking the following measures to address bullying.

Address aggressive behavior. According to StopBullying.gov, a website managed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, aggressive behavior in young children is very common. Failure to address such behavior can lead to bullying, and children whose aggressive behavior goes unchecked may experience other problems with their peers. Whether their children have exhibited aggressive behaviors or not, parents can encourage cooperative behaviors like helping, sharing and problem-solving.

Engage with your children. Various studies have shown that children are more likely to bully other kids if their parents spend little time with them or do not regularly supervise their activities. But studies also have found that students are less likely to bully other children if their parents warmly engage with them.

Learn about bullying. Parents who learn about bullying are in better position to prevent it. Various myths prevail about bullying, and it’s important that parents recognize these myths. No child is immune from bullying, as StopBullying.gov indicates that children from all racial and ethnic backgrounds are vulnerable to bullying, which also affects kids of all ages. In addition, any child can engage in bullying. Parents who recognize these facts are in better position to identify signs their child is being bullied or even bullying other students.

Teach by example. Children reflect the attitudes and behaviors of their parents. If parents exhibit disrespectful behaviors toward one another or other people, children are more likely to follow suit. In addition, a 2001 study published in the Journal of Clinical Child Psychology found that abused children are more likely to bully others and be bullied by others than children who are not abused. Maintaining a home environment in which every individual, including children, is respected can reduce the likelihood that kids will bully or be bullied by others.

These are just a handful of strategies parents can employ to address bullying with their children. More information is available at www.StopBullying.gov.
How to spark more family communication

Communication is at the core of any successful relationship. Families who are able to communicate effectively can express their concerns, needs and desires to one another in an open and honest manner. Effective communication can change a home environment, foster more intimate and trusted relationships, and serve as a foundation for children to grow.

The benefits of effective home communication are numerous. According to Hearing and Speech-Language Services, regular and intentional communication with a child is one of the most effective tools parents and caregivers can use to foster healthy development, paving the way for the child to be an effective communicator as he or she grows and interacts with others. In addition, regular communication can foster a strong sense of self-esteem, improve problem-solving abilities, decrease problem behaviors, and prepare kids for voicing their opinion on important issues.

No topics are off limits when it comes to stimulating family conversation. In fact, the more creative, funny and adventurous the ideas, the more apt children and adults may be to engage in the discussion. These talking points can help get the conversation flowing and require specific answers instead of vague generalities.

• What has been the best part of the week so far?
• Tell me something interesting you learned at school (work) today.
• What is the funniest joke you have ever heard?
• If you could be anyone or anything in the world, what would you be and why?
• If you won a lot of money, what would you spend it on?
• What do you do when you see someone being teased?
• Name a quality of yours that you are most proud of.
• If a genie granted you three wishes, what would they be?
• What is your favorite childhood memory?
• Where in the world would you like to live most?
• Are there things that scare you? If so, what?
• What would your superhero power be?
• If you could fly for a day, where would you go?

These are a handful of interesting conversation starters that can get creative conversation juices flowing at home. Families can customize the questions or turn them into a regular game that everyone can enjoy throughout the week.

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The dog days of summer can be challenging. As the mercury rises to potentially unhealthy heights, spending time outdoors can become less comfortable and even dangerous. Finding ways to beat the summer heat can help people avoid injury and illness and ensure they still get to enjoy their summers. The following are three ways to beat the summer heat, though it’s important that seniors, pregnant women, parents of young children, and anyone with a preexisting health condition speak with their physicians about the precautions they should take before going outside on hot days.

1. Change your exercise routine, if necessary. Summer is a great time to exercise outdoors. However, it’s important that people who are used to working out in midday change their outdoor exercise routines on hot days. Members of the Miami-based Bikila Athletic Club provide a list of tips to new members who may be unaccustomed to the Florida heat and humidity. One of those tips recommends training early in the morning before the sun gets too high. During the dog days of summer, early morning temperatures tend to be more mild than midday temperatures. That can reduce athletes’ risk of injury or illness, though it’s still important to avoid exercising in especially hot temperatures regardless of the time of day.

2. Practice passive cooling at night. Nightflushing is a passive cooling technique that involves opening the windows in a home at night. Doing so can make indoor areas healthier and more comfortable for a home’s inhabitants during the dog days of summer. HVAC systems keep homes cool in summer, but over time hot and stale air can accumulate inside a home. If that air is not removed, a home can feel stuffy and airborne pollutants like carbon dioxide can reach potentially unhealthy levels. By opening their windows at night, homeowners can let that stale, potentially unhealthy air out and let the cool air of summer evenings in.

