A Newsletter of WV Birth To Three Regional Administrative Unit 7

BRIDGES

Early Intervention….Building Bridges for a Bright Future

Spring 2022

Being mentally healthy during childhood means reaching developmental and emotional milestones and learning healthy social skills and how to cope when there are problems. Mentally healthy children have a positive quality of life and can function well at home, in school, and in their communities.

Mental disorders among children are described as serious changes in the way children typically learn, behave, or handle their emotions, which cause distress and problems getting through the day. Many children occasionally experience fears and worries or display disruptive behaviors. If symptoms are serious and persistent and interfere with school, home, or play activities, the child may be diagnosed with a mental disorder.

Among the more common mental disorders that can be diagnosed in childhood are attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety (fears or worries), and behavior disorders. Other childhood disorders and concerns that affect how children learn, behave, or handle their emotions can include learning and developmental disabilities, autism, and risk factors like substance use and self-harm.

Symptoms of mental disorders change over time as a child grows, and may include difficulties with how a child plays, learns, speaks, and acts, or how the child handles their emotions. Symptoms often start in early childhood, although some disorders may develop during the teenage years. The diagnosis is often made in the school years and sometimes earlier; however, some children with a mental disorder may not be recognized or diagnosed as having one.

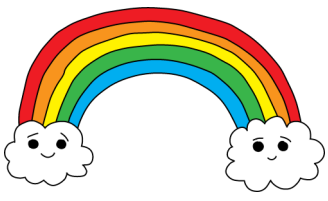
Childhood mental disorders can be treated and managed. There are many treatment options based on the best and most current medical evidence. Parents and doctors should work closely with everyone involved in the child's treatment—teachers, coaches, therapists, and other family members. Taking advantage of all the resources available will help parents, health professionals, and educators guide the child towards success. Early diagnosis and appropriate services for children and their families can make a difference in the lives of children with mental disorders.

Excerpts taken from: What Is Children's Mental Health? | CDC

Let's Spring Clean Our Mental Health

Spring is a time for renewal and cleaning things out. Think about all the mental dirt we have accumulated in our minds. Decluttering negativity, drama, bad habits, etc. from our lives helps us to start Spring feeling refreshed and renewed. Let's start our mental health spring cleaning list. Let's start by decluttering:

- ⇒ Do not hold on to toxic relationships or drama. People who feed on negativity and drama will exhaust you emotionally. It may be hard to let go of certain relationships, but think, does this relationship reflect who I am today or who I want to be.
- ⇒ Eliminate Bad habits! Most of your bad habits are caused by two things: Boredom and stress. These habits can be eating poorly, smoking, biting nails, drug addiction, etc. Whatever the habit, you can choose many ways to break it. Example, if you want to be sober, surround yourself with people who live the way you want to live. If you want to quit smoking, pair up with someone and quit together. This gives you the extra support you need. Remember, stay positive and never give up.
- ⇒ Negative attitudes and feelings of helplessness and hopelessness can create chronic stress, which upsets the body's hormone balance, depletes the brain chemicals required for happiness, and damages the immune system. Chronic stress can actually decrease our lifespan. Spring is a great time to get rid of gossip, constant complaining, self-depreciating thoughts, and self-doubt. What Is Positivity? Positivity is the practice or tendency to be positive or optimistic in life. When we are positive, we engage in positive thinking, have positive emotions, and engage in positive behaviors like kindness and generosity.
- ⇒ Gratitude is a warm feeling of thankfulness towards the world, or towards specific individuals. The person who feels gratitude is thankful for what they have, and does not constantly seek more. Spring is a great time to rid yourself of negative thoughts and refocus on things and people who make us grateful.
- ⇒ Clean house, clear mind. Keeping you home clean and tidy is no mean feat, but it could be key to maintaining your mental and physical wellbeing. Decluttering and cleaning promotes a positive mental attitude and can have an energizing effect, allowing you to focus on other challenges in your life.
- ⇒ Spring is a great time to reflect on our mental state. Mindfulness means paying full attention to something. It means slowing down to really notice what you're doing. Being mindful is the opposite of rushing or multitasking. When you're mindful, you're taking your time. You're focusing in a relaxed, easy way.



"Try To Be A Rainbow In Someone's Cloud" — Maya Angelou

"Do good and good will come to you" Proverbs 11:27

Activities for Kids and Parents to Enjoy Together

Excerpts taken from: A to Z Activities for Kids and Parents to Enjoy Together (thespruce.com)

Bubble Party

Throw a bubble party in your backyard. Make your own bubbles recipes and head outdoors with bubble wands made out of straws, cups, fly swatters, or try a more elaborate project that will give you huge bubbles.

