

Strong4Life Tips for Parents

Children's Healthcare of Atlanta Strong4Life is here to help families raise healthy, safe, resilient kids. To support families and school staff, we've created sample newsletter content for schools to share via email or on social media. Highlight, copy and paste into your school newsletter, social media posts and more. This information is yours to use anywhere you communicate with families.

What's included?

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General healthy habits for kids

The Strong4Life healthy habits

A habit is something we do over and over again, sometimes without even thinking about it.

Practicing healthy habits regularly can help improve your child's overall wellness—their physical, mental and emotional health. Try practicing the 4 Strong4Life healthy habits together as a family to help everyone build strong bodies and minds.

Strong4Life healthy habits for kids:

1. Eat smarter, drink water
2. Screens away, go play
3. Get rest to be your best
4. Emotions are real, express how you feel

Visit [Strong4Life.com](https://www.strong4life.com) for more tips for raising healthy, safe, resilient kids. You can also subscribe to the [Strong4Life newsletter](#) and follow [Strong4Life on Instagram](#).

Healthy habits can help kids do better in school

Healthy students do better in all areas of academic achievement: academic performance, behavior and attitudes.

Students who practice healthy habits:

- Show more focus
- Have better attendance
- Are at lower risk for disease
- Have improved emotional well-being
- Experience better quality sleep

All these things factor into greater success in the classroom and beyond.

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Being a healthy role model for students

It's no surprise that kids mirror adult behavior. So when it comes to building strong bodies and minds, we all have an opportunity to be a positive influence and support kids.

Be a healthy role model by:

- Participating in activities and mealtimes

- Drinking water throughout the day
- Modeling healthy boundaries with technology
- Practicing healthy coping skills and prioritizing self-care

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Building healthy eating habits

Practice division of responsibility at mealtimes

If you're working on building healthy eating habits—and want to minimize mealtime stress—start by knowing the roles you and your child play during mealtimes. This concept, called division of responsibility, can help you build healthy family eating habits and make mealtimes more enjoyable for everyone.

Here's how it works.

As the caregiver, it's your job to **decide**:

- What food you'll offer
- When you'll offer food
- Where you'll offer food

And trust your child to **choose**:

- If they'll eat
- What they'll eat
- How much they'll eat (from the food you provide)

When it comes to school meals, you may not have control over what, when and where your child eats, but you can practice division of responsibility at home. You can also let your child know they still get to choose if they'll eat, what they'll eat and how much they'll eat when they're at school.

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Healthy snack ideas for kids

Balanced meals and snacks give kids the energy they need to focus and explore, and the nutrients they need to grow. To create a balanced plate, build snacks with foods from 2 to 3 different food groups.

Here are some snack combinations to get you started:

- Carrots + whole-wheat crackers + nut or seed butter
- Pretzels + cheese cubes + pear
- Orange slices + turkey + almonds
- Blueberries + string cheese + pretzels
- Bell peppers + tortilla chips + avocado
- Pita bread + hummus + celery
- Popcorn + strawberries + edamame

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How to encourage kids to drink more water

Kids' bodies and minds need water to stay healthy and strong. Not only is drinking water important for helping kids grow, but drinking water also helps them perform their best at school, in sports and doing their favorite activities.

Encourage your family to drink more water with these helpful tips:

- **Make frozen fruit ice cubes** by freezing mashed fruit and water in ice cube trays and adding to water.
- **Make homemade flavored water** by adding slices of fruits, veggies or herbs to water.
- **Let your child choose** their own water bottle or a silly straw.
- **Try sparkling water** with no artificial sweetener, added sugar or caffeine.

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Eat meals together as a family

One of the best ways to raise healthy eaters is to model healthy eating habits during family meals. When kids eat at a table without distractions and share conversation with family, they're more likely to develop a range of healthy habits. In fact, kids who grow up with regular family meals perform better in school, have higher self-esteem and are less likely to take part in high-risk behaviors.

Family meal pro tips:

- Keep all screens off and away from the table (e.g., phones, TV, computers, tablets, etc.).
- Clear the area of toys, reading material or other distractions.
- Focus on connecting through conversation, not talking about what everyone is or isn't eating.

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Easy breakfast ideas for kids

Starting the day with a balanced meal does more than just calm that first bout of hunger. It helps kids stay focused longer and perform better academically than those who skip eating or start with a sugary option.