3. Stay hydrated. It’s easy to become dehydrated at any time of year, but especially so during the dog days of summer. The U.S. National Library of Medicine notes that the human body needs an average of three quarts of water per day on a normal day. However, conditions on mid- to late-summer days make it necessary for many people to consume more water than that, especially if they plan to spend time outdoors. On hot days, make sure you’re taking in more fluids than you’re losing. Take water with you when going outside, and be sure to rehydrate with more water when going back indoors.

Summer heat can be a formidable opponent, but it can be overcome in various ways.

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3 ways parents can become more involved in their kids educations

The dawn of a new school year provides a host of opportunities for students and their families. Parents who pursue that opportunity can have a profound impact on their youngsters' academic success. According to an analysis from the National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools, students perform better when parents are involved in their children's education. Parents who want to take a more active role in their children's educations can consider these three simple means to doing just that.

1. Help children establish academic goals.

The National Education Association notes that the most significant type of parental involvement is what moms and dads do at home. Before a new school year begins, parents can discuss academic goals with their children. Be as specific as possible when establishing goals so kids have something definitive to work toward during the school year.

2. Foster a strong learning environment at home.

Numerous studies have highlighted the effects that strong home learning environments can have on students. A 2014 study published in the Journal of Experimental Psychology found that something as simple as playing games with numbers with children can improve young students' ability to understand and work with numbers. Continuing to foster that same environment as students continue their educations is equally beneficial. Establish quiet hours after school so kids can concentrate on their homework free from distractions. When kids ask for help, offer it promptly. Such a response sends the message to students that school is of the utmost importance.

3. Become more involved at school.

Of course, it’s not just what parents do at home that can have a profound impact on their children’s educations. If possible, take an active role at school as well as at home. Get involved with parent-teacher organizations and/or offer to assist with extracurricular activities. Parents also can attend board of education meetings to learn about the happenings in their children’s school district. Such meetings typically provide parents with an opportunity to comment publicly on any issues they feel are important, providing a great channel for parents to communicate directly with decision-makers. Parents can take various steps to be more active in their children’s educations, which can benefit students in myriad ways.

How to keep your baby Sun-Safe

Spending time outdoors is a summertime tradition for people of all ages. Sunny summer afternoons may be especially cherished in 2020, when people across the globe have been forced to spend more time indoors as they adhere to social distancing guidelines implemented to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

Parents of infants may be extra excited to get outdoors this summer. Chances to get out and about don’t come around very often for parents of infants, and those chances may be even more rare as social distancing guidelines remain in place. But before parents rush out the door to soak up some summer sun, it’s imperative that they take steps to protect their tiny tots from UV rays.

• Avoid exposing infants to the sun. The Skin Cancer Foundation notes that infants’ skin is especially sensitive to the sun, so the organization advises parents to shield children six months and younger from the sun rather than using sunscreen. Instead of applying sunscreen to their infants, parents should keep them out of the sun entirely. Seek shade between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., when the sun’s rays are especially intense. When taking infants out in their strollers, make sure they are shaded at all times and avoid walking on the sunny side of the street.

• Dress babies for the sun. The SCF advises parents to dress their babies in brimmed hats and lightweight clothing that fully covers their arms and legs. Dressing babies for the sun may seem like common sense, but the SCF notes that researchers at the University of Miami found that only 43 percent of parents consistently cover their babies with hats, and even fewer (40 percent) cover babies with long-sleeved shirts and pants when going out in the sun.

• Consider sunglasses. Sunglasses are another way parents can protect their children from the sun’s harmful ultraviolet rays. Sunglasses can be an alternative for parents whose infants keep taking off their hats, as many baby-sized sunglasses are equipped with elastic straps to keep the glasses on. Sunglasses may be vital because the melanin in infants’ eyes is still forming, and that development can be adversely affected if infants’ eyes are exposed to UV rays.

• Introduce sunscreen at six months. The SCF advises parents to begin applying sunscreen to their infants when their children reach six months of age. Choose a broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen with a minimum sun protection factor (SPF) of 15. The SCF notes that sunscreens that contain zinc oxide and titanium dioxide are good choices because these physical filters do not rely on absorption of chemicals and are therefore less likely to cause a skin reaction. The SCF also advises testing the sunscreen on your baby’s wrist before applying it all over the body. This can indicate if the product irritates the child’s skin and needs to be replaced, or if it’s safe to use.

In the rush to get outside, parents should make sure...
How to prevent dehydration during the dog days of Summer

A person’s desire to be outdoors can sometimes be at odds with the outdoors itself. The dead of winter tends to be a time of year when people know to stay indoors, but the dog days of summer can be dangerous as well.

