

The American Institute of Stress

CONTENTMENT

Your source for science-based stress management information

Volume 7 Number 3

Fall 2018



Back To School Stress



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Your source for science-based stress management information

CONTENTMENT

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Contentment is a quarterly magazine published in Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter with news and advertising designed with the general public in mind. It appeals to all those interested in the myriad and complex interrelationships between stress and health because technical jargon is avoided and it is easy to understand. Contentment is archived online at stress.org. Information in this publication is carefully compiled to ensure accuracy.

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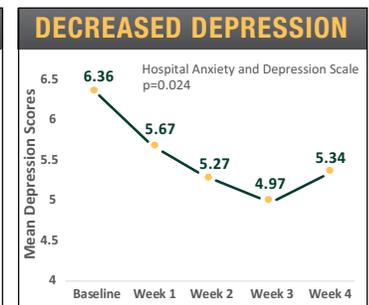
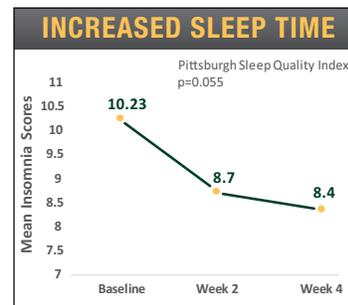
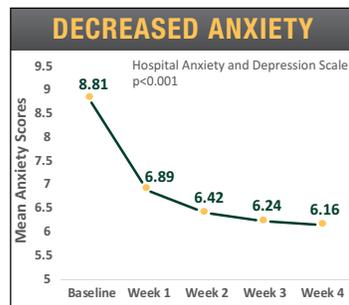
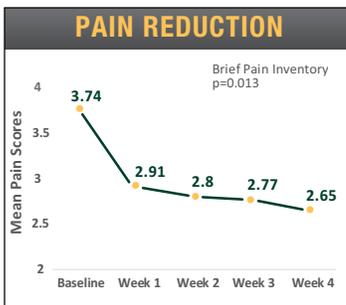


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REFERENCE

Yennurajalingam S, Kang D-H, Hwu W-J, Padhye NS, Masino C, Dibaj SS, Liu DD, Williams JL, Lu Z, Bruera E. Cranial electrotherapy stimulation for the management of depression, anxiety, sleep disturbance, and pain in patients with advanced cancer: a preliminary study. *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management*. 2018 Feb; 55(2): 198-204.

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Easing children's back-to-school anxiety and stress: Tips for parents

The beginning of a new school year is exciting for the majority of children who are energized by their thoughts of going back to school. Others, however, may have fears and be anxious about the unknown. Their thoughts might include the following: “Will my classmates like me?” “What if nobody likes me?” “Will my new teacher(s) be nice or very strict?” “Will my clothes be okay?” “Who will I sit with at lunch?” These are only some of the kinds of questions children may be struggling with.

Fortunately, most children are very capable of coping with change, and parents can help them by creating an environment that nurtures resilience and encourages them to share their feelings about going back to school. While some anxiety is normal, parents need to be able to recognize the difference between normal jitters and anxiety that warrants attention from a suitably qualified healthcare professional. The goal for parents should be to provide support while also being careful not to exacerbate their children’s worries.

Below are some tips for parents to help them ease their children’s back-to-school worries and fears.

Talk to and listen to your child

Empathize with your children by letting them know that you are aware they may be worried or anxious and that you’re there to help. Let them know that being

a bit jittery is normal and quite common at back-to-school time. Ask your children about any fears or worries they have. Before and during the first 3 or 4 weeks at school, consider having a regular time and place to talk. The best time and place will vary from child to child. For some, especially older children, it may be best to have such talks while taking a walk or travelling in the car. For others, during dinner might be better. Do not tell your child not to worry. Instead, tell her/him that it is normal to have worries or concerns but that you are confident he/she can handle these. Some children will share their worries without being asked. For those that don’t, use open-ended questions to facilitate this e.g. “How are you feeling about starting school soon?” Listen attentively and supportively and try to understand exactly what your child’s fears or concerns are. By fully understanding her/his anxieties, together you can explore approaches to relieve these.

Manage your own anxiety

Back-to-school time can be anxiety provoking for parents too. Children are very perceptive and can pick up cues from their parents, including non-verbal ones. If a parent has anxieties about their child’s return to school, their child may recognise these feelings and think something like: “If mom is worried about me going back to school, then I should be worried too.” Children tend to use their parents as models for how they should feel in certain situations. A relaxed parent

While some anxiety is normal, parents need to be able to recognize the difference between normal jitters and anxiety that warrants attention from a suitably qualified healthcare professional.

is conducive to a relaxed child. Parents need to monitor and pay attention to their own behavior. The more calmness and confidence a parent displays, the more calm and confident their child is likely to be. When saying goodbye to their child at the entrance to school, a parent should say it happily and once only, with no hanging around.

Highlight the positives

Setting any anxieties aside, re-starting school can be exciting, and most children can think of things they're looking forward to. Having addressed their worries, parents can try to direct their attention towards the positives. These might include seeing friends again or playing their favorite sports.

