

TODAY'S family

August 2026 Lake Geauga

Cleveland Orchestra

How to Train Your Dragon
in concert August 7 & 9

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Mentor CityFest

Two-day festival
returns August 14 & 15

Artificial Intelligence

Helping students learn
or doing the work for
them?

Plus

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Living Well
Mommy Chronicles
Parent Win/Parent Fail

Back To School

THE MYSTERY MEAT YEARS

A look back at
school lunches

BACK-TO-SCHOOL NERVES

When the worries
don't go away

HOMEWORK WITHOUT BATTLES

Tips to make after-school
work less stressful

MAKING FRIENDS

Helping your child navigate
the social side of school

And lots more!

Today's Family BOOK CLUB

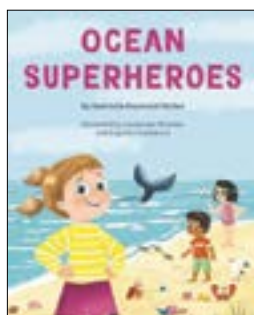


A Kid's Guide to Backyard Stargazing

By Eliza Berkowitz
Illustrated by Nicole LaRue

Packed with captivating facts about the Sun, the Moon, planets, stars, constellations, and other celestial objects—all visible from North America—*A Kid's Guide to Backyard Stargazing* is perfect for young nature lovers. This brightly illustrated, easy-to-carry guidebook helps children discover the wonders of the night sky, learn how

to become expert nature explorers, and understand why protecting our natural world is important. Ages 6 to 8.



Ocean Superheroes

By Gabrielle Raymond McGee
Illustrations by Anastasiya Halionka and Angelika Scudamore

Discover how ocean animals help protect our planet in this inspiring STEM picture book about marine life, conservation, and real-world heroes.

When legendary oceanographer Dr. Sylvia Earle visits one special class, students dive into the brilliant biodiversity of the ocean and learn

how marine animals work together to keep our planet healthy. One curious student discovers that the ocean has its own superheroes, from phytoplankton and oysters to whales, and that kids can help protect our blue planet through everyday choices that support beaches, reefs, and marine life. Ages 4 to 8.



An Amazing Friendship

Unbreakable friendship – The remarkable journey of Isaiah and Midnight

By Margaret Browne
Illustrations by Angel De la Pena

Join Isaiah and his loyal dog, Midnight, on a heartwarming journey filled with adventure, discovery, and the magic of companionship.

In a small town of friendly faces and open skies, Isaiah and Midnight share a special bond. From exploring secret paths to discovering hidden treasures, their everyday adventures become moments they will never forget. Along the way, young readers are reminded that the best friendships are built on loyalty, trust, and time spent together.

An Amazing Friendship is a touching story that celebrates the simple joys of love, adventure, and the unbreakable connection between a boy and his best friend. Ages 5 to 8.

Do you know someone who deserves the SPOTLIGHT?

We're always looking to share inspiring, heartwarming stories. If you know someone whose story would inspire or uplift Today's Family readers, please send us an email and tell us about them!

SCAN TO EMAIL US!



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**TODAY'S
family**
Lake, Geauga & Cuyahoga Counties



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Deepwood Idol Returns to Mentor CityFest to Showcase Talent, Dreams and Inclusion

Thirteen talented performers will take center stage at Mentor CityFest as Deepwood Idol returns to celebrate dreams, determination and the talents of individuals with developmental disabilities. Now in its 14th year, the popular event has become one of Lake County's most inspiring showcases of inclusion, community spirit and self-expression.

Deepwood Idol will take place on Saturday, August 15, 2026, from 1:00 to 2:30 p.m. on the main stage at the Mentor CityFest amphitheater. This marks the fifth year this free event has been featured as part of Mentor CityFest.

Inspired by the television show *American Idol*, Deepwood Idol gives individuals eligible to receive services through the Lake County Board of Developmental Disabilities / Deepwood (LCBDD) the opportunity to perform before a large audience and share their talents on a professional stage.

"Deepwood Idol demonstrates what makes Lake County special—a community that celebrates inclusion and recognizes the talents and contributions of people with developmental disabilities," said Elfie Roman, LCBDD superintendent. "Being part of Mentor CityFest allows even more people to experience the joy, excitement and inspiration these performers bring to the stage."

After auditions featuring singers, dancers, comedians and musicians, 13 acts earned a spot in this



Charlotte Daprano, winner of 2025 Deepwood Idol

year's finale. For many contestants, it will be their first Deepwood Idol experience.

"What began as a small talent show at a day

habilitation program has evolved into a highly anticipated community event that requires months of planning and preparation," said Ashley Cozzens, LCBDD community relations director. "About half of this year's finalists are performing in Deepwood Idol for the first time, and we're excited to watch them shine."

Deepwood Idol 2025 winner Charlotte Daprano knows firsthand the impact the event can have. Her performance of "True Colors" captivated audiences and earned her last year's title.

"The song is special because we are all different, and that's a good thing," said Daprano. "Don't be afraid to be who you are."

Audiences can expect a memorable and uplifting event filled with music, dancing, comedy and inspiring performances from contestants pursuing their dream of performing on a big stage.

Those interested in learning more about Lake County Board of DD/Deepwood programs and services can visit www.LakeBDD.org or connect with LCBDD on social media @Deepwood-LakeDD.

The mission of the Lake County Board of Developmental Disabilities/Deepwood is to empower people with developmental disabilities to engage in activities that enrich their lives and contribute to their community.



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Helping individuals of all ages and their families to identify and receive the services and supports they need to lead safe, healthy, and fulfilling lives.



www.LakeBDD.org
Call 440-350-5100
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Artificial Intelligence: Tool or Crutch?

If a child can explain the answer, AI may have helped them learn.
If they can't, AI may have simply done the work for them.

By Dan Miller, Today's Family

A generation ago, students carried encyclopedias to the kitchen table. Today, they carry a device in their pocket that can answer almost any question in seconds. Now, with the rise of artificial intelligence, that same device can do even more—it can explain concepts, solve math problems, summarize books, write essays, and generate ideas.

For parents, the arrival of AI raises an important question: Is this technology helping children learn, or is it making it easier to avoid learning altogether?

The answer, like most things in parenting, is somewhere in the middle.

Artificial intelligence is already becoming a common part of daily life. Students use it to brainstorm ideas, check grammar, explain difficult concepts, and help organize information. Used thoughtfully, AI can function much like a tutor—offering guidance, answering questions, and helping learners work through challenges.

The concern arises when AI moves from being a tool to becoming a substitute for thinking.

Imagine a student assigned to write a report on the American Revolution. With a few prompts, AI can generate a complete paper in less than a minute. The assignment may get completed, but has the student actually learned anything? Research on learning consistently shows that people retain information better when they actively engage with it rather than simply receiving the finished product. In other words, much of the learning happens during the process itself.

Anyone who has ever helped a child learn to ride a bicycle understands this principle. Training wheels can be useful. They build confidence and provide support while a child develops balance and coordination. But eventually the training wheels have to come off. The goal is not dependence—it is independence.

Educational researchers have long known that learning often requires effort. Psychologists refer to this as “desirable difficulty”—the idea that



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struggling through a problem can actually improve understanding and memory. Similarly, research on the “generation effect” shows that people remember information better when they create an answer themselves rather than simply reading one provided by someone else. While AI can provide quick solutions, parents and educators face a new challenge: ensuring children still experience the productive struggle that turns information into knowledge.

