

Advisor

Families

Helping

Families

Creating a lower stress home

Ways to reduce stress, and help keep your family feeling healthy and happier.

Foster Parent Courses & Training Sessions

See upcoming details and dates.

Annual General Meeting Notice

The Saskatchewan Foster Families Association (SFFA) Annual General Meeting will be on Saturday June 14th, 2025 at 10:30am (CST)

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

Protecting your Marriage while Fostering

Busting Autism Myths

Court Appearances & the Importance of Documentation

Restoring Cultural Ties in Aboriginal Children

Tips on Getting Kids to Eat Healthier



Advisor

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OUR MISSION

The Saskatchewan Foster Families Association exists to support and encourage Foster families through education and advocacy, helping create healthy homes, positive environments, and brighter futures for children and youth across the province.

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Contents



10



6



14



4

SPRING 2025 | Volume 20, Issue 2

- 3 AGM ANNOUNCEMENT
- 4 RESTORING CULTURAL TIES IN ABORIGINAL CHILDREN
- 5 FOSTER PARENT COURSES & TRAINING
- 6 PROTECTING YOUR MARRIAGE WHILE FOSTERING
- 8 COURT APPEARANCES & THE IMPORTANCE OF DOCUMENTATION
- 10 CREATING A LOWER STRESS HOME
- 13 WATER SAFETY
- 14 BUSTING AUTISM MYTHS
- 16 TIPS ON GETTING KIDS TO EAT HEALTHIER
- 18 PRACTICE ACTIVE LISTENING WITH A TALKING STICK
- 20 GOOD READS

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING NOTICE

AGM

The Saskatchewan Foster Families Association (SFFA) Annual General Meeting will be on

Saturday June 14th, 2025
10:30am (CST)

The meeting will be hosted virtually through Microsoft Teams.



If you are interested in attending the Annual General Meeting, please send your request to rsvp@sffa.sk.ca

APPLY TO JOIN THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The SFFA Board of Directors is seeking interested members to apply for an open position on the board.

If you are interested in learning more about the duties and responsibilities of the Board of Directors, please contact **Kevin Harris, Board Chair** kevin@sffa.sk.ca

Applications will be reviewed by the Board of Directors and successful candidates will be presented to the membership at the 2025 Annual General Meeting.



RESTORING CULTURAL TIES IN ABORIGINAL CHILDREN



Restoring cultural ties in Aboriginal children can involve providing access to traditional stories, language, and arts, and connecting with Elders. It can also involve supporting family reunification and providing culturally-based healing.

PROVIDE ACCESS TO CULTURAL RESOURCES

- **Learn traditional stories:** Support children in learning traditional stories and legends from Elders.
- **Learn traditional language:** Provide opportunities for children to learn their First Nation language.
- **Practice traditional arts:** Incorporate traditional arts and crafts into play time, such as drumming, dancing, throat singing, and beading.
- **Participate in cultural events:** Attend cultural and community events with children.

CONNECT WITH ELDERS

- **Invite Elders to participate** in family or child care programs by teaching language, cooking traditional meals, or demonstrating traditional skills.
- **Network with Aboriginal Elders** to share ideas and experiences.

SUPPORT FAMILY REUNIFICATION

- **Visit family:** Encourage children to visit their families or call them.
- **Support foster parents** to learn about Indigenous history, practices, and communities.
- **Provide culturally-based healing**, such as trauma counseling, education, and life skills training.

CELEBRATE NATIONAL INDIGENOUS HISTORY MONTH

- **June is National Indigenous History Month** in Canada, an opportunity to learn about the unique cultures, traditions and experiences of First Nations, Inuit and Métis. It's a time to honour the stories, achievements and resilience of Indigenous Peoples.
- National Indigenous History Month recognizes not only the historic contributions of Indigenous peoples to the development of Canada, but also the strength of present-day Indigenous communities and their promise for the future.

Source: <https://www.canada.ca>





MONTHLY LIVE STREAMED

Information Session Features
are as follows:

APRIL

Session and date to be announced.

Watch for upcoming details.

MAY

MAY 13TH, 7PM-8PM

MICROSOFT TEAMS

Domestic Abuse Awareness

Presented by Joan McDonald

Joan McDonald is a wife, mother and grandmother recently retired from her administrative career with the Saskatchewan Health Authority. Her daughter, Abbie Speir, became a victim of domestic homicide in April 2017. Invested in changing that story for others, Joan began speaking to workplaces, schools and community groups and events. Her mission is to raise awareness about domestic abuse and provide education to the general public of resources that are available to assist victims. Breaking the silence and arming ourselves with simple information will change and save lives.

JUNE

JUNE 12TH, 7PM-830PM

MICROSOFT TEAMS

How Attachment Relationships Impacts Childhood Development and What We Can Do

Presented by: Saskatchewan Prevention Institute

This session will explore how attachment and child development are closely linked, and how healthy relationships nurture the capacity to manage stress and build resiliency. During the presentation, Jackie and Connie will talk about strategies to help children and caregivers to strengthen the attachment bond.

