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How working parents can create better work-life balance

Many working parents struggle to maintain a healthy balance between their responsibilities at work and their obligations to their families. An inability to maintain that healthy balance can have adverse effects on men and women's careers as well as the relationships they have with their families.

A survey of more than 2,000 adults commissioned by the workplace solution provider Workfront found that 38 percent of survey participants have missed life events because of a bad work-life balance. Access to technology that means work is never too far away might contribute to poor work-life balance, as 57 percent of respondents also acknowledged feeling that technology has ruined the definition of a family dinner.

Finding a healthy balance between work and life at home may require a concerted effort on the part of working parents, but there are ways to successfully juggle a career and family.

• **Set reasonable goals.** Much of the difficulty men and women experience in regard to finding a healthy work-life balance may be a by-product of working parents spreading themselves too thin. Setting reasonable goals can help avoid that, but doing so requires taking commitments to one's employer and family into consideration before agreeing to take on new projects or setting deadlines for projects to be completed. This should be applied to both work and home. If a work deadline is unreasonable, professionals should discuss that with their employers, who might change the deadline or arrange for extra persons to work on the project. At home, parents should avoid taking on too many projects, such as chaperoning a child's dance or coaching a sports team, if doing so will adversely affect the amount of time they get to spend with their families.

• **Look for ways to be more efficient.** Interactions with coworkers can make work more enjoyable, but working parents should not spend too much time shooting the breeze with their fellow employees. Doing so wastes time and only contributes to work-related stress. Commuters who don't drive themselves to work can be more efficient by using their commutes to read emails, arrange meetings or catch up on projects. Doing so allows for more time to get work done while in the office, which can make it easier to go home on time.

• **Request changes to work schedules.** While technology may have largely eliminated the separation between the office and home, working parents can use that to their advantage by asking their employees to alter their work schedules. Telecommuting one or two days a week can help parents feel more connected to their families, while flex schedules can ensure working parents don't miss any of their children's dance recitals or weekday afternoon ballgames.

• **Unplug when you get home.** Perhaps the simplest and most effective way for parents to regain a healthy work-life balance is to unplug their devices. Employing "Do not disturb" settings on smartphones and turning off tablets can ensure parents don't spend their time at home working but connecting with their families.

Maintaining a healthy work-life balance is no small task for today's working parents. But such a goal is possible.

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8 activities to keep kids entertained

Parents can counter "I'm bored" with these eight boredom-busting activities that are certain to help pass the time in entertaining and sometimes educational ways.

What parent hasn't heard their child utter the familiar phrase "I'm bored" at some point? Despite a seemingly vast array of toys, electronics and other items at their disposal, children can be quick to sulk and say there's nothing to do. Parents can counter "I'm bored" with these eight boredom-busting activities that are certain to help pass the time in entertaining and sometimes educational ways.

1. Craft time: Pick a theme and gather the materials for the project. For example, kids can evoke a trip to the ocean by creating handmade sea creatures. Paint a paper plate and hang brightly colored yarn underneath it to create the "tentacles" of a jellyfish. Kids can use salt dough clay to fashion seashells, sea snails or crustaceans.

2. Painting: Shaving cream is a great sensory material that is relatively easy to clean up. Kids can whip up a batch of shaving cream paint and use it to finger paint on a table or even in the bathtub. Simply mix shaving cream with food coloring in a bowl, or use a muffin tin to separate the colors.

3. Build a birdhouse: Birdhouses or bird feeders can be made from scraps of material found around the house. Scavenge for spare lumber or other supplies in the shed or garage. An adult or older sibling can help cut the wood into pieces. Young children may enjoy painting the house. Wood adhesive or screws can be used to assemble the project.

4. Plan a garden: Kids can help to design a garden the entire family will maintain and even be responsible for a special parcel that's all their own. Gardens can grow food, flowers and more. Add a touch of whimsy with figurines for a fairy garden or even small superhero figures for a spot for boys to tend.

5. Box makeovers: Tissue boxes or cereal boxes can be made into many different creations with paint or construction paper. Use a few craft supplies like pom-poms or wiggly eyes to turn boxes into "monsters."

6. Boat races: Build a small sailboat for each member of the family. Fill up a long, shallow container and take turns racing the boats by blowing on the sails.

7. Leaf art: Gather leaves and twigs from around the yard and then combine pieces to make them look like various animals.

8. Spray park: Create an at-home spray park with a garden hose and a pool noodle. Poke several small holes into the pool noodle on all sides. Stick a garden hose into the end of the pool noodle and hot-glue a wine cork into the hole at the other end. Turn on the water and let kids run through.

Head off kids' boredom by having plenty of ideas ready.

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How to keep pets occupied while you're at work

Concerned pet owners can take various steps to help keep their pets occupied and content while their human companions are away from home.

If one had to find a silver lining during the global pandemic that kept people close to home for an extended period of time, the chance to spend more time with pets is worthy of consideration. Cats, dogs, birds, and other animals reaped the rewards of having humans nearby for much of the day.

As the world continues to open up and people are returning to their offices and schools, pets who have grown accustomed to having company all day long may be in for a shock. Concerned pet owners can take various steps to help keep their pets occupied and content while their human companions are away from home.

Get a buddy

When two pets get together, the opportunity for play increases exponentially. Animals can keep themselves company and hopefully out of trouble. A single pet may experience separation anxiety when his owner goes away to work or school, and that may result in damaging behavior like chewing, scratching or even soiling in inappropriate places.

Provide puzzling toys

Keeping pets' brains active can reduce instances of boredom. PetMD suggests food puzzle toys that can be stuffed with treats and involve brain power to unlock the food rewards. .

Expend energy

Prior to leaving for work or school, pet parents can help pets expend some energy so they're more inclined to sleep during the day. The Animal Behavior College suggests an extra 20 minutes of walking each day may be enough to tire out most breeds. Working dogs, such as shepherds, pointers and setters, may need 40 or more minutes to burn off energy. Cat owners can play with their cats indoors, but generally cats will lounge around during the day anyway.

Provide white noise

Pets may have grown accustomed to the sounds of an active house, so white noise can fill the void owners' absences create. Turn on the television or radio. Pet fountains, fans and other devices can create noises to keep pets content.

Introduce new toys

Keep a cache of new toys and rotate them on a regular basis. Pets may become so interested in the bevy of new toys that they fail to even realize their owners are gone for much of the day.

Make rest enticing

Invest in a new and cozy pet bed (or cage bedding) that's too comfortable for pets to ignore.

Pets who grew accustomed to constant companionship during the pandemic may need to readjust to a quiet home. Owners can try various strategies to help pets during this adjustment period.

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How to protect vision right now

Taking inventory of behaviors that put eyes at risk, and making important changes, can safeguard the eyes for as long as possible.

The prospect of vision loss is not typically a concern for most people until a decline in visual acuity becomes noticeable. Vision changes as a person ages, and it also may be affected by injury. But there are entirely preventable factors that contribute to poor vision or diminished eye health as well.

Taking inventory of behaviors that put eyes at risk, and making important changes, can safeguard the eyes for as long as possible.

Get routine comprehensive wellness exams

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says about 93 million adults in the United States are at risk for vision loss. Factors that contribute to vision loss can include being overweight or obese, diabetes, high cholesterol, and high blood pressure. A wellness exam also may uncover family history issues that increase risk for hereditary eye conditions.

Receive a dilated vision exam

Many eye diseases, like glaucoma or age-related macular degeneration, have no warning signs, states the CDC's Vision Health Initiative. The only way to determine if there is an eye health issue or compromised vision is to get a complete vision exam, which includes dilating the pupil to see the retina, blood vessels and other components of the inner eye. This is the only way to detect diseases in their earliest stages.

Step up healthy eating

Many eye-healthy foods are rich in vitamins and minerals. Dark, leafy greens like spinach, kale and collards are good for the eyes, according to the National Eye Institute. In addition, foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids, like salmon, halibut and tuna, also are good choices for maintaining eye health, as they lower the risk for dry eyes and eye diseases such as macular degeneration and cataracts.

Sip on green tea

True Eye Experts says green tea is a great source of antioxidants that can keep eyes healthy and defend them from cataracts and AMD.

Wear protective eyewear

Always don sunglasses with UVA and UVB protection when outdoors. Protective eyewear is a must for those who work in an industry that requires eye protection or athletes who play sports in which eye injuries are a consistent threat.

Discard old cosmetics

Exercise caution with outdated eye makeup. Experts suggest discarding mascara that is more than four months old. Avoid applying eyeliner to the inside of the eyelid, as that can lead to irritation or infection.

Practice smart contact hygiene

Always wash hands before inserting or removing contact lenses. Lenses should be stored properly in cleansing solution and discarded after the recommended amount of time for the particular type of lens (daily, bi-weekly, monthly). Unless they are approved for overnight use, remove contacts before going to bed.

Quit smoking (or don't start)

Smoking increases a person's risk of developing various eye diseases and can make diabetic eye disease more severe, says the CDC.

It's never too late to make changes that can preserve vision.

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Different generations can learn and benefit from one another

Even though people of different age groups may not entirely have the same interests, the interactions between generations can benefit both young people and their aging relatives.

In the not-so-distant past, extended families frequently lived in close proximity to one another. Such families shared meals and experiences and essentially grew up together. Nowadays, families separate for various reasons, such as job opportunities and cost of living concerns.

While there are advantages to spreading out, there are also some disadvantages, namely that grandparents and grandchildren may not see one another frequently enough. Even though people of different age groups may not entirely have the same interests, the interactions between generations can benefit both young people and their aging relatives.

Finding renewed vigor

Senior living and active lifestyle communities provide invaluable care and amenities for seniors. While being around like-minded individuals can be handy, it's also limiting. Seniors who continue to age in place in mixed-age communities can extract joy from watching youthful children and young adults growing up, playing and socializing. Being around multiple generations also can spark interesting conversation, and all parties involved can learn something from one another.

Planning for the future

Younger generations may not understand the concept of "hard times" or "doing without" like a person who has lived through various ups and downs. Passing along advice about economic cycles, saving for the future and maintaining stability is one area of expertise at which many seniors excel.

Practicing interpersonal skills

All the technological savviness in the world cannot compensate for the power of strong interpersonal skills. Being able to address a group of people or speak one-on-one is essential in the workplace and in life. When younger generations speak to older adults, they may become stronger at verbal discourse and have greater perspective of different points of conversation.

Learning new technology

Younger generations can impart knowledge of technological devices to older adults. People with skills are usually happy to share their knowledge. Even if seniors aren't ready to purchase tablets or smartphones, they may be excited to have their grandchildren teach them about the latest gadgets.

Providing sense of purpose

Both seniors and younger generations can realize a greater sense of purpose when interacting with one another. That person may be the reason the other one greets the day with a smile. Visits from grandchildren can reduce the liklihood of isolation and depression in older adults. And younger generations can discover the benefits of personal social interaction rather than communicating exclusively through social media apps.

Fostering intergenerational connections is a great way to broaden social circles, improve communication and learn new things.

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Age-appropriate chores for kids

The AACAP offers the following age-based chore suggestions to parents as they look to give their children more responsibility around the house.

Few people look forward to chores around the house. Though adults may not be excited by the prospect of mopping the kitchen floor or folding the laundry, their lack of enthusiasm no doubt pales in comparison to their children's opinion of chores.

Chores can play a vital role in kids' development. According to the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, children can learn time management skills, which also can teach them how to balance work and play time. Kids can apply those lessons throughout their childhood and into adulthood. Giving kids chores also benefits them by teaching them to accept responsibility within the family and providing them with an opportunity to be successful.

Parents may have a long to-do list in regard to chores around the house, and it can be tempting to share that workload with youngsters. However, the AACAP notes the importance of picking age-appropriate chores for children. Children given chores more suited for older youngsters may fail at completing those tasks. Such failure may set a negative precedent that adversely affects kids' self-esteem and makes them reluctant to do their chores in the future. On the flip side, the AACAP notes that picking an age-appropriate chore for a child will increase his or her likelihood of success, boosting their confidence and making them more likely to approach their chores with enthusiasm as they navigate their way through childhood and into adolescence.

- **2- to 3-year-olds:** Children in this age group can put their toys away and help put groceries away as well. Stick to groceries that can be dropped without breaking or spilling, which rules out jars of pasta sauce or milk and juice. Children in this age group also can start to dress themselves, though the AACAP recommends parents offer help when necessary so kids do not become discouraged.
- **4- to 5-year-olds:** Four- and 5-year-olds can help feed pets and make their beds. In addition, children in this age group can help clear the table after meals, but parents should be sure to take sharp objects like knives to the sink before kids begin helping.
- **6- to 7-year-olds:** This is a good age for children to begin taking on more complicated chores, including wiping tables and counters, putting laundry away and sweeping floors.
- **7- to 9-year-olds:** Children in this age group can help their parents prepare meals and even pack their own lunch for school. The responsibility of loading and unloading the dishwasher also can be given to kids between the ages of seven and nine.
- **10- to 11-year-olds:** More difficult tasks like changing the sheets on their beds, cleaning kitchens and bathrooms and doing yard work are appropriate for kids in this age group.
- **12-years-old & older:** Children 12 and older can help take care of younger siblings and pitch in with grocery shopping and running errands.

Don't require perfection: A child may not immediately perform a chore as well as an adult or adhere strictly to a parent's specifications. For kids to learn from the experience and be encouraged to continue, parents need to be a little more flexible when judging how kids perform their chores. Yelling that the job wasn't done up to snuff may set kids up for failure, compelling them to throw in the towel prematurely.

Give a lot of praise: Praise kids as they are performing their chores and reward this good behavior. The goal is for parents to build positive momemtum, especially for young children.

Chores play a vital role as children grow up and mature. Assigning age-appropriate chores is important as parents look to help their children develop into responsible adolescents.

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The various health benefits of yoga

Though yoga may need to be studied more closely and extensively, many people who include it in their regular health care routines report feeling better both physically and mentally for having done so, and that may not be a coincidence.

Health-conscious individuals can do many things to improve their overall health. As medical researchers continue to uncover new things about how to achieve optimal health, one practice dating back to ancient times remains a highly effective way to take care of the human body.

Though there's no written records regarding the origins and invention of yoga, the practice is believed to date back to ancient India. The earliest written record of yoga is "The Yoga Sutra of Pantañjali," a collection of aphorisms that historians believe was compiled sometime between 500 BCE and 400 BCE.

