As a general rule, fall can be a time of great excitement (and sometimes anxiety) for both kids and parents alike. You have the start of a brand new year, with all the new experiences and milestones that will go along with it. Some families embrace this and look forward to a year with a good amount of positivity. But for just as many, all this newness and “the unknown” can be quite overwhelming and even cause for fear. This could be especially true if a child has recently suffered a traumatic event, changed schools, or is prone to social anxieties (new teachers, new friends to make, etc. — sound familiar?). It can take time for children to establish a comfortable routine and adjust to significant changes in school and family life. It stands to reason that the first few months of school can be a challenging time for even the most “normal” families.

We must all remember, however, that “normal” is just a setting on a washing machine. What remains important is for the lines of communication between parents and children to be as open as ever, even as schedules become busier and the school year progresses. And parents must take it upon themselves to make this happen. Children, especially as they reach adolescence and beyond, may try to shut down and shut out concerned and interested parents. Try to be available for them if they want to talk, and show that you are interested in what they are saying without demanding information. For more helpful suggestions on how to communicate with children of all ages, visit the PBS Parents website at http://www.pbs.org/parents/talkingwithkids/.

While communication is key, perhaps all of our most modern forms of communication need to take a back seat during this time. Why not make dinner time a much-needed chance to “unplug” for all parties involved? — no cell phones, Internet, texting, etc. Whatever happened to just good old talking? Dinner could really be a means for everyone to compare notes on the day. Another time to connect could be to and from kids’ activities and practices. We can so quickly get wrapped up in our own problems; hearing what other members of the family are dealing with can help everyone to better understand one other and get along. A family that talks together is truly a family that can live and function healthily together.

So with these thoughts, I send all parents and kids good vibes for the rest of the school year. Even if your year has gotten off to a rocky start, there is still time to make positive, lasting changes that will bring your family closer together. What a time of promise and hopes of good things to come — make it a great one!
Dear MG,

My son just told me that he is being bullied at school. He’s embarrassed and doesn’t want to tell his teacher about it because he thinks the bullying will get worse if he "tattles." What can I do to help him?

Sincerely,
Perplexed Parent

Dear Perplexed Parent,

Bullying is a very serious problem, and it’s understandably upsetting for you as a parent. One of the best things you can do for your son right now is to follow your instincts and comfort him! Offer him support and praise him for sharing with you. Let him know that it’s not his fault, and that it’s the bully who has the problem. Also remind him that he’s not alone. According to the National Association of School Psychologists, 3 out of every 4 kids is teased at some point during childhood.

Even though your son is scared to tell his teacher, it’s important that you talk to his teacher or school counselor as soon as possible, before the bullying escalates. But your son is right; teachers can’t be everywhere, and there are still times when he might have to deal with the bully himself. Here are some healthy ways of dealing with the bully:

- Use the buddy system. If your son sticks with a friend, he’s much less likely to be victimized.
- Control reactions. Bullies feel more powerful when their victims get angry or upset. Help your son practice counting to ten, taking deep breaths, and wearing a “poker face.”
- Walk away. Tell the bully to stop and simply walk or move away from him or her. Bullies tend to pick on kids who do what they say, so if your son refuses to agree to what the bully wants, the bully may eventually give up.

With the school year well underway, homework and studying are important parts of your children’s daily schedules. But for many kids, of course, games and other fun activities are much more appealing! If you’re like most families, one of these activities is video gaming. In fact, it’s estimated that 190 million households worldwide have next generation gaming consoles (XBOX 360, PlayStation 3, or Nintendo Wii). Although these games have become fixtures in many households, parents still wonder whether video games can affect their children negatively.

There are many ways that video games can affect children, but two of the most common concerns relate to violent content in video games and the effects video games have on children’s academic performance. To understand the dangers of violent game content, it is vital to understand the ever changing video game industry. The target audience for video game providers is no longer children, as it has been in the past. In reality, the average video game player is actually closer to the age of thirty! Due to the nature of the target audience, some video game providers have responded by increasing the maturity level of their games in order to offer a more realistic experience for adult audiences.

