

# youth mind



the peace building issue

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# for the youth by the youth

*Youth Mind* is an online magazine made for the youth, by the youth. Our editors and contributors aim to cover content that we believe young people care about.

Whether it's school, the job market, the environment or social justice, we know that these areas affect—and will continue to affect—our demographic the most.

For this reason we wanted to cover such content with the utmost respect and attention that it deserves.

We hope that *Youth Mind* will inform, motivate and empower the young people of today.

**Sponsors**



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# Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

*The Peace Building Issue.*

Welcome to Volume 4 Issue 1 – Fall 2023.

My team and I specifically wanted to ensure that our readers were well equipped with the appropriate resources to overcome challenges in the education system such as bullying, social media dangers, school stress, and difficulties with forming professional and academic relationships with their teachers.

At the *Youth Mind* publication, our team believes that education is an important aspect of a youth's lifestyle, and confronting these very realistic situations can become difficult given a lack of awareness on the accessible support networks that are made available to the public.

My team and I have placed an emphasis on illustrating an array of meaningful stories that cover four important sections such as support, confidence, mind, and teamwork.

Our support section addresses ways to overcome bullying by seeking the appropriate help from professional counsellors, therapists, and support groups. There are tips that guide our readers on how to reach out to reputable anti-bullying hotlines and websites such as Kids Help Phone and Bullying Canada.

Our confidence section is intended to encourage our readers to design a healthy workout plan and disengage from the pressures surrounding an online social presence.

Our mind section focuses on ways to cultivate a healthy diet that is effective when alleviating stress. This section focuses on the benefits of guided meditation and further addresses the importance of eating a nutrient dense diet to improve mental cognition in the youth's earlier years.

Our teamwork section is geared towards those who want to strengthen their academic relationship with their teachers to excel in their studies. This section encourages students to visit office hours and ask questions that can benefit teachers to address areas of difficulties. This section also focuses on recognizing different learning styles to facilitate a productive class environment.

I hope our readers recognize that overcoming challenges in the education system does not have to be a lonely path. With the appropriate resources, there are many fantastic people who are willing to cultivate a support system that fosters a productive, healthy, and balanced lifestyle alongside you.

Please always remember to consult your healthcare provider and general practitioner before consulting healthcare tips, exercise routines, and when seeking professional help.

With utmost love and respect,

*Anjali Becharbhai*



## Land Acknowledgement

*Youth Mind Magazine* acknowledges the Indigenous land on which we work that has been inhabited by Indigenous peoples since the beginning.

As settlers, we're grateful for the opportunity to meet here and we thank all the generations of people who have taken care of this land — for thousands of years.

Long before today, there have been Indigenous peoples who have been the stewards of this place.

We wish to acknowledge the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. We also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit. We recognize and deeply appreciate their historic connection to this place.

We also recognize the contributions of Métis, Inuit, and other Indigenous peoples have made, both in shaping and strengthening this community in particular, and our province and country as a whole.

As settlers, this recognition of the contributions and historic importance of Indigenous peoples must also be clearly and overtly connected to our collective commitment to make the promise and the challenge of Truth and Reconciliation real in our communities, and in particular to bring justice for murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls across our country.



# The Peace Building Issue

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# The importance of taking a break from social media

Vincent Tran

Photo courtesy of [Helena Lopes](#)

The world of social media can be a great one to be a part of. Everyone is so interconnected on social media that you can easily contact your friends, family, and loved ones.

There are also a variety of resources on these platforms that serve many purposes. Many social media platforms offer a combination of entertainment, communication, and information to millions of people worldwide.

The things you can do on social media are endless. However, like anything, too much of one thing may not be the best for you. You can easily get lost and consumed by these platforms. That is why it is essential to maintain a balance between using social media and taking a break from it.

Keep reading to learn why taking breaks from social media is important and how you can establish boundaries with your social media use.

## The toxicity of social media

One reason you might want to take a break from social media is due to the negativity and toxicity present on these platforms. While social media can be a great place for many things, it is also essential to highlight some negatives of these various social platforms.

The free nature of social media allows for many opinions and voices to be heard on a wide range of topics. While this can be a good thing, this “free space” can also host many toxic and harmful opinions and movements.

For example, political posts or forums are usually places of heated debates and beliefs. Many users often get into arguments with one another over certain topics. These posts can stir up controversy, leading to users insulting one another over their differing beliefs.

While it is good to hear the opinions of others on a particular issue, these discussions sometimes devolve into pointless arguments, and nobody

gains anything from them. It also opens up the possibility for [cyberbullying](#) from people you are unfamiliar with, which can take a significant toll on your mental health.

The toxicity on social media can end up negatively affecting your mental state if you are constantly surrounded by it wherever you go on the internet.

An example of social media’s negative impact is the effects it can have on your mental health. [Many](#) young people and teens use social media regularly, and the toxicity of these platforms can negatively impact their growth and upbringing.

Issues among [young people](#), such as body image and depression, can be amplified on social media because of unfavourable comparisons present on these platforms. Applications such as Instagram often feature profiles where users portray a perfect lifestyle. Routinely engaging with this content could make you develop an unrealistic view of life and negatively impact how you view your own experiences.

While social media has many positives, it is essential to understand its negative side and impact on yourself and those you interact with.

## Knowing when to take a break

Understanding when to take a break from social media and recognizing the signs that you may need one is essential. Sometimes, you might need a break without even being aware of it.

There can be many [signs](#) that you need a social media break. Some examples include scrolling through social media whenever you can, continuously checking your phone, or getting upset at the lack of engagement on your posts. Be mindful of these signs and take action when you start to notice yourself doing these things.

The length of your social media breaks is totally up to you. Some people can take short breaks from social media and feel better afterwards. Others

might benefit from taking a prolonged period of time off of these platforms. Everyone is different, and it is up to you to [understand](#) what you need at the moment.

You can try deleting or offloading social media applications from your phone if you feel you are spending too much time on them. You can also employ this strategy if the toxicity of these platforms is impacting you negatively. Having these applications off your phone can help you not think about them and prevent you from frequently using them.

Try to get your mind off these applications and do something else you might enjoy. Some options include reading a book, going for a walk, exercising, or grabbing a meal with a friend. These will keep you entertained instead of mindlessly scrolling on your phone.

## The benefits of taking social media breaks

Once you understand and prioritize the importance of taking a break from social media, you will be able to see the benefits of taking breaks. Apart from helping you take your mind off of everything happening on social media, taking a break can benefit you in many ways.

Some of these [benefits](#) include things such as improved mental health, a better sleep, and reduced anxiety and depression. Staying off social media or not engaging with it as often can significantly benefit your well-being and dramatically improve your health.

Incorporating regular breaks from social media into your life or even taking a week-long break from social media can help you a lot. You will likely find that you feel much better after your break.

As social media can be a place where negativity can spread easily, it can be very overwhelming and tiring to see these things all the time. It is crucial to establish boundaries that allow you to use social media positively without affecting your well-being.

Try your best to put your phone down occasionally and enjoy your life [outside](#) of social media. Your mental health will appreciate it.



# Are video games addictive?

## How to stop video game addiction

Callum Denault

Photo courtesy of [JESHOTS.com](https://www.jeshoots.com)

Love or hate them; video games provide an array of fun ways to pass time and can encourage a dangerous addiction. While multiplayer gaming can be a fun way of socializing with others, it can become a distraction. It can become so distracting that it affects work, self-care, and personal relationships.

Keep reading to learn more about the addictive properties of video games and how you can achieve a healthy balance between playing and living your life.

### Video games are designed to be addictive

Video games, especially online games, are generally designed to be addictive. *Fortnite* is an excellent example, [making billions of dollars](#) despite being entirely free to play. This is mainly because of the [battle pass](#), which *Fortnite* helped popularize among other games.

Whenever games like *Fortnite* release an update, they have a limited-time battle pass. Battle passes gradually unlock tiers as gamers progress by playing the game and completing challenges. It only fully awards players with all of its content if they spend in-game currency to buy it. This creates [artificial scarcity](#) in these items that can no longer be obtained once the battle pass goes

away to make way for the next one. This drives gamers to spend their time and money unlocking tiers while they can.

Micro-transactions—in-game purchases using real-life money—are a significant cause of addiction, especially when combined with loot boxes that randomly give players rare loot. This often leads to gamers developing old-fashioned [gambling addictions](#) as they keep hitting the button to try and get that golden prize.

Finally, some games may rig the outcomes of matches to encourage longer play sessions. Many *Call of Duty* players—ranging from casuals, professionals, and streamers—are adamant that their matches are controlled by a [skill-based matchmaking system](#).

Players believe they are being unfairly matched based on their skill level and are given unfair games they are destined to lose. The idea is that this will drive players to play for longer until they are rewarded with a match against less-skilled players for an easy win.

While inconclusive, one study found that longer playing sessions in *Call of Duty: Warzone* correlated to a higher win ratio. However, the study also found that the number of games played did not impact the win rate at all.

Video games are classified as a [behavioural addiction](#), which is different from the chemical dependencies caused by substance abuse. Games can be just as addicting as drugs, even if the mechanisms behind what makes those things addictive are very different from each other.

### Impact of gaming on relationships

As far back as 2009, studies have found a negative correlation between playing video games and its impact on [relationships](#). Young adults who play a lot of video games [are more likely to abuse drugs](#), including alcohol and illegal substances. It has also been found that young women who play games often report feelings of low self-worth.

