

The Purposeful Parent

Family wellness for every age at every stage



A Parents Guide for Raising Healthy Kids

This e-book from Hofstra Summer Camps offers parents tips and advice on being creative, staying healthy, and finding fun.



How to Create Close Siblings

No one fights like siblings, but those relationships can be the most rewarding ones in life. You can encourage closeness and deflate some of the arguing with three simple tips.

1. Create a Family Value System

“Simply put, values are what is important to a person,” said Dr. Susan Kuczmariski, the author of six books, including the best selling *Becoming a Happy Family*. “Young children, very early on, have their own values, and it is very important to let them surface. Seeing clearly what you value is the first step.”



So have each member of your family write down their values (and help children express their values if they are too young to know their ABCs). Then have everyone in the family take a close look at what’s important, circling the top five. Talk about what everyone wrote down and decide what the “family values” should be.

“This does not mean that the individual abandon those personal values not selected by the group,” said Kuczmariski. “Those values will always be important to that person, but the family needs to have its own set of values. It is important that a family’s values include at least some of the values of each individual member.” Try to design specific ways to keep and reinforce these values through your family’s activities and choices.

2. Encourage Family Closeness

Spend time together – without technology. Be playful and creative. “Our family has an annual frog race,” said Kuczmariski. “We’ve discovered that when you blow gently on the frog’s back end, it will leap. You can’t pick up or touch the frog with your hands (or feet) at any point in the race. Every entrant must receive a prize.” Such activities promote togetherness and make lifelong memories. She also suggests doing a “blank canvas” project where the family paints together on a single canvas, with each member contributing to a portion. Do this once a year and date the projects. The art will serve as a lasting memory. “Do whatever it takes to share, listen, and connect,” said Kuczmariski.

3. Have Rules and Be Kind

Nothing pits siblings against one another than having no rules in place in the family culture. Rules are different than values – they determine the regulations of the household. “Setting and maintaining appropriate boundaries helps to protect each family member’s dignity (and sanity!) and to preserve reasonable harmony in your home,” said Kuczmariski. Offer your kids a chance to help create the rules. Then communicate clearly what the agreed upon rules are, through written and verbal reinforcements. “The goal is to arrive at a mutually generated and agreed upon set of rules, but one that leaves the door open for adjusting them a bit down the road [as kids age],” she suggested.

Stress to your children the importance of kindness. You should set an example in how you treat your spouse and each family member. “There are no specific activities that bring about kindness, but the adults in a child’s life should model kindness,” said Dr. Judith S. Kaufman, professor of teaching, learning, and technology in Hofstra University’s School of Education. “Young children are most interested in what adults are doing and will observe them closely. A child’s play is usually based on their observations of the grown-up world.”

Insist that siblings treat each other with kindness, too. Talk to your children about why kindness is important and what it looks like. “It can be as simple as a hello, a smile, or ‘How are you feeling?’” explained Kuczmariski.

Create Your Own Adventures: Family Videos 101

You don't need to be a techie to make a family video with your children. "Smartphones are by far the easiest and most practical way to record video for a trip, especially considering how much technology has advanced in camera functionality, quality, and accessibility," said Michael Pugliese, president and co-founder of Game Builders Academy.

When recording a family outing, you may want to consider narrating your experiences to the camera or having conversations that explain what you are doing in that moment. This will remind you of the details years later when you may have forgotten them. It will also allow others watching with you to feel like they are part of the experience. Don't wait for the annual vacation though; you can video anything – a trip to the park, a day at the beach, or planting a garden in the backyard. You can also make movies with your family. Write a script, assign roles, gather some simple props, and film it. Then hold a viewing party with popcorn and movie candy.