Let your child participate in decision making

Feeling they aren't in control can be a significant contributor to anxiety in children. Parents should provide their children with a sense of having some control by allowing them to contribute to decision making about small things e.g. what lunch or snack to bring to school, what school bag to take, and what to have for breakfast. Helping to make small decisions like these can help children feel more in control. Allowing their child to make a list of things needed for school and allowing them to participate in shopping and decision making concerning items to be bought, can be beneficial in preparing their child for their return to school.

Role play anxiety provoking situations

Parents can prepare their child to deal with certain situations that may arise and result in anxiety e.g. being bullied by another child. A parent can carry out a role play in which his or her child plays the bully and the parent helps their child to develop an appropriate response. Such a role play should help the child to feel more confident that they can handle such a situation. The child should be encouraged to use what they've learned to handle a bullying incident should one arise. In addition, the parent should encourage their child to tell them about any such incidents, as soon as possible.

Re-establish the school-day routine

After a long vacation that probably featured going to bed later and getting up later, it's very important to re-establish a back-to-school schedule. It's best to begin this a week or two before school commences. This will



To elicit positives from their children, parents could ask questions such as: "What excites you most about your first day back at school?" or "What are you looking forward to most when you return to school?" Parents could also consider associating positive experiences with the start of the school year by arranging something that their child will enjoy e.g. a back-to-school party with school friends.

have the effect of resetting the child's internal body clock. Screens should be switched off at least an hour before bed time because the blue light emitted by electronic gadgets decreases the body's production of the hormone melatonin. This results in children (and adults) feeling too alert at bed time, to fall asleep, even when their body is tired. Children should be taught the habit of using their own traditional analogue alarm clock. The removal of the need for parents to act as human alarm clocks can eliminate, or at least lessen, a significant source of parent-child early morning discord.



A morning ritual of having a nutritious, ideally unrushed breakfast is extremely important because it enhances mood and improves the brain's ability to focus and learn. A routine can also be established for making a lunch and/or snack the night before each school day. Indeed, it may be possible, depending on their age, for a child to make their own lunch or snack.

Organize a first day 'trial run' for a new school

In cases where a child is starting a new school it can be very beneficial if (with your child's teacher's or principal's permission) your child can have a 'trial run' visiting the school a few days before the first term begins. This could consist of walking around the inside of the school building to see and become familiar with the classrooms, bathrooms, cafeteria, lockers, etc. It could also include walking around the outside of the school and

its immediate surroundings. If possible, arrange for your child to meet her/his new teacher. Make the journey to school in the way(s) your child will travel to school. If this is by bus and/or walking, point out relevant aspects of pedestrian and bus safety.

Consider curtailing extra-curricular activities

In order to adjust to a busy and very time-consuming school schedule, it may be prudent to limit your child's extra-curricular activities.

This will help the child (and the parent(s)) adjust to the busier and increased pace of family life. Having too many and/or too frequent extra-curricular activities can have a damaging effect on educational outcomes at school. Give considerable thought to your child's extra-curricular schedule and make whatever changes you feel appropriate.



Helping to make small decisions can help children feel more in control.

Teach your child anxiety reducing breathing

Teaching your child the correct way to do diaphragmatic breathing (also called abdominal or belly breathing) can elicit the ‘relaxation response’. The relaxation response is a set of physiological and psychological changes that occur when the mind and body become tranquil. Eliciting this response has the effect of countering anxiety.

According to the eminent cardiologist Dr. Herbert Benson, who coined the term the relaxation response:

“Immediately after you elicit the relaxation response, you become calmer, less anxious, and you learn better.”

A large number of techniques can be used to elicit the relaxation response. However, using diaphragmatic breathing is a very convenient, portable, and free one. Before attempting to teach your

supported by the back of your chair. Also, any tight-fitting clothing should be loosened. However, diaphragmatic breathing can also be practiced while lying on your back or standing.

Place one hand on your chest, over your breastbone (sternum), and the other hand over your belly button. Breathe gently in and out through your nose. Nose breathing is healthier than mouth breathing. This is explained in my article ‘The Health Benefits of Nose Breathing’ in the June 2018 issue of *Contentment*. Nose breathing also facilitates diaphragmatic breathing.

When practicing diaphragmatic breathing, look at your hands as you breathe. The hand on your chest should not be moving as you breathe in and out. The hand over your belly button should be moving out as you inhale, and in as you exhale.

