



# WINGS FOR LIFE

Emotional Wellness for Families

*This is an informational fact sheet. The purpose of the publication is to provide basic information. It is not intended to be used for assessment or treatment of mental health. If you suspect your child or teen needs help in the emotional wellness and mental health areas, please contact a mental health professional immediately.*

*An online directory of mental health services in South Dakota, searchable by town, is available at [www.sdkidsmentalhealth.org](http://www.sdkidsmentalhealth.org). Other mental health resources are at this site as well. Information can also be obtained by calling 211 in Rapid City or Sioux Falls or calling toll-free 1-877-377-0941 from other areas of South Dakota.*

*We would appreciate your feedback on this “Wing For Life” newsletter. Please take three minutes to complete the on-line survey: [www.seuw.org/wings.aspx](http://www.seuw.org/wings.aspx)*

away from home. Some camps are actually made specifically for first time campers. Consider an overnight camp for children who have had successful experiences of being away from home and who have good self-care skills. Children should be independent and have the ability to adapt to being away from home. The American Camping Association suggests that a child be at least six years old before considering an overnight camp.

As the camp date comes closer your child may start to feel uneasy about going away from home. Encourage your child to talk about these feelings. Tell your child that you are confident he will be able to handle being away from home. Discuss with your child the ups and downs that he/she may experience while at camp. Make sure your child knows that the main purposes of camp are to relax and have fun!

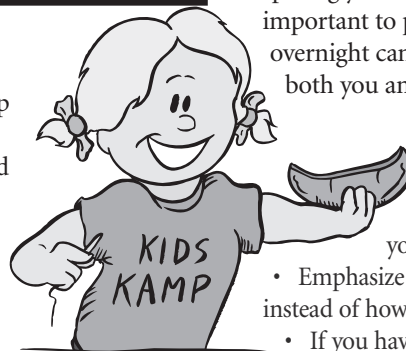
## IN THIS NEWSLETTER:

- Camp
- Building Character: Helpfulness
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- Talking to Your Child about Disasters and News

### Camp

Camp is both a vacation for your child and a great learning opportunity. Camp is a chance for you and your child to practice “letting go.” It allows your child to develop a sense of self, make new friends, develop new social skills, learn about teamwork, and be creative.

When deciding on a camp it is most important to consider what would fit your child’s personality and interests. Include your child in helping decide which camp to go to. Some camps have structured activity programs and others are more flexible. Some promote competition or rivalry with other camps while others promote cooperative learning. Consider one-day camps or mini camps if your child is not used to being



Most camps will provide a “bring list” to follow when packing for camp. These are well prepared; there is no need to send extra things. Do not send clothing or items that you cannot handle coming back in less than excellent condition.

Preparing your child for camp is important, but it is also important to prepare yourself, especially if it is an overnight camp. This will be a good experience for both you and your child.

- Think positively. Most children thrive on camp.
- Don’t communicate your worries to your child.
- Emphasize the new experience your child will have instead of how much you will miss him/her.
- If you have questions about the camp – ask the camp director. This will lessen your fears.
- Maintain realistic expectations.
- Understand and respect the lines of communication/visitation rules the camp has set up.
- Plan something special for yourself while your child is at camp.
- Plan a welcome home celebration for your child.

These parenting guides are a gift to you from the Sioux Empire United Way. They were adapted and written by the South Dakota Cooperative Extension Service. We hope the information is helpful and gives you additional resources to assist in your efforts to raise healthy and successful children.

For additional resources on children’s mental health, visit [www.sdkidsmentalhealth.org](http://www.sdkidsmentalhealth.org).

This is a United Way partner program that connects you to all available services for your family.



## Turn the Screen Off, Turn Life On!

Have you noticed how many special days are designated for a variety of things? There is “Sandwich Day,” “Eat More Vegetables Week,” and “Talk like a Pirate Day,” just to name a few. Some of those sound pretty silly, but one observance that deserves attention is “TV-Turnoff Week.” These statistics about children’s TV viewing habits may surprise you and remind all of us why we need to give special attention to the power of TV.