Used well, it can help children understand difficult concepts, generate ideas, and receive feedback on their work. Used poorly, it can become a shortcut that bypasses the very skills schools are trying to develop: critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, communication, and perseverance.

The issue isn't unique to AI. Parents have wrestled with similar questions before. Calculators changed how students approached math. Spell-check changed how we write. GPS changed how we navigate. Each technology offered convenience while raising concerns about what skills might be lost.

AI is simply the latest—and perhaps the most powerful—example.

That doesn't mean parents should panic or ban it altogether. In fact, today's children will almost certainly enter a workforce where AI is as common as email and smartphones are today. Learning how to use these tools responsibly may be just as important as learning when not to use them.

One helpful question for parents to

ask is simple: Is my child using AI to learn, or using AI to avoid learning?

There is a big difference between asking AI to explain a math concept and asking it to complete a math assignment. Likewise, there's a difference between using AI to brainstorm ideas for a report and having it write the report from start to finish.

Parents can encourage healthy habits by asking children to explain concepts in their own words, discuss how they arrived at an answer, and demonstrate understanding beyond what appears on the page. After all, the goal of education has never been simply producing correct answers. It has always been about developing minds capable of asking good questions.

Technology will continue to evolve. The tools available to today's children will be far more powerful than anything previous generations could have imagined. But some things remain unchanged.

Curiosity still matters. Creativity still matters. Character still matters.

And in a world where machines can provide answers almost instantly, the ability to think independently may become one of the most valuable skills of all.

Can Teachers Tell When AI Was Used?

Many parents assume schools can easily detect AI-generated assignments. In reality, it's not that simple.

Unlike plagiarism, AI-generated writing is typically original content. If a student copies a paragraph from a website, software can often locate the original source. But when AI creates new text, there may be no source to compare it against.

While several AI-detection programs have been developed, experts caution that they are not always reliable. Some tools incorrectly flag human-written work as AI-generated, while others fail to identify AI-assisted writing.

As a result, many educators are shifting their focus away from detection and toward demonstration of learning.

Some strategies include:

- Requiring handwritten drafts or notes
- Having students explain their work verbally
- Reviewing multiple drafts of an assignment
- Incorporating more in-class writing activities
- Assessing the learning process, not just the final product

Ultimately, the question for educators is becoming less about whether AI was used and more about whether a student truly understands the material.

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Lake, Geauga & Cuyahoga Counties





Providence House Charity Classic to support children and families in crisis

Providence House will host its Charity Classic at the Barrington Golf Club to raise critical funding in support of children and families in crisis across Greater Cleveland.

Presented by Exscape Group, the Charity Classic benefits Providence House's mission of keeping kids safe and families together while helping prevent unnecessary foster care placements. Providence House provides emergency shelter in a loving, homelike environment for babies and children from newborn through age 12 whose families are experiencing crisis. The organization also offers holistic support to parents and guardians, helping them address challenges, strengthen stability, and safely welcome their children home.

Today, 99% of Providence House families stay together.

The day begins with registration at 9 a.m., followed by a 10 a.m. shotgun start. The event concludes at 5 p.m.

Foursomes include 18 holes of golf and a golf cart for four golfers, lunch and dinner for four, complimentary on-course beverages including alcohol, and premier guest gifts.

Those who do not golf but still want to support the mission are invited to purchase dinner tickets and attend the post-outing dinner. Guests will have the opportunity to learn more about the organization's work to keep children safe and families together.

To register or learn more, visit providencehouse.org/event/charity-classic.



How to Train Your Dragon © 2010 DreamWorks Animation LLC. All Rights Reserved.

The Cleveland Orchestra presents How to Train Your Dragon in concert at Severance Music Center

The Cleveland Orchestra will present two special summer performances of *How to Train Your Dragon* in concert at Severance Music Center on Friday, August 7 at 7 p.m. and Sunday, August 9 at 3 p.m.

This DreamWorks film is a captivating and original story about a young Viking named Hiccup, who defies tradition when he befriends one of his deadliest foes — a ferocious dragon he calls Toothless. Together, these unlikely heroes must fight against all odds to save both their worlds. Featuring John Powell's

Oscar-nominated score performed live to picture, *How to Train Your Dragon* in Concert is a thrilling experience for all ages.

With its sweeping music, humor, and heart, *How to Train Your Dragon* in concert offers a perfect introduction to orchestral music for newcomers and a thrilling cinematic event for longtime fans alike.

Tickets for *How to Train Your Dragon* are on sale now through the Severance Music Center ticket office by phone at 216-231-1111 or through clevelandorchestra.com.



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Taste of the Browns returns September 14 to support the Greater Cleveland Food Bank

One of the Greater Cleveland Food Bank's biggest fundraisers of the year returns this fall, inviting guests to kick off football season while helping tackle hunger across the community.

Taste of the Browns will be held Monday, September 14, 2026, from 6 to 8:30 p.m. at Huntington Bank Field inside the club lounge and will feature some of the best food and beverages from Cleveland's dining scene, exciting auction packages, and the opportunity to mingle with Cleveland Browns players and alumni.

This year's event will be co-chaired by Joel Bitonio, recently retired Browns Pro Bowl guard; Carson Schwesinger, Browns line-backer and 2025 Defensive Rookie of the Year; and Chef Rocco Whalen, owner of Fahrenheit Cleveland.

Proceeds from Taste of the Browns support the Greater Cleveland Food Bank's mission to ensure that

everyone in the community has the nutritious food and essential resources they need to thrive. Each ticket purchase helps provide meals for neighbors facing hunger.

General admission tickets are \$225 and include access to the event from 6 to 8:30 p.m., all food and beverage, a souvenir wine glass, complimentary valet parking, and

the opportunity to meet and mingle with Browns players past and present. Each general admission ticket provides the equivalent of up to 450 meals for those in need.

VIP tickets are \$325 and include all general admission benefits, along with exclusive access to specialty cocktails and private VIP space. Each VIP ticket provides the equivalent of up to 650 meals.

Visit www.greaterclevelandfoodbank.org/taste for more info and to purchase your tickets.



Asian Lantern Festival at Cleveland Metroparks Zoo

Tickets are on sale now for the summer's popular Asian Lantern Festival now running at Cleveland Metroparks Zoo through Sunday, August 23. Experience the wonder of the Zoo illuminated after dark, featuring live performances and a variety of culturally inspired cuisine.

New this year, guests can expect more hands-on interactive experiences and the debut of the K-Pop Family Dance Party. Guests can dance the night away with an energetic, interactive experience designed for all ages to enjoy. Throughout the evening, dynamic festival hosts will keep the celebration going, featuring family-friendly K-Pop and global pop hits, host-led dance tutorials, and interactive games that invite guests of all skill levels to join the fun.

Additional interactive opportunities include several pedal, crank, and step-operated lanterns, walk-through tunnels and uniquely themed areas, including the RainForest Path.

In addition to the full walk-through experience Thursdays



through Sundays from 6:30 p.m. to 10:30 p.m., the Zoo is excited to announce the return of the Asian Lantern Festival drive-through experience. On select nights, guests will be able to drive-through the festival from the comfort of their own vehicles.