Heat-related diseases like dehydration can put lives at risk. According to Johns Hopkins Medicine, children and people over the age of 60 are particularly susceptible to dehydration. Understanding dehydration and how to prevent it is essential for anyone who plans to spend time outside during the summer.

What is dehydration?
The U.S. National Library of Medicine notes that a dehydrated body does not have enough fluid and electrolytes to work properly. On an average day, the human body needs about three quarts of water. But the USNLM notes that anyone planning to spend time outside in the hot sun needs significantly more water than that to avoid dehydration.

What are the signs of dehydration?
Johns Hopkins Medicine notes that people experience dehydration differently. However, there are some common symptoms that indicate someone is dehydrated. These symptoms include:

- thirst,
- less frequent urination,
- dry skin,
- fatigue,
- light-headedness,
- dizziness,
- confusion, and
- dry mouth and mucous membranes,
- increased heart rate and breathing.

Children who are dehydrated may exhibit additional symptoms, including dry mouth and tongue; no tears and crying; no wet diapers for several hours; sunken abdomen, eyes or cheeks; listlessness; irritability; and skin that does not flatten when pinched and released.

How to prevent dehydration

Drinking plenty of fluids when working or playing in the sun is one way to prevent dehydration. Being sure to take in more fluid than you are losing is another way to prevent dehydration. Anyone, and especially people who sweat a lot, should keep a close eye on fluid loss when spending time outdoors in the summer. Sports drinks that help people maintain their electrolyte balance, such as Gatorade, can help prevent dehydration as well. Pedialyte is often recommended for sick infants or children who have experienced vomiting, as it can help restore electrolyte balance that was adversely affected when kids became sick. The solution can be equally effective at restoring electrolyte balance that was thrown off during heat exposure.

Dehydration poses a significant health risk at any time of year, but people who spend time out in the summer heat may be especially vulnerable. Limiting time spent outdoors on hot days and keeping a close eye on your fluid intake and fluid levels can help prevent dehydration.

How to prepare kids to go back to school

The end of summer can be a bittersweet time for students. While many students look forward to seeing their friends, few want to say goodbye to the relaxing days of summer.

Parents know that getting their children back in the school day swing of things can be a challenge. The following are some ways to make that transition go smoothly.

- Introduce more structure as summer vacation winds down. The chance to unwind in a structure-free setting can benefit students at the onset of summer vacation. Many parents grapple with the notion that their children’s lives are overscheduled, and the Cleveland Clinic notes that limiting organized activities clears up down time for kids to play and relax and spend time with their families. So it’s important that parents afford their children this down time during summer vacation. In the weeks before the school year is slated to begin, start waking kids up a little earlier and reintroducing bedtimes for younger children who may have been staying up later over the last couple of months. This can be an effective way to begin slowly preparing youngsters for the structure of the school year.

- Focus on the positive. Even kids who love school may be apprehensive about returning to the classroom. After all, summer vacation is fun. Parents can confront that apprehension by focusing on the positives of returning to school. Emphasize the chance to see friends every day or participate in a beloved extracurricular activity, like sports, band or a favorite academic club.

- Let kids do some of their own back-to-school shopping. The items that constitute back to school supplies may have changed since parents were in school. But many parents still take their children on back-to-school clothes shopping excursions. Let kids choose their own clothes, as an opportunity to wear clothes they picked themselves might make them excited for the new school year.

Parents can take various steps to make the transition back to school a successful one for their young students.

Scholastic notes that the slide is largely attributed to a lack of reading when school is not in session. By encouraging kids to read during their summer vacations, parents can make sure youngsters’ brains stay sharp and are ready to learn once the school year begins.

- Encourage children to read throughout the summer. A report from the education publishing company Scholastic found that 47 percent of parents are unaware of the “summer slide,” which refers to the loss of academic skills that occurs when school is not in session.
No two students are the same. Some students may love to read and naturally gravitate toward English class, while others may be fascinated by the world around them and find nothing stokes their academic passions quite like the study of physics.

A passion for a given subject can make students more excited about school. But what about students with a passion for art? Many school districts have drastically cut back on fine arts classes. For example, a recent analysis of data from the State Department of Education in Oklahoma found that schools in the Sooner State cut more than 1,100 fine arts classes between 2014 and 2018. In the face of such budget cuts, parents may need to take a more active role in support of their children’s passion for art. The following are some ways parents can encourage that passion.

- Recognize the educational value of art. PBS notes that creative activities are some of the building blocks of child development. While schools may be shifting their focus to common core subjects like mathematics, parents should recognize that art can be incredibly valuable to young minds as well. For example, art can help young children develop language skills, as creating art projects, even while just a toddler, often compels children to talk about their art. In addition, a recent report from Americans for the Arts found that art education strengthens problem-solving and critical-thinking skills. If parents recognize the value of art, students are more likely to follow suit and reap all the rewards that art education provides.

