



# The Parent and Family Engagement Connection

## Home & School:

Together We Can Make a Difference



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Parent and Family Engagement Newsletter

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Skip Forsyth

*Ho! Ho! Ho!* Season's Greetings! Happy Holidays! That time of year of "peace on earth and good will toward every man, woman, and child" is rapidly approaching. In some parts of town the lights are brighter, the smiles are broader, and the festivities are louder. Our annual celebrations are important markers to look back with thanks and appreciation and to look forward with hope and expectation.

The victories in 2017 might include: passing the STAAR tests, high school or college graduation, overcoming a serious illness or injury, becoming a legalized citizen, the birth of your first child or grandchild, seeing your son or daughter enlist in the armed forces or serve as a first responder, watching your child participate in team sports for their first time, another anniversary with the one you love, a family vacation, a daughter or son's wedding, a season of good health, tasty summer barbecues with family and friends, etc. When you think about it, 2017 has been an extremely good year.

Unfortunately, the holidays are not "the most wonderful time of the year" for a sizeable number of families in the great state of Texas. Some families continue to struggle with more month than paycheck. Other families still bear the painful memory of a loved one, even a child, who died in recent months and are absent from family gatherings. Many families are trying to recover from the hardships and havoc of hurricane Harvey.

In a unique way this is the time of year to "pay it forward." Although random acts of kindness should be put into practice throughout the year, the needs become more evident and more acute during the holidays. Support one or two "angel tree" kids, serve in a "soup kitchen" to witness firsthand and better empathize with those of limited means, take homemade baked items to shut-ins you may know, provide some blankets to a homeless shelter, rake the leaves and clean the yard for an elderly couple, give a holiday meal to a family that cannot afford one, wash cars for free, stay with the child or children of a young couple so they can have a date night, etc. If you choose to consistently pay it forward through the new year, 2018 will become an exceptional year.

Gratitude and service changes the conversation from me to we. In the process of helping others, we discover hidden strengths in those individuals and in ourselves. This in turn expands our vision to see opportunities and possibilities that were previously blindspots. Other-centeredness produces humility and joy. As Steve Maraboli said, "A kind gesture can reach a wound that only compassion can heal."

Holiday blessings to you all.



## The Smile

*I had an extra smile  
When I left the house today  
I thought I'd give it to someone  
I passed along the way.  
I tried to give the smile away*

*But incredibly ...*

*Each time I gave it to someone  
They'd give it back to me  
So now I have a bunch of smiles*

*What am I to do?*

*I think I'll keep a couple  
And give the rest to you!*

*Author Unknown*

# Stress, depression and the holidays: Tips for coping

*Stress and depression can ruin your holidays and hurt your health. Being realistic, planning ahead and seeking support can help ward off stress and depression.*

*The holiday season often brings unwelcome guests — stress and depression. And it's no wonder. The holidays present a dizzying array of demands — parties, shopping, baking, cleaning and entertaining, to name just a few.*

*But with some practical tips, you can minimize the stress that accompanies the holidays. You may even end up enjoying the holidays more than you thought you would.*

## TIPS TO PREVENT HOLIDAY STRESS AND DEPRESSION

When stress is at its peak, it's hard to stop and regroup. Try to prevent stress and depression in the first place, especially if the holidays have taken an emotional toll on you in the past.

