



SPIN NEWS

The Newsletter for Parents of Children with Disabilities

SPECIAL
PARENT
INFORMATION
NETWORK

2022-23 School Year Special Edition

SPIN is co-sponsored by the Disability & Communication Access Board and the Hawaii Department of Education. Services include a phone line for information referral and support, a quarterly newsletter, an annual conference and community workshops. SPIN is guided by an Advisory Committee made up of parents, professionals and people with disabilities.

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Preparing for the New School Year

Along with the many losses experienced by our families during the COVID pandemic is the **loss of time**--time to learn, time to explore, time to socialize with friends and family. While there is truly no simple way to make up for lost time, SPIN is offering our valued readers some thoughts on how to resume the journey with a sense of hope--a belief that our glass is half full and not half empty.

Jack Canfield who helped to write **Chicken Soup for the Soul** reminds us that we only have control over three things in our life: the thoughts we think, the images we imagine and the actions we take.

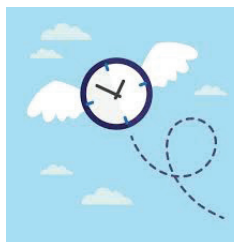
One baby step toward hopefulness is to think about changes to special education brought about by the pandemic which resulted in positive outcomes for our children. For example, we learned that some students with IEPs actually did better academically when distance learning. Schools have tried to make up for the technology gap, parents have gained first hand knowledge on how to help their child make progress, and in many cases, the partnership between teachers and parents has grown.

In other words, the pandemic has provided some *opportunities* that might make things better down the road. Remembering that you only have control over your own thoughts and actions, think about

ways you can prepare for this next school year by first looking within and meeting your own basic needs. Rather than always putting yourself last, make an effort to get into the habit of *self-care*. It'll give you a better base to manage the uncertainty of the near future.

While you're at it, be sure to leave room for a giggle or a belly laugh. Humor is often the best medicine, and we can learn to focus on the humor in every day situations to relieve stress, both within ourselves and within our family.

Modeling self-care and relieving stress through laughter is a way to help children become more resilient in our "new normal." Another is to reinforce the importance of having empathy--not only for family members, but for classmates and folks in the community. One silver lining of the pandemic is that it has caused more people to show empathy to others, but empathy must be practiced, and it can be taught to our children. Check out our infographic on page 4 to help your child be more caring and, as a result, more successful in life.



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Self Care is not Selfish

Set up a daily routine



Try to add structure to your day by creating a routine that works for you.

Get some exercise every day



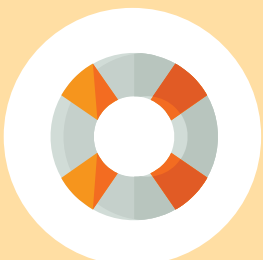
Moving the body through stretching, walking or running gets your blood flowing.

Eat healthy balanced meals



Maintaining a regular meal time is also helpful for your health & well-being.

Ask for help when you need it



Leaning on friends and family or social groups provides emotional support.

Nurture your spirit



Practice meditation or get outside to enjoy Hawaii's beautiful air, land and sea.

De-clutter your living space



Keeping your home and work space neat and clutter free adds to your sense of calm.

Aim for 7 or more hours of sleep



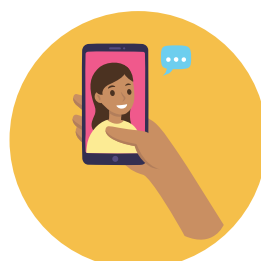
Quality counts too. See your doctor if you don't feel rested after 7-8 hrs. of sleep.

Practice gratitude



Focus on the positives in your life by journaling or reflecting on the good parts of your day.

Stay connected with friends



Friendships can add joy to your life. Be sure to touch base and plan time together.



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Sources: 7 Easy Ways to Do Self-Care: <https://positivehealthwellness.com>
This is What Self-Care Looks Like for Parents of Kids with Disabilities: <https://themighty.com>
Special Needs Parenting: Self-Care: <https://childrenfirst.com>

Growing Your Sense of Humor Can Benefit Your Health

It may sound too good to be true, but there's actual scientific evidence about the benefits of laughter in reducing stress.