Before filming, prepare your equipment – charge your battery and make sure you have adequate storage space. Pugliese suggests bringing a portable battery pack and backing up photos and videos using cloud services such as Amazon Photos. For editing, he says that Adobe Premiere and Final Cut Pro provide highly sophisticated editing power, but you can go surprisingly far with free software and services such as the built-in Windows Movie Maker and iMovie on your PC or Mac, and web applications that automate the editing process for you like Animoto. "A crucial step in the editing process is to cut out any unwanted or unnecessary footage," said Pugliese. "This could be mistakes while recording or just long stretches of time that may be uneventful. The ability to edit your videos in this way should also alleviate any pressure while recording, knowing that you can always choose to leave out any parts that aren't to your liking."

Keep in mind that a professional video is not the goal here. "Having a great experience with loved ones should always take priority over preserving that moment in time through video," said Pugliese. "Be sure to make the recording process part of the fun ... and not to get too caught up with making every recording perfect."

Finding Creative Space: How Families can Live an Inspired Life

“You can’t use up creativity. The more you use, the more you have,” said author and activist Maya Angelou, but finding time for creative pursuits often gets sidelined by homework, activities, and daily responsibilities. Here are some ideas from Hofstra Adjunct Instructor of Teaching, Learning, and Technology Evangeline Christodoulou on how to put creativity back in your family life:

Incorporate art in your traditions

Start by displaying art that your family made all around the house. “Your creations make wonderful memories, inspire creativity, and provide rich experiences for your family,” said Christodoulou. Bring art into family gatherings by making invitations, cards for seating arrangements, and napkin rings for the holiday/celebration table. For meals, have your children design menus, either digitally or by hand.

You can also brainstorm with your family to come up with ideas for traditions they would like to start, such as making gingerbread houses for Valentine’s Day. If you’re short on ideas, have them browse Pinterest or the internet for inspiration, and then adapt the ideas to fit into your family.

Inspire with a stimulating living space

Designate a room or even a small space into a permanent art studio. Keep it simple. Set up a table, chairs, and plenty of art supplies organized in containers. You can use blackboard paint to create a place where everyone can draw. Christodoulou’s kitchen door is painted with it, and her family always has fun with the area. “It is a wonderful conversation starter as we always have a drawing, a list [or] a quote on it,” said Christodoulou. “Our guests even have fun with it. We keep a container of chalk next to it so it is easily accessible to all.”

You can also fill the area with a trunk of old clothing or costumes so children can play dress up. Encourage your kids to take photos of their fashion creations with an instamatic camera. They can post the photos and their artwork on a bulletin board. The key is to give your children unstructured time to make and create. Energize them with some music while they are playing.

Live a creative life

Give your family all types of experiences, even if it’s something you don’t usually do – make it a goal to try a new thing every few weeks. Go to art shows, gallery exhibits, and theater and dance performances. Visit museums; many have hands-on art programs for families (The Hofstra University Museum of Art offers ARTful Adventures, for instance; see more at hofstra.edu/museumfamilyfun). Take a walk around your neighborhood, or go hiking, visit the zoo, or take a trip to a botanical garden. Snap family selfies at each exploration and make a photo album of your adventures. You can even hold a fun competition to design the cover.

Think outside the box. Take a cooking class at a culinary school or a local bakery as a family. Go to the library and encourage your children to read a genre they’ve never tried. Or have everyone browse through the shelves and select a book. Give each family member a minute to talk about their choice and then vote for one that the whole family can read together.

Make free time at home creative by writing a play and acting it out, jamming with musical instruments or karaoke, or holding a family dance competition. None of this needs to be professional quality; take an hour and have some fun. In the summertime, do art in your backyard. You can freestyle it or choose a theme that you can all paint or draw together. Create a small gallery in your home and show off your work!



Getting College Ready ... Even Before High School

Whether your child is a junior in high school or just starting kindergarten, the college admission process starts sooner than you think. Not everyone opts for higher learning – about 66.7 percent of high school graduates enrolled in colleges or universities in 2017, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). But college graduates will make more money – according to the BLS, full-time workers without a high school diploma had average weekly earnings of \$515, compared with \$718 for high school graduates and \$1,189 for those with a bachelor's degree.

