

Healthy Living from the Start:

A Health Curriculum for Grades K–3



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Introduction

Welcome to *Healthy Living from the Start*, a comprehensive health curriculum that provides the framework for teaching children about health and well-being. Developing healthy habits in the early grades can help children maintain a high level of wellness throughout their lives.

Designed with flexibility in mind, this book has a format that allows you to easily customize your health program for use with multiple grades or in a sequential manner from kindergarten through third grade. The course is divided into 36 lessons, one per week for an entire school year. Each lesson includes three activities to choose from for each grade level, giving you a wide range of options for exploring each topic. Activities usually can be completed in 15–30 minutes.

This course offers a hands-on, experiential approach to health and fitness with varied activities that encourage children to learn by doing, making the learning more relevant and memorable. The material is divided into six units:

- I. Physical Body
- II. Personal Safety
- III. Healthy Habits
- IV. Self-Esteem
- V. Self and Community
- VI. Whole Health

Reviews are placed at the end of each unit, every six weeks, to give you a chance to go over previous information or to go into more depth on a topic of interest to your child. A checklist is provided with each review, and you are encouraged to check off activities as you do them. This will give you a good record of the health topics covered during the year, and it will tell you at a glance which activities are still waiting to be enjoyed in future months or years.

DISCLAIMER: None of the information, instructions, or activities in this book is intended to take the place of the advice and care of a qualified health-care professional. If you have any questions about your health or your child's, please consult your health-care provider.

This book is written with parents in mind, particularly homeschooling parents, but the curriculum can easily be adapted by teachers in a group setting. Sometimes you'll notice that the instructions specify that you should do something, or ask your child to do something, but oftentimes the instructions will be written as though you and your child are the same person. This is because you are encouraged to do these exercises with your child to promote good habits and to demonstrate proper technique. Doing the activities together also gives you the opportunity to personalize topics and makes it easier for you to adapt activities for your own family or group of children.

You may be surprised to find how much you know about health and fitness, or you may discover that there are a lot of areas where you might want to expand your knowledge. This book assumes that you, as the teacher, have a general knowledge of many of these topics. However, don't be discouraged if you don't know the nutritional makeup of the foods you eat or what task the kidneys perform. Turn each new question into an opportunity to learn. Let these lessons become a starting point for you and your child to seek answers and explore topics together.

Please keep in mind that this information is not intended to diagnose or treat illness or injury. The lesson material is designed to introduce topics related to health that will give your child a point of reference and framework for understanding health and illness, and injury care and prevention. None of these activities is meant to address, detect, or treat abusive or traumatic situations.

All of these activities provide an excellent opportunity for practical conversations around health-related topics, and these conversations can be done anywhere and anytime. Be on the lookout for ways to incorporate healthy activities and health knowledge into daily life. You may find the list of recommended reading found in the back of this book to be a helpful resource.

Above all, feel free to be creative and have fun! If an activity strikes your fancy, create variations on the theme. Use these lessons as a springboard for your own ideas. Imbue the activities with a sense of humor and playfulness whenever possible. Health is not just another subject to learn—it is the foundation for an energetic, productive, exuberant life.

Healthy Living from the Start can open the door for you and your children to experience together a lifestyle of health and wellness!

Lesson

1

Growth and Development

This week you'll expand your child's body awareness into the realm of growth and development. Choose one or more of the activities below and enjoy exploring together the ways that bodies grow.

K Kindergarten **From babyhood to now**

Look how far I've come

Time to pull out the baby photos and videos, and tell stories about when your child was a baby! Children love to hear about when they were young, particularly about when they couldn't do something (climb the stairs or say a person's name correctly, for example). This activity never gets old.

What can babies do?

This activity can be especially fun if you have a baby in the house, or there is one among your friends. This can start as a semi-serious experiment: Can the baby talk? Can the baby walk? Can the baby move a toy from hand to hand? It can quickly escalate into a silly game: Can the baby climb a tree? Can the baby whistle? Can the baby pour a glass of milk? No doubt the baby will enjoy the attention as your child tries to "teach" them to whistle or read a book. Of course, your child will realize these are silly ideas, but in the meantime, your child will become more aware of all the things they can now do that weren't possible in younger years.



If you have a baby in the family, you might move this conversation in another direction: What do babies need? This is a good chance to talk about body needs that don't change (the need for food and air, for instance) and those that do (the need for water or a toilet, for instance, neither of which babies need).

▣ Stages of life

Bring your child's attention to the many different ages and stages of growth and development revealed in the people around you. If you can, identify the following stages: infancy, toddlerhood, early childhood, childhood, preadolescence

(twens), adolescence (teens), young adulthood, adulthood, middle age, and old age (elders). You can take the opportunity to not only talk about physical growth and development, but also about mental and emotional growth, and how the development of intellectual or creative capacities can change over time and with experience.



1 Grade 1 Ways we grow

▣ Measure me!

Children love to keep a growth chart, and if you haven't started one yet, this is a great time to do so. If you have been keeping track of your child's height on a chart, wall, or doorway, compare different heights at different ages. Find other ways to measure your child. How much does your child weigh? How long are their hair and nails? Measure foot length, finger length, arm length, head circumference, hand span, and anything else you can think of, talking all the while of how bodies grow in different ways. Include siblings and pets—measure everyone!

