



Oregon City Pediatrics

# Take Care

HEALTHY TIPS  
for **SPRING 2024**

In the Pacific Northwest, spring has sprung, then un-sprung... Tried to spring... Then sprung again! Here are a few tips for your teens to practice self-care for the gray "un-sprung" days, as well as some ways to play with your kiddos outside when spring has sprung again! Whether there are clouds in the sky, or the sun is shining bright, always remember to take care!



## Healthy Self-Care for Teens: 4 Ways Families Can Help

By: Dr. Rebekah Fenton, MD, FAAP

The more we learn about the effects of **stress** on the body and mind, the more we see the value of helping kids learn coping skills early in life.

Parents and caregivers of teens often ask me how to support their kids in dealing with the pressures of a turbulent world. The good news is that families can have a tremendous impact on the way teens experience and deal with stress.

Here are suggestions for making self-care a family priority while supporting your teen's personal exploration of what works best for them.

### *1. Open a family conversation about stress & health*

Teens care about privacy and independence, so there may be times they try to hide any signs that they're experiencing stress. But **newer studies** (and our own observations) suggest many teens feel intense pressure to do well in school, sports and extracurricular activities, to fit in with others or look a certain way. Many face **bullying, racism** or discrimination that can have severe effects on their mental and physical health. **Studies** suggests that social media use can magnify these pressures, contributing to risks for depression, anxiety, **substance use** and other serious health issues.

The first step in helping your teen cope and build **resilience** is to make mental health an open topic in your family. If kids know it's OK to say they're **not OK**, they will feel safe sharing what's happening in their lives. Parents and caregivers who listen without judgment, ask open-ended questions and express empathy and support can build the trust and understanding teens need to reveal their concerns and ask for help.

The Children's Health Foundation is a non-profit organization that partners with your Pediatrician to develop quality health care programs in our community. We work together to foster the highest quality care for children, to raise awareness on health issues, and to achieve better children's health outcomes. Please ask your provider for more information.

CHILDREN'S HEALTH *foundation*

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## 2. Make self-care a family affair

In a stressful world, building **resilience** is a family health issue. You can support your teen by agreeing on healthy routines that all of you will follow. Here are some good ideas that center on practices that help all humans feel their best.

- **Healthy rest.** **Sleep loss** weakens our ability to deal with everyday pressures, and many teens (and adults!) don't get nearly enough. Work with your teen to create bedtime routines that enhance relaxation and calm, leading to **at least 8 hours** of restful sleep.
- **Tasty, nutritious meals you enjoy together.** The random chatter that happens while you're cooking, setting the table and eating together can foster connection (and help you pick up signals that your teen needs extra support). Mealtime also gives you the chance to talk about the stress-busting superpower of healthy foods that deliver essential nutrients. For conversation starters, visit [MyPlate.gov](https://www.MyPlate.gov).
- **Physical activity.** **Regular exercise** is a proven way to release tension, elevate mood and improve sleep. Parents who enjoy a sport or activity can invite kids to join in, keeping the competition friendly and the focus on fun. Families that swim, run, play, ski, skate or walk together will benefit from an active lifestyle.
- **Healthy media use.** Tech is here to stay, but there's growing evidence that we need to use it thoughtfully. Use our family media plan **tool** to help you and your children set media priorities that reflect your intentions around digital devices and content, emphasizing issues such as safety, privacy, kindness, compassion and other shared goals.

## 3. Encourage your teen to build a self-care toolbox

Self-care can be virtually anything that calms and relaxes us. Support your teen's independence by encouraging them to seek out ways of unwinding that work well for them.

Here's a list of possibilities to get you both started. Many of these techniques help evoke the "relaxation response," our body's natural way of recovering from stress.

- Deep breathing
- Guided imagery
- **Meditation**
- Yoga
- Massage
- Dance
- Drawing, painting, sculpture and other visual arts
- Knitting, crocheting, beading and other craftwork
- Cuddling and caring for **pets**
- Hikes and **nature** walks
- Music (whether listening or playing)
- Journaling
- Volunteering, tutoring or any activity that helps others

These can be solo pursuits or something your teen enjoys with others. Notice, too, that most of these practices don't cost a lot. Your teen can get started with them via free or low-cost apps, online videos or community courses.