Try these easy breakfast ideas to boost kids' brainpower:

- Oatmeal with nuts and fruit
- Veggie and egg muffins
- Cereal trail mix with dried fruit, whole-grain cereal and nuts

Hectic mornings ruining your breakfast plans? Ask your school nutrition team about their breakfast menu!

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Raising active kids

How to get kids moving

Regular activity is important for your child's physical and mental health. It can strengthen their body (muscles, bones and even immune system), improve their sleep, boost their mood and sharpen their focus. Encourage your child to limit screen time and be active throughout the day.

Try these tips to motivate kids to get moving:

- **Make physical activity fun.** When kids enjoy an activity, they will want to do more of it.
- **Encourage kids to try new activities** to help them develop a range of skills.
- **Break activity up into short spurts.** It's easier for kids to get the recommended 60 minutes of daily activity if they don't try to do it all at once.
- **Motivate by role modeling.** Getting active together is a great way to make memories with your family.

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The emotional and social benefits of physical activity

From boosting their mood to helping connect with others, physical activity does wonders for kids' minds and bodies.

Being active:

- Boosts academic performance
- Builds self-esteem
- Improves mood
- Reduces stress
- Improves sleep quality

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Limiting screen time for kids

Technology can help make life a little easier, but too much screen time can negatively affect our mood and take away time to be active and connect as a family.

Try these tips to help limit screen time:

- Reduce screen time gradually.
- Make screen-free mealtimes a priority.

- Keep all screens out of the bedroom and power down 1 hour before bedtime.
- Model screen time habits you want kids to work toward.

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Raising kids who are active for life

Being active benefits kids' physical and mental health. And building a healthy relationship with activity can set them up to be active for life.

Here are some tips to encourage physical activity:

- **Plan for activity.** Set your family up for success by planning times to be active.
- **Keep things positive** and avoid presenting activity as a chore, a way to earn things or a privilege to be taken away.
- **Let kids choose.** Kids are more likely to participate in an activity if they enjoy it. Plus, choosing their activities can help build independence.
- **Have fun!** Nine out of 10 kids say having fun is the top reason they enjoy being active.

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Keeping kids safe

Swim safety for kids and teens

Practicing water safety for kids of all ages is crucial because drowning is a leading cause of death in children from birth through the teen years. And drowning is often quick and silent.

But the good news is drowning is preventable. Here are our top swim safety tips for kids and teens:

- **Practice proper supervision.** Keep [beginner swimmers](#) within arm's reach to practice touch supervision. Be a water watcher for strong swimmers by keeping them within eye's reach.
- **Be honest about swim skills.** There's no shame in not knowing how to swim. But the good news is it's never too late to learn. (Take it from NFL running back, [ItoSmith!](#)) If your child isn't a strong swimmer, give them the courage and confidence to be open about their skills with their peers and other adults so they can be properly monitored.
- **Sign up for [swim lessons](#).** Our experts recommend that children be able to swim confidently by the time they are in school. Check out our tips for finding swim lessons for kids.
- **Talk about risk-taking behavior.** Older kids and teens are more likely to drown because they're taking risks in or around water. Risky behaviors include jumping and diving, swimming or boating at night, and swimming while under the influence of alcohol or drugs. [Peer pressure](#) plays a part. Talk to your child about how certain behaviors can be life threatening. And empower them to make the right decisions under pressure.

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Hand washing steps for kids

Just because you can't see germs doesn't mean they aren't there. Washing your hands often is key in preventing the spread of germs. Always wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water aren't available, use a hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.

Try following these hand washing steps for kids:

- Wet your hands with warm running water.
- Lather your hands with soap until you get lots of bubbles.
- Wash both hands entirely for at least 20 seconds.
- Rinse hands well under running water.
- Dry hands completely.

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Guide to kids' helmets

Riding bikes and skating is a great way to stay active! But whether they're riding a bike or a taking scooter for a spin, kids should wear a properly fitted helmet any time they're on wheels.

Here are some helmet fit tips:

- Make sure the helmet fits snugly on your child's head.
- Check that 2 fingers fit in the space between your child's eyebrows and the bottom of the helmet.
- Make sure the front and back straps form a V just below the ears.
- Hook 1 finger above the chin strap; there should be no extra space.