▣ Giving a hand

Comparing hand size is another way to bring your child's attention to how bodies grow and change. Get a large piece of paper and paint your child's hand with a bright color of nontoxic paint. Press the hand onto the paper and lift it carefully. Write your child's name next to the handprint. Next, have each person in the family make a handprint, using different colors, if possible. Label each handprint and compare hand sizes. If you are feeling adventurous, do the same thing with footprints. If you are visiting the beach, you can easily compare hand- and footprints in the wet sand. Another idea is to make wet handprints and footprints on the sidewalk to compare shapes and sizes.



❑ How old? How young?

Does short mean young? Does tall mean old? Here is a fun way to focus attention on the different rates of normal growth by finding people (ones you know or people in photos in magazines) who defy what may be a commonly held belief. Ask your child: Do you know someone shorter than you who is older than you? Do you know someone who is taller than you but younger? Can you tell people's ages by their height? By their hair or faces? By their voices? By the way they walk? This activity can easily flow into a conversation about presumptions and judgments and respect for differences.

2 Grade 2 Body differences and diversity

❑ Wonderful world of differences

This is a great activity for introducing the subject of ethnic diversity. It can be done while you are out and about (large gatherings often provide especially diverse groups of people), or at home using photos from books and magazines. Begin by looking for similarities: That woman has the same color hair as I do. That boy has glasses like mine. That librarian has curly hair like Dad. You and your child can take turns pointing out similarities. Next, begin to notice differences: That grocery clerk was much taller than me; the old woman at the post office walked with a limp. Model sensitivity and respect by saying something like, "Sometimes people don't like to talk about their bodies," or by making sure to speak quietly or out of earshot of others. Present this activity with a sense of wonder at the amazing diversity of humankind.

❑ Growing my way

Use animal books or videos to find out how quickly animals learn to walk, run, hunt, swim, etc. Compare this to humans in general and then to individual human beings. This is a good way to introduce the topic of learning differences, medical conditions, and special needs, and to point out that every individual grows and develops at their own pace.

❑ Every shade of color

Begin this activity by having your child place their arm next to every willing person (friends, family, and neighbors) to look at the differences in skin tone. Probably no two people, even within a single family, will have the exact same skin tone. Next, have your child use colored pencils to try to capture on paper the many different skin tones seen during the experiment. This will work best if you have available a large selection of colored pencils or a set of colors that can easily blend with one another. Watercolor paints are also a good medium for this activity. This exercise can also be done with eye color and hair color.



3

Grade 3

Body changes

❑ **Growing pains**

Sometimes growing up is painful in more ways than one. Many children experience physical aches and pains as their bodies go through a growth spurt, but growing up can be painful in other ways as children become aware of leaving behind the carefree state of early childhood. Ask your child what things they miss about being little. Fitting comfortably on laps and being carried might be mentioned, for instance. Let your child know, “It’s okay to sometimes want to go back to a time when you were carried if your legs got tired, or to when others took care of so many of your needs and you weren’t expected to do anything.” You might even let your child act out some babyish behavior (such as letting you feed them) or play with toys they’ve outgrown. After some time reliving this earlier time, you can begin to discuss the privileges and benefits of being older that your child now enjoys. Perhaps the child has recently outgrown having to use a booster seat in the car, or now has a later bedtime than before. End this exercise by looking at the new freedoms middle childhood brings.

❑ **I’m still me**

Instead of focusing on what has changed, this is a chance to talk about what has stayed the same. Have your child make a list of all the things they can think of that haven’t changed in recent years. At the same time, you make a list of ways that your child has remained the same. Don’t look at each other’s lists until you are finished. Your list might include things like eye color, love of french fries, sleeping with a certain stuffed animal, humming when drawing, etc. When your lists are complete, compare them. This activity can give your child a sense of security during a time when so many changes are happening physically, mentally, and emotionally.

❑ **Tweens and what to expect**

Big changes are on the horizon for the third grader, and it’s helpful to provide a space for talking about feelings as well as imparting knowledge. This is a great time to provide a book about body changes during adolescence. Often tweens prefer to read privately about hormonal and physical changes that may make them feel self-conscious. See the resource section for titles (Karen Gravelle and Lynda Madaras have written excellent books for girls and boys), or ask friends, a librarian, or search online. This is also an excellent time to establish a routine for talking and checking in regularly, such as just before bedtime or while riding in the car.

Lesson

2

Body Awareness

In this lesson, you'll help your child explore the amazing human body. Choose one (or more) of the following activities to do this week.



Kindergarten

Body geography: Outside parts

□ What's this?

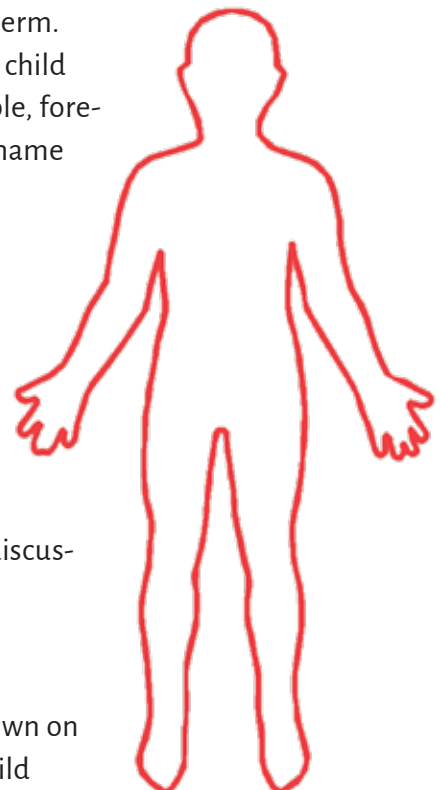
This is a playful questioning game where you point to something on your body or your child's (say, your elbow or your heel) and ask your child, "What's this?" You can take turns, letting your child point to something and asking you its name. Start off easy, with well-known body parts, and then make it more challenging: scalp, gums, knuckle, sole of the foot, small of the back, etc. Change things up by asking, "What do you call this?" and point to the arch of the foot or the earlobe and see if your child can come up with the correct term.