## 4. Reinforce healthy views that support teen and family well-being

Stress often comes from sources outside us, but our own beliefs and attitudes can feed our anxieties too. You can help your teen by offering healthy, empowering perspectives like these:

- **There is no perfect.** Comparing our lives (or bodies or careers or relationships) to others can fuel depression, anxiety and poor self-esteem. Helping your teen build a healthy context for the glossy images and videos they see on social media (and in fact, just about everywhere) will support their health.
- **Grind culture isn't healthy or realistic.** The popular narrative tells us we need to be "on" 24/7 to succeed, but in reality, our brains and bodies need rest to perform well. Let your teen know that long-term success comes from healthy practices like the ones they're developing now.
- **Therapy is for everyone.** There's a growing recognition that talk **therapy** can benefit anyone who wants to build resilience and deal with stress more effectively. Conversations with a therapist—whether in-person or online—can be a great addition to our personal self-care toolboxes.
- **Feeling prepared helps melt stress.** Practicing ahead of time can help us deal with stressful tasks like giving a talk or interviewing for a job. Building healthy communication skills that help us advocate for ourselves without anxiety or guilt is another way of feeling ready for life's challenges.
- **We can talk back to negative self-talk.** When an inner voice says, "My life is the worst," it can help to imagine things going a very different way with some hard work and a little help. This simple habit can make a real difference in turning around negative thoughts that can erode our well-being.
- **We're in this together.** The world's **longest-running study of happiness** shows that close relationships are the secret to a happy, healthy life. Encourage your teen to seek out friends and mentors who will expand the circle of strength that surrounds them. Let them know that asking for help when they're down is another essential way they can care for themselves and their long-term health.

# Healthy Outdoor Play Ideas By Age

Playing and being in **nature** is good for children's health and well-being on so many levels. Children play harder outdoors, and so getting them outside can help with motor development and overall physical health. Exploring nature is a way to nurture children's curiosity, creativity and critical thinking. Spending time outdoors can help children lower their **stress** and increase their focus. Here are some outdoor play ideas to try, based on your child's age:



## Outdoor Play Ideas for Babies & Toddlers

### *Take story time outside.*

**Reading** with your child is one of the best ways to develop strong emotional bonds, helping build a sense of security is essential for growth and development. Grab a blanket and a few books and find a shady spot for outdoor story time. Ideally, bring along books that are set outside so you can help your child make connections: "Oh, look, a picture of a cloud. Let's look up in the sky to find a cloud!"

### *Go on a guided tour.*

Put your baby in a **carrier** or a stroller and head out for a walk. Pretend you're a tour guide; try to see your neighborhood through the eyes of someone who has never been there before. Describe out loud all that you see in as much detail as possible: "This is where your big sister skinned her knee learning to ride her **bike**. That's the apartment building where our friend lives. I think it was built a long time ago..." If your baby is in a stroller, stop and squat down to their level, see what is getting their attention and talk about it. This kind of running commentary helps kids learn vocabulary and **communication skills**.

### *Break out the bubbles & balls.*

Blow bubbles and challenge kids to chase them and either catch or pop them. Who can make the biggest bubble? Who can make a double bubble? A fun activity for toddlers is to fill a bucket with water and some dish detergent. Give the child a whisk to stir up the bubbles and explore their properties. Ball play is another great way to engage this age child outside. Sit on the grass across from one another and roll a ball back and forth. This not only builds motor planning and balance skills, but also helps teach social turn-taking and watching each other's body language.

## Outdoor Play Ideas for Preschoolers

### *Start a nature collection.*

When outdoors with kids, encourage them to look for wonder in the natural world! Rocks, acorns, leaves, pinecones, seashells, vials of sand from beaches visited—these all make for great collections for kids! And collecting helps build focus, patience, and commitment as kids learn to discern what makes an object worthy to be added to their treasures. Find a place in their bedroom or outside where they can safely keep these items, and return to them again and again.