1. Acknowledge your feelings. If someone close to you has recently died or you can't be with loved ones, realize that it's normal to feel sadness and grief. It's OK to take time to cry or express your feelings. You can't force yourself to be happy just because it's the holiday season.
2. Reach out. If you feel lonely or isolated, seek out community, religious or other social events. They can offer support and companionship. Volunteering your time to help others also is a good way to lift your spirits and broaden your friendships.
3. Be realistic. The holidays don't have to be perfect or just like last year. As families change and grow, traditions and rituals often change as well. Choose a few to hold on to, and be open to creating new ones. For example, if your adult children can't come to your house, find new ways to celebrate together, such as sharing pictures, emails or videos.
4. Set aside differences. Try to accept family members and friends as they are, even if they don't live up to all of your expectations. Set aside grievances until a more appropriate time for discussion. And be understanding if others get upset or distressed when something goes awry. Chances are they're feeling the effects of holiday stress and depression, too.
5. Stick to a budget. Before you go gift and food shopping, decide how much money you can afford to spend. Then stick to your budget. Don't try to buy happiness with an avalanche of gifts.  
Try these alternatives:
  - o Donate to a charity in someone's name.
  - o Give homemade gifts.
  - o Start a family gift exchange.
6. Plan ahead. Set aside specific days for shopping, baking, visiting friends and other activities. Plan your menus and then make your shopping list. That'll help prevent last-minute scrambling to buy forgotten ingredients. And make sure to line up help for party prep and cleanup.
7. Learn to say no. Saying yes when you should say no can leave you feeling resentful and overwhelmed. Friends and colleagues will understand if you can't participate in every project or activity. If it's not possible to say no when your boss asks you to work overtime, try to remove something else from your agenda to make up for the lost time.
8. Don't abandon healthy habits. Don't let the holidays become a free-for-all. Overindulgence only adds to your stress and guilt.
  - o Have a healthy snack before holiday parties so that you don't go overboard on sweets, cheese or drinks.
  - o Get plenty of sleep.
  - o Incorporate regular physical activity into each day.
9. Take a breather. Make some time for yourself. Spending just 15 minutes alone, without distractions, may refresh you enough to handle everything you need to do. Find something that reduces stress by clearing your mind, slowing your breathing and restoring inner calm.  
Some options may include:
  - o Taking a walk at night and stargazing.
  - o Listening to soothing music.
  - o Getting a massage.
  - o Reading a book.
10. Seek professional help if you need it. Despite your best efforts, you may find yourself feeling persistently sad or anxious, plagued by physical complaints, unable to sleep, irritable and hopeless, and unable to face routine chores. If these feelings last for a while, talk to your doctor or a mental health professional.

[www.mayoclinic.org](http://www.mayoclinic.org)



# Did You Know???

## It's getting tougher to become a Longhorn...

Heads up for Texas high school juniors—it just became more difficult for you to gain automatic admission to the University of Texas at Austin in the fall of 2019.

UT-Austin has announced that students who hope to enroll as undergraduates in the fall of 2019 will need to be in the top six percent of their Texas high school's graduating class to gain automatic admission. The current automatic cutoff is seven percent.

School officials say that the change is the result of the growing number of applicants that UT-Austin receives each year.

State law requires UT-Austin to provide automatic admission to students near the top of their high school class, but it also allows them to cap their automatic enrollment at three-fourths of each freshman class. The remaining quarter is admitted through a holistic process, which takes into account grades, standardized test scores, race and extracurricular activities.



## The graduation-day tradition of recognizing a valedictorian is becoming a thing of the past at more and more of the nation's high schools.

The ranking of students from No. 1 on down based on grade-point averages has been fading steadily for about the past decade. In its place are honors that recognize everyone who scores at a certain threshold — using honors courses, for example.

About half of public high schools in the United States no longer report class rank, according to the National Association of Secondary School Principals. Administrators worry about the college prospects of students who are separated by large differences in class rank despite small differences in their grade point averages and view rankings as obsolete in an era of high expectations for every student.

Still, class rankings play an important part in the college admissions process. There are scholarships for the top-ranked students, and the number of top students at colleges is factored into college rankings.

More and more schools are moving toward a more holistic process. They look deeper into the transcript.

## Buzzer beaters...

In a break with its past position on the issue, the University Interscholastic League now says they will allow 6A and 5A high school basketball coaches to experiment with a "shot clock," if they so want.

UIL has traditionally rejected all shot-clock proposals.

Cost concerns have been a factor, but the biggest stumbling block is the National Federation of State High School Associations. UIL follows the federation rules for basketball, and it doesn't allow for shot clock competition.

"If 6A and 5A schools want to experiment with it, I think we should let them," said UIL Executive Director Charles Breithaupt, who once coached high school basketball.

While nothing is official for the upcoming season, UIL says that it could potentially give the go-ahead for 6A or 5A games or tournaments to use a shot clock this season. The clock probably would be 30 seconds. UIL would then consult with coaches about how it affected play.

But formal implementation of a shot clock into UIL-sanctioned basketball games won't happen until the national high school sports federation gives its blessing.



