

FDLRS Record

Newsletter for the University of Florida FDLRS-MDC program in Jacksonville

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Unwind to Get Ready for the Grind—Revisited

By Lotoya Odom, SSP, B.A.

Most students look forward to the end of the school year as they have often recently completed high-stakes testing which can be daunting and stressful. Luckily, most schools/school districts offer a break just before those testing periods begin—Spring Break! Individuals and families utilize Spring Break in a number of ways: to take family vacations, to begin spring cleaning, to regroup and reorganize schedules, etc.

Sometimes we forget to simply unwind and take the 'break'. For students, the timing of Spring Break allows for rest and relaxation before returning to school and gearing up for tests that measure what they've learned all year. Spring cleaning, vacations, and reorganizing all are certainly needed to serve their purpose. Afterward, however, breaks are usually welcomed by all. Decompress and rejuvenate the body by allowing it to relax so that it has the stamina to continue thriving.

One way to do this is to engage in mindfulness exercises. Simply put, that means to be in the moment and focus less on thinking—a cognitive task that takes mental effort and can make you tired. Mindfulness exercises can be structured or more free-flowing.

Use the QR code provided below to read an article to better understand mindfulness and to get ideas for exercises that may work for you and your family!

Here is a link to the mindfulness article:

Mindfulness Exercises – Mayo Clinic



Be safe, have fun, take a break.



**Florida Diagnostic & Learning
— RESOURCES SYSTEM —**

OUR SERVICES

Who we Serve:

- Individuals between the ages of 3 & 22 who have not graduated high school.
- Who are struggling in school and have complicated medical, behavioral, developmental, &/or social histories
- And who reside in Baker, Clay, Duval, Flagler, Nassau, & St. Johns counties

Services for Families:

- Comprehensive, multidisciplinary assessment, which may include psychoeducational, emotional-behavioral, &/or developmental pediatric evaluations
- Feedback sessions and a report detailing our findings
- Assistance in planning for your child's educational and psychological needs
- Trainings for parents covering a variety of topics

Services for the Community:

- Training/consultations for educators, students, & other professionals
- Educational consultation and support services: This can include collaboration with school personnel to facilitate school placement & provision of services



The Final Countdown: Helping Parents Thrive During the End-of-School-Year Hustle

By Gwenivere Mauro, M. Ed.

As the school year winds down, the days can feel like one long sprint toward summer—jam-packed with field trips, projects, testing, sports, and endless to-dos. If you're feeling stretched thin, you're not alone. The end-of-year hustle is real, but take heart: you're doing better than you think, and there are simple ways to bring more calm, connection, and even joy into this season.

Use these strategies and action steps to help your family not just survive these final weeks, but finish well—with less stress and more intention.

1. Acknowledge the Marathon! This is a hard season, and that's okay. You're carrying a lot, and showing up every day matters.

Action Steps:

- Say: "This is hard, but I'm doing my best."
- Write down 3 ways you've supported your child this year.
- Text a fellow parent—connection eases the weight.

2. Celebrate Effort Over Outcomes! Academic growth isn't just about grades. Praise progress and perseverance.

Action Steps:

- Ask your child at bedtime, "What did you try your best at today?"
- Make a "Growth Chart" on the fridge for non-academic wins—like remembering their lunch or showing kindness.

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-Affirm with words like, "I saw how hard you worked today. That matters."

3. Simplify the Routine! Focus might be fading, and that's normal. Keep it simple and doable.

Action Steps:

- Try 15-minute work sessions with breaks.
- Use a visual checklist (e.g., snack → homework → play).
- Set consistent start times. Start homework, dinner, and bedtime around the same time each day—even a general window helps regulate expectations.

4. Protect Your Calendar (and Your Peace)! It's okay to say no to extras. Guard your time and energy.

Action Steps:

- Review your week every Sunday and highlight only the non-negotiables.
- Color-code a family calendar so everyone sees what's happening and when.
- Practice saying: "We're already committed to rest that evening."

5. Rethink Homework Time! Homework can be calm, not chaotic. Choice and comfort are key.

Action Steps:

- Offer options: "Spelling or math first?"
- Create a cozy homework space—think soft lighting, a comfy seat, light instrumental music.
- Add a snack with protein to fuel focus.
- If stress builds, step away for 5 minutes and come back with fresh eyes.

