

EXTRA SPECIAL EDITION

Parent Newsletter

Winter 2021-2022

Welcome to the **Winter Extra Special Edition Newsletter**. Each issue contains information for parents and caregivers for children in the Exceptional Student Education (ESE) programs.

Ways to Connect with Your Child by Robert Meyers, PhD

Living from day to day as a busy family can be stressful for all members of the family. This often leads to friction, arguments and sibling rivalry. For most parents, the desire to love and provide for their child is as natural as breathing. But the truth is in this day and age where people are inundated with text messages, social media, nontraditional work schedules, hundreds of channels on television and increased financial demands – more parents than ever are struggling to feel truly connected to their child. It is normal to become slightly removed in your involvement as your child becomes more independent, but children still need to know they have someone to turn to whenever life becomes challenging. At one point or another all parents fear that they are not connecting with their children as well as they want to. You might start to worry that you don't know them as well as you should, or that they may be doing things that you would not recommend. The good news is that this problem can be solved. By wanting to connect with the children in your life, you are already making great strides toward your goal. It is important to care about them and what goes on around them.

Talk (and Listen) to Them

The most basic way to connect with your children is to talk to them. Tell them about your day and ask about theirs. Try to remember everything they tell you. Ask them questions. It's important for people to feel like the person they are talking to cares about what they have to say. Asking questions about what they tell you proves you are listening and want to know more. Don't expect your kids to tell you everything about themselves in one sitting. It takes time to build the kind of connection you are looking for, especially with teens and older children who are still feeling rebellious.

Take an Interest in Their Interests

Sometimes just talking doesn't work for all kids. They may have built their guard up too high to realize that you just want to help them. In this case it may be a good idea to consider doing something else together. If your child likes to play video games, ask for the second controller and play too. Maybe help them with an art project they're working on. Get involved in anything they like to do. They may still try to shut you out sometimes, but eventually you will find something to do together. Just try not to seem judgmental about their hobbies. If they start to feel that you don't appreciate what they love, they will start to push you further away.

Invite Them into Your World

If you can't find common ground in the things they like to do, look for some in the things you enjoy. Sometimes children forget that parents or guardians are people too. If you are willing to show them who you are, perhaps they will open up and do the same. You can invite them to one of your favorite shows or sporting events. Let them meet some of your coworkers. If your children are old enough, then you can take them with you to the gym or your yoga class. Anything can work as long as you can get them interested.

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“Believe you can
and you are
halfway there.”
Unknown

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Ways to Connect with Your Child/Children (continued)

Find a New Hobby

You may find that you simply have no current interests in common with your child. That's OK. In this case, you can talk to them about finding something new for the two of you to do together. Try to find something that neither of you have done and you both find at least mildly interesting, and start together. Neither of you will be the leader in this activity because no one has more experience. Even if you find out that you both hated the activity, you at least have a mutual experience to work with. You can also make this a family activity. Whether it is building model airplanes or learning to golf as a family, shared life experiences create greater feelings of connectedness in families. Make sure the skill or pastime you decide to pursue is something each member of your family is happy to learn or try. If you are having a hard time coming up with ideas on your own, invite your children to make suggestions until you each agree on your new hobby.

There's a Time for Friendship and a Time for Parenting

It's great to be your child's friend. The feeling is unmatched. But it can be easy to take it too far. You should never forget that you are a guardian first. You are there primarily to see to it that the child in your care is safe and grows up well. A balance must be found between parenting and friendship. You need your child to trust you enough to tell you about the things going on around you but also to feel safe enough to seek true guidance from you.

Don't Get Discouraged

Kids can be difficult. It may seem that no matter what you try, you're still feeling just as distant from them as when you started. Don't give up. They know what you're trying to do, and on some level, they appreciate it, even if they don't make it obvious right now. If nothing else, they will at least think of you when they face any struggles and remember that at least one person cares for them. Sometimes that's enough.

Implement a Screen-Free Dinner

More families than ever spend their dinner time sitting around a television set or playing with their cell phones. One way to become a more connected parent is by implementing a strict, no screen policy for one hour during dinnertime. It may feel strange at first, but as you begin to make this policy a part of your regular routine, you and your family will naturally begin to open up more and experience a more connected environment.

Spend One-on-One Time with Each Child

Connecting as a family can be relatively easy for some parents and children, however, more introverted individuals may need some additional time to truly connect. Having one-on-one time with each child in your family will allow you each to connect on a deeper and more meaningful way. Make sure whatever activity you choose to do together includes fun and also time for private conversation.

