



## BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



### Using Social Emotional Learning Against Social Media

*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 are talking about using social emotional learning to help the schools in our community stop a dangerous social media trend.***

The latest TikTok challenge targeting students is called devious licks, and it encourages them to break or steal items from their school and post the photos or videos to their social media account.

According to a recent article in [USA Today](#), school restrooms are primary targets for the challenge with soap dispensers, mirrors, sinks, urinals, ceiling tiles, and even doors among the items being damaged or stolen and displayed in videos on the social video site. Schools right here on Florida’s Suncoast and from across the country are asking for help from parents and the community to stop the vandalism and theft that is occurring as part of this challenge.

At the BHI, we are concerned parents as well as community influencers. We have talked to our own teens about the serious consequences of these challenges — reminding them about a 15-year-old in nearby Pasco County who was recently arrested for vandalizing a bathroom. But we also see this as an **opportunity** to promote teaching brain healthy prosocial behaviors.

Educators around the country are focusing on social emotional learning (SEL). As defined by the [Collaborative for Social Emotional and Academic Learning](#), SEL is “the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.”

These behaviors are all developed and managed in the brain and through reinforcement (for better or worse) by the environment in which we are engaged. In other words, if our primary influencers — parents, caregivers, schools, coaches — consistently support prosocial behavior, then prosocial values, morals, and behaviors are developed as opposed to the alternative. It is

essential to teach our children right from wrong and reinforce their prosocial behavior.

SEL includes those core values often seen in a school's mission statement, addressing the behavioral expectations of its students. The neurodevelopmental skills acquired through SEL provide students with the ability to control their behavior, understand the impact their behavior has on those around them, and enable them to empathize and collaborate with others.

According to the [Ecological Approaches to Social Emotional Learning Laboratory](#) at Harvard, the framework for supporting brain development related to SEL is built on five core competencies developed by CASEL:

- **Self-awareness:** The ability to reflect on your feelings and thoughts and understand how they affect behavior.
- **Self-management:** Also referred to as self-control, the ability to control your emotions, actions, and thoughts.
- **Social awareness:** Your ability to empathize with others, understand and adhere to social cues, and adapt appropriate behaviors in a given social situation.
- **Relationship skills:** Communicating with your peers, making friends, managing disagreements, managing appropriate and inappropriate peer pressure, and cooperating with a diverse range of people.
- **Responsible decision making:** Making healthy choices about your behavior while weighing consequences, safety, ethics, and the well-being of the group.

SEL is being taught in many classrooms, and after a year of distance learning, the ongoing turmoil of masks versus no masks, and the need to relearn basic skills, social learning must take a front seat right now. We can help support our kids and our schools by promoting prosocial behaviors at school and at home.

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

The BHI recommends these activities for children of all ages, and you may even recognize many of them as things happening in your child's school, classroom, and youth development programming.

- **Read together.** While reading, talk about the characters and how they may think and feel to help your child understand the emotions and thoughts of others.
- **Hold family meetings.** This is an opportunity for your kids to be heard when there are problems to be solved and in planning family activities and events together.
- **Create and experience the arts.** The arts are a powerful way to develop self-awareness as well as positive coping strategies for managing stress.
- **Practice positive self-talk.** That little voice in their head should be reassuring and encouraging them. Many of the things on social media, including TikTok challenges, are negative. Encourage positive automatic thoughts (PATs) as the primary self-talk — I can do it! If I try hard, I will succeed! It's OK to make mistakes! — and make sure you practice it yourself.

- **Manage emotions.** Be open with kids about how to manage their emotions and offer strategies. If your child is nervous about a test, use PATS and remind them to tell themselves: “You’ve got this!”
- **Assign responsibilities.** Giving your kids jobs and responsibilities helps build their sense of self-worth and sends the message that they are important to the family’s success.
- **Become a Brain Health Scholar.** Students 16 and older are invited to apply for the BHI Brain Health Scholar program. [Scholars](#) work with the BHI in its effort to promote and protect brain health, prevent and fight brain illness, and improve performance for all ages. Specifically, Scholars will help carry out the BHI’s community engagement, research, and innovation agenda to better understand and take action on the brain health and well-being concerns, values, priorities, and attitudes of both youth and adults.
- View a [full list of activities](#).

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

The Brain Health Initiative (BHI) is a cutting-edge approach to protecting brain health, promoting brain performance, and preventing and fighting brain illness across the lifespan. The BHI is creating brain healthy communities, cultures that foster brain health protective factors and address 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](#).