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BACK-TO-SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

SUPPORTING OUR CHILDREN FOR A SUCCESSFUL YEAR AHEAD

As August progresses and the new school year approaches, parents and caregivers are preparing children for the transition back to school. While new classes, reuniting with friends, and extracurricular activities can be exciting, this time can also present challenges for children. For the [20 percent](#) of children who suffer from a mental health or learning disorder, back-to-school time can be exceptionally difficult.

It is crucial to prioritize your child's mental health, as supporting their emotional well-being is essential for a successful and enjoyable school year. Explore strategies and resources to help children cope with these challenges and changes, ensuring they feel supported and ready to thrive academically and socially.

PROMOTE A HEALTHY TRANSITION

The return to school can be a stressful time, whether it's a child's first day of kindergarten, a transition to middle or high school, or just the end of the freedoms of summer. It's normal for children to feel anxious about these changes. Here's how you can help ease their worries:

- **Communicate:** Encourage your child to express their feelings about going back to school. Acknowledge their fears, make them feel understood, and reassure them that it's perfectly normal to feel anxious about these changes. As children enter their teens, their brains undergo significant changes that can affect behavior and emotional health. Keep communication open and provide support as they navigate this period.
- **Create Routines:** A consistent routine fosters a sense of security in children. Establishing a regular sleep schedule, eating healthy meals, and setting aside time for homework and relaxation can help children adjust to the rhythm of the school year.
- **Make Advance Preparations:** If possible, attend any scheduled school orientations. Meeting teachers, locating classrooms, and becoming familiar with the school layout can help students feel more confident on the first day of school. If there is no scheduled orientation, make time to visit the school ahead of time to help children familiarize themselves with the environment. It can also be helpful to practice morning routines like getting ready for the bus or identifying routes to school.

STRESS-FREE HOMEWORK ENVIRONMENT

As the school year begins, establishing a supportive homework environment is crucial for all children, especially those with neurodivergent conditions. Here's how to create a positive and effective homework routine for both neurodivergent and neurotypical children.

UNDERSTANDING THE NEED FOR BALANCE

Young children, particularly in elementary school, benefit greatly from play and movement. Many schools are now reducing homework for younger students to ensure they have ample time for unstructured play and family interaction. At this stage, homework should be manageable and developmentally appropriate, with an emphasis on activities like reading with a parent. This approach supports both academic and emotional development.

Children need to develop strong executive functioning skills—such as planning, organizing, and executing tasks—to handle homework independently. During elementary years, parents typically need to assist due to children's developing attention spans and motor skills. By around fifth grade, children should start developing these skills to manage homework with less parental assistance.

Teach children to balance homework with relaxation and family time. Overloading them with excessive homework can lead to stress and negatively impact their love of learning.

STRATEGIES FOR STUDENTS

- **Establish Consistent Routines:** Set a regular time and place for homework to help all children feel secure and organized. A predictable routine reduces anxiety and improves focus.
- **Create a Conducive Workspace:** Designate a quiet, well-lit area free from distractions. This environment supports concentration and efficiency.
- **Break Tasks into Manageable Steps:** Divide assignments into smaller, manageable tasks to avoid overwhelming children. This approach helps them track progress and stay motivated.
- **Adapt to Specific Needs:** Neurodivergent children, such as those with ADHD or autism, may need additional accommodations. Tailor homework routines to their unique needs, such as incorporating sensory tools or visual aids.
- **Encourage Breaks:** Neurodivergent children might benefit from shorter, more frequent breaks during homework sessions to manage energy levels and maintain focus.
- **Collaborate with Educators:** Work with your child's teacher to ensure homework aligns with their abilities. For neurodivergent students, discuss potential modifications to support

independent completion and effective workload management.

FOSTERING ONGOING SUPPORT

- **Engage with Educators:** Regular communication with teachers can provide insights into your child's progress and highlight areas needing additional support. This is crucial for all children but especially important for those with neurodivergent conditions.
- **Maintain Open Dialogue:** Keep lines of communication open with your child regarding their homework and any challenges they face. Understanding their perspective helps you provide the right support and make necessary adjustments.

By addressing both mental health and homework needs, you can help your child thrive academically and emotionally throughout the school year. To better support your child's needs, explore Bloom: Supporting You in Growing Kids' Mental Well-Being for valuable resources and strategies. Additionally, consider discussing neurodivergent challenges with your primary care provider to find personalized methods for support. [Begin your journey with Bloom](#) by using code **BLFC01**.

LEARN ABOUT BLOOM



HOW TO PREP FOR A 5K

REGISTER FOR THE FRANKLIN COUNTY 5K & THRIVEON CHALLENGE

Participating in this year's Franklin County 5k & ThriveOn Challenge is a fantastic step towards better health and well-being. If you're among the many who signed up, you might be wondering, "How can I successfully complete this?" Whether you walk, run, or do a combination of both, finishing a 5k is a significant achievement that enhances your health and boosts your confidence, regardless of the time on the clock when you cross the finish line.

Here's how to prepare effectively for the 5k:

Assess Your Starting Point: Before beginning your training, assess your current fitness level. Determine how far and how fast you can comfortably walk or run. This will help you set realistic goals and create a training plan that suits your needs.

Set a Goal: Decide whether your goal is to walk, run, or combine both for the 5k. Having a clear goal can keep you motivated and focused. Whether you aim to finish the race, achieve a personal best, or simply enjoy the experience, having a specific objective will guide your training.