Although these games are intended for adults, unfortunately, children are often able to access them. Recently, the Supreme Court declared a California law enacted in 2005 that prohibited the sale or rental of “violent video games” to minors unconstitutional. This makes it likely that violent video games will be available in stores for a long time to come. It is therefore important that parents monitor content in video games before they buy them for children.

The research regarding video games affecting scholastic performance is so far unclear. Some studies show students who play video games frequently have lower grades, but others indicate that time spent playing video games does not affect grades. Obviously, parents play a big role in determining how much time to allot to games and to studying. You can keep your kids on track with these gaming tips:

- Help your kids prioritize (i.e., homework first, then video games).
- Monitor bad grades and time spent playing video games to see if there is a connection before blaming the video games directly.
- There are plenty of family friendly titles available on all consoles that the whole family can play.
- The ESRB’s website is www.esrb.org, at which thorough information and ratings for any video game on the market is offered free of charge. For quick and concise information, check the back of the game box for an ESRB rating.
By: Philip Keck, MA

These days, kids have a lot on their plates. In addition to managing schoolwork, they also have clubs, sports, and social relationships with peers and family members to negotiate. For both children and parents, expectations are high. Whether it is preschool or university, parents and their school-aged children are faced with new challenges every day. So how can we help our children to cope with the pressures of modern academic life?

For younger children, especially those just starting school, it is important to maintain a routine. If possible, you and your little one may operate under a fixed schedule each day so that everyone will have their expectations met accordingly. This includes setting a bedtime, handling as many tasks as possible the night before (picking out clothes, making lunches, packing bags), and a consistent morning routine (breakfast, brushing teeth, getting out the door by a certain time). Talk with your child’s teacher about what expectations there may be at school and work with your child on understanding what that may be.

Focusing on the positive aspects, like making new friends and the fun activities they will do at school, can help both you and your child get excited.

To help ease your child’s worries about school, take the time to recognize any anxiety they might have and encourage them with positive, but realistic comments. You can help free up time to talk and learn about their experience by periodically preparing and freezing meals for those busy evenings. Arranging the household in a way that makes the process of doing homework easier can help you child be more productive. Turn off the TV or other entertainment devices, clear off an area where they can work, and model good behavior by performing your own work or tasks around the house (and maximize your own productivity!).

Teenage students can sometimes feel added pressure to perform well not only academically, but also socially. Both aspects of teen life can be grounds for giving up in both domains, but consistent support from parents can help combat this. Make sure your teen is getting enough sleep at night and eating healthy foods, because both can affect mental and physical development. Modeling these good behaviors for your teen can be instrumental for you and your child, even though it feels like sometimes you might be invisible!

Be available to your teen to explore their thoughts and beliefs about alcohol, drugs, and sex. Peer pressure and bullying can lead to poor decisions while teens are developing their attitudes and beliefs about life, but you can always be open to navigate these topics with them when the time is right. It may even feel uncomfortable to discuss these topics with your teen but when you are honest with them, they can start to develop a mutual level of respect.

These are just a few tidbits to think about with your children when they are heading back to school. Please feel free to talk with your school counselor or a counselor at our clinic about your specific parenting situation and how to further improve your communication and organization styles to keep you and your child feeling good, both mentally and physically.
**Featured Counselor Profile**

**Jackie Engebretson, M.Ed.**

By: Laura Walker, MA

This column is a way for the community to learn about the diverse talents, both master’s and doctoral students, employed at the Ball State University Counseling Practicum Clinic.

Jackie Engebretson received her Ms.Ed. in mental health counseling from the University of Miami and is currently a second year doctoral student in the Department of Counseling Psychology and Guidance Services. Jackie is currently seeing clients at the Ball State University Counseling Practicum Clinic while also working with children and families at the Madison County Health Clinic. Jackie is also the proud parent of three-month-old Adriana Sophia. The following is a discussion with Jackie, one of the many talented individuals employed at the Ball State University Practicum Clinic.

