We Can Get Stronger! Transcendence and Spirituality

Family beliefs can help us to make meaning out of hardship. Our personal beliefs include values, attitudes, and spirituality. Sharing our values and culture with our children can help them to cope with tough experiences and the big emotions that come with them. These beliefs play an important role in fostering resilience by offering meaning, support, and comfort in the face of adversity.

This week we focus on fostering transcendence and spirituality in children through storytelling and connecting with nature. Storytelling is a powerful way to share important values and beliefs with children at any age. However you engage in storytelling, talk to your children about why these stories are meaningful and how they relate to their lives today. For more information about how to foster resilience with storytelling, consider reading “Building Resilient Kids, One Story at a Time.”

Getting outside, while social distancing, can be one way to foster resilience. When children interact with nature they learn about its importance and beauty. For more information about engaging children with nature, visit the Children & Nature Network website.

- **Read books and sing songs together.** Read stories together that convey your cultural values or faith. For example, *The Little Engine That Could* teaches about optimism and hard work. Find books that include positive messages that reflect your faith and beliefs. You may wish to check out books digitally through your local library or through the Global Digital Library. Many songs include messages about values that may be important to you (e.g. “This Land Is Your Land”). You may also have music that has specific meanings for family through personal experience or faith. Enjoy this music with your child and discuss the meaning behind it.

- **Share stories from your family.** Every family has a history. Develop links to your family’s culture by talking about your heritage. Consider telling stories about your childhood or passing down tales about your ancestors. Sharing these types of stories provides a personal history for your child that will help them understand their place in the world. Consider archiving your family story at the Library of Congress by recording conversations with family members remotely through Story Corps Connect.

- **Write stories together.** For older children, work on writing stories together that reflect your family beliefs, culture, or heritage. Encourage your child to take the lead in developing the moral of the story. If you need help in getting started you may wish to check out some tips fromReadWriteThink.

- **Explore and collect objects from nature.** Take a nature walk around your yard, around the block, or in a local park. Suggest a focus for each walk, or ask your child to choose a focus. For example, say “Let’s see how many birds we spot today!” or “Let’s look for the smallest plants or animals we can find.” Take along a magnifying glass for viewing very small things, if possible. You may wish to take photos of interesting things your child notices or encourage your child to collect small, interesting objects like leaves, flowers, acorns, maple seeds, rocks, twigs, etc. Your child may wish to keep their “treasures” in a bag or express their creativity by making a nature collage.
We Can Get Stronger! Transcendence and Spirituality

Non nobis solum is Latin for “not for ourselves alone.” The meaning of this phrase is that people should contribute to the general greater good of humanity, apart from their own interests. Our families’ cultural, spiritual, and religious values are ways we emphasize how our lives have purpose, meaning, and an impact on others. Religion/spirituality is important to teens and is considered a protective factor against negative health outcomes. Religion has been shown to help teens regulate their behaviors while practices which are spiritual in nature, such as mindfulness and meditation, help teens regulate their emotions. These values also help teach youth how to take responsibility, not just for themselves and their immediate family, but for their local and global community, as well.

This week we focus on activities for teens that can help them demonstrate their character and commitment to others, as well as cultivate practices that help build meaning. Studies have shown that compared to doing things for ourselves, doing something kind for others may give us more enduring satisfaction.

The Greater Good
The current situation provides a unique opportunity for teens to think more deeply about big questions. You may wish to ask, “What do you genuinely care about the most in this crisis?” or “What skills can you use to contribute to our family, community, and world?”

1. **Family projects.** Encourage your teen to try projects that involve the entire family, such as organizing family photos or recreating the family's history. This is a great topic for calls to grandparents, who may be able to describe challenging times in the past, and how the family was resilient.

2. **“Care-mongering.”** Suggest your teen drop off a special card like the card mentioned in this article, with neighbors who are self-isolating, offering their help with shopping or a friendly phone call.

3. **Volunteer within the community.** Following social distancing and local regulations, suggest your teen look online for local opportunities to serve such as volunteering to help tutor online.

Meaning Making
Strong faith and contemplative practices such as prayer and meditation can help teens regulate their emotions, promote health and healing, reduce stress, and strengthen neurological, immune, and cardiovascular systems.

1. **Train your brain to be kinder.** Encourage your teen to concentrate on kindness by sending kind thoughts to someone they love and to someone they don't get along with. Learn more by watching this short video.

2. **How taking photos can help you find meaning in life.** Suggest your teen take meaningful photos and then write about why the photos are meaningful to them. Learn more about how this supports your teen as they look for meaning in their life by watching this short video.

3. **Mindfulness training.** Mindful breathing is another simple exercise teens may wish to try. Invite your teen to focus on their breathing, while trying to refrain from forcing themselves to breathe in a certain way.
Encourage your teen to practice the following steps:
- Sit in a comfortable position with eyes closed.
- Breathe normally and notice how it feels; pay attention as air goes in and out of the lungs.
- Notice how breath moves the body; does the chest and/or belly rise and fall as a breath is taken?
- Sit for a few minutes, paying attention to breathing, and become as relaxed as possible.
- If the mind starts to wander from the task at hand, gently guide it back to breathing.