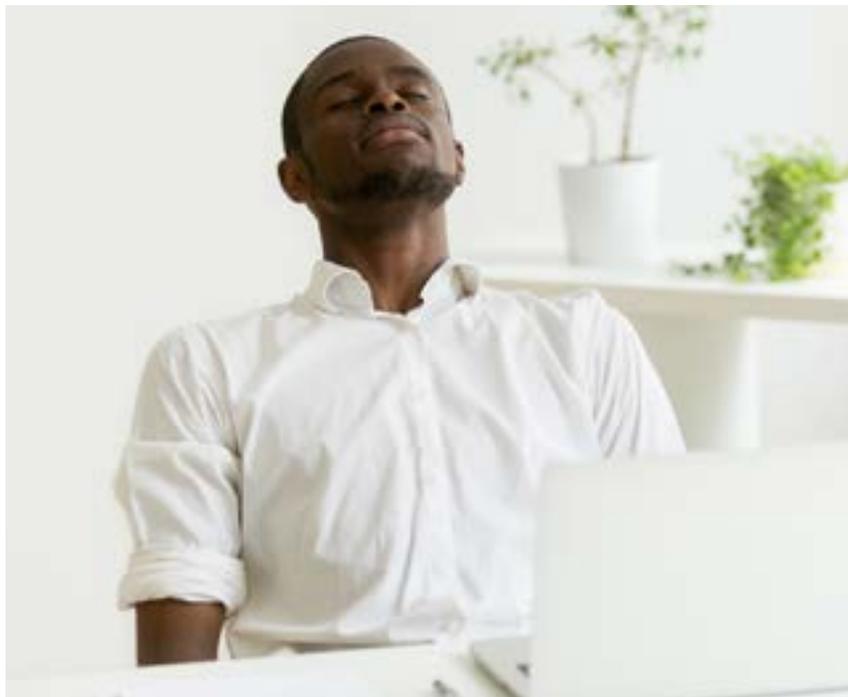
If breathing in that way makes you feel dizzy, you are over breathing (hyperventilating) and moving too much air out of your lungs, too quickly. You should be breathing in and out gently, smoothly, and quietly, and your breathing should slow down. I emphasise that you should not breathe through your mouth because it tends to promote over breathing (hyperventilation). Keep your mouth closed.

If you practice breathing in this way for a few minutes per day, you will find that your inhale and exhale will be of approximately the same duration. There should be no pause in breathing, just one smooth motion. If you continue breathing in this way, you will notice how relaxing it feels. When you have completed enough practice, you should be able to do it without using your hands. This will enable you (or your child) to do it without anyone being aware you’re doing it.

When you have taught your child

child diaphragmatic breathing it’s best to master the technique yourself. Here’s a simple ‘how to’ guide:

When initially practicing diaphragmatic breathing, it’s often best to sit comfortably, with your back fully



correct diaphragmatic breathing, you should encourage her/him to use it as an anxiety easing tool when suitable opportunities arise e.g. when travelling to and from school by car or bus, during lunch break and/or play break, while watching television at home.

Reserve ‘me time’

As soon as school starts, as a parent, you will be back in the daily grind of school related activities e.g. getting your child up in the morning, making school lunches, supervising homework, and maybe stressful car journeys to school. You may also have a demanding job to do. With all this going on, it’s very important to be



mindful of your own mental and physical health. Be sure to allocate adequate ‘me time’. For example, maybe get up before your child and engage in something you enjoy and find relaxing. This could be yoga, meditation, exercising, doing a couple of jobs around the house, or simply having an undisturbed cup of coffee.

Be patient

Don’t expect it to always be smooth sailing. It can take time for a child

and their parent(s) to adjust to a changed situation. Each day can potentially produce new and unexpected challenges. Expect ups and downs and when there are downs, try not to let your child perceive you might be flustered. This will help maintain his/her confidence level and help to overcome any setbacks that may arise.

In conclusion

It’s normal for a child starting back to school to be somewhat anxious. However, parents need to be able to differentiate between simple back-to-school jitters and excessive anxiety that may require a consultation with a suitably qualified and experienced healthcare

professional.

While it is normal for a child to feel anxious about restarting school, after the summer vacation, parents can help ease the back-to-school tensions by employing some of the tips provided in this article.

If you would like to learn more about how to use breathing to relieve anxiety, I would recommend the

following books. Both are available from [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

- McKeown, P. (2010) *Anxiety Free: Stop Worrying and Quieten Your Mind – Featuring the Buteyko Method and Mindfulness*, PatrickMcKeown.net, Loughwell, Moycullen, Co. Galway, Ireland
- Graham, T. (2017) *Relief from Anxiety and Panic: By Changing the Way You Breathe*, BreatheAbility Publications, Canberra, Australia

Dr. Alan Ruth BSc, MA, PhD, MBA, FAIS, FRSB is an Irish based, stress and anxiety specialist. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Biology and a Fellow of the American Institute of Stress. Formerly, he was Managing Director (Ireland) for an American multi-national pharmaceutical company and CEO of a health products manufacturers’ trade association.

A photograph of a woman with long dark hair hugging a young girl from behind. They are both smiling and looking upwards. The scene is set in a field of yellow flowers, likely sunflowers, during a golden sunset. The lighting is warm and soft, creating a nostalgic atmosphere.

Bubble wrap *and* bubble gum

Where did the Summer go?

In the blink of an eye there is a switch from flip-flops and beach towels to class schedules, textbooks and backpacks. Summer fun can quickly become a distant memory and a bit of panic can occur with the back-to-school rush. Some people experience severe “back-to-school” anxiety that has become hard-wired in their brain. This apprehension often begins as early as elementary school and can become deep-rooted over time. Purposeful interventions can reduce stress and change these established brain patterns.

We know that playful mirth, laughter and humor are not only beneficial for learning, but can be a critical component for dealing with stress. The lightness of summer does not have to disappear as we switch to autumn routines.

Fall into humor with these ten powerful strategies:

1 Flip-flop the Brain: The goal is to flip the anxiety and flop into some fun. With purposeful implementation, humor can become a habit. Laughter interrupts damaging and negative thought-producing patterns in our brain. Playfulness induces amusement and mirth. Humor optimizes learning. There are many fun flip-flop techniques that will enhance learning and facilitate the storage of information in the long-term memory.

