

Advisor

FALL 2023

**Thank-you
Foster
Parents!**

**Tips from a
single parent
foster mom**

**Keeping kids
safe in the
carpool**

**Training Course
Fall Schedule**

**Easy SCHOOL
LUNCH IDEAS**

**Helping children
maintain school-life
balance**

*Encourage kindness in
your foster child*

**Painted Rocks
Tic-Tac-Toe**

**Evermore Centre
Resources**



**SASKATCHEWAN
FOSTER FAMILIES**

www.saskfosterfamilies.ca

Advisor

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OUR MISSION

The Saskatchewan Foster Families Association exists to support and encourage Foster families through education and advocacy, helping create healthy homes, positive environments, and brighter futures for children and youth across the province.

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Tim Adams, Director, Moose Jaw
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Jim Madill, Director, Regina
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Message from the Chairman of the Board

I find it hard to believe that summer is over! I hope you were able to get some down time. As a family we were able to get away to Calgary to celebrate our first grandson's first birthday! In addition we were privileged to be able to attend numerous powwows in Treaty Four area with Rayne, and took in a stop at the Foster Family Culture Camp at Buffalo Pound where he first danced powwow about 6 years ago.

My wife Lori-Lee and I have been involved in a number of Trauma sessions with some of our existing families. As well, we have been honored and privileged to provide this training to our First Nation Agency partners at the First Nation Family caregivers conferences.



“At our Provincial AGM we welcomed three new board members.”

Saskatchewan is very blessed by so many caring and giving families that are engaged in supporting families in need.

At our Provincial AGM we welcomed three new board members, Jim Madill, Nate Polsfut and Janet Michaylow. They join John Quong, Tim Adams and Kallie Wood, and me. I am looking forward to working with these individuals on behalf of the SFFA and you, our members.

Thanks for your continued work on behalf of the children of this province. My thanks also for the continued support from Deb and the team at the SFFA office.

Kevin Harris

Kevin Harris
Board Chair



Let's stay connected...

We regularly send out e-mails to our foster parents. To be added to our contact list and receive the latest news, please send your e-mail address to **Taylor@sffa.sk.ca**



Thank You *Foster Parents*

who do so much for kids each and every day.

And thank you to the rest of our supporting network of caregiver advocates and social work professionals, who all collaborate together to create healthy homes and brighter futures for children in care.



October

is FOSTER FAMILIES MONTH

The SFFA is celebrating Foster Families Month in a number of ways including our recognition dinners across the province.

I hope I have the chance to visit with you at one of these events.

We will also be celebrating with gift cards again this year. Keep an eye on your mailbox for more details.

Deb Davies,
Executive Director,
Saskatchewan Foster Families Association



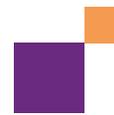
Foster Families **Appreciation Banquets**

The Ministry of Social Services and the Saskatchewan Foster Families Association invite you to attend this year's Foster Families Appreciation Banquet.

Please RSVP to rsvp@sffa.sk.ca or (306) 975-1591 with the location, number attending and any dietary restrictions. This is an adults-only event.

- October 2nd Saskatoon
- October 3rd North Battleford
- October 4th Meadow Lake
- October 11th Melfort/Nipawin
- October 12th Prince Albert
- October 17th Swift Current
- October 18th Regina/Fort Qu'Appelle/
Moose Jaw
- October 23rd Estevan
- October 24th Yorkton/Melville

SFFA Training Course Fall Schedule



Please watch your emails for registration for the below courses being offered to Foster Parents this fall. For more information, please contact Tessa at 306-975-1528.

Domestic Abuse

Presentation by Joan McDonald

Joan will be joining us to share:

- definitions and statistics,
- signs and risk factors of abusive relationships,
- educational and learning resources for victims, survivors and those supporting victim and survivors of abusive relationships.

Joan will include some of her own family's experience as her daughter, Abbie Speir, was a domestic homicide victim in April 2017. Joan's purpose in speaking is to raise awareness of the prevalence of and dangers associated with domestic abuse in our society, and particularly Saskatchewan.

Grief & Loss

Presented by Deb Mooney, SEP (Registered Social Worker and Somatic Experiencing Practitioner) with Simplicity Counselling Services (SCS).