Have fun by naming body parts faster and faster and having your child scramble to touch them: wrist, cheekbone, ankle, chin, shin, temple, forearm, jaw, forehead, eyelashes. Switch places and have your child name body parts in quick succession while you react as fast as you can.

Your comfort level and your family's values will help you decide whether or not you want to include genitals in this game (easily done if you are playing it at bath time or while dressing). If you do include all external body parts, you may want to include both the common name your family uses (if any) and the correct anatomical term. Using correct terminology along with more familiar terms will help your child feel more comfortable and informed if an illness, injury, or doctor's office visit requires discussion about genitalia.

□ Body tracing

Place a large piece of paper on the floor and have your child lie down on it. Draw an outline of your child's body in chalk or marker. Your child



might want to draw clothes, hair, a face, and other features on it. Cut out the body shape and tape it to the wall or door.

If you don't have a large piece of art paper (from an easel roll, for example) or butcher paper (often used as packing material in boxes), you can glue or tape together several pieces. You can also do this activity outside, drawing chalk outlines on the sidewalk or driveway (make sure to color them in!).

❑ **Animal friends**

Use your pet for this activity, or borrow a pet from a friend. Examine the animal's body to find ways it is similar to the human body. Can you find the knee or ankle? Are there finger or toe joints like ours? What does the animal's tongue look like? Next, look for ways the animal's body is different: ears, tail, neck, etc. This is a fun way to marvel at the diversity of body types and body mechanics, and to gain a greater appreciation for the human body. Make sure the pet is a willing participant and comfortable with this attention. This is a good time to teach your child to respect animals.

1 Grade 1 **Body geography: Inside parts**

❑ **Where is it?**

This activity asks children to point to internal organs, which is much more challenging than identifying external body parts. They might not know very many organs yet, but they can probably point to their heart (and put their ear to your chest to listen to your heartbeat for proof of its location) and lungs. (You might have to explain that lungs are used for breathing.) Experiment with taking big breaths with hands on your rib cage to feel the lungs working. See if your child can point to the stomach, brain, throat, bones, and muscles too. Feel free to add complexity according to your child's interest and knowledge: bladder, kidney, diaphragm, veins. You may want to combine this activity with the body tracing activity in the kindergarten section above so your child can relate these organs to the body map.

❑ **What does it do?**

The goal of this activity is to explore the basic purpose of different internal organs. Depending on your own knowledge, and your child's interest, you may want to do a little research beforehand to brush up on your anatomy and physiology. Here is a basic list to begin with:

- heart: pumps blood through the body
- lungs: breathe air in and out
- throat: lets air into the lungs and food into the stomach—divided into esophagus (food) and trachea (air)
- stomach: digests food to give us energy
- intestines: absorb nutrients from digested food

- brain: controls the body and houses all our thoughts
- muscles: move the body
- bones: support the body

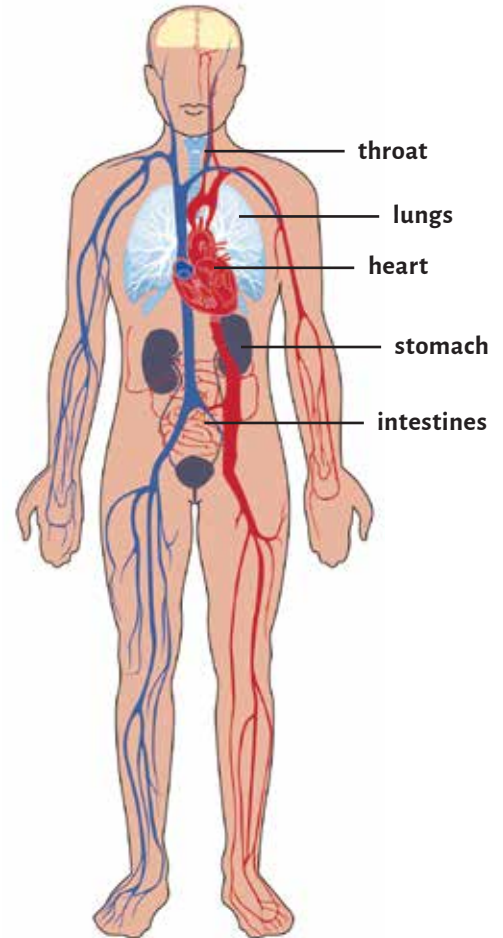
Let your child try to feel where each body part is or get a book from the library with simple illustrations to help make the information more real.

❑ I wonder . . .

Sometimes asking questions can help us understand things, even if we don't know all the answers. The goal is to promote curiosity about the human body. You can search together to find the answers to any questions that really spark your child's interest. You might have to ask all the questions, or your child might be good at wondering about things. Here are a few questions to get you started:

- How many hairs are on your head?
- How long would your hair grow if you never cut it?
- What is the fastest a person has ever run?
- How long can a person hold their breath under water?
- How many pounds of food does a person eat in one year?
- How tall will I grow?
- Why are there lines on my palm?