Make Family Night a Weekly Occurrence

It is not uncommon for adults and children to occasionally feel mentally depleted. An easy way to respect everyone's need to unwind and relax without the pressure of conversation and cooking is by doing a weekly family night, where you rent a movie, order take-out food and just relax together as a family.

Take an Interest in Your Child's Passions

Being interested in the things your child enjoys may seem intimidating at first, but it can be one of the most rewarding ways you ever connect with them. If your child is musical, it may be a good idea to sign them up for lessons. If they like to build things, a robotics club could help them fine tune their skills. When you take notice in the things that are important to your child and give them opportunities to polish their skills, they will feel more connected than ever because your involvement teaches them that their contribution to your family matters.

5 Foods That Negatively Affect Your Child's Mood by Pam Myers, BSEd

Parents intuitively know that food can impact their child's behavior and mood. We know that sweets, for example, can cause bouts of hyperactivity. But mood-altering food isn't limited to sugar – there are other culprits in the snacks and meals that we eat. The following five foods are the most common contributors to mood and behavioral changes in children.

1. **Dairy:** If your child is lactose intolerant or allergic to the proteins found in dairy, you may see changes in their mood and behavior. Many children become irritable, cranky, or aggressive. Children with dairy allergies or intolerance also tend to suffer from frequent colds and ear infections. Babies may exhibit colicky symptoms, whereas toddlers and older children may become inconsolable and irritable.
2. **Artificial Coloring:** Many countries have banned artificial coloring due to the detrimental effects these chemicals have on children. Linked to ADHD, anxiety, hyperactivity, and headaches in children, artificial coloring can also cause significant behavioral changes. Because artificial coloring is in many sugary foods, parents often blame behavioral changes on sugar. Artificial coloring is often hidden in unexpected foods such as bread and yogurt. Avoid products with yellow No. 5, red No. 40, and blue No. 1 if you're concerned about your child's mood swings after consuming food with artificial coloring.
3. **Sugar:** Sugar can cause a child to be hyperactive. Unless they're eating a whole foods-based diet, sugar is in just about everything the average child eats. Sugar has been shown to cause long-term health damage, and a diet high in processed foods has been linked to depression, cognitive delay, and sleep problems.
4. **Preservatives:** Several preservatives may cause behavioral problems in children. They include but are not limited to nitrates, nitrites, and sodium benzoate. Monosodium glutamate (MSG) is a flavor enhancer that also causes mood and behavior changes, including headaches and hyperactivity. Sodium benzoate is commonly found in juice products marketed toward children.
5. **Food Allergens:** Common food allergens are dairy, nuts, eggs, soy, and corn. When a child has an intolerance or an allergy to a particular food, it can cause significant health and behavior issues. However, it can be difficult to pinpoint which allergen is making your child sick without the help of an allergist. A food intolerance, for example, is often missed and a child is instead diagnosed with ADHD. If you notice behavior changes or mood swings in your child, consider keeping a food journal. Track what they eat and when they exhibit concerning behavior. Try eliminating suspicious foods to see if the behavior changes. While food is not the cause of all behavioral issues and conditions, it's important to make sure that your child is not suffering from something that can be easily remedied.



The Florida Inclusion Network (FIN) provides services to schools and districts to increase and improve inclusive practices for students with disabilities in general education classrooms and other natural settings.

Planning for Inclusion—Steps for Getting Involved

- ◆ Create a list of things that describe your child. Include your child's strengths, challenges, interests, learning needs, health/medical information, and future dreams.
- ◆ Do your homework about inclusive education. Check out the FIN website listed below.
- ◆ Ask for a meeting with your child's teacher to review your child's information.
- ◆ State your willingness to be a partner on your child's team throughout the year, not just at the IEP meeting. After all, you are an expert when it comes to your child!
- ◆ Ask for an IEP team meeting to discuss inclusive opportunities available at your school.
- ◆ Ask your child's team to contact FIN for assistance in planning for inclusion.
- ◆ Be open minded! Effective inclusion takes time, effort, resources, creativity, and collaboration. Trust that your child's team wants the very best for your child.

The Florida Inclusion Network offers many resources to assist parents. Visit the FIN website at www.FloridaInclusionNetwork.com or contact your FIN Facilitators, Caren Prichard and Emily McCann, at 850-638-6131 x 2206 or email: caren.prichard@paec.org or emily.mccann@paec.org.



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