Did you know hairstyles can affect how your child's helmet fits? A good rule of thumb is to keep long ponytails and bulky buns and braids lower, toward the nape of the neck. This is why it's important to check and adjust your child's helmet before each ride.

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Is your child ready to say “bye” to their booster seat?

Most kids need to ride in a booster seat through elementary school to ensure their seat belt fits correctly and to keep them safe in the event of a car crash. Even if they're begging for a big kid seat belt, keep them in a booster until:

- They are at least 57 inches tall.
- They can sit with their back against the back of the vehicle seat and their knees bent over the edge of the seat.
- The seat belt fits correctly. Make sure the belt lies across the center of the chest and shoulder, and the lap belt fits across the hip bones.
- They can stay seated this way for the duration of your trip.

Note: Even if they meet the guidelines for a seat belt, kids should ride in the back seat of the car until they are at least 13 years old.

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How to store medicine and household supplies safely

Kids are curious by nature. Even if you don't have a baby or toddler at home, it's still important to keep medicine and household supplies—like cleaning and laundry products—out of kids' hands.

To prevent poisoning, make sure medicine and household chemicals are:

- **Up high.** Make sure kids can't reach places you store poisonous chemicals.
- **Away.** Put products away after each use.

- **Out of sight.** The best way to keep poisonous chemicals out of curious hands is to make sure kids can't see them.
- **In their original container.** Keep prescription and over-the-counter medicines in their containers so you always have drug information, like dosage and warnings, available.

Store the Poison Control number in your phone in case you're concerned or there's an emergency: **800-222-1222**.

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Teach kids about medicine

In addition to safely storing poisonous chemicals, like medicine and household cleaning supplies, it's also important to teach kids about medicine.

Here are our top tips:

- Talk to kids about how medicine can be dangerous.
- Never tell kids that medicine is candy (even if they don't like the taste of it).
- Tell young children that only adults can handle their medicine.
- Teach older kids to only take prescription medicine prescribed to them.
- Teach older kids to read medicine labels and only take recommended doses.

Store the Poison Control number in your phone in case you're concerned or there's an emergency: **800-222-1222**.

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Safe gun storage at home

If you own a gun, hiding it isn't enough. If your child has ever found something you've hidden at home, they can find a gun. And children as young as 2 are strong enough to pull a trigger.

You can practice safe gun storage at home by keeping them:

- Unloaded
- Locked in a lockbox
- Separate from ammunition
- Out of reach and sight for kids

Even if you don't own a gun, keep your child safe by asking about unsecure guns at homes where your child visits or plays.

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Keep kids safe online

Technology offers kids new ways to learn and connect every day, but sometimes that comes at a cost. The internet can expose children to some scary stuff, including bullying, inappropriate content and online predators.

Here's how to keep kids safe online:

- Have open conversations about being online. Ask them where they access the internet away from home and how they use the internet.
- Let your child know that they should let you know right away if anything feels unsafe. If they do come to you with a problem, try to manage your reaction so your child trusts they can go to you in the future.
- Set clear boundaries and limits for being online. Let them know what your expectations are for when, where and how long they can be online, as well as how they are allowed to use the internet.
- Check in with your child regularly. Ask how they feel when they surf the internet or connect with friends.

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Be a safe driving role model for kids

Whether your child is still in a car seat or learning how to drive, they're watching your behavior in the car. Model safe driving habits by eliminating distractions.

That means if you're driving, you're not:

- Texting
- Talking on the phone without a hands-free connection
- Eating
- Applying makeup
- Adjusting the radio
- Taking your eyes off the road

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Pedestrian safety tips for kids

Walking is a great way to be active, whether you're going on a family walk or your child is walking to school. But while they're on the move, it's important for kids to follow safety rules.

Here are our top pedestrian safety tips:

- Teach kids to cross the street safely. Stop at the curb, look left-right-left and wait until it's safe to cross.

- Make sure kids wear bright colors while walking, biking or getting around outside, especially in the evening.
- Teach your child that they should never talk to strangers or anyone that your family does not know well. There are some “safe stranger” exceptions, such as police officers, firefighters and teachers, who can help them if they need it.
- Encourage kids to walk with a buddy whenever possible.
- Stress that staying alert and off their devices could prevent a major accident.

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Building healthy sleep habits

The health benefits of a good night's sleep

From birth through their teenage years, kids need to get plenty of rest to be their best. Getting enough quality sleep helps support your child's mind and body.