Create a Training Plan: A well-structured training plan is essential for success. Here's a basic outline:

Weeks 1-2: Build a Base

- Walk or run/walk for 20-30 minutes, three times a week with a rest day in-between run/walk days.
- Try intervals of 1-5 minutes, switching off between running and walking. (Example: Run for 1 minute then walk for 1 minute and repeat until you reach 20 minutes)

Weeks 3-4: Increase Endurance

- Walk or run/walk for 30-35 minutes, three times a week with a rest day in-between run/walk days.
- Try intervals of 7-8 minutes, switching off between running and walking.

Weeks 5-6: Add Intensity

- Walk or run/walk for 35-40 minutes, three times a week with a rest day in-between run/walk days.
- Try intervals of 8-10 minutes, switching off between running and walking.

Weeks 7-8: Peak Training

- Walk or run/walk for 40-45 minutes, three times a week with a rest day in-between run/walk days.
- Try intervals of 9-12 minutes, switching off between running and walking.

Week 9: Tapering

- Reduce intensity and duration to allow your body to recover.
- Keep sessions light and easy.

Stay Consistent: Stick to your training plan as closely as possible. Consistency is key to building endurance and preparing your body for the 5k. Even on busy days, fitting in a short session can help maintain your progress.

Listen to Your Body: Pay attention to how your body feels during and after workouts. If you experience pain or excessive fatigue, take a break, or modify your plan. Rest is an essential part of training and helps prevent injuries.

Incorporate Strength and Flexibility Training: Adding strength and flexibility exercises to your routine can improve your overall performance and reduce the risk of injury. Include activities like yoga, Pilates, or bodyweight exercises a couple of times a week.

Fuel Your Body: Maintain a balanced diet rich in whole grains, lean proteins, fruits, and vegetables. Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water before, during, and after your workouts. Proper nutrition supports your training and enhances recovery.

Stay Motivated: Keep your motivation high by tracking your progress, celebrating small milestones, and staying connected with fellow participants. Joining a training group or finding a workout buddy can provide support and encouragement.

Prepare for Race Day: As race day approaches, get ready by:

1. **Tapering:** Reduce your training intensity to ensure you're well-rested.
2. **Gathering Gear:** Prepare your running or walking gear, including comfortable shoes and appropriate clothing.
3. **Planning Logistics:** Familiarize yourself with the race course, start time, and parking details.
4. **Enjoy the Experience:** On race day, focus on enjoying the experience. Trust your training, pace yourself, and soak in the positive atmosphere. Whether you walk, run, or combine both, crossing the finish line is a remarkable achievement.

By following these steps, you can confidently prepare for the Franklin County 5k & ThriveOn Challenge. Embrace the journey, celebrate your progress, and look forward to the sense of accomplishment that comes with completing the race. Registration for this year's event is still open with limited spots left! Virtual registration is available until October 13th. If you would like to sign up as a participant or volunteer, click the icon below.

[REGISTER FOR THE 5K](#)

EMOTIONAL WELLBEING INSIGHTS

What is Neurodiversity? - Neurodiversity refers to the natural variations in how people learn, think, perceive the world, interact, and process information. It includes conditions such as autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

These different ways of thinking and problem-solving can foster innovation and creativity. Despite its benefits, only 1 out of 10 people disclose their neurodivergence to their employers.

A neurotypical person thinks, perceives, and behaves in ways considered the norm by the general population. Many institutions, including schools, sports leagues, and workplaces, are often designed to accommodate neurotypical people.

However, there is no universally stable concept of "normal." Perceptions and behaviors considered normal vary greatly depending on culture and location. For example, direct eye contact is expected in some cultures but considered rude in others.

Neurodiversity embraces the idea that there are many unique ways to think, behave, and learn. It values differences without labeling one way of thinking as better than another. When referring to an individual, "neurodivergent" may be used to describe how they navigate the world. Examples of neurodivergent individuals include:

- **People with dyslexia:** They have difficulty with reading and spelling due to impacts on the brain's language processing area.
- **People with ADHD:** Individuals with a cluster of symptoms that may result in inattention, hyperactivity or impulsivity.
- **People with autism:** Individuals who may experience social, learning, and behavioral differences that range on a spectrum.

While everyone with a mental disability is considered neurodivergent, not all neurodivergent people are considered disabled. The neurodiversity movement celebrates the vast differences in people's thought processes and behaviors, advocating for acknowledgment and accommodation of these differences.

CHALLENGES AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF NEURODIVERGENT INDIVIDUALS

Neurodivergent individuals often feel excluded and invisible, a feeling exacerbated by stereotypical portrayals in pop culture. They are frequently depicted as unemotional or struggling to triumph over everyday challenges, which can influence how they are perceived by others and by organizations.

However, neurodivergent people bring valuable talents, skills, and perspectives that can enhance productivity and performance. Tapping into the strengths of neurodivergent individuals can have many benefits, including:

- Innovation and creativity
- Technical, design, and creative strengths
- New ways to solve problems
- High levels of concentration
- Keen accuracy and ability to detect errors
- Strong recall of information and detailed factual knowledge
- Reliability and persistence

As a member of the Franklin County Cooperative, you have access to several confidential and free resources designed to support you in various aspects of life. One invaluable resource is Valerie Schenk-Greil, your dedicated EAP Consultant through Optum. Valerie is available to help you navigate challenges such as work-life balance, parenting and family concerns, depression, anxiety, stress, and more.

*Your discussions with Valerie are completely confidential and incur no cost to you. You can reach out to her by calling the Onsite EAP and Health Engagement Nurse Support Line at **614.525.6773** or you can contact Valerie with the prompts below.*



Valerie Schenk-Greil LPCC, LICDC, NCC

[Email Valerie](#) or [Book An Appointment](#)