Rather than looking for scientific answers to these questions, you might explore them in a physical way. Count the number of hairs in one tiny section of your child's head. See how fast your child can run, and how fast you can run. Place a piece of cardboard in your palm to keep you from bending it (pretending the skin was stiff and those lines weren't there) and see how hard it is to do things.



2 Grade 2 Anatomy

❑ Amazing body

Find a book in the library with a human body model and overlaid transparencies that allow you to see deeper into the body (skin, then muscle, then organs, then skeleton). Many encyclopedias have these, or you can search online. (You'll probably want to look for a good resource ahead of time

since some are more graphic than others—a sketched version may be more appropriate than a photo-realistic one.)

If your child is interested, you can point out more complex body parts: esophagus, trachea, liver, kidney, intestines, etc. You can also trace a human body and have your child draw in organs or bones. *The Anatomy Coloring Book* is a wonderful resource, though it is aimed at high school and college students, so it is fairly complex. You can also find anatomy coloring templates online.

❑ **Making the connection**

This is a fun activity that is done standing up. Face each other and ask your child to move a single body part, such as a finger, without moving anything else. You do the same. The finger will be easy. Next, ask your child to move a hand or foot without moving anything else (and you do the same)—this gets a little harder and your child might notice other muscles or joints coming into play. Talk about what you are feeling and which body parts seem to be connected to others. Progress to more challenging tasks, moving ribs, neck, hips, etc., while trying to keep everything else still. It can't be done! You can't move your neck without moving your head; you can't move your hips without moving your knees, buttocks, or spine. Once you start laughing—which is very likely—talk about what moves when you laugh.

❑ **Skeletons**

Explore the skeletons of animals and humans in as many different ways as you can. Here are just a few ideas:

- Find a skeleton model (check the doctor's office or a local university).
- View animal skeletons in a museum.
- Examine animal skeletons found while out hiking.
- View X-rays.
- Play with Halloween decoration skeletons.

Make comparisons between your child's body (and your own body) and the skeletons, whether human or animal. If possible, explore how the bones and joints move. See how many moving parts (joints) you can identify. Some are obvious—knee and elbow—but what about jaw, spine, toes, etc.? If you can, name a few of the bones, or talk about how each one has its own unique name.



3

Grade 3 Privacy

□ **Good touch, bad touch**

This is an opportunity to talk about inappropriate touch in a very safe, empowering way. Depending on your circumstances and your child's personality, you can keep this information very general, or move carefully into the realm of abuse prevention. A good way to begin is to play a role-playing game where you take turns touching each other's hand or arm in good ways and bad ways. For instance, a fingertip touch or a massage-type squeeze feels good, but a pinch or a slap doesn't. Experiment back and forth, taking turns, and talk about how everyone has a different threshold for pain and a different comfort level. Some people love deep massage, for instance, while others can't tolerate it, and some people love a light touch, but others are too ticklish.

You can stop the activity here, just discussing how to be aware of and respect the body sensitivities of others, or you can move the conversation into the realm of how some body parts are more public, so to speak, and others are more private. A good entry into this more serious conversation is to use the example of hugging. Talk about how a hug from someone you love makes you feel great but a hug from someone you don't like or don't know well can feel awkward or invasive.

□ **Clothes, doors, and respect**

How does your family protect the privacy of each member? Who needs privacy and who doesn't? (Babies and dogs don't, for example.) What helps us be aware of the need for privacy and respect it? Each family has different rules and levels of comfort around privacy, nudity, and bodily functions. For instance, many young moms find it necessary to have the baby in the bathroom with them, but might prefer privacy from older children or other adults. This conversation can take place any time it naturally arises and be talked about when privacy needs change as a child gets older or as parents draw new boundaries.

□ **Comfort zones**

What is a comfort zone? Does everyone have the same "zone"? Everyone has a certain comfort level with touch, privacy, nudity, etc., and even within a single family with shared values, individuals can feel very differently. As children grow toward adolescence, their feelings will undoubtedly go through a change in this regard as well. For instance, young children usually don't pay any attention when their parents kiss, but older children often become uncomfortable or embarrassed by public displays of affection (even if these "public displays" take place inside the home!). Make space to discuss these matters with your third grader whenever a situation arises or whenever your child has questions or shows a natural change in a comfort zone level.

Lesson

6

Unit I Review: Physical Body

Check off the activities you completed in the first unit (lessons 1–5). Review any information that your child was particularly interested in, and take some time to explore the topic more fully, or revisit activities that your child especially enjoyed. Feel free to try one or two new activities to increase your child’s knowledge of the physical body.

Lesson 1: Growth and Development

KINDERGARTEN	From babyhood to now <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Look how far I’ve come<input type="checkbox"/> What can babies do?<input type="checkbox"/> Stages of life
GRADE 1	Ways we grow <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Measure me!<input type="checkbox"/> Giving a hand<input type="checkbox"/> How old? How young?
GRADE 2	Body differences and diversity <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Wonderful world of differences<input type="checkbox"/> Growing my way<input type="checkbox"/> Every shade of color
GRADE 3	Body changes <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Growing pains<input type="checkbox"/> I’m still me<input type="checkbox"/> Tweens and what to expect

Lesson 2: Body Awareness

KINDERGARTEN	Body geography: Outside parts <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> What's this?<input type="checkbox"/> Body tracing<input type="checkbox"/> Animal friends
GRADE 1	Body geography: Inside parts <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Where is it?<input type="checkbox"/> What does it do?<input type="checkbox"/> I wonder . . .
GRADE 2	Anatomy <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Amazing body<input type="checkbox"/> Making the connection<input type="checkbox"/> Skeletons
GRADE 3	Privacy <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Good touch, bad touch<input type="checkbox"/> Clothes, doors, and respect<input type="checkbox"/> Comfort zones