6. Prioritize Connection Over Completion! Your relationship comes first. Let love lead the way.

Action Steps:

- Sit near them during homework just to be present.
- Give a hug or words of encouragement before transitions.
- End the day with a few minutes of one-on-one time—read, talk, or cuddle.

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UF-Jacksonville
FDLRS-MDC serves
Baker, Clay, Duval,
Flagler, Nassau, &
St. Johns County.

7. Make Space for Joy! Joy restores balance and keeps school in perspective.

Action Steps:

- Schedule one small fun thing each week—a walk, a treat run, or a spontaneous dance party.
- Let your child pick the activity to give them something to look forward to.
- Keep a “Joy Jar” with simple ideas to pull from when energy is low.

8. Let Go of Perfection! You don’t have to do it all—you just have to keep showing up with love.

Action Steps:

- Let go of one thing each day.
- Use this mantra: “Peace over perfection. Love over logistics.”
- Remember: they’ll remember how you made them feel, not how much you got done.

You've got this. The finish line is near and every little bit of grace you show (to your kids and yourself) is a victory. Keep showing up. That’s more than enough!



A voluntary identification program that aids in the safe return of individuals that may be endangered, vulnerable or missing with cognitive and memory impairment or sensory disabilities. The registry is free to those who apply.





Summer Smiles: Teaching Kids to Manage Big Emotions

By Brett Walden, MPH

Summer gives families a chance to slow down, relax, and enjoy more time together. It's also a great time to help children learn how to understand and manage their emotions. One of the best ways to teach this is by modeling it yourself. When you feel upset, try talking out loud about what you're feeling and what you're doing to calm down. For example, you might say, "I'm feeling a little stressed, so I'm going to take a few deep breaths." Children learn a lot just by watching how adults handle emotions. Sticking to simple routines—like regular meals, bedtimes, and quiet time—can also help kids feel safe and more in control of their day.

It's important to help children name their emotions and know that all feelings are okay. When your child is upset or excited, you can gently name what they might be feeling: "You seem really frustrated that your game isn't working," or "You're so excited about going to the park!" Naming emotions helps kids understand what's going on inside and gives them the words to express themselves. You can also help them learn calming strategies like deep breathing, counting to ten, or taking a break with a book or toy. Making a calm-down space or a kit with favorite calming items—like coloring pages, a stuffed animal, or fidget toys—can make this easier and even fun.

When problems come up, like disagreements with siblings or changes in plans, talk through the situation together. Ask simple questions like, "What happened?" and "What could we do differently next time?" This helps build problem-solving skills and emotional resilience. Most of all, make sure to spend quality time with your

child every day. Play a game, read a book, or just talk and listen. These moments of connection show your child they are loved and supported, which helps them feel more confident and better able to manage their emotions. A summer filled with teachable moments, family connection, and gentle guidance can help your child grow into a more emotionally strong and aware person.

Here's a list of engaging and age-appropriate books that help children understand and manage their emotions. These titles are great for starting conversations about feelings and emotional regulation at home:

For Ages 2–6 (Toddlers to Early Elementary):

- 1) *The Color Monster: A Story About Emotions* by Anna Llenas
- 2) *In My Heart: A Book of Feelings* by Jo Witek
- 3) *Grumpy Monkey* by Suzanne Lang
- 4) *When Sophie Gets Angry—Really, Really Angry* by Molly Bang
- 5) *A Little Spot of Emotion Box Set* by Diane Alber

For Ages 6–10 (Elementary Age):

- 1) *What Should Danny Do?* by Ganit & Adir Levy
- 2) *The Invisible String* by Patrice Karst
- 3) *The Way I Feel* by Janan Cain
- 4) *My Many Colored Days* by Dr. Seuss
- 5) *Breathe Like a Bear* by Kira Willey

Routines Matter for Kids During the Summer

By Elan Santiago, LMHC

Most kids dream about summer break - no alarms, no homework, and lots of play time. It's easy for days to start blurring together with all that freedom. Kids can fall into habits that leave them feeling tired, bored, or even unruly. Keeping a simple daily routine is more important than many people think.

