

TEAMWORK:

ISSUE 2 / SUMMER 2020

A QUARTERLY CHILDREN'S CLINIC AND FLEX NEWSLETTER
FROM OUR TEAM TO YOURS



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SUMMER'S NOT OVER YET

The second edition of our **Children's Clinic and Flex Team** newsletter is here just in time for the last precious weeks of summer. This issue is filled with summer fun activity ideas as well as helpful COVID-19 specific tips for facing back-to-school time.

We are proud to announce that this newsletter has been made possible through our agency partnership with the United Way of the Pioneer Valley.

 Cutchins Programs
for Children & Families



Hello Clinic and Flex Families,

This continues to be a unique time in history, a time when some are finding more time on their hands to learn new skills and take on new projects while others are wishing for more hours in the day, feeling overwhelmed with the task of working, educating and parenting from home. We see and feel how complex this time is, especially for families where things may have already felt a bit more complicated due to life stressors, attachment complexities and other emotional experiences. Wherever you find yourself on this spectrum, we are here to support you and your families, without judgement, as best we can. Here are some updates on our programs:

- **Flex Teams:** The Flex teams (DMH services for Youth and Transitional Aged Youth) have been busy filling up our programs and meeting with clients and parents via Zoom. We are fully staffed with Clinicians, Therapeutic Support Workers, Peer Mentors and Parent Partners and have been working on planning groups for the future!
- **Antiracism initiatives:** Our clinic staff pledge to become more effective allies in the movement toward social justice and against all forms of racism and oppression, within the field of mental health and beyond. To this end, we have committed to active self-education and self-examination, antiracism conversations, trainings and podcasts. We have begun a reading group to discuss the books “My Grandmothers Hands” by Resmaa Menakem and “How to be an Antiracist” by Ibram X. Kendi. We also commit to the difficult process of reflecting on our own unexamined biases and privileges and how they can impact the therapeutic relationship. We realize that given the larger context of the world these are small steps, but feel that we have a responsibility to our clients and families we serve to take action.
- **Summer shifts:** We understand the effects of the loss of typical summer activities for many families: annual camps children attended, family traditions including special vacations and reunions to name a few. We hope that your families are able to recreate some “staycation” fun with some of the ideas in this newsletter.
- **Back to school:** Many schools have not yet rolled out plans for the upcoming school year, and we know families are anxiously awaiting the decisions on In Person, Hybrid or Virtual schooling plans. Leslie Leff, a Children’s Clinic clinician and former teacher has summarized some of her recommendations for families navigating back to school in 2020 in this newsletter. We have also offered suggestions on mask-wearing, as we know this may be a difficult task for some of our clients.

(continued)

- **Telehealth:** We are continuing to meet with clients and families on Zoom and continue to refine our skills as Telehealth clinicians. At this point we do not have a plan to reopen the Clinic to in person sessions, as you can imagine this is a highly complex process and we want to ensure that when we do fully reopen, we have a plan that feels safest for all. We are beginning the process for a phased plan to see some clients outdoors in person on an as needed basis, again, making sure that we are thoughtful about all aspects of being in person for sessions during a pandemic.

I know there is much uncertainty in the world right now; what is safe/what is not, what will happen with schools reopening, and how we will adjust back to “normalcy” when this pandemic is a thing of the past.

Overall, even with uncertainty swirling around, I have been struck by the resiliency I have witnessed from humanity in this time. We use that word a lot in mental health, as a way of expressing someone’s ability to bounce back from a difficult situation. Students, teachers, children, clinicians, parents... I recognize your resiliency, and am so impressed by how everyone is pulling through this stressful time.

I hope you enjoy, find comfort and learn from this second edition of our newsletter.

My best to all your families. Be safe and be well.

With warmth,
~Amanda Harrison, LMHC
Children’s Clinic Director



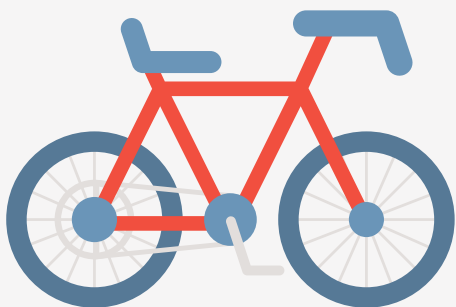


FAMILY TRIATHALON

A FUN WAY TO GET FAMILY MEMBERS OUTSIDE AND MOVING

Create your own triathlon!

- It starts with a swim if that's available to your family. If not, choose another activity such as a skateboard route, obstacle course, hoop shoot, etc. Bike comes next, followed by a run.



Take time to create the course, making maps and setting up water tables.

- Check out super sprint distances to find appropriate lengths for each segment.
- If socially distant neighbors are available, inform them of timing so they can cheer the kids on!

Celebrate at the end!