The advance discounted cost for Zoo members is \$24 or a four-pack for \$70. Advance nonmember tickets are \$27 or a four-pack for \$80. Limited same-day tickets can be purchased online or at the box office for an increased cost. The box office will close at 9:30 p.m. Children under 2 are admitted free.

Advance tickets are on sale now at FutureForWildlife.org/lanterns.

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Cardinal is a member-owned, full service financial institution open to anyone who lives, works, worships, or attends school in Lake, Cuyahoga, Geauga, Ashtabula, Portage, Summit, Mahoning, Trumbull, and Columbiana counties.

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The Boom Still Matters

Drone shows can dazzle, but fireworks still own the summer sky

We're in the heart of summer here in Northeast Ohio, and for me and my family, it wouldn't feel like summer without seeing at least one fireworks display lighting up the sky on a warm summer night. I don't know which part I enjoy more: the bright colors, the sparkling trails of light, or the combination of pops, booms and crackles synchronized with a soundtrack of patriotic music.

According to Britannica, the tradition of fireworks on Independence Day began the year after the signing of the Declaration of Independence—July 4, 1777. As a nation, we've celebrated in much the same way for nearly 250 years.

As another Fourth of July has now come and gone, I find myself reflecting on what makes these displays such an enduring part of summer. Lying back on a blanket and watching colorful blooms appear overhead, leaving sparkling trails as they crackle, whistle and bang, is one of those simple experiences that never seems to get old.

When my kids were little, we would take turns inventing names for each new burst that appeared in the sky. “That’s a Whistling Sister!” one of us would say. “That’s a Fuzz Boom Bah!” another would answer. We kept it up until the rapid-fire grand finale made it impossible to keep up with the

explosions overhead.

Recently, though, at a local festival, we experienced something new: a drone show. Maybe you've seen one before, but this was my first, and I was excited to see what all the buzz was about. At the same time, I wondered whether this newer technology might someday replace traditional fireworks.

Hundreds of drones lifted into the air in a coordinated display of lights and motion. Unlike fireworks, drones can create detailed images, animations and even words across the night sky. Patriotic music accompanied the performance, though at a much lower volume than a typical fireworks show.

As the drones shifted colors and formations, they transformed from the Statue of Liberty to a soaring eagle with slowly flapping wings. An American flag appeared to ripple in the breeze before changing into a soldier's salute. The display concluded with the words "Thank You Heroes" stretching across the sky.

Was it impressive? Absolutely.

Was it patriotic? Without question.

Yet when the drones landed, I found myself wanting something more. The experience was fascinating, but it lacked the anticipation, thun-



Adobe Stock / By PhotoSpire

der and excitement that come with a traditional fireworks display. I was relieved to discover I'm not alone in feeling that way.

As I looked into other drone shows around the country, I learned that most communities and entertainment venues aren't replacing fireworks. Instead, drones are often used to complement them. From Disney's massive 800-plus-drone productions to smaller community displays, drone shows frequently serve as an opening act or special feature before the main event—a classic fireworks show.

To me, that feels very American. We embrace new technology while still holding onto traditions that bring people together.

Whether you're firmly Team Fireworks, enthusiastically Team Drone, or somewhere in between, I hope you find time to spend a warm summer evening looking up at the night sky with family and friends. Technology may change, but the simple joy of sharing a memorable experience beneath the stars remains timeless.

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Plan a family vacation this summer at Lakeside Chautauqua

Lakeside Chautauqua is a hidden gem tucked away on the Marble-head Peninsula just an hour west of Cleveland. It's the perfect family destination for a weeklong vacation, weekend getaway or day trip to Lake Erie.

Within the one-square-mile historic community, you'll find hundreds of unique Victorian cottages, a concert auditorium, an arts center, a historic waterfront hotel, a movie theater and much more.

Recreation & wellness

The perfect setting for recreation and wellness along Lake Erie, Lakeside offers sailing, kayaking, paddleboarding, miniature golf, shuffleboard, basketball, sand volleyball, pickleball and tennis. It also features several parks and playgrounds, a pool, splash park and lake swimming.

Accommodations

A variety of unique and charming accommodations complete the experience—from the historic Hotel Lakeside and Fountain Inn to weekly



cottage rentals, a campground and bed & breakfasts. View available accommodations at lakesideohio.com/stay.

Summer entertainment & events

Lakeside hosts an impressive list of family-friendly entertainers, keynote speakers and memorable events. To view the full schedule of events visit lakesideohio.com/calendar.

Admission & parking

Lakeside requires guests and residents to purchase a Chautauqua Pass and Auto Pass to enter the grounds during the summer programming season. Depending on the length of your stay, choose from a variety of Chautauqua Passes.

Visit lakesideohio.com or call 419-798-4461 for more info.

Bringing out the best in your girl with Girl Scouts of North East Ohio

You want a brighter, happier tomorrow for your girl—and that's exactly what we want, too!

Studies show Girl Scouts improves girls' confidence and makes them better prepared for life's challenges. That's because we are dedicated to helping your girl follow her heart while she discovers new interests, strengths, and abilities. We're here with your family, hand in hand, to support: her dreams, her growth, and her success. The best part? It's a journey that you take with your girl and there's a place for the entire family.

Girl Scouting is a way of life that brings out the best in your girl, and helps her bring out the best in everyone around her. While she's learning about STEM, the outdoors, entrepreneurship, and important life skills, she's also discovering new ways to make your family and community stronger, kinder, and better for everyone.

At Girl Scouts, groups of girls from the same community, called troops, typically meet weekly or biweekly for an hour or two. Hand in hand



with adult volunteers—often parents or caregivers—girls select exciting hands-on activities and projects, try new things, and cheer each other on. Together, they earn badges to reflect their successes and show the world what they're made of.

Our goal is to make sure girls see and have the opportunity to reach their potential. It isn't just about helping them earn better grades, make better decisions, and have happier lives (although it helps with those things, too!). It's about creating a more fair, equal, and compassionate world where every girl has a seat at the table and can make her dreams come true. Check out our values in the Girl Scout Promise and Law.

To learn more about Girl Scouts of North East Ohio visit gsneo.org/join.

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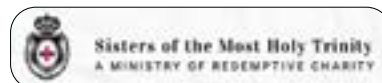
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Dance classes at Rabbit Run

Fall in love with the arts this autumn at Rabbit Run Community Arts Association (RRCAA) in Madison. Registration for fall classes and lessons is now open.

Dance classes are available in creative movement, ballet, and tap/jazz from preschoolers, who just love to move, to adults looking to get back into shape. Also available are classes in modern dance, contemporary and lyrical and ballroom dancing.

RRCAA also offers visual art experiences with “Art with Miss Katie.” In these three to six week sessions students will work on a variety of

art projects using many different mediums.

RRCAA provides a full range of private music instruction from beginner to advanced students in voice, brass, beginning band instruments, acoustic and electric guitar, woodwinds, piano/keyboard, viola/violin/ Suzuki violin, cello and fiddle.

For specific class information or to register visit www.rabbitrun.org or call 440-428-5913. RRCAA is a non-profit organization that receives partial funding from the Ohio Arts Council and is located at 49 Park St., Madison.



Niagara Falls Tips for a great experience!

Niagara Falls is one of those destinations many Northeast Ohio families have visited at least once — but every trip is a little different. Attractions change, hotels are renovated, new experiences open, and old favorites can surprise you all over again.