Deb will cover topics related to Grief & Loss surrounding children entering and exiting care and effects on caregivers and family members. Deb has a unique lens on this topic as she worked many years with the Ministry of Social Services in several roles before branching into her own practice. Deb is also a contracted counsellor with Victim Services and Non-Insured Health Benefits for First Nations and Inuit peoples, completed inter-provincial assessments for organizations and partnered with Valiant Recovery Treatment and Recovery Center for aftercare counselling so has a variety of experiences and resources to assist individuals in their healing journey's.

Foster Parent College:

Courses are available to all members. Please watch your email each month for the featured course or contact the SFFA Training Coordinator Tessa Stock at 306-975-1528 or Tessa@sffa.sk.ca for more information.

SEPTEMBER

"Taking Things- Stealing"

This class explores common reasons for taking things including:

- experimentation
- intellectual disability
- trauma history
- social or psychiatric problems

OCTOBER

"Eating & Food Issues"

This class explores common eating and food issues, including:

- hoarding food and excessive eating
- eating food from unhealthy sources
- overweight and obesity
- picky eating

NOVEMBER

"Anger Pie"

This course examines the ABCs of behavior as a tool parents can use to understand their child's anger:

- antecedents
- bias/behavior
- positive and negative consequences
- healthy anger





The Good, the Bad, and the Sticky

Tips From a Single Foster Mom

Jt's a question she hears a lot. *Why did you decide to become a foster parent?* The seed was planted when she was just 15 years old. On a mission trip to Mexico, Lauren came face-to-face with orphaned and vulnerable children for the first time and was particularly heartbroken by one girl's story. She knew she'd spend her life loving kids like these. "The Lord so clearly spoke to me that the hurt I was feeling for that girl was just a sliver of the hurt he feels for the 163 million orphaned and vulnerable children," explains Lauren. Now a foster mom to two

girls, ages 4 and 7, she is living the dream that was planted in her heart so many years ago. What she didn't expect then was that she'd be living it as a single mom.

"I definitely hoped that I would be married before I started fostering," she says. But after another trip reinforced her dream of fostering and a serious relationship ended in a break-up rather than a proposal, she realized "kids experiencing trauma don't need you to be married, they need you to show up." So, she showed up. In the year-and-a-half she has been licensed, she has loved and cared

for five children in her home. Here are a few of Lauren's tips for others who want to step into single foster parenting:

Start, even if it's small.

Foster care is big and Lauren knows how intimidating it can feel at the beginning, especially if you're single. "Wanting, wishing, and dreaming are fun, but it doesn't do anything," she explains. "So, go do something." If you're worried about how to start, start small. Take classes slowly. Get a background check so you can babysit for a foster family. They



need it. Do respite care. And, if all of that feels overwhelming, simply show up for a foster family. Befriend them, deliver them a meal, or help them with dishes. Be involved and the next step will become clear.

Rely on your community.

"Make sure you have a support system in place," she shares. "Because you're going to need them like you never thought possible. When you become a single foster mom, your world shifts literally overnight. You don't have nine months to prepare. You

get a phone call and everything changes. You aren't just providing for you anymore. I constantly feel like I cannot do enough for my kids. The truth is, I can't. I'm one person. We are more successful when others join us."

“ Kids experiencing trauma don't need you to be married, they need you to show up.”

Where do you find community? Reach out to your family, friends, within your place of worship, and to other foster parents you'll meet as you go through the process. No matter how independent you are, understand that you need people and get comfortable asking for help. If they ask what you need, tell them. They can cook a meal, pick up a kid from an appointment or practice, drop off hand-me-downs, or just keep you company while helping fold laundry or put kids to bed. Most importantly, they can pray for and with you. "Also, coffee," adds Lauren. "It's what's best for everyone really."

It's ok to say no.

"I used to think that disruption was a dirty word—until I had to do it," she explains. "It's always better for the child if you know your limits before accepting a placement. But there are also times you just don't and can't

know until you're in it. First, call on your team for support. Make decisions carefully, but know that it is ok if you cannot take something on. You have to know your limits and you have to be healthy going into it."

Find beauty in the mundane.

"I cannot tell you how many times I have had to learn that every mundane thing is a miracle. We made it through dinner without a tantrum. We got through the grocery store. We made our appointments. We spent the whole day at home. We comforted the sadness of not having mommy. We grew our bond. There are some days we all forget that this is foster care. There are other days that we are fiercely aware."