Despite its age, yoga has not been studied extensively by medical researchers. According to the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health, many studies looking into the health effects of yoga have included only small numbers of people and have not been of high quality. As a result, the NCCIH can only say that yoga shows promise in regard to helping people manage or overcome certain health issues, but not that it has been proven to do so.

Though yoga may need to be studied more closely and extensively, many people who include it in their regular health care routines report feeling better both physically and mentally for having done so, and that may not be a coincidence. A comprehensive review of yoga's use as a therapeutic intervention published in the Journal of Physiology and Pharmacology indicated that yoga targets unmanaged stress, which has been linked to chronic disorders like anxiety, depression, obesity, diabetes, and insomnia.

In addition to that review, the NCCIH notes that research has suggested yoga can:

- Relieve low-back pain and neck pain
- Relieve menopause symptoms
- Help people manage anxiety or depressive symptoms associated with difficult life situations
- Help people quit smoking
- Help people who are overweight or obese lose weight
- Help people with chronic diseases manage their symptoms and improve their quality of life.

It's important that anyone considering making yoga part of their health care routines recognize that there are various forms of yoga, some of which are more physically demanding than others. So it's best if individuals speak with their physicians before trying yoga so they can find the type that aligns best with their current levels of fitness.

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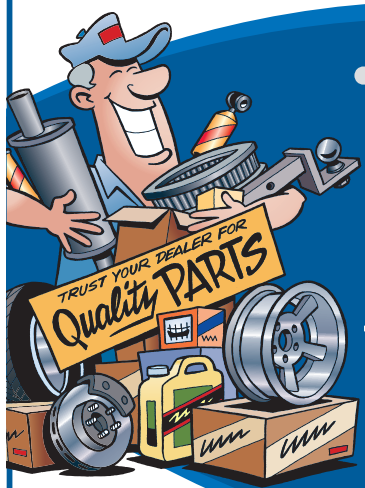

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Pros and cons to giving kids allowances

Allowances can be tough to figure out. For example, parents may not know how to determine the rate and frequency of payouts.

Parents can employ various strategies, including assigning chores, to instill a sense of responsibility in their children. The natural segue from chores is to offer compensation for the jobs that children are doing.

Allowances can provide foundations for parents to teach kids about working for a living. Kids are able to grasp the concept that money doesn't come without hard work. Also, allowances paint the picture that one's financial resources are commensurate with the effort he or she puts in. Giving allowances also can help teach children how to manage money, plan ahead and make spending choices about what's most important, according to the parenting guide Raise Smart Kids.

Allowances can be tough to figure out. For example, parents may not know how to determine the rate and frequency of payouts.

According to Lewis Mandell, a former dean of business at the State University of New York at Buffalo, giving a child an allowance, especially a regular, unconditional allowance that the child can depend on, isn't the right way to approach allowances. Children may begin to view this allowance as an entitlement. In fact, Mandell's research on teens in the United States, Canada, Europe, and Australia found, without exception, that teens who received a regular unconditional allowance had diminished financial literacy, lower levels of motivation and an increased aversion to work.

But when handled properly, allowances can be important tools. Here are some additional benefits to allowances.

- Allowances can provide incentive to get chores done.
- Allowances can motivate students to work hard at school.
- Allowances can include a required portion to be donated, teaching kids the importance of being charitable.

Learning the correlation between work and compensation is a lesson that starts in childhood. Allowances can be an important part of kids' early financial education.

Resolve to be a better parent

Raising successful, happy and well-rounded children takes effort, and the following tips may help parents along the way.

Parenting is a challenging, yet rewarding role that many adults take on lovingly. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau indicates that there were 73.7 million children under age 18 living in families in 2016, the most recent year for data.

Parenting is a hard job that evolves as children age, and moms and dads may wonder if there is anything they can do to be better parents. Raising successful, happy and well-rounded children takes effort, and the following tips may help parents along the way.

Take care of yourself!

It's hard for parents to serve as good role models for their children if they aren't taking care of themselves. A little self-reflection and some positive changes can help parents set strong examples for their youngsters.

Beware of comparisons

Parents often wonder what they may be doing wrong, especially when they see other children meeting milestones that their children may not be achieving. According to Harvey Karp, MD, author of "The Happiest Toddler," babies develop rapidly and each child is unique. One set of abilities is bound to develop faster than another, Karp says. Making comparisons between children, whether it's with youngsters' siblings or friends, can be a recipe for conflict and self-doubt. Speak with a pediatrician if you have concerns about development.

Be an active listener

Being an attentive parent includes listening to youngsters. Encourage kids to share their points of view on activities or topics they feel are important. That can reassure children they know they can come to you without fear of reprisal, even when they may have been out of line. This strengthens the bond between parents and their children.

Explain you are human, too

Sometimes children need to see that their parents are not perfect to realize they needn't be perfect either. The website Aha Parenting! recommends parents apologize when they are wrong and use such instances to teach kids that adults are human, too.

These are just a few of the many steps parents can take to form strong bonds with their children and be the best parents possible.

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How to plan a perfect game night

The following are a few things to consider when planning a game night.

Shared experiences are ideal ways to make new friends or solidify established relationships. Bonds can be strengthened even further when those shared experiences include entertaining activities. This is a great reason for adults to incorporate routine game nights into their social calendars.

Game nights are nothing new. Perhaps your parents or grandparents gossiped over a few games of gin rummy or weekly poker gatherings? Before the widespread proliferation of digital video games, board games were a go-to way to have fun. Even now, game nights can provide the perfect way to slow down, have fun and get together with friends. Hosting a game night can be an ideal way to have fun at home without turning on the television. The following are a few things to consider when planning a game night.

How many people are invited to game night will determine the games that can be played. Game nights tend to be more successful with a guest between four and eight players. Keeping people engaged in a game can be more challenging if there are more than eight individuals, and most games are designed for a maximum of eight players.

Plan for finger foods

Game night etiquette typically dictates that hosts will provide refreshments. In lieu of a sit-down meal, offer finger foods, which are easier to manage while engaged in game play. Premade party platters are an option if you want to spend more time entertaining and less time preparing food. Guests also can be encouraged to bring small dishes, such as sandwiches, chips and dips or other snacks.

Have a variety of games on hand

Let the course of the night be relatively fluid, even if you have a certain game in mind. If guests are not fans of a particular game, make sure you have others at the ready. Music or a sports game playing in the background also can be a way to keep guests entertained between turns. When deciding on games, consider these criteria, courtesy of Game Night Gods, an online game night resource

- The game should be easy to learn.
- The game should be relatively fast-moving.
- The game should pique interest and be strategic.

Get out of your comfort zones

Acting zany and engaging in games that push people out of their comfort zones can help guests get to know one another and laugh along the way. Games also are a perfect way to learn something new with little to no pressure.

A game night can unite existing friends and help people interested in making new acquaintances find common ground. If in person game nights are not doable, gather virtually through video chat applications.

SUMMER FUN!

Warm Summer nights are here along with the lightning bugs and the chirping tree frogs that help make the nights full of laughter and fun. So call your friends and family to set up an outdoor carnival for the kids, rent a popcorn machine and of course a cotton candy machine. And don't forget the boxes of candy!

Here are two suggestions for a leisurely "drive-in" movie: - Have large boxes with paper headlights and taillights cut out, or use paper plates - the plates can be used as tires as well! This way the kids can decorate their very own cars for the "drive-in" movie. - For the teenagers and adults blow up swimming pools, add some pillows and blankets to keep them comfortable and content. *Place some charged solar lights around for safety.* Enjoy the movie and concessions!

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A guide to cooking with kids

Parents can foster their children's love of cooking and help them along the way with these tips.

Children may start their culinary careers crafting mud pies in their backyards, but that creativity and imagination soon may translate into foods they can actually eat. Many kids love cooking because it can be fun and messy, which are two qualities that children find hard to resist.

Parents can foster their children's love of cooking and help them along the way with these tips.

• **Be patient.** Going into the cooking experience knowing there will be a mess, typically when young children are involved, can help you prepare. Toddlers have not yet mastered manual dexterity, so they're bound to spill and drop. Put a plastic tablecloth under the work area and on the floor to help catch what falls. Also, cooking with youngsters likely will take more time than it normally would, so set aside extra preparation and cooking time.

• **Teach kids good hygiene.** Hygiene is important and can prevent foodborne illnesses. Make sure everyone involved in cooking, including children, washes his or her hands before cooking begins and continues to do so after handling foods, particularly raw meat and poultry. Hair should be tied back, and separate prep surfaces should be designated for produce and meats.

• **Assign age-appropriate tasks.** Consider age and maturity levels when assigning tasks in the kitchen. Even children as young as 3-years-old can chop food if they are provided a serrated butter knife with a rounded point and soft vegetables or fruits. This helps teach knife skills that kids can develop more thoroughly in the future. Children can mix and add ingredients as well. As kids get older, parents can decide the right time to let them use the stove.

• **Experiment with dough.** Kids can have a blast with dough, particularly rolling out pie crusts and pasta. They also can make dumplings and then fill them with vegetables. Many cookware retailers sell small rolling pins that are easy for kids to handle.

• **Practice measuring together.** Let children read the recipes and be in charge of portioning out ingredients. This reinforces classroom lessons about temperature, ratios and fractions.

• **Move on to more sophisticated tasks.** Around age eight or nine, children can take on jobs like opening cans, scooping batter, pounding poultry, proofing yeast, skewering kabobs, and slicing bread, according to cooking educator Julie Negrin. Negrin notes that children between the ages of 10 and 12 can start working independently in the kitchen so long as an adult is in the home. Ultimately, children can cook without close supervision.

• **Involve children in meal planning.** Get input from your children about what they might like to see on the menu. While there may be some items that are expected, including comfort foods like mac-and-cheese, parents may be surprised at how mature their children's palates can be. Maybe they've heard about a dish on television or learned about a specific ethnic cuisine at school and want to give it a try.

Children also can be involved in cooking by helping to draft shopping lists and taking trips to the supermarket. This shows kids the complete process of gathering ingredients for meals, what they cost and how they are made before foods make it to the dinner table.

How to teach children to respect their parents

These are some ways to teach kids how to respect their parents.

Parents are tasked with teaching their children many lessons. Some are more obvious, like how to live safely or how to ride a bike or tie their shoes. Other lessons are more complicated and abstract, especially as they pertain to issues like respect.

Early in life, children get attention by crying, throwing tantrums or through other means. Youngsters must be taught to be respectful of others, including their own parents. People, including children, may have their own ideas in regard to what constitutes respect, so families have to work together to find common ground.

Parenting for Brain, a parenting resource that focuses on child psychology, notes that respect can refer to the way kids admire or look up to someone, but also as an act of giving attention and showing care. It's not simply about being compliant. Establishing patterns for respect can be challenging because there are no shortages of situations in popular culture — from movies to music to social media — that complicate, if not compromise, parents' efforts to teach children respect. However, there are ways to teach kids how to respect their parents.

• **Be a good role model.** Children learn by examining the world around them. If parents are rude to restaurant servers, cut people off on roadways, make fun of others, or even yell at members of their own families, their children are more likely to follow suit.

• **Be a parent first, not a friend.** Raising children is complicated, but many parents try to be their kids' friends before they act as their parents. While it seems healthy to want to hang out and be equals with them, Psychology Today warns that this approach compromises the unique relationship parents have with their children because kids have many friends but not an infinite number of parents. Children should not have equal power with their parents as they would their peers. Plus, kids often don't respect parents who try to act like their friends. They may feel their parents are trying too hard, and some may even grow to resent their parents for trying to be friends first and parents second.

• **Explore other outlets for anger.** Children may act out and be disrespectful to others when faced with strong emotions that make them feel angry or overwhelmed. In addition to encouraging kids to talk out their scary feelings, parents can guide them toward outlets to relieve frustration, such as engaging in healthy exercise or even escaping into a craft or hobby. Children who are struggling to cope with a significant life change may need a little time to get back on track.

Teaching respect takes time and is not a one-size-fits-all task. Parents must find an approach that works for them and their children.

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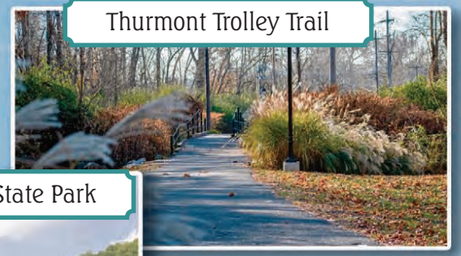

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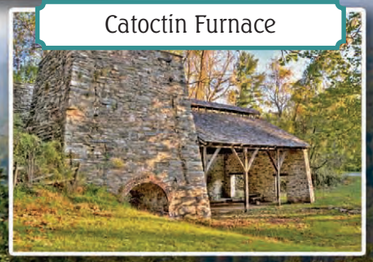

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Have fun as a family without breaking the bank

The following are a handful of ways that families can have fun without breaking the bank.

Raising children is no small task. Parents face numerous challenges when raising their kids, and while it may not be the biggest hurdle they face, the cost of raising a family can sometimes seem daunting.

A report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture found that a typical middle-income American family spent just under $13,000 annually per child. Those costs included housing, food, childcare, health care, and the various other expenses associated with raising children. Multiply that number by 18 years and parents can expect to spend $234,000 per child by the time the youngster graduates high school. That's before parents write a single college tuition check.

Since the costs of raising children are so substantial, it's no surprise that parents are often on the lookout for budget-friendly ways to have fun as a family.

• **Picnics:** Dining al fresco is an enjoyable way to break bread, but if backyard barbecues have grown stale, parents can always plan picnics in local parks. Park admission is probably free, and parents can save even more money by packing picnic-style foods, like salads and sandwiches, rather than using grills provided by the park (parks may or may not charge fees to use grills).

• **Family days:** Local attractions like zoos and museums may designate a certain day of the week as "Family Day." Admissions might be discounted on these days, and some attractions may even allow kids to enter free. Take advantage of these promotions whenever possible. In addition, inquire about family memberships at local attractions. Such memberships may offer year-round entry for the whole family for an annual fee. Depending on how often you visit the attraction, paying an annual fee can save you a lot of money compared to paying regular admission on each visit.

• **Festivals:** Community festivals are another great way for families to get out of the house without taxing their budgets. Community festivals typically do not charge for admission. Parents should not downplay the benefits of free entertainment, as a report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics found that the average American spends over $2900 on entertainment.