1. It brings a sense of stability

Kids will benefit from knowing what their day will look like. Regular meal times, consistent bedtimes, and predictable rhythms help them feel secure, especially when summer plans include camps, vacations, or visits with relatives.

2. It encourages healthier habits

A routine helps kids eat regularly, get enough rest, stay active, and avoid spending too much time on screens.

3. It keeps minds engaged

Taking a lengthy break from learning might sound great, but it can lead to a dip in academic skills known as the "summer slide". Carving out 20-30 minutes a day for reading or learning activities can keep kids sharp and may make the return to school easier.

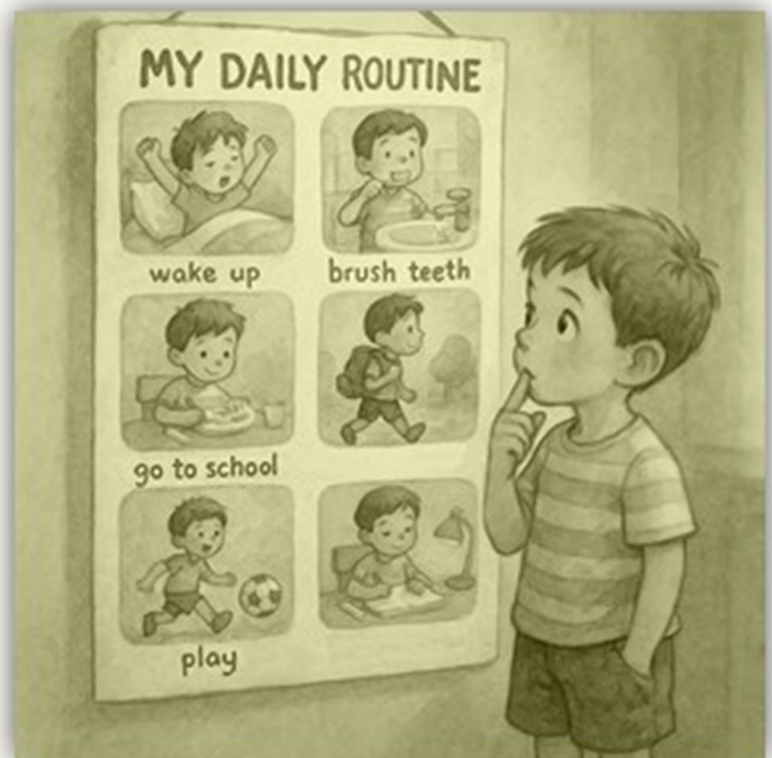
4. It fosters independence

When kids know the flow of their day, they can start to take more ownership over tasks like getting dressed or helping with lunch. Over time, this builds confidence and important life skills.

5. It helps with emotional regulation

Unstructured time can sometimes lead to irritability or behavior issues. A balanced day that includes play, quiet time, and rest gives kids the space they need to reset and recharge.

Summer is about having fun and making memories. But a bit of routine helps children stay grounded, healthy, and emotionally balanced. Routines can help kids make the most of their summer.



Moving with Confidence: Summer Relocation Tips for Families of Children with Unique Needs

by Maria J. Robles, Ed.S.

Summer is a popular time for families to move—whether it's across town or to an entirely new city. While moving can bring exciting opportunities, it can also be a stressful time, especially for children with disabilities like ADHD or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). These children often rely on routines and familiar environments, and the unpredictability of a move may increase anxiety or behavioral challenges.

With thoughtful preparation and the right support, your family can make the transition smoother and more positive. Here are some helpful strategies to consider as you plan your move:

1. Start Preparing Early

Children, especially those with ADHD or ASD, often benefit from having time to process changes.

- Talk about the move using age-appropriate and concrete language.
- Use visual supports such as social stories or picture schedules to explain what's happening and when.
- Visit the new home or neighborhood (if possible), or

explore it virtually using Google Maps or pictures from real estate listings.

2. Keep Routines Consistent

Maintaining daily routines provides a sense of security.

- Try to preserve mealtimes, bedtime routines, and screen time schedules, even during packing or travel.
- Pack your child's essential items last so they remain accessible.
- Bring comfort items, like a favorite toy, blanket, or noise-canceling headphones, during the move.