To thrive in foster parenting, embrace the hard along with the fun. That means understanding trauma and finding humor wherever you can. "Basically, someone will probably be sobbing and something will probably be sticky. This is your life now," she laughs. "But it also includes dance parties and snuggles and the gift of growing together, so it's super worth it."

No matter the situation she's facing, especially when things don't go the way she thinks they should, Lauren remembers these four words: **love is never wasted**. Single or not, that's what foster parenting is all about.

Source: <https://focusonyouth.com/the-good-the-bad-and-the-sticky-4-tips-from-a-single-foster-mom/>



The start of the school year signals the return to the hustle and bustle of busy days with packed schedules. With parents off to work or trying to get other errands taken care of, it is challenging for parents to be everywhere with all of their kids. Hence the reason that carpooling has become an essential function in the lives of many families. Whether it involves taking kids to and from school or shuttling them back and forth between extracurricular activities, carpooling can help your day run a little smoother. The unfortunate reality is that being in a motor vehicle can be a dangerous spot. So how can you keep your kids safe in the carpool with others?

ALWAYS KNOW WHO WILL BE DRIVING

Before you allow your child to ever ride in someone else's vehicle, it is imperative that you know and trust the person. If you have seen them use good judgment in other situations, the odds are favorable that they will be a smart driver as well. In addition to making sure the individual has his or her driver's license and will not knowingly

4 tips for **Keeping Kids** **Safe** in the Carpool

put your child in a dangerous position, it is also important to have a conversation about carpool plans when the designated driver becomes unavailable. Make it clear that you do not want other individuals driving your child around, especially if there is a chance they may use a new driver as their backup person.

ENSURE THAT YOUR CHILD WILL BE PROPERLY SECURED

All individuals who will be driving in the carpool must be fully educated about which type of seat each child needs to be in and how to properly install the device. Whether your child needs to be restrained by a car seat, booster seat or seat belt, all carpool participants need to know what

to do. Not only that but they need to actually make sure your child is restrained.

BE AWARE OF THE PLAN

As you chat with others in your carpool group, you should also use this time to come up with a plan that each driver should follow. Keeping things consistent is one way to help eliminate misunderstandings or mistakes from occurring. Everyone should be on the same page about where and when the children should be both picked up and dropped off. This will help parents and children know what to expect and prepare for each day.

EDUCATE YOUR CHILDREN

Since you won't be in the car when the other adults are driving, it is essential to educate your children about the situation as well. Let them know that they can come talk to you if they ever feel unsafe in the vehicle or if they are left inside of the car alone. Trust what they have to say, and never force them to ride with someone that makes them feel uncomfortable in any way.

Source: <https://saferide4kids.com/blog/staying-safe-in-the-carpool/>

Painted Rocks Tic-Tac-Toe

Tic-tac-toe is a great game for kids of all ages (and adults alike)! It teaches kids valuable skills like problem-solving, anticipation, logic, strategy and more. The tic-tac-toe game featured here is created out of river rocks and a slice of wood. It's fun for the kids to make and portable so you can play it anywhere. There's no required game board or small pieces, no batteries to charge or dice to lose.

You can begin by painting a grid onto a wood slice so you can take your board anywhere you want. However, if you don't have a board to use for the grid, and you are playing in the outdoors, there are tons of ways to make your own. Use four long sticks for the outline or draw a grid on the sidewalk with chalk or use 9 large leaves to designate the spots.

Make rock collecting fun



If you want to make your own DIY painted rock tic-tac-toe set, start by collecting the rocks for your game pieces. Take your kids to a creek (or even just a dry creek bed) and let them explore the area and collect the rocks they want to use. Explain to your kids that round flat rocks work best and show them a few good examples and let them



choose their own. Give each kid a small bag and tell them they can bring home as many rocks as they can carry! Once home, pick the best ones, clean them with dish soap and let them dry outside.

Let them pick the colours



When painting the rocks, you can use regular craft paints in any number of bright fun colours. You can stick to just 2 colours (all X one colour and all O another colour)...or have fun with mixing it up.