- Make it exciting by creating race t-shirts and awards for the end.
- Get creative with the awards such as 'Biggest Smile during the run' rather than the usual fastest wins.



THE GREAT FAMILY BAKE-OFF

1. Divide family members into teams. Grown-ups vs. kids? Chocolate lovers vs. Vanilla fans? Each team will work together on a baking project of their choosing.

- For the two-person families: instead of teams, you'll serve as Head Chef and Assistant Chef to one another, creating two different recipes



2. Spend time researching and choosing recipes, then make a list of your ingredients.

- Want an extra challenge? Add some specifications like the baking competition shows on TV. Examples: Ingredients must cost under \$20 total, recipe must use fruit, etc.

3. Let the baking begin!

- Safety first... always make sure that kids are appropriately supervised in the kitchen.



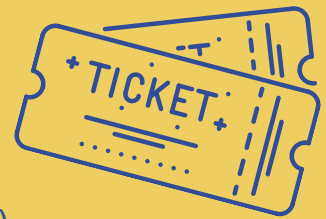
4. Taste time

- Use a fun score-sheet to rank the treats, or assign a judge to taste and choose a winner. Not into competition? Assign alternative awards like: "Best Looking" or "Most Chocolate-y" to ensure that everyone's efforts are acknowledged.

BACKYARD MOVIE NIGHT

Everything you need to host an outdoor movie screening at home:

- 1 White, wrinkle-free sheet
 - 4 Tacks to secure each corner of the sheet to a wall
 - 1 Comfortable place to sit for each person
 - Snacks of your choice
 - 1 great movie
 - & 1 projector
- ([click here to learn how to make one out of a shoe-box](#)).



Gather up the family, relax, and enjoy the show!



RETURNING TO SCHOOL (OR NOT)

HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD NAVIGATE ALL OF THEIR FEELINGS ABOUT THE UPCOMING SCHOOL YEAR

LESLIE S. LEFF, MED, MSS, LICSW

Uncertainty. Fear. Excitement. Confusion. Anxiety. Frustration. Disappointment.

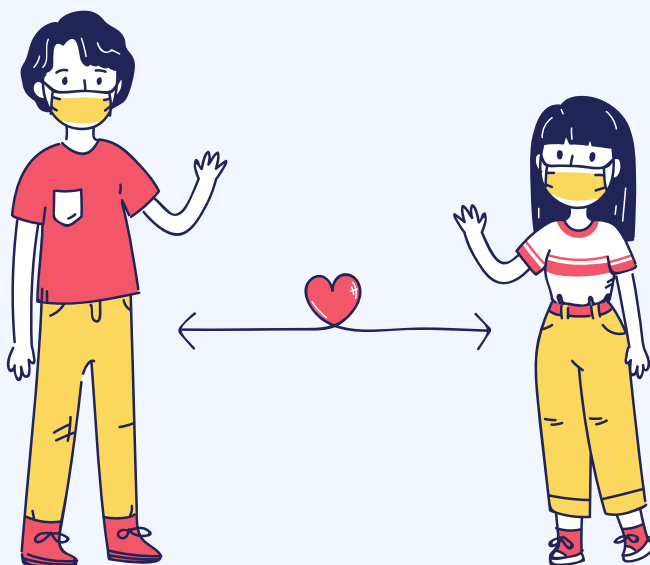
These are just some of the emotions that your child might experience in anticipating returning to school this year. You may be feeling many of them, too – especially with so many unknowns. Here are some tips for helping your child (and yourself) during this challenging time.

EIGHT "R'S" TO KEEP IN MIND

Regulate: Children often take their emotional cues from the adults in their lives. They are little sponges who absorb everything around them – spoken or not. Find ways to keep your own reactivity in check by caring for yourself and calming your own fears when you are around your children.

Receptive: Most children communicate their feelings through their behavior, so be observant about any changes in behavior or mood. It could be helpful to be curious by wondering with them what emotions they may be feeling.

Responsive: It is important to provide your child with outlets to express their emotions through play, art, movement, talking, etc. Then, validate your child's feelings and to express empathy.



Real: In an attempt to support your child, never deny the reality of their own experience. Be honest about what is actually going on by relaying facts.

However, make sure that what you share with your child is developmentally appropriate, so that they can take the information in without becoming overwhelmed.

RETURNING TO SCHOOL (OR NOT)

Reassure: Let your child know that the safe adults in their life are working hard to keep everyone safe and healthy and to help your child as they transition back to school.



Remind: Help your child remember some of the positive things about school – especially if they will be returning to an actual school – like seeing friends, excitement about learning new things, returning to fun activities.

Routine: Before school starts, you may want to get your child back into a bedtime routine. Set up a: weekday school routine and proactively share it with your child, so they can know what to expect. You can empower your child by letting them have some input into the schedule and/or creating a chart or calendar to remind them of what to expect. It would also be helpful to review the new school procedures to prepare them for changes. This could be done through talking, role-playing, other play, drawing, or creating a social story.