Taken in part from an article by Andy Welch, A Service of the Texas School Public Relations Association  
<http://www.tspra.org/news-and-reports/tspra-news/edulege/1407-edulege-tracker-10-19-17>

# Community Service: A Family's Guide to Getting Involved



It's easy to feel disconnected, as many parents juggle work, school, kids, and activity after activity. One of the most satisfying, fun, and productive ways to unite is volunteering for community service projects. Volunteerism also sets a good example for your kids and helps the community.

## **Reasons to Get Involved**

Why should your family lend a helping hand? It feels good. The satisfaction and pride that comes from helping others are important reasons to volunteer. When you commit your time and effort to an organization or a cause you feel strongly about, the feeling of fulfillment can be endless.

- It strengthens your community. Organizations and agencies that use volunteers are providing important services at low or no cost to those who need them.
- It can strengthen your family. Volunteering is a great way for families to have fun and feel closer. But it can be hard to find the time to volunteer. You could select just one or two projects a year and make them a family tradition.

## **What Kids Can Learn from Volunteering**

If volunteering begins at an early age, it can become part of kids' lives — something they might just expect and want to do. It can teach them:

- A sense of responsibility. Kids and teens learn what it means to make and keep a commitment. They learn we're all responsible for the well-being of our communities.
- That one person can make a difference. A wonderful, empowering message for kids is that they're important enough to have an impact on someone.
- The benefit of sacrifice. By giving up a toy to a less fortunate child, a child learns that sometimes it's good to sacrifice and that there are important things besides ourselves and our immediate needs.
- Tolerance. Working in community service can bring kids and teens in touch with people of different backgrounds, abilities, ethnicities, ages, education and income levels. They'll learn that even the most diverse individuals can be united by common values.
- Job skills. Community service can help young people decide on their future careers.
- How to fill idle time wisely. If kids aren't involved in traditional after-school activities, community service can be a wonderful alternative.

## **Getting Your Family Involved**

The Internet offers lots of sites with information about volunteer opportunities. You can also call a favorite charity, hospital, or church directly to see if they have any needs.

When looking for a volunteer position, remember that it may be difficult to find the perfect volunteer slot. Be flexible. It may take a while to find a perfect fit, but once you do, it will be worth it.

## **Good Volunteer Jobs for Families**

Families can do many volunteer jobs. Even the smallest child (with adult supervision) can pick up garbage at the park, playground, or beach. You don't even have to be part of a big effort to do this.

Or become involved in repair and renovation efforts for low-income residents. Younger kids might not be able to do the big jobs, but helping out by fetching a paintbrush or holding the nails involves them just the same.

Work at a community food bank or soup kitchen as a family. Find an organization that serves the elderly. Take food to people who are homebound and visit with them. Your kids can brighten a lonely senior's day instantly. Offer your family's help at the local animal shelter. Help plant flowers or trees. The possibilities are endless.

Whatever you choose to do, volunteering and community service can benefit both the community and your family. Get involved today!

<http://kidshealth.org/en/parents/volunteer.html>



# Exercise and Nutrition

## HAVE YOUNG ATHLETES IN YOUR FAMILY?



Feeding them requires knowledge and planning. Not only do they need optimal nutrition for fueling and recovery from training, but they must also meet the energy demands of growth and maturation. Help your kids to refuel with the nutrients carbohydrates provide, focusing on family mealtimes before and after practice or competition.

**Pre-Game Breakfast** - Gather the family together for a pre-game breakfast. About three hours beforehand, have your child consume sliced and lightly grilled potatoes, paired with scrambled eggs and nutrient-dense carbohydrates such as berries and orange juice or fat-free milk for the optimal pre-game meal.

**During the Game/Practice** - Make sure that your child keeps hydrated before, during and after practices and competitions. Dehydration results when your child athlete fails to adequately replace fluid lost through sweating. Dehydration that exceeds two

percent body weight loss harms exercise performance, so make sure your child is well hydrated throughout the game with small amounts of water. Also, make sure to replace fluid losses after exercise by having your child drink lots of water. Look to foods such as bananas, potatoes and fat-free or low-fat yogurt or milk. They contain potassium and carbohydrates which are important to replenish after exercise.