2 Shake it Up: It is amazing how a quick surprise or noticing something odd can interject humor into the most challenging day.

Walk backwards outside for 5 minutes or discover another silly activity to revitalize your brain cells. Scan your surroundings for something whimsical or funny. Share gratitude with those who bring you delight. A silly note or fun item in a child’s lunchbox or on a colleague’s desk can make their day. An unexpected greeting card is especially appreciated in this day of texts and email. Givers become receivers of joy when sharing humergy*.

3 Jest Smile: Smiling is contagious. Infect as many people as you can. Smiles can be shared with store clerks and with people on the street, as well as your friends and colleagues. Show your pearly whites often, and your life will brighten too. Repeat silly words or phrases to get others to smile. “My dog can lick anyone.” usually gets a laugh while walking your dog. Compliments work well as a smile companion. Be generous!

4 Humor the Humordoomers*: You may want to soar with the eagles but end up feeling like a buzzard, after an encounter with a humordoomer. Everyone has a bad day once in a while, but for those who are consistently negative, it helps to plan a counter-offensive. Try to squash the negativity with kindness, understanding and humor. Often these insecure folks will laugh at humorous one-liners:

- I resemble that statement.
- What would Scooby Do?
- There is no time like the pleasant.

Try to change the direction of negative conversations with planned

The lightness of summer does not have to disappear as we switch to autumn routines.

A focus on humor and fun can relieve back-to-school stress and energize your learning experiences. Never take life too seriously, you won't get out alive.

Mary Kay is a speaker, author, and lifelong educator. She is Past-President of AATH (Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor) <http://www.aath.org/> and was the 2016 AATH Lifetime Achievement Award Recipient. Mary Kay is founder of the AATH Humor Academy and CHP (Certified Humor Professional) Program. She is the author of several books including, *Using Humor to Maximize Learning*; *The Links between the Positive Emotions and Learning*. <http://www.questionforhumor.com/>

redirection. Your best efforts may not work, so avoiding these folks may be a last resort.

5 Chew on It: Bubble gum is a great way to blow off the stress. This minor interjection can create a huge interruption in a negative thinking process. Blowing bubbles can be mind-altering. At the next meeting or class offer gum to everyone! When distressed—chew on it! Note of caution: some schools have rules about chewing gum. Ignore those rules. (Kidding)

6 Smash the Wrap: Don't just pop bubblegum, crush some bubble wrap! Pop it with your fingers, knees and toes! Dance on it! Pop it with the help of colleagues! Pop it, in unison, to the beat of music! When in close proximity to others try taking your smashing efforts outside or just grab that stress ball.

7 Spice it UP: Post funny signs, quotes and quips on bulletin boards, in email attachments and even on the floor. Recently some creative college folks produced a newsletter for the inside of bathroom stalls called: "The Flush". They found it was a successful way to promote student events. Another group used laughter quotes and cartoons in their schedule books. Several administrators have found that they can post riddles in a variety of formats. Puns can add spice to any bulletin board. Add funny quotes and memes to tag lines.

8 Try it on Ice: Icebreakers often have a bad rap, but well-thought out activities can be energizing during a class or meeting. Invite other fun-seekers to plan creative options. Do not let humor-doomers keep you from having fun. There are countless ideas for group activities that can be found on line. Kathy Laurenhue's web site <http://www.wisernow.com/> has

many imaginative options.

9 The Write Stuff: Purposeful implementation of humor is a strong anti-anxiety tonic. Notice the funny and journal about it. Just like being physically fit, humor is a habit that requires time and effort. Journaling helps put information into the long-term memory. Repetition and reflection are integral to supporting healthy humor habits. Kelly Epperson has an awesome blog with numerous writing hints to get folks started. <http://kellyepperson.com/>

10 Fit and Fab: We know that the brain operates best with increased the oxygen levels. Practicing humor is a great companion to being physically fit. Explore ways to combine the oxygen generators of laughter and exercise. Seek friends and colleagues who enjoy laughter and spend more time with them. Walk daily with a friend who loves to laugh. Tell them that their sense of humor is appreciated. A supportive friend is the best antidote for stress.

A focus on humor and fun can relieve back-to-school stress and energize your learning experiences. Never take life too seriously, you won't get out alive.

Additional research and resources are available through AATH (Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor) <http://www.aath.org> AATH is an international, non-profit organization. The AATH Humor Academy is held at the AATH annual conference. The 2019 AATH conference is in Chicago, April 3-7th.

Definitions

* *Humergy*: The energy that emerges from the joy and optimism of our inner spirit, reflects our unique personality and nourishes a healthy mind/body balance (Morrison 2008).