• **Camping:** Campsites may charge fees, but such fees are nominal compared to the costs associated with more traditional lodging, like hotels. Camping is a fun activity the whole family can enjoy, providing a great weekend getaway that won't cost parents too much money.

• **Rivers/lakes:** Escaping to a nearby river or lake for a day on the water can make for a memorable, family-friendly getaway. Look for activities like fishing and bring your own rods or rent from nearby bait and tackle shops. If cruising is more your family's style, look for boat tours that offer a chance to explore local history while giving the whole family a chance to relax on a boat and soak up some sun.

Parents whose budgets are stretched thin can still find affordable ways to have fun as a family.

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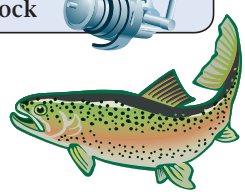

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Parents can help kids struggling with social media

There are steps parents can take to help tweens and teens who may be struggling and need assistance managing social media

Social media is a big part of young people's lives. Psychology Today reports that social media use is now the most common activity children and teenagers engage in, with the majority of users accessing social media platforms several times each day through their personal cell phones.

Social media has its benefits, and being able to keep in touch with friends and family remotely was one of the saving graces in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic when people were isolating in their homes. But there's a dark side to social media as well. Recently leaked documents from Meta, the company that oversees social media giants Facebook and Instagram, suggest the company has known for several years that its Instagram app is contributing to body image issues and other mental health problems for teens, particularly females. Social media platforms use algorithms to enhance users' engagement. Feeds may be driven toward polarizing topics or those that have the most shock value, further leading teens down a negative path.

The current tween and teen generation is faced with constant information being delivered right to their handheld devices. Children may not be developmentally ready for the immediate gratification that social media provides nor the constant onslaught of content. As a result, teens increasingly are becoming more irritable, having trouble sleeping and are spending more time alone as a result of phone usage. The Harvard Graduate School of Education says recent studies have noted a significant uptick in depression and suicidal thoughts over the past several years for teens, especially those who spend multiple hours a day using screens.

There are steps parents can take to help tweens and teens who may be struggling and need assistance managing social media.

- **Set real limits.** The Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health suggests that until meaningful government oversight is in place to police social media platforms, parents will have to set their own parameters for use. Putting phones down at meal times, turning off alerts close to bedtime, and making certain days "a rest from technology" can help.
- **Block upsetting content.** It's a parent's job to be a parent, not a best friend. Giving in to requests to engage with certain social platforms, even when they do not align with one's beliefs or values, can be harmful. Set limits on which platforms children are allowed to use.
- **Regularly monitor kids' usage.** Parents should look through their kids' phones and accounts on a regular basis to see which sites are being visited and how kids are engaging with others. If social media is affecting a child's mental health, have him or her take a break or delete the account.

Social media is ever-present in kids' lives. Parents and other caregivers have to find a way to assist struggling tweens and teens with social media so it does not become a detriment to their overall health.

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Explore these relaxing hobbies

Summertime is an ideal time of the year to embrace relaxing activities because the hustle and bustle of everyday life tends to slow down during the summer, when kids are out of school and vacations are on the docket. These hobbies and other interests can help tame stress by promoting calm.

Stress is a part of many people's daily lives. A recent survey from the American Psychological Association found that 44 percent of Americans feel their stress levels have increased over the past five years. Children also are struggling, with almost a one-third reporting that they have experienced a health symptom associated with stress, such as stomach aches, trouble sleeping and headaches.

Calming activities that can tone down the body's stress responses are great ways to alleviate stress.

• **Listen to and/or play music.** Music can be energizing or calming, depending on which music you choose. Researchers at Stanford University found that rhythmic music may have therapeutic effects for treating a range of neurological conditions, as it stimulates the brain and can perhaps change how it functions. Familiar melodies and gentle music can reduce the level of the stress hormone cortisol.

• **Gardening:** Gardening lets a person tend to living things while getting some fresh air. Both the sunlight and the activity itself can be soothing and have a positive effect on mood. A study from the Journal of Health Psychology found that gardening, like listening to music, lowers cortisol levels.

• **Grab a good book.** Taking the time to unwind and read can help ease tension in the muscles, lower one's heart rate and induce calm. Research from the consultancy Mindlab International at the University of Sussex found reading reduced stress levels by 68 percent.

• **Start painting or crafting.** Engaging in a creative hobby sharpens the mind and improves focus. You may also want to try focusing emotions onto the canvas to help release tension. A study published in the British Journal of Occupational Therapy found that 81.5 percent of respondents with depression reported feeling happy after knitting.

• **Take a dance class.** A form of art and music, dancing can promote well-being through exercise and expansion of creative ability. It also can be good for the mind. A study from Swedish researchers that was published in the Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine found that a dancing intervention program, twice weekly for eight months, helped teenage girls struggling with stress, anxiety, depression, and other problems.

Many relaxing activities can tame stress, and these activities can be perfect for lazy summer days.

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Prevent lost pets with these simple tips

While it is impossible to prevent every situation that may lead to a lost pet, pet owners can take some simple preventative steps to keep pets from becoming lost.

No pet parent wants their pets to escape the house, car or yard and become lost. But curious pets have a way of getting out on their own, which not even the most watchful pet owners can always prevent.

The American Humane Association estimates that more than 10 million dogs and cats are lost or stolen in the United States every year. One in three pets will become lost at some point during its life. While it is impossible to prevent every situation that may lead to a lost pet, pet owners can take some simple preventative steps to keep pets from becoming lost.

Identify the pet

Pets should wear some form of identification, which will differ based on the animal. For example, a dog can wear a collar and a name tag. A homing pigeon or other bird may have a numbered ankle band. Many pet owners choose to microchip their pets. These small devices are implanted under the skin and can be read by a special electronic wand. If you microchip your pet, it is essential to keep your contact information associated with the chip updated.

Track the pet

GPS-based devices can be used to locate a pet if it gets out of the house. Much like the tracking devices in phones and watches, small tags can be placed on the pet's collar and be tracked through an app on the owner's phone or another device.

Provide a secure space

Pets need a secure, supervised area to exercise. Fencing needs to be tall enough to prevent pets from jumping over it. Make sure pets cannot dig under the fence and that fence gates are always latched tightly. Self-latching fence gates can be handy. Indoors, be sure to close doors promptly when exiting and entering the house. Be mindful of pets trying to escape.

Use a leash or carrier

When the pet is taken out of the house, he or she should be leashed or secured in an animal carrier. Many pets have a strong prey instinct and love to chase animals. Keeping pets close by can keep them from getting lost or injured.

Spay and neuter

According to the Animal Humane Society, studies indicate that sterilized animals are less likely to roam than unsterilized animals. Many clinics will perform the surgery for a discount; some may even do it free.

Obedience training and keeping a watchful eye on pets also can prevent them from getting lost.

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Resolutions inspired by trending health topics

Individuals focused on health and wellness may consider these trending topics.

Improving personal health is a popular New Years resolution. A Finder survey found that an estimated 188 million Americans planned to make resolutions and carry them into the next year. Similar numbers of people will put personal goals on the calendar as well. Those focused on health and wellness may consider these trending topics.

Collagen supplementation

Collagen is a family of proteins that serves as the structural component of most connective tissues in the body. Collagen production wanes as people age, but it also can drop quickly due to excess sun exposure, smoking, lack of exercise, and excess alcohol consumption, according to the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.

Many people are interested in maintaining adequate levels of collagen, which is vital to giving skin a youthful appearance and helps to maintain healthy joints. According to Google Trends, online searches for collagen have increased steadily in the past few years. Collagen has become a top-selling supplement to improve hair, skin and nails. Though human studies that prove collagen supplementation efficacy are lacking, some randomized controlled trials have found that collagen supplements improve skin elasticity and joint mobility and reduce joint pain. Collagen supplements are thought to be safe, but people should discuss supplementation with a doctor first.

Fermented foods

More research is showing a connection between digestive tract (gut) health and immunity, and people concerned with boosting their immune systems are paying attention. Research published in the journal Cell indicated the immune system has evolved to maintain a symbiotic relationship with microbiota in the gut. Accordingly, when operating optimally, this immune system-microbiota alliance allows the induction of protective responses to pathogens.

Naturally fermented foods may help strengthen the gut microbiome by supplying it with healthy probiotics, according to Dr. David S. Ludwig, a professor of nutrition at the T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Some pickles, Korean kimchi, sauerkraut, and other foods can be beneficial. Consumers should look for product labels that say "naturally fermented," which use live organisms for the fermenting process.

CBD and hemp products

Even though medical marijuana and recreational marijuana use is now legal in many parts of the country, CBD is widely being harnessed in its own right. Cannabidiol oil is a chemical found in marijuana and hemp plants. CBD doesn't contain THC, the psychoactive ingredient found in marijuana that produces a high, advises the Mayo Clinic. CBD has been studied as a treatment for a wide range of conditions like Parkinson's disease, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, and anxiety. The only CBD product currently approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration is prescription Epidiolex for epilepsy.

Since hemp oil is high in essential fatty acids, it may produce anti-inflammatory effects and improve brain function. It is widely used in beauty products like skin creams as well. Always speak to a doctor before using CBD and related products.

How to protect your hearing

There are steps everyone can take to protect their hearing and reduce their risk for NIHL.

Aging has long been associated with hearing loss, and that association is not unwarranted. The National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders notes that age-related hearing loss can arise from changes in the inner ear as the body ages. However, hearing loss can affect people of all ages, including the very young.

Noise-induced hearing loss, or NIHL, can affect people of all ages. In fact, a study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that as many as 40 million adults in the United States have some degree of hearing loss related to exposure to loud noise. Another study published in the journal Pediatrics found that as many as 17 percent of adolescents between the ages of 12 and 19 had features of their hearing suggestive of NIHL.

No single activity can explain the prevalence of NIHL among adolescents and adults under 70. However, there are steps everyone can take to protect their hearing and reduce their risk for NIHL.

- **Switch from earbuds to over-the-ear headphones.** The Cleveland Clinic notes that over-the-ear headphones encase the ear and are often more effective at canceling outside noise. Why is that important? If outside noise is effectively canceled out, wearers won't have to turn up the volume on their headphones in order to hear their music. Listening at lower volumes is a great way to protect your hearing and prevent NIHL.
- **Recognize that others shouldn't hear what's coming through your headphones.** Audiologist Sharon A. Sandridge, Ph.D. of the Head and Neck Institute at the Cleveland Clinic notes that if people standing at arm's length can hear the music coming from an individual's headphones or earbud, then the volume levels on that person's devices are too loud.
- **Purchase activity-specific headphones, earplugs or earmuffs.** Hardware stores and sporting goods stores sell activity-specific headphones, earplugs and earmuffs that can be utilized when engaging in activities like yard work or hunting. Such products are often designed to block out noises from backpack leaf blowers and hunting rifles, and could therefore prove more protective of users' hearing than over-the-ear headphones designed for listening to music.

Age-related hearing loss may not be preventable. However, individuals can protect themselves from NIHL, and efforts to do just that should begin at a young age and continue throughout adulthood.

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Healthy activities for kids of all ages

The amount of physical activity children need each month depends on their age, and the AAP recommends the following age-based guidelines.

Children have a seemingly endless supply of energy. Channeling that energy into something positive can benefit kids' minds and bodies.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends various amounts of daily physical activity for children depending on their ages and abilities. Adhering to these recommendations is especially important in the wake of what many public health officials fear has become an epidemic of childhood obesity. For example, the United States-based Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that roughly 13.7 million children between the ages of two and 19 are presently obese.

Routine physical activity can help children maintain healthy weights, and it also pays dividends for youngsters' mental health. According to the American Psychological Association, children between the ages of six and 18 who exercise regularly tend to have lower levels of depression, stress and psychological distress. Those findings, part of a study published in the journal Sports Medicine, reflect the ways exercise affects the mind. And the mental benefits don't stop there, as the study also found that youngsters who are physically active also have higher levels of positive self-image, life satisfaction and psychological well-being.

The amount of physical activity children need each month depends on their age, and the AAP recommends the following age-based guidelines.

•Infants: The AAP recommends infants get at least 30 minutes of tummy time and other interactive play throughout the day.

•Toddlers: Toddlers can be tough to keep up with, and parents can channel that energy into something positive by ensuring their kids get at least three hours of physical activity every day. Free play outside and daily neighborhood walks are some examples of appropriate physical activities for children in this age group.

•Preschoolers: Three-plus hours of physical activity, including one hour of moderate to vigorous exercise, is recommended for preschool-aged youngsters. Tumbling, throwing and catching are some of the activities recommended by the AAP.

•Elementary school students: School-aged children need at least 60 minutes of physical activity on most days of the week. The AAP recommends giving children in this age group ample opportunities for free play but also notes that organized sports focused on fun can be great outlets for kids in elementary school. Parents can speak with their children's pediatricians about appropriate muscle/bone strengthening activities, which the AAP recommends three days a week for kids in this age group.

•Middle school students: Students in this age group need the same amount and types of exercise that elementary school students need. But the AAP advises parents to guide children toward physical activities that encourage socialization and to avoid having kids this age specialize in a single sport.

•Teenagers: Teenagers need an hour or more of physical activity most days of the week. Muscle/bone strengthening activities should be included three days per week. Activities that encourage socialization and competition are beneficial to teenagers' development.

Physical activity can benefit kids in myriad ways and should be a vital component of their daily lives.

How parents can create household budgets

The high cost of raising a child only emphasizes the importance parents must place on creating household budgets. A few dollars put away here and there can add up to substantial savings over the years.

Raising a family is no small feat. Along with the love and joy, there are some obstacles that must be surpassed, including the financial investment required.

A report from the Department of Agriculture found that middle-income married couples would spend an estimated $233,610 to raise a child born in 2015., with an annual adjustment for inflation of 2.2% each year factored in, the current cost of raising a child is now estimated at $272,049. Parents who find that figure high should know that it does not include costs incurred after children turn 18. So parents could be responsible for well over a quarter million dollars before they ever write a college tuition check.

The high cost of raising a child only emphasizes the importance parents must place on creating household budgets. A few dollars put away here and there can add up to substantial savings over the years.