In our full online feature, we share highlights from a recent visit to both the American and Canadian sides of the Falls, including one of our long-time favorites, Cave of the Winds. The series of wooden walkways near the base of Bridal Veil Falls remains one of the most thrilling ways to experience the power of Niagara up close. Getting soaked is not a possibility — it’s practically the point.

We also take readers aboard Niagara City Cruises, where the boat ride into the mist of Horseshoe Falls continues to be one of the signature Niagara experiences. On the Canadian side, we stayed at the newly renovated Hyatt Regency Niagara Falls Fallsview, enjoyed dinner and breakfast at STK Steakhouse, and



visited Niagara Takes Flight, a new indoor attraction that uses motion seating, wind, mist, scent and a giant domed screen to create the feeling of flying above the Falls.

To help families plan their own visit, we also created a Niagara Falls attraction scorecard with grades for several major experiences, including Cave of the Winds, Niagara City Cruises, Niagara Takes Flight, Journey Behind the Falls, Clifton Hill, Skylon Tower, the Butterfly Conservatory and more.

Before you plan your next Niagara Falls getaway, read the full story, see our attraction grades, and get practical tips at TodaysFamilyMagazine.com.

Visit TodaysFamilyMagazine.com for the entire trip recap and our grades for the major attractions.

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GreaterClevelandFoodBank.org/Taste

Enhancing Indoor Air Quality

The role of high-end HVAC systems in NE Ohio

Maintaining healthy indoor air quality is crucial for the well-being of residents in Northeast Ohio. While various factors can affect air quality, high-end HVAC systems play a significant role in mitigating health risks and ensuring cleaner indoor environments. In this blog, we will explore how these advanced systems contribute to improving indoor air quality in NE Ohio.

1. Filtration Efficiency

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6. Customized Zoning

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High-end HVAC systems in NE Ohio play a vital role in enhancing indoor air quality and promoting healthier living environments. Through



advanced filtration, fresh air exchange, proper ventilation, air quality monitoring, UV lights, and customized zoning, these systems ensure cleaner and safer indoor air for residents. Investing in such HVAC systems is essential for maintaining optimal indoor air quality and supporting the well-being of individuals and families throughout NE Ohio.

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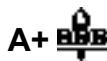
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LIVING WELL

with Rebecca Fellenbaum

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Finding Your Way Back

Dear Rebecca: "I don't feel like myself. I hate to admit it, but my temper is short, my nerves are shot, and I'm craving space, time, and peace and quiet. I know I'm not showing up as the mom, wife, or friend I want to be. How do I get myself back?" — *Laura, Kirtland*

Hi Laura: I don't think you've lost yourself. I think—and this is very common—you've lost touch with yourself. Let me explain.

Your short temper and craving for quiet are important pieces of information. They tell me your life has likely become very outward-focused. This is normal! As a mom, wife, and friend, you're probably spending a lot of time caring for others and

have slowly stopped checking in with yourself.

The fact that you're noticing the desire to reconnect with yourself—and that you reached out for advice—tells me you're already headed in the right direction.

Can you remember what it felt like to be yourself? What was important to you? How did you feel, and what was your outlook when you felt most like yourself? It may be that you were in a different head space then, or maybe your responsibilities were simply different.

When I work with clients who don't feel like themselves, we talk about tools they can use to rediscover what they want and need. Before we change anything, though, it's important to slow down. Reconnecting

with ourselves isn't another task to accomplish—it actually begins with doing less.

There are many ways to slow down. Whether you go for an evening walk, journal for five minutes, drink your coffee in silence, or take a few deep breaths before getting out of bed, ask yourself: How do I feel? Keep doing more of the things that help you feel like yourself.

You say you want more space, time, and peace and quiet. Is that something you can ask for or intentionally carve out? Shifting our mindset can happen in small increments. A whole day would be wonderful, but even five minutes of peace can make a real difference.

My final thought is to be gracious and compassionate with yourself. Notice when you ask for what you need. Appreciate yourself when you pause before responding to the kids. And keep your connection to the version of yourself that feels most peaceful. She's right there, ready and waiting.

A Calmer School Year

Dear Rebecca: "My kids are heading back to school in a few weeks, and every year I promise myself things will be different. We'll be less rushed, less stressed, and it will go smoothly. But by October, we're right back where we started. How can I actually create a calmer school year?" — *Cassidy, South Euclid*

Hi Cassidy: You're not alone in creating a fantasy version of the school year, complete with color-coded calendars and morning checklists. Every back-to-school season feels like a fresh start, and I can hear both your hope and your disappointment from years past.

A new school year doesn't require us to put pressure on ourselves to get everything right and stick with it perfectly. The reality is that a calmer school year begins with calmer expectations.

You say you promise yourself things will be different every year. What,

specifically, are you hoping will be different? Can you identify what you most want to feel calmer about? Imagine October coming and going while you've maintained that sense of calm. How would you feel?

One practical idea is to write down the areas of your life that cause the most stress. It's okay if the list is long. Then choose one thing you'd like to improve—for example, last-minute homework stress. Write down what could be done differently and brainstorm solutions with your family. And don't forget that letting go of the need to do everything perfectly is a wonderful goal.

One more thought to consider. You said you always end up right back where you started. Instead of asking, Why can't I stick with this? ask yourself, What made it easier during those first few weeks? Pay attention to what worked at the beginning of the school year and look for ways to make those routines easier to maintain.

Finally, remember that sometimes the calm we're chasing doesn't actually exist. We compare our hectic Tuesday mornings to someone else's Instagram highlight reel and decide we're failing. Before deciding this school year isn't going well, ask yourself: Compared to what?

I love that you're thinking ahead and looking for ways to set your family up for success!

Rebecca Fellenbaum is a certified life coach, writer, and Cleveland-area mom who helps parents enjoy this season of life. Learn more at rebeccafellenbaum.com.



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Lake County Catholic School Network

Newly added educators and expanded programs

As students return to the classroom, the Lake County Catholic School Network is preparing for a new academic year marked by growing enrollment, additional staff, and expanded programs designed to support students academically, socially and spiritually.

The network, which includes Mater Dei Academy and All Saints School, has added 12 new hires across its campuses for the coming school year. The additional educators and specialists will help support classroom instruction, maintain strong student-to-teacher ratios, and provide more individualized attention for students.

LCCSN is also expanding opportunities beyond the core curriculum. Students will have broader access to specials programs including art, music, physical education, foreign language and technology. These programs give students the chance to explore new interests, develop talents and experience a well-rounded Catholic education.

Student support services are also being strengthened. Enhanced resource programs and counseling services will be available to help students who may need academic intervention, emotional support or additional guidance during the school year.

The growth comes as more families seek a faith-based educational environment focused on academic excellence, character development and community.

The Lake County Catholic School Network is a collaborative educational network of six Catholic parishes in western Lake County: Immaculate Conception in Willoughby, St. John Vianney in Mentor, St. Justin Martyr in Eastlake, St. Mary Magdalene in Willowick, St. Noel in Willoughby Hills, and Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Wickliffe. Together with Mater Dei Academy and All Saints School in Wickliffe, the network provides a unified, faith-centered learning environment for area families.



Some days you feel like parent of the year.

Other days... not so much. Here are a few back-to-school moments most every parent can probably understand. Scan the QR code and let us know your win or fail!