* *Humordoomer*: A person who consistently uses negative humor to control and manipulate

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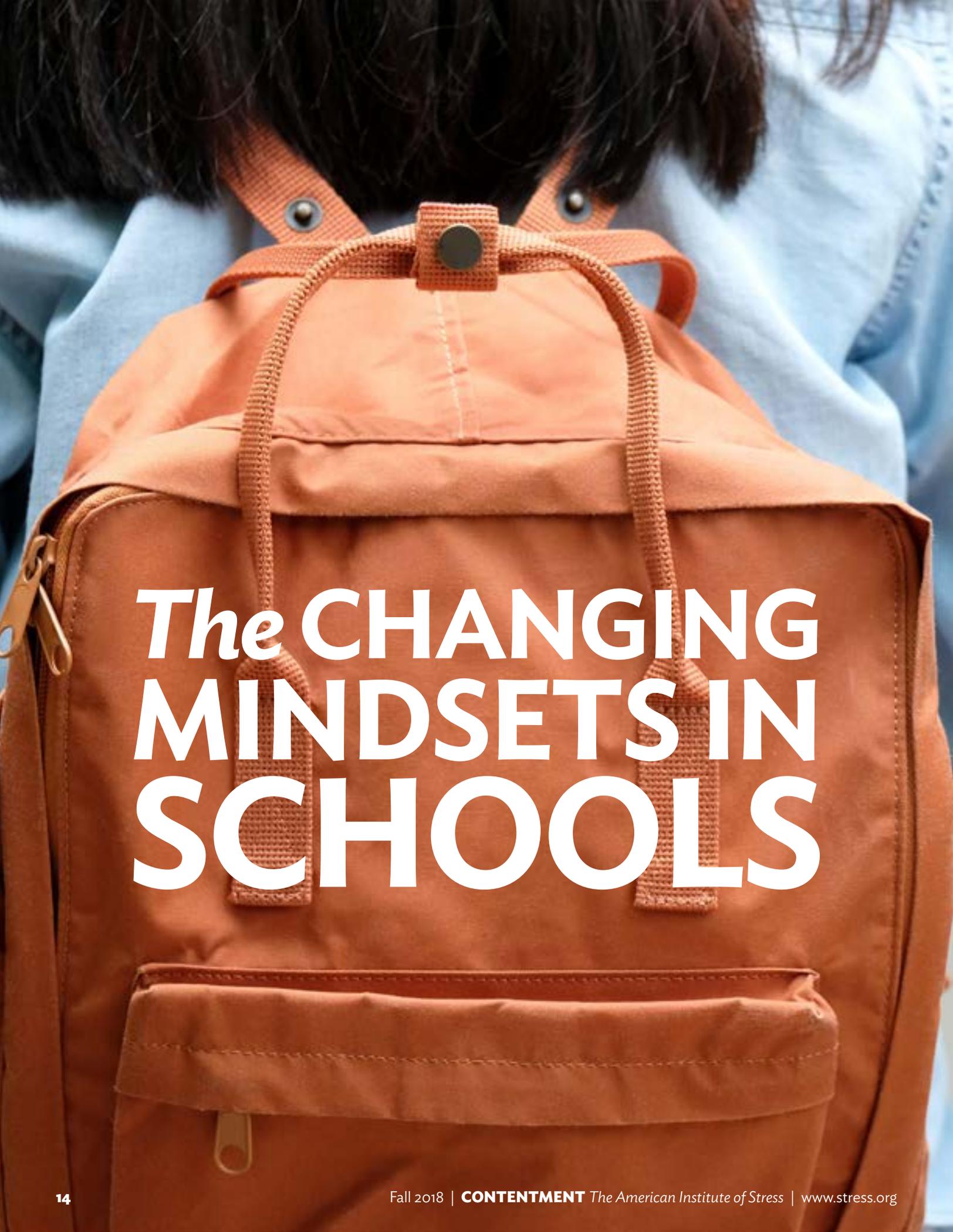


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The **CHANGING
MINDSETS IN
SCHOOLS**

By Jeff Goelitz

A few years ago, our county school superintendent invited a select group of people to visit local schools so we could get a pulse of what is happening. He said right up front that schools have a giant PR problem. Most people are ignorant about some of the good things taking place in their local schools. So, every Wednesday morning for ten weeks, a group of community leaders and business people, myself included, would board two minivans to drive off to a regional school. There at each site, we spent hours interviewing teachers, school leaders and students about their school days, what challenges they faced and what excited them. The schools included sites such as a Head Start for mostly migrant farmworker families, a vocational

education program, a high school coding class, and a wonderfully innovative elementary school. Afterward, we would have candid discussions with the superintendent about topics such as school finance, graduation rates, technology, teacher burnout, and more. I think all of us were impressed by the sophistication of education practices. More than a few misconceptions about schools were shattered.

At [HeartMath Institute](#), we've been actively involved in education for the more than 25 years. Two decades ago, it was an uphill climb when promoting new ideas of learning to schools. The singular focus of subject-matter-knowledge and test-score accountability was so consuming that windows of discussion and approachability were limited. That mindset is changing, some would say rapidly.



With the explosion of neuroscience and best practices from educational research, the interest in new ways of thinking and learning has surged. Many policy makers, decision makers and classroom teachers have ditched the more traditional top-down, ‘sit-be-quiet-and-listen’ model for a more dynamic one where students have become active participants in content and meaning. Educators know that if students’ brains, emotions and bodies are not engaged, very little learning takes place.

A rich set of best classroom practices are emerging that promote deeper learning for an increasingly diverse student population. **Differentiation is an approach that gets away from the ‘one-size-fits-all’ model to try and meet the needs of each human-being.** Because student brains function differently, some require individual coaching to absorb complex content while others thrive in groups. There are different arcs of development within each classroom that need intelligent strategies to bring

out the best of each student.