Housing: Housing is many families' most substantial monthly expense. When determining how much they can afford to pay for housing, families may come up with a figure they're comfortable paying for their monthly mortgage. But it's important that parents, particularly those who have never owned their own home before, also take utility costs into consideration before signing their mortgage agreements. Utility costs for single-family homes can dwarf the cost of utilities in apartments

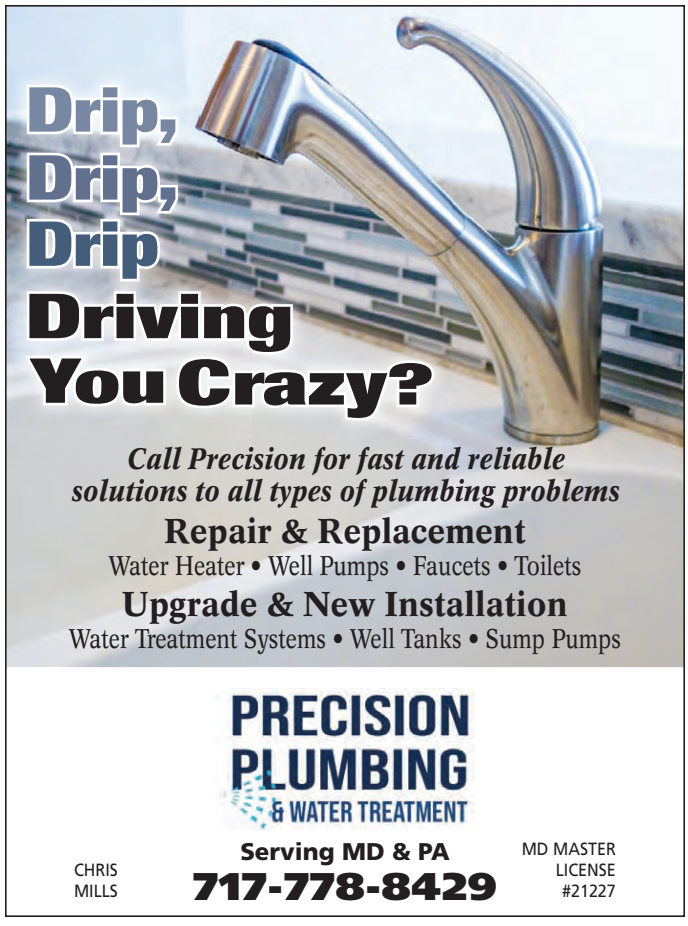
The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' Consumer Expenditure Survey recommends people making housing budgets commit 58 percent of total housing costs to mortgage payments, 21 percent to utilities, just over 9 percent to furnishings and equipment, and roughly 7 percent to household operations. Utilizing this formula before taking out a mortgage can help families ensure they are not scraping pennies together each month to meet their housing costs.

Food: Food is another significant expense, especially for growing families. The BLS notes that the average U.S. household spends just about 13 percent of its monthly budget on food. Parents who examine their spending habits over the previous year can look at how much they're devoting to food and find ways to reduce that figure if it's well over 13 percent. Reducing food spending may require more savvy spending at the grocery store, including shopping sales or buying certain items in bulk when it's advantageous to do so. With our current situation the average percentage is much higher.

Transportation: Parents may find this odd, but the BLS reports that the average U.S. household spends more of its monthly budget (roughly 17 percent) on transportation than it does food. Parents who want to trim their monthly budgets can opt for more affordable cars and trucks, reserving their splurging on luxury vehicles for later in life when their kids have moved out of the house. Again, % is higher now due to gas prices.

Miscellaneous expenses: When creating their household budgets, parents should leave room for unexpected miscellaneous expenses, such as healthcare costs if the children get sick and clothing and entertainment. Without accounting for such expenses, parents may find themselves taking on potentially crippling debt in times of emergency.

Carefully constructed household budgets can help parents survive the often expensive costs of raising a family.



How financial planners can help you every day

Financial planners can help people create effective long-term financial plans, and they also can be vital resources for people who need help managing their money every day.

Financial planning and retirement go hand in hand. Without effective planning, many people would never be able to retire, while others might have to work much longer than they hope to. While financial planning is essential to achieve long-term goals, planning also can make it easier for people to meet their everyday financial needs.

Managing money is a big responsibility, and it's one that many people may need help with. A recent survey from Pew Charitable Trusts found that 55 percent of Americans spend as much or more than they earn. That's not only compromising their financial futures, but also making daily life more stressful, as the American Psychological Association's annual "Stress in America" survey routinely finds that money is a top cause of stress among millions of Americans.

Adults who are finding it difficult to manage their money on a day-to-day basis may benefit from the services of a financial planner. Financial planners can help people create effective long-term financial plans, and they also can be vital resources for people who need help managing their money every day.

- **Planners can look at things from an unbiased perspective.** An honest assessment of monthly expenses is essential when creating a monthly budget. However, many people tend to be biased when it comes to their monthly expenses. For example, some may feel that three streaming service subscriptions are something they cannot live without. That can make it difficult to trim some of the fat from their monthly expenditures. A financial planner will begin by examining your monthly expenses and may or may not make unbiased suggestions regarding where you can save.
- **Planners have the time.** The average household is a hectic place. Adults with commitments at work and home often cite a lack of time as one of the reasons they aren't more on top of their finances. A 2018 survey from Bankrate.com found that 16 percent of respondents aren't saving more money because they haven't gotten to it. Financial planners have the time to help clients save, and over time a planner can be an expense that pays for itself if families are saving more as a result of enlisting the services of a planner.
- **Planners have the expertise many people lack.** One of the reasons people struggle financially is that it can be hard to navigate the world of investments, insurance and taxes. Planners have the financial literacy necessary to navigate those waters successfully and can help people realize both their short- and long-term financial goals.

Financial planners don't just help people plan for retirement. Many planners are equally effective at helping clients achieve their daily financial goals as well.

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Intersection of the Nursing Home and Estate Planning:

Families meticulously plan for the transfer of their assets and money upon their passing, hoping for a seamless transition, only to be confronted with the sudden proposition that they will run out of money after a stay at the local nursing home. Relying solely on the limited advice of Estate Planning Attorneys, Financial Advisors, and Accountants, families are left wondering where they went wrong when the first $15,000.00 monthly nursing home bill arrives.

The missing component to any comprehensive estate plan, must include a discussion with an Elder Law Attorney. You need to plan for the possibility where you or a family member has no choice but to enter a skilled nursing facility. Y**ou need to discuss Medicaid Planing with an Elder Law Attorney.** Medicaid Planning focuses on protecting your assets during your lifetime so that you have a choice on where the assets go during your lifetime and upon your passing.

In the world of traditional estate planning, "gifts" are an effective means to avoid the big 'ol bad Pennsylvania Inheritance Tax. However, what is good in traditional estate planning, is poor advice in Medicaid Planning. The "gift" whether to your favorite charity, supportive church, or deserving child, will count against you when you need care at a nursing facility. Understand that the size of the gift, regardless of the recipient, puts you and your family at risk of the nursing facility suing everyone for any unpaid funds.

Furthermore, traditional estate planning takes the view that *when* you die, your assets will go to your loved ones in the manner you deem most appropriate. Yet again, this traditional approach fails to consider that you may not have the stuff to give away because you spent everything on your care at a nursing home.

The Elder Law Attorneys at Mooney Law understand the balance between traditional estate planning and distribution your assets in the most appropriate manner, while incorporating Medicaid Planning to ensure that you still have your stuff to use during your lifetime and upon your passing. Regardless if you or your family member is healthy and planning for the distant future, or has just entered a nursing home, Mooney Law knows the means for you to keep the most of your hard earned assets.

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Create positive outcomes for kids during and after divorce

Divorce can be difficult for a couple, but challenges also arise when children are in the mix.

Divorce affects millions of people each year. According to Randy Kessler, a Georgia-based divorce lawyer with 30 years of experience, scientists have yet to quantify risk for divorce based on how many years a person has been married. In fact, despite the common "seven year itch" theory, many variables affect whether or not a marriage will dissolve.

Divorce can be difficult for a couple, but challenges also arise when children are in the mix. Most municipalities consider the best interests of the child when it comes to mapping out custody agreements or other decisions, but couples can get the ball rolling by considering the children in each and every decision being made. This can ensure the divorce process — however difficult — leads to more positive outcomes.

Willingness to support each other

Adults get divorced for various reasons, notably because they no longer feel comfortable nor willing to stay together in the household. No matter what you feel about a soon-to-be or former spouse, it's important to be cooperative with one another and work together to support relationships with the children. The more cooperative everyone is, the more supported and happy a child may feel.

Develop a common message

Do not use the divorce as a way to disparage the other person or shift blame, which can make co-parenting harder in the future. Get together to develop a common message on why you're getting divorced and how you plan to be civil in the future when birthdays, marriages, sports practices, and anything else comes up.

Let children have a say

Children who are old enough to have a voice should be invited to do so. A judge may even speak with a child around age 12 or older to find out his or her preferences about custody and visitation, according to Divorce.net. Children may naturally gravitate toward one parent, and when the marriage has ended, he or she may want to live with or spend more time with a particular parent. All considerations should be made to help children feel comfortable, even if it forces parents to make additional concessions.

Consider a child specialist

Children may appreciate the opportunity to speak with a family or child therapist who can lend an unbiased ear. In addition, a professional can review how you plan to interact and speak with the children so that the tone and the messages will be more well-received.

Expect and answer questions

Divorce is fluid, and even after the separation occurs children may still have questions or there will be an adjustment period. Being open, willing to talk and answer questions, and reinforcing that the divorce is not the fault of the child or children is important, indicates Yeatts Law Firm.

Divorce is seldom easy, but when children are prioritized, they can walk away from the experience in a much more positive way.

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Various factors can adversely affect mood

No one is immune to the occasional bad mood. A bad mood can make a difficult day feel even more so, and multiple-person households can become uncomfortable places to be if one person's mood is less than welcoming.

Bad moods can be easy to shrug off, and that may not inspire people to wonder why their generally upbeat outlooks can suddenly take a turn for the worse. Each person is different, so what triggers a mood swing in some individuals may not necessarily do so in others. However, various factors can adversely affect mood. Taking steps to avoid or minimize such factors can reduce the number of days when you feel as though you woke up on the wrong side of the bed.

• **Lack of physical activity:** A 2019 study from the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health found that running for 15 minutes a day or walking for an hour reduces the risk of major depression. That link is likely connected to the release of endorphins triggered by exercise. Endorphins are hormones that studies have shown contribute to a general feeling of well-being, which explains why a lack of physical activity can adversely affect mood.

• **Chronic stress:** Chronic stress has long been linked to a host of health problems. According to the Mayo Clinic, chronic stress puts individuals at increased risk for heart disease and weight gain but also issues that affect mood, including anxiety and depression. Individuals who find themselves routinely confronting bad moods may be dealing with chronic stress. Identifying the source of that stress and speaking with a health care professional about how to reduce and manage it may lead to improvements in mood.

• **Hunger:** A 2018 study of researchers found evidence that a change in glucose levels can have a lasting effect on mood. The study, published in the journal Psychopharmacology, found that rats injected with a glucose metabolism blocker experienced stress and depressed mood due to the resultant hypoglycemia. The study lends credence to the notion that many people have about feeling moody when they don't eat.

• **Weather:** Seasonal Affective Disorder is a type of depression that adversely affects certain individuals' moods during winter, when hours of sunlight are fewer than during spring, summer and fall and when temperatures outside can sometimes be so cold as to keep people indoors for extended periods of time. In addition, a study published in the journal Social Indicators Research found that individuals report greater life satisfaction on exceptionally sunny days than they did on days with ordinary weather.

Bad moods come and go for most people. Identifying common triggers for bad moods can help individuals prepare for potential mood swings and navigate them in healthy ways.

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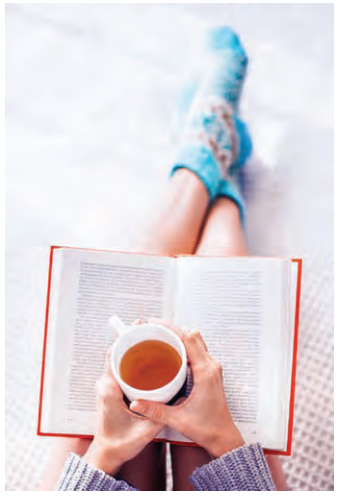

Self-improvement is a noble endeavor, and there's no limit to what one can achieve. These six strategies can serve as catalysts for change.

Aspiring to continue to learn and grow is one of the keys to a fulfilling life. Sometimes it can be eye-opening to look in the mirror, examine oneself and figure out where there may be room for improvement.

Self-improvement is a noble endeavor, and there's no limit to what one can achieve. These six strategies can serve as catalysts for change.

1. Make good habits even easier
Individuals can be their own worst enemies, procrastinating in regard to personal goals. Some habits require consistency, and they include exercising, waking up earlier, drinking and eating healthier, and reducing stress. One way to make sure you stick to healthy habits is to prioritize them and make a concerted effort to overcome your uncooperative side. Lay out workout clothes the night before if you want to exercise in the morning. Meal plan on the weekends and create healthy lunches to take to work. Set phone reminders to breathe and meditate several times during the day to calm stress. Eventually these habits will be as easy as brushing your teeth.

2. Read every day
Books have the power to educate, inspire creativity, strengthen cognition, and so much more. Think of reading a book as a daily multivitamin for the brain. Even if you can't devote hours on end to reading, plan 20-minute sessions each day to tackle some pages.

3. Learn a new skill
One way to grow is to continue to learn new things. Many people like to explore new languages, not just for the potential for travel or employment, but also for personal betterment. Other skills to learn include baking, woodworking, accounting, crocheting, or anything that requires practice to master.

4. Boost positivity
There's something to be said about maintaining a positive outlook no matter your positivity baseline. Rather than seeing what went wrong in a day, figure out what went right. Memorize positive words and personal reflections to help build stronger neural connections to positive concepts, which may help you become even more positive.

5. Overcome persistent fears
Fears reflect areas where you can grow and often indicate areas that need attention. Pick at least one fear to tackle. If that is public speaking, make a concerted effort to speak in front of a crowd, whether it's during a work meeting or at a school function.

6. Make your bed each morning.
Admiral William H. McRaven said that the first step to changing yourself and potentially the world is to make your bed every morning. You will have accomplished the first task of the day and it can give you a small sense of pride to tackle task after task. All it takes is one step to start a long journey.

Personal growth involves taking inventory and making gradual improvements and alterations in areas that require attention.