The Supply List Victory

I got every single item on the school supply list before the first day of school. Folders, glue sticks, tissues, headphones—the works. I felt unstoppable. Then my son came home the first week and said, “The teacher said we need a different kind of notebook.”

— Mom of two, Mentor

Lunchbox Reality Check

I packed a balanced lunch with fruit, a sandwich, yogurt, and a cute little note. My son came home with everything eaten except the sandwich. He said, “I liked the note, though.”

— Terri, mom of three, Painesville Twp.

The Bus Stop Win

I was worried my kindergartner would cry getting on the bus. Instead, he climbed right up, waved once, and never looked back. I smiled until the bus turned the corner. Then I cried in the driveway.

— Mom of one (so far), Beachwood.



As the summer days wind down, the Lake County Catholic School Network is thrilled to welcome back the wonderful families, students, teachers, and staff of **All Saints School & Mater Dei Academy!**

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Tuition-Free, K-7 Bilingual School

Welcomes students for the new school year

Lake Erie Bilingual Academy, a tuition-free public charter school serving students in kindergarten through grade 7, is now enrolling students for the upcoming school year. Families throughout Lake County and surrounding communities are invited to discover a unique educational experience that combines strong academics with daily Spanish language instruction in a supportive, student-centered environment.

Lake Erie Bilingual Academy is committed to preparing students for future success through rigorous academics, individualized support, and bilingual learning opportunities. The school offers a college-preparatory curriculum with extended instruction in English language arts and mathematics, helping students build a strong academic foundation while developing confidence and critical thinking skills.

A hallmark of the school is its commitment to bilingual education. Every student receives daily Spanish instruction, and our bilingual teachers integrate language learning into the school experience, helping students build communication skills and cultural awareness that will benefit them for years to come.

"We are thrilled to welcome both new and returning families for another exciting school year," said Principal Joy Bock. "At Lake Erie Bilingual Academy, every day is an opportunity for students



to grow academically, discover new talents, and develop confidence in two languages. Our dedicated bilingual teachers create a welcoming environment where every child is encouraged to reach their full potential. We can't wait to see all that our students will accomplish together this year."

As a tuition-free public charter school, Lake Erie Bilingual Academy is open to all eligible students, regardless of where they live. Students also receive free breakfast and lunch, ensuring they are ready to learn each day.

Lake Erie Bilingual Academy is managed by ACCEL Schools, a nationally recognized K-12 public charter school management organization dedicated to providing high-quality educational opportunities for students through innovative academic programs and strong community partnerships.

Families interested in learning more or enrolling can call 440-578-0722 or visit www.lebilingual.org.



"He has attendance deficit disorder."

What's the difference between June and August?

In June, parents say, "I'm so glad we'll have more time together." In August, they say, "What time does the bus come?"

Back-to-school shopping is fun because it reminds parents of one important thing:

Their kids have somehow lost every pencil they owned since May.

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The Stomachache That Only Happens Before School

When back-to-school nerves may be something more

By Dan Miller, Today's Family

The backpack is packed. The new shoes are by the door. You've taken the obligatory first-day-of-school photo, complete with a nervous smile and a sign announcing your child's grade.

Then Monday morning comes.

Your child complains of a stomachache.

You reassure them, get them off to school, and by that evening they're laughing, playing outside, and acting like their usual self.

The next morning, the stomachache returns.

By Wednesday, there are tears before school. Thursday brings another headache. Every morning seems to bring a new reason not to go to school, yet every afternoon your child seems perfectly fine.

As a parent, it's confusing.

Are they really sick? Are they simply trying to avoid school? Is this just part of adjusting to a new school year, or is something more going on?

The answer is often reassuring.

Feeling nervous about a new school year is completely normal. Meeting a new teacher, navigating unfamiliar classrooms, making new friends, or worrying about fitting in can leave even confident children feeling uneasy. For most kids, those butterflies gradually fade as the school routine becomes familiar.

But sometimes those worries don't go away. Instead, they begin showing up in ways parents don't always recognize.

Anxiety doesn't always look like anxiety

When adults think about anxiety, they often picture someone who is obviously worried or frightened. Children, however, don't always express their feelings that way.

Instead, anxiety often shows up through physical complaints or changes in behavior.

A child who is anxious may suddenly complain of frequent headaches or stomachaches before school. They may have trouble falling asleep, become unusually clingy, ask the same reassuring questions over and over, or seem unusually irritable over

small problems. Some children become very quiet, while others appear angry or defiant.

"Children don't always have the words to tell us they're anxious," says pediatrician Dr. Shelly Senders. "Sometimes their bodies or their behavior speak first."

Not all worry is bad

Believe it or not, a certain amount of anxiety serves an important purpose.

Dr. Senders notes that those nervous feelings before the first day of school, a big test, or sports tryouts reflect a surge of adrenaline which dilates airways pushing extra oxygen into the brain to clear mental fog, stimulates the liver to release stored glucose (blood sugar) to give muscles a rapid energy boost and increases heart rate and blood pressure to push blood to muscles and make responses sharper. "A little bit of nervousness can actually help children focus and stay alert." Those feelings usually fade as school routines become familiar and confidence grows.

Parents often worry because their child seems upset in the moment. But temporary nervousness doesn't necessarily mean something is wrong.

The key is whether those worries gradually improve with time.

If your child gradually settles into the school routine, begins making friends, and returns to their usual personality after the first few weeks, chances are they're simply adjusting to something new.

When the worries don't fade

For most children, the butterflies begin to settle as the school routine becomes familiar. The questions become less frequent, the morning stomachaches disappear, and school gradually starts to feel normal again.

But if your child is still struggling after the first few weeks of school—or the worries seem to be growing instead of fading—it may be more than a temporary adjustment.

If anxiety begins interfering with everyday life, it's worth having a conversation with your child's pediatrician.

Some signs to watch for include:



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- Frequent requests to stay home from school
- Ongoing headaches or stomachaches without a medical explanation
- Trouble sleeping because of worry
- Avoiding friends or activities they once enjoyed
- Extreme fear of making mistakes
- Constant reassurance-seeking
- Anxiety that continues to affect family life or daily routines

Dr. Senders explains, "Our goal isn't to eliminate all anxious feelings. Life will always bring challenges. We want children to learn that they can face those feelings and discover that they are stronger than they realized and that they truly can do almost anything."

How parents can help

Parents naturally want to make the fear disappear.

Sometimes, however, the best first response isn't offering solutions.

Instead of saying, "You're okay," try saying "You'll be okay."

Instead of saying, "There's nothing wrong with your tummy," try saying, "It must be scary sometimes to go to school by yourself."

Instead of saying, "Go to sleep," try saying "Let's talk about your day."

Children often feel calmer simply knowing someone understands what they're experiencing.

Parents can also help by keeping school routines predictable, getting enough sleep before school starts, limiting last-minute morning stress, and celebrating small successes during those first few weeks.

Most importantly, resist the urge to let anxiety make all the decisions. While it's natural to want to protect your child, confidence grows by facing challenges one step at a time—not by avoiding every uncomfortable situation.

Trust your instincts

No one knows your child better than you do.

If something feels different this year—if the worries seem bigger, last longer, or begin affecting your child's daily life—it's perfectly appropriate to ask questions.

Dr. Senders encourages parents not to wait until things become overwhelming.