Monique Ryan, MS, RD, CSSD, LDN, is a Chicago-based author and owner of Personal Nutrition Designs, LLC, which provides nutrition programs for athletes. <http://www.eatright.org/resource/fitness/exercise/exercise-nutrition/feeding-your-child-athlete>

## SHOULD MY CHILD LIFT WEIGHTS?

**In addition to playing outside and participating in sports, your kids may want to lift weights, join CrossFit classes or do some other form of strength training. But is this a good idea for children, or will it harm their growth and cause injury?**

"Strength training programs are almost essential in our society because we have so little opportunity" to build strength in daily activities, says Wayne Westcott, PhD, exercise scientist at Quincy College. Strength training, also called resistance training, might involve the use of free weights, weight machines, elastic tubes or the child's own weight. "There's never been a study to show that strength training stunts growth," says Westcott. "In fact, the opposite is true." Westcott, who studies the health effects of strength training in children, says that, for example, a 9-year-old girl using dumbbells and elastic bands for 10 months could expect her bone density to increase by (an average of) six percent compared to just (an average of) 1.5 percent if she did not strength train.



By Jill Weisenberger, MS, RDN, CDE, FAND. <http://www.eatright.org/resource/fitness/exercise/exercise-nutrition/should-my-child-lift-weights>

## Key Lime Dip with Fresh Fruit Kebabs

### Dip

- 1 1/2 cups (12 oz.) block-style light cream cheese
- 3 tablespoons powdered sugar
- 1 teaspoon grated lime rind
- 1 (6-ounce) carton key lime pie light yogurt

### Fruit

- 2 cups strawberries
- 1 cup seedless red grapes
- 1 cup pineapple chunks (about 12 chunks)
- 2 kiwifruit, peeled and cut into wedges
- 12 (6-inch) wooden skewers

### How to Make It

#### Step 1

Combine first 4 ingredients in a medium bowl; beat with a mixer at medium speed until smooth. Cover and refrigerate while preparing fruit kebabs.

#### Step 2

Thread fruit alternately onto each wooden skewer.

**Serve with dip.**



# The Busy Parent's Checklist

**S**o what's a parent to do with all this information? To help, we've boiled down some key advice into a convenient checklist that helps you keep in mind simple, easy steps you can take each day, week and month to stay connected to your teen.

## Try To Do Daily:

- Know your teen's main activities and plans for the day.
- Know where your teens are when you are at work or not otherwise with them, and who they are likely to be with.
- If appropriate for that day, remind your teen about relevant rules.
- At the end of the day, ask about your teen's activities.
- Praise and thank your teen for good behavior.
- Check that homework and other responsibilities have been completed.
- Try to have family meals together or engage in a family activity on a regular basis.



## Try To Do Weekly:

- Take some time to check in with each child. Set 20 minutes aside to find out how friendships are going, what's happening at school and what other events are important in your teen's life.
- Ask your teen mid-week if there are any special plans for the weekend that require your input. Do this early to avoid last-minute conflict.
- Every once in a while, check that your teens are where they say they are going to be.
- Encourage your teen to have a friend over to engage in fun activities together.
- Remind your teen about weekday/weekend rules when appropriate.

## Try To Do Monthly:

- Make sure you've had at least a couple of individual activities or outings with your teen.
- Check the temperature of your relationship. How are things going?
- Check in with your teen to see what has taken up his or her time and interest this month, and discuss it. Ask if there's anything you can do to help.
- Make sure you've followed through on any recent promises to your teen.
- Plan one special family event or activity. Try to do things that your teens enjoy.
- Get a report from teachers on your teen's school progress. Check in with coaches or a guidance counselor about extracurricular activities.
- Take a monitoring inventory. Who has your teen been spending time with? What has he been doing? Follow up on any red flags or concerns.
- What have they been spending their money on?
- Stay up-to-date on news and trends among teens in the area. Talk with other parents and discuss concerns with your kids. Check with local youth organizations to find out about problems in your community.
- Check in with your teens about rules. If they've been doing well, then be flexible and reward them in meaningful ways. When your teens are ready, allow them more freedoms. Discuss any new rules or limits for new activities.