Quality sleep can:

- Improve our mood
- Help with decision making
- Boost memory and focus
- Increase physical energy
- Strengthen the immune system

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Healthy sleep habits for kids

Quality sleep comes with physical and mental health benefits, so it's important to practice good sleep habits.

Try these tips to help get a good night's rest:

- **Be consistent with bedtime.** When kids have the same bedtime and wake-up time every day, it's much easier to keep them on track and help them sleep better.
- **Turn off screens 1 hour before bed.** Screens stimulate the brain, making it harder to fall asleep.
- **Create a calming bedtime routine** to signal your child's mind and body that it's time for sleep.
- **Try not to overschedule kids.** More free time on the calendar can make it easier for everyone to get the rest they need.

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How much sleep do kids need?

Sleep affects every aspect of your child's development (both their body and mind) and a good night's sleep can improve mood, focus, academic performance and more. Here are the CDC recommendations for how much sleep kids need by age:

- Newborns: 14 to 17 hours
- Infants: 12 to 16 hours
- Toddlers: 11 to 14 hours
- Preschoolers: 10 to 13 hours
- Grade schoolers: 9 to 12 hours
- Teens: 8 to 10 hours

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Building resilience at every age

Helping kids develop coping skills

Coping skills are tools we can use to manage feelings and handle stress in healthy ways. It's difficult to learn something new when we're anxious, angry, or distracted, so try to practice any new coping skill when everyone is calm.

Try some of these coping skills, and learn what works best for your child:

- Listen to music or sing a song.
- Go for a walk or do 5 jumping jacks.
- Take several deep breaths.
- Color, draw or write in a journal.

Encourage your kids to build a long list of coping skills so they have lots of options to pick from.

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Helping kids and teens with anxiety about school

Going to school, tests and schoolwork can bring on feelings of worry and nervousness for many kids.

Here are tips to help kids and teens manage their anxiety in healthy ways:

- Instead of telling kids not to worry, normalize feelings of anxiety or nervousness by using messages such as, "It's normal to feel worried about tests." Telling someone what they are feeling makes sense and is normal helps them feel understood.
- Coping skills (such as deep breathing) can help manage emotions and improve focus. Practicing coping skills regularly means kids are more likely to use them during tough or stressful moments.
- Encourage your kid or teen to fuel their body and mind by getting enough sleep, drinking water, eating balanced meals, and taking breaks to be active. These can all help reduce anxiety as well.

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Ask kids open-ended questions about school

Sometimes kids need help opening up and sharing how they're feeling. Asking open-ended questions about school encourages them to answer with more than just "yes" or "no."

Instead of ...

"Did you have a good day?"

"You doing OK?"

"Can I help you?"

Try ...

"What was the best/hardest part of your day?"

"How are you feeling?"

What can I do to help?"

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Introducing Raising Resilience

Resilience is the ability to handle life's ups and downs. It's an important skill that kids need to learn and adults need to teach. Strong4Life recently launched Raising Resilience, an initiative to give all parents and caregivers the tools they need to shift from reacting in the moment to proactively teaching kids how to cope with challenges, manage stress and ultimately make healthy decisions throughout their lives.

Sign up for the Raising Resilience [newsletter](#) to receive campaign updates and parenting tips from licensed therapists twice each month.

Follow Strong4Life on social media ([Instagram](#), [Facebook](#)) for Raising Resilience tips, as well as parenting tips that focus on whole-child wellness (both emotional and physical).

Visit Strong4Life.com/resilience to learn about raising resilience at every age.

Identifying, expressing and managing feelings for kids and teens

All kids need to practice identifying, expressing and managing their feelings in healthy ways. You can help by:

- **Building their feelings vocabulary.** Encourage your child to use specific feelings words. Instead of “mad,” help them find out what lies underneath the anger. Are they disappointed, hurt or embarrassed?
- **Modeling how to share feelings.** Your child looks to you as an example at every age. When appropriate, share your feelings to show that they are OK to talk about.
- **Providing different options for expression.** Sometimes kids aren't ready to talk, and that's OK. Encourage them to use other forms of expression, such as journaling or creating art.
- **Teaching and practicing healthy coping skills.** Whether it's being active, listening to music or deep breathing, regularly practicing healthy coping skills can help reduce stress.

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