Lesson 3: Hygiene

KINDERGARTEN	Keeping clean <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Show me how<input type="checkbox"/> The skin you're in<input type="checkbox"/> Getting dirty, getting clean
GRADE 1	Teeth <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Be true to your teeth (or they'll be false to you)<input type="checkbox"/> Visiting the dentist<input type="checkbox"/> Counting teeth
GRADE 2	Disease prevention <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Rules to remember<input type="checkbox"/> How things spread<input type="checkbox"/> Building immunity
GRADE 3	Good grooming habits <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Use your senses<input type="checkbox"/> Long hair everywhere<input type="checkbox"/> Grooming checklist

Lesson 4: Illness Prevention

KINDERGARTEN	Staying healthy <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> The big five<input type="checkbox"/> Eyes, ears, nose, and mouth<input type="checkbox"/> Water every day
GRADE 1	Recognizing illness <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Body check-in<input type="checkbox"/> What comes out<input type="checkbox"/> Colds and flu
GRADE 2	Being sick <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Garden delights<input type="checkbox"/> Warm comfort<input type="checkbox"/> TLC (tender loving care)
GRADE 3	Contagious diseases <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Fly through the air with the greatest of ease<input type="checkbox"/> Keep it to yourself: Bodily fluids and contagious illnesses<input type="checkbox"/> Wise words

Lesson 5: Basic First Aid

KINDERGARTEN	Cuts and scrapes, bumps and bruises <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Band-Aid, ice, or heat? What does it need?<input type="checkbox"/> Caring for a cut<input type="checkbox"/> Sew an ice pack cover
GRADE 1	Caring for broken bones <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Wearing a splint<input type="checkbox"/> Making a sling<input type="checkbox"/> Making a plaster cast
GRADE 2	Medical supplies and equipment <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> First aid kit<input type="checkbox"/> Pharmacy visit<input type="checkbox"/> Ambulance exploration
GRADE 3	Medical careers <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Medical jobs<input type="checkbox"/> Medical specialties<input type="checkbox"/> Ask the doc

Lesson

17

Stress Management

No matter how hard we try to create a harmonious home for our families, life can get stressful at times. Children can feel the strain of this as keenly as adults, and can benefit from developing skills to recognize and deal with stress effectively.

K Kindergarten **Getting outside**

❑ Run for fun

Exercise is an excellent way to shake off the physical tension and negative feelings caused by stress. Running has its own element of sheer joy. Tell your child that the two of you are going to come up with a plan of where/how far to run when one of you needs a break or feels frustrated. Plan an easily accessible route: once around the outside of the house, for instance, or down the driveway to the mailbox and back, or around the backyard and up and down the steps three times. Practice the “Run for Fun” route when your child is in a good mood, and talk about using a phrase (“Time to run for fun!”) when one of you needs a break.

❑ Dig and pour

Sensory activities, like playing in the sand, dirt, or water, have a very soothing effect. The next time your child is showing signs of stress (seems distracted, frustrated, angry, has a tense facial expression, etc.), introduce a sensory activity like one of the following:

- Put some sand in a plastic dishpan or baking tray with some glass “gems,” small animals or vehicles, or small wooden blocks. (If your child doesn’t immediately get involved, you can move a few things around and push the sand a bit with your finger to get things started.)



- Fill the sink with warm water, add a few drops of dish soap, and drop in an egg beater, whisk, and a couple of small plastic cups for pouring. A straw can also be used to blow bubbles (you might have to show your child how to do this).
- Take a shovel outside and dig up a small patch of dirt. Add a few toy cars, sticks, rocks, or blocks to encourage hands-on play.

Afterward, when your child is feeling better, talk about how they felt before and after this sensory play. This is a good opening for a simple conversation about learning to recognize when you need a break and doing something that will help you feel more relaxed.

Walk out loud

It's hard to hold on to stress when walking outside and talking, or better yet, singing. Take a hike together and start talking or singing, encouraging your child to do the same. When you see your child begin to relax, invite a conversation about handling stress by talking about your own experience. For instance, you might say, "Whenever I'm feeling tense about something, it always helps me to take a walk. I usually start feeling better right away, like a heavy weight is lifted off my shoulders, and I can take a deep breath and relax. Do you ever feel that way?" You don't have to try to bring your child's attention to it any more formally—just a simple conversation like this can help your child begin to develop effective stress management skills.

Grade 1 **Figuring out what bothers you**

Bother list

A big part of learning to manage stress is learning to recognize what triggers it. This is different for each person, of course. Create a bother list with your child—one for each of you—listing all the things that bother each of you. Feel free to make suggestions for one another's list: "I notice that you don't like it when someone slams the door" or "I think it bothers you when your brother takes your toys without asking." Your child might want to illustrate their list. If you'd like, brainstorm solutions to managing these stressors in an effective way.

Stress continuum

This activity can help your child begin to judge different levels of stress. Draw a line with chalk outside or place a tape measure or a long ribbon on the floor inside. On one end of the line, place a happy face, and on the other end, a sad face. Begin by mentioning something that bothers you and stand on the line in a place between happy and sad that illustrates how much this thing bothers you. For instance, you might say, "I don't like it when people leave their shoes in the middle of the floor. It bothers me this much," and go stand on the line about one-third of the way toward happy

(closer to happy than sad, or wherever feels right to you). Take turns with your child saying something you don't like and moving to different points along the continuum.