Cook

You prepare three meals plus snacks by yourself every day. Put on those aprons and get into the kitchen together. Cooking with your kids is actually a learning experience disguised as fun. They can use those reading skills to follow recipes and use math to measure out ingredients.

Do Good Together

Charity work is an excellent lesson for your kids while also giving you quality family time together. There are plenty of charity events for children and their parents that are age-appropriate and allow you all to help others who are less fortunate.

Forts

Who doesn't love blanket forts? Rip off the covers, grab some chairs, and build a secret hideaway with the kids. Add in some books and toys and you'll be surprised how long your children play inside this magical place of theirs.

Getaway

Escape! Pack up the car for a family day trip. Head to a neighboring city's children's museum or zoo. Simply go for a ride. Be spontaneous and change up your scenery from time to time. Not only is it an adventure for your children, but it's also refreshing for you.

Imaginary Play

From playing airplane to opening a pretend restaurant, your kids will never be bored when they use their imagination to play. There are plenty of imaginative ways to play with your children and there's no telling where their imagination will take them.

Quiet Nature Activities

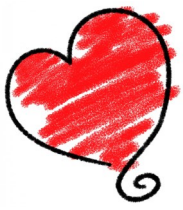
Mother Nature is calling and she wants your family to come outside to play. Try some quiet nature activities that will turn your kids into nature lovers. From bird watching to treasure hunting, there are so many things you can do to break outside of your four walls and enjoy some time under the big blue sky.

Reading Fun

A good book can take you to outer space or to another time in history. Pick a book to read together and then let your kids become a part of that book. They can dress up like characters from the book, act out their favorite scenes, or write their own sequel. Make reading fun for kids to encourage a life-long love of the written word.

Under the Stars

There's something about playing in the dark that kids absolutely love. Camp out, go on a night walk, or play flashlight games with some simple nighttime activities that are perfect for those evenings when the weather is great outside.



Rituals & Traditions That Nurture Strong Families – Surviving the Family Vacation

We all love vacations – including children. Vacations give children something much more than a location and something far more important: Connection with you! Usually, parents are more relaxed, more fun, more emotionally available. It's common for kids to say that their favorite summer memory is something simple and free of charge, like lying on a blanket looking at the stars with the family. These sweet pleasures are the golden experiences that shape rich childhood memories.

But vacation can also be stressful. Kids often stay up late, get disconnected from parents, and melt down from the overload. Of course, parents often experience their own version, whether from extended family tensions, grandparents judging their parenting, or logistical pressures. So, the first rule for a restful vacation is to find a way to restore your own peace when you get off balance and avoid tears and tantrums. Here are tips to help you manage life during vacation so you can maximize the joy and minimize the tears.

1	**Before you leave**	**Give plenty of warning about upcoming events so they know what to expect.** Before traveling with young children, you might make a little book to show them what will happen each day. Your book doesn't have to be fancy -- print out photos on loose-leaf paper and put them in a 3-ring binder. Or, you can have kids who love to draw create a picture of what will be happening each day to add to your book. This helps them both enjoy the anticipation and conquer any fears. And seeing those smiling faces in advance helps them warm up more quickly to relatives they don't see often. **Coach your kids about the social behavior you expect.** Role play with them in the car before you arrive, or make a game of it before you go: *"In the hotel hallways, we use inside voices, and we don't run. Why do you think that is?"* *"What do you when Uncle Norman wants to hug you hello?"* (Don't force kids to hug if they don't want to but teach them to offer a hearty handshake instead.) *"What if you don't like the dinner that's served?"* *"When you want to leave the table, how do you ask?"* *"The airplane is like a flying village with everyone close together, so there are special rules to be safe and considerate. Let's see if we can guess what they are... It can be hard to stay in your seat...what do you think you could do on the plane if you get bored?"* *"What will you do if the cousins start arguing?"*
2	**Travelling**	**Flying?** plan to arrive early enough that they get to "run" a bit in the airport hallway after sitting still in the car and before sitting still on the plane. Make sure to change diapers and use the bathroom just before boarding. If you use overnight diapers (more absorbent), you might get lucky and avoid diaper changes on the flight. Bring small wrapped "presents" – books, treats, Chap Stick, puzzles, simple crafts – for each child. Kids can look forward to getting one as soon as they've buckled their seat belts, and more whenever you need a distraction mid-flight. Blue painter's tape always comes in handy, too -- you can make a tic-tac-toe board on the tray table, use it for crafts, tape up blankets around his seat to make a cozy fort, and even make a hopscotch board in the airport while you're waiting. Be sure to bring bottles, sugar-free lollipops or something else to suck on during take-off and landing if your child isn't nursing (sucking on anything will help equalize the air pressure on those tiny ear drums.) And even if you don't usually use screens with your child, it's smart to have movies downloaded and at the ready so your child has something to watch even if there's no wifi on your flight. **Driving?** Plan time for extra stops to allow little ones to move Overnight diapers might eliminate potential accidents when you cannot stop quickly Those same "presents" shared above will work here too, along with snacks and downloaded movies too. Continue on next page...

