

## BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



### Going Back-to-School Brain Healthy

*The Brain Health Initiative (BHI) is working to develop brain healthy communities, creating a culture that promotes brain health protective factors and decreases risk factors, thereby improving brain health, optimizing brain performance, and preventing and fighting brain illness across the lifespan for the Florida Suncoast region and beyond. **Today we talk about making sure our kids have a brain healthy return to school.***

Our kids are back to school, making this an exciting —and possibly also stressful — time for our families. In addition to new teachers, new classrooms, new classmates, and new routines, many students are actually attending school in person for the first time in more than a year. All of these factors combined have the potential to make the start of this school year even more stressful.

The BHI recommends creating a brain healthy environment to help provide our children with the right tools for learning and to ease the transition back into in-person learning. We can start by encouraging our kids to practice thoughts, behaviors, emotions, responses, and language that support the protective factors of brain health.

**Stress resilience.** Enhance your child’s brain health by building their resilience. As a supportive parent, your relationship provides the foundation that protects your child from developmental disruption and teaches the necessary skills for planning, monitoring, and regulating behavior that enable them to adapt to adversity and thrive.

**Nutrition.** Certain nutrients in foods have been shown to enhance brain health, optimize brain performance, and prevent brain illness so make sure to provide healthy meals and snacks for your child. The key is to find brain healthy choices your child likes and will eat.

**Physical activity.** Being physically active is critical for the development of your child’s bones, muscles, heart, and brain, as well as improving concentration and sleep. It is also an important part of playing, learning and academic achievement. Physical activity also helps to build relationships and learn about sharing.

**Sleep.** Getting your child on a good sleep schedule with good sleep habits is essential for concentration, learning, memory, and overall brain and physical development, performance, and health.

**Social connection.** Returning to the classroom provides a boost for social connections that may have suffered during virtual classrooms. Strong social skills are linked to enhancing brain health, decreasing risk to brain illness, greater educational success, and better success in life for the future.

**Emotional well-being.** Your child needs to feel safe, secure, and positive. As a parent you provide care, food, and shelter. School provides opportunities for growing, learning, and socializing. You can also promote a component of your child's brain health, emotional well-being, by making sure they feel loved, trusted, understood, and valued.

**Home, nature, and environment.** Where we live, work, and play influences our brain health and physical health. A child's surroundings can have a huge impact on their sense of well-being. Opportunities to get outside abound on Florida's Suncoast. Visit [MyLWR](#) for information about everything that is happening in Lakewood Ranch and [Visit Sarasota, Sarasota Parks, Recreation and Natural Resources](#), [Bradenton Gulf Islands](#), [My Manatee Things to Do](#), and [Sarasota Arts](#) include event listings and suggestions for ways to enjoy all our community has to offer.

**Meaning and purpose:** Most children begin to talk about what they "want to be when they grow up" at an early age. You can help connect the dots between your child's interests and how they can lead to future success.

**Cognitive stimulation:** School is designed to provide cognitive stimulation for your child. Cognitive stimulation builds the brain's physiological architecture and, therefore, impacts brain performance. As an active and engaged parent you can support that development by encouraging your child to communicate about and use the new skills that they are developing.

**Positive impacts:** Teaching your child to think positive can have a long-lasting impact on their life. Positive thoughts and emotions are linked with better brain and physical health, longer life, and greater well-being.

**General health:** Returning to school in the age of COVID presents many challenges for parents. You are committed to protecting the health of your child, but you also know the importance of in-person learning and the social connections being established at school. Following the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines](#) can help protect your child from being exposed to the coronavirus and optimizing overall health and well-being.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO PROTECT YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

Genetics and early childhood experiences shape the future brain and physical health of your child. Making sure your child has a safe environment, strong relationships, and positive experiences provides them with the building blocks for a long, happy, and brain healthy life.

With the recent surge in COVID-19 numbers in Florida, it is important to protect your kids from the coronavirus. Currently, none of the COVID-19 vaccines are authorized for use in children under the age of 12 and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration is not expected to decide when — or if — young children can be vaccinated until later this year. In early August, the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) updated its guidelines for students K-12. In summary, the revised guidelines recommend:

- Indoor masking is recommended for all students, staff, teachers, and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status.
- Fully vaccinated people who have a known exposure to someone with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 should be tested three to five days after exposure, regardless of whether they have symptoms.
- Vaccination is currently the leading public health prevention strategy to end the COVID-19 pandemic. Promoting vaccination can help schools safely return to in-person learning as well as extracurricular activities and sports.
- Schools should maintain at least three feet of physical distance between students within classrooms, combined with indoor mask wearing. When it is not possible to maintain a physical distance of at least three feet, such as when schools cannot fully reopen while maintaining these distances, it is especially important to layer multiple other prevention strategies, such as indoor masking.
- Screening testing, ventilation, handwashing, and respiratory etiquette, staying home when sick and getting tested, contact tracing in combination with quarantine and isolation, and cleaning and disinfection are important layers of prevention to keep schools safe.
- Students, teachers, and staff should stay home when they have signs of any infectious illness and be referred to their healthcare provider for testing and care.

### **About the Brain Health Initiative ([www.brainhealthinitiative.org](http://www.brainhealthinitiative.org))**

The Brain Health Initiative (BHI) is a cutting-edge, new approach to protecting brain health, optimizing brain performance, and fighting brain illness across the lifespan. The BHI is a collaborative effort with Massachusetts General Hospital, a Harvard Medical School Teaching Hospital, to build brain healthy communities through education, collaboration, research, innovation, and action, with a specific focus on *brain health promotion, prevention, early*

*detection, evidence-based intervention, and optimization of performance.* The BHI is creating a culture that promotes brain health protective factors and decreases risk factors, thereby improving brain health and optimizing brain performance outcomes for the Florida Suncoast region and beyond. Join the ***Be Brain Healthy*** movement, ***because brain health matters, and lifestyle makes a difference.*** To view all Brain Health Boosts [click here](#).