"We'd much rather have a reassuring conversation early than have a family struggle alone for months," he says. "Parents know their children best, and if their instincts tell them something isn't right, we want to hear about it."

The beginning of a school year brings change for every family. For most children, the butterflies disappear as new routines become familiar.

For others, those butterflies may need a little extra support.

Either way, one of the greatest gifts parents can give their children is knowing someone is there to listen, encourage, and remind them they don't have to face their worries alone.

Senders Pediatrics is located at 2054 South Green Road in South Euclid. To schedule an appointment, call 216-291-9210 or visit senderspeditrics.com for more information.

The Mystery Meat Years

Memories from the school lunch line

By Dan Miller, Today's Family

When I was a kid, my mother rarely packed my lunch. Most mornings, I was handed 45 cents and sent off to buy whatever the school cafeteria had waiting for us that day.

Milk was three cents for a small carton. Chocolate milk, if we were lucky enough to get it, was five cents. Looking back, that sounds like a price from a museum exhibit. At the time, it was just lunch.

I remember being jealous of the kids who brought packed lunches from home. Their sandwiches may have been a little warm and slightly soggy after spending the morning in the coatroom—no backpacks in my day—but at least they knew what they were getting.

Those of us in the lunch line were not always so lucky.

There was, of course, the mystery meat. One day it was called a hamburger. Another day it was Salisbury steak. Another day it was meatloaf.

I am sure, in reality, these were all different meals prepared with great care and strict nutritional standards. But to us, it felt like one big cafeteria conspiracy.

"They're just changing the name," we whispered, with the confidence of children who had solved a government cover-up.

Then there was spinach day.

Popeye made spinach look powerful, even heroic. Our cafeteria spinach looked like something dragged out of Lake Erie an hour earlier. It arrived in a wet, green pile, placed carefully in one compartment of the tray, where it hopefully stayed. I was never more grateful for those little tray dividers than I was on spinach day. If that spinach touched anything else, the entire meal was considered contaminated.

We did, however, have Patrick.

Patrick loved spinach. Not tolerated it. Not politely ate it. Loved it. With our enthusiastic permission, he would reach over, grab the clump of



spinach from our trays, and put the entire thing in his mouth while the rest of us watched in horror.

He knew exactly what he was doing.

Not every cafeteria day was a disaster. Pizza burger day was usually Friday, and that was the day we begged our mothers for an extra dime so we could buy a second one. A pizza burger was nothing fancy—just a hamburger bun with cheese and pepperoni melted on top—but to us it was the filet mignon of school lunches.

There were also the little buns. They cost a nickel and sold out fast. I cannot explain why a small plain bun held such power, but it did.

It's funny now to think how much I wished for packed lunches. Somewhere, there was probably a kid unwrapping a warm bologna sandwich, looking across the cafeteria at my tray and thinking I had it made.

That may be the real lesson of school lunch.

No matter what was on your tray, someone else's always looked better.



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BACK TO SCHOOL



Who Moved the First Day of School to Mid-August?

And can we ask if the building has air conditioning first?

By Dan Miller, Today's Family

There was a time, not so long ago, when summer vacation had a clear and civilized ending: Labor Day.

You had June. You had July. You had August. Then, after one final cookout, one last swim, and one more night of pretending you didn't need school supplies until tomorrow, the yellow buses returned.

Now? Some schools start while August is still actively trying to melt the driveway.

I know there are reasons. Earlier starts can help balance semesters. They can make room for professional development days. They can allow for a full week off at Thanksgiving, which sounds lovely in theory.

But let me be honest: I would trade those extra November days for a few more in August without needing a committee meeting.

Thanksgiving week is nice, but August is summer. Real summer. Popsicle summer. Barefoot-in-the-yard summer. The kind of summer that should not be interrupted by math worksheets, bus schedules, and the annual hunt for the exact type of folder no store seems to carry.

And then there's the air conditioning question. Many school buildings

were not exactly designed with "early August learning environment" in mind. I remember thinking scorching hot September school days were torture when I was a kid. Now we send children back even earlier, sometimes into buildings where "climate control" means opening a window and hoping for a breeze.

To make things more confusing, neighboring districts often start on different dates. One child is back in school while their cousin is still swimming. One friend has homework while another is eating ice cream on his front porch. It's not exactly a friendship-ending crisis, but it does make the end of summer feel less like a finish line and more like a staggered evacuation.

Maybe the modern school calendar makes perfect sense to administrators.

To parents, it can feel like we blinked and summer was over before the beach towels were dry.

So yes, I understand the reasons. I appreciate the planning. I respect the calendar.

But deep down, I still believe school should start after Labor Day.

Preferably in a building with air conditioning.

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SMOOTH TRANSITIONS

Tips for K-5 Parents



After weeks of sunshine, play dates, and a looser schedule, the transition from summer to school can be tough for young children—and their parents. But with the right steps, it's possible to ease kids back into a school-year mindset and start the year on a strong note.

"Children do best when they're mentally prepared for what's coming," says Kimberly Walter, director of the Huntington Learning Center in Mentor. "Some kids dread the end of summer fun. Others feel anxious about a new teacher, tougher aca-

demics, or being in a more structured environment again. The key is to help them feel confident, capable, and supported."

Here are some simple but powerful strategies Walter recommends for helping elementary students make the most of their back-to-school season:

1. Talk About Nerves

Fear of the unknown is common—especially among younger children. "Ask your child what's on their mind," Walter suggests. "Let them express

what they're worried about, whether it's math, making friends, or finding their new classroom. Just being heard can ease anxiety."

2. Re-establish Routines

Routines give kids a sense of control and predictability—something many students crave after the free-flowing days of summer. A week or two before school starts, begin practicing school-year habits: earlier bedtimes, morning wake-ups, and consistent meal times. Go over what a typical school day will look like and discuss after-school plans, homework expectations, and screen time rules.

3. Set Goals (and Break Them Into Steps)

Once your child feels a little more settled about the return to school, talk about what they'd like to accomplish this year. For some, that might mean improving reading skills or mastering multiplication. For others, it might simply be staying more organized or getting better grades. "Help your child break big goals into smaller steps they can manage—and celebrate progress along the way," Walter encourages.

4. Review What They've Learned

Summer learning loss is real. Without regular practice, students can forget important concepts, especially in subjects like math and reading. "Spend 10–20 minutes a few times a week reviewing last year's work," Walter advises. "Pull out worksheets or old homework and talk through it together. This helps reactivate skills and sets the stage for learning new material."

5. Organize for Success

A clean desk and a stocked backpack can go a long way in getting

students mentally and physically prepared. Encourage your child to make a checklist of supplies they need, and create a dedicated spot at home to manage school papers and artwork. "The more involved students are in the prep process, the more ownership they feel," Walter notes.

6. Fill Skill Gaps Now—Not Later

If your child struggled last year, don't wait until the first report card to take action. "Those academic gaps won't close on their own—and they'll only widen if left unaddressed," Walter says. Even with the school year quickly approaching, there's still time to get support. At Huntington, students begin with a comprehensive academic evaluation and receive a personalized plan to strengthen their weak areas. "A student who feels confident in their skills is more motivated, less anxious, and better prepared to thrive," she adds.