- Allow children the freedom to create. While technique is important for artists, young artists can benefit from some space. Other subjects are necessarily structured, but art sessions can be a great time for kids to simply explore their creativity without much interference from parents or educators. A designated room for arts, including arts and crafts, can illustrate to children that their interest in the arts is important and worthy of exploration.

- Keep supplies well-stocked. Much like parents of young athletes enroll them in sports leagues or purchase the latest equipment, parents of children with a passion for art can indulge that passion by enrolling them in local art classes and keeping them well-stocked with art supplies. Even if the supplies are as simple as crayons and construction paper, their availability can send kids the message that their passion for art is not taken lightly.

The arts can benefit students in myriad ways. If local school districts no longer offer art programs, it’s up to parents to find ways to encourage their children’s love of art.

Technology has transformed nearly all facets of life, including education. While desks and blackboards can still be found in the classroom, technology has become more and more influential in regard to how students learn. Many teachers now employ tablets and other devices to help students better understand their coursework. Devices can make for useful learning tools, but when does screen time cross over from useful learning tool to something that’s potentially harmful to students’ overall health? The American Academy of Pediatrics has produced age-specific guidelines that can help parents determine if their school-aged children are spending too much time staring at screens.

**Children between two and five years of age**

Parents should limit screen time for this age group to one hour per day of high-quality programs. The AAP advises parents to co-view with children in this age group so they can help kids understand what they’re watching and how it applies to the world around them.

**Children ages six and older**

The AAP does not provide specific information regarding how many hours children ages six and older should use screen media. However, the AAP advises parents to make sure such media does not take the place of adequate sleep, physical activity and other behaviors essential to health. In addition to following AAP recommendations about screen time as closely as possible, parents can take steps to ensure their children are not spending too much time using their devices.

- Promote extracurricular activities. Urging children to participate in extracurricular activities that do not employ screen media, such as sports, music lessons and academic clubs, can be a great way to get kids to put down their devices and engage in in-person interactions with their peers.

- Establish no-device hours at home. The AAP recommends that parents designate certain times of the day as media-free times for the whole family, and not just children. Parents can put down their smartphones and tablets and engage with their children without the television on. In addition, make sure devices don’t make it to the dinner table, as nightly, device-free dinners together can help families build strong bonds.

- Establish media-free zones. Designate certain areas of the home, such as the kitchen and dining room, as device-free zones. Keep devices out of bedrooms unless children need them to do their homework.

Devices in the classroom can help young students fulfill their academic potential. Parents can govern their use outside the classroom by adhering to some simple strategies.
activities to keep kids entertained

What parent hasn’t heard their child utter the familiar phrase “I’m bored” at some point? Despite a seemingly vast array of toys, electronics and other items at their disposal, children can be quick to sulk and say there’s nothing to do. Parents can counter “I’m bored” with these eight boredom-busting activities that are certain to help pass the time in entertaining and sometimes educational ways.

1. Craft time: Pick a theme and gather the materials for the project. For example, kids can evoke a trip to the ocean by creating handmade sea creatures. Paint a paper plate and hang brightly colored yarn underneath it to create the “tentacles” of a jellyfish. Kids can use salt dough clay to fashion seashells, sea snails or crustaceans.

2. Painting: Shaving cream is a great sensory material that is relatively easy to clean up. Kids can whip up a batch of shaving cream paint and use it to finger paint on a table or even in the bathtub. Simply mix shaving cream with food coloring in a bowl, or use a muffin tin to separate the colors.

3. Build a birdhouse: Birdhouses or bird feeders can be made from scraps of material found around the house. Scavenge for spare lumber or other supplies in the shed or garage. An adult or older sibling can help cut the wood into pieces. Young children may enjoy painting the house. Wood adhesive or screws can be used to assemble the project.

4. Plan a garden: Kids can help to design a garden the entire family will maintain and even be responsible for a special parcel that’s all their own. Gardens can grow food, flowers and more. Add a touch of whimsy with figurines for a fairy garden or even small superhero figures for a spot for boys to tend.

5. Box makeovers: Tissue boxes or cereal boxes can be made into many different creations with paint or construction paper. Use a few craft supplies like pom-poms or wiggly eyes to turn boxes into “monsters.”

6. Boat races: Build a small sailboat for each member of the family. Fill up a long, shallow container and take turns racing the boats by blowing on the sails.

7. Leaf art: Gather leaves and twigs from around the yard and then combine pieces to make them look like various animals.