### *Go for a silly stroll.*

Take a cue from Monty Python's Ministry of Silly Walks **skit** and go for a silly stroll. Challenge kids to tiptoe for half a block, turn in circles as they walk, march with high knees, or wiggle their hips and shimmy their shoulders. Then let kids call the shots! It might be fun to trade off being the "leader" with each block!

### *Take imagination outside.*

The wonders of the outdoors can inspire new ideas. Trees and bushes can become hideouts, rock walls can become mountains for favorite figurines, while flowers can become jungles for toy animals. Let children draw make-believe worlds on the sidewalk in chalk, or creative obstacle courses to run! If your children tell you they don't know what to play, then think up something you played as a child.

### *Raise a yardwork helper.*

Many children may groan when asked to help out in the yard, but preschoolers are just the right age to give small, helpful tasks such as watering flowers. Preschoolers love to feel like helpers, and many yardwork tasks provide sensory input that can be calming.

## Outdoor Play Ideas for School-Age Children

### *Leave a trail.*

Help kids maintain important friendships by coordinating with the parents of your children's friends to send kids on "secret spy missions." The way it works is one family goes on a walk with some sidewalk chalk, drawing arrows and letters along the way to spell out a secret message. When that family returns home, they call or text the other family with the coordinates of the starting location for the "mission." That family follows the arrows and records the letters to spell out the secret message.

### *Take a walk-and-talk.*

School-age kids may find it easier to share how they are feeling while walking side-by-side with you rather than a face-to-face conversation. A short daily walk can be a great time for an emotional check-in with your child. It lets you see how they are handling any changes and challenges in their life and to let them know how you are there to help them through it all. Some children also open up while tossing a baseball or kicking a soccer ball back and forth.

### *Make a birdfeeder.*

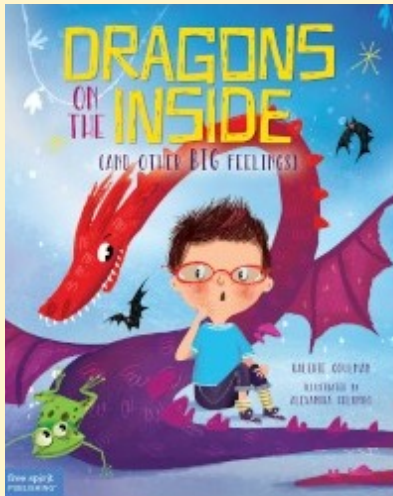
Birdfeeders are great ways to attract wildlife to your window or yard. It can be fun to look up the birds you see, keep a list and watch what time of the year different species come around.



## Book Recommendations

### Dragons on the inside (And Other Big Feelings)

Valerie Coulman, illus. by Alexandra Colombo (ages 4-8)



On the inside, a child's emotions come to life in the form of dragons and creatures, and as he works on his mental battles, he learns to communicate his inner turmoil to the "outside" for help.

### Growing Pangs

Kathryn Ormsbee, illus. by Molly Brooks (ages 8-12)

Though Katie and Kacey are different, they are best friends. But after Kacey starts drifting away from her at summer camp, it's all Katie can think about when she arrives back home, and Katie fears her habits that help her stop worrying may prevent her from ever fitting in.



### Iveliz Explains It All

Andrea Beatriz Arango, illus. by Alyssa Bermudez (ages 10-14)

Iveliz wants seventh grade to be different, but when she arrives at school she can't help the anger she feels when her peers aren't kind. Iveliz learns with the guidance of her family and therapist to advocate for herself in this novel in verse.

## Recipe: Rice Cake Fairy Faces



### Ingredients

- 3 large plain rice cakes
- 2-3 Tbsp cream cheese
- 3 slices cucumber
- 1 cherry tomato
- 2 slices raw carrot
- 6 blueberries
- handful cress and/or fresh pea shoots

### Instructions

1. Spread cream cheese over each of the rice cakes, right to the edges
2. Decorate the rice cakes by creating fun fairy faces with the vegetables. Try making some with tomato & cucumber noses, cucumber mouths and blueberry & carrot eyes.

## Color in Some Spring Critters!

From: Crayola