- Average time per week that the American child age 2–17 spends watching television: 19 hours, 40 minutes
- Time per week that parents spend in meaningful conversation with their children: 38.5 minutes

- Hours per year the average American youth spends in school: 900
- Hours per year the average American youth watches television: 1,023
- Children ages 2–7 watch alone and unsupervised 81% of their viewing time.
- Children older than 7 watch alone and unsupervised by their parents 95% of the time.
- Number of violent acts the average American child sees on TV by age 18: 200,000
- 91% of children polled said they felt “upset” or “scared” by violence on television

Some research links TV time to bullying behavior, obesity, and poor academic performance. Excessive screen time,

## BUILDING CHARACTER:

### Helpfulness

Many parents already know one of the secrets of making their child feel important — give him a meaningful task so that he can feel helpful and experience a sense of accomplishment. Children ages 6 to 10 often want to be helpful. If you encourage your child, even require him, to be helpful it will increase his feelings of self-worth and self-sufficiency.

Helpfulness has been identified as one trait of many resilient children, or children who are able to bounce back after a tough time. Young children who perform helpful acts build self-esteem, in fact, far more effectively than children who receive overused or false praise. It appears that children draw strength from being needed. At this age, children are becoming capable, independent, and helpful and they want to demonstrate those skills to others. By performing helpful acts, your child will feel he is part of the “team” and thus making a contribution.

Every member of a group has responsibilities. These responsibilities are different in every situation. No matter what group young children are in, it is important for every child to have something meaningful to contribute, at least from time to time, if not everyday. Below are some ideas for your child to be helpful.

- Read a story to a younger brother/sister.
- Pick up and put away things in one room.
- Learn to sew a button onto a shirt or pants (8–9 year olds should be able to do this).
- Play a board game or cards with someone who feels left out or lonely.
- Make a greeting card for someone who is lonely or sad.
- Make a thank you card or do something nice for the people who help us everyday.

For your child to feel genuinely helpful by the things he does, he needs to be successful at the tasks you give him to do. Be realistic about the chores that you give your child to do based on his age and developmental stage.

#### Chores for 6–7 year olds

- Pick up clothes off the floor, furniture, etc and put them away
- Help with setting the table
- Turn off TV, lights when they leave a room

#### Chores for 8–9 year olds

- Learn to take phone messages
- Take out the garbage
- Help take care of the garden

#### Chores for 10–11 year olds

- Read a story to a young child
- Help prepare meals, especially convenience foods
- Sweep the floor or vacuum the carpet

It is important to communicate to your child how important it is to the family to have him help with a chore. Avoid nagging; make chores fun when possible. Be sure to explain step-by-step how to accomplish a task so your child can experience success.

Be patient and tolerant. Your child may not accomplish a task to your standards at first. It is important to instill the habit of helping first, and then later you can help him improve his skills.

Always encourage your child when he is helpful by acknowledging how his efforts benefited you or someone else in the family. Be specific, for example, “because you picked up the art supplies, we now have a clean table for dinner.” Or, “I could tell that Jenny was in a better mood after you read a story to her.”

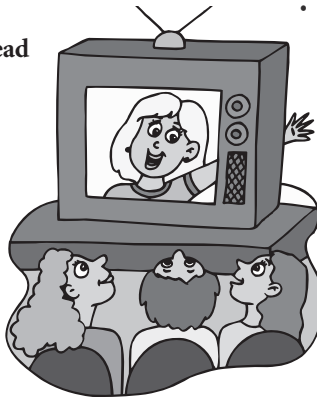
which also includes computers and video games, is simply unhealthy for growing minds, growing bodies, and for families.

Often a child learns best by modeling others' behaviors. TV, computer, and video games frequently provide models of violent, aggressive behavior. Excessive screen time also diminishes the time your child spends interacting with real people, such as caring adults and peers, hindering the development of important social skills.