Karen Kolb, college admission and academic specialist and certified applied positive psychology coach, who teaches in Hofstra Continuing Education's Precollegiate program, believes college prep starts early – by instilling a love of learning in your children. "They will naturally want to know and do more," she said. So pay attention to your child's interests and passions, even at a young age, and encourage conversation through exploration.

Embrace their passions

Go on adventures based around the things that fascinate your children. "An interest in trains could show a love of engineering," said Kolb, "and those fun trips to the aquarium could just be the start of a lifelong passion for, and career in, biology. A love of learning is truly all about confidence." Another way to encourage their likes is to build a home library around their interests. If they like biographies, fill the shelves with them. If your child isn't a reader, encourage them to use graphic novels or comics. Be sure you nurture a love of literature by reading together.

Find opportunities for volunteering

Children, at any age, can establish their own service project, offers Kolb. "Any passion(s) or interests(s) can be turned into a project that serves the common good," she said. "While truly helping to serve a cause, these projects can, as a byproduct, help build their résumé for college. Many colleges actively seek applicants who believe in, and want to serve, the common good in some capacity throughout their lives." Many of Kolb's students have done this. One, who is interested in animals and baseball, created a weekend-long baseball tournament that raises money to benefit America's VetDogs. Another student, who enjoys singing, started a not-for-profit to benefit nursing homes. She sang at the centers accompanied by friends who played instruments. "My own daughter created a company called Dollars-for-Animals and collected blankets, food, and bedding, as well as monetary donations, that she then donated to shelters throughout the area," said Kolb.



Develop their talents

One of the most important things a parent can do for a child is to listen and help guide them. "Children leave clues – like breadcrumbs," said Kolb. "Once passions are verbalized or clues are uncovered, it is the parent's duty to help find avenues through which these passions can be nurtured and developed." So if you have a great singer, but he loves rock 'n' roll and not the Broadway tunes you love, let him follow his heart, and enroll him at a music school where he can jam. If your daughter is an amazing painter, but she paints in her own style and hates traditional classes, embrace that. All the greats did their own thing, too. Encourage her to create, and then sell, her work at a craft fair. Model Congress-type clubs are great for children who are considering a career in law, according to Kolb, who added, "Children are limitless and, truly, so are the opportunities in, and out, of schools these days."

Raise a leader

Colleges today look for students with leadership skills. Encourage your children to explore as many clubs and sports as possible, as early as they can, offers Kolb. "Exposing children to a variety of activities early increases the odds that they will find and have enough time to become proficient in a few of them, and hopefully a few that they love and through which they have performed service work," she said. Remember: It is never too late to start this process. So don't worry if you have an uninvolved high school sophomore. Colleges don't look for membership in 100 activities and clubs. "They look for dedication to chosen activities and sports, and leadership positions within them," according to Kolb. If your kids are young, encourage them to run for student council at school, and to help organize local events held at their schools or at their religious institutions.

Working Together: Making a Family Garden

Thirty-five percent of households in the United States grow food either at home or in a community garden, according to a report by The National Gardening Association, *Garden to Table: A Five-Year Look at Food Gardening in America*. This means that 2 million more families garden, up 200 percent since 2008.

Do you want to get in on the trend? Patrice Dimino, a Hofstra University landscape designer, suggests deciding first on the kind of garden you want – flowers, vegetables, or both? What you want to plant will help choose your location and determine the necessary sun exposure needed to make your garden thrive. “Plant colors that are pleasing to the eye,” said Dimino. “Select flowers with attractive fragrances ... Most importantly, however, create an environment that you connect to emotionally, spiritually, and physically, and take in nature’s therapeutic benefits.”



