

# BACK *to* SCHOOL

2020

**Happy,  
Healthy  
& Whole**

**Tia Mowry's  
parenting goals**

**30**  
*Essential*  
**SCHOOL  
SUPPLIES**



**TAKE LESSONS  
ON THE ROAD**

**COVID-19'S IMPACT  
ON EDUCATION**

**TIME-HONORED  
FIRST-DAY  
TRADITIONS**



## FEATURED CONTRIBUTORS



**Lisa Iannucci** has written and contributed to more than 20 books, including her latest, *Road Trip: A Sports Lover's Travel Guide*. The Hudson Valley, N.Y., resident has written for such publications as *USA Weekend*, *Syfy.com*, *Next Avenue* and *Glamour*. She remembers making the first day of school special for her three now-grown children (**page 30**). "I treasure all of the photos I took of them, the traditions we had and the memories I can look back on."



**Shameika Rhymes** is a former TV news producer turned entertainment, lifestyle and culture writer. She lives in Charlotte, N.C., and has written for digital outlets and publications including *Entertainment Tonight*, *Ebony*, *Insider* and *Vanity Fair*. In this issue, she speaks with actress Tia Mowry about her back-to-school preparations (**page 56**). "Hearing her tips for getting her kids ready inspired me to use some of her ideas in my own life, especially the snack options."



**Fiona Soltes'** freelance work across industries such as retail, health care and the arts has appeared in numerous books and publications. The Nashville, Tenn.-based writer's story about homework help tips for parents (**page 84**) hit home. "It reminded me not only of childhood days spent exploring the world through reading, but also the stress and frustration that came with geometry proofs and scientific theory."



**Adam Stone's** coverage of education, technology and government has appeared in a range of national publications including *EdTech*, *Government Technology* and *Teach Magazine*. While researching the rise of esports in high schools (**page 90**), the Annapolis, Md.-based writer says, "I was pleasantly surprised to find out that the video games my kid plays might earn him a college scholarship! Fingers crossed."



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# Mind Over Matter

How parents can help children focus for success

BY CARLI PIERSON



**T**he coronavirus pandemic forced most schools to abruptly close and turn to distance learning, leaving many families struggling to find fun ways to focus their children's attention. As the new school year nears, whether in a real or virtual classroom, students might be anxious about what to expect.

Before COVID-19 hit, getting some children to concentrate on school work could already be a challenge. Video games, smartphone apps, tablets and social media all competed for their attention. But there are simple techniques to help your kids improve their ability to focus by creating and strengthening neuropathways in the brain.

By developing certain aspects of attention, children's brains can grow,

but we have to watch "where the attention goes," says Daniel Siegel, founding co-director of UCLA's Mindful Awareness Research Center and executive director of the Mindsight Institute.

"Attention is a driver of memory, he adds. "Kids who are doing more than one thing at a time won't remember what they were doing before. So, one thing we've learned is that multitasking impairs memory."

That doesn't mean that your child can't have a favorite toy on their lap while they do their online learning, but it does mean they shouldn't be playing with it at the same time.

Siegel recommends letting kids take lots of breaks to get up and move their bodies. He also stresses the importance of children feeling seen and to "verbally

acknowledge that they're having trouble concentrating and that things are hard for them right now."

## PRACTICE MINDFULNESS AS A FAMILY

Mindfulness is the practice of making a conscious choice to focus our awareness on our thoughts, feelings and surroundings. Many experts assert that practicing mindfulness helps kids relax, concentrate for longer periods of time and refocus their attention and energy.

"A lot of people view mindfulness as sitting still, but when there's a lot of emotional activity, sitting still can be problematic," says Susan Kaiser Greenland, creator of Inner Kids, an online resource that offers family mindfulness and meditation activities.

Mindfulness, she says, “is also the skillful release of nervous energy.” So, if your child is upset or hyper, have them wiggle their body to get out that nervous energy and then go back to stillness a few times. It will help them become grounded, and once they’re grounded, they can concentrate better, she says.

Greenland suggests families try simple exercises together like “paying attention to the breath, or moving your attention to ... sounds in the room.” She explains that “focusing awareness doesn’t mean you block out the difficult things; it means you gather your attention on one thing and keep it there.”

#### **OTHER CONCENTRATION-BUILDING ACTIVITIES**

Activities such as learning to juggle or balancing a basketball on their foot or a peacock feather in the palm of their hand are other great ways to train your children’s brains to concentrate. As with the mindfulness

exercises, challenge them to see how long they can do the activity and record their times. Keeping track of their improvement will also keep kids motivated and boost their self-esteem.

Another simple exercise involves sound healing to increase focus and calm the mind. First, search for a three- to five-minute sound-only (no speaking) file on a smartphone app like Calm or Insight Timer, which has more than 45,000 guided meditations. Then, gather your family around a lit candle in a dark room. Make sure everyone is sitting comfortably and challenge your children to focus on the flame while being as quiet and still as possible until the timed meditation ends. Be prepared to try out different meditations and figure out what works best for your family.

Remember that things are not normal right now and kids know it. According to Siegel, parents should be compassionate and provide sincere, positive encouragement when kids approach an activity with a positive

attitude and successfully complete it. Keep your cool when your child gets frustrated with her work. By staying calm, you’re modeling the type of behavior you want to see in your child when they are upset. Finally, instead of stressing about the benefits of online learning, Siegel recommends focusing on being present and supportive.