Positive, age-appropriate programming is available, but the key is to allow your child to watch only quality programming and still limit the amount. Excessive screen time is not just a problem for some; it is more the norm of our society, especially in homes with multiple TVs and with TVs in the child's room. For those reasons, now is the time to lessen the screen time in your family and increase physical activity, interaction with real people, creativeness, and imagination!

### Consider these ideas and activities instead of watching TV

Go to the library  
Start a garden  
Write a letter  
Take a walk, a swim, or a bicycle ride  
Roller-skate or roller-blade  
Cook together  
Play hopscotch, hide & seek, or freeze-tag  
Watch the clouds or look at the stars  
Learn sign-language  
Climb a tree



### Try these suggestions to help your child curb his screen time:

- Chart your family's current screen time; list all shows, video/computer games, etc. watched or played in a week. Discuss which are worthwhile and which can be dropped in favor of other activities.
- Limit your child's TV viewing to one to two hours of quality programming a day. It is recommended that children under the age of two not view any television.
- Know what your child is watching and playing. Select TV programs and video games that spark interest in other activities, such as reading, hobbies, or the outdoors.
- Watch some shows together. By watching together, you're telling your child that you care. "Co-viewing" can lead to lasting educational benefits.
- Tape quality shows and view them at a later time.
- Talk with your child. Ask him, "What do you learn from that game?" or "Why do you like to watch that TV character?"
- When you see a portrayal that offends you, let your child know. Teach your child that programs that glorify violence or promiscuity and present gender, racial, or cultural stereotypes are against your values.
- The Ready to Learn Service on PBS offers more than 40 hours a week of quality educational children's programming without commercials, plus resources for parents and other caregivers on how to use television as a learning tool. Visit PBS online for more information at [www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org).

## TODAY'S ISSUE

### Talking to Your Child about Disasters and News

Children react to a disaster in different ways. Some may show reactions right away while others may seem fine for weeks or months. A child may be affected by the disaster even if the family was not directly impacted. Your child could be affected simply by hearing about the event and seeing the images on TV. It is important for parents to know how their child might respond to a disaster and how to talk to him/her about it.

Children in early elementary school may have a hard time adjusting to the changes that a disaster may cause. They may go back to an earlier behavior, such as thumb sucking or being afraid of strangers. They may cling to their parents or teachers and want to stay where they feel safe. It is normal to see changes in their sleeping and eating patterns, along with unexplainable aches and pains. They may withdraw from their play groups or friends, fear going to school, and find it hard to concentrate.

### When talking to your child after a disaster here are some tips to follow:

- Provide your child with the opportunity to talk about what she is seeing in the media, and to ask questions.
- Tell your child your feelings and fears about the situation.
- Tell your child the truth about what occurred but do not create a sense of panic.
- Don't be afraid to admit that you can't answer all questions.
- Answer the questions at a level your child can understand. Don't use big words that will confuse your child.
- Provide opportunities for your child to talk about the event more than once because she will probably have more questions as time goes on.
- Use this as an opportunity to create a family emergency plan. This may be very comforting to you and your child.
- Allow your child to discuss other fears and questions since the communication lines are open.
- If your child does not want to talk about what happened, suggest she express herself in other ways such as drawing pictures or playing with toys.

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- Monitor your child's exposure to the media. Some parents may wish to limit how many graphic and troubling scene their child views. If possible, watch the news reports with your child as this is when questions might develop.
- Talk with your child about the difference between the news and real life.
- In addition to the tragic views, help your child see the heroic actions and assistance offered by people to the disaster victims.
- You may want to help your child find a way to help others to make her feel like she is doing something to help those affected by the disaster. Younger children can send drawings and cards to the victims.

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For information on children's mental health services in South Dakota, [www.sdkidsmentalhealth.org](http://www.sdkidsmentalhealth.org).

*The term "parent" is used throughout this newsletter. It is intended to encompass guardians and primary caregivers as well.*