Foster Parent College Monthly Sessions

Please watch your emails to register for the below courses being offered to caregivers. For more information, please contact Tessa at 306-975-1528.

APRIL

Lying vs. Telling Untruths

This explores untruth telling, including:

- Purposes for untruths
- Potential origins of untruth telling
- How to respond

MAY

Fire Play and Fire Setting

This course examines fire activity including:

- Fire Play
- Fire Setting
- The three levels of concern

JUNE

Running Away

This course explores five types of running away behaviour in children:

- Searching for roots
- Running from rules
- Running from love and intimacy
- Wanting to be wanted
- Running to street crime



Let's stay connected...

We regularly send out e-mails to our foster parents. To be added to our contact list and receive the latest news, please send your e-mail address to keanna@sffa.sk.ca



Protecting Your *Marriage* while Fostering

Parenting children from hard places can test you on every level, especially in your marriage. And it can start before a child ever enters your home. Both parents need to be on the same page regarding foster care, before jumping in. It's not enough for one parent to simply "go along" with fostering because they want to appease their spouse or because it's the "right thing to do." It isn't sustainable to be partners in every aspect of life except for fostering. This is not a journey to be undertaken alone. Even the best single foster parents need a community of support to provide respite, encouragement and help. You cannot expect to fight well for your children or your marriage in your own strength. Here are five tips to help you prioritize your marriage while on mission.

Communicate

Calendars can fill up quickly. Our children's busy schedules on top of challenging behaviors require a lot of time, energy and attention from both parents. It's important to have an established, uninterrupted time and way to communicate about your goals, needs, concerns and emotions.

- Set aside at least 15 minutes each evening to communicate with your spouse about what happened that day, what is happening the next

day and what your expectations are for who will take what responsibilities. (i.e. — appointments and activities).

- Have a shared calendar (visual or an app) where appointments can be added and seen.
- Talk through commitments and what to say "yes" and "no" to.

Be a Team

Triangulation and manipulation are commonly used tactics for children with trauma. It's important for both your children and your spouse to understand that Mom and Dad are a team, not to be played against one another. Whether you agree with your spouse in the moment or not, make sure you are presenting a united front, even if you have to step away to discuss something before continuing.

- Check in with the other parent before agreeing to a child's request. (Applies to situations that have not been previously discussed, like unplanned outings, irregular purchases or major deviations from routine).
- Agree to support one another in public and discuss differing parenting opinions in private.
- Never criticize or minimize your spouse in front of your children.

Be Intentional

Find moments to enjoy one another in the midst of all the other things. Even if it means locking the kids out of your bedroom for a couple hours. Work on practicing all five love languages with one another — words of affirmation, quality time, gift giving, acts of service and physical touch.

- Words of affirmation — Remind your spouse of the things you enjoy and admire about them. Be your spouse's cheerleader on the hard days and rejoice with them on the good days.
- Quality time — take a walk around the block while the kids ride their bikes or play a game of cards after the kids go to bed.
- Gift giving — surprise your spouse with a sugary snack they don't have to share or a fun pair of socks. Show them that they are worthy of the same thought and expense you invest in the kids.
- Acts of service — look for something that needs to be done and do it. Fill up their gas tank so they don't have to or pick up those dishes they were too tired to wash last night. Try to make life just a little easier for each other whenever you can.
- Physical touch — hold hands at the grocery store, scratch their back before bed. When life gets busy, even though it may feel strange, schedule time for intimacy throughout the week. It's not only good for your marriage, it's vital.

Ask for Help

Parenting is hard, and fostering is even harder. You will get burnt out, discouraged and overwhelmed. Be willing to ask others for help so you can do the above well without leaning too hard on one another.

- Have a list of people you trust with your children and can reach out to ask for respite, carpooling, a meal, etc.
- Find a therapist for yourself or as a couple. You don't have to be in crisis mode to seek professional help and support.
- Learn to say "yes" when someone offers to help. You were never meant to do this alone, and allowing others to care for you blesses them as well.

Remember in times of stress and strain that your spouse is not your enemy. You're on the same team, standing side by side to face each problem together.

Source: <https://www.childbridgemonntana.org/blog/protecting-your-marriage-through-foster-care>



GOODS & SERVICES VOUCHERS

The Ministry of Social Services issues Requisitions for Goods and Services vouchers to citizens to help with the purchase of goods and services. Foster families may receive requisition forms (vouchers) for immediate purchases children or youth may need when coming into or while in their care. Required items may include clothing, diapers, formula, car seats or other special needs requests that are approved by the child's Caseworker.