Put the rocks on paper plates or newspaper and let the kids paint them by themselves. If your kids are little (not the best painters), just know that the rocks will need

multiple coats of paint to fully cover and you can correct all the splotchiness later. After you get the rocks fully coated (top and bottom), let them dry overnight. The next day you can paint X's and O's on them with black paint. In order to keep the paint from chipping/scratching off, lightly spray them with a coat of Mod-Podge or any other type of clear coat you feel comfortable with (or skip this step).

Play anywhere



Once your rocks are painted and dry, you're ready to play! The rocks make it easy to play over and over again and the board is portable. These tic-tac-toe painted rocks are a fun craft, easy for kids to make and don't require a lot of prep work from parents. And at the end of the day, you've got a great game that they can play for years! Good luck!

5 WAYS TO ENCOURAGE Kindness IN YOUR FOSTER CHILD



All parents want to raise happy, healthy children. This can become even more challenging when fostering a child. Many foster children come from abusive or neglectful environments. Foster parents strive to build confidence, self-esteem, and compassion in the children they care for so they can begin to heal and grow up to live productive, fulfilling lives.

Of all these qualities, compassion seems to hold the key, contributing to the child's overall well-being. The way a child treats others and themselves matters. Compassionate behavior leads to stronger relationship satisfaction, and feelings of happiness in life.

Parental modeling, whether foster or otherwise, is the most powerful way to foster kindness in children. Situations happen on a daily basis that present golden opportunities to practice compassion. In doing so, you're strengthening consistent, kind behavior in the child you care for.

Below are five circumstances in which you can encourage kindness each day.

1. During Sadness and Discouragement

It's hard going through life without feeling sad or discouraged. When these emotions strike, it's an excellent time to practice kindness. Let your child know it's okay to feel the way they do.

Give them plenty of support and affection. Encourage them to come up with ways to make it better. Do this for yourself, as well. Your child is likely observing you more than you realize.

2. During Frustration

When your child can't do a task and becomes frustrated, that's the time to step in with a kind attitude. Let your child know that it happens to everyone. Ask them if they have any suggestions to help the situation.

Show them that staying calm and patient makes tackling problems easier. Again, when you can't do something, model positive self-talk. Say things like, "I know I can do this if I relax and think a minute. Let's see what I can figure out."

3. During Mistakes

We all make mistakes. When they happen, you can model handling them with kindness. First of all, we learn from mistakes. Secondly, they happen because we're trying.

This attitude can turn a negative situation into a positive one. Encourage your child by saying things such as, "You tried. That's awesome and brave. Let's look at what went wrong and how you can improve it next time."

4. During Emotional Meltdowns

Angry, emotional meltdowns can sometimes create moments of chaos. This is especially true if you let your child's strong feelings push your buttons. Every parent, to some degree, gets triggered by their child's anger.

Here is a moment to show kindness, although it can be difficult when you're upset, too. Remind your

child that feelings are part of being human. They don't make them any less lovable or beautiful inside. Model acceptable ways to handle powerful emotions before they escalate into destructive behavior.

5. During Excitement and Happiness

When your child feels excited and happy, share in their joy. You're showing kindness when you do. As parents and foster parents, we can get busy or preoccupied.

We sometimes forget to show our happiness about their achievements. Let your child know how proud you are. Take the time to celebrate and appreciate how good they feel inside about themselves.

Modeling kind behavior teaches your child compassion. They'll begin to treat others and themselves with understanding, patience, and support. Through consistent compassion, you can change the life of a foster child and help them learn to trust and love. Indeed, they'll begin to feel good about themselves and valued by you. You'll see their kindness reflected back to you in the weeks ahead.

Source: <https://tfifamily.org/5-ways-encourage-kindness-foster-child/>

“
*Compassionate
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stronger relationship
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in life.*”

In our "FOSTER CORNER" we would like to highlight anything from foster inspired stories to artwork submitted by foster parents on behalf of children in their homes.

If you have a foster story, poem, artwork or some other foster related experience or information to share with our readers, please send it in! All communication or submissions for "Foster Corner" can be sent by email to taylor@sffa.sk.ca



Widening the Circle of Support



The
Evermore Centre

www.evermorecentre.ca

We provide pre-and post-adoption support services, as well as support for all forms of permanency including legal guardianship, Person of Sufficient Interest (PSI), and kinship care.