Keep the focus on stress-producing scenarios and not opinions, such as food dislikes. If your child says, "I don't like broccoli," you can rephrase it to, "I don't like it when I have to eat broccoli for dinner." (Broccoli isn't stressful, but eating broccoli is.) Afterward, discuss ways to minimize the stressors or come up with strategies to manage the ones that cannot change.

□ **Count, sing, climb, and then check in again**

In this activity (which you can introduce either when your child is feeling relaxed and happy or when your child seems stressed), you'll encourage using a loud voice and large motor activities to diffuse the tension. The activity has three steps:

1. Acknowledge the need for a break.
2. Do a lively, noisy activity from the list below (or make up your own) for five minutes.
3. Check in again and report any change in feelings.

Here are some good activities to try:

- March around the house (inside or out) and loudly count 1-2-3-4 over and over, or chant a rhyme or sing a song in time to the marching. Demonstrate for your child big movements (high knees, arms swinging) and a very strong, loud voice.
- Climb while singing a song—any song will do, or you can make up a silly song: "Look at me! I'm climbing in a tree!" Climbing can take place in a tree (if you are lucky enough to have a good climbing tree), a climbing structure, or any sturdy obstacles in the house or yard. Even a stepladder will work, or your child can hop on and off a chair. Set the timer for five minutes and encourage vigorous climbing and singing.
- Put on lively or dramatic music and dance while humming or singing along. Encourage big movements and loud vocal accompaniment. Dancing with a silk scarf can encourage large, sweeping motions.
- Use your hands to drum on your legs, making drumming sounds with your mouth at the same time. Or use your hands to drum on a table, wall, or a real drum, if you have one. Keep up a rhythm with your mouth that matches or complements the rhythm of your hands.
- Hand clapping (especially creating a complex rhythm) and tap dancing are also good ways to use the body as a percussion instrument. Remember to vocalize along with it.



- If you'd like, you can talk about how getting the heart and lungs pumping and the muscles flexing and active creates physical changes that help your mind and body to relax.

2 Grade 2 Relaxation techniques

□ The great outdoors

Being outside in nature can have a relaxing effect that is almost instantaneous—you might notice deeper breathing, a calmer mind, and more relaxed movements within minutes. Try several of these ways of being in nature over the next few days or weeks:

- Sit by a stream and listen.
- Use a stick to draw in the dirt.
- Try to silently follow a bird or squirrel.
- Collect stones or sticks that look interesting.
- Dig a hole in the sand and fill it up with water.
- Wrap your arms around a tree and look up.

Discuss with your child how each makes you feel. Does your body feel more relaxed? Do your thoughts feel calmer and clearer? Do you feel happy, content, or peaceful?

□ Music and movement

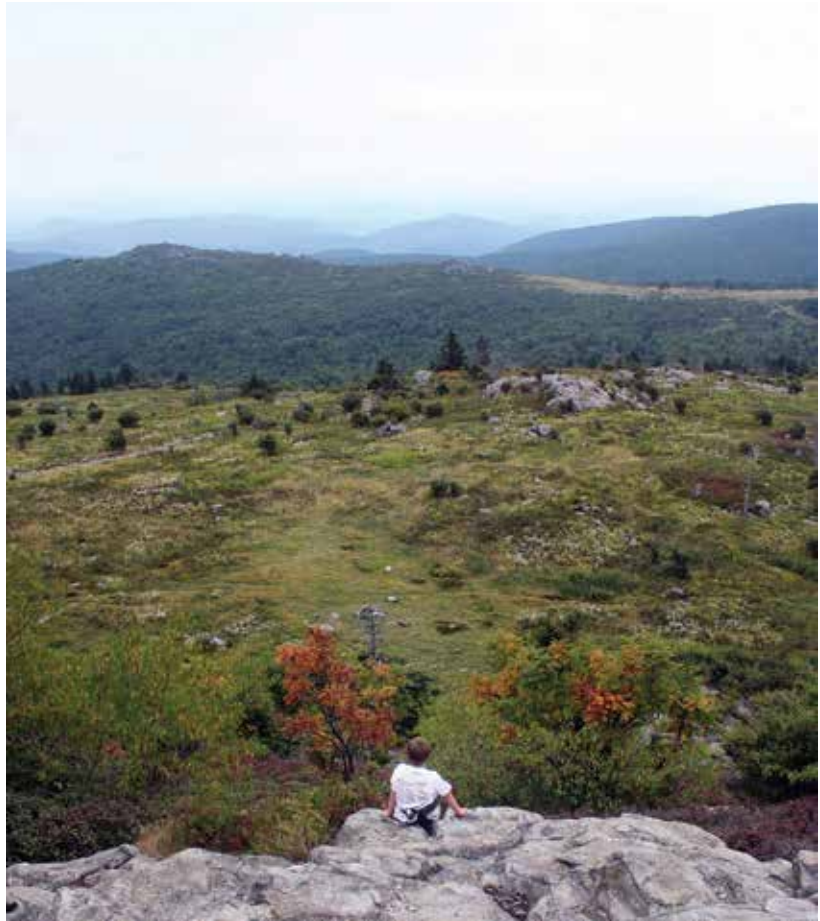
Music and movement go together naturally and most children will move their bodies to music without much prompting or guidance. Feel free to join in, though! Put on different types of music and play a couple of minutes of each type, such as pop, classical, rock, jazz, and folk. Talk about how you feel after moving in different ways to different music. Keep it simple: “That song made me feel like jumping.” “That song made me think of lying in a hammock.” Afterward, you might discuss how relaxed you feel after dancing to music.