**How did you decide to pursue your Ph.D. in counseling psychology?**

Well, everyone in my family is a teacher, so I’ve always wanted to teach. However, after working on my master’s thesis and gaining experience as a therapist, I also realized that I wanted to conduct research and work more directly with clients. I really enjoy working with children, talking with them, and being able to help them and their families. I realized that I would need further schooling in order to do all of those things. I also feel that pursuing my Ph.D. is helping me to grow as a person and improve my clinical skills.

**What are your clinical interests?**

My primary interests lie with children and families. In particular, I enjoy working with adolescents with emotional or behavioral problems, such as ADHD, conduct problems, depression, anxiety, and previous traumatic experiences.

**Are you currently doing any research?**

Last year, I assisted with a study comparing reactive and proactive aggression in children and how these types of aggression are related to empathy and emotional regulation. I am currently developing a project that will focus on risk and resiliency factors related to youth who have been exposed to trauma and violence.

**What has been your most influential (or exciting, or enjoyable) work experience?**

While I was pursuing my master’s degree in Miami, I worked at an alternative school for underprivileged, African American adolescent females. I encountered a lot of problems that I had no prior experience with, and the severity level was much higher than I ever could have imagined. It was a rewarding experience for me because, in addition to learning a lot about myself and improving my counseling skills, I really felt like I was making a difference in their lives.

**Are there any populations that you particularly enjoy working with in counseling?**

In addition to the interests I mentioned previously, I also enjoy working with children from underprivileged backgrounds. Becoming a mother has definitely made advocacy for children and social justice issues more of a priority for me; I want other children to have the same opportunities that my daughter will have.

**What do you hope to do after you graduate?**

I’d like to have the opportunity to practice and teach, if possible. Ideally, I’d like to work in a juvenile detention center and teach courses at a university as an adjunct professor.
Featured Wellness Issue

Back to School Doesn't Have to Be the End of Physical Fun

By: Emily Mastroianni, BA

As fall comes to an end, kids will be spending more and more time indoors. This doesn't mean the physical exercise should come to an end. In fact, spending long hours sitting at school may leave kids with energy to spare. Furthermore, physical exercise can be beneficial for the mental health of both you and your children. Exercise has been shown to reduce depression and anxiety. Here are a few helpful ideas on how kids can get their energy out in healthy ways.

Join a Team
Allow your child to join a sports team at school or the local YMCA orYWCA. Sports not only provide a way for your child to get some exercise, they can also benefit your child academically and socially. Some research has shown that kids who play sports, especially girls, are more likely to develop a positive body image and have higher self-esteem. Kids in sports also tend to be less likely to use drugs and girls who play sports seem to be less likely to become pregnant. Sports help kids develop discipline, leadership skills, good sportsmanship, and teach them how to work on a team. In addition, kids who play sports develop critical thinking, motor skills, and even math skills. These kids also learn to work hard and tend to experience more success in school. Finally, sports are fun and a great way to relieve stress.

Make a Play Date
If your kids do not enjoy organized sports or don't have the time, you can still encourage your child to exercise by playing with others or with you. Set some time aside to shoot some hoops or visit a local indoor pool. Many recreational centers (YMCA, YWCA, etc.) often have open gym and open pool hours during which you and your kids can go and play freely. Besides the mental health benefits mentioned above (increasing self-esteem, relieving stress, etc.), the American Heart Association encourages sixty minutes of physical activity daily for children in order to help control weight, reduce blood pressure, raise “good” cholesterol, and to reduce the risk of diabetes and some types of cancer.

Don't Give Up as the Weather Gets Colder
The colder weather doesn't have to stop you and your children from staying active. The activities mentioned above can be done at a local gym or recreation center. Or you can use a space in your house or garage to jump rope, play hopscotch, dance, or do jumping jacks. There are even some video games now (i.e.,Wii Fit) that allow your kids to get off the couch and be active. Even in the winter, kids can bundle up and go outside to sled, ice skate, or play in the snow. You can be a good role model by staying active too. Think of these activities as a way to bond with your child while also benefitting both you and your child’s physical and mental health.