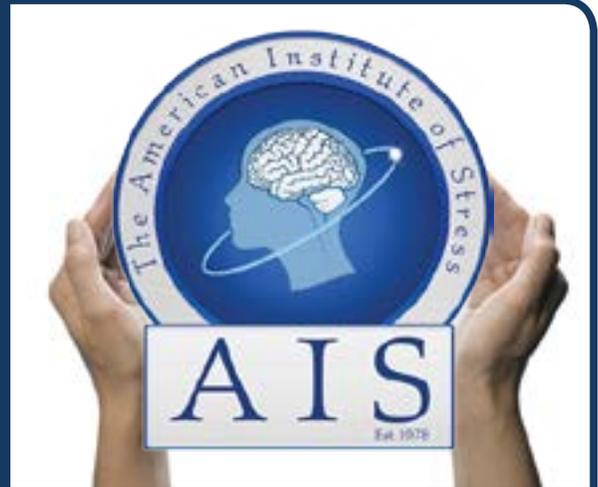
Basic neuroscience suggests that students can’t learn if the classroom environment doesn’t feel safe or is overwhelming. Bullying, school violence, high-stakes testing stress, and mental health issues are widely recognized as barriers to deeper learning. In response, educators are embracing new ways to help students deal with these kinds of stressors including meditation and mindfulness, trauma-informed teaching and evidence-based social and emotional learning such as HeartMath’s programs. HeartMath Institute is now in over 3,000 schools with its classroom programs and self-regulation technology. Clearly, the classroom practices among educators are evolving. They see firsthand how stress interferes with learning. Helping students take more responsibility for their education while gaining skills in self-regulation and social and emotional learning are part of the changing education landscape.

Jeff Goelitz is Director of Education for the HeartMath Institute. He is an author, speaker and educator. His 30 years’ experience as an education specialist has contributed to the Institute’s development of practical solutions for improving social/emotional learning in children, lowering test anxiety and improving test scores. Jeff is a senior master trainer, program and curriculum developer for the HeartMath Institute. To learn about the HeartMath Institute go to <https://www.heartmath.org/education/>



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Helping our children thrive *at school* & kick the “bad” stress *to the curb...*



By Sally Gray ND, Nut(M), Transpersonal Counsellor,
Master Life Coach, NLP & EFT Practitioner

There's no denying that school presents challenges; it always has and now possibly more than ever. Many of these challenges are dangerously impacting the stress levels of our children and tipping the scales toward disease. The long-term health implications of stress in childhood are only now being scientifically validated. The stress they experience now may well shape the disease of tomorrow, which makes this a critical conversation.

The world for this generation of students has been tremendously altered and shaped by our modern practices; think technology, internet, social media, instant gratification, the “cyber” age.

The challenge is for us to adapt to modern life with our well-being intact, so I want to share with you a modern school survival kit so that your family remains on course, rather than derailed from the overwhelming impact of “stress” that is predicted to worsen and impact the physical and emotional wellbeing of children across the globe.

None of us are immune to the impact of stress and with an understanding that we must take action to mitigate the consequences, the ideal approach is to teach our children as early as possible how to separate themselves from automatic reactions and deliberately practice relaxation strategies to ensure the brain and nervous system are primed for health not headed toward disease.

Many of us have to learn these

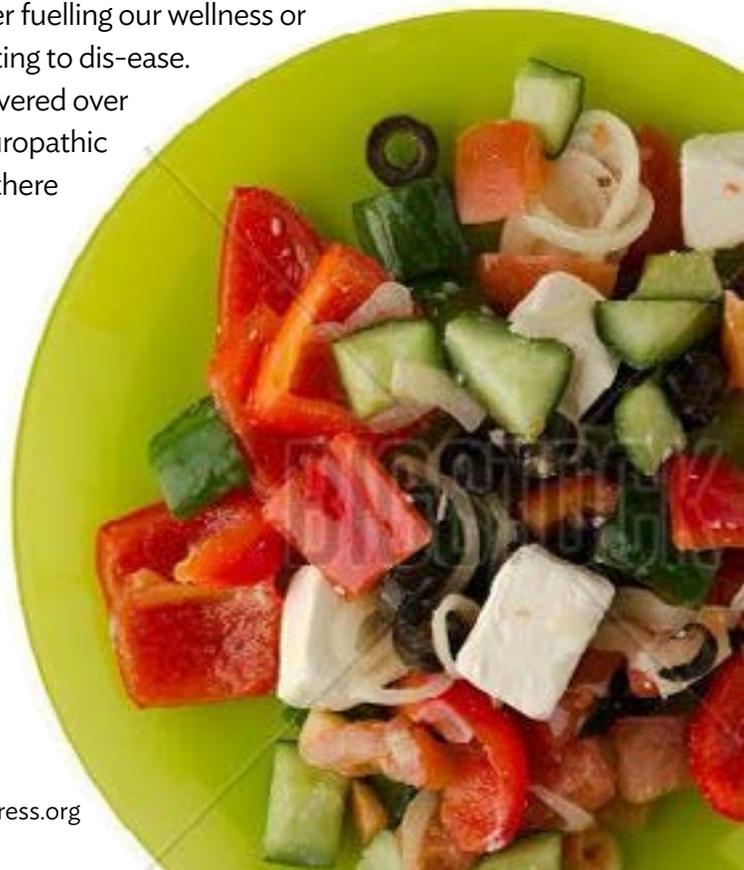
techniques and learn how to apply them ourselves simply because we haven't been educated about our health to the extent we really need. In addition, our children “learn what they live,” so the ideal situation is for us to role model relaxation strategies and live a lifestyle that honours our biology.