□ Visualization

Many people use visualization to help them relax during times of stress. “Go to your happy place” has become a cliché for this technique, but the technique is quite valuable and very easy to teach to children. Explain to your child that visualization is helpful to do whenever they are feeling overwhelmed or anxious about something. It is fun to practice anytime, and practice will help your child be better able to draw upon their inner resources whenever needed.

Begin by asking your child to get in a comfortable position (sitting or lying down) with eyes closed. Say, “Take a deep breath, slowly breathing in through your nose, and then letting all the air out through your mouth.” Do this for three or four breaths, and then ask your child to picture a place

they really love to be. Your child may want to talk about this place or just picture it silently. Encourage your child to picture this place in their mind as fully as possible, remembering as many details of how it looks, sounds, smells, and anything else that helps put the child in that imagined environment. At this point, you may begin to see a smile on your child's face as these happy memories work their magic. After your child has spent a few minutes imagining this favorite place, you might say something like, "You can open your eyes whenever you are ready, but remember you can always go back to this wonderful place whenever you need a little break from your worries." You can also suggest that your child might have several special places to call to mind to help them feel relaxed whenever it is needed.



3 Grade 3 When stress is good

Motivating stress

There are times when stress can be beneficial. Many adults use short term stress motivators very effectively: deadlines or intense challenges (mental or physical) are good examples. This activity helps your child explore how stress can be useful in improving performance, which can lead to a lower level of anxiety-producing stress in the long run. When performance improves, you often feel better about yourself and feel better equipped to handle future challenges.

Begin this activity by asking your child to leap as far as possible. Mark the place where they took off and landed on the ground. Measure this if you'd like. Next, draw a line or place markers at the take-off and landing points and explain that your child has to jump again but this time cannot step on either line. You can be creative and say it is hot lava or an electric fence or a sleeping snake, or just

say that under no circumstances must a foot touch either line. (This introduces tension into the situation.) Have your child leap again. Chances are good that the leap will be even farther than the one that was “as far as possible.” Talk about why this happened. You can explain how stress produces an adrenaline boost in the body, or just discuss how the situation made your child want to focus and try harder.

□ Tension and relaxation

Tension can be detrimental if held in the body without being released, but tension can also lead to a greater sense of relaxation when it is released. Have your child try this. (You do it too.) Talk about how relaxed the body feels after a period of extreme tension. Begin by having your child lie down on the floor and relax the legs. Ask your child to think about how the relaxed legs feel and remember this feeling. Next, do something very strenuous with the legs—a fast bike ride, running in place, running up and down stairs, etc. Do this strenuous activity for an additional 30 seconds or a minute longer than your child wants to—this is when the added level of tension comes in. Push your child to a greater effort just when energy is flagging. Act like a fitness trainer (“You can do it! Faster! Harder!”). Then walk for a minute or so until the heart rate and breathing are normalized, and then lie down again and have your child focus on relaxing the legs. Do they feel different now? More relaxed, loose, or heavy? Warmer? Discuss what happened in the body as a result of pushing it into a state of tension and then fully releasing the tension.

□ Internal warning system

Recognizing stress, distinguishing helpful tension from anxiety-producing stress, and knowing when and how to release tension are important life skills. Brainstorm with your child ways to tell when stress is building up and what to do with the stress (use it or lose it). Every person will have different observations and ideas in this regard. Write down warning signs that the stress is not helpful or needs to be released, and include ideas for dealing with it.

Lesson

23

Anger Management

Even people who love each other very much get angry at one another at times. Negative emotions, such as anger, are a natural part of being human, and learning to deal with anger effectively is an essential part of growing up.



Kindergarten

How to show your anger

❑ Angry body

Children know what anger feels like, but they might not understand how it is expressed in the body. Choose a time when your child is in a good mood, and ask them to make a mad face. (You make one too.) Next, ask them to show what angry hands look like (or what you do with your hands when you are angry). Then ask to see angry feet. Ask to see an angry walk. You might even ask to see angry eyebrows or angry hair (that should be funny!). Finally, ask what an angry body looks like.

Depending on how your child feels at this point (dissolving into giggles or becoming tense) you might de-escalate things by having your child show happy face, happy hands, happy feet, etc.

❑ Mad words, mean words

Most of us have had the experience of speaking in anger and saying something mean-spirited or hurtful. In this exercise, you will help your child begin to differentiate between mad words (words expressing feelings of anger) and mean words (words that are insulting or hurtful). There's a big difference. Ask, "What would you say if you were mad at someone for breaking your favorite toy on purpose?" Depending on the response, you can point out that these words express feelings clearly in a perfectly acceptable way or that they are hurtful words. If hurtful, explain why they hurt, and help your child find a more appropriate way to express these strong emotions. Give your child a few different scenarios to help you discuss healthy ways to express anger verbally.

❑ Mad art

Expressing anger nonverbally through art—drawing, painting, music, dance, etc.—can be very helpful, especially to a young child whose verbal skills may not yet be very sophisticated. The next time your child is angry, guide them into a vigorous artistic activity. Choose one to which your child is naturally drawn. Instruct your child to “Draw your anger,” or “Draw how that makes you feel.” Afterward, you might want to talk about how the child felt before and after the artistic activity.