There are [several signs](#) to tell if gaming has become an unhealthy obsession. This includes when someone spends time away from their partner to play games or cancels real-life dates in anticipation of attending in-game events.

Another warning sign can be someone socially withdrawing to spend more time looking at a screen. Excessive gaming can even impact a person's ability to look after their self-care needs and save money as they spend it all on gaming. Video games have also been found to create tension between gamers and their [non-gaming spouse](#).

### How to enjoy video games without crossing over into addiction

Gaming can be a healthy, creative escape, but it can just as easily become a distraction from personal issues someone needs to focus on. It is essential to find a balance between gaming and

your personal life.

For example, try involving your friends, family, and significant others in your gaming. [Studies](#) have found that couples who game together are more likely to stay together than those who do not. One [study](#) found that 76 per cent of couples that play video games together report a positive impact on their marriage.

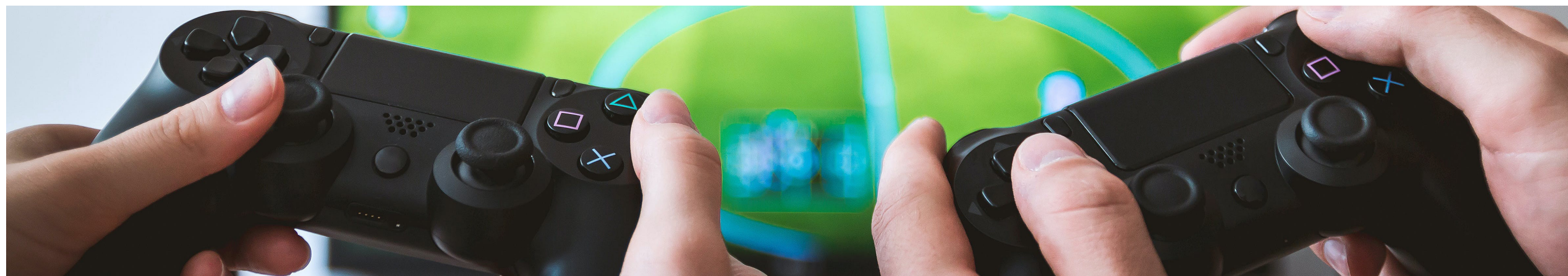
Video games can also be a [good social life line between friends](#), especially during periods of physical isolation caused by external factors like the COVID-19 pandemic. The long-distance convenience of video games cannot be understated, as it allows people to remotely join the same adventure together from across the world.

It is important to remember that it is not video games themselves that will negatively affect your relationships or self-care needs but rather devoting all your time to them.

Excessive gaming can be mitigated by prioritizing real-life hobbies, social commitments, volunteer work, and sports. Video games can often fit into a busy person's schedule as a weekend activity.

Someone suffering from gaming addiction may benefit from trying to pick up any new hobby outside of video games. They may also consider seeking professional help if their addiction is causing them to have [withdrawal symptoms](#).

Gaming can be a healthy addition to an individual's life when it is not at the expense of work or more physical hobbies. Remember to focus on cultivating a healthy balance and use video games to enhance your life, social interactions, and happiness rather than limit them.





# Pounding pavement: The benefits of walking

Kyle Quilatan

Photo courtesy of [Pexels](#)



Incorporating exercise into an everyday routine may be daunting at first. It can be hard to know where to start and what to do, especially without a personal trainer to look out for your individual needs and goals.

Walking, however, does not require any extra workout equipment and can be done at your own pace according to your personal schedule. Despite its simplicity, walking still brings about several health benefits. Keep reading to learn how daily walking can be a beneficial addition to any routine.

## Improved mood

Like other forms of physical activity, walking regularly helps to improve the release of [endorphins](#) in the brain. These hormones act as natural pain-relievers that are produced during pleasurable activities like exercise and can help improve mood. By extension, the release of endorphins through walking is also helpful for relieving stress.

These benefits can have an even more significant effect when [walking in nature](#), which is especially useful for helping to relieve stress. A 2019 [study](#) found that people who spent 120 minutes or more per week in nature had higher levels of health and well-being than those who had no exposure.

## Maintain bone health

Walking outdoors means more exposure to sunlight, which also means a higher production of [vitamin D](#) in the body. Vitamin D is essential for bone growth, helping to prevent bones from becoming brittle or thin.

One [study](#) found that regular brisk walking over a long period of time is an effective way to improve and maintain bone density, especially for those experiencing [osteoporosis](#).

## Reduce risk of diseases

Walking is helpful in preventing a number of diseases. Like all forms of physical activity, walking – brisk walking especially – can help reduce the risk of [chronic conditions](#). Some examples include obesity, type 2 diabetes, certain types of cancer, and dementia.

Walking is especially beneficial for preventing various heart diseases, such as [cardiovascular](#)

[disease](#), which largely stem from prolonged inactivity or limited movement.

As discussed earlier, outdoor walks also promote [vitamin D](#) production in the body. Aside from improving bone density, vitamin D also aids in reducing inflammation in the body, cell growth, and immune function.

## Improve brain functioning

Even short bursts of walking can help improve brain functions. A [study](#) found that at least 10 minutes of walking helped improve mathematical problem-solving abilities in high school students. Memory and feature detection were also found to be improved. Additionally, the study found that these brain-boosting effects were even more effective in students who were usually lower-performing.

Another [study](#) found that those who walked more than 4,000 steps daily had greater hippocampus volume than those who walked less. This area of the brain is responsible for memory, learning, and overall cognitive functioning.

## Walking tips

Walking itself is simple enough, but many factors can determine the actual quality of each walk. The [Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety](#) offers the following guidelines:

- Be aware of your posture. Keep the head and spine straight, and try not to lean forwards or backwards. Keep shoulders and arms relaxed. Let them swing naturally without forcing them.
- Keep breathing steady, not too shallow or too deep.
- Taking breaks of more than five days between walks makes cumulative effects unnoticeable. Try to walk as frequently as you can, every day if possible.
- Go at your own pace. Slow down if you have difficulty breathing.
- If you experience pain, check to ensure you have proper footwear, or consult a physician or fitness expert.

Walking is a simple form of physical activity that can be incorporated into almost any daily routine. Walking consistently is the key to prolonged positive effects, so stick to it to see the full extent of the benefits this form of exercise offers.





# Exploring the food pyramid

Kyle Quilatan

Photos courtesy of [Nadine Primeau](#), [Vicky Ng](#), and [NatureFriend](#)

The [food pyramid](#) is something that most people are familiar with. It was initially conceived to act as a guide for healthy eating. The idea was that translating nutrition advice into a colourful pyramid would be a great way to illustrate what foods make up a healthy diet. However, it has been heavily criticized over the past few decades.

Keep reading to learn about how the food pyramid was created, the different components, and the criticism it has faced recently.

## The origin of the food pyramid

Ironically, the origin of the food pyramid was not rooted in providing recommendations for a balanced diet but rather in combatting [food shortages](#).

In the 1940s, against the backdrop of [World War II](#), certain food regulations were created. These regulations were used in countries like Canada and the United States of America to account for food rationing and ongoing poverty.

It was not until 1974 that Anna-Britt Agnsäter created the first food pyramid for a Swedish grocery cooperative. It took almost another two decades for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to create [its own version](#) in 1992.

## Food pyramid components

The food pyramid consists of four levels of decreasing size to depict the proportions of each food group to be eaten. The bottom level comprised bread, cereal, rice, and pasta. The second level contained fruits and vegetables. The third level was split between milk, dairy products, meat, and other proteins. The top-level included fats, oils and candy, which were advised to be eaten sparingly.

## Criticism of the food pyramid

This pyramid structure has since been heavily criticized for its oversimplification of what should

be included in a healthy diet.

One of these criticisms is the inclusion of fats at the top of the pyramid. There is no differentiation between types of fats, leading to the assumption that all fats should be avoided. However, [research](#) shows that unsaturated fats are healthier than saturated fats and can even be used in diets to help prevent conditions such as coronary heart disease. This criticism also applies to nutrients like carbohydrates and proteins.

Another main criticism of the USDA food pyramid is the lack of clarity regarding portion sizes. The pyramid only includes the recommended portions for each level but does not directly state how much constitutes a portion.

The Canadian equivalent of the food guide was released the same year as the USDA food pyramid. The food guide, which took the shape of a rainbow instead of a pyramid, was called [Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating](#).

The concept was similar to the USDA's guide, with rainbow bands of varying sizes meant to indicate proportions of food. The first band is for grain products, the second is for vegetables and fruit, the third is for milk products, and the fourth is for meat and alternatives.

While this Canadian food guide does have some of

the same issues as the food pyramid, such as listing all fats as bad, it does show some improvements. It lists some examples of serving sizes for different foods and acknowledges that different people will require different amounts of each food group.

[Canada's food guide](#) has most recently been updated in 2019. The guide also shares other eating-related information, such as mindfulness around being [hungry and full](#) and [cooking](#) instead of eating out.