START STRONG—STAY STRONG

"Back-to-school preparation isn't just about shopping for notebooks and pencils," says Walter. "It's about ensuring that your child feels ready—mentally, emotionally, and academically—to face the challenges and opportunities ahead."

Whether your child needs a confidence boost, a refresher on last year's material, or extra support in core subjects, the team at Huntington Learning Center is ready to help.

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Making Friends Isn't Easy for Every Child

Helping your child navigate the social side of school

By Justin Daniels

Back-to-school season often focuses on supplies, schedules, teachers, buses, lunches, and homework. But for your child, the biggest worry may have nothing to do with spelling lists or math facts.

It may be lunch.

Your child may wonder who they will sit with, whether anyone will talk to them, what happens if their best friend is in another class, or whether everyone else already seems to have someone.

For some children, friendships seem to happen easily. They walk into a classroom, find a group, and settle in without much trouble. For others, the social side of school can feel confusing, lonely, or overwhelming.

And when your child is the one who feels left out, it can be heart-breaking to watch.

Making friends is not always as simple as telling a child, "Just go talk to someone." Some children are shy. Some are anxious. Some have trouble reading social cues. Some are new to the school. Some had friendship drama the year before and are afraid of being hurt again. Others may want friends badly but have no idea how to begin.

Friendship is a skill

Adults sometimes talk about friendship as if it should come naturally to every child. But friendship involves many skills that take time to develop.

Children have to learn how to introduce themselves, join a game, take turns, listen, compromise, handle rejection, apologize, forgive, and recognize when someone is not treating them kindly. That is a lot.

Some children pick up those skills quickly. Others need more practice, coaching, and encouragement. A child who struggles socially is not failing. They may simply still be learning how friendship works.

Listen before fixing

When your child says, "Nobody likes me," your first instinct may be to jump in with reassurance. You may want to say, "That's not true," "You have plenty of friends," "Just play

with someone else," or "Don't worry about it."

Those responses come from love, but they can accidentally shut the conversation down. Sometimes the better first response is simply, "That sounds really hard," "Tell me what happened," "Who did you sit with today?" or "What part of the day felt the hardest?"

Children often need to feel heard before they are ready to problem-solve.

Look for patterns

Not every lonely lunch or playground disappointment means something serious is wrong. Friendships shift, especially at the start of a school year.

But parents should pay attention to patterns. Is your child regularly eating alone? Are they avoiding recess? Are they no longer interested in activities they used to enjoy? Are they coming home sad, angry, or withdrawn most days? Are they being excluded, teased, or bullied?

Your child may not always say, "I'm lonely." Sometimes it shows up as stomachaches, irritability, tears, refusal to go to school, or a sudden dislike of things they used to enjoy.

Help them practice

Some children need help learning what to say. That does not mean scripting every interaction, but a little practice at home can make school feel less intimidating.

You can help your child rehearse simple conversation starters, such as "Can I play?" "What are you building?" "Do you want to sit together?" "What did you do this weekend?" or "I like your backpack."

These may sound small, but for a child who feels unsure, having a few words ready can make a big difference.

It can also help to talk through common situations. What can your child do if someone says no? How can they join a game without taking over? What makes someone a good friend? What should they do if a friend is unkind?

These conversations help children build social confidence one step at a time.



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Create opportunities outside of school

Sometimes friendships grow more easily in smaller settings.

A child who feels overwhelmed on the playground may do better with one classmate invited over after school. A child who struggles in large groups may connect through a shared interest like art, music, sports, theater, Scouts, coding, dance, robotics, or volunteering.

The goal is not to fill every afternoon with activities. The goal is to create natural opportunities for your child to meet others who enjoy some of the same things they do.

Friendship often begins with proximity. Seeing the same child at soccer practice, art class, or youth group week after week gives a relationship time to grow.

Don't confuse popularity with friendship

Parents can unintentionally make friendship feel like a numbers game. But your child does not need to be invited to every party or surrounded by a large group to be socially healthy.

One good friend matters. A few kind classmates matter. A place where your child feels accepted matters.

Some children are happiest with one or two close friends. Others enjoy bigger groups. The goal is not popularity. The goal is connection.

Know when to step in

Parents should not try to manage

every playground disagreement. Children need chances to work through ordinary conflict.

But there are times when adults should get involved. If your child is being bullied, repeatedly excluded in a targeted way, threatened, humiliated, or emotionally distressed, contact the teacher or school. Share specific examples and ask what they are seeing.

Teachers and school counselors may notice classroom dynamics that parents cannot see from home. They can help monitor situations, encourage healthy groupings, and support children who are struggling socially.

Be the safe place

The social world of childhood can be tender. Your child may feel embarrassed to admit they are lonely. They may worry that telling you will make things worse. They may not even have the words to explain what is happening.

That is why parents matter so much.

A calm, listening parent can help a child feel less alone before anything is "fixed."

The beginning of a school year brings new faces, new routines, and new social challenges. Some friendships will form quickly. Others will take time.

Making friends may not be easy for every child. But with patience, practice, and support, your child deserves the chance to find a place where they feel seen, included, and known.

Homework Without the Battles

How to make after-school work less stressful for everyone

By Dan Miller, Today's Family

The backpack hits the floor. Shoes are kicked off somewhere near the door. Your child is hungry, tired, and ready to be done with anything involving pencils, worksheets, or reading logs.

Then you remember.
Homework.

For many families, homework is one of the most stressful parts of the school year. What should be a short review of classroom learning can quickly become a nightly battle filled with frustration, stalling, bargaining, tears, and the occasional dramatic collapse across the kitchen table.

Parents are left wondering how much to help, how much to push, and whether every evening really has to feel this hard.

The good news is that homework time does not have to be perfect to become more peaceful. Sometimes a few small changes can make the routine feel less like a fight and more like a manageable part of the day.

Start with a reset

Children spend much of the school day listening, sitting, thinking, following directions, and managing emotions. By the time they get home, they may need a little time to decompress before jumping into more work.

For some kids, homework goes better right away before they lose momentum. Others need a snack, movement, or quiet time first. The key is figuring out what works for your child.

A simple after-school rhythm might look like this:

Snack.
Short break.
Homework.
Free time.

The routine does not have to be complicated. It just needs to be predictable.

Choose the right place

Some children work best at a desk in a quiet room. Others do better at the kitchen table where a parent is nearby. The "right" homework spot is not necessarily the quietest or prettiest place in the house. It is the



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place where your child can focus, stay on task, and get help when needed.

Once you find a place that works, try to make it the regular homework spot. A predictable location helps signal that it is time to settle in and work.

If that place is the kitchen table, keep a small basket of supplies nearby with pencils, erasers, crayons, scissors, glue sticks, paper, and anything else your child regularly needs. That way, homework does not begin with a 15-minute search for a sharpened pencil.

A bed may seem comfortable, but it usually is not the best homework spot. It can make children sleepy, distracted, or too relaxed to focus. Homework tends to go better in a place that feels calm, but still feels like work.

Know your role

One of the hardest parts of homework is knowing when to step in and when to step back.

Parents should support homework, but they should not have to do it. If you find yourself giving every answer, rewriting every sentence, or sitting beside your child for the entire assignment every night, something may need to change.

A helpful approach is to ask guiding questions:

"What part do you understand?"
"Where did you get stuck?"
"What did your teacher say about this?"

"Can you try the first one, and then I'll check in?"