Things to remember when using a Requisition (voucher):

- Must have photo identification to match the name on the requisition otherwise it will not be accepted
- The amount purchased (including tax) must not exceed the amount indicated on the requisition
- Purchases are not subject to the Goods and Services Tax (GST)
- The requisition is not valid for payment after six months from date of issue
- Refunds covering the cost of a returned item must be made to the Ministry of Social Services

For a list of community retailers accepting vouchers, visit the following online link:

<https://www.saskfosterfamilies.ca/resources-for-foster-parents/member-benefits>

Court Appearances and the Importance of Documentation for Foster Parents



Foster parents are sometimes required to testify in court. This was never mentioned during all the hours of education and training I've had to undergo to get and maintain my foster parent license. It's not that there is any special technique that foster parents need to know, or specific protocols that need to be followed, but I've discovered there are a few things a foster parent can do to make the most of court appearances.

Depending on the facts of the case and on the judge, foster parents might make somewhat regular appearances. For my first six foster children, I was never required to physically appear in court. I had to write several letters to the court for one child, stating my opinions as his caregiver, but those were delivered by the child's case manager. However, for my two current foster children (a half brother and sister who are part of a larger sibling group), I've had to attend several hearings, including two for termination of parental rights. Foster parents' observations are valuable, and they should expect to be involved in representing the interests of their foster children. I've always tried to keep a good record of important events in my foster children's lives. As the frequency of my required court appearances increased, I learned how important it is to write EVERYTHING down. No matter how silly it might seem at the time, having a

record of how your foster child acted after returning from visitations, when he started having nightmares, what birthday presents he did (or didn't) receive from his father, and how often you took him to visit his grandmother outside of the pre-arranged visits could all come in handy later.



“An important part of being a foster parent is advocating for the child.”

I document a lot of that information in e-mails to the children's case managers and guardian. I try to send a “weekly update” e-mail to everyone who might be

interested; even if there is nothing important to report, I let everyone know that the kids are doing well.

I also keep every scrap of paper that has anything to do with the foster children: medical records, school papers, and reports from therapists. In the case of foster children, it's better to have too much information than not enough. I've been asked to provide information to the children's case manager, guardian and even the court countless times. I was once asked to bring copies of all of my foster daughter's medical records to a court hearing, and it was so nice to know that I had everything in one place, ready to go.

It's been my experience that the court is less interested in my opinions about the child or the child's parents than in having me report provable facts. Were my foster daughter's immunizations up to date when she was placed in my home? How often does my foster son attend speech therapy and what kind of progress has he made since being placed in care? How do the children act after returning home from a visitation with their biological mother? The more information I have written down or filed, the easier it is for me to answer these questions. I always skim through my notes before I attend a hearing, just to make sure that I have everything fresh in my mind.

For the foster parent, court hearings may be opportunities to gain new information. Case managers get busy and might not remember to tell the foster parents every new development in the child's case. The case manager might omit mentioning something not out of neglect but because it simply doesn't seem important. For example, I heard something at one of the termination of parental rights hearings that seemed to everyone else like an inconsequential detail of an event that happened a long time ago, but for me, one of my foster son's strange behaviors suddenly made perfect sense. If I hadn't sat through the hearing, I'd have never understood what was bothering my foster son.

An important part of being a foster parent is advocating for the child. Foster children need their best interests represented not only at school or at the doctor's office, but in the courtroom, as well. Keeping good records for my foster children and being willing to testify about that information is an essential part of what I do as a foster parent.

Source: <http://www.adoptivefamiliescircle.com/blogs/post/foster-parent-court-appearances-importance-of-documentation/>



Legal Services Expenditures

Legal Documents:

DID YOU KNOW?

1. The department shall pay actual fees for the following legal documents:
 - birth, marriage and death certificates when required for court purposes or to complete the children's services file
 - required certificates for adoption applicants who are receiving financial assistance;
 - passports for children in care
 - court transcripts
2. If the child is a temporary ward an application for a passport can only be made after consultation with the parent. The parent and the Regional Director should sign the passport application.

Some Practice Guidelines:

Youth 16 years of age or older complete their own passport applications.

The caseworker completes the application for children under 16 years.

- follow instructions closely omitting the names of the parents
- state the child is a ward of the Minister of Social Services
- the application should be signed by the caseworker, and by the caseworker's supervisor, as guarantor.

Passport pictures of the child must be obtained. The necessary fee for the passport must be enclosed with the application.

CREATING A **lower-stress** HOME

Stress often has a trickle effect through families. When one family member experiences high stress levels, the rest of the family can often feel it, too.

Every parent knows the feeling of being frazzled - when you're stuck in traffic and late getting the kids to school, or dinner isn't ready but you've got to get your child to an important activity.

With so many daily pressures, it can feel as if life has no "off-switch". But thankfully, there are ways to reduce stress, and help keep your family feeling healthy and happier.