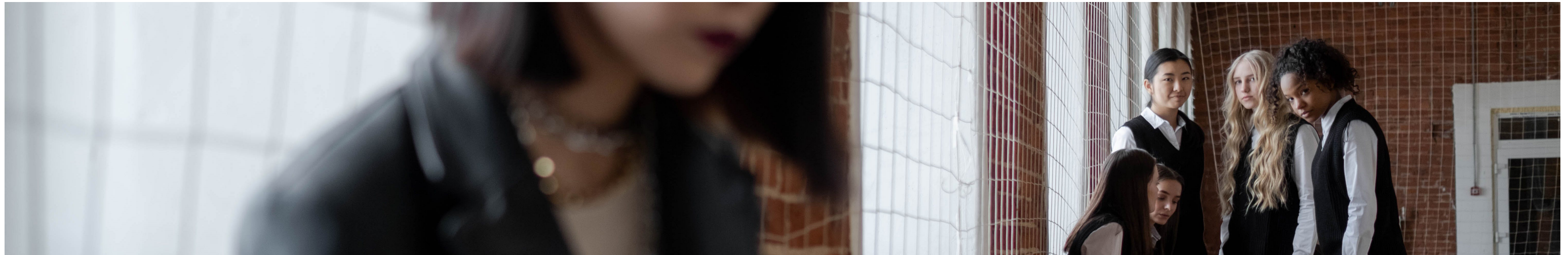
One of the guide's most significant improvements is the new acknowledgement of different people needing different diets. The guide now shows recommended portions of each food group as meal proportions instead of listing specific serving counts. This change allows for diets to be more flexible to suit individual needs.

Food guides have seen significant development since their first implementation. As research on food and health continues to progress, diet guidelines will inevitably change with them. It is important to always see such guides as just that: guides.

They are not strict requirements, and cannot make blanket recommendations for everyone. While they are helpful for overall information, always be sure to understand your individual needs or consult a doctor to keep yourself in good dietary health.







## Strategies and tools: Battling bullying in school

**Dru Gary**

Photos courtesy of [cottonbro studio](#)

Bullying remains a consistent and pervasive issue in schools all over the globe, and Canada is no exception. As youth navigate the complex landscape of adolescence, it is essential to know your resources, tools, and strategies to confront and overcome bullying.

### Build a support system

Establishing an expansive and compassionate support system is one of the most effective ways to combat bullying. For youth, confiding in friends, family members, or trusted adults about their experiences is extremely important. A [2022 study](#) found that social support enhances resilience in stressful situations. This network of people who care can provide emotional support and practical advice on handling bullying situations.

### Lean on trusted adults

Encourage open communication between students and teachers or school staff. Schools often have [anti-bullying policies](#) in place, and reporting incidents promptly can lead to effective intervention. Youth should feel comfortable discussing their concerns with adults who can take appropriate action to address the issue.

### Develop confidence and strength

Building [resilience and self-confidence](#) is a powerful tool against bullying. Youth should focus on their strengths and talents, recognizing that their unique qualities make them valuable individuals. Engaging in activities they are passionate about can foster self-esteem and resilience, making it easier to navigate challenging social situations.

### Online safety and awareness

In the digital age, bullying extends beyond the schoolyard into the online realm. Youth need to be aware of the potential dangers of [cyberbullying](#) and practice [responsible online behaviour](#). Encourage them to report any online harassment and, if necessary, seek guidance from parents, teachers, or school counsellors.

### Compassion, inclusivity, and empathy

Creating a culture of inclusivity and empathy within schools is essential for preventing bullying. Youth can actively contribute to this by being kind, respectful, and inclusive. Youth can stand up [against bullying](#) by supporting classmates and fostering a positive atmosphere that discourages negative behaviours.

### Conflict resolution

Teaching [conflict resolution](#) skills equips youth with tools to address issues peacefully. Schools can implement programs that educate students on effective communication, empathy, and problem-solving. These skills not only help in resolving conflicts but also contribute to a more harmonious school environment.

### Seek professional help

For those experiencing persistent and [severe bullying](#), seeking professional help is crucial. Counsellors, therapists, or support groups can provide guidance and a safe space for individuals to share their experiences. If the bullying has escalated to the point where you are receiving threats or being subjected to physical violence, you may need to contact the police. It is essential for youth to understand that asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness.

### Know your resources

These invaluable resources provide youth with a compassionate and professionally trained adult who can help support them and give them tools to navigate tricky and contentious situations.

Here are some of the resources available to youth experiencing bullying in Canada:

#### [Kids Help Phone](#)

- Phone Number: 1-800-668-6868
- Kids Help Phone offers confidential counselling, information, and resources for young people across Canada. They provide support via phone, text, and online chat.

#### [Bullying Canada](#)

- Bullying Canada is a national anti-bullying organization that provides support and assistance to individuals affected by bullying. Their website includes information on coping strategies and reporting procedures.

#### [PREVNet](#)

- PREVNet is a national network of researchers, organizations, and individuals dedicated to preventing bullying and promoting safe and healthy relationships for Canadian youth. Their website provides resources and information on bullying prevention.

By equipping young individuals with these tools, society can work towards cultivating a generation of individuals who are resilient in the face of adversity. Additionally, this generation will contribute to creating a safe, compassionate, and supportive environment for everyone.





# Pink shirt day: Empowering Canadian youth to battle bullying

Dru Gary

Photos courtesy of Yan Krukau and MART PRODUCTION



In the chaos of the modern world, small acts of kindness can create ripples of positive change. [Pink Shirt Day](#), celebrated annually in Canada, is a powerful symbol of unity and empowerment against bullying. It also serves as a reminder that kindness is an undeniable and transformative force.

As Canadian youth, understanding the significance of Pink Shirt Day is essential in fostering a culture of empathy, love, compassion, and community.

Pink Shirt Day, observed on the last Wednesday of February each year, originated in Nova Scotia in 2007. It was [started](#) by two high school students who took a stand against the bullying of a fellow student. In a simple yet profound gesture, they distributed pink shirts to fellow students, encouraging everyone to wear them in solidarity.

The movement gained quick momentum, spreading across the country and beyond. Pink Shirt Day became a day that represented solidarity and commitment to battling bullying and choosing love and kindness.

Wearing a pink shirt on this day is a symbol of a commitment to [promoting kindness, empathy, and respect](#). Pink serves as a visual representation of anti-bullying sentiments, sending a powerful message that unity and compassion can overpower negativity and cruelty.

Keep reading to learn more about the importance of Pink Shirt Day for Canadian youth.

## Awareness

Pink Shirt Day is a vital platform for raising awareness about the prevalence and impact of bullying. By participating in this initiative, Canadian youth contribute to the broader conversation on creating safer and more inclusive spaces for everyone.

## Fostering empathetic communities

[Empathy](#) lies at the heart of the Pink Shirt Day movement. It prompts individuals to consider the feelings and experiences of others, fostering a deeper understanding of the consequences of bullying. Through empathy, Canadian youth can build a supportive community that stands up against mistreatment.

## Promoting inclusivity

Pink Shirt Day emphasizes the importance of embracing diversity and creating an inclusive environment. It encourages Canadian youth to celebrate differences, recognize the value of every individual, and work towards building a society that accepts and supports everyone.

## Empowering bystanders

Bullying often thrives in silence, and [bystanders](#) play a crucial role in breaking this cycle. Pink Shirt Day empowers Canadian youth to speak up against bullying, whether it is happening to them or someone else. By fostering a culture where bystanders are encouraged to take action, we can collectively create a safer and more compassionate society.

## Inspiring positive change

Participating in Pink Shirt Day is a proactive way for Canadian youth to contribute to positive change. By choosing kindness over cruelty, individuals can create a ripple effect extending far beyond a single day's confines. Their kindness can make a lasting impact on their communities and beyond.

Beyond the symbolic act of wearing pink shirts on a designated day, the essence of Pink Shirt Day lies in its ability to inspire ongoing kindness. Canadian youth are not just participants in a yearly tradition but ambassadors for change. They are working hard to battle bullying and foster supportive and compassionate communities among youth.

Pink Shirt Day is a profound reminder that even the smallest acts of kindness can make a significant difference. As Canadian youth, embracing the values of empathy, inclusivity, and respect enriches lives and works to create a society where everyone can thrive. By donning pink shirts on this special day, we stand united against bullying, sending a clear message that kindness has the power to change the world.



# OLDF PROGRAMS

## Children

- Achievers Summer Learning Camp (Ages: 5-12)
- Home Alone Safety Course
- Homework Club

## Women

- Newcomer Settlement Program
- Preventing Violence Against Women
- Women Entrepreneurship Program

## Youth

- Canada Learning Bond
- Career Counselling
- Road Map
- Microsoft Office Certification
- Baby Sitting Course (Ages: 12+)

# confidence





# Maintaining a healthy balance between your schoolwork and personal life

Vincent Tran

Photo courtesy of [StockSnap](#)

It can be difficult to find time for yourself amidst the busyness of school and managing various tasks. Whether you are overwhelmed with projects, assignments, or upcoming due dates, finding a balance can be a challenge.

Learning to balance your academic responsibilities while focusing on your personal needs is important. Not only will a lack of balance affect your performance in school, but it could also affect your physical and mental well-being.

When you are caught up with planning your academic goals and future, it is easy to lose yourself in the process. That is why balancing your schoolwork and personal life is essential so that you do not lose track of what hobbies are important to you.

## The importance of balancing your schoolwork and personal life

It is crucial to understand why achieving a balance between your schoolwork and personal life is important and a crucial aspect of being a student. This will help you brainstorm a healthy balance between the two that works for you.

In school, you may feel obligated to focus only on your schoolwork and try your hardest to perform well on every assignment and exam. However, by working too hard all the time, you may lose track of your interests and end up **burning** yourself out very quickly.