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How working parents can create better work-life balance

Many working parents struggle to maintain a healthy balance between their responsibilities at work and their obligations to their families. An inability to maintain that healthy balance can have adverse effects on men and women's careers as well as the relationships they have with their families.

A survey of more than 2,000 adults commissioned by the workplace solution provider Workfront found that 38 percent of survey participants have missed life events because of a bad work-life balance. Access to technology that means work is never too far away might contribute to poor work-life balance, as 57 percent of respondents also acknowledged feeling that technology has ruined the definition of a family dinner.

Finding a healthy balance between work and life at home may require a concerted effort on the part of working parents, but there are ways to successfully juggle a career and family.

• **Set reasonable goals.** Much of the difficulty men and women experience in regard to finding a healthy work-life balance may be a by-product of working parents spreading themselves too thin. Setting reasonable goals can help avoid that, but doing so requires taking commitments to one's employer and family into consideration before agreeing to take on new projects or setting deadlines for projects to be completed. This should be applied to both work and home. If a work deadline is unreasonable, professionals should discuss that with their employers, who might change the deadline or arrange for extra persons to work on the project. At home, parents should avoid taking on too many projects, such as chaperoning a child's dance or coaching a sports team, if doing so will adversely affect the amount of time they get to spend with their families.

• **Look for ways to be more efficient.** Interactions with coworkers can make work more enjoyable, but working parents should not spend too much time shooting the breeze with their fellow employees. Doing so wastes time and only contributes to work-related stress. Commuters who don't drive themselves to work can be more efficient by using their commutes to read emails, arrange meetings or catch up on projects. Doing so allows for more time to get work done while in the office, which can make it easier to go home on time.

• **Request changes to work schedules.** While technology may have largely eliminated the separation between the office and home, working parents can use that to their advantage by asking their employees to alter their work schedules. Telecommuting one or two days a week can help parents feel more connected to their families, while flex schedules can ensure working parents don't miss any of their children's dance recitals or weekday afternoon ballgames.

• **Unplug when you get home.** Perhaps the simplest and most effective way for parents to regain a healthy work-life balance is to unplug their devices. Employing "Do not disturb" settings on smartphones and turning off tablets can ensure parents don't spend their time at home working but connecting with their families.

Maintaining a healthy work-life balance is no small task for today's working parents. But such a goal is possible.

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8 activities to keep kids entertained

Parents can counter "I'm bored" with these eight boredom-busting activities that are certain to help pass the time in entertaining and sometimes educational ways.

What parent hasn't heard their child utter the familiar phrase "I'm bored" at some point? Despite a seemingly vast array of toys, electronics and other items at their disposal, children can be quick to sulk and say there's nothing to do. Parents can counter "I'm bored" with these eight boredom-busting activities that are certain to help pass the time in entertaining and sometimes educational ways.

1. Craft time: Pick a theme and gather the materials for the project. For example, kids can evoke a trip to the ocean by creating handmade sea creatures. Paint a paper plate and hang brightly colored yarn underneath it to create the "tentacles" of a jellyfish. Kids can use salt dough clay to fashion seashells, sea snails or crustaceans.

2. Painting: Shaving cream is a great sensory material that is relatively easy to clean up. Kids can whip up a batch of shaving cream paint and use it to finger paint on a table or even in the bathtub. Simply mix shaving cream with food coloring in a bowl, or use a muffin tin to separate the colors.

3. Build a birdhouse: Birdhouses or bird feeders can be made from scraps of material found around the house. Scavenge for spare lumber or other supplies in the shed or garage. An adult or older sibling can help cut the wood into pieces. Young children may enjoy painting the house. Wood adhesive or screws can be used to assemble the project.

4. Plan a garden: Kids can help to design a garden the entire family will maintain and even be responsible for a special parcel that's all their own. Gardens can grow food, flowers and more. Add a touch of whimsy with figurines for a fairy garden or even small superhero figures for a spot for boys to tend.

5. Box makeovers: Tissue boxes or cereal boxes can be made into many different creations with paint or construction paper. Use a few craft supplies like pom-poms or wiggly eyes to turn boxes into "monsters."

6. Boat races: Build a small sailboat for each member of the family. Fill up a long, shallow container and take turns racing the boats by blowing on the sails.

7. Leaf art: Gather leaves and twigs from around the yard and then combine pieces to make them look like various animals.

8. Spray park: Create an at-home spray park with a garden hose and a pool noodle. Poke several small holes into the pool noodle on all sides. Stick a garden hose into the end of the pool noodle and hot-glue a wine cork into the hole at the other end. Turn on the water and let kids run through.

Head off kids' boredom by having plenty of ideas ready.

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How to keep pets occupied while you're at work

Concerned pet owners can take various steps to help keep their pets occupied and content while their human companions are away from home.

If one had to find a silver lining during the global pandemic that kept people close to home for an extended period of time, the chance to spend more time with pets is worthy of consideration. Cats, dogs, birds, and other animals reaped the rewards of having humans nearby for much of the day.

As the world continues to open up and people are returning to their offices and schools, pets who have grown accustomed to having company all day long may be in for a shock. Concerned pet owners can take various steps to help keep their pets occupied and content while their human companions are away from home.

Get a buddy

When two pets get together, the opportunity for play increases exponentially. Animals can keep themselves company and hopefully out of trouble. A single pet may experience separation anxiety when his owner goes away to work or school, and that may result in damaging behavior like chewing, scratching or even soiling in inappropriate places.

Provide puzzling toys

Keeping pets' brains active can reduce instances of boredom. PetMD suggests food puzzle toys that can be stuffed with treats and involve brain power to unlock the food rewards. .

Expend energy

Prior to leaving for work or school, pet parents can help pets expend some energy so they're more inclined to sleep during the day. The Animal Behavior College suggests an extra 20 minutes of walking each day may be enough to tire out most breeds. Working dogs, such as shepherds, pointers and setters, may need 40 or more minutes to burn off energy. Cat owners can play with their cats indoors, but generally cats will lounge around during the day anyway.

Provide white noise

Pets may have grown accustomed to the sounds of an active house, so white noise can fill the void owners' absences create. Turn on the television or radio. Pet fountains, fans and other devices can create noises to keep pets content.

Introduce new toys

Keep a cache of new toys and rotate them on a regular basis. Pets may become so interested in the bevy of new toys that they fail to even realize their owners are gone for much of the day.

Make rest enticing

Invest in a new and cozy pet bed (or cage bedding) that's too comfortable for pets to ignore.

Pets who grew accustomed to constant companionship during the pandemic may need to readjust to a quiet home. Owners can try various strategies to help pets during this adjustment period.

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How to protect vision right now

Taking inventory of behaviors that put eyes at risk, and making important changes, can safeguard the eyes for as long as possible.

The prospect of vision loss is not typically a concern for most people until a decline in visual acuity becomes noticeable. Vision changes as a person ages, and it also may be affected by injury. But there are entirely preventable factors that contribute to poor vision or diminished eye health as well.

Taking inventory of behaviors that put eyes at risk, and making important changes, can safeguard the eyes for as long as possible.

Get routine comprehensive wellness exams

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says about 93 million adults in the United States are at risk for vision loss. Factors that contribute to vision loss can include being overweight or obese, diabetes, high cholesterol, and high blood pressure. A wellness exam also may uncover family history issues that increase risk for hereditary eye conditions.

Receive a dilated vision exam

Many eye diseases, like glaucoma or age-related macular degeneration, have no warning signs, states the CDC's Vision Health Initiative. The only way to determine if there is an eye health issue or compromised vision is to get a complete vision exam, which includes dilating the pupil to see the retina, blood vessels and other components of the inner eye. This is the only way to detect diseases in their earliest stages.

Step up healthy eating

Many eye-healthy foods are rich in vitamins and minerals. Dark, leafy greens like spinach, kale and collards are good for the eyes, according to the National Eye Institute. In addition, foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids, like salmon, halibut and tuna, also are good choices for maintaining eye health, as they lower the risk for dry eyes and eye diseases such as macular degeneration and cataracts.

Sip on green tea

True Eye Experts says green tea is a great source of antioxidants that can keep eyes healthy and defend them from cataracts and AMD.

Wear protective eyewear

Always don sunglasses with UVA and UVB protection when outdoors. Protective eyewear is a must for those who work in an industry that requires eye protection or athletes who play sports in which eye injuries are a consistent threat.

Discard old cosmetics

Exercise caution with outdated eye makeup. Experts suggest discarding mascara that is more than four months old. Avoid applying eyeliner to the inside of the eyelid, as that can lead to irritation or infection.

Practice smart contact hygiene

Always wash hands before inserting or removing contact lenses. Lenses should be stored properly in cleansing solution and discarded after the recommended amount of time for the particular type of lens (daily, bi-weekly, monthly). Unless they are approved for overnight use, remove contacts before going to bed.

Quit smoking (or don't start)

Smoking increases a person's risk of developing various eye diseases and can make diabetic eye disease more severe, says the CDC.

It's never too late to make changes that can preserve vision.

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Different generations can learn and benefit from one another

Even though people of different age groups may not entirely have the same interests, the interactions between generations can benefit both young people and their aging relatives.

In the not-so-distant past, extended families frequently lived in close proximity to one another. Such families shared meals and experiences and essentially grew up together. Nowadays, families separate for various reasons, such as job opportunities and cost of living concerns.

While there are advantages to spreading out, there are also some disadvantages, namely that grandparents and grandchildren may not see one another frequently enough. Even though people of different age groups may not entirely have the same interests, the interactions between generations can benefit both young people and their aging relatives.

Finding renewed vigor

Senior living and active lifestyle communities provide invaluable care and amenities for seniors. While being around like-minded individuals can be handy, it's also limiting. Seniors who continue to age in place in mixed-age communities can extract joy from watching youthful children and young adults growing up, playing and socializing. Being around multiple generations also can spark interesting conversation, and all parties involved can learn something from one another.

Planning for the future

Younger generations may not understand the concept of "hard times" or "doing without" like a person who has lived through various ups and downs. Passing along advice about economic cycles, saving for the future and maintaining stability is one area of expertise at which many seniors excel.

Practicing interpersonal skills

All the technological savviness in the world cannot compensate for the power of strong interpersonal skills. Being able to address a group of people or speak one-on-one is essential in the workplace and in life. When younger generations speak to older adults, they may become stronger at verbal discourse and have greater perspective of different points of conversation.

Learning new technology

Younger generations can impart knowledge of technological devices to older adults. People with skills are usually happy to share their knowledge. Even if seniors aren't ready to purchase tablets or smartphones, they may be excited to have their grandchildren teach them about the latest gadgets.

Providing sense of purpose

Both seniors and younger generations can realize a greater sense of purpose when interacting with one another. That person may be the reason the other one greets the day with a smile. Visits from grandchildren can reduce the liklihood of isolation and depression in older adults. And younger generations can discover the benefits of personal social interaction rather than communicating exclusively through social media apps.

Fostering intergenerational connections is a great way to broaden social circles, improve communication and learn new things.

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Age-appropriate chores for kids

The AACAP offers the following age-based chore suggestions to parents as they look to give their children more responsibility around the house.

Few people look forward to chores around the house. Though adults may not be excited by the prospect of mopping the kitchen floor or folding the laundry, their lack of enthusiasm no doubt pales in comparison to their children's opinion of chores.

Chores can play a vital role in kids' development. According to the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, children can learn time management skills, which also can teach them how to balance work and play time. Kids can apply those lessons throughout their childhood and into adulthood. Giving kids chores also benefits them by teaching them to accept responsibility within the family and providing them with an opportunity to be successful.

Parents may have a long to-do list in regard to chores around the house, and it can be tempting to share that workload with youngsters. However, the AACAP notes the importance of picking age-appropriate chores for children. Children given chores more suited for older youngsters may fail at completing those tasks. Such failure may set a negative precedent that adversely affects kids' self-esteem and makes them reluctant to do their chores in the future. On the flip side, the AACAP notes that picking an age-appropriate chore for a child will increase his or her likelihood of success, boosting their confidence and making them more likely to approach their chores with enthusiasm as they navigate their way through childhood and into adolescence.

- **2- to 3-year-olds:** Children in this age group can put their toys away and help put groceries away as well. Stick to groceries that can be dropped without breaking or spilling, which rules out jars of pasta sauce or milk and juice. Children in this age group also can start to dress themselves, though the AACAP recommends parents offer help when necessary so kids do not become discouraged.
- **4- to 5-year-olds:** Four- and 5-year-olds can help feed pets and make their beds. In addition, children in this age group can help clear the table after meals, but parents should be sure to take sharp objects like knives to the sink before kids begin helping.
- **6- to 7-year-olds:** This is a good age for children to begin taking on more complicated chores, including wiping tables and counters, putting laundry away and sweeping floors.
- **7- to 9-year-olds:** Children in this age group can help their parents prepare meals and even pack their own lunch for school. The responsibility of loading and unloading the dishwasher also can be given to kids between the ages of seven and nine.
- **10- to 11-year-olds:** More difficult tasks like changing the sheets on their beds, cleaning kitchens and bathrooms and doing yard work are appropriate for kids in this age group.
- **12-years-old & older:** Children 12 and older can help take care of younger siblings and pitch in with grocery shopping and running errands.

Don't require perfection: A child may not immediately perform a chore as well as an adult or adhere strictly to a parent's specifications. For kids to learn from the experience and be encouraged to continue, parents need to be a little more flexible when judging how kids perform their chores. Yelling that the job wasn't done up to snuff may set kids up for failure, compelling them to throw in the towel prematurely.

Give a lot of praise: Praise kids as they are performing their chores and reward this good behavior. The goal is for parents to build positive momemtum, especially for young children.

Chores play a vital role as children grow up and mature. Assigning age-appropriate chores is important as parents look to help their children develop into responsible adolescents.

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The various health benefits of yoga

Though yoga may need to be studied more closely and extensively, many people who include it in their regular health care routines report feeling better both physically and mentally for having done so, and that may not be a coincidence.

Health-conscious individuals can do many things to improve their overall health. As medical researchers continue to uncover new things about how to achieve optimal health, one practice dating back to ancient times remains a highly effective way to take care of the human body.

Though there's no written records regarding the origins and invention of yoga, the practice is believed to date back to ancient India. The earliest written record of yoga is "The Yoga Sutra of Pantañjali," a collection of aphorisms that historians believe was compiled sometime between 500 BCE and 400 BCE.