This keeps your child engaged in the work while letting them know they are not alone.

Watch the clock

Homework that drags on too long can stop being useful. A child who is exhausted, frustrated, or crying is probably not learning much at that point.

If an assignment regularly takes far longer than expected, let the teacher know. Teachers may not realize that a worksheet meant to take 20 minutes is turning into a two-hour ordeal at home.

A quick note can help:

"Just wanted you to know this assignment took about 90 minutes last night, and she became very frustrated. Is that what you expected, or should we approach it differently?"

That kind of communication gives the teacher important information without blaming anyone.

Remove obvious distractions

Homework is harder when a child is trying to compete with television, video games, phones, tablets, or siblings running through the room.

For many families, screens are best saved until after homework is done. When your child needs a computer or tablet for schoolwork, make the expectations clear before they begin. Homework time should not slowly turn into YouTube time with a math tab open in the background.

Praise effort, not perfection

Children need to know that effort matters.

Instead of focusing only on whether every answer is right, notice when your child sticks with something difficult, asks for help, or tries again after making a mistake.

Try saying:

"I like how you kept working even when that was hard."

"You figured out where you got stuck."

"You took a break and came back to it. That helped."

Those small comments build confidence over time.

Know when homework is telling you something

Every child has rough homework nights. But if homework is a battle almost every day, it may be worth looking closer.

A child who constantly avoids reading, melts down over writing, forgets assignments, or takes much longer than expected may not simply be lazy or stubborn. They may be tired, overwhelmed, anxious, distracted, or struggling with a learning difference.

Parents do not have to solve that alone. Teachers can share what they see in the classroom, while parents can explain what homework looks like at home. Together, those observations can help determine what kind of support may be needed.

Keep the bigger picture in mind

Homework is meant to reinforce learning, not damage the relationship between parent and child.

There will still be difficult nights. There will still be forgotten folders and last-minute projects. There will still be evenings when everyone is tired and nobody has much patience left.

But a calmer homework routine can help children feel more capable and parents feel less defeated.

Sometimes the goal is not a perfect worksheet.

Sometimes the goal is simply getting through it together without turning the kitchen table into a battlefield.

Fairs, Festivals & Events

AUGUST 2026

Twilight at the Zoo

Fri., August 7 • 7 pm–midnight
Cleveland Metroparks Zoo
www.ClevelandZooSociety.org
Spotlights local bands playing pop, rock, dance, swing, country and blues. Admission for all partygoers includes cover charge, small bites, complimentary beer, wine and soda. 21 & over.
Tickets start at \$95.

Concord Community Day

Sat., August 8 • 3:30–9:30 pm
Town Hall Campus
7229 Ravenna Road
440-354-7510
www.concordtwp.com/community
Food trucks, beer and wine, live music, basket raffle, craft vendors, fireworks at 9:30, and more. Kids World features bounce houses, DJ and karaoke, carnival games, face painter and animal show.

Last Stop Willoughby

Saturday, August 8 • 8 am–4 pm
Downtown Willoughby
www.heartofwilloughby.com
A community event designed to showcase the Historic Downtown District of Willoughby. The day starts at 8 am with the Willoughby Outdoor Market. There are activities throughout the day including: parade at 2 pm, KidZone, 10 am–2 pm, a chalk fest and continuous showing of Twilight Zone: A Stop in Willoughby 10 am–4 pm at Willoughby Library.

Super Star Party

Saturday, August 8 • 7–11 pm
Penitentiary Glen Reservation
8668 Kirtland Chardon Road
440-256-1404
www.lakemetroparks.com
Discover the many mysteries surrounding our universe. Featuring engaging activities for people of all ages and interest levels including:

- Cosmic craft, intergalactic games, spaced-out contests.
- Wild animal shows.
- Popcorn, soda, and snacks for purchase.
- Miniature train rides must be scheduled in advance.

Registration required. \$8 fee per person.

47th International Cleveland Kite Festival

Sunday, August 9 • 11 am–5 pm
Edgewater Park, Cleveland
6500 Memorial Shoreway (Rt. 2)
www.osekcleveland.org
Featuring a thrilling contest where participants try to keep their kites airborne while engaging in friendly battles. The Mystery Ballet, both in solo and pairs categories, showcases flyers performing intricate maneuvers with their kites, synchronized to music they hear for the first time. Activities and suitable for all ages. Free.

Little Italy

Feast of the Assumption

Thu., August 13 • 6–10 pm
Fri., August 14 • 6–10 pm
Sat., August 15 • 10 am–10 pm
Sun., August 16 • noon–10 pm
12021 Mayfield Road, Cleveland
216-421-2995
www.littleitalyfeast.com

Street festival featuring Italian foods, desserts, live music, shops, vendors, casino, raffle, childrens games and activities. Free admission.

Mentor CityFest

Friday, August 14 • 5–11 pm
Sat., August 15 • noon–11 pm
Civic Center Park
8600 Munson Road, Mentor
www.mentorcityfest.com
See page 5 for more info!

Willoughby Hills Music Fest

Saturday, August 15 • 1–9 PM
Willoughby Hills
Community Center
35400 Chardon Road
Featuring two stages of live music, a kids zone, food trucks, beer garden, dunk tank, Teentopia, local vendors. Bands include High Horse, The BeSides, Pieces Of Eight & Sumrada. Free admission.

Cleveland Garlic Festival

Sat., August 29 • noon–8 pm
Sun., August 30 • noon–6 pm
Historic Shaker Square, Cleveland
www.clevelandgarlicfestival.org
Featuring a garlic gourmet alley, live music, kids area with a clown, inflatable obstacle course, mobile farm, craft brew tent, artist gallery and more. Tickets: adults 13+ are \$9, ages 4–12/ seniors 65+ are \$5.

Old-Fashioned Picnic

Thursday, August 29 • 5–8 pm
Painesville Township Park
1025 Hardy Road
www.lakemetroparks.com
Enjoy the warm sunshine, cool lake breezes and a mesmerizing sunset at Painesville Township Park with a variety of fun “old-fashioned” family-friendly activities and more. Pack a picnic and spend the evening with family and friends celebrating the park’s history that has drawn visitors to the beauty of Lake Erie, both past and present. No registration required.

80th One World Day Festival

Sunday, August 30 • 11 am–6 pm
Cleveland Cultural Gardens
Martin Luther King Jr. Dr.
Parade of Flags, a naturalization ceremony, fun multicultural activities for children and adults and great ethnic food.



SEPTEMBER 2026

Geauga County Fair

September 3–7 • 9 am–midnight
Geauga County Fairgrounds
14373 N Cheshire St., Burton
geaugafair.com
General admission: \$12
Children 6 and under are free.
Special Ticket Pricing
Thursday
Fun Day, Fair Day – \$10
Friday
Seniors 65+ and veterans – Free
Monday
Family Day
All-day ride bracelets for \$15

Patterson's Family Fun Fest

September 16–November 1
8765 Mulberry Road, Chesterland
440-729-7144
www.pattersonfarm.com
Featuring a giant covered straw pile, tons of slides, pedal tractors, tire swings, push carts, corn maze, sand box, play buildings, wagon rides & more. Admission is \$8–\$12. Two and under are free.



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Call the Foster Care line:

(440) 350-4218

(440) 918-4218

lakecountyfostercare.com

**Lake County Department
of Job and Family Services**