School can be very demanding. Additionally, you may have to live up to high expectations from your family, teachers, or even yourself, so it is easy to see how draining it can be.

This is why it is important to also prioritize your personal life and interests. Having **hobbies** and interests unrelated to your studies can help you relax. You also have the chance to explore your interests to learn more about yourself and your capabilities.

Finding a healthy balance between your schoolwork

and personal life will also greatly **help** your mental health. Finding the right balance between school and your personal life has many benefits, including reducing stress and increasing productivity.

Regularly participating in hobbies and interests outside of school will help you regain your academic focus. This will encourage you to focus on schoolwork and finish tasks more efficiently after taking a well deserved break.

## Steps you can take to find a balance

To establish a productive balance between your schoolwork and personal life, you can plan your day out and schedule breaks between your study periods. Dedicating specific timeframes within your day can help you enjoy your hobbies or interests and other aspects of your life.

You can start slow and set aside 10 to 15 minutes to spend doing something you enjoy that is not related to school. You can read a book, go for a quick walk, or practice yoga. The important thing is to do something you are interested in and take a break from your schoolwork for a bit.

Another step you can incorporate into your daily life is whenever you finish a task or assignment, take an extended break to relax before taking on another project.

Sometimes, in school, all your projects might end up being due around the same time as each other, which can be very challenging. However, taking them on one at a time instead of trying to do them all at once could help you manage your projects and reduce stress.

Taking on too many tasks at once can be overwhelming and lead to burnout quickly. That is why taking a **break** once you have finished an assignment is important because it can help you shift your focus to a new task.

If your due dates are close together and you do not have time for your hobbies, you can still try to

incorporate small breaks. Taking short breaks can be very helpful, especially when you have exams to study for. Incorporating small breaks during these rigorous academic periods can help you be more productive and less overwhelmed.

## Figuring it out

When balancing your schoolwork and personal life, finding out what works well for you and what makes you feel best is crucial. For some, they may feel as though they can function with more time dedicated to school. For others, they may need an even split between the two. It is entirely up to you to figure out what works best for you.

If you like to be on top of all your assignments and due dates, you would probably prefer to spend more time on schoolwork. However, it is also important not to neglect your personal life, as that is what makes you unique as a person.

Always try to find time within your daily schedule to focus on yourself and your interests. Try not to get too deeply involved in schoolwork as it could be all you think about, and that could lead to stress.

Take a break from time to time to relax. Maintaining a healthy balance between schoolwork and your personal life is a delicate process. However, figuring out what is right for you will significantly help you as a student and make things simpler.





# Using social media in a more positive way

Vincent Tran

Photos courtesy of [Julia M. Cameron](#) and [Vedant Sharma](#)



Social media plays a significant role in our society. Many of us are on social media, which takes up a majority of our daily lives. This is because it has been incorporated into almost everything we engage with.

With how prevalent social media is, it is easy to get caught up in the loop of it all and be immersed in online environments. Social media offers an escape, and it is easy to lose yourself in all of it.

While social media allows you to engage with others without being physically present, you are still interacting with other humans. This makes it important to conduct yourself online as you would in person.

That is why it is also essential to understand how to conduct yourself appropriately on these social platforms, as it could go a long way in improving your and other's online experiences.

## Improving and educating yourself

One way that you could use social media more positively is to use it as a way for you to improve and educate yourself.

You can use social media to do things such as learn

new topics, acquire a new skill or better yourself both mentally and physically. You can use social media to search for a workout routine or as a way to [improve](#) your career opportunities.

The possibilities for how you can improve yourself through social media are endless. Many content creators base their content around things that could help their viewers, such as fitness influencers on Instagram or educational YouTubers.

You could also use social media to keep yourself informed on everything happening around the world. Instead of mindlessly scrolling through TikTok or X (formerly Twitter), you could follow news channels. This will help keep you updated on news or developments in your city or worldwide.

For example, if there is an upcoming election, you could use social media platforms to learn more about the different political parties to inform your vote. If you cannot vote, you can still use social media to learn more about the candidates. This can help you share your insights about candidates' political campaigns with others who can vote, such as your parents or extended family.

Social media is more than just funny videos or memes; it could be a way for you to understand the world around you.

## Promoting positivity

Another way you could use social media more positively is by being more friendly and kind on these platforms.

The openness of social media is an excellent way to spread positivity among people you know and other users. Spreading positivity can be as simple as liking your friends' posts or posting a nice comment. These small actions can go a long way and improve someone's mood or [self-esteem](#).

By posting a kind comment or frequently liking your friends' posts, you can make them feel better about themselves and make them feel accomplished. Spreading positivity could motivate your friends to do the same and encourage them to incorporate kindness in their online interactions.

Being kind on social media not only benefits the people you are interacting with, but it can also benefit you personally. Being positive and friendly on social media could [help](#) you in your career, especially if your work requires an online presence. If you run your own website or social media page, positively engaging with users can create an appealing brand image and drive more users towards your pages.

In our modern day and age, with all the negativity in the news, it is good to spread positivity. Being kind on social media is a great place to start promoting positivity.

## Setting limits

As mentioned earlier, social media can offer you an escape. It is really easy to lose yourself on the various sites and applications with all the content available to you.

Social media can be a great way to take your mind off something you are working on or the stresses in your life. However, it is important to take breaks from social media.

Setting limits for your social media usage can help you better engage with the platforms. This allows you to use social media in a way that does not take over or hinder significant aspects of your life.

Limiting yourself to one to two hours of social media a day can help you keep a good balance between entertainment and productivity. It could also stop you from developing an addiction to

social media and keep you from being affected by all the [negativity](#) on these platforms.

## Building better habits on social media

There are many ways in which you can improve your usage of social media. There is no one-size-fits-all approach, and finding whatever solution works for you is essential. Some may benefit from breaks on social media while others might find that engaging with positive and educational content helps them. Try out a few strategies and see what works best for you.

The important thing is to always strive toward curating a better social media experience for yourself and others.





# The importance of setting goals for yourself

Vincent Tran

Photos courtesy of [WOKANDAPIX](#) and [Gabrielle CC](#)

It is natural to have big aspirations for your future and what you want to do with your life. However, achieving these dreams requires action from yourself.

One way you can work towards your dreams and aspirations is to practice setting goals for yourself and to make it a consistent routine in your life.

It is essential to stay motivated and to complete tasks on time. That is why it is critical to understand the importance of establishing goals and develop a consistent plan to achieve them. Keep reading to learn how to set goals and how these two elements can help you in the present and future.



## How you can start

You can start to set goals for yourself by envisioning the ambitions you want to achieve. Try taking a look at the big picture you see for yourself and [break](#) it down into smaller, more attainable steps. Breaking a large dream down into smaller goals makes it [easier](#) for you to achieve your objectives. It will also help you to see the progress you are making towards your dream.

Frequently accomplishing smaller tasks and goals will make you feel much better than working on a significant goal that takes a lot of time. If you stick with a large goal for a long time, you may feel like you are not making much progress on a daily basis. However, breaking it down into smaller components will allow you to see your progress and encourage you to keep going.

You can also try setting a specific time period in which you want to achieve your goals. The time limit can be in a few weeks, months or even years. It is completely up to you to determine when you anticipate being able to complete your goal.

Another thing you can do is to [write](#) down your goals somewhere you are likely to see it the most. You can write them down in your notebook or on a piece of paper you pin up in your room. You could also take a picture of your goals and make that image your phone's lock screen.

It is one thing to state your goals, but writing them down will help you [commit](#) to them and put action to your words. Frequently seeing your goals and being exposed to them can help you manifest your dreams and always have them at the front of your mind. If you are constantly thinking about your goals, it will help you work towards them and strive to accomplish your dreams.

## Sticking through the process

The most significant aspect of setting goals and maintaining this practice is perseverance. It is essential to try and stick through it until the end, no matter how challenging things get.

[Determination](#) is one of the most important traits to have in goal setting and life in general. Being determined to accomplish your goals will take you a long way and help you when times get tough. It will encourage you to see things out until they are finished and help you figure out ways to work through any challenges.

You will not be able to achieve your goals if you frequently give up or make excuses for yourself to pivot in another direction. Some things may be difficult, but if you are determined to get something done, you will be surprised by what you can achieve.

## How setting goals can help you

Goal setting can help you in many different ways outside of getting things done in your life.

One way it can help you is that it keeps you busy and motivated towards a target. It will give you a sense of [purpose](#) and direction and inspire you to finish different things in life. Without goals, you may find it hard to be motivated to do anything. If you have a particular set of goals you want to achieve, you will always feel pushed to do something. It will help you be motivated and inspired as you will always be working toward an end target.

Goal setting is also [great](#) for your mental health. It helps you feel a lot better about yourself if you can consistently achieve the goals and ambitions that you set for yourself. It will make you feel happier and more self-confident as you continually feel successful after accomplishing some of your goals.

It is also important to note that you should set achievable goals and not expect too much out of yourself. It is okay to reach high and demand more out of yourself, but keep your goals and expectations realistic. You do not want to run into issues like [burnout](#) and exhaustion. You also want to avoid being disappointed and upset if you cannot meet unrealistic goals.

Goals are meant to help push yourself and keep you inspired and busy. If you have not already, you should practice setting goals, as it will significantly improve your future and outlook on life. You will be surprised at what you can do when you believe in yourself and establish a consistent plan to achieve your goals.