Family Craft Night

Date: Sept. 21st, 6:30-7:30pm

Did you know, making cultural crafts supports your child's cultural plan? Our Indigenous Resource Representative, Samantha, will lead you in an evening full of craft making with all age-appropriate material and, of course, snacks! Please join us at the Evermore Centre to share and learn something new!

Circle of Security

Date: Thursdays, Oct. 5th-Nov. 9th, 1:15-3:15pm

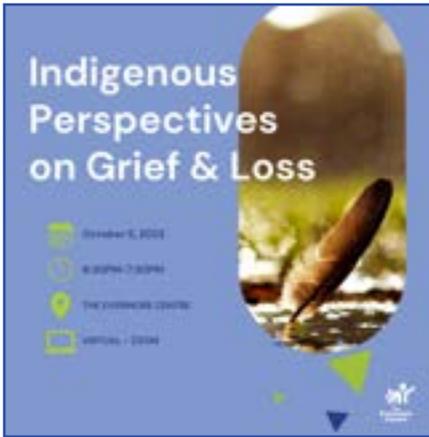
The Circle of Security Parenting Program recognizes that all caregivers want what is best for their child. COSP is a six-week parent program focusing on helping caregivers reflect upon their child's attachment needs to promote secure and healthy attachment with their child.



Family Workshop: Prince Albert

Date: Oct. 14th, 10:30am-3:00pm

Please join us for a day for the entire family, filled with interesting and fun activities! The morning session will divide the parents/caregivers into one group and the children into another, allowing for open discussion and learning for each. Lunch will be provided to socialize and connect with other families. After lunch, we will start with a session on supporting Indigenous culture and then we will conclude with an Indigenous craft – making dreamcatchers – fun for all ages!



Indigenous Perspectives on Grief & Loss

Date: Oct. 5th, 6:30-7:30pm

Indigenous Perspectives on Grief & Loss is an educational hybrid event that delves into the profound wisdom of Indigenous cultures in understanding and coping with grief and loss. This event aims to create a bridge between traditional Indigenous knowledge and contemporary practices, providing participants with a unique opportunity to explore diverse perspectives on the universal human experience of grief.

Round Dance

Date: Nov. 18th, 2:00-6:00pm

An inclusive event that brings together diverse communities to celebrate the power of family, unity, and resilience. Rooted in the tradition of Round Dances observed by many Indigenous cultures, this intercultural gathering aims to foster a sense of belonging, understanding, and shared humanity among participants from all walks of life. The event provides an opportunity for families to build meaningful connections, forge new friendships, and develop support networks that extend beyond the event itself, nurturing ongoing community bonds.



We all have the capacity to be a **superhero**. In order to become one, you just have to find your **unique power or ability** and exploit it for the **greater good**. The cape and mask are optional accessories, but a **kind heart** is essential.

– Robert Clancy



Helping children maintain school-life balance

By Jessica Lahey



FINDING BALANCE

Kids are overscheduled, families are in a constant rush, but a few, strategic pauses in your family's day can make a huge difference.

Help kids create effective good routines

Present mornings, chores and homework time to kids as a problem to be solved together. In a quiet, calm moment, say, "You know, mornings are really hectic around here and it's hard for everyone to remember to get out the door with everything they need. How do you think we can make mornings easier and happier?"



Kids are more likely to stick with a plan they created themselves. Buy-in happens most often when kids have a hand in creating strategies, and sometimes it's more important to be functional and efficient than to be right.

Try asking, "What would your ideal morning routine look like?" or "What would a perfect homework day look like for you?" then help them come up with ways to make those visions real.

Help kids operationalize the systems they create. If it's a planning book, talk about setting intermediary deadlines. If it's alarms on a virtual calendar, try different sequences of alerts

ahead of a due date. Think of your role in this process like that of the training wheels on your kid's bike. As our children get more sure of their strategies and systems, we can raise the training wheels up until they are no longer needed at all.

Model: Talk about your own systems, when they fail, why they work for you. As I get older, I find I have to write more things down or I will forget them. When I do, I mention this to my kids, and they have even helped me brainstorm ways to get things down on paper before I lose them to the ether.



Encourage good study habits

Ensure quiet time in your home. Multi-tasking is a myth, especially for kids. Shut off the TV, and if they like to play music, studies show that music with lyrics undermines concentration and productivity.