1 Grade 1 How do I really feel?

❑ So many emotions

It’s easy for many of us (both children and adults) to fall into the habit of identifying just a handful of emotions to describe the many ways we feel. We might say we’re happy when we are really content or proud or blissful. We might say we’re angry when we are really disappointed or frustrated or feeling betrayed. In this activity, your child will keep track of all the different feelings experienced over the course of one day or one week. You will need to help by reminding your child to write things down or by doing it yourself. The idea is not to interrupt your child’s experience repeatedly but to help draw attention gently to the wide range of nuanced feelings experienced regularly in life. Help your child pinpoint an elusive or complex emotion by providing new feeling words.

❑ That makes me feel . . .

In this activity, your child will create a visual barometer of emotions. On strips of paper or small cards, write down as many emotions as your child can think of, one per strip. Have your child create a sign that says, “I’m feeling _____.” Put the sign on your child’s bedroom door or on the refrigerator (or wherever makes sense). Attach a small piece of rolled tape or double stick tape to the back of each emotion card, and place these in a long row beside the sign. Whenever your child recognizes a change in emotion, they can choose the appropriate emotion card and use it to fill in the blank.

❑ How many feeling words do you know?

Help your child expand their vocabulary or emotions with this activity. Have your child name an emotion, such as bored, and then you give two or three related emotions (like lonely, weary, or restless). See if your child knows what these words mean, and if not, explain them. Describing emotions can be challenging, much like trying to describe a taste or color. It is often easier to define an emotion by describing a scenario to which your child can easily relate. Have your child name four or five emotions for you to supply similar but different feelings, and discuss how each emotion differs from similar emotions.

2 Grade 2 Resolving anger

❑ What's really the problem?

It is common for a child to display anger over something when the root of the problem lies elsewhere. Even adults do this! Successful resolution of anger depends on identifying the root cause. This activity can be done using imaginary scenarios when your child is feeling good (“How would you feel if . . .”) or with an actual situation to which your child is reacting with anger. Help your child resolve the angry feelings by asking questions like, “What happened? Why did that happen? Why did that make you feel angry? Did something else about this situation make you mad? What led up to this situation?” Help your child talk through the issues to find the true cause of the anger and then work toward a solution.

Children often like to hear about when others had to deal with difficult situations, so feel free to share stories from your own life about times when you experienced strong emotions.

❑ Problem-solving

There are times when we get mad at ourselves for something we've done or failed to do, or when something happens for which there is no one to blame. The next time your child expresses anger over something that happens, help them zero in on the problem and look for ways to fix it, if possible. For instance, if your child is angry because a fort they are building keeps falling apart, help your child pinpoint why this is happening. Brainstorm solutions by asking, “What can change this situation for the better?” Let your child try various ideas until they find one that works, going from problem to accomplishment. This activity can introduce the importance of being kind to yourself and bring awareness to the fact that getting angry at yourself doesn't solve the problem. Making mistakes is part of living and learning, and it is often best to focus on how to correct mistakes rather than trying to ensure they never happen (impossible) or getting angry when they (inevitably) do.

❑ Say it, stomp it, start over

Here is an activity that gives your child a way to physically and verbally express anger and then release it and move on. It has three parts:

1. Say it.
2. Stomp it.
3. Start over.

You can have your child practice this first for fun so that the next time anger bursts forth, your child will know what to do. First, have your child name the feeling and what has caused it (such as, “I am mad because there is no more milk and I want milk!”). Then have your child stomp around a bit, either making mad noises or using words (“No more milk! No more milk!”). After this has gone on for a minute or so, have your child take a deep breath and maybe shake out their arms and legs, and then start over with what they were doing before getting mad (in this case, getting a drink). The difference is that this time your child can approach the problem in a calmer way (“There’s no more milk. What else can I drink?”).

3 Grade 3 De-escalation techniques

□ Heading it off at the pass

Learning to recognize emotional triggers allows you to avoid getting upset or to diffuse the situation before it can escalate. Ask your child to make a list of things that often bring on anger. For each item on the list, encourage your child to think about warning signs that signal the situation is about to happen. Write these down. For instance, your child might get angry every time a younger sibling interrupts repeatedly when your child has a friend over to visit. The warning sign that anger might be triggered could be that there have already been two interruptions, or that the older two are involved in something that requires concentration, or that the younger child is tired or hungry (and thus more likely to need attention). Once the warning triggers are identified, help your child come up with a plan to use this awareness to prevent problems in the future.

□ Take a breath (or several)

Many adults learn to take a few deep breaths to calm down when anger threatens. This simple technique can help you face a stressful situation in a more productive way. Children can be encouraged to use this technique too. Teach your child to take a few deep breaths (or breathe deeply while counting to ten), and then try to view the situation in a calmer manner. You might also help your child think of activities that can help when life is stressful, such as deep breathing, going for a walk, spending time with a pet, or talking to a friend. You can share what works for you, and then your child can create a list of things to do to de-stress. This list can be added to over time.

□ Take a hike

When two or more people are having trouble coming to an agreement or when emotions are making it difficult to work together, it can be very useful to take a break and do something physical together, such as a hike. This works for children and adults alike. The next time your child is feeling anger as a result of an interaction with someone else, try to take the two of them for a hike or a bike ride or a swim—anything that gets them in a new environment (preferably outdoors) and doing something they both enjoy. Chances are good that the problem will either dissolve and disappear, or the children will be able to come back to it with a new, productive mindset. Afterward, make sure to discuss how and why this works.