## How to design a healthy workout plan

Callum Denault

Photo courtesy of Pavel Danilyuk

Exercising is a great habit that everyone can benefit from. Aside from the physical benefits, there are also various mental health benefits that come with consistent exercise.

However, it can be intimidating and confusing to cultivate a healthy workout plan, especially as a youth. Your body is continuously changing as you grow through puberty. Youth also have school and extracurricular activities, making it hard to find time to squeeze in a workout.

Keep reading to learn how to design a healthy workout plan, the exercise resources available for youth, and the physical and mental health benefits of physical activity.

### Designing a workout plan

First, it is essential to consult a doctor or physical trainer before beginning an intense workout plan. While it is usually perfectly safe to engage in sports without consulting a professional, strength training requires proper [supervision and instruction](#). A physical trainer can teach you proper techniques and how to use equipment safely. Otherwise, you could run the risk of injuring yourself. A professional

will also be able to guide you on how often you should be engaging in rigorous physical activities, especially if you already play a sport.

[Physical activity guidelines](#) for youth generally recommend that they get around one hour or more of moderate to strong physical activity on a daily basis. Additionally, the guidelines state that most physical activity should be aerobic based, which can include running, swimming, and dancing. For strength training, experts recommend including these types of workouts in your routine around three times a week.

When beginning strength training, it is important to take your time getting accustomed to it as strength training is very [different](#) from aerobic-based exercises. Aerobic exercises are mainly low-intensity and target weight loss while strength training is high-intensity and focussed on increasing muscle mass.

Another key component of a healthy workout is always stretching before any physical activity, whether aerobic or strength training. [Stretching](#) helps you increase your heart rate, warm up your muscles, and improve your flexibility.

[Rest days](#) are also a very important element of a healthy workout plan. Taking regular breaks allows your body to recover and repair. Skipping rest days can lead to overtraining your body or leave you feeling burnt out.

You can try a few different exercises and routines to see what works best for you. You may find that you like swimming and strength training three times a week while incorporating a rest day in between. It is your workout routine, so it is important that you are happy and comfortable with it.

### Resources for youth

One challenge youth may encounter when trying to develop a workout plan is where they can engage in physical activities and strength training. After all, gym memberships can be quite expensive.

The City of Toronto offers various [recreation services](#), including drop-in programs, free weight rooms, and discounted rates on fitness memberships. There are [free centres](#) scattered all around the city to enable easy access for Toronto communities. These free centres offer access to cardio rooms, weight rooms, and group fitness classes. The city also offers free drop-in programs, including swimming and skating classes.

The [Toronto District School Board](#) provides students with the opportunity to participate in various sports through the Toronto District Elementary School Athletic Association (TDESAA). Depending on the seasons, students can engage in cross-country, volleyball, basketball, and hockey.

The YMCA offers a program titled [Teen Night](#). This program allows youth to enjoy all the resources offered at the YMCA's health and fitness centres across the GTA. Some of these resources include gymnasiums, conditioning rooms, pools, and dance studios.

### Physical benefits of exercise

There are various physical benefits of a consistent workout routine. [Regular exercise](#) has been found to help adolescents improve cardiorespiratory fitness, build strong bones and muscles, control weight, and reduce the risk of developing health conditions such as heart disease, cancer, and type 2 diabetes.

There have also been [connections](#) established

between students who are physically active and improved academic performance. Physically active students tend to have better grades, school attendance, cognitive performance, and classroom behaviours.

On the other hand, the negative consequences of physical inactivity can be quite serious. Physical inactivity can lead to energy imbalance, which can increase the risk of adolescents becoming overweight or obese. Another concern of physical inactivity is that it increases the risk of cardiovascular disease, including [hyperlipidemia](#), high blood pressure, insulin resistance, and glucose intolerance.

### Mental health benefits of exercise

Similarly to the physical benefits of exercise, working out is associated with a [positive influence](#) on mental health.

Exercise has been found to reduce stress and increase relaxation. Youth can release physical and mental stresses related to school or personal issues through exercise. Additionally, youth may find that a consistent workout routine increases relaxation, benefiting individuals who struggle with insomnia or sleep deprivation.

Physical activity can also alleviate anxiety and depression as it releases [endorphins](#), which are natural chemicals in your body that release feelings of happiness. [Studies](#) have shown that even getting 30 minutes of exercise a few times a week can significantly improve depression, anxiety and overall mood levels.

Not exercising has been found to have the opposite effect on mental health. Lack of exercise can [decrease self-esteem](#) and encourage individuals to develop self-deprecating thought patterns. Also, a lack of a regular workout routine can lead our brains to [release](#) the stress hormone cortisol, making it harder to manage our emotions effectively.

Establishing a consistent workout routine is essential to living a happy and healthy life. Speak with your doctor and consult a physical trainer to design a workout plan that works for you. Everyone is different, and we have different physical needs, goals, and limitations. There is no need to go all out and put your body under physical stress. Consistency and happiness are the keys to a successful and healthy workout plan.





# FINANCIAL PROGRAMS

## COUNCIL OF CARIBBEAN ASSOCIATIONS BURSARY PROGRAM



To encourage and assist youth from **Caribbean countries** who are currently resident in **Ontario** to pursue their educational goals at the **university or college level**.

To recognize academic effort, community involvement and contributions to the Caribbean community in Ontario.

In 2023, **Twelve (12) \$1,000.00** each Bursaries will be awarded. The value of each bursary is **CDN \$1,000.00** and is used towards full courses leading to a **first diploma** or **first degree**.

## NEW PROGRAM - SCHOLARSHIP SPONSORED BY SENECA POLYTECHNIC **Seneca** POLYTECHNIC

To encourage and assist youth from **Caribbean countries** who are currently resident in **Ontario** to pursue their educational goals at **Seneca Polytechnic**.

To recognize academic effort, community involvement and contributions to the Caribbean community in Ontario.

**One (1) Full Tuition Scholarship** valued up to **\$6,000.00** per year for up to 4 years to a qualifying student for the duration of the program the student applied for and admitted into.

Learn more:

<http://bit.ly/44RfWt8>

## CANADA LEARNING BOND



Receive \$2000 to an RESP. \$500 in Year 1.  
Apprenticeship Programs, CEGEPs, Trade Schools, Colleges and Universities.

The Canada Learning Bond, popularly known as (CLB) is money that the Government adds to a Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP) for children from low-income families to assist them in paying for high education.

Learn more:

<https://bit.ly/44RBaqL>

# mind





# Navigating social media for digital well-being

Josephine Naghvie

Photos courtesy of [Zoe Fernanadez](#) and [cottonbro studio](#)



In our interconnected world, social media has seamlessly woven itself into the fabric of our lives, particularly for young individuals. Platforms like Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter serve as arenas for communication, self-expression, and information exchange. Yet, the pervasive use of social media has raised concerns about its impact on mental well-being.

This article will explore the effects of social media on mental health and offer practical guidance for maintaining a wholesome online presence.

## Comparisons and self-image

Social media often showcases an idealized version of reality. We all get caught up in other people's carefully curated feeds. It can be challenging to remember that the images and videos before us have been meticulously created to appear "perfectly imperfect."

Users typically share their highlights, leading to profiles full of polished and crafted content. This can lead to what is known as "social comparison," where individuals measure their own lives against the seemingly flawless lives of others. Such continual comparison can chip away at self-esteem and foster feelings of inadequacy.

## FOMO: Fear of missing out

The stream of updates and events on social media can trigger a fear of missing out. [Fear of missing out](#), or FOMO, is the perception that one is missing out. This apprehension can lead to anxiety and a sense of being left out. While this fear existed before social media, it has been heightened by the ability to publicly display what you are doing through status updates and photos. As you scroll through social media, you observe others "relishing" life without you and feel as though you are being excluded. The exciting vacations, trips and parties can also make you feel like you are not living your life enough.

## Cyberbullying and harassment

Social media serves as a platform for both positive and negative interactions. The same platforms that bring positive connections can also leave you vulnerable to cyberbullying, trolling, and harassment. These can all have severe repercussions on mental health, which can result in feelings of isolation, depression, and even contemplation of self-harm.

## Filter bubbles and echo chambers

Social media algorithms are designed to present us with content that aligns with our existing beliefs and preferences. While this can create a sense of belonging, it can also lead to a limited perspective and reinforce [echo chambers](#). An echo chamber is an environment where you only engage with information or opinions that reflect and reinforce your own. This can impede critical thinking skills and your ability to understand diverse viewpoints.

## Digital dependency

Excessive use of social media can give rise to behaviours [akin to addiction](#). Constantly checking notifications and seeking validation through likes and comments can lead to anxiety and a diminished capacity to focus on real-world activities.

The important thing to remember is that while there can be negative components of social media, your experience is entirely in your control. Keep reading for tips on how to have a positive social media experience while prioritizing your mental health.

## Establishing boundaries

Define specific periods and time limits for social media use and follow them. Many mobile devices include [screen time features](#) that can track how much screen time you use daily. Some devices also offer features enabling you to set specific application time limits. There are also applications available that can help you reduce your screen time, including Space, Flipd, and Forest. Some even feature reward systems, which can be a great motivator.

## Curating your feed

Exercise discernment in selecting who you follow and what content you consume. You can consider unfollowing accounts that evoke feelings of inadequacy or trigger negative emotions. This can be toxic for your everyday life, especially when comparing yourself to others. Instead, try opting for accounts that motivate, educate, or infuse positivity into your life.