3. Organize Important Records

Having access to your child's educational and medical records is critical.

- Collect IEPs, evaluations, therapy notes, and medical documents in a folder or digital file.
- Notify your current school and service providers about your move, and ask for recommendations or referrals in the new location.
- Contact the new school district as

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early as possible to start the registration and special education transfer process.

4. Ease the School Transition

Starting at a new school can be overwhelming. A little planning can go a long way.

- Ask for a school tour, and try to schedule a meet-and-greet with teachers or support staff before the school year starts.
- Create a transition plan with input from your child's current and future IEP teams if possible.
- Share any helpful strategies or tools that work well for your child at their current school.

5. Connect and Communicate

Help your child build new relationships and feel connected in their new environment.

- Look into local support groups, parent networks, or community centers that offer inclusive programs.

- Encourage social opportunities like summer camps, library events, or local autism-friendly activities.
- Keep an open line of communication with your child. Let them express their feelings—even if they don't have the words, behaviors may show how they feel.

Final Thoughts

Moving is a big change, but it can also be a fresh start. With preparation, structure, and support, your family can help your child with unique needs adjust and thrive in their new home and community.

For more guidance or individualized support during transitions, don't hesitate to reach out to your local FDLRS center. We're here to help families navigate these important changes with confidence and care.

FDLRS-MDC/CARD Satisfaction Survey

Here at FDLRS-MDC we continue to look for creative ways to meet individual and family needs. Please consider taking a moment to complete a short survey. We hope to use the feedback to tailor our services, group offerings, and training opportunities to best meet our constituent's needs. We look forward to hearing from you.

[CLICK HERE TO TAKE THE SURVEY](#)

Use this QR Code to take our quick survey:



Working Together: Building Connections Between Families and Teachers

By Sarah Falls, M.S., CCC-SLP



Whether your child is just starting out in school or navigating the teenage years, having a strong, trusting relationship with their teacher can make a real difference, especially when your child has learning differences or receives special education support.

1. Start with a Hello

Reach out early in the school year, even if it is just a quick email or note. Let the teacher know a little about your child, like what lights them up, what they find challenging, and what helps them at home. That small gesture can go a long way in setting a positive tone and helping the teacher understand your child beyond the paperwork.

2. Keep the Connection

You don't need to wait for a formal meeting to check in. A short message here and there can help keep everyone in the loop. If something changes at home, like a new routine, a health issue, or a tough week, sharing that can help the teacher understand and support your child better.

3. Go into Meetings Ready

Before any school meeting, take a few minutes to think about what's working, what's not, and what you'd like to see happen next. Write down questions or concerns. If something doesn't sit right with you, speak up, but try to keep the conversation focused on finding solutions together. You are all there to help your child succeed!

4. Lean on the Whole Team

Your child's support system might include teachers, paraprofessionals, therapists, and counselors. Each person brings something valuable to the table. Share what you see at home and listen to their insights. When everyone works together, your child gets more consistent and individualized support.

5. Let Your Child Take the Lead (When They're Ready)

As children grow, it's important to help them speak up about their own learning. Encourage your child to share what is working and what is difficult. If they're comfortable, let them be part of meetings or conversations. Learning to advocate for themselves builds confidence and independence.

6. Celebrate the Little Things

Progress doesn't always come in big leaps. Sometimes it's a small win, like a good day, a new word, or a moment of calmness. Share those wins with your child and their teacher. It keeps everyone encouraged and reminds your child that their efforts matter.

At the end of the day, families and educators are on the same team. When we work together, we create a space where children feel supported, understood, and ready to grow.

FALL FESTIVAL

October 23

5:30 pm to 8:00 pm

**6271 St. Augustine Rd, Suite 1
Jacksonville FL, 32217**



**A fun event for families to
indulge in activities and games
in an accepting and inclusive
environment. Costumes are
welcome and encouraged.**

**Participate in a raffle for hotel
stays, dinners for 2, and more.**

**Multiple vendors & community
service providers will
be available.**



**Use this QR Code
to register early.**

For additional information contact Terry.Lee2@jax.ufl.edu or call 904.633.4332.