Planting: Before planting your new vegetables or flowers, remove old plant materials and debris. Loosen the existing soil and improve dirt by incorporating organic matter such as leaf compost. Consider testing the pH level of the soil (acidity vs. alkalinity) since the pH level might help in your plant choices. Certain plants work better in acidic soil such as azaleas, rhododendrons, and holly trees. Dig, plant, and add mulch to help keep weeds down and hold water in the soil.

Weeding and Watering: You’ll want to weed often, but especially in the spring since you’ll want to get rid of any new weeds before they yield seeds. Removing these will result in less weeds throughout the growing season. “The better you are at keeping up with that job, the better the garden and bed will look,” said Fred Soviero, director of grounds and landscaping at Hofstra University.

Dimino says watering depends on rainfall, temperature, and sun exposure. A good technique is to use the pencil test: Stick a pencil in the soil, and if it comes up dry, add water. “A garden should be enjoyed and not become labor intensive,” said Dimino. “So, don’t take on more than you can handle. Choose your plants so that they invite your senses. Plant grasses that rustle in the wind with flowers that are soothing to the touch.”

Five Ways to Get Kids Moving

Children spend anywhere from two hours and 19 minutes to four hours and 36 minutes on screen media, according to a report from Common Sense Media. But you can help your child reduce that time with a few simple tricks.

1. Don’t use TV and video games as a babysitter, says Hofstra Summer Camps Director Terry Ryan, who suggests getting kids out of the house by registering them in academic, arts, or athletics programs instead. “Both my kids take dance,” offered Heather Waldon, adjunct instructor of drama and dance at Hofstra University. “It was easy for my daughter but not so easy to get my son to take dance. I ended up finding a sports dance class, which really sparked his interest.” Check out the library as well, which sometimes offers yoga and other programs that emphasize physical activity.
2. Go into nature, offers Steven Frierman, associate professor of specialized programs in education at Hofstra University. Visit local parks, disguising hikes as a reason to picnic. Bring along a frisbee and some outdoor games to get even more activity in.

3. Take family trips. Try spending a day in the big city. Kids don't even realize they are getting exercise, says Ryan, as they see the sights. If you don't like all that hustle and bustle, try exploring a local village or town. Kids love simple things such as flea markets and festivals.
4. Find a cause. Many foundations organize walk/run/bike-athons that the whole family can do together. You can get exercise and use the event as a teaching tool about giving back, explains Ryan.
5. Family exercise classes. Many gyms and yoga studios have family memberships and sessions. "One thing I have done in the past is check with local hotels that have indoor pools and see if they have day passes," said Waldon. "This has been helpful in the winter months." Use your imagination, too, Frierman advises. You can join a bowling league, use exercise videos, or even build an indoor obstacle course in your house. "If it (exercise) starts at a young age, the kids are socialized into it," he said. "They are going to keep doing it."

From the Hofstra Summer Camps Director

Thanks for reading Hofstra Summer Camps' first e-book. We firmly believe that a healthy child starts with family wellness. So we wanted to create something that promotes the same things our camp program seeks to provide: a sense of community, a shared curiosity, and a safe, nurturing place. We hope that you find this book helpful in your lives and that it will start discussions on our blog as we create an online camp family.

My personal goal is to assist in the development of the whole child – educationally, socially, and creatively. Our programs combine Hofstra's varied curriculum with the professionalism and knowledge of our distinguished staff. We want to meet the interests of all of our campers, and we want our campers to challenge themselves and identify their goals and dreams.

Please let me know what you think of our e-book, and feel free to send suggestions for other topics you would like us to explore.

With Pride and Purpose,
Terry Ryan
Director, Hofstra Summer Camps

Hofstra Summer Camps has offered a safe, nurturing, and enriching environment for children ages 5-18 for more than 30 years. Our beautiful, 244-acre campus – with its state-of-the-art indoor and outdoor athletic, academic, and cultural facilities – allows us to offer unique and rich experiences as campers play and learn in the same labs, classrooms, and facilities that our own University students enjoy.



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