Despite its age, yoga has not been studied extensively by medical researchers. According to the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health, many studies looking into the health effects of yoga have included only small numbers of people and have not been of high quality. As a result, the NCCIH can only say that yoga shows promise in regard to helping people manage or overcome certain health issues, but not that it has been proven to do so.

Though yoga may need to be studied more closely and extensively, many people who include it in their regular health care routines report feeling better both physically and mentally for having done so, and that may not be a coincidence. A comprehensive review of yoga's use as a therapeutic intervention published in the Journal of Physiology and Pharmacology indicated that yoga targets unmanaged stress, which has been linked to chronic disorders like anxiety, depression, obesity, diabetes, and insomnia.

In addition to that review, the NCCIH notes that research has suggested yoga can:

- Relieve low-back pain and neck pain
- Relieve menopause symptoms
- Help people manage anxiety or depressive symptoms associated with difficult life situations
- Help people quit smoking
- Help people who are overweight or obese lose weight
- Help people with chronic diseases manage their symptoms and improve their quality of life.

It's important that anyone considering making yoga part of their health care routines recognize that there are various forms of yoga, some of which are more physically demanding than others. So it's best if individuals speak with their physicians before trying yoga so they can find the type that aligns best with their current levels of fitness.

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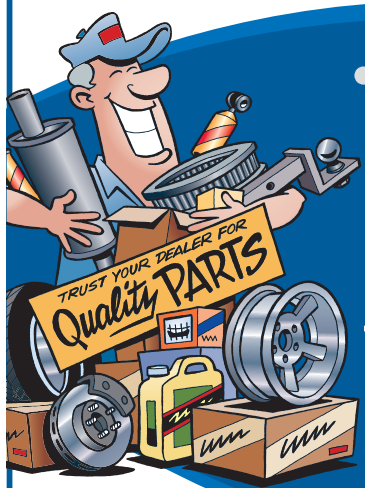

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Pros and cons to giving kids allowances

Allowances can be tough to figure out. For example, parents may not know how to determine the rate and frequency of payouts.

Parents can employ various strategies, including assigning chores, to instill a sense of responsibility in their children. The natural segue from chores is to offer compensation for the jobs that children are doing.

Allowances can provide foundations for parents to teach kids about working for a living. Kids are able to grasp the concept that money doesn't come without hard work. Also, allowances paint the picture that one's financial resources are commensurate with the effort he or she puts in. Giving allowances also can help teach children how to manage money, plan ahead and make spending choices about what's most important, according to the parenting guide Raise Smart Kids.

Allowances can be tough to figure out. For example, parents may not know how to determine the rate and frequency of payouts.

According to Lewis Mandell, a former dean of business at the State University of New York at Buffalo, giving a child an allowance, especially a regular, unconditional allowance that the child can depend on, isn't the right way to approach allowances. Children may begin to view this allowance as an entitlement. In fact, Mandell's research on teens in the United States, Canada, Europe, and Australia found, without exception, that teens who received a regular unconditional allowance had diminished financial literacy, lower levels of motivation and an increased aversion to work.

But when handled properly, allowances can be important tools. Here are some additional benefits to allowances.

- Allowances can provide incentive to get chores done.
- Allowances can motivate students to work hard at school.
- Allowances can include a required portion to be donated, teaching kids the importance of being charitable.

Learning the correlation between work and compensation is a lesson that starts in childhood. Allowances can be an important part of kids' early financial education.

Resolve to be a better parent

Raising successful, happy and well-rounded children takes effort, and the following tips may help parents along the way.

Parenting is a challenging, yet rewarding role that many adults take on lovingly. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau indicates that there were 73.7 million children under age 18 living in families in 2016, the most recent year for data.

Parenting is a hard job that evolves as children age, and moms and dads may wonder if there is anything they can do to be better parents. Raising successful, happy and well-rounded children takes effort, and the following tips may help parents along the way.

Take care of yourself!

It's hard for parents to serve as good role models for their children if they aren't taking care of themselves. A little self-reflection and some positive changes can help parents set strong examples for their youngsters.

Beware of comparisons

Parents often wonder what they may be doing wrong, especially when they see other children meeting milestones that their children may not be achieving. According to Harvey Karp, MD, author of "The Happiest Toddler," babies develop rapidly and each child is unique. One set of abilities is bound to develop faster than another, Karp says. Making comparisons between children, whether it's with youngsters' siblings or friends, can be a recipe for conflict and self-doubt. Speak with a pediatrician if you have concerns about development.

Be an active listener

Being an attentive parent includes listening to youngsters. Encourage kids to share their points of view on activities or topics they feel are important. That can reassure children they know they can come to you without fear of reprisal, even when they may have been out of line. This strengthens the bond between parents and their children.

Explain you are human, too

Sometimes children need to see that their parents are not perfect to realize they needn't be perfect either. The website Aha Parenting! recommends parents apologize when they are wrong and use such instances to teach kids that adults are human, too.

These are just a few of the many steps parents can take to form strong bonds with their children and be the best parents possible.

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How to plan a perfect game night

The following are a few things to consider when planning a game night.

Shared experiences are ideal ways to make new friends or solidify established relationships. Bonds can be strengthened even further when those shared experiences include entertaining activities. This is a great reason for adults to incorporate routine game nights into their social calendars.

Game nights are nothing new. Perhaps your parents or grandparents gossiped over a few games of gin rummy or weekly poker gatherings? Before the widespread proliferation of digital video games, board games were a go-to way to have fun. Even now, game nights can provide the perfect way to slow down, have fun and get together with friends. Hosting a game night can be an ideal way to have fun at home without turning on the television. The following are a few things to consider when planning a game night.

How many people are invited to game night will determine the games that can be played. Game nights tend to be more successful with a guest between four and eight players. Keeping people engaged in a game can be more challenging if there are more than eight individuals, and most games are designed for a maximum of eight players.

Plan for finger foods

Game night etiquette typically dictates that hosts will provide refreshments. In lieu of a sit-down meal, offer finger foods, which are easier to manage while engaged in game play. Premade party platters are an option if you want to spend more time entertaining and less time preparing food. Guests also can be encouraged to bring small dishes, such as sandwiches, chips and dips or other snacks.

Have a variety of games on hand

Let the course of the night be relatively fluid, even if you have a certain game in mind. If guests are not fans of a particular game, make sure you have others at the ready. Music or a sports game playing in the background also can be a way to keep guests entertained between turns. When deciding on games, consider these criteria, courtesy of Game Night Gods, an online game night resource

- The game should be easy to learn.
- The game should be relatively fast-moving.
- The game should pique interest and be strategic.

Get out of your comfort zones

Acting zany and engaging in games that push people out of their comfort zones can help guests get to know one another and laugh along the way. Games also are a perfect way to learn something new with little to no pressure.

A game night can unite existing friends and help people interested in making new acquaintances find common ground. If in person game nights are not doable, gather virtually through video chat applications.

SUMMER FUN!

Warm Summer nights are here along with the lightning bugs and the chirping tree frogs that help make the nights full of laughter and fun. So call your friends and family to set up an outdoor carnival for the kids, rent a popcorn machine and of course a cotton candy machine. And don't forget the boxes of candy!

Here are two suggestions for a leisurely "drive-in" movie: - Have large boxes with paper headlights and taillights cut out, or use paper plates - the plates can be used as tires as well! This way the kids can decorate their very own cars for the "drive-in" movie. - For the teenagers and adults blow up swimming pools, add some pillows and blankets to keep them comfortable and content. *Place some charged solar lights around for safety.* Enjoy the movie and concessions!

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A guide to cooking with kids

Parents can foster their children's love of cooking and help them along the way with these tips.

Children may start their culinary careers crafting mud pies in their backyards, but that creativity and imagination soon may translate into foods they can actually eat. Many kids love cooking because it can be fun and messy, which are two qualities that children find hard to resist.

Parents can foster their children's love of cooking and help them along the way with these tips.

• **Be patient.** Going into the cooking experience knowing there will be a mess, typically when young children are involved, can help you prepare. Toddlers have not yet mastered manual dexterity, so they're bound to spill and drop. Put a plastic tablecloth under the work area and on the floor to help catch what falls. Also, cooking with youngsters likely will take more time than it normally would, so set aside extra preparation and cooking time.

• **Teach kids good hygiene.** Hygiene is important and can prevent foodborne illnesses. Make sure everyone involved in cooking, including children, washes his or her hands before cooking begins and continues to do so after handling foods, particularly raw meat and poultry. Hair should be tied back, and separate prep surfaces should be designated for produce and meats.

• **Assign age-appropriate tasks.** Consider age and maturity levels when assigning tasks in the kitchen. Even children as young as 3-years-old can chop food if they are provided a serrated butter knife with a rounded point and soft vegetables or fruits. This helps teach knife skills that kids can develop more thoroughly in the future. Children can mix and add ingredients as well. As kids get older, parents can decide the right time to let them use the stove.

• **Experiment with dough.** Kids can have a blast with dough, particularly rolling out pie crusts and pasta. They also can make dumplings and then fill them with vegetables. Many cookware retailers sell small rolling pins that are easy for kids to handle.

• **Practice measuring together.** Let children read the recipes and be in charge of portioning out ingredients. This reinforces classroom lessons about temperature, ratios and fractions.

• **Move on to more sophisticated tasks.** Around age eight or nine, children can take on jobs like opening cans, scooping batter, pounding poultry, proofing yeast, skewering kabobs, and slicing bread, according to cooking educator Julie Negrin. Negrin notes that children between the ages of 10 and 12 can start working independently in the kitchen so long as an adult is in the home. Ultimately, children can cook without close supervision.

• **Involve children in meal planning.** Get input from your children about what they might like to see on the menu. While there may be some items that are expected, including comfort foods like mac-and-cheese, parents may be surprised at how mature their children's palates can be. Maybe they've heard about a dish on television or learned about a specific ethnic cuisine at school and want to give it a try.

Children also can be involved in cooking by helping to draft shopping lists and taking trips to the supermarket. This shows kids the complete process of gathering ingredients for meals, what they cost and how they are made before foods make it to the dinner table.

How to teach children to respect their parents

These are some ways to teach kids how to respect their parents.

Parents are tasked with teaching their children many lessons. Some are more obvious, like how to live safely or how to ride a bike or tie their shoes. Other lessons are more complicated and abstract, especially as they pertain to issues like respect.

Early in life, children get attention by crying, throwing tantrums or through other means. Youngsters must be taught to be respectful of others, including their own parents. People, including children, may have their own ideas in regard to what constitutes respect, so families have to work together to find common ground.

Parenting for Brain, a parenting resource that focuses on child psychology, notes that respect can refer to the way kids admire or look up to someone, but also as an act of giving attention and showing care. It's not simply about being compliant. Establishing patterns for respect can be challenging because there are no shortages of situations in popular culture — from movies to music to social media — that complicate, if not compromise, parents' efforts to teach children respect. However, there are ways to teach kids how to respect their parents.

• **Be a good role model.** Children learn by examining the world around them. If parents are rude to restaurant servers, cut people off on roadways, make fun of others, or even yell at members of their own families, their children are more likely to follow suit.

• **Be a parent first, not a friend.** Raising children is complicated, but many parents try to be their kids' friends before they act as their parents. While it seems healthy to want to hang out and be equals with them, Psychology Today warns that this approach compromises the unique relationship parents have with their children because kids have many friends but not an infinite number of parents. Children should not have equal power with their parents as they would their peers. Plus, kids often don't respect parents who try to act like their friends. They may feel their parents are trying too hard, and some may even grow to resent their parents for trying to be friends first and parents second.

• **Explore other outlets for anger.** Children may act out and be disrespectful to others when faced with strong emotions that make them feel angry or overwhelmed. In addition to encouraging kids to talk out their scary feelings, parents can guide them toward outlets to relieve frustration, such as engaging in healthy exercise or even escaping into a craft or hobby. Children who are struggling to cope with a significant life change may need a little time to get back on track.

Teaching respect takes time and is not a one-size-fits-all task. Parents must find an approach that works for them and their children.

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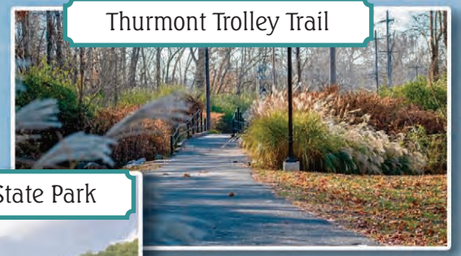

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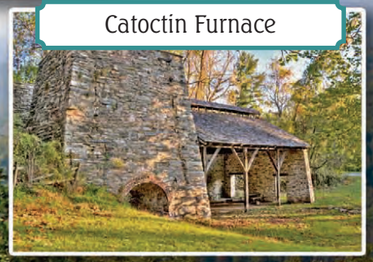

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Have fun as a family without breaking the bank

The following are a handful of ways that families can have fun without breaking the bank.

Raising children is no small task. Parents face numerous challenges when raising their kids, and while it may not be the biggest hurdle they face, the cost of raising a family can sometimes seem daunting.

A report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture found that a typical middle-income American family spent just under $13,000 annually per child. Those costs included housing, food, childcare, health care, and the various other expenses associated with raising children. Multiply that number by 18 years and parents can expect to spend $234,000 per child by the time the youngster graduates high school. That's before parents write a single college tuition check.

Since the costs of raising children are so substantial, it's no surprise that parents are often on the lookout for budget-friendly ways to have fun as a family.

• **Picnics:** Dining al fresco is an enjoyable way to break bread, but if backyard barbecues have grown stale, parents can always plan picnics in local parks. Park admission is probably free, and parents can save even more money by packing picnic-style foods, like salads and sandwiches, rather than using grills provided by the park (parks may or may not charge fees to use grills).

• **Family days:** Local attractions like zoos and museums may designate a certain day of the week as "Family Day." Admissions might be discounted on these days, and some attractions may even allow kids to enter free. Take advantage of these promotions whenever possible. In addition, inquire about family memberships at local attractions. Such memberships may offer year-round entry for the whole family for an annual fee. Depending on how often you visit the attraction, paying an annual fee can save you a lot of money compared to paying regular admission on each visit.

• **Festivals:** Community festivals are another great way for families to get out of the house without taxing their budgets. Community festivals typically do not charge for admission. Parents should not downplay the benefits of free entertainment, as a report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics found that the average American spends over $2900 on entertainment.