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3	**Once you are at your vacation spot**	**Keep kids on their usual schedule as much as possible** Kids need the security of familiar routines. They get stressed by unfamiliar events and what feels to them like chaos and unpredictability. Do what you can to keep them on schedule and be patient when they get hyped-up or irritable. **Plan no more than one event per day** What you want to avoid, of course, is racing around, getting stressed out by a busy trip that includes lots of meltdowns, and returning home in need of a vacation. Kids tend to get cranky and stressed with travel and schedule changes, so plan to do less. You'll all enjoy it more. **Have age-appropriate expectations -** A young child can't be expected to sit quietly while you enjoy a fancy dinner. If you're doing a lot of visiting with adults, be sure the kids have something to occupy them. Even if you usually have dinner as a family, vacations are a great time to feed kids early-- less pressure on the kids to "behave" at a table of adults, and the adults can enjoy a chance to talk at dinner. Remember, you need to recharge your own batteries, too! **Physical Activity** Be sure your schedule includes plenty of visits to the playground or other opportunities for the kids to get wild. **Down time** Kids need downtime, just to chill out, snuggle, and do whatever relaxes them. If they don't get it, they can't really be blamed for melting down when the over-stimulation gets to them. Make sure every day includes a little downtime with your child's favorite activity to help him regroup. **Soothing activities for little ones** . . . that work for most kids: **Sand play** - Put some sand in a lasagna pan on the deck, add small figurines, vehicles, and a strong spoon for digging. **Water play** - At the beach or lake, of course. But even on a back deck with a spaghetti pot of water. For variety, add ice cubes, paint brushes, sponges, plastic water pitchers. Toddlers love to "paint" the deck or wash the picnic table. **Bubbles.** You'll have to help the little ones, but all kids love bubbles and blowing bubbles reduces stress. You can easily make your own bubble mix (Add 3 Tbsp. of Glycerine and 2/3 cup of dish soap -- Joy & Dawn are best -- to a gallon of water.) Any twig with a loop of yarn can be used as a bubble wand. **Clay-** If you're in a rented space on vacation, limit clay to a tray, pan, or outside. But clay, sculpey or playdoh is a wonderful, tactile way for kids to knead and pound out the stresses that inevitably accompany all new experiences. **Plan time with you** **Snuggle with your child every morning** before getting out of bed. It's very grounding for kids to connect with you and review how the day is expected to unfold -- even if it will be a lot like yesterday. Your kids may be chasing the older cousins, but they still want, and need, time with you. This is a perfect opportunity to **turn off your cell phone and see what an inspired parent you are** when you have a chance to relax and revel in just being alive. Spend five minutes in the water with your child. You'll be amazed how much more alive -- and connected to your child -- you feel after a five minute water fight. And how much more willing your child is when you need their cooperation.
4	**Mealtimes**	**Watch your kids' food intake in the midst of too many treats and hyped-up schedules** Many tantrums originate from hunger. And all parents recognize the sugar high that sends kids bouncing off walls and then crashing into tears. If necessary, speak with others in advance about limiting treats. And carry small protein-rich snacks with you so your child doesn't have a melt-down while the adults are negotiating where to go to dinner.
5	**Bedtime**	**Schedule decompression time before bed** – bring some favorite, comforting books from home. And don't forget stuffed animals and blankets! **White noise machines can be invaluable** both to keep kids sleeping longer in the morning, and to block out the sound of adults and older kids carousing, so little ones can settle down. **Bring black out curtains** to keep your child sleeping longer in the morning and to help your child settle on those summer evenings when the sun is shining so long.

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Take Care of You!	**Don't try to work on vacation** -- this is family time. Forgo organized evenings in favor of family board games and keep your focus on connecting rather than sight-seeing or structured activities. **If friends and family criticize your parenting**...Parenting in public is always hard and kids are often not at their best when they're out of their usual routine and schedules. Stay calm, smile, and acknowledge the other person's concern. Then do whatever you can to address their concern. Don't worry, this is just a case of conflicting needs, not a referendum on your parenting. **Manage yourself so you can stay calm -** You're on vacation with your child or children, so this is by definition a "working vacation." And traveling is stressful for everyone. But remember that your kids depend on you not only to regulate their environment, but also to help them regulate their moods -- so you need to maintain a state of well-being yourself. Besides, you deserve a vacation too! Make sure you take this opportunity to trade off child care responsibilities with other adults, if possible, so you get a chance to replenish your own spirits. You're never too old to have a summer vacation you'll always remember.