# Parent Participation: How to Get Involved in Your Child's School Activities

*Parent involvement in a child's education is crucial. When parents get involved in their children's education, children are more likely to do better in school, be better behaved, have more positive attitudes toward school, and grow up to be more successful in life.*

## WHAT'S THE BEST WAY FOR ME TO STAY INVOLVED IN MY CHILD'S SCHOOL ACTIVITIES?

### AT THE BEGINNING OF THE SCHOOL YEAR, ATTEND BACK-TO-SCHOOL NIGHT OR OTHER ORIENTATION EVENTS

- Get to know the teachers and other school personnel. Listen to their plans, know what they hope to accomplish with their students, and understand why they chose these goals.

### ATTEND SCHOOL EVENTS

- Go to sports events and concerts, student exhibitions, parent-teacher meetings, parents' night, and awards events, such as a "perfect attendance" breakfast.

### LEARN WHAT THE SCHOOL OFFERS

- Read the information the school sends home, and ask to receive information in your native language, if necessary. Talk to other parents to find out what programs the school offers.

### ATTEND PARENT ORGANIZATION MEETINGS

- At most schools, a group of parents meets regularly to talk about the school. The meetings give you a good chance to talk with other parents and to work together to improve the school, as well as the chance to voice your hopes with other parents.

### VOLUNTEER IN YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL

- If your schedule permits, look for ways to help out at your child's school. Schools often send home lists of ways in which parents can get involved. Schools often need volunteers who can:
  - Chaperone field trips or dances
  - Serve on the school committees or advisory councils as a parent representative
  - Help in your child's class, in the school library, in the cafeteria, or in the school office
  - Make food for a school event
  - Tutor students in areas such as reading, math, English, Spanish, computer skills, etc.
  - Work in a parent resource center or help start one

### IF WORK OR OTHER COMMITMENTS MAKE IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR YOU TO VOLUNTEER IN THE SCHOOL, LOOK FOR WAYS TO HELP AT HOME

- For example, you can make phone calls to other parents to tell them about school-related activities or maybe help translate a school newsletter from English into another language.

### WHAT IF I DON'T HAVE TIME TO VOLUNTEER AS MUCH AS I WOULD LIKE?

- Even if you can't volunteer to do work at the school building, you can help your child learn when you're at home. The key question is, "What can I do at home, easily and in a few minutes a day, to reinforce and extend what the school is doing?"



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#### References

Adapted from the following U.S. Department of Education publications:  
Helping Your Child Succeed in School. First published in June 1993. Revised 2002 and 2005.  
Questions Parents Ask About Schools. First published January 2003. Revised 2005.

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## Advice for Moms of Daughters

Expect lots of drama and enjoy it as much as possible.



All the emotions that your daughter is throwing at you, you once threw at your mom or dad. It may seem over the top, dramatic or ridiculous, but it's just a moment in time that you once faced, too.

Enjoy every second of the beauty of raising your girls. Each is an individual and each will have her own mind, her own path, and her own beauty to share with you and the world. Give them the confidence to spread their wings and fly on their own, but always the right path to find their way home.

*"The natural state of motherhood is unselfishness. When you become a mother, you are no longer the center of the universe. You relinquish that position to your children."*

~ Jessica Lange.

## Be Your Own Kind of Dad

**Being a dad** means something different to everyone, even your kids. Sure, you should find out what they love about you and what they want from you, but what do you **love about being a dad?** What's your favorite part? Is it taking the kids out for milkshakes? Is it teaching them to build stuff? Is it taking pictures of cool activities with the kids and then blogging about it?

And what kind of dad are you? The protector with a huge soft side for kid kisses? The hipster dad producing dumbstep beats with your kid? The gadget geek taking your kid geocaching on the weekend? All the research shows that your own identity as a father, what being a dad means to you, is the major predictor of how involved you are with your kids. So own it, your own way. And whatever it is that makes you love being a dad, do



that all the time with your kids. It's extremely likely they will inherit their own father identity from you: boys will become it; girls will look for it. Long story short, if you "aren't really into" being a dad, you're doing it wrong.

**Change it up! Be your own kind of dad.**

<http://www.parenting.com/parenting-advice/dad/10-tips-how-to-be-great-dad-daily>

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