Great health, success and inner resilience are deliberately created, they aren't a product of chance, so let's begin the new school year with our eyes wide open and the strategies to build rather than diminish our well-being.

There are a number of practices that I teach my clients to ensure our children (and of course us) stay on track in order to live our best life possible. Let's look at some of them here:

Nutrition - The food we eat is a critical ingredient for our physical and emotional health, it is either fuelling our wellness or slowly contributing to dis-ease.

What I've discovered over 25 years in Naturopathic practice is that there is no single right approach to nutrition that suits everyone. We are all biochemically unique and have to discover our own “Unique Food Prescription.” The basic



Our children need enough time and space to simply “be” and get “bored.”

guideline to follow is to simply eat REAL food. Small, positive changes over time have a profound impact on our health and even benefit our genes. If you need guidance to make the necessary changes that will support your child’s back-to-school health potential, then click here (<https://realhealthykids.com/signup/>) to access the FREE “Healthy Essentials” program and access the recipes and guidance that will make the transition a breeze.

Daily “Me” Time - Our children need time to “be” children. There’s often the temptation to overload our kids with activities and extra-curricular programs that in fact can harm their brains and bodies in myriad ways. The challenge I often see for parents is that parents will say that their kids “love” what they’re doing. Unfortunately, they may love all the stuff they’re doing, but the reality is that body and brain are telling a very different story,

to simply “be” and get “bored.” We may have seen this as a negative headspace to be in, but Neuroscience research tells a very different story and our brain needs downtime in order to function optimally; to solidify what’s been learnt in the day, to switch into creativity and to rest the nervous system for our highest well-being. This means that less activity can actually deliver more and better outcomes. We don’t need to force the learning, in fact doing so may well create the opposite of what we’re aiming for. Be sure to schedule down-time for improved performance.

Self-care Practices - Kids are never too young to learn this critical ingredient for well-being. This is such a beautiful conversation to have for the entire family, it’s often the opportunity that begins a new practice that leads to wellness for parents and siblings alike. The question to ask is “how am I looking after my own well-being?” Our children are learning what they live, and we can begin to role model practices that will exponentially benefit their journey throughout school and beyond. Self-care includes the above two considerations and the deliberate activities that honour your unique needs. This might include; walks outside, a cup of tea in the garden, proper breaks in the day to refresh your body and brain (Neuroscience research has shown we function far better when we do and in fact cause harm when we don’t), a ride on the bike, jumping on the trampoline, lying on the grass staring at the clouds, building a cubby house... Let your child discover their needs and create daily habits that promote well-being and longevity!

Mindful Breaks - We have all the resources we could ever need to successfully navigate this human journey and enjoy a life living up to our fullest potential already within each of us, we



keeping them from the relaxation that is vital for enhanced memory and hormone function. As adults we have to make the decisions to protect their greatest asset, health, and make tough decision sometimes. This is vital to understand because “overdoing it” can lead to exhaustion directly and set up a learned behaviour that doesn’t support health. Our children need enough time and space

just have to learn to listen. Our children learn this quickly and easily and we can introduce them to a range of tools and let them choose what they need. Children under the age of 7 are very connected to their inner world still and we can help older children to re-connect by asking them to decide for themselves and trust the response. There are many fabulous resources to choose from here such as: online meditation or yoga for your child's age, phone apps such as "Smiling Mind" to guide your child through daily practices of mindfulness. The key here is to take a proactive approach to inner peace with a daily practice that is consistent, and this will have tremendous power to counter the stress "peaks" that your child will face, keeping them centred and calm in the face of chaos. It's never too late to start.

Dinner Time Rituals - Social connection is a vital ingredient for well-being, both physical and emotional. The simplest way to reinforce the value of family, communication and the unwavering support that this can offer is through a dinnertime ritual. I've seen many a family embrace this with incredible success over a wide range of ages, the younger the better, it creates a powerful foundation for success habits that can last a lifetime. The dinnertime ritual can include anything you choose such as; thankfulness, blessings, gratitude, highs and lows of the day (an opportunity to discuss emotions/feelings), acts of kindness challenges and so much more. If this is new to you, start with just one and invite each member of the family to contribute and enjoy the connection that this creates. Psychology research has shown that discussing "emotions" with our children has profound consequences that establishes a solid platform of "inner" awareness that paves the way for personal fulfillment in life, who doesn't want that for their child!

The "ROCK" Practice (Acronym: Reflect, Observe, Consider, Keep) -

This final tip is one of my favourite clinical tools that is easy for kids to make their own as a compass for living. We can guide our children through a discovery process and creating a plan for their own success. Grab a journal and help them with this task that will empower them in all areas of life! The first step is to REFLECT on what you truly want to create and feel in the realm of life in question, in this case school. Then we OBSERVE what our behaviours are in relation to this vision, spot your strengths and weaknesses, so you know where to focus your attention and make the changes needed to succeed. Next, CONSIDER what new behaviours you need to take on board and make a note of them. Finally, KEEP focused with persistent action, create a list and stick it somewhere obvious (like the fridge) so you know what needs to happen to make your vision real, with the understanding that you are responsible for doing what you've committed to and the outcomes we create. Planning is one of the most powerful ways to avoid STRESS and is something that can be learned. We really do have the power to shape a life by design and break free of living a life by default a moment longer...