Ten ways to help families reduce stress and boost coping skills:

1 | Start with a quick 'scan' of your family environment

Take stock of your own stress levels by doing a 'scan' of the family environment.

Ask yourself:

- Are you rushing around from one activity to the next? Does it feel like everyone's always 'running on empty'?
- Does your home space put you at ease? Look around your home and ask: does this space make me feel comfortable? Does it feel disorganized and cluttered?
- What are the family routines like? Do you have regular family routines, such as in the morning, after school, or a usual bedtime routine? Are there family mealtimes?
- Is there time for rest and play? Are you able to balance the



busy times with enough time to rest, hang out, get creative, and enjoy some play?

- Are you taking care of yourself?

2 | Be a role model: Make your own healthy lifestyle a top priority

Many parents don't stop to think about their own health. Give yourself permission to focus on your own self-care, and practice a healthy lifestyle.

Nothing boosts skills to cope with stress like leading a healthy, balanced lifestyle. Being physically active, and eating and sleeping well, are some of the best stress-management strategies out there.

By working on keeping your own stress level down, and keeping calm under pressure, you model for your children to respond more

positively to stress and even build up their own resilience to it.

3 | Stick to routines: Family rituals create comfort and security

Family routines can often leave everyone feeling more relaxed, organized, and in control.

You can create after-school routines, weekly cleaning routines as a family, and set up bedtime rituals.

For example, keep to a regular bedtime and have your child pick out their clothing the night before to avoid rushing around the next day. Involving children in routines can help them feel more secure and in control.

Remember when setting rituals to start with one small change



and build up from there. Too many changes at once can be overwhelming. Also, it's important to be consistent, so starting with one change and seeing it through is better than making a bunch of great changes that are not followed through.

4 | **Get active: Motion is a family stress-fighter!**

Physical activity not only relieves emotional intensity but also reduces the negative effects of stress on your body.

You don't have to go to the gym, or join a sports team, to stay active. Going on family walks, digging around together in the garden, having a 10-minute dance party in the living room, or playing active games all offer stress-busting benefits.

5 | **Build in breaks and buffer zones: Avoid overscheduling and packed calendars**

One of the biggest causes of family stress is having too much to do. Can you schedule in some time to slow down and recharge? Are there any family activities that can be paused, done less often or cancelled?

Without some downtime between activities, your child can begin to feel stressed. See if you can try to simplify your schedule. Have a look at your family's weekly obligations – write them down on a calendar and then stand back together and see what may need to change.

Discuss the pros and cons of stopping an activity. Have a weekly family meeting to review everyone's schedules and commitments so you can plan for the week ahead. This is also a good time to check-in and talk about how everyone is doing.

6 | **Eat healthy: Good nutrition fuels your day**

Our bodies are much better able to cope with stress when fueled with good nutrition.

Family mealtimes also have the added benefit of building closer connections, which is great for helping kids open up about their feelings.

7 | **Sleep well: Make sleeping and bedtime routines a priority**

Ever feel more stressed and irritable after a sleepless night? That's because getting a good night's sleep can help keep our mood in check and improve our sense of well-being. A tired child often gets stressed more easily. Managing stress can also help with sleep.

So, set up a regular family bedtime routine to set the stage for a better night's sleep.

8 | **Stay connected: Help your child build social support and create closer bonds with you and friends**

Having strong social support has been proven to help lower stress. So, encourage your child to participate in fun activities and spend time with friends.

At home, prioritize fun time together, and make time to connect with your child regularly to relax and talk. When children feel connected, they're more likely to reach out for help.

And don't forget about your own need for support – connect with your partner and other supportive family members and friends.

9 | **Make family fun outside a priority: Set aside time for nature and play**

Spending time as a family outdoors offers great mental health benefits - walks in the park, wilderness hiking, or a family picnic amid trees and water can do wonders for reducing stress.

Even viewing images of nature or listening to nature sounds when you can't get outside has been shown to help relieve stress and improve well-being. There are lots of great shows about nature and amazing places around the world. See what you can find online or on TV!

When you can't stray too far from home, play a backyard game together as a family and leave those screens and gadgets behind. Children are experts at play, so let them choose an activity and go!

Continued on next page...

10 | Create a cozy spot: Pick a quiet space for your child's down time

Set up a special place in your home where your child can go to unwind when they're upset.

For example, you can set up a little tent in the corner of your child's room so they have their own place to slip away when facing a difficult or stressful situation, or to decompress. Other ideas of items to include are stress balls, play dough, a book they like, or some pillows and extra blankets. You could also have a place that's in a common space, like a corner of the living room with extra pillows and a cozy lamp, or a place in the kitchen with art supplies.

Five tips to reduce triggers that may cause stress in children:

1 Plan ahead for potentially stressful situations

Encourage children to rehearse and practice for situations which may cause stress, such as public speaking, or a sports try-out.