Ask your kids what their perfect homework routine might look like. Help them create that vision. Some kids might want a break after school to blow off pent-up energy, others may want to get the homework done first so they can get on to free play. Let them choose the space, too. Just because you envisioned a central

study location in your home when you designed it, does not mean it's going to be their preferred spot.

Limit phones during homework time. Phones are a distraction when they are in the room, even when they are turned off, one study shows. If they are a distraction for adults, with their fully mature executive function skills, they are even more distracting for kids, whose frontal lobes (and the executive function skills that originate there) won't be fully mature until their mid-20s.

Model: Let kids see you working distraction-free, in an environment that promotes focus.

As ever, kids do what we do, not what we say. Work on your projects the way you'd like to see them doing their work.

Plan for technology use

Have a plan in place for family tech usage. This can be around minutes, data or context. If you want family dinners and homework to be tech-free zones, agree to that ahead of time. Then sign a tech contract. Some kids respond to the clarity of a signed contract you can point to for reference.

Model: When I ask kids what they'd most like me to convey to their parents at my speaking events, one of comments I hear most often is something like: "If you want us to turn our phones off, or spend less time texting with our friends, then parents should do the same." When we ask kids to make sacrifices we are not willing to make ourselves, they see us.



SUCCEEDING AT SCHOOL

A successful experience in school is not only about report cards. Ideally your child will learn how to learn, retain information, think independently, ask questions and develop an increasing sense of competence. Here are some →

guidelines for making sure you start on the right foot and keep enthusiasm and momentum high throughout the school year.

There is so much to think about each school year, but above all else, these simple rules can help keep you focused on what's most important for school success.

Do

- Focus on the process, not the product.
- Encourage kids to self-advocate.
- Keep a long-term perspective.
- Maintain a healthy sleep schedule.
- Love the child you have, not the child you wish you had.

Don't

- Over schedule.
- Worship grades.
- Encourage helplessness.
- Compare kids to one another.
- Love kids based on their performance.

Value the process over the product

Very young children are naturally driven to learn and explore. They are at the very beginning of their lifelong quest to understand and gain mastery of the world around them. As they reach out, fall and get back up again, they gain a heightened sense of mastery, competence and self-efficacy. Somewhere around kindergarten, however, parents and teachers begin to undermine this process by devaluing the process of learning and replacing it with a mad dash for the end products. Suddenly, the intrinsic motivators of natural curiosity, competence and self-efficacy are less valuable than extrinsic motivators



such as stickers, points and grades. Unfortunately, extrinsic motivators undermine kids' desire to learn over the long term. Want your kid to lose interest in school? Pay them for their A's and worship at the altar of grades. If you'd instead like your kids to remain curious and hungry for mastery, here are some tips for re-orienting kids' priorities.

Keep report cards off social media and the refrigerator. We can tell our kids that we value learning all we want, but when we gush over grades and stick them to the refrigerator, we show them that what we value most are the grades. Of course, grades are what most parents are stuck with, even if they are flawed and incomplete indicator of learning as well as what's known as an "extrinsic motivator," which has been shown to reduce motivation over the long term, undermine creativity, and encourage cheating. Some schools have moved away from letter-based grades and are using reports focused on mastery- or

standards-based evaluations, which can help parents and kids focus on what's being learned rather a grade. No matter what kind of report your child gets, humble-bragging about it on social media only feeds parental competition, raises the pressure for kids and teaches them that your love and approval is contingent on the content of their report card.

Focus on the process they used to get that grade. When we invest less energy and emotion in the number or letter at the top of the page, we can begin to ask our children questions such as, What did you do to get this grade? Which study techniques worked for you and which ones did not? What are you going to do differently next time?

Look forward, not back. The best question parents can ask when faced with a grade, whether high or low, is: How are you going to use this experience to be better next time? This technique works particularly well for anxious and

overly perfectionist kids, because they can get stuck in a negative feedback loop, obsessing wholly on the numbers and grades. Helping them shift their focus back to the process can alleviate that anxiety, particularly when we help them prioritize the aspects of learning they can control.

Model: Talk about your own failures and successes with your kids, showing them that you, too, are invested in the process of learning. If you berate yourself over failures, so will they. If, however, they see you being brave and learning from your mistakes so you can be better next time, so will they.

