

BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



Brain Health Matters and Connecting with Our Kids Makes a Difference

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 fighting brain illness across the lifespan for the Florida Suncoast region and beyond. Today, we are looking at ways to connect or reconnect with our kids during the winter break.

Wouldn't it be nice if our kids could stay little forever? Remember, back when they wanted to be around us and told us about everything that was going on in their lives? Becoming independent is a part of growing up, but that doesn't mean we should give up on trying. After an especially trying year of remote learning/working from home, this winter break provides us with an opportunity to connect or reconnect with our kids.

Depending on their age, our relationship with them, and other circumstances, sometimes we feel like there are light-years between us and our kids. In a recent McLean Hospital [webinar](#), Dr. Lisa Coyne, Harvard Medical School assistant professor of psychology and senior clinical consultant at McLean's Child and Adolescent OCD Institute, pointed out that while we want to spend time together as a family, preteens and teenagers especially may feel like they are getting too much family time. As a result, they may resist our attempts to engage them in family activities.

During the pandemic, many of us have been together in the same space a lot of the time, and our teens may be craving their privacy, Dr. Coyne said. Her recommendation is to keep trying to talk to talk to them and keep trying to draw them out. She recommends checking in with your kids regularly, even if it's just sitting down for a few minutes and inviting them to join the family. It is important for them to know that we are there, she said. They may still choose not to connect, but we can't take that personally.

Recent research also shows that for some us, the pandemic has helped us feel more connected to our kids. An article in [The Harvard Gazette](#) reported this time together has helped fathers feel closer to their kids. A survey of more than 1,300 adults found that spending more time at home

was helping dads learn more about their kids, discovering more shared interests and strengthening their bond with their kids.

Based on these findings, learning more about your children and what interests them may be the key to helping you connect or reconnect while your family has some downtime on winter break.

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

The Brain Health Initiative recommends these tips for staying connected or trying to reconnect to your kids while they are home on winter break.

- **Schedule family meals.** Everybody eats, so make a ritual of planning a few meals for the week as a family and a rule that once a day everyone eats and prepares a meal together.
- **Take an interest in what they are doing.** Is your teen a gamer? Ask them about their favorite game. What do they like about it? Can they teach you how to play?
- **Schedule time to hang out.** Let your child know that you miss being with him or her and even if it's just five or 10 minutes, schedule time every day for the two of you to be together.
- **Exercise.** Combine bonding with brain health through physical activity. Let your child choose the activity and make time to value fitness and health together.
- **Be creative together.** Encourage your kids to express their creative side and experience the arts and culture as a family. There are many opportunities both online and in person to participate in the arts.
- **Go for a walk.** Our area has numerous parks, green, and beach spaces that give you and your child the opportunity to get out in nature together. Don't ask questions or try to solve their problems. Let your child be the guide and just spend time together.
- **Watch a movie of their choice.** Watching a movie with your kids is a great way to bond and a good way to learn about their interests. Teens are much more likely to join family movie night if they get to pick the film.
- **Listen to their music.** Remember how important music was to you growing up? Ask what your kids are listening to and then listen with them. Ask them what they like about the music and how it makes them feel. You may even like it!
- **Read a book *with* your child.** Consider reading a book your child is also reading. It can offer a shared experience you two can talk about. Experts, parents, and children offer some suggestions, published in the [Harvard Gazette](#).
- And as always, **adopt a Brain Healthy Lifestyle**, including thoughts, behaviors, emotions, responses, and language that promote:
 - Stress resilience
 - Nutrition
 - Physical activity
 - Sleep
 - Social connection
 - Emotional wellbeing
 - Meaning and Purpose
 - Cognitive stimulation and creativity
 - Engaging with nature
 - General health
 - 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, optimizing brain performance, 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, 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 brain health movement, ***because brain health matters, and lifestyle makes a difference***. To view all Brain Health Boosts [click here](#).