It can be helpful to let your child know ahead of time when a potentially stressful event is coming up (such as a doctor's appointment or dental visit), and talk about what will happen to prepare them for the visit.

2 Give children plenty of notice if anything in their lives is changing

Since many children struggle when they feel like they don't have much control, talking to them about upcoming changes (like a move to a new house) can help. Give them time to share their concerns

and ask questions. Accept that your child may be feeling lost or confused.



Try to minimize any other changes where you can, and look for opportunities to provide choices and control where possible. The more your child feels they understand and are prepared for situations and events, the better.

3 Be aware of the news and media that your child watches

Your child may feel scared and worry about their safety and the safety of loved ones if they see disturbing news images on TV or hear talk of natural disasters and war, for example.

Limit the content they are exposed to, make sure what they are seeing and watching is developmentally appropriate and even then, watch and listen with them so that you can talk about the events together during and after the programming.

Even a well-intentioned video at school that inspires some children, could trigger fear in others. Ask them about their school day to help know topics you may want to discuss together. Talk through these experiences with them to help put it all in perspective.

4 Manage your child's expectations and build up their confidence

Many children's stress comes from wanting to please their caregivers and mentors, or live up to a standard of their own. It can be useful to talk to your child about setting reasonable and achievable expectations early on.

Take an active lead by loosening expectations and pressure, by saying things like, "I am so proud of how hard you worked on the project this weekend" or "You were a great passer in the soccer game today. I love watching you play."

To help build up their confidence, try to avoid using other children as a standard for measuring your child's success.

5 Avoid discussing parental stresses around children

Parents face stress in their everyday lives, and children are often very aware of their parents' stressors.

It's important for parents to have time to talk about stress – to vent and to problem solve. Just make sure that you are aware of who is listening when expressing your own stress. Children who overhear may start to worry themselves.

Source: <https://kellymentalhealth.ca/creating-lower-stress-home>

Water Safety


for Caregivers of Children and Youth



Spending time in and around water is a great activity for families, children and youth. However, DROWNING is the SECOND leading cause of injury-related DEATH for children ages 14 and under. The majority of drownings and non-fatal drownings for infants occur in bath tubs. For toddlers, the majority occur in residential swimming pools, while older children and youth are more likely to drown in lakes, rivers and oceans. Drowning can occur in as little as TEN SECONDS and can occur in just INCHES of water. Research on water safety shows that implementing a layered approach to water safety is the best way to prevent drownings. Water safety always starts with the caregiver as the first and most important component.

Water Safety Tips:

- Constant and active supervision should be maintained when any child is in or around water.
- Children should not be permitted to play in areas where there is any body/container of water, including swimming pools, ponds, dug outs, wading pools, tubs, pails, sinks or toilets without supervision.
- Make sure you give 100% of your attention when supervising. Put cell phones, magazines and BBQ duties aside. Find another adult to take over if you need to turn away for any reason.
- Watch the face – especially the eyes. Many victims don't call, wave or signal for help because they can't keep their head or arms above water.
- Caregivers should be familiar with the child/youth's swimming abilities and provide the appropriate level of supervision. For infants, 1:1 adult to child supervision should be provided. For toddlers and preschoolers arm's length/touch supervision should be provided.
- At the pool, the lake or the beach, young children and children who can't swim should wear a PFD.
- Never rely on inflatable cushions, air mattresses, water toys, etc., for the support of non-swimmers.
- Restrict access to the pool or other bodies of water when not in use. Use multiple barriers or strategies to restrict access
- Empty and turn over wading pools and other containers of water when not in use.
- Keep hot tubs covered and locked when not in use.
- Away from home, swim in designated swimming areas, where possible.
- Water conditions in locations such as lakes and rivers can change rapidly. Be familiar with water conditions and be satisfied the area is safe.
- Provide children and youth with a water safety plan that includes water safety instructions (boundaries, depth of water, condition of the water bottom, the appropriate use of PFDS, etc.).
- Any child under the age of five should not be left alone at bath time. The caregiver should supervise the child at all times and ensure everything that is needed for bathing is gathered prior to the bath. Bath tubs should be emptied while not in use.



BUSTING AUTISM MYTHS: FACTS VS. FICTION

WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON MYTHS ABOUT AUTISM?

When people begin grasping at straws to try to create their own understanding of autism, myths can become widespread. Promoting accurate information about autism is essential for greater acceptance and understanding.

Below are the five common misconceptions about autism.

Autistic People are Anti-Social

Autistic individuals often struggle with social skills but are not anti-social. In social situations, autistic people may feel overwhelmed due to sensory overload, lack of ability to read social cues, and pressure to interpret emotions and body language. This can be physically and emotionally draining, which may make autistic individuals avoid some social interaction.

Autism Is a Childhood Condition

While some of the characteristics of autism may soften over time, autism remains a lifelong condition. While symptoms are most commonly identified in childhood (around 12-18 months), autism can still be diagnosed after age 50.

