

BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



Brain Health Matters and Focusing on the Essentials for Back to School Makes a Difference

When it comes to enhancing brain health and optimizing brain performance during times of transition and increased stress, many of us turn to keeping things simple. Letting go of what is not essential is an effective brain healthy lifestyle intervention that helps keep us from feeling overwhelmed, and therefore protects our brain health and fights brain illness.

The Brain Health Initiative (BHI) studies and takes innovative action on the factors that protect brain health, as well as the factors that increase risk for brain illness. Building resilience to stress is a factor that may increase the brain and body's risk of future illness and will be investigated under the BHI's Brain Health Pillars of Stress Resilience, please see below.

This concept of letting go of the non-essentials helped make Marie Kondo a household name. A [recent article](#) in the *Harvard Gazette* discusses a report released by researchers from [Harvard's Graduate School of Education \(HGSE\)](#) and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, that suggests using that same concept to design creative lesson plans for students returning to schools.

"The pandemic brought that rule of thumb back to me," Shanna Peebles says in the article. She is the 2015 National Teacher of the Year and a recent graduate from of HGSE's Doctor of Education Leadership program, she continues: "As educators, it is so easy to put more into our already overfull proverbial closets — that's the nature of work that encourages us to see everything as a potential learning resource. This is even more true of our curricula, overstuffed as it is with all of its 'nice to haves.' Everything in our curriculum has a purpose but not everything in our curriculum needs to stay."

Elementary schools, high schools and universities are all juggling with online and in-person teaching and the challengers of keeping students engaged. The report suggests focusing on developing foundational skills and knowledge and letting go of the rest.

The report suggests schools focus on the essential knowledge and skills that kids need to learn. This gives teachers the opportunity to form essential relationships, build a classroom community, and support the social learning and extracurricular interests that are important to students' brain, physical, cognitive, and social-emotional development, as well as academic achievement. With many schools offering online-only classes, it is important to build relationships between teachers and students.

It is also important to remember that there is no "one-size-fits-all" plan for reopening. Some parents want their kids to stay home, other parents want their kids to go to school. Some teachers are ready to be back in the classroom, while others need to stay home. One thing that is universal is that as another school year begins, educators are thinking creatively about what school can and should look like in these challenging times. Further, letting go of what is non-essential will go a long way to enhancing the overall physical and brain health, performance, achievement, and well-being outcomes.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO *BOOST YOUR BRAIN HEALTH*

Developed with input from teachers, administrators, local officials, students, and parents from school districts across the country, "Imagining September" outlines a range of possible solutions to help schools focus on the essentials.

- Create a "call a teacher" button that allows students studying online to virtually raise their hands and ask for help from a teacher on call.
- Allow high school seniors in good academic standing to substitute regular coursework with volunteering.
- Encourage students doing well in virtual classroom settings to continue studying from home and give students who are more vulnerable, or who have limited internet access, additional time for in-school learning.
- Create "microschools" with three to five other families and take turns providing support and supervision for these small groups of online learners.
- Pair a teacher with a small group of students for weekly virtual check-ins.
- Adopt a brain healthier lifestyle, including thoughts, behaviors, emotions, and language that promote an increased brain health and enhanced brain performance:
 - o Stress resilience
 - o Nutrition
 - o Physical activity
 - o Sleep
 - o Social connection
 - o Emotional wellbeing
 - o Meaning and Purpose
 - o Cognitive stimulation and creativity
 - o Engaging with nature
 - o General health
 - o Positive impacts

About the Brain Health Initiative (www.brainhealthinitiative.org)

The Brain Health Initiative (BHI) is a cutting-edge, new approach to protecting brain health and fighting brain illness across the lifespan. The BHI works collaboratively with Massachusetts General Hospital, a Harvard Medical School Teaching Hospital, and the Academy for Brain Health and Performance to build brain healthy communities through education, research, innovation and action, with a specific focus on *brain health promotion, prevention, early detection, evidence-based intervention, and performance optimization*. 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 brain health movement, ***because brain health matters, and lifestyle makes a difference.***

To view all Brain Health Boosts [click here](#).