• **Camping:** Campsites may charge fees, but such fees are nominal compared to the costs associated with more traditional lodging, like hotels. Camping is a fun activity the whole family can enjoy, providing a great weekend getaway that won't cost parents too much money.

• **Rivers/lakes:** Escaping to a nearby river or lake for a day on the water can make for a memorable, family-friendly getaway. Look for activities like fishing and bring your own rods or rent from nearby bait and tackle shops. If cruising is more your family's style, look for boat tours that offer a chance to explore local history while giving the whole family a chance to relax on a boat and soak up some sun.

Parents whose budgets are stretched thin can still find affordable ways to have fun as a family.

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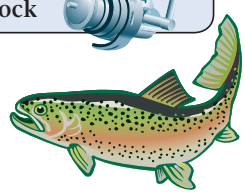

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Parents can help kids struggling with social media

There are steps parents can take to help tweens and teens who may be struggling and need assistance managing social media

Social media is a big part of young people's lives. Psychology Today reports that social media use is now the most common activity children and teenagers engage in, with the majority of users accessing social media platforms several times each day through their personal cell phones.

Social media has its benefits, and being able to keep in touch with friends and family remotely was one of the saving graces in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic when people were isolating in their homes. But there's a dark side to social media as well. Recently leaked documents from Meta, the company that oversees social media giants Facebook and Instagram, suggest the company has known for several years that its Instagram app is contributing to body image issues and other mental health problems for teens, particularly females. Social media platforms use algorithms to enhance users' engagement. Feeds may be driven toward polarizing topics or those that have the most shock value, further leading teens down a negative path.

The current tween and teen generation is faced with constant information being delivered right to their handheld devices. Children may not be developmentally ready for the immediate gratification that social media provides nor the constant onslaught of content. As a result, teens increasingly are becoming more irritable, having trouble sleeping and are spending more time alone as a result of phone usage. The Harvard Graduate School of Education says recent studies have noted a significant uptick in depression and suicidal thoughts over the past several years for teens, especially those who spend multiple hours a day using screens.

There are steps parents can take to help tweens and teens who may be struggling and need assistance managing social media.

- **Set real limits.** The Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health suggests that until meaningful government oversight is in place to police social media platforms, parents will have to set their own parameters for use. Putting phones down at meal times, turning off alerts close to bedtime, and making certain days "a rest from technology" can help.
- **Block upsetting content.** It's a parent's job to be a parent, not a best friend. Giving in to requests to engage with certain social platforms, even when they do not align with one's beliefs or values, can be harmful. Set limits on which platforms children are allowed to use.
- **Regularly monitor kids' usage.** Parents should look through their kids' phones and accounts on a regular basis to see which sites are being visited and how kids are engaging with others. If social media is affecting a child's mental health, have him or her take a break or delete the account.

Social media is ever-present in kids' lives. Parents and other caregivers have to find a way to assist struggling tweens and teens with social media so it does not become a detriment to their overall health.

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Explore these relaxing hobbies

Summertime is an ideal time of the year to embrace relaxing activities because the hustle and bustle of everyday life tends to slow down during the summer, when kids are out of school and vacations are on the docket. These hobbies and other interests can help tame stress by promoting calm.

Stress is a part of many people's daily lives. A recent survey from the American Psychological Association found that 44 percent of Americans feel their stress levels have increased over the past five years. Children also are struggling, with almost a one-third reporting that they have experienced a health symptom associated with stress, such as stomach aches, trouble sleeping and headaches.

Calming activities that can tone down the body's stress responses are great ways to alleviate stress.

• **Listen to and/or play music.** Music can be energizing or calming, depending on which music you choose. Researchers at Stanford University found that rhythmic music may have therapeutic effects for treating a range of neurological conditions, as it stimulates the brain and can perhaps change how it functions. Familiar melodies and gentle music can reduce the level of the stress hormone cortisol.

• **Gardening:** Gardening lets a person tend to living things while getting some fresh air. Both the sunlight and the activity itself can be soothing and have a positive effect on mood. A study from the Journal of Health Psychology found that gardening, like listening to music, lowers cortisol levels.

• **Grab a good book.** Taking the time to unwind and read can help ease tension in the muscles, lower one's heart rate and induce calm. Research from the consultancy Mindlab International at the University of Sussex found reading reduced stress levels by 68 percent.

• **Start painting or crafting.** Engaging in a creative hobby sharpens the mind and improves focus. You may also want to try focusing emotions onto the canvas to help release tension. A study published in the British Journal of Occupational Therapy found that 81.5 percent of respondents with depression reported feeling happy after knitting.

• **Take a dance class.** A form of art and music, dancing can promote well-being through exercise and expansion of creative ability. It also can be good for the mind. A study from Swedish researchers that was published in the Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine found that a dancing intervention program, twice weekly for eight months, helped teenage girls struggling with stress, anxiety, depression, and other problems.

Many relaxing activities can tame stress, and these activities can be perfect for lazy summer days.

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Prevent lost pets with these simple tips

While it is impossible to prevent every situation that may lead to a lost pet, pet owners can take some simple preventative steps to keep pets from becoming lost.

No pet parent wants their pets to escape the house, car or yard and become lost. But curious pets have a way of getting out on their own, which not even the most watchful pet owners can always prevent.

The American Humane Association estimates that more than 10 million dogs and cats are lost or stolen in the United States every year. One in three pets will become lost at some point during its life. While it is impossible to prevent every situation that may lead to a lost pet, pet owners can take some simple preventative steps to keep pets from becoming lost.

Identify the pet

Pets should wear some form of identification, which will differ based on the animal. For example, a dog can wear a collar and a name tag. A homing pigeon or other bird may have a numbered ankle band. Many pet owners choose to microchip their pets. These small devices are implanted under the skin and can be read by a special electronic wand. If you microchip your pet, it is essential to keep your contact information associated with the chip updated.

Track the pet

GPS-based devices can be used to locate a pet if it gets out of the house. Much like the tracking devices in phones and watches, small tags can be placed on the pet's collar and be tracked through an app on the owner's phone or another device.

Provide a secure space

Pets need a secure, supervised area to exercise. Fencing needs to be tall enough to prevent pets from jumping over it. Make sure pets cannot dig under the fence and that fence gates are always latched tightly. Self-latching fence gates can be handy. Indoors, be sure to close doors promptly when exiting and entering the house. Be mindful of pets trying to escape.

Use a leash or carrier

When the pet is taken out of the house, he or she should be leashed or secured in an animal carrier. Many pets have a strong prey instinct and love to chase animals. Keeping pets close by can keep them from getting lost or injured.

Spay and neuter

According to the Animal Humane Society, studies indicate that sterilized animals are less likely to roam than unsterilized animals. Many clinics will perform the surgery for a discount; some may even do it free.

Obedience training and keeping a watchful eye on pets also can prevent them from getting lost.

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Resolutions inspired by trending health topics

Individuals focused on health and wellness may consider these trending topics.

Improving personal health is a popular New Years resolution. A Finder survey found that an estimated 188 million Americans planned to make resolutions and carry them into the next year. Similar numbers of people will put personal goals on the calendar as well. Those focused on health and wellness may consider these trending topics.

Collagen supplementation

Collagen is a family of proteins that serves as the structural component of most connective tissues in the body. Collagen production wanes as people age, but it also can drop quickly due to excess sun exposure, smoking, lack of exercise, and excess alcohol consumption, according to the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.

Many people are interested in maintaining adequate levels of collagen, which is vital to giving skin a youthful appearance and helps to maintain healthy joints. According to Google Trends, online searches for collagen have increased steadily in the past few years. Collagen has become a top-selling supplement to improve hair, skin and nails. Though human studies that prove collagen supplementation efficacy are lacking, some randomized controlled trials have found that collagen supplements improve skin elasticity and joint mobility and reduce joint pain. Collagen supplements are thought to be safe, but people should discuss supplementation with a doctor first.

Fermented foods

More research is showing a connection between digestive tract (gut) health and immunity, and people concerned with boosting their immune systems are paying attention. Research published in the journal Cell indicated the immune system has evolved to maintain a symbiotic relationship with microbiota in the gut. Accordingly, when operating optimally, this immune system-microbiota alliance allows the induction of protective responses to pathogens.

Naturally fermented foods may help strengthen the gut microbiome by supplying it with healthy probiotics, according to Dr. David S. Ludwig, a professor of nutrition at the T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Some pickles, Korean kimchi, sauerkraut, and other foods can be beneficial. Consumers should look for product labels that say "naturally fermented," which use live organisms for the fermenting process.

CBD and hemp products

Even though medical marijuana and recreational marijuana use is now legal in many parts of the country, CBD is widely being harnessed in its own right. Cannabidiol oil is a chemical found in marijuana and hemp plants. CBD doesn't contain THC, the psychoactive ingredient found in marijuana that produces a high, advises the Mayo Clinic. CBD has been studied as a treatment for a wide range of conditions like Parkinson's disease, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, and anxiety. The only CBD product currently approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration is prescription Epidiolex for epilepsy.

Since hemp oil is high in essential fatty acids, it may produce anti-inflammatory effects and improve brain function. It is widely used in beauty products like skin creams as well. Always speak to a doctor before using CBD and related products.

How to protect your hearing

There are steps everyone can take to protect their hearing and reduce their risk for NIHL.

Aging has long been associated with hearing loss, and that association is not unwarranted. The National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders notes that age-related hearing loss can arise from changes in the inner ear as the body ages. However, hearing loss can affect people of all ages, including the very young.

Noise-induced hearing loss, or NIHL, can affect people of all ages. In fact, a study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that as many as 40 million adults in the United States have some degree of hearing loss related to exposure to loud noise. Another study published in the journal Pediatrics found that as many as 17 percent of adolescents between the ages of 12 and 19 had features of their hearing suggestive of NIHL.

No single activity can explain the prevalence of NIHL among adolescents and adults under 70. However, there are steps everyone can take to protect their hearing and reduce their risk for NIHL.

- **Switch from earbuds to over-the-ear headphones.** The Cleveland Clinic notes that over-the-ear headphones encase the ear and are often more effective at canceling outside noise. Why is that important? If outside noise is effectively canceled out, wearers won't have to turn up the volume on their headphones in order to hear their music. Listening at lower volumes is a great way to protect your hearing and prevent NIHL.
- **Recognize that others shouldn't hear what's coming through your headphones.** Audiologist Sharon A. Sandridge, Ph.D. of the Head and Neck Institute at the Cleveland Clinic notes that if people standing at arm's length can hear the music coming from an individual's headphones or earbud, then the volume levels on that person's devices are too loud.
- **Purchase activity-specific headphones, earplugs or earmuffs.** Hardware stores and sporting goods stores sell activity-specific headphones, earplugs and earmuffs that can be utilized when engaging in activities like yard work or hunting. Such products are often designed to block out noises from backpack leaf blowers and hunting rifles, and could therefore prove more protective of users' hearing than over-the-ear headphones designed for listening to music.

Age-related hearing loss may not be preventable. However, individuals can protect themselves from NIHL, and efforts to do just that should begin at a young age and continue throughout adulthood.

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Healthy activities for kids of all ages

The amount of physical activity children need each month depends on their age, and the AAP recommends the following age-based guidelines.

Children have a seemingly endless supply of energy. Channeling that energy into something positive can benefit kids' minds and bodies.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends various amounts of daily physical activity for children depending on their ages and abilities. Adhering to these recommendations is especially important in the wake of what many public health officials fear has become an epidemic of childhood obesity. For example, the United States-based Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that roughly 13.7 million children between the ages of two and 19 are presently obese.

Routine physical activity can help children maintain healthy weights, and it also pays dividends for youngsters' mental health. According to the American Psychological Association, children between the ages of six and 18 who exercise regularly tend to have lower levels of depression, stress and psychological distress. Those findings, part of a study published in the journal Sports Medicine, reflect the ways exercise affects the mind. And the mental benefits don't stop there, as the study also found that youngsters who are physically active also have higher levels of positive self-image, life satisfaction and psychological well-being.

The amount of physical activity children need each month depends on their age, and the AAP recommends the following age-based guidelines.

•Infants: The AAP recommends infants get at least 30 minutes of tummy time and other interactive play throughout the day.

•Toddlers: Toddlers can be tough to keep up with, and parents can channel that energy into something positive by ensuring their kids get at least three hours of physical activity every day. Free play outside and daily neighborhood walks are some examples of appropriate physical activities for children in this age group.

•Preschoolers: Three-plus hours of physical activity, including one hour of moderate to vigorous exercise, is recommended for preschool-aged youngsters. Tumbling, throwing and catching are some of the activities recommended by the AAP.

•Elementary school students: School-aged children need at least 60 minutes of physical activity on most days of the week. The AAP recommends giving children in this age group ample opportunities for free play but also notes that organized sports focused on fun can be great outlets for kids in elementary school. Parents can speak with their children's pediatricians about appropriate muscle/bone strengthening activities, which the AAP recommends three days a week for kids in this age group.

•Middle school students: Students in this age group need the same amount and types of exercise that elementary school students need. But the AAP advises parents to guide children toward physical activities that encourage socialization and to avoid having kids this age specialize in a single sport.

•Teenagers: Teenagers need an hour or more of physical activity most days of the week. Muscle/bone strengthening activities should be included three days per week. Activities that encourage socialization and competition are beneficial to teenagers' development.

Physical activity can benefit kids in myriad ways and should be a vital component of their daily lives.

How parents can create household budgets

The high cost of raising a child only emphasizes the importance parents must place on creating household budgets. A few dollars put away here and there can add up to substantial savings over the years.

Raising a family is no small feat. Along with the love and joy, there are some obstacles that must be surpassed, including the financial investment required.

A report from the Department of Agriculture found that middle-income married couples would spend an estimated $233,610 to raise a child born in 2015., with an annual adjustment for inflation of 2.2% each year factored in, the current cost of raising a child is now estimated at $272,049. Parents who find that figure high should know that it does not include costs incurred after children turn 18. So parents could be responsible for well over a quarter million dollars before they ever write a college tuition check.

The high cost of raising a child only emphasizes the importance parents must place on creating household budgets. A few dollars put away here and there can add up to substantial savings over the years.