Autism Is Caused By Bad Parenting

“Bad parenting” does not cause autism. While varying parenting styles can affect mental health, it cannot create a developmental condition like autism. Before modern autism research was developed, doctors in the 1960s placed the blame on non-nurturing parents. Nicknaming them “refrigerator mothers,” these mothers were described as cold and unaffectionate to their children. With solidified knowledge, it

is now known that this is false. Autism is caused by genetics or environmental factors!

Autism Is Caused By Vaccines

Vaccinations do not cause autism. Autistic children are born with this neurodevelopmental disability, and external factors, such as medicine, do not cause it. There are no studies or records concluding that vaccinations have such an effect.

Only Boys Are Autistic

Autism is not limited to one gender. Boys are more commonly diagnosed, as girls tend to “mask” their symptoms. Girls are also more likely to be misdiagnosed because of the differences in symptom presentation between girls and boys, which leads to a higher statistic of diagnosed males. This ratio is about 5:1.

WHAT ARE FOUR INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT AUTISM?

Now that we've settled those myths.... time to talk about what is truly known about autism! Autism is a unique and complex disorder, and countless facts about it are interesting. Below are essential facts to distinguish from fiction.

Autism Is a Spectrum Disorder (It Is Not Linear)

As a spectrum disorder, autistic people can experience it very differently. With various types and presentations, autism doesn't always come in the same shape and size. How one processes change, interacts socially, and communicates are a few of the hundreds of factors that make up the autistic spectrum.

Some autistic individuals may have one presentation of symptoms completely absent from another autistic person. With fluidity between each person's skills, needs, and challenges, autism is considered a spectrum disorder!

Autism Is Not a Degenerative Disorder

While someone is born with autism, this does not mean this disorder worsens with age. autistic people don't see a progression of symptoms as they get older but may experience different signs of autism in various settings. With professional intervention, individuals can learn and build new skills that can ease the effects of autism.

Everyone Is Not "On The Autism Spectrum"

This is most likely a phrase you have heard many times before,

and people may even experience shared signs of autism. But regardless of common symptoms, the diagnosis of autism comes from a neurological difference in brain activity. Diagnosing autism is a long and complicated process and takes a deep look into genetics and environmental factors. So, while people may emphasize certain signs, it is black and white- autistic or not autistic. While being autistic provides its own spectrum, a non-autistic person will not fall

on this spectrum.

Pets Can Be a Support for Autistic People

With the ability to soothe children, redirect aggressive behavior, and promote safety and independence, dogs are a great companion for an autistic person! Additional benefits include reduced anxiety, increased confidence levels, taught road safety, consistent playing, and a best friend.



WHY DOES AUTISM SEEM TO BE SO COMMON NOW?

Autism has not necessarily become more common, but resources to diagnose it have become more accessible. As awareness increases, the CDC states that autism prevalence has increased from 1 in 150 children to 1 in 36 since the early 2000s.

Research continues to develop solidified knowledge of the signs and symptoms of autism, and this allows caregivers to more accurately indicate how their child may fit this description. This directly increases the number of official diagnoses as more people become educated and aware of neurodiversity.

Source: <https://allypediatric.com/blog/busting-autism-myths-facts-vs-fiction/#h-what-are-the-most-common-myths-about-autism>



Tips on getting kids to eat healthier

1. Schedule Meals and Snacks

Children need to eat every three to four hours: three meals, two snacks, and lots of fluids. If you plan for these, your child's diet will be much more balanced and they'll be less cranky. I put a cooler in the car when I'm out with my kids and stock it with carrots, pretzels, yogurt, and water so we don't have to rely on fast food.

2. Plan Dinner Menus in Advance

If planning a weekly menu is too daunting, start with two or three days at a time. A good dinner doesn't have to be fancy, but it should be balanced: whole-grain bread, rice, or pasta; a fruit or a vegetable; and a protein source like lean meat, cheese, or beans. I often make simple entree soups or chili ahead of time and then freeze it; at dinnertime, I heat it up and add whole-grain bread and a bowl of sliced apples or melon to round out the meal.

3. Make One Meal for the Whole Family

A few years ago, I got into a bad habit. I'd make two suppers—one that I knew the kids would like and one for my husband and me. It was exhausting. Now I prepare one meal for everybody and serve it family-style so the kids can pick and choose what they want. Children often mimic their parents' behavior, so one of these days, they'll eat most of the food I serve them.

4. Don't Comment on Your Kids' Eating Habits

As hard as this may be, try not to comment on what or how much your kids are eating. Be as neutral as possible. Remember, you've done your job as a parent by serving balanced meals, and your kids are

responsible for eating them. If you play food enforcer—saying things like "eat your vegetables"—your child will only resist.

