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EASING THE STRESS OF BACK TO SCHOOL

ATLANTA – Back to school is a great time to start new, healthy habits for the whole family. As some 50 million students head off to U.S. schools*, there are a simple exercises for the mind and body that will help families ace the happiness scale through living a “spa inspired life.”

As a mother of two young sons and founder of an international spa consulting company, lifestyle expert Mindy Terry knows a thing or two about tackling stress. She has spent 18+ years incorporating wellness into everyday life through her consulting work and also as a licensed cosmetologist, yoga instructor and certified infant massage instructor. “I believe in the lifestyle lessons taught in spas. Instilling this wellness culture in your home will reduce stress for the entire family. Kids, mom, dad, grandparents; everyone can incorporate simple techniques to help them achieve a greater sense of peace and well-being,” said Terry.

Terry pulled from her favorite books, training and personal experience to offer parents a blueprint for teaching kids spa inspired, well-being techniques. “You don’t need to rush out and spend a lot of money to create a spa inspired life in your home,” Terry explained. “Living spa is about knowing when to slow down (even if only for a few minutes), taking deep breaths and focusing on how to make every situation more positive and less stressful.”

Family Time – the statistics prove it, family time makes a difference. The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse reports that eating dinner as a family helps kids earn better grades, as well as stay away from cigarettes, alcohol and marijuana. While a sit-down dinner may not always be possible, try to take at least 30 minutes every night to sit as a family, without TVs or computers, and reflect about the day over a simple meal. Saturday or Sunday may give you more time to prepare a family meal together. Though, as Terry says, “It’s not the food that is important. What’s critical is the quality, uninterrupted time that your family spends together. Don’t stress and feel that you have to create a four-course meal. Crazy nights at our house end up with PB&J and some good laughs together.”

When you do have time to cook or on the night before a big test, pasta with fresh tomatoes and basil (recipe below) offers a treat for the taste buds and brain. Why pasta? It is carb-rich, which increases serotonin levels in the brain and helps one feel more calm and relaxed. Basil has also been used to treat anxiety. Additionally, the tomatoes and olive oil are rich in antioxidants, which help with memory. Garlic is rich in Vitamin B6, which is also good for the brain.

Tomato and Basil Pasta

5 c. coarsely chopped ripe tomatoes, juice reserved
1/3 c. extra virgin olive oil
2 tsp. Balsamic vinegar
1 tbsp. salt
1 tsp. ground black pepper
2 cloves of garlic, peeled
¼ lb. bow tie pasta
1 c. fresh basil, chopped
½ c. freshly grated parmesan cheese

Fill large pot with water and bring to boil. Add pasta and cook 7-10 minutes or until al dente. Blanch garlic in water while pasta is cooking. Mince garlic after cooking. In a serving bowl combine tomatoes and juice, oil, vinegar, salt, and pepper. Add cooked pasta to serving bowl and toss with fresh basil, tomato mixture and garlic. Top with parmesan cheese.

Sense of Touch – There is nothing better for a child than the loving, nurturing touch of a parent. Research shows that massage can help children’s growth, both physically and emotionally. Of course, massage

helps soothe nerves before a stressful event, can ease physical growing pains, and can enhance performance for student athletes. “My favorite benefit of touch is that it increases natural levels of oxytocin, a chemical in the body that lowers the level of stress hormones,” says Terry. “Less stress is good for everyone.”

When massaging your child, Mom and Dad should use a light, conscientious touch. Kids tend to enjoy massage most on the hands, feet, legs, back and abdomen. Movements should work in the direction the blood flows, ex. from ankles to leg; clockwise on abdomen, etc.

Belly Breaths – “The stress of an upcoming test or not-so-nice classmates are just as relevant in a child’s world as financial, relationship, or work-related issues are in the adult world,” said Terry. “Never diminish your child’s concerns. Instead, just as we practice in the spa, urge your child to breathe, focus and relax.”

To control test anxiety, teach your elementary-aged children how to take in long, deep, belly breaths while visualizing themselves doing well on the test. Have your child close his/her eyes and tell them to take a slow deep, breath (do this with them). While they inhale, tell them to visualize fresh air flowing through their nose and filling their lungs “like balloons filled with happy thoughts.” Using their tummy, they will push the air back out, and while doing so, imagine all fear and worries being pushed out and replaced with the happy thoughts.

Calming with the Sense of Smell – Essential oils can be very therapeutic and nurturing to both your child and you. Essential oils are used on the outside of the body in your child’s bath, in body lotions, oils, creams, etc., and can be sprayed on a pillow case or item of clothing. The effects of aromatherapy vary from assisting in healing from minor illnesses and accidents, supporting your child’s overall sense of well-being, to helping your child focus or get better quality rest.

A few suggested blends include:

- Restful Sleep - 4 drops lavender, 2 drops Roman Chamomile, 1 oz. Sweet Almond Oil
- Happy Child - 3 drops Rose, 1 drop Neroli, 1 oz. Sweet Almond Oil
- Emotional Nurturing - 1 drop Rose, 1 drop Vanilla, 2 drops Lavender, 1 oz. Sweet Almond Oil

More ideas may be found on www.aromaweb.com and www.healthandgoodness.com

Homework Haven – Instead of nagging your child to stay focused and do their homework; let them create a special haven for studying. They can decorate their space (such as a closet, small room, corner, etc.) with things that make him happy. Though, TVs and anything else that would be distracting should be kept out. It’s good for a parent to hang outside of the space in case they need help, turn on some classical music and spray essential oil of Geranium (or another clarifying blend) to help your child focus.

Ommm Together – Proving that it’s never too soon to begin yoga, Terry’s second child was just an infant when she introduced him to Yoga. Yoga offers a great bonding time for the whole family and can be done on a mat, the grass, or carpet. Two of Terry’s favorite resources for parents are Itsy Bitsy Yoga® created by Helen Garabedian for babies, tots and preschoolers (www.itsybitsyyoga.com) and “YogaKids” by Marsha Wenig for kindergartners through teens (www.yogakids.com).

About Mindy Terry

Mindy Terry is the President and Founder of Creative Spa Concepts. Pulling from her 18 years of experience in the spa and wellness industries, Terry is a respected presenter and educator for her diverse expertise in the spa industry. In addition to leading Creative Spa Concepts, Terry is also a licensed cosmetologist, aesthetician, yoga instructor and certified infant massage instructor. You are invited to read more about Mindy Terry at www.creativespaconcepts.com.

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* Source - National Center for Education Statistics