If you feel it is appropriate, it could be beneficial to also alert your child to the possibility that school might have to close again in order to keep everyone safe, and to discuss how the routine might change. In which case, you can brainstorm together ways they can be in touch with family, friends, and continue their learning if that happens.

Relationship: Reach out to the teacher, school principal, your child's therapist, and to other parents and caregivers to support you in this uncharted territory of helping your child return to school during a pandemic. Your relationship with your child can be a grounding force. You are their safe port in the storm. Keeping your connection respectful, reliable, and playful can make all the difference in the world to your kiddo.



CALLING ALL SUPERHEROS! A KID-FRIENDLY MASK WEARING GUIDE

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed so much about the ways we engage with the world around us in a short period of time.

The Children's Clinic and both Flex teams are holding that the necessity of wearing masks in public spaces can be tough for many of the people we work with.



Though mask wearing can help keep us all safe, it can be tricky to navigate for folks who struggle with sensory processing and trauma.

We have compiled some resources to help with the process of normalizing mask wearing and trouble-shooting common concerns.

Stay safe!



RESOURCE LIST

Ways to slowly introduce the idea of wearing a mask through play based mask wearing scenarios: [Helping your child wear a mask with play and sensory strategies](#)

Helpful tips for helping kids with sensory processing disorders adjust to masks: [Helping kids wear a mask if they have Autism or SPD](#)

This easily navigable resource guide is filled with great information about how families and caregivers can provide support with mask-wearing for loved ones with sensory difficulties, communication challenges, and/or those who are deaf or hard of hearing: [Wearing a Mask and Communication](#)
[Click here to download a social story about mask-wearing that's featured in the article.](#)

Here is an article about the impact of wearing PPE for those who have experienced trauma: [Face Masks, PPE, and Trauma-Informed Care: Cultivating Connection in the Era of Covid-19](#)

SENSORY FRIENDLY MASKS FOR PURCHASE:

<https://www.autism-products.com/product/sensory-friendly-protective-fabric-mask/>

<https://www.sensacalm.com/products/sensacalm-face-mask>

<https://www.etsy.com/listing/833128393/anti-fog-transparent-mask-for-teacher?gpla=1&gao=1&>



QUICK TIPS TO NORMALIZE MASK-WEARING

Talk about it: Knowledge is power. Providing kids with clear, specific, science-backed information about the reasons for wearing masks can help them see how they are playing an important role in limiting the spread of COVID-19.

Ask + Listen: Find out how kids feel about wearing masks by listening to their words, asking about their thoughts and feelings, and noticing the emotions and behaviors that arise when the topic of masks comes up.

Give choices: Masks come in many colors and prints, and you may even be able to find one featuring your child's favorite character or special interest. Try out a range of fabrics and styles if your child is sensitive to certain materials. Some kids may prefer the style that ties, while others may find elastic more comfortable. Consider using a face shield if a mask is too challenging.



Practice: Start using masks to familiarize your child with the process before the time comes to visit a space where they are required to wear it. Make sure to build in extra time before needing to leave the house with a mask on, as transitions can be hard. Have fun with this by acting out play scenarios (doctor's office, science lab) that feature masks!

Set-up expectations: Help prepare your child for what to expect by using language to help them organize around what is happening next.

For example, "Before we get out of the car, let's check and see if any other families are here at the playground. I don't see anyone else here, do you? Okay, that means for now we can keep our masks off. I have them in my pocket so we can both put them on if anyone else arrives."

Reinforce: Provide praise and positive reinforcement when your child is trying out wearing their mask at home, and/or when they've successfully worn it in public.

STAFF PICKS

A round-up of resources and links that we've found helpful lately



A Kids Book About - **Amanda's Pick**

"This is a wonderful series of books by different authors, that take complex ideas and break them down for kids and teens (and adults). Covering topics like anxiety, mindfulness, racism, empathy and death, the authors use approachable language and simple visuals to help the readers begin to deepen their understanding and open up avenues for rich conversation. Bonus, many of the books have author read videos on YouTube!"

GoNoodle® - **Laura's Pick**

Movement and Mindfulness Videos Created by Child Development Experts.

"I think kids will find these videos colorful, fun, and engaging. The hardest part is choosing from so many options!"

Videos and Recordings by Dr. Chaitra Wirta-Leiker - **Leslie's Pick**

"Wirta-Leiker is a psychologist, adoptee & adoptive parent and has a unique perspective and insight into raising an adopted child. I would strongly recommend any of her resources for any parent of an adopted child. The videos are very inexpensive to rent, but filled with priceless information."

Embrace Race - **Sam's Pick**

"A community of parents working together to share knowledge, ask questions, and learn together about what it means to raise children in a world where race matters. Check out this great list of [20 Picture Books for 2020: Readings to Embrace Race, Provide Solace, and Do Good.](#)"