The following are some guided meditations to try:
- [Mindfulness Meditation to Help Relieve Anxiety and Stress](#)
- [Guided Meditations from UCLA Health](#)

The following apps are good for teens practicing mindfulness:
- [Calm](#)
- [Aura](#)
- [Stop, Think & Breathe](#)
We Can Get Stronger! Transcendence and Spirituality

Multiple news stories and personal accounts have mentioned that, amidst the challenges the pandemic has created, it has also provided us with an unusual chance to step back, slow down, and reprioritize. So often in our fast-moving world, our focus is either on the future and what comes next or it is on the past and the choices we’ve already made. The problem with these perspectives is that we cannot change the past and we cannot predict the future. The best we can do is to focus on the present and to make the wisest decisions we can based on the information that is available to us.

With that in mind, the focus of this week is mindfulness. Rather than a new age concept utilized by a few people who somehow have the time to ponder their existence, mindfulness is a practice that we can all easily incorporate into our daily lives. By being conscious of what is occurring right in front of us, mindfulness enables us to get in touch with how we are feeling emotionally, the sensations that are taking place in our bodies, and the thoughts that are drifting through our minds. What is more, researchers have consistently indicated that regular mindfulness practice leads to a host of positive outcomes, including more restful sleep, lower stress levels, increased attention, and better health overall.

Sometimes it can help to bring a little structure to your mindfulness. For example, you could train yourself to be more mindful and aware every time you go through a door, or feel the wind blow, or put your shoes on, or turn on a light, etc. Everyday activities can be cues for remembering that life is precious. Although we have challenges to face and obstacles to overcome, we have the capacity to act and to choose how we will respond.

Video Resources
- All It Takes Is 10 Mindful Minutes
- The Habits of Happiness

Internal Actions
- We can do a lot for ourselves when we actively watch for the “nuggets” of wonder and beauty that are around us. They can be things like the smell of something baking in the kitchen, a smile from a stranger, a colorful leaf on the sidewalk, the memory of a friend you have not thought about in a while, or hearing a song that makes you want to sing along and dance. Try and notice these wonder-filled nuggets this week!

External Actions
- Practicing mindfulness can be something to do as a family. Try a mindfulness app with a sibling, parent, or someone else, and talk to each other about how you feel after doing it.
We Can Get Stronger! Transcendence and Spirituality

Exploring and sharing our beliefs and cultural heritage can foster spiritual connectedness. This builds resilience by offering us meaning, purpose, and connection beyond ourselves. Spiritual connectedness can be found in many different ways. For example, in nature, with animals, through art or through religion. This can also promote health, healing, and acceptance of difficult situations.

These activities are some ways that older adults can connect to their beliefs and heritage.

**Practice mindfulness or meditation.** For older adults, mindfulness and meditation can reduce depression and pain, preserve cognitive functioning, and decrease loneliness. Mindfulness encourages you to be aware of your thoughts and feelings in the moment. You can use mindfulness and meditation to shift focus, reflect, and find acceptance. Through mindful practice, set an intention. Or, find a deep connection within yourself and concentrate on it. How can you feel more fulfilled? How can you increase joy and peace within your life? You can also try a 10-minute gratitude meditation to reflect on all the gifts in your life. Read more about building a spiritual life during COVID-19.

**Gardening.** Connectedness to nature is one way to promote psychological and spiritual resiliency. Watching and helping things grow can give us a sense of control. Some of the mental health benefits include mood improvement, reduced stress and anxiety and improved self-esteem. Gardening is also a great form of physical activity for older adults and can be especially helpful for those with dementia. Not sure where to start? Read some of the articles below about how to garden. Gardening doesn’t have to be complicated. You can even pick out a few, new low-maintenance houseplants.

- Start an indoor vegetable garden: growing vegetables indoors made easy
- How to create an indoor garden that’s easy to take care of
- How to grow a quarantine garden when you’re tight on space

**Plant a tree in remembrance of a loved one.** Planting a tree can honor a loved one and provide comfort to those who experienced loss. It can bring together families, connect future generations, and provide environmental benefits beyond our lifetime. You can plant a tree yourself or go through an organization, such as the Arbor Day Foundation.

**Research and tell stories from your family history.** Family history can connect generations and shed light on family values and practices. You may wish to visit your local library’s website to use genealogy resources or search registries, manuscripts, and vital records for information on your genealogy. Consider telling stories about your childhood or passing down tales about your ancestors. Sharing these types of stories provides a personal history for younger family members that will help them understand their place in the world. Consider archiving your family story at the Library of Congress by recording conversations with family members remotely through Story Corps Connect.