5. Introduce New Foods Slowly

Children are new-food-phobic by nature. I tell my kids that their taste buds must sometimes get used to a flavor before they'll like the taste. If you feel that your child isn't getting enough nutrients, talk to your pediatrician or dietitian about ways to add nutrients like adding a multivitamin or a nutrition shake to their eating schedule.

6. Make Healthy Food Fun

If your kids won't eat vegetables, experiment with condiments and dips. Kathleen tried her first vegetable when I served her a thinly cut carrot with some ranch salad dressing. My children also like ketchup, hummus, salsa, and yogurt-based dressing.

7. Make Mornings Count

Most families don't eat enough fiber on a daily basis, and breakfast is an easy place to sneak it in. Look for high-fiber cereals as a quick fix. Or make batches of whole-grain pancake and waffle batter that last all week.

8. Add a Touch of Sweetness

Julia eats her cooked carrots with a bit of brown sugar, and I mix a little root beer into her prune juice to make prune-juice soda. Kathleen and Marty like a sprinkle of sugar on their fruit. I know that they'll eventually outgrow this need for extra sweetness, but in the meantime, they're eating fruits and vegetables.

9. Get Your Kids Cooking

If your children become involved in choosing or preparing meals, they'll be more interested in eating what they've created. Take them to the store, and let them choose produce for you. If they're old enough, allow them to cut up vegetables and mix them into a salad. Although Julia refuses to eat fresh fruit, we make banana or apple muffins together—and she always eats them once they're done.

10. Think More, Not Less

Remember, you—not your kids—are in charge of the foods that enter the house, so change your focus to adding more nutritious food choices on hand instead of stressing eating less sweets and treats. By having more readily-available healthy choices around, you can encourage your children to eat more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and dairy products.

11. Allow Treats in Moderation

Having less healthy foods occasionally keeps them from becoming forbidden—and thus even more appealing. We call candy, soda, and cookies "sometimes" foods. I generally buy only healthy cereals such as Cheerios and Raisin Bran, but I let my kids have sugary cereals when they visit their grandparents or when we're on vacation. And I treat them to McDonald's for lunch every so often.

12. Get Creative with Meals

The more creative the meal is, the greater the variety of foods my kids eat. We make smiley-face pancakes and give food silly names. (Broccoli florets are "baby trees" or "dinosaur food.") Anything mini is always a hit too. I often use cookie cutters to turn toast into hearts and stars, which the children love.

13. Be a Good Role Model

It's very important for parents to model positive attitudes and habits around food as well, so it can be helpful to examine your own beliefs about food. Trust your body to tell you when you're hungry and when you're full, and your kids will learn to do the same. And don't be afraid to seek professional help for developing a healthy relationship with food; many of us didn't grow up with healthy food habits and therapy may be able to help you re-establish your own healthy habits.

Above all else, realize that what your kids eat over time is what really matters. Having popcorn at the movies or eating an ice-cream sundae are some of life's real pleasures, as long as you balance these times with nutritious food choices.

Source: <https://www.parents.com/kids/nutrition/healthy-eating/get-your-kids-to-eat-better/>



Asian Chicken Lettuce Wraps

Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 tablespoon sesame oil
- 1 lb ground chicken (or turkey)
- 1 med/lg onion, diced small
- ¼ cup hoisin sauce
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon rice wine vinegar
- 1 tablespoon Asian chili sauce
- 3 cloves garlic, finely minced
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger or 2 teaspoons freshly grated ginger
- one 8-ounce can water chestnut, drained and diced small
- 2 to 3 green onions, sliced thin
- butter lettuce leaves, for serving

Instructions

To a large skillet, add the oils, chicken, and cook over medium-high heat until chicken is cooked through; stir intermittently to crumbly while cooking. Add the onion, hoisin sauce, soy sauce, rice wine vinegar, Asian chili sauce, stir to combine, and cook for about 5 minutes, or until onion is soft and translucent and most of the liquid has been absorbed; stir intermittently. Add the garlic, ginger, stir to combine, and cook for about 1 minute, or until fragrant. Add the water chestnuts, green onions and cook for 2 more minutes, or until tender. Spoon about 1/4 cup of the mixture into the lettuce leaves to serve.

Cauliflower Mac & Cheese

Ingredients

- 6-8 cups cauliflower, chopped
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 3 tablespoons flour
- 2 cups whole milk
- 1 ½ teaspoons salt
- ¼ teaspoon cracked black pepper
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- 2 cups shredded cheddar cheese

Instructions

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Fill a microwave-safe bowl with 1 inch of water. Add cauliflower to the bowl and microwave on high for 8 minutes. Drain and set cauliflower aside. In a large sauce pan, melt butter over medium heat. Stir in flour for about 3 minutes. Gradually whisk in the milk, a little at a time, until completely incorporated and mixture is thick and smooth. Remove from heat, salt, pepper, stir in garlic powder, and shredded cheese until melted and completely incorporated and smooth. Stir in cauliflower. Transfer to a 9x13 inch baking dish. Bake for 25 mins until cheese is bubbly and begins to brown. Switch to broil for 2-4 mins to brown the top a bit more. Dish will be hot! Allow to cool slightly before serving.