## Practice mindful consumption

Stay conscious of your emotional responses while scrolling through your feed. If you find yourself experiencing envy, anxiety, or sadness, maybe take a step back and reassess your consumption habits. You can try going for a walk, colouring, or some other relaxing activity before returning to social media.

## Engage in social media thoughtfully

Rather than passively scrolling, as many of us do, participate in meaningful interactions. Posting questions about your views can broaden your thinking skills. It also allows you to engage in conversations that align with your interests and values and expand your understanding. Ensure you allocate time for offline pursuits that help with your well-being, such as exercise, hobbies, and quality time with friends and loved ones.

## Safeguarding your mental well-being

Recognizing the signs of digital fatigue or burnout can be difficult, especially in this day and age when technology is constantly at our fingertips. If you feel overwhelmed, take a break from social media. Prioritizing self-care is essential for your mental health.

It can be hard to resist the temptation to project an idealized version of yourself online, but try to begin to embrace your imperfections. You should also try to share your honest experiences instead of curated ones. Authenticity nurtures genuine connections and eases the pressure to conform to unrealistic standards.

While social media holds a significant influence and can enrich lives and connections when used mindfully, it is important to recognize its potential impact on mental health. By establishing



boundaries, curating your feed, and engaging thoughtfully, you can cultivate an enjoyable online presence that complements your overall well-being.

Remember, you hold the power to shape your digital experiences, and safeguarding your mental health should always take priority.



## A comprehensive guide to vitamins and supplements: Nutrition essentials for youth

Dru Gary

Photo courtesy of [Engin Akyurt](#)

As a youth, life gets busy, and it is easy to get caught up in the bustle of work and school and neglect basic nutrition. It can be a challenge to maintain a balanced and nutrient-rich diet. Fortunately, vitamins and supplements can play a crucial role in filling nutritional gaps and promoting overall well-being.

This guide will provide a comprehensive overview of vitamins and supplements, explaining their functions and the benefits they offer to support optimal health.

Please remember to always consult a healthcare practitioner before using supplements to ensure you are taking vitamins that align with your individual health needs.

### Vitamins: The basics

Vitamins are organic compounds that our bodies require in small amounts for various physiological functions. They are crucial for maintaining health and preventing deficiencies.

Vitamins are classified into two categories: [fat-soluble and water-soluble](#). Fat-soluble vitamins are absorbed with the other fats from the food you eat. After being absorbed, they are stored in your body's fat tissue and liver along with other fats. Water-soluble vitamins are not long-term like fat-soluble vitamins. Instead of being stored in the body, they enter your bloodstream and anything the body does not need is eliminated through urine.

Keep reading to learn more about vitamins and their functions and sources and why ensuring your body gets a sufficient amount is essential.

### [Vitamin A](#)

- Function: Vital for maintaining healthy vision, skin, and immune function.
- Sources: Carrots, sweet potatoes, spinach, and dairy products.
- Why It Matters: Supports clear vision, promotes radiant skin, and boosts the immune system.

### [Vitamin D](#)

- Function: Crucial for calcium absorption, bone health, and immune function.
- Where to get it: Sunlight, fatty fish, fortified dairy products, and egg yolks.
- Why It Matters: Strengthens bones, supports a positive mood, and boosts the immune system.

### [Vitamin E](#)

- Function: Antioxidant that protects cells from damage and supports skin health.
- Where to get it: Nuts, seeds, spinach, and vegetable oils.
- Why It Matters: Maintains youthful skin, protects against oxidative stress, and supports a healthy cardiovascular system.

### [Vitamin B Complex](#)

- Function: Essential for energy metabolism, brain function, and nervous system health.
- Where to get it: Whole grains, lean meats, nuts, seeds, and leafy greens.
- Why It Matters: Enhances cognitive performance, helps combat fatigue, and supports overall vitality.

### [Vitamin B12](#)

- Function: Vital for nerve function, red blood cell formation, and energy metabolism.
- Where to get it: Meat, fish, dairy products, and fortified plant-based foods.
- Why It Matters: Supports cognitive function, prevents fatigue, and ensures optimal energy production.

### [Vitamin C](#)

- Function: Powerful antioxidant that supports the immune system and collagen formation.
- Where to get it: Citrus fruits, strawberries, bell peppers, and broccoli.
- Why It Matters: Guards against illness, aids wound healing, and promotes healthy skin.

### [Magnesium](#)

- Function: Essential for muscle and nerve function, bone health, and energy production.
- Where to get it: Whole grains, nuts, seeds, leafy greens, and legumes.



- Why It Matters: Supports muscle contractions, aids nerve transmission, and contributes to overall energy levels.

#### Calcium

- Function: Essential for bone health, muscle function, and nerve transmission.
- Where to get it: Dairy products, leafy greens, fortified plant-based milk, and almonds.
- Why It Matters: Builds strong bones, supports muscle development, and aids nerve signalling.

#### Iron

- Function: Critical for oxygen transport, energy metabolism, and preventing fatigue.
- Where to get it: Lean meats, beans, lentils, and fortified cereals.
- Why It Matters: Prevents anemia, supports cognitive function, and ensures optimal energy levels.

#### Omega-3 Fatty Acids

- Function: Supports brain health and cognitive function while reducing inflammation.
- Where to get it: Fatty fish (salmon, mackerel), flaxseeds, chia seeds, and walnuts.
- Why It Matters: Enhances cognitive performance, supports emotional well-being, and reduces the risk of chronic diseases.

#### Folate (Vitamin B9)

- Function: Important for DNA synthesis, red blood cell formation, and brain development.
- Where to get it: Leafy greens, beans, lentils, and fortified cereals.
- Why It Matters: Supports cognitive development, prevents anemia, and aids overall growth.

#### Zinc

- Function: Essential for immune function, wound healing, and DNA synthesis.
- Where to get it: Meat, dairy, nuts, and legumes.
- Why It Matters: Boosts immune response, supports skin health, and aids overall growth and development.

Prioritizing nutrition is vital to the overall well-being of an individual. It is essential to build positive nutritional habits as a youth that can carry on throughout the rest of your life. Individuals can enhance their physical well-being, cognitive function, and overall vitality by understanding the importance of vitamins and incorporating these nutrients into their diets.



## Mind and body: The benefits of exercise on mental health

Kyle Quilatan

Photos courtesy of [Bruce Mars](#) and [Andrea Piacquadio](#)

Exercise is an essential part of taking care of one's body. This is true for physical health but also for mental health. Regular exercise produces positive effects in several areas, from brain function to emotion.

Keep reading to learn more about how physical activity can improve mental health.

#### Stress

Exercise is commonly known as an effective stress reliever. Many people turn to exercise as a way to combat the stresses of everyday life. This is because exercising [helps to reduce](#) the levels of stress-related hormones like cortisol and adrenaline.

Physical activity not only helps reduce immediate stress, it also helps to build resilience to stress in the future. Those who do not exercise are more [susceptible](#) to the negative effects of acute stressors than those who exercise regularly.

#### Mood

Physical activity can greatly improve mood immediately after exercising and for some time afterwards. Even light amounts of exercise can effectively [reduce](#) negative moods and enhance positive feelings. After exercising, tension, anger, and confusion decrease, while energy and attention increase. These effects can last up to a day after exercising and consistent physical activity is recommended to maintain an improved mood.



This energizing effect can be particularly effective when exercise occurs in or around outdoor green spaces. According to an article from the [American Psychological Association](#), even short durations of contact with nature can increase subjective happiness and well-being. This is why many people enjoy short walks outside when feeling overwhelmed or mentally distressed.

### Brainpower

Exercise not only improves emotional and mental states, it is also beneficial in improving cognitive function in the long run. There have been connections identified between regular exercise and [improved neurogenesis](#), the process by which new brain cells are created.

Regular exercise also strengthens the [hippocampus](#), the part of the brain responsible for memory and learning, helping to reduce memory loss. Both of these effects aid in combatting premature cognitive decline, allowing the brain to remain sharper for longer.

### Confidence

While many people exercise with the intention of improving the areas discussed above, physical activity can ultimately boost confidence. Regular exercise can make it difficult to notice the improvements in one's physical and mental state from day to day. However, being able to see one's progress over a duration of time can be a very rewarding achievement in itself.

Climbing the stairs without getting fatigued, walking further distances without tiring, or getting closer to reaching other health goals can lead to increased endurance. These benefits can come with a boost of confidence as all the effort begins to feel more worthwhile, encouraging individuals to continue exercising.

### Mental health

Physical activity can also be used as an effective natural remedy for combatting the everyday symptoms of various mental health conditions. Exercise has been found to help [alleviate](#) symptoms of depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety, bipolar disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The



mood-lifting effects and higher self-esteem that exercise brings can be particularly effective in dealing with depression.

However, it is important to note that exercise alone cannot be used as a complete solution for these mental health conditions. They should not be used as a replacement for prescribed medications or treatments from a doctor. While exercise can be helpful in dealing with certain symptoms, its effectiveness may vary for different people. Always speak to a healthcare professional to determine how physical activity might be incorporated as a mental health treatment.