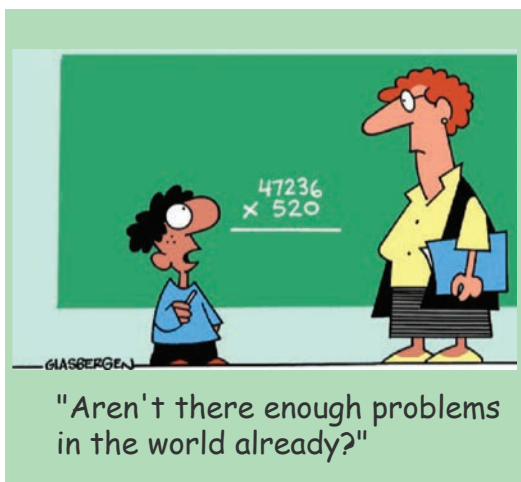
Did you know that...?

Laughter in the SHORT term can:

- Improve your intake of air, stimulate your heart, lungs and muscles, and increase endorphins,
- Activate and relieve your stress response, leaving you with a relaxed feeling, and
- Soothe tension by stimulating circulation and helping muscles relax.

Laughter in the LONG term can:

- Improve your immune system,
- Relieve pain by causing the body to produce its own natural painkillers,
- Make it easier to cope with difficult situations, and
- Improve your mood and your self-esteem.



"If you are too busy to laugh, you are too busy."
--Proverb



"Most children threaten at times to run away from home. This is the only thing that keeps some parents going."
--Phyllis Diller



"From there to here, from here to there, funny things are everywhere."
--Dr. Seuss



"Sometimes I laugh so hard, the tears run down my leg."
--Anonymous

Having a sense of humor is especially helpful to parents of kids with disabilities.

One of the coping skills that works well for our families is having a sense of *mastery*. *Mastery* means gaining a feeling of control over a threatening event in order to manage it or keep it from occurring again.

When we train ourselves to laugh at ourselves or look for the humor in an awkward or uncomfortable situation, we "lighten up" the situation and it is no longer a threat to us. Laughing in the face of stress is not only a good coping skill, but a gift we give to our children and others.

To get your funny bone engaged, try these ideas:



Keep funny movies, TV shows, books or videos handy for when you need a boost of humor.



Find something to laugh about with your own mistakes and those of your kids.

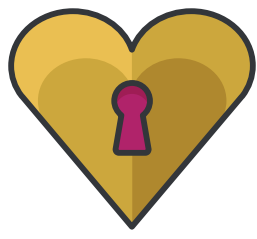


Spend time with friends who make you laugh.



Take a funny story to your next IEP meeting and feel the tension melt.





6 Tips for

unlocking empathy in your kids

Empathy is the ability to recognize, feel and respond to the needs of other people. It requires that you put yourself in another person's "slippers" to imagine what they are thinking and feeling, and then to offer your help. Empathetic kids grow up to be successful, caring adults. Below are some evidence-based strategies for nurturing your child's ability to empathize.



Be a role model by empathizing with your child and other people.



Follow the "2 ears, 2 eyes and 1 mouth rule". Spend more time listening and paying attention than talking. Seek understanding and show kindness.



Teach your child how to regulate their negative emotions.



Kids need to learn techniques—like belly breathing or counting to 10—to manage their own negative feelings like frustration or anger.



Look for frequent opportunities to practice empathy.



Encourage empathy by asking your kids to reflect on how family and friends are feeling. Involve your kids in helping neighbors and with community projects.



Teach how to read facial expressions and body language.



Young children and some children with disabilities misinterpret facial expressions or body cues (like crossed arms), making it harder to identify feelings in others.



Help your kids discover what they have in common with others.



People tend to find it easier to show empathy to someone who they think is similar to them. That's why making kids aware of how others are more like them than different is helpful.



Assist your kids to develop their internal sense of right & wrong.



Kids are more likely to develop their own sense of morality if their parents avoid using bribes or shaming to help others, and talk to them instead on how wrong-doing affects others.



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Source: Teaching Empathy: Evidence-based tips for fostering empathic awareness in children:
<https://parentingscience.com/teaching-empathy-tips/>