



## Home Stretch to Higher Grades

Four months down, five to go. Is your child on track for a successful school year? If not, don't panic – there's plenty of time to stage a New Year comeback. Your job is to provide coaching, encouragement, and some discipline. School work can turn into meaningless drudgery when it's not connected to real-world outcomes, so tune in to your child's emotional triggers and find areas of interest that you can use as leverage. Defeat discouragement by breaking up the remainder of the year into manageable, short-term goals that build to your year-end goal. Demonstrate the usefulness of schoolwork by showing how skills learned in school apply to your child's hobbies or career interests, and help your child to recognize opportunity within adversity. Build good work habits by carving out scheduled study time in 30-minute blocks with a 10-minute break between blocks. Staying on top of daily workloads will help your child avoid the stress of last-minute cramming. Make sure your child has a designated work area that's free of distractions such as television and cell phones. Use a planner to prioritize daily assignments. If materials have a way of getting lost, spend an evening developing a good

system for filing and organizing class work. Step in if your child is spending too much time on social Web sites such as Facebook.

## Is Seeking Happiness Preventive Health Care?

A recent study found that survey participants who reported being happy all or most of the time were 1.5 times more likely to report good health. Seeking happiness is a preventative healthcare strategy. Awareness of your mind-body link can help prevent issues such as depression, anger, and stress from compounding into greater problems. If you just haven't felt like yourself lately, don't hesitate to visit your employee assistance program for guidance and resources. There's no shame in feeling down. Happiness is a work in progress. Source: American Journal of Health Promotion, Sept/Oct 2008.

## Exercise Mind Over Matter

Don't let your New Year's fitness resolution succumb to waning enthusiasm. Staying power is mental, so get your game plan together with these five tips to maintain your drive: 1) View workouts as time for yourself, rather than as a chore. On days when you're unmotivated, promise to do just five minutes of exercise. After getting started, you'll probably do much more. 2) Whether it's pounds or performance, set yourself up for morale-building victories by establishing short-term goals and rewarding yourself after achieving each one. 3) Vary your workouts occasionally by trying different exercises. 4) Bring your ultimate goal to life through visualization. Imagine how you'll feel slipping into a new dress or walking confidently in a swimsuit along a beach. 5) Take pictures along the way to document your progress. This is a powerful strategy not to let go of your goal.

## Making "No" Mean "No"

Attempts to stop offensive behavior can be undermined if you are more concerned about hurt feelings or what others might think of your being firm. It's crucial to avoid sending double messages. Apologizing, smiling, or not clearly saying "no" can undermine your goal of having offensive behavior

stop. If something concerns or offends you enough to make an offending person stop (e.g., sexual harassment), try the head shake and both hands up to indicate “stop” and say, “Stop. Please.” Tell the person you do not feel comfortable with a specific behavior, certain words, or particular actions. Policies and rules that prohibit offensive or hostile behavior work, but they depend on clear and assertive communication, and employee willingness to act on them.

### Keeping Your Brain Fit as You Grow Older

Your brain, like your body, loses pliability, quickness, and stamina with age. Keeping mentally fit isn't much different from staying in shape – it's really just about lifestyle. If you already work out regularly, congratulations – 25 percent of the blood pumping through your body is delivering performance-enhancing oxygen to your brain as you exercise. Your diet is also important. Start by cutting the fat. Cholesterol buildup can reduce the oxygen supply to your brain by almost 20 percent over time. Load up on foods rich in antioxidants, such as strawberries or red beans, to nurture brain cell health. Add fish to reduce age-related brain inflammation, increase memory, and help your brain send and receive messages efficiently. Consume leafy green veggies rich in folate to enhance brain processing; leafy greens could also play a role in preventing Alzheimer's. Finally, shape up underused areas of your brain by “cross training” your mind with new and different mental challenges.

### Overcoming Alienation

Are you feeling detached, with fewer quality relationships, because of a fast-paced, overworked lifestyle that never seems to let you take a breath? Are the neighbors next door still strangers? This phenomenon is called “alienation.” The concept of alienation is not new, but it's getting more attention from sociologists because more people are complaining about it. Before the years slip by, take steps to intervene. First, rein in your media and Internet consumption. One presents a false reality and the other consumes time. Decrease isolating activities and increase face-to-face interactions. Once you “get out there” you'll want to stay there.

### First Responders: Say “Yes” to CISD

Are you an emergency first responder? If so, you know the risk for psychological trauma from exposure to intense life-and-death events. Don't pass up opportunities to participate in critical-incident stress debriefings (CISDs) when offered by your organization after such events. You may think “I don't need it,” but participate anyway. The beneficial effects of CISDs on mental health have been well documented. They can prevent lasting consequences on your health and even disturbances in relationships with family members and other loved ones. Thinking you don't need CISDs because you're “used to” trauma means you may be unaware of the damaging effects of “horrible knowledge” on your brain. Let the occurrence of the traumatic event itself be the criterion for saying, “Yes, I'll go.”

### Internal Customers Count

Think you don't interact with customers? Think again. Are there work units or departments in your organization that suffer if you do not provide correct information? What about missed deadlines? If you put a caller from another office on hold or if you don't complete or follow-through on a project, will the productivity of that person's department or work unit be affected? Others in your organization who depend on you for information or services to do their jobs are customers – internal customers.

**Remember: employees and eligible dependents can request CONCERN counseling and work/life services by phoning our 800 number, answered live 24/7. You can request CONCERN: EAP services on-line at: <https://www.concern-eap.com/Employees/bRequestforServicesb/tabid/87/language/en-US/Default.aspx>**

**Here are some recent quotes from employees who used CONCERN: EAP explaining what they liked best about the services:**

*“Both the ease of scheduling and the counselor were excellent.”*

*“Your service really helped me and my sister feels better about our parents' needs.”*