Tips and Tools for Helping Kids Thrive in the Upcoming School Year

Stephanie Malia Krauss
Tw: @stephanie_malia
Kids have spent their entire lives in a constant state of disruption.
Today’s Kids

DIGITAL + DISRUPTION NATIVES

Tech Dependent
Kids only know life with smart technologies, social media, and online gaming.

Digitally Divided
There are huge differences in connectivity and device access.

Hyperconnected
Kids seamlessly enter and exit virtual life. They are dual citizens.

Used to Extremes
Kids have only known a life of divides and disparities because of power, politics, pandemics, and more.

Survivors of Volatility & Violence
Kids are growing up in an age of mass shootings, racial violence, community violence, constant change, and other life-threatening problems.

Strong and Powerful
Kids are proximate to our most complex problems. They are poised to be our most powerful changemakers yet.
Differently Wired

**Kids’ wiring is shaped and reshaped by environment and experience.** The biggest periods of developmental growth and transformation happen in early childhood (0–5) and adolescence (~11–26).

**Overwhelmed**
Kids have access to information, 24/7. They are growing up in an “Open Source” society.

**Unsafe and Unsettled**
Kids have lived a lifetime of threats, stress, and volatility. They crave safety, security, and predictability.

**Distracted**
Distractions and notifications demand attention. Tech notifications trigger an addictive response stronger than a crack craving. Big tech is designed for repeat use, not health.

**Traumatized**
The past few years have been collectively traumatizing. Kids most harmed are mostly those who were already struggling before.

**Overloaded**
Kids face too many demands and challenges. It can inhibit and delay executive functioning.
Start With a Portrait of a Whole Child

Kids bring their whole selves into our classrooms and programs, onto teams, into offices, and across whatever spaces where they spend time.

- **Demographics + Determinants**: What levels of advantage do kids have? What resources and opportunities are available to them?
- **Age + Stage**: Where are kids developmentally – chronologically, socially, emotionally, and cognitively?
- **Brain + Body**: How are kids doing health-wise?
- **People + Places**: Where do kids spend time, and who do they spend time with?
- **Strengths + Struggles**: What gives kids their signature styles? What do you know about their strengths of character, their quirks, and where they have a tough time?
Institute a Well-Being Barometer

This year, prioritize kids’ readiness and wellness. Focus on what they need for long lives, and lives worth living.

Safe & Supported
Are kids free from unhealthy risks and anything that threatens their health and well-being?

Healthy & Healing
Are kids on a path to feeling good physically and mentally?

Rooted & Connected
Do kids know who they are and are they benefitting from strong community and relationships?

Learning & Growing
Are kids being curious and creative and taking on new risks and pursuits?

Living with Joy & Purpose
Do kids feel a sense of hope and meaning in life, and have I caught them experiencing awe and wonder?
Meet Basic Needs
(these must be met wherever kids spend time)

**Essentials**
Are kids getting the rest, nourishment, and health care they need?

**Safety**
Do kids feel physically and psychologically safe with wherever and with whomever they spend time?

**Belonging**
Do your kids feel like they can be their true selves? Do they feel welcome and comfortable?

**Purpose**
Do kids know and believe they matter and that what they are doing matters?

**Play**
Do kids have time and space for unstructured play? Do they have freedom in what they do for fun?

**Downtime**
Do kids have time to rest and relax? Are you giving them space to decompress?

**Exploration**
Do kids have opportunities for novelty and discovery? Do they get to explore their interests, identities, and the great outdoors?

**Community**
Do kids have people they can count on, where they feel at home?
Put Whole Life Practices in Place
These 10 practices optimize kids’ well-being and well-becoming.

- **Meet Basic Needs**: Flatten Maslow’s Hierarchy
- **Prioritize Mental Health**: Focus on Mind, Soul, and Body Care. Treat Mental Illness.
- **Invest in Personal Interests**: Let Kids Explore What Gives Them Energy & Purpose
- **Nurture Healthy Relationships**: Encourage Positive Connections With Others
- **Embrace Identities & Cultures**: Operate From a Place of Love, Openness, & Respect
Put Whole Life Practices in Place
These 10 practices optimize kids’ well-being and well-becoming.

1. Build Community & Belonging
   - Ensure Kids Are Safe & Free to be Themselves

2. Attend to the Present & Past
   - Make Life Livable and Worth Living Right Now.

3. Act With a 150-Year Mindset
   - Plan for What Will Be Needed For a Long Life Ahead.

4. Be a Force for Good
   - Encourage Good Changemaking and Tap Into Kids’ Moral Compass

5. Cultivate a Sense of Awe & Wonder
   - Encourage Kids to Find Beauty in Their Lives and the World

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These 10 practices optimize kids’ well-being and well-becoming.
Practices to Promote Well-Being
(My Priorities This School Year)

**Take a Whole Child, Whole Life Approach**
Keep the vertical and horizontal of kids’ lives in mind.

**Make Readiness & Wellness Key Priorities**
Prioritize readiness and wellness over participation, completion and achievement.

**Work With Other Adults**
My kids need more than me. Cultivate and connect relationships across the people and places in kids’ lives.

**Be Just, Inclusive & Caring**
Become a better listener and learn from kids’ unique lived experiences. Their childhoods are different from ours.

**Be an Advocate & Ally**
Know how to fight to remove or change barriers, policies and structures that cause harm to kids. Teach kids be their own best advocates.
“Beyond making it, young people need us to help them flourish in changing and challenging times. To take whatever life looks like, and make is something worthwhile, meaningful, and healthful—to not just prepare, but provide kids with the promise of well-being and well-becoming.”