Value goals over grades

One easy way to invest in process is to set goals, both individually and as a family. Try to do this at the beginning of a new school year, the first of the month, or the beginning of a new season. Keep the discussion light and low-pressure. This process isn't about getting better grades, it's about supporting learning as a family.

Everyone (yes, that means parents, too) sets three short-term, achievable goals oriented around tasks and improvements under your control. For example, "I'm going to get all A's this semester" is too broad and too difficult to control. Instead, try "I'm going to ask for help in math more often," "I will plan one extra help session a week," or "I will practice my multiplication three extra times this month."

One of those three goals should be a challenge. We can't hope to convince our children to be

emotionally and intellectually brave unless they see us do the same, so set some goals that get you out of your comfort zone. Take guitar or dance or Spanish lessons, try an activity you have never tried before, or pick up a new hobby. This is, after all, how we expand our cognitive potential and make new connections in our brains that can help us become stronger, smarter and more efficient learners.

A few years ago, one of my sons' goals was to make a few new friends, a goal that was both challenging and important to him.

Before you set new goals, take the time to assess how everyone did on past goals. Review these goals once a month or once a semester. If you fail to achieve your goals talk about why, and what you plan to do differently next time. If you succeed, celebrate that achievement!

Model: Watching a parent set a scary, ambitious goal and talk about the process of achieving it is the most direct way to teach children that learning and striving to be better are human goals, not just school goals.

Maintain a long-term perspective

Education and parenting are both long-haul endeavors, and improvements don't happen on a daily basis.

Don't live in the daily emergency of this homework or this test. Instead, think about where you'd like your child to be in a year or five years in terms of competence and growth. Which

is more important to you, that you deliver your child's forgotten math homework today or that she develops a strategy for not forgetting her math homework tomorrow?

Model: When things go wrong in your own life, talk about them. Keep your focus on doing better next time and your long-term perspective. For example if you mess up at work, frame your discussion around improvement and long-term progress: "Well, this work project did not work out the way I wanted, but I still love what I do and want to be doing something related in five years. Here's how I plan to learn from this so I can get there."

COMMUNICATION



When students, parents and teachers communicate openly and honestly with each other about what's happening at home and in the classroom, everyone can stay focused on the learning.

Keep school-home lines of communication open

The research is clear: Family involvement and positive home-school communication have been associated with improved grades, positive behavior and attitudes about learning, increased →



participation and increased attendance. Start by finding out how your child's teacher would like to be contacted, and honor his or her preferences by sticking to that method.

When something comes up, go to the teacher first, and not to the principal. That is unfair to both the principal and the teacher. Besides, the principal most likely was not present in your child's classroom to witness the events in question, so it puts him or her in an awkward position.

Remember the good moments too. Thank teachers for their efforts on behalf of your child. Thanking teachers lets them know that you respect and appreciate what they do and how they do it. I have an envelope full of these notes accumulated over 20 years of teaching Latin, English and writing, and I often refer back to them when I'm having a bad day or feeling unappreciated. Gratitude matters.

Model: Don't bash or undermine a teacher in front of the kids. Kids hear what you say about their teachers, and it's essential to preserve the student-teacher relationship at all costs. It can be

confusing for kids when parents say negative things about their teachers.

Promote self-advocacy

Starting as early as kindergarten, children need to be encouraged to speak up, tell adults what they need, and stand up to people who are not treating them the way they want to be treated. Self-advocacy is a key part of building a child's sense of self-efficacy, or the understanding that they have the power to control and change their behavior, motivation and environment.

When your children come to you to complain about how another child or a teacher treated them, ask what they said or did (or what they plan to say or do) to make sure they are heard and understood. Simply asking this question can help children reframe the situation and consider what they can do to effect change themselves.

Expect children to be a part of home-school communication from the first day of elementary school and increase your expectations for their involvement each year until your child is the main conduit of information between home and

school. You can provide support, of course, but somewhere around the beginning of middle school, your child should take the lead.

Get support for your efforts to boost their self-advocacy. Let teachers know you are making this shift so they can support your child's efforts to be more effective in their communication.

Coach your children through talking with teachers about problems and talk through the approaches they can take. You can write scripts or role play if a child is anxious about the discussion. This can actually be a fun way to dispel anxiety and play-act the conversation until your child is comfortable.