### Getting started

Many people know that exercise is good for them, but committing to a set schedule can be daunting. There is no need to purchase a gym membership immediately if you have never stepped foot in a gym. Instead, try finding ways to incorporate more physical activity into your existing routine. This can include:

- Trying morning yoga or stretches
- Walking or biking instead of driving short distances
- Taking the stairs instead of an elevator
- Stretching regularly during work, especially when seated for long periods

Exercise has several mental health benefits, which only increases when physical activity is a regular part of your schedule. Today, start building effective exercise habits to gradually work towards your health goals.

## Guide to meditation: Finding the peace within and improving overall well-being

Dru Gary

Photos courtesy of [Prasanth Inturi](#), [Artem Podrez](#), and [ArtHouse Studio](#)

In the fast-paced, digital age, finding moments of stillness and calm can seem like a luxury. However, amidst the chaos, meditation is an accessible way to get closer to serenity, offering a pathway to inner peace and overall well-being.

Whether the aim is stress relief, improved focus, or a deeper connection with the self, meditation provides a holistic approach to cultivating a balanced and harmonious life. This guide will explore the art of meditation, its various forms, and the numerous benefits it brings to those who embrace its practice.

### What is meditation?

[Meditation](#) is an ancient practice that many cultures have embraced for centuries. Meditation involves training the mind to achieve a state of heightened awareness and mindfulness. Contrary to popular belief, meditation is not about completely emptying the mind of thoughts but instead observing them without attachment or judgment.

Meditation is not only an incredible way to connect with the self and settle the mind, but it is also highly accessible and budget-friendly. It is a practice that is easy for youth to engage with at home, at school, or on breaks at work.

Keep reading to learn about some essentials to help you get started with meditation.

### Create a quiet space

Choose a quiet and comfortable space where you will not be disturbed. This could be a corner of your room, a serene garden, or any place that allows you to disconnect from external distractions.

### Comfortable seating

Sit comfortably, either on a chair or cushion, with your back straight. Relax your shoulders and rest

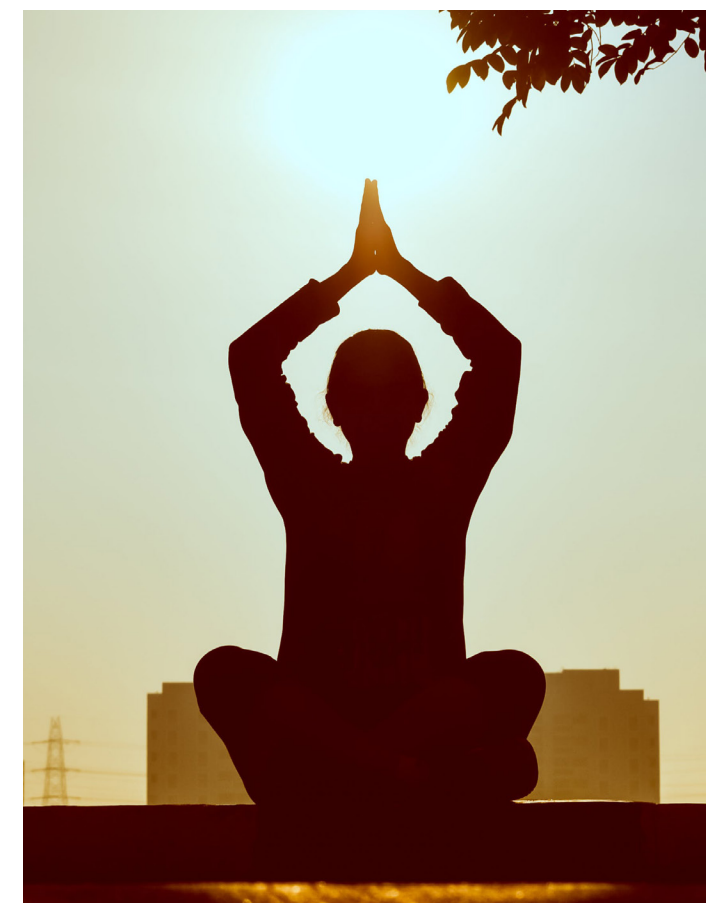
your hands on your lap. Find a position that allows you to be alert and at ease.

### Focus on breath

Close your eyes and bring your attention to your breath. Notice the natural rhythm of inhalation and exhalation. Focus on the sensation of each breath, whether the rise and fall of your chest or the feeling of air passing through your nostrils.

### Mindful observation

As thoughts arise, acknowledge them without judgment and gently redirect your focus back to your breath. Observing your thoughts without getting entangled in them is a fundamental aspect of meditation.





## Different kinds of meditation

There are several different kinds of meditation, each with different techniques and benefits. Depending on the individual's goals, they may be drawn to a particular variety of meditation.

Here are a few of the different types of meditation to try out and explore.

### **Mindfulness Meditation**

[Mindfulness Meditation](#) focuses on being present in the moment, observing thoughts and sensations without attachment.

### **Loving-Kindness Meditation**

[Loving-Kindness Meditation](#) cultivates feelings of compassion and love, starting with oneself and extending to others.

### **Transcendental Meditation**

[Transcendental Meditation](#) involves repeating a mantra to achieve a state of deep relaxation and heightened awareness.

### **Body Scan Meditation**

[Body Scan Meditation](#) focuses on bringing attention to different parts of the body, promoting relaxation and awareness.

## Health benefits of meditation

Meditation has several health benefits. The world can be incredibly overwhelming with the constant pressure of work and school. Additionally, we often experience information overload due to social media, the news, and the digital age in general.

There are many benefits to quieting the mind and detaching from all external stimuli and distractions. Here are some of the benefits of meditation.

### **Stress reduction**

Meditation has been [scientifically](#) proven to reduce stress by lowering cortisol levels and promoting a sense of calm.

### **Improved focus and concentration**

Regular meditation enhances cognitive function, improving attention span and the ability to concentrate on tasks.

### **Emotional well-being**

Meditation fosters emotional resilience, helping individuals manage and regulate emotions more effectively.

### **Enhanced self-awareness**

By observing thoughts without judgment, meditation facilitates a deeper understanding of oneself, leading to personal growth.

### **Better sleep**

Meditation can alleviate [insomnia](#) and promote restful sleep by calming the mind and relaxing the body.

### **Physical health benefits**

Meditation has been associated with lower blood pressure, improved [immune](#) function, reduced inflammation, and improved mental health.

Beginning a journey of meditation is an investment in your mental, emotional, and physical well-being. Individuals can experience the various benefits of meditation through patience and consistent practice.

Whether seasoned in meditation or a beginner, the path to inner peace begins with sitting down and focusing on breathing. From there, a commitment to inner peace and a consistent routine is all one needs to sustain a meditation practice that facilitates a more balanced life.







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At Black Voice we aim to create an inclusive community that strives to achieve equal representation among Black people in Canada.



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# teamwork





# Understanding learning styles

Kyle Quilatan

Photo courtesy of Yan Krukau

The concept of learning styles is nothing new. The idea that different people learn in different ways seems almost intuitive. It makes sense that individuals prefer one method of learning over another.

However, many question the validity of this theory and even identify potential negative effects it may have on students' success in the classroom. Keep reading to learn more about the nuance surrounding the learning styles theory.

## What are learning styles?

The [learning styles theory](#) refers to the idea that each person has a specific learning style that enhances their understanding of new information. This concept has been applied to academic spheres, theorizing that each student has a particular method that helps them study more effectively.

The four most commonly identified learning styles are described in the acronym VARK, which stands for visual, aural/auditory, reading/writing, and kinesthetic. The [VARK website](#) provides a questionnaire to help students determine which learning style(s) they most identify with. The website also offers tips and techniques associated with each learning style and strategies for incorporating each learning style in educational settings.

[Visual learners](#) prefer lessons that include graphs, diagrams, charts, or any other format that presents information visually. [Aural learners](#) benefit from hearing information, so they do well with lectures. [Reading/writing learners](#) retain written information best, whether writing it themselves or reading it elsewhere. [Kinesthetic learners](#) are more hands-on, learning best through practice and simulation.

## The problems with the learning styles theory

The main concern with the learning styles theory is that it has never been proven concretely. Most of the theory's validity comes from students' subjective understandings of their study habits. There is little evidence that supports the theory's

claim that using one's preferred learning style to study will produce better results.

One [study](#) attempted to test the effectiveness of learning styles by presenting participants with a story. Researchers presented the story to half the participants in a method aligned with their learning styles, while the other half received the story differently. The participants were then tested on the story's contents to determine their comprehension. The results showed no statistically significant difference between those who received the story through their preferred learning style and those who did not.

This would not be much of an issue if the learning styles theory had no negative effects on students' study habits. After all, if a student feels most comfortable studying a certain way, it seems obvious to encourage them to continue learning that way. Unfortunately, this theory is not as harmless as it looks.

If a student strongly believes they learn best with one specific method, this belief becomes a [self-fulfilling prophecy](#). The student will begin to stick with one learning style and become unable to learn in other ways. For example, a kinesthetic learner might find they cannot pay attention during a lecture, or an aural learner might have difficulty learning from a textbook. This becomes an even bigger problem in postsecondary schools where instructors often will not cater their lessons to their students' preferences.

This theory also poses a problem to teachers, particularly in high school. Teachers may put in excess amounts of effort to understand the learning styles of each of their students and accommodate their lessons according to these preferences. This can put extra stress on teachers to present their lessons in multiple ways.

## What can teachers do?

There is no need to eliminate the idea of learning styles altogether. There just needs to be a shift from trying to fit students into one learning style to understanding different styles. Teachers and

students may also benefit from borrowing and integrating techniques from different learning styles.