Housing: Housing is many families' most substantial monthly expense. When determining how much they can afford to pay for housing, families may come up with a figure they're comfortable paying for their monthly mortgage. But it's important that parents, particularly those who have never owned their own home before, also take utility costs into consideration before signing their mortgage agreements. Utility costs for single-family homes can dwarf the cost of utilities in apartments

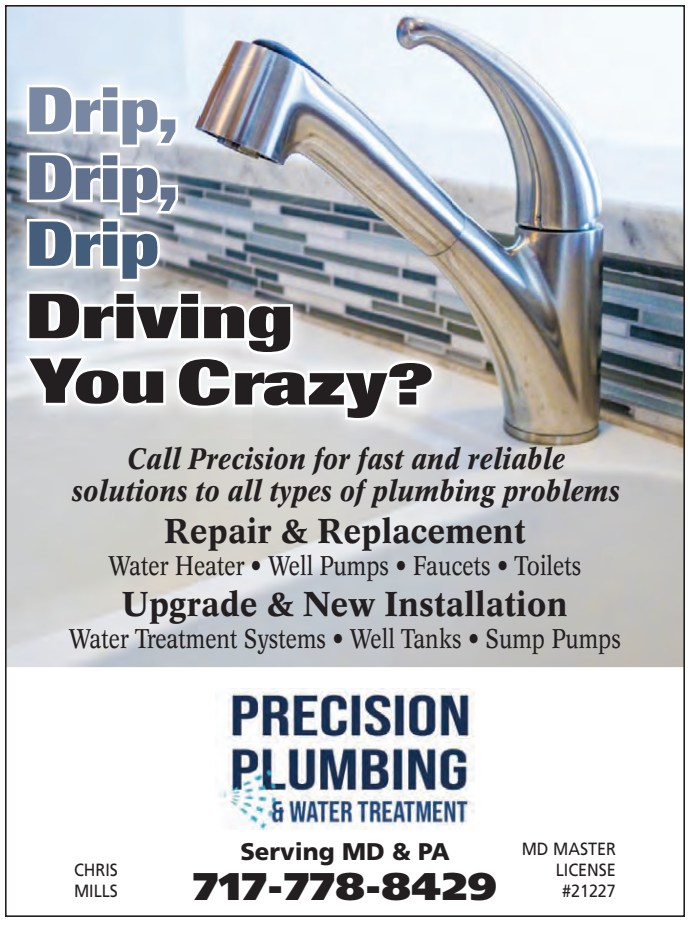
The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' Consumer Expenditure Survey recommends people making housing budgets commit 58 percent of total housing costs to mortgage payments, 21 percent to utilities, just over 9 percent to furnishings and equipment, and roughly 7 percent to household operations. Utilizing this formula before taking out a mortgage can help families ensure they are not scraping pennies together each month to meet their housing costs.

Food: Food is another significant expense, especially for growing families. The BLS notes that the average U.S. household spends just about 13 percent of its monthly budget on food. Parents who examine their spending habits over the previous year can look at how much they're devoting to food and find ways to reduce that figure if it's well over 13 percent. Reducing food spending may require more savvy spending at the grocery store, including shopping sales or buying certain items in bulk when it's advantageous to do so. With our current situation the average percentage is much higher.

Transportation: Parents may find this odd, but the BLS reports that the average U.S. household spends more of its monthly budget (roughly 17 percent) on transportation than it does food. Parents who want to trim their monthly budgets can opt for more affordable cars and trucks, reserving their splurging on luxury vehicles for later in life when their kids have moved out of the house. Again, % is higher now due to gas prices.

Miscellaneous expenses: When creating their household budgets, parents should leave room for unexpected miscellaneous expenses, such as healthcare costs if the children get sick and clothing and entertainment. Without accounting for such expenses, parents may find themselves taking on potentially crippling debt in times of emergency.

Carefully constructed household budgets can help parents survive the often expensive costs of raising a family.



How financial planners can help you every day

Financial planners can help people create effective long-term financial plans, and they also can be vital resources for people who need help managing their money every day.

Financial planning and retirement go hand in hand. Without effective planning, many people would never be able to retire, while others might have to work much longer than they hope to. While financial planning is essential to achieve long-term goals, planning also can make it easier for people to meet their everyday financial needs.

Managing money is a big responsibility, and it's one that many people may need help with. A recent survey from Pew Charitable Trusts found that 55 percent of Americans spend as much or more than they earn. That's not only compromising their financial futures, but also making daily life more stressful, as the American Psychological Association's annual "Stress in America" survey routinely finds that money is a top cause of stress among millions of Americans.

Adults who are finding it difficult to manage their money on a day-to-day basis may benefit from the services of a financial planner. Financial planners can help people create effective long-term financial plans, and they also can be vital resources for people who need help managing their money every day.

- **Planners can look at things from an unbiased perspective.** An honest assessment of monthly expenses is essential when creating a monthly budget. However, many people tend to be biased when it comes to their monthly expenses. For example, some may feel that three streaming service subscriptions are something they cannot live without. That can make it difficult to trim some of the fat from their monthly expenditures. A financial planner will begin by examining your monthly expenses and may or may not make unbiased suggestions regarding where you can save.
- **Planners have the time.** The average household is a hectic place. Adults with commitments at work and home often cite a lack of time as one of the reasons they aren't more on top of their finances. A 2018 survey from Bankrate.com found that 16 percent of respondents aren't saving more money because they haven't gotten to it. Financial planners have the time to help clients save, and over time a planner can be an expense that pays for itself if families are saving more as a result of enlisting the services of a planner.
- **Planners have the expertise many people lack.** One of the reasons people struggle financially is that it can be hard to navigate the world of investments, insurance and taxes. Planners have the financial literacy necessary to navigate those waters successfully and can help people realize both their short- and long-term financial goals.

Financial planners don't just help people plan for retirement. Many planners are equally effective at helping clients achieve their daily financial goals as well.

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Families meticulously plan for the transfer of their assets and money upon their passing, hoping for a seamless transition, only to be confronted with the sudden proposition that they will run out of money after a stay at the local nursing home. Relying solely on the limited advice of Estate Planning Attorneys, Financial Advisors, and Accountants, families are left wondering where they went wrong when the first $15,000.00 monthly nursing home bill arrives.

The missing component to any comprehensive estate plan, must include a discussion with an Elder Law Attorney. You need to plan for the possibility where you or a family member has no choice but to enter a skilled nursing facility. Y**ou need to discuss Medicaid Planing with an Elder Law Attorney.** Medicaid Planning focuses on protecting your assets during your lifetime so that you have a choice on where the assets go during your lifetime and upon your passing.

In the world of traditional estate planning, "gifts" are an effective means to avoid the big 'ol bad Pennsylvania Inheritance Tax. However, what is good in traditional estate planning, is poor advice in Medicaid Planning. The "gift" whether to your favorite charity, supportive church, or deserving child, will count against you when you need care at a nursing facility. Understand that the size of the gift, regardless of the recipient, puts you and your family at risk of the nursing facility suing everyone for any unpaid funds.

Furthermore, traditional estate planning takes the view that *when* you die, your assets will go to your loved ones in the manner you deem most appropriate. Yet again, this traditional approach fails to consider that you may not have the stuff to give away because you spent everything on your care at a nursing home.

The Elder Law Attorneys at Mooney Law understand the balance between traditional estate planning and distribution your assets in the most appropriate manner, while incorporating Medicaid Planning to ensure that you still have your stuff to use during your lifetime and upon your passing. Regardless if you or your family member is healthy and planning for the distant future, or has just entered a nursing home, Mooney Law knows the means for you to keep the most of your hard earned assets.

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Create positive outcomes for kids during and after divorce

Divorce can be difficult for a couple, but challenges also arise when children are in the mix.

Divorce affects millions of people each year. According to Randy Kessler, a Georgia-based divorce lawyer with 30 years of experience, scientists have yet to quantify risk for divorce based on how many years a person has been married. In fact, despite the common "seven year itch" theory, many variables affect whether or not a marriage will dissolve.

Divorce can be difficult for a couple, but challenges also arise when children are in the mix. Most municipalities consider the best interests of the child when it comes to mapping out custody agreements or other decisions, but couples can get the ball rolling by considering the children in each and every decision being made. This can ensure the divorce process — however difficult — leads to more positive outcomes.

Willingness to support each other

Adults get divorced for various reasons, notably because they no longer feel comfortable nor willing to stay together in the household. No matter what you feel about a soon-to-be or former spouse, it's important to be cooperative with one another and work together to support relationships with the children. The more cooperative everyone is, the more supported and happy a child may feel.

Develop a common message

Do not use the divorce as a way to disparage the other person or shift blame, which can make co-parenting harder in the future. Get together to develop a common message on why you're getting divorced and how you plan to be civil in the future when birthdays, marriages, sports practices, and anything else comes up.

Let children have a say

Children who are old enough to have a voice should be invited to do so. A judge may even speak with a child around age 12 or older to find out his or her preferences about custody and visitation, according to Divorce.net. Children may naturally gravitate toward one parent, and when the marriage has ended, he or she may want to live with or spend more time with a particular parent. All considerations should be made to help children feel comfortable, even if it forces parents to make additional concessions.

Consider a child specialist

Children may appreciate the opportunity to speak with a family or child therapist who can lend an unbiased ear. In addition, a professional can review how you plan to interact and speak with the children so that the tone and the messages will be more well-received.

Expect and answer questions

Divorce is fluid, and even after the separation occurs children may still have questions or there will be an adjustment period. Being open, willing to talk and answer questions, and reinforcing that the divorce is not the fault of the child or children is important, indicates Yeatts Law Firm.

Divorce is seldom easy, but when children are prioritized, they can walk away from the experience in a much more positive way.

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Various factors can adversely affect mood

No one is immune to the occasional bad mood. A bad mood can make a difficult day feel even more so, and multiple-person households can become uncomfortable places to be if one person's mood is less than welcoming.

Bad moods can be easy to shrug off, and that may not inspire people to wonder why their generally upbeat outlooks can suddenly take a turn for the worse. Each person is different, so what triggers a mood swing in some individuals may not necessarily do so in others. However, various factors can adversely affect mood. Taking steps to avoid or minimize such factors can reduce the number of days when you feel as though you woke up on the wrong side of the bed.

• **Lack of physical activity:** A 2019 study from the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health found that running for 15 minutes a day or walking for an hour reduces the risk of major depression. That link is likely connected to the release of endorphins triggered by exercise. Endorphins are hormones that studies have shown contribute to a general feeling of well-being, which explains why a lack of physical activity can adversely affect mood.

• **Chronic stress:** Chronic stress has long been linked to a host of health problems. According to the Mayo Clinic, chronic stress puts individuals at increased risk for heart disease and weight gain but also issues that affect mood, including anxiety and depression. Individuals who find themselves routinely confronting bad moods may be dealing with chronic stress. Identifying the source of that stress and speaking with a health care professional about how to reduce and manage it may lead to improvements in mood.

• **Hunger:** A 2018 study of researchers found evidence that a change in glucose levels can have a lasting effect on mood. The study, published in the journal Psychopharmacology, found that rats injected with a glucose metabolism blocker experienced stress and depressed mood due to the resultant hypoglycemia. The study lends credence to the notion that many people have about feeling moody when they don't eat.

• **Weather:** Seasonal Affective Disorder is a type of depression that adversely affects certain individuals' moods during winter, when hours of sunlight are fewer than during spring, summer and fall and when temperatures outside can sometimes be so cold as to keep people indoors for extended periods of time. In addition, a study published in the journal Social Indicators Research found that individuals report greater life satisfaction on exceptionally sunny days than they did on days with ordinary weather.

Bad moods come and go for most people. Identifying common triggers for bad moods can help individuals prepare for potential mood swings and navigate them in healthy ways.

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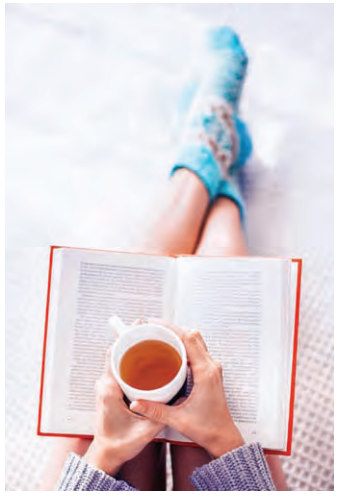

Self-improvement is a noble endeavor, and there's no limit to what one can achieve. These six strategies can serve as catalysts for change.

Aspiring to continue to learn and grow is one of the keys to a fulfilling life. Sometimes it can be eye-opening to look in the mirror, examine oneself and figure out where there may be room for improvement.

Self-improvement is a noble endeavor, and there's no limit to what one can achieve. These six strategies can serve as catalysts for change.

1. Make good habits even easier
Individuals can be their own worst enemies, procrastinating in regard to personal goals. Some habits require consistency, and they include exercising, waking up earlier, drinking and eating healthier, and reducing stress. One way to make sure you stick to healthy habits is to prioritize them and make a concerted effort to overcome your uncooperative side. Lay out workout clothes the night before if you want to exercise in the morning. Meal plan on the weekends and create healthy lunches to take to work. Set phone reminders to breathe and meditate several times during the day to calm stress. Eventually these habits will be as easy as brushing your teeth.

2. Read every day
Books have the power to educate, inspire creativity, strengthen cognition, and so much more. Think of reading a book as a daily multivitamin for the brain. Even if you can't devote hours on end to reading, plan 20-minute sessions each day to tackle some pages.

3. Learn a new skill
One way to grow is to continue to learn new things. Many people like to explore new languages, not just for the potential for travel or employment, but also for personal betterment. Other skills to learn include baking, woodworking, accounting, crocheting, or anything that requires practice to master.

4. Boost positivity
There's something to be said about maintaining a positive outlook no matter your positivity baseline. Rather than seeing what went wrong in a day, figure out what went right. Memorize positive words and personal reflections to help build stronger neural connections to positive concepts, which may help you become even more positive.

5. Overcome persistent fears
Fears reflect areas where you can grow and often indicate areas that need attention. Pick at least one fear to tackle. If that is public speaking, make a concerted effort to speak in front of a crowd, whether it's during a work meeting or at a school function.

6. Make your bed each morning.
Admiral William H. McRaven said that the first step to changing yourself and potentially the world is to make your bed every morning. You will have accomplished the first task of the day and it can give you a small sense of pride to tackle task after task. All it takes is one step to start a long journey.

Personal growth involves taking inventory and making gradual improvements and alterations in areas that require attention.

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