We have such a profound opportunity to role model and inspire our children to embrace the tools they really need to live up to their potential and navigate a path to optimal well-being, avoiding the devastating trap of "stress."

Humans are built "tough" for survival as well as for personal peace and limitless results when you know how. You and your family are born for brilliance, let go of what's not working and UP-level your skills to become the master creator that you truly are.

Sally Gray is a Naturopath (BSc), Nutritionist (Masters), Herbalist, Transpersonal Counsellor, Master Life Coach, Success Principles Trainer, EFT & NLP Practitioner, Neuroscience Trainee & self-confessed personal growth junkie with over 20 years clinical experience.

Sally's clinical specialty has been in supporting families who are facing chronic child health issues such as cancer, epilepsy, auto-immune disease, mood and behavioral disorders and chronic immune dysfunction. Sally's favorite area of practice is facilitating women to achieve optimal wellness prior to conception to create optimal pregnancy outcomes and beyond for moms & babies.

Simple ABCs for school stress management

By Dr. Ron Rubenzer

How the Best Handle Stress - Your First Aid Kit 2018

Tips From Top Students:

Advice from top students in the most stressful academic courses of study is provided here, so the reader hopefully will take home some helpful tips for school success. School success is not magic, but method. Educational-Burnout is possible, not necessary. Most college (bound) students find academic rigors the most stressful aspect of school, but some of it is based on attitude.

- **Follow the ABC Approach to School Stress Management**

Practicing healthy Attitudes, Breathing

and Choices can increase the chances of your success, even under school stress.

- **Attitude:**

World renowned astronaut, Scott Kelly quotes explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton (1915) “A man must shape himself to a new mark, directly the old one goes to ground” (Kelly, S. 2017. Pg. 2).

- **Ask Yourself - “Why Are You Accepting This Challenge?”**

For your family (current and future)? Self-improvement? Helping others? Respect? Meeting a challenge? Midlife Crisis? Resiliency? List your own purpose.

- **Remember - Tested is Trusted**

Passing tests builds trust in yourself and others. Some folks (even politicians) are ‘legends in their own mind.’ Imagine if you will, a very young looking commercial airline pilot saying, “I’ve flown a lot, so I’m sure I can fly this plane.” The distance between a thought and a thing, is closed by calm, strategic, and persistent focus.

- **Working From the Inside Out**

No one can rob you of your free will. Focus on what you want (success) not what you don’t want. “If you think you can do a thing or think you can’t do a thing, you’re right.” (Henry Ford)



Breathe:

Doctor Recommended, wave-crest breathing – the cure to stress is right under your nose!

- Breathe in deeply to the count of five, hold at the crest of your breath
- Breathe out slowly to the count 6- 7- 8- 9- 10.
- Repeat as needed.

The famed Dr. Herbert Benson speaks of the Harvard Mantra as just being ONE. Focus your mind on ONE thought, one picture. Enjoy the sensation of relaxation.

Choice:

- **Develop a Plan** (*on a big calendar*) **and Stick to It.** – Celebrate that big exam AFTER you take it (not before). The National Education Association (3,000,000 members strong) researchers found that not having a plan for test-anxiety etc. lowers scores by 15 points (on a 100-point scale). A premier planning guide is the *College De-Stress Handbook* (www.heartmath.org; (831) 338-8500; **email:** info@heartmath.org).
- **Get Positive Peer Support** – Personalities are catching. Calm breeds calm. Choose successful, positive peers. Join a Pep Rally, not a Pity Party.
- **Journal Your Journey** – A Gratitude Journal is the best. Have a fun only,

no-judgment zone (no worries about correctness).

- **Enjoy Wet Pets** – Watching swimming fish tends to relax us.
 - **Have a Music Play List** – It soothes the soul. Einstein took “brain-breaks by playing Mozart. Einstein said, “I get most joy in life out of music.” <http://www.azquotes.com/quote/809758>
 - **“Candy IS Dandy”** – For Test Performance. Even the taste of peppermint has been found to improve performance. But try avoiding stress-snacking. Enjoy your treat just prior to your performance.
 - **Make Fun of Stress** – I took an IQ test and the results were NEGATIVE.
 - **Doctor Recommended. Least But Not Last** – Remember, exercise is the miracle drug without the drug. And realize the best, most faithful exercise equipment you can have is, your dog.
-

In Conclusion:

What IS the Heart of your school success?

In the end, the Heart of your school success, IS your heart. Learn by heart and by using your head. Your ‘head’ is equivalent to 100 laptops in memory capacity! But it is knowing by heart, what questions to ask and why, that makes you smarter than your smartphone.

Dr. Rubenzer is a school psychologist and the author of *How to Best Handle Stress*. He does private testing, SAT prep, and stress management at *Triad Counseling and Clinical Services* in Greensboro, North Carolina.

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Have *Contentment* delivered to your inbox each quarter!



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