Adapted from Aha! Parenting (n.d.) Family vacation survival guide. Retrieved from https://www.ahaparenting.com/read/Summer-Family-Activities-Vacation.

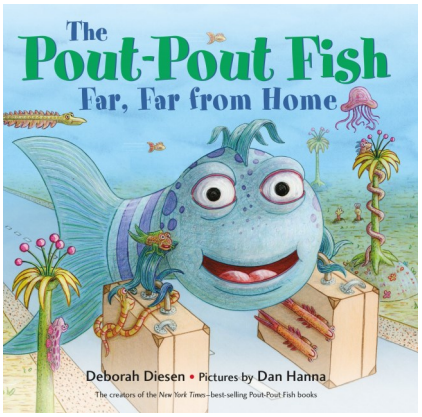
"It's the memories we make with others that are forever written in our hearts."

"Sometimes you will never know the value of a moment until it becomes a memory."

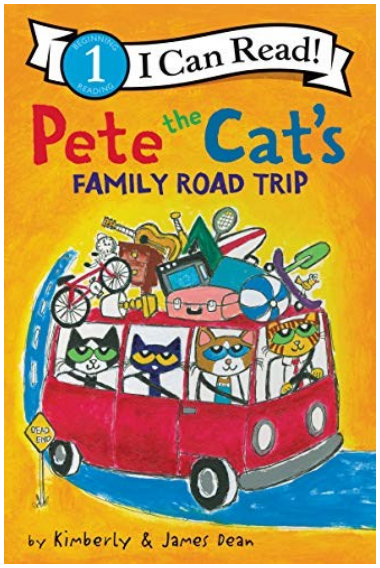
Family Travel Checklist:

- wipes
- plastic bags – handy for rubbish or vomit
- spare clothes, in case of spills, accidents or delays
- hand sanitizer
- water in refillable drink bottles
- healthy snacks
- books, toys and games – ask your child to help you choose
- medication if your child needs it
  a first aid kit.

If you're travelling with children with additional needs, you might need to give extra thought to things like packing your child's medications and equipment, preparing your child for travel, planning your time and so on.



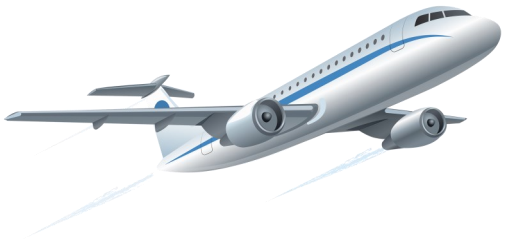
Swim along with Mr. Fish as he explores new places and meets new friends in THE POUT-POUT FISH, FAR, FAR FROM HOME. He might just learn that a few bumps along the way are all part of the journey. *Deborah Diesen* and *Dan Hanna* are back with everyone's favorite grumpy fish, to show that love doesn't have to be packed, it travels with you always.

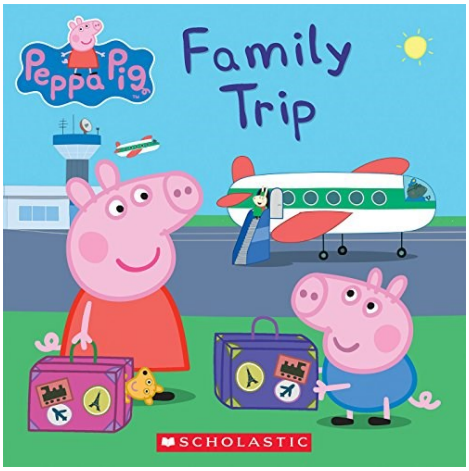


Pete the Cat and his family are ready explore all the many wonderful American landmarks on their fun family road trip! They visit many famous sights, including Niagara Falls, New Orleans, Savannah, and more.

Of course, no true road trip is complete without a flat tire! But the Cat family isn't going to let a small setback get in the way of fun...

Pete the Cat's Family Road Trip is a Level I Can Read book, complete with original illustrations from the creators of Pete the Cat, *Kimberly and James Dean.*





Peppa Pig and her family are going on a trip to Italy. They pack their bags, fly on an airplane, meet a new friend, and even learn how pizza is made! But what will happen when Peppa keeps leaving her teddy bear behind everywhere they go?

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Growing Together

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