If children are facing especially stressful challenges as a result of bullying, special education needs or mental health issues, school counselors can be parents' greatest ally. Today's school counselors are mental health professionals who are able to guide students in school and provide referrals as needed to other mental health and academic support professionals in the community.

Model: Talk about how you ask for help and assert yourself even when it makes you nervous. Explain how you make sure your needs are heard and addressed. If you need to talk to your boss about a misunderstanding at work, make your kid a part of a dinnertime discussion about ways you could approach the conversation. We are, after all, our children's first teachers when it comes to conflict resolution and self-advocacy.



These easy make-ahead school lunches aim to please even the pickiest of eaters, and they can make packing school lunches just a bit easier. Preparing kid's school lunches the night before, can take some pressure off of the morning rush. The majority of these combinations are homemade, so they're going to be somewhat healthier than similar store-bought food, and probably cheaper too!



Cracker Stacks

A homemade version of "Lunchables", but way healthier and tastes better too, by using sliced turkey or chicken breast, cheddar cheese (using a mini cookie cutter to make varied shapes such as hearts). Add crackers, fresh berries, celery, and a few chocolate treats to round everything out. So easy, and so fun!



Quesadilla Bento Box

These cheese and bean quesadillas are simple to prep and easy to add veggies like spinach, peppers or mushrooms.



Meat + Cheese Skewers

Kids will love it when you make little skewers for them with meat and cheese, or fresh fruit. Everything is more fun when it's on a stick!



Turkey Cranberry Pinwheels

A fun way to get kids to eat spinach! Just spread a wrap with cream cheese and cranberry sauce, then layer on roasted turkey breast and baby spinach. Roll it up tightly, then slice it into 3/4 inch slices. Add some fresh fruit, tomatoes, and a few of their favorite snacks, and you're set!



Cream cheese and honey cracker sandwiches

Kids love these tiny sandwiches, especially because you can let them assemble them on their own. Just take two crackers of your choice, then spread one side with cream cheese and drizzle with honey. Add the second cracker on top. Serve with snap peas or baby carrots, fruit, and a little cup of trail mix.



One-Pot Hamburger Meal

Busy families can turn to leftovers from a one pot hamburger meal to fill a thermos for the kids lunches.



Chicken Chopped Salad

A bagged salad, leftover rotisserie chicken and a few other simple ingredients can make for an easy salad.



Taco Salad Bento Box

Who says lunchboxes have to be complicated? Turn last night's Taco Tuesday into a delicious taco salad for lunch the next day with your leftover taco meat.



Fruit + Bagel

A bagel and cream cheese with some fresh fruit on top is a fun idea that is healthy, too! If you have a reluctant eater, they may be more likely to actually eat their lunch if you present it in a fun way. Try cutting food into different shapes with cookie cutters, or arranging it in a fun design.



Kid-Sized Sliders

Kids may get overwhelmed by large portions, so creating kid-sized versions of their favorites is a good way to go. Slider-size buns are perfect for sandwiches and easy to fit in lunch boxes.



Easy Picnic Bento Box

Capture your favorite summer picnic in a bento box! Chicken or potato salad accompanied by a few other hand-held snack items.



Veggie Caesar Pasta Salad

When you know you'll be in a time crunch with lunchboxes during the week ahead, make a big batch of this salad to last all week!

Fruit skewers with yogurt dip

A great way to get kids to eat fruit. Serve with yogurt. Add crackers or pretzels on the side, along with a few chunks of cheese.





goodreads

Keep the Doors Open: Lessons Learned from a Year of Foster Parenting

by Kristin Berry

Will You Open Your Heart and Home to Children in Need? As a teenager, Kristin Berry had heard all the horror stories surrounding foster care and adoption abuse, neglect, rejection, anger, and misunderstandings. But instead of closing her heart, God opened it wide.

This is Kristin's honest, unvarnished story of some of her experiences as a foster parent of twenty-three children over the course of nine years.

What she learned is that living in a foster home is like living with a revolving door. You never know who will arrive or who you will have to say goodbye to. Leaving the door open means there will be heartache and pain, but also adventure and unexpected joy. Kristin and her husband, Mike, have been through it all in their unique parenting journey.

If you have ever wondered what it's really like to be a foster parent, this book will help you gain a true understanding of the everyday trials and triumphs these moms and dads face. It will also inspire you to consider opening your door...and to leave it wide open.

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RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO:
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