Positive Parenting!

By: Deborah Miller, MA

With the school year in full swing, many families are struggling to manage school, work, and family time. I know that for my family, the time and money spent during the academic year can be draining on our family resources in many ways. That’s why it’s important now more than ever to maintain a positive focus to help alleviate some of the stresses and get our kids and keep our families on track for another year. Here are some great activities that can help your family focus on what’s going right in life:

- When you’re putting the kids to bed at the end of the day, do a little positivity exercise. Take turns telling each other one or two good things that happened that day (no matter how trivial they may seem). An added bonus is that the person telling the good thing also must say how they played a role in making that good thing happen. This will help you and your kids end the day thinking about positive things instead of worrying about difficult things tomorrow might bring.
- Have meals together around the dinner table (with the TV off! – as many as you can manage but at least two per week). During these meals, try to keep conversations focused on what is going well at school, with friends, in after-school activities, etc. While it is important to allow your family to voice negative concerns and emotions, it is also important to nurture positive attitudes and experiences.
- Take a walk, ride bikes, go bowling, get off the couch! – again, use this time with your family to accentuate the positive. If you take a walk or ride bikes, take time to “smell the roses.” Point out the beauty of nature, tell your kids how much you enjoy being with them, compliment each other.

It is truly amazing how adding one or two positive activities to your day can change your whole attitude. You’ll find that you and your family members begin to look forward to these times instead of seeing them as a chore, and it will become easier and easier to point out the positives in life. Try it today!
Mind Matters

Ball State University Counseling Practicum Clinic
Ball State University
Teachers College 621
Muncie, IN 47306

Mind Matters Contributors
Editor: Laura Walker, MA
Staff Contributors: Philip Keck, MA
Emily Mastroianni, BA
Deborah Miller, MA
Maggie Orr, Clinic Manager
Tony Severtson, BA

Clinic Director: Theresa Kruczek, PhD, HSPP
Summer Clinic Director: Don Nicholas, PhD, HSPP
Clinic Manager: Maggie Orr
Clinic Advisory Committee:
Paul Spengler, PhD, HSPP
Kristin Perrone-McGovern, PhD, HSPP
Stefanía Ægisdóttir, PhD, HSPP
Jeong Han Kim, PhD
Charlene Alexander, PhD, HSPP

Ball State University Counseling Practicum Clinic:
Serving the Community Since 1969

Mission
- The clinic is a training and research facility for the Department of Counseling Psychology and Guidance Services.
- The clinic provides high-quality, low-cost psychological services to the Delaware County community and beyond.

Service Providers
- Over 50 graduate student counselors under the supervision of faculty.
- Faculty supervisors are licensed psychologists and counselors.

Services Offered
- Individual Counseling
- Couple Counseling
- Family Counseling
- Child/Adolescent Counseling
- Group Counseling with a focus on:
  Parenting
  Social skills
  Anger control
  Issues of concern to children and adolescents

Hours of Operation
- August-May (Spring & Fall)
  9 AM to 9 PM M-Th
  9 AM to 12 PM Fri
- May-August (Summer)
  9 AM to 8 PM M-Th
  Closed on Friday
- The clinic is closed during university vacations and holidays.

All clients have the right to receive timely, competent counseling services consistent with the ethical principles and guidelines established by professional organizations. All counseling services provided at the Counseling Practicum Clinic are guided by the Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct, the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice of the American Counseling Association, the American School Counseling Association, the American Rehab Counseling Association, the General Guidelines for Providers of Psychological Services, and the Specialty Guidelines for the Delivery of Services by Counseling Psychologists.

Ball State University Counseling Practicum Clinic
Teachers College, Sixth Floor
Ten Story Building on the corner of Riverside and McKinley

We’re on the Web!
http://cms.bsu.edu/Academics/CollegesandDepartments/Teachers/Departments/CounselingPsych/Practicum.aspx

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