8. Spray park: Create an at-home spray park with a garden hose and a pool noodle. Poke several small holes into the pool noodle on all sides. Stick a garden hose into the end of the pool noodle and hot-glue a wine cork into the hole at the other end. Turn on the water and let kids run through.

Cyber safety is important for every grade

People rely on the internet every day. In recent months, reliance on digital technology was pushed even further as social distancing measures had the world going online for school and work and to maintain relationships with friends and family.

A 2018 report from Pew Research Center indicated that nearly 25 percent of young adults in America reported being online almost constantly. Common Sense Media says teens spend an average of nine hours a day online, compared to roughly six hours for those between the ages eight and 12 and 50 minutes for kids younger than eight.

Students must exercise caution when spending time online. Connectivity can be empowering, but it also puts students at risk from others and even their own, sometimes irresponsible behaviors. Staying safe online should remain a priority for students who must spend more time on the internet and using digital education tools. These are some tips for maintaining cyber safety.

- Exercise caution when sharing information like your name, address, phone number, and other personal data online. Check with a trusted parent or teacher before sharing private data.
- Report any online activity that makes you feel uncomfortable, scared or confused, whether it is directed at you or a classmate.
- Think carefully before you post comments online. Data remains online indefinitely, and your words and actions today can greatly affect your future.
- Respect others online by refraining from demeaning or bullying comments.
- Do not try to get around firewalls and blocked websites set up by school administrators. These limitations are there for your protection.
- Stick to school-sanctioned assignments and internet browsing when using school-issued devices. Administrators may have the right to monitor student activity without students’ knowledge and you can easily get yourself in trouble.
- It is easy to hide or fake one’s identity on the internet, so never take someone you meet or speak with online at face value. Never meet up with someone you do not know or only met online.
- Talk to your parents or educators about extortion and ransomware that tries to trick you into providing payment in some shape or form to prevent a perpetrator from releasing private information about you, advises the Readiness and Emergency for Schools Technical Assistance Center.

Various steps can be taken to promote cyber safety among students, parents and administrators.

Head off kids’ boredom by having plenty of ideas at the ready.
Parents can exercise caution with youth-based social apps

Internet access is no longer limited to desktop or laptop computers. World Advertising Research Center, using data from mobile trade body GSMA, says almost three-quarters of internet users, or roughly 3.7 billion people, will access the internet exclusively via smartphones by 2025.

Young people are one of the largest demographics utilizing smartphones today. A Common Sense Media survey says just over half of children in the United States now own a smartphone by the age of 11. In addition, 84 percent of teenagers have their own phones. Most youth grew up with the internet, and they have embraced a variety of apps, particularly social media apps, that connect them to the world.

Social media certainly can be an asset, but it has inherent risks, such as making kids easy targets for identity theft or sexual predators. Other apps expose users to explicit, unfiltered content. Parents must educate themselves about the popular apps their tweens and teens may be using and weigh their pros and cons. Here’s a list of apps every parent should know in 2020.

**TikTok:** This app (formerly Musical.ly) is designed for creating and sharing short videos, notably music videos. Users are urged to express their creativity, and special effects can be added. While minimum age for use is 13, there is no real way to validate users’ ages so anyone can download the app. Parents say the videos are plagued by inappropriate language and content, including pornographic material. Also, some have warned that when sexual predators are identified, the app is slow to flag and remove these users.

**Kik:** This is a cross-platform messaging app that enables users to chat anonymously without the need for phone service. Users also can share most digital media and video chat with one another. Forbes reports that Kik has had issues with child exploitation and sexual harassment.

**Tellonym:** The web resource FamilyEducation says this messenger app allows kids to ask and answer questions anonymously, purporting to be the “most honest place on the internet.” Cyber bullying and violent threats are common, according to watchdog groups.

**MeetMe:** This social app advertises its ability to have users meet new people through messages, video calls and live streams. With no option to set privacy limitations, users can freely view other profiles within the vicinity. Also, reaching out to others and viewing profiles generates in-app reward incentives.

**Bigo Live:** Common Sense Media says this app is like YouTube and Twitch in that Bigo Live lets users stream live video of themselves that others can see and comment on in real time. People also can send and receive “beans,” which are virtual gifts that cost real money. The warning is that Bigo has a lot of mature content and predatory commentary.

**Yolo:** Yolo is an easy add-on for Snapchat, which also is a popular app among children. Yolo lets users ask anonymous questions and receive feedback. The anonymity of commentary can be a recipe for bullying, trolling and hurt feelings. Parents can safeguard their children by monitoring internet access and understanding popular apps used by today’s youth.
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