Instead of trying to customize lessons to each student's learning style, teachers can try using the learning styles that best suit the lesson. For example, a physics lesson on motion might be more effective with an accompanying video or live demonstration rather than just a lecture or textbook. A lesson on English literature must include reading, but might also benefit from class discussion to understand different interpretations. It is possible to incorporate aspects of more than one learning style into a lesson, which helps expose students to different ways of learning.

Teachers should also be aware of their school's resources that can help students with studying, such as guidance counsellors or study groups. Students are not always aware that these resources exist, so it is helpful for teachers to suggest them when they can.

## What can students do?

Students can still stick with their preferred learning style but might want to consider incorporating other study methods when they may be more effective. The important thing for students is to try to avoid boxing themselves into definitive learning style restrictions.

Students should also try to familiarize themselves with study help options in their schools. These resources are in place for the students' benefit, so students should use them when needed.

While it is true that each person learns differently, this does not mean there must be strict categories of learners. Learning is flexible, and individuals may find that their preferred study methods change over time. There is no need to limit yourself to a single learning style. Experiment with different techniques to find what works best for you, even if some of these methods fall outside your preferred style. You may find that you learn best when using a variety of study methods instead of just one.





# Connecting with your teachers: How it helps everyone

Vincent Tran

Photos courtesy of [Alena Darmel](#) and [Polina Tankilevitch](#)



One aspect of learning that is often overlooked is the relationship between teachers and students. The connection between students and teachers is vital, and a positive one benefits everyone involved.

Building this connection might be difficult at first, specifically for students, but once established, many positive opportunities emerge for both the student and the teacher.

Establishing a connection between a student and a teacher is very crucial. Keep reading to learn more about how to build connections with teachers and the benefits of reaching out and forming an academic relationship with your teachers.

## How to build connections with teachers

Building connections with teachers can initially seem difficult, but it is usually quite simple.

First, make sure to show up to class on time with all your assignments completed. It is also beneficial to have questions prepared so that you can contribute to classroom discussions. This will demonstrate to your teacher that you respect them and the class they are teaching while also displaying your interest.

Another way you can form connections with your teachers is by scheduling a private meeting to go over any difficulties. You can use this as an opportunity to get extra help, ask questions, seek advice, or discuss your progress in the class. By engaging with your teacher one-on-one, you will likely find it easier to talk to them and establish connections.

However, it is important to be mindful of what to [avoid](#) when trying to form relationships with your teachers. Always ensure you are being sincere in your interactions with your teachers. It is perfectly acceptable to ask your instructors for a reference, but make sure that is not your only motivation to establish connections. Also, avoid giving your teachers extravagant gifts. It is okay to offer a small gift to show your appreciation, but something expensive could make your gesture appear insincere.

Just try to focus on establishing real, genuine connections. If you are unable to form a relationship with your teacher, that is okay! Teachers are people too, and sometimes people do not personally click. The important thing is to be respectful and sincere in your interactions with your instructors.

## How building connections with teachers helps students

Building a connection with your teachers is an excellent way to grow as a student and learn more from them. It may seem intimidating at first to reach out and try to start that connection, but your teachers are there to help you. Building a strong relationship with them will [benefit](#) you personally and academically.

Creating a connection between yourself and your teachers can benefit you because it allows your teachers to understand any issues you face outside of school. Teachers are more than just instructors; they are also people students can speak to about varying issues and get advice on many different topics.

For issues in school, your teacher can be there to help you with lessons or subjects you are having trouble understanding. They can guide you to comprehend complex concepts and clarify points in lessons or lectures that might have confused you.

Outside of school, your teachers can be a voice of advice and reasoning. If you are experiencing stress outside of school, your teachers can be there to listen and help resolve any issues. For example, suppose you are stressed about applying for universities after high school or finding work after university. Your teachers are there to guide you and show you the best possible options and paths for you to take.

Your teachers can also be your references for future career opportunities. Building a strong connection with your teachers could get them to put in a good word for you if future professional opportunities require a reference.

Teachers can also speak from positions of experience as they have lived through different moments in their own lives. Always respect what they say, take their advice in good faith, and use their experiences as a life lesson for yourself.

Another reason for developing a strong relationship with your teachers is that it could help you become a more [confident](#) student. By growing your confidence, it will help you achieve your academic goals.

Your teachers can be excellent sources of inspiration and confidence for you, especially if they trust and support you. By having a strong



relationship with them, they will believe in you and your abilities. This will positively impact you as you will have gained the trust and support of someone you look to for guidance.

### How building connections with students helps teachers

On the other hand, connecting with your teachers also benefits them in many different ways. Building a strong relationship with your teachers opens up many opportunities for them to improve and grow.

One way it can benefit your teachers is by helping them discover what methods enable you to learn better. Once teachers understand how each person learns best, they can shape their lessons to incorporate different elements that help each student learn.

Opening up to your instructors and letting them know more about yourself can help them understand who you are and make teaching easier for them. This, in turn, will lead to [stronger](#) classroom performances and help everyone

improve academically. [Research](#) has shown that students are more likely to learn when they feel cared for and valued by their teachers.

While some issues may be too personal, you could also support your teachers with problems they may be experiencing. Checking in with your teachers to see how their day or week has been is a great way to show that you are interested in their lives. It also demonstrates that you care about them as human beings and you value your connection with them. Spreading positivity is always good, and your teachers will appreciate your kindness.

Being kind and respectful to your teachers will make them feel more at ease when teaching. It will also lead to a more friendly and fun atmosphere in your classroom where everyone enjoys learning and being in each other's company.

These are just a few reasons why building a strong relationship and connecting with your teachers is beneficial and can help everyone involved. Try putting this into action and form connections with your teachers, as it could help you greatly in the present and future.



## Getting the most out of parent-teacher interviews

Kyle Quilatan

Photos courtesy of [Julia M. Cameron](#), [ThisisEngineering](#), and [Michelle Raponi](#)

Parent-teacher interviews are an integral part of a child's education. Parents can be valuable assets in improving their child's learning experience. It is important for teachers to ensure these meetings go well so that parents know how to best support their children.

Keep reading for some guidelines on how to get the most out of parent-teacher interviews.

### Prepare beforehand

Just as students must put in the work before giving a presentation, teachers must have the necessary materials prepared before the parent-teacher conference takes place. This can include grades, rubrics, assignments, and anything else the teacher thinks might be relevant. Even if not all of these materials end up being used, it is better to be over-prepared than under-prepared.

### Make a good impression

This may seem obvious, but it is important to keep a good rapport with parents in order for them to be most cooperative. This does not mean being inauthentic in order to appease parents, but it does mean maintaining a professional and welcoming manner is essential. Making a good impression can lessen parents' anxieties about their child and increase their faith in an instructor's teaching ability.

Of course, treat parents with respect and patience, even if that is not reciprocated at first. Although it can be frustrating, immediately responding with anger is counterproductive. The child is the main focus of the meeting, not the teacher or the parent, so keep calm when faced with initially [difficult parents](#). They just might warm up to you as the meeting goes on.

Being prepared is also a big part of this. It looks unprofessional and unorganized when a teacher is constantly looking for materials or does not know where things are during a meeting. Teachers should

ensure they have all necessary materials prepared before the meeting so they can easily be referred to when necessary.





### Keep parents on the same page

Ensure that parents fully understand classroom expectations and learning objectives before getting into their child's performance. Take the time to explain any terms or concepts that might be unfamiliar to them so that they do not get lost during the meeting.

This is a good time to refer to rubrics and assignment outlines so parents can have concrete examples of what their child is working on. It also makes it easier for them to follow along and ask questions if need be.

### Be honest

There is no need to sugarcoat anything. When explaining a child's performance, it benefits parents and their child more if teachers clearly and directly state a child's strengths and shortcomings. Of course, this can be done without being rude to the child, so ensure that honesty does not slip into accidental insults.

When discussing a child's areas of improvement, it may help to present this information following something positive about the child. For example, a teacher might lead by saying, "your child shows



an analytical ability above their peers." They could follow that up: "however, they tend to be unfocused during class." Then, continue by reiterating the child's strengths and how they might be used to counteract the critique. This can make the areas of improvement seem less daunting and prevent any criticism from sounding like an insult on the child.

However, if using this method, sometimes called a [praise/compliment sandwich](#), ensure that the criticism at the centre of the "sandwich" is not lost between the compliments. When presented with a critique like this, it can be easy for the listener to think that the problem is not as bad as it really is due to the compliments softening the impact. It is essential to find a balance between sharing genuine concerns about students' performances and being kind and respectful.

### Create a plan

Do not just leave the parents and child with a set of issues. Have a realistic plan ready to go on how the child's problem areas might be worked on. Outline specific steps that can be taken both in the classroom and at [home](#) to get parents more involved in their child's education.

Be ready to listen to parents with questions or concerns about this plan and work with them to accommodate the plan to address the child's needs.

### Communicate

The child's education does not suddenly stop when the meeting does. Their performance as a student may change over time, so it is best for parents to know how best to reach the teacher in the future. Provide ways for parents to stay in touch with you and encourage them to ask questions and provide updates.

Inevitably, some parent-teacher interviews will not go as planned. No amount of preparation can prepare a teacher for every possible scenario. However, at the end of the day, these meetings are for the child's benefit. Ensure they are performed to the best of your ability to maintain connections with parents and drive students' academic growth.





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