Practice *Active Listening* with a *Talking Stick*

by Emma

INTRODUCTION TO THE TALKING STICK

When I visited my children's classroom for a birthday celebration circle, I was introduced to the classroom talking stick. It was my daughter's birthday and while sitting in a circle the kids would pass the talking stick between them. Whoever was holding the stick would say something nice or something they liked about her. I really liked this idea and it made me aware of how we don't take time to listen to each other. Hence; let this be a lesson in listening.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING

How many times this week (or even today) have you caught yourself not listening to your kids? I mean; REALLY listening to what they have to say and how they feel? How many times do we look at our phones instead of listening to each other? And how can we expect our children to listen to us if we don't listen to them?

I get it; you're with your kids all day and sometimes you just need a break. But it's really important that we try to listen to each other more. Challenge yourself to put your phone (and other distractions) down and just listen to, and be, with your kids.

USE OF THE TALKING STICK

We have much to learn from the Native American people in regards to listening. Whenever they held a council or a gathering, a "talking stick" was used. The purpose of the talking stick was to fully listen to, and respect, each other's opinions. The talking stick was passed from person to person and only the one holding it was allowed to talk. An "Answering Feather" was also used. If the speaker asked a

question, the answering feather was passed out to the person who was to answer the question.

SYMBOLIC MEANINGS OF THE TALKING STICK DESIGN

The talking stick can vary widely in color and design. Colors have different symbolic meanings for different tribes. Also the kind of tree used for the stick has symbolic meanings, as well as beads and hides used for decoration. The answering feather was usually from an eagle, but a turkey feather (or one that is a bit larger) could also be used.



How to make your own *Talking Stick*

We decided we would like to make our own talking stick. Here's how we did it:



MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Sticks to decorate
- Saw (if required)
- Sand paper
- Acrylic paints
- Paint brushes
- Yarn
- Beads
- Feathers
- Leather/Faux suede string (or material of preference)
- Stain of your choice (optional)



STEP-BY-STEP

1. GATHERING STICKS

First we went out in nature to gather some really nice sticks. This is a good excuse to get

the kids out too. We went for a shorter hike and the kids climbed some trees on the way. Please don't break branches from the trees, but gather only dry sticks from the ground.

2. PREPARING THE STICKS

Cut the branches the desired length and sandpaper any rough surfaces. My kids are pretty comfortable with the saw, but make sure you provide parental supervision, so your children don't get hurt.



3. DECORATING

Finally it's time to be creative! We covered some of the sticks with stain (I LOVE stain), some we painted in different colors and some we wrapped with yarn. We used beads, feathers and string for decoration. Use your imagination when you make your own talking stick. Make it personal.



CONCLUSION

You can make your own talking stick not only for the purpose of listening to each other, but also as a nice decoration of your home. We were very satisfied how ours turned out and will put them out for display. Have fun and remember to listen to each other! Forget about all distractions and take the time to really listen to each other.



Source: <https://homeschoolfridays.com/make-your-own-talking-stick/>

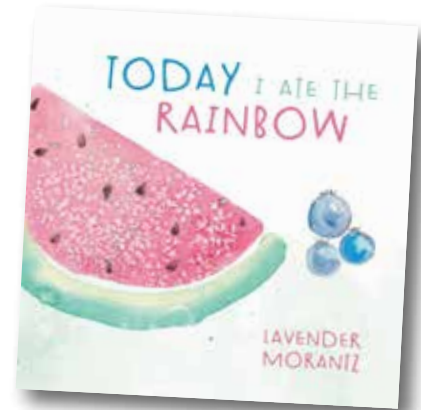
“Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.”

— Stephen R. Covey

Today I Ate the Rainbow

by Lavender Morantz

Eating healthy foods doesn't have to be boring or a chore. Let's connect with the colors of the rainbow to make it fun while keeping our cells and bodies happy. A playful intro to our mind, body, soul connection for children and families. Lavender Morantz is a passionate children's author and illustrator, an international and TEDx speaker, and a proud mama to two spirited daughters. She is a motivated entrepreneur, founding multiple start-up businesses including business and lifestyle coaching. She is a certified nutrition and wellness specialist who deeply desires to empower and educate children and families about the mind, body, and soul connection through her work.



Lavender Morantz beautifully illustrates healthy fruits & vegetables in a fun & appealing way with an emphasis on the importance of eating for wellness.

~ Alex

Love this one! So bright and colourful! Makes learning colours easy for kids and teaches them different healthy foods they can eat!!! My girls asked to read this one over and over.

~ Arden

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