**References**

We Can Get Stronger! Transcendence and Spirituality

Spirituality can provide a sense of meaning, purpose, and emotional connection to something beyond ourselves. Believing in a higher power or participating in emotional connections beyond ourselves can increase one’s sense of purpose and change how everyday events are seen. All of us have experienced moments of focusing on something beyond oneself at some point in our lives. For some, these experiences happen after spending time getting lost in reading a book or listening to music. For others, it was a moment of becoming lost in prayer or meditation while feeling a deep sense of connection with something beyond oneself. Spirituality can be experienced in many ways. Below are some ideas on activities that can be spiritual catalysts for individuals and families.

Spiritual Self-Care Checklist
Spiritual beliefs and practices play a significant role in resilience by offering meaning, support, and comfort in the face of adversity, especially in situations beyond comprehension, clarity, or control. Think create a list of activities you already do to fulfill your spiritual self-care (go for walks, play with your pet, volunteer, pray), next create a list of the activities you want to do (mediate, dance, listen to music). Refer to the list over the next few weeks and try to incorporate an activity from the list of want to do items and revisit the list as often as needed.

Connect with Nature
Take time to connect with nature in an intentional way. This could be by yourself or a hike with your family. The rhythm of walking and/or running can encourage thoughts and provide an opportunity for you connect with the world beyond yourself. The whole family can benefit from time in nature, even a short leisurely walk can lower the heart rate and blood pressure and can reduce stress and anxiety. When you are by yourself, take note of your surroundings and notice the details around you. What do you see, hear, smell, and feel in the space you are in? Connecting with nature can provide individuals with a space to connect spiritually and find comfort in the face of adversity.

Write a Family Mission Statement
Families forge new meaning and growth out of adversity. Resilient families believe that their trials have made them more than what they might have been otherwise. Each family has a set of values and beliefs that are important and meaningful to them. It is important that you and your family identify questions important in helping you to craft your mission statement, and reflect on how you and your family live, laugh, love, learn, and relate. Here are some example questions to get you started: What are our family’s values? What is important to us? What impact do we want to have on others?

Nature activity adapted from Urban Nature Experiences Reduce Stress in the Context of Daily Life Based on Salivary BioMarkers
We Can Get Stronger! Transcendence and Spirituality

Resilient community members desire to give back to others in their community, which often sparks local community action. This “empathic action” has been found to in-turn increase healing and resilience. Resilient communities find inspiration in role models, heroes, and compassionate outreach. Members of these communities recognize the importance of giving love through concern, compassion, and empathy by supporting community agencies and individuals who provide much needed assistance. Communities that find ways to reinvent and reimagine new possibilities can support positive growth.

This week’s activities focus on promoting transcendence and spirituality throughout a community. By focusing on transcendence and spirituality, community members can provide meaning, purpose, and connection beyond themselves and their families.

Activities

- **Reach out to a local ministry that provides food and essentials.** Consider volunteering your time, food, toiletries, or money to help less advantaged families living and working in your community.

- **Think of small acts of kindness that can brighten someone else’s day.** Decorate your mailbox or trash/recycling containers to celebrate the work of the mail carrier and/or trash collector. Consider leaving a note or small gift of thanks to your community’s essential workers. Learn more about how acts of kindness are good for you and others.

- **Clean out closets or the basement to help others.** Donate items you no longer need. These items can help those who need assistance. Some items can be donated to specific organizations. For example, old eyeglasses can be redistributed to people in need through Lion’s Club International. Learn more about how to donate old eyeglasses.

- **Care for the environment.** Think of ways to care for the environment as a community. Encourage other community members to work together to establish a pollinator habitat in open areas within the community. Click here to find out more about plants that attract pollinators. You may also wish to promote the importance of community reusing and recycling. Learn how to promote recycling in your community.

- **Consider joining a virtual church service.** As many churches are beginning to open and have “in person” services, many still offer the ability to join services virtually. This can be a great opportunity to “visit” a new church. Listening to a church service virtually can help you to feel connected with others in your community and can help to feed your spiritual self.

Prayer

Prayers can be a powerful way to help us cope with difficult times and give us the strength to heal. When we pray out loud, it can give our family the opportunity to release their deepest hurts, giving them a voice while generating a sense of belonging. Praying together as a family also gives each person in the family an opportunity to forgive themselves and forgive others. Forgiveness can free us from our pain. Also, when we pray together for others, our prayers become more powerful.
Prayers can also strengthen family ties and relationships as we gain a sense of connectedness with each other and find out what is happening in each other’s lives. We can discover each other’s needs and dreams as we open up communication and give each family member the opportunity to show that they care about each other. Below are some suggestions for prayer:

- **Join together in prayer.** When people cannot pray together in person, they may choose to pray together virtually. This serves multiple purposes; to receive more blessings, to gain a sense of soul satisfaction and a feeling of togetherness/united souls, and to promote socialization. People can also pray for spiritual, emotional and physical healing for themselves, their families and others.
- **Make a rosary/tasbih.** Consider making a rosary or tasbih with others. Click to find out how to make a simple rosary without beads or a homemade tasbih.
- **Sharing religious music.** Invite older community members to teach younger community members a religious hymn or song. This can promote a feeling of relatedness. This sharing of wisdom with a new generation can help older community members feel needed and a sense of togetherness.