

# The Parent and Family Engagement Connection

Home & School

*"Together We Can Make a Difference"*



**Shannon Lang**

Terry Brooks once said, "Everything changes with time's passage. Only time itself is constant." Change is not always comfortable, but it is inevitable. Change comes in many forms that we tackle on a regular basis. Our lives can be changed by big events such as marriage, children, or the death of our loved ones. It can also come from smaller events such as bringing home a new pet, purchasing a new car, or even getting a new haircut. Even though these things seem insignificant, they do create a new process to our regular schedule. Over the last two years, our world has seen many changes. As we struggle to navigate through all of these new changes, many have said, "When we get back to normal..." The more I consider this phrase, the more I believe we will never get back to where we were before, and maybe that isn't a bad thing. Reflecting on the changes I have experienced, there are many that I feel are changes for the better. I have been able to spend more precious time with my own children at home than I have before. Being 19 and 15 years old, they will soon be out of my house, and I have realized this mandated time with them is a gift. In the educational world, we have had the opportunity to look at our education system through an entirely different lens. We have learned how to teach remotely, learned how to meet individual students where they are, and most importantly we have gotten to work with parents and families more than we ever have before. Due to quarantines and online learning, parents and families have had firsthand experiences with their students education as they became the teachers themselves in many instances. This was stressful for many, including myself, but I personally feel bringing parents to the forefront of our education system has been a need for a long time. Moving forward into the spring of 2022, the pandemic seems to be on the rise again, and we are once again faced with uncertainty for the future. One thing I continue to try on a daily basis is to look at the positive that comes with each new day and share that with my kids. I want them to understand that even when things are hard, and we face challenges, those struggles are what make us strong. I want my kids to live each day with excitement and determination. My challenge for the spring is to find one positive each day to share with my family, realizing this change we are living through is just another season of life that will eventually mold each of us into the people we were destined to be, and people the world needs.

**The flower that blooms in adversity is the most rare and beautiful of all. -Mulan**

## My Daddy, MD

Whenever daddy signs his name  
He always writes MD.  
So people always know  
That he belongs to me.

For MD means "MY DADDY"  
Or something just the same.  
And that is why he always puts  
Those letters in his name.

Some letters in this name are small  
But these are not, you see.  
He always makes them big like that  
Because he's proud of me.

Author Unknown



# How to Overcome Test Anxiety

*Test anxiety is a type of performance anxiety in which fear of failure contributes to symptoms that interfere with your ability to perform well in an exam situation.*

Before a test, anyone can feel a bit anxious.

If you experience serious test anxiety, you may have physical symptoms such as a headache, nausea, diarrhea, shortness of breath, and light-headedness. You could even have a panic attack, during which you may feel like it's hard to breathe or you may think you're having a heart attack.

Feelings of anger, fear, and helplessness are other symptoms of test anxiety, as are thinking negatively and comparing yourself to others. If you experience test anxiety, there are a number of coping strategies that you can employ. Below are 10 tips to help you cope.

**Prepare Well** - Ensuring that you are well-prepared for a test can put your mind at ease and help get rid of the anxiety you may feel when test day arrives.

Cramming for a test or exam will only increase your anxiety. Instead, follow this routine to give yourself the best chance at learning all the material well:

- Ask friends who study regularly for advice.
- Find a study skills tutor.
- Join a study group.
- Read books about study skills.

Finally, learn all you can about the test or exam in advance. Knowing the types of questions and whether they are multiple-choice or essay can help ensure that there will be no last-minute surprises.

**Watch Self-Talk** - When performance suffers because of test anxiety, it can be easy to fall into a downward spiral of negative thinking. Watch what you are telling yourself and replace any negative thoughts with positive ones.

Consider how rational your thoughts are and whether there are better things you could say to yourself.

## Don't Tell Yourself

- "I should have studied more."
- "I must be stupid."
- "I have to do well, everything is on the line."

## Do Tell Yourself

- "I am prepared for this test."
- "Even if I don't do well, it's not the end of the world."
- "I am smart enough to do well."

**Visualize Success** - Elite athletes visualize themselves succeeding in competition. You can do the same to overcome test anxiety.

- While studying, imagine yourself feeling confident and clearheaded in the exam. Visualizing yourself doing well on the test can help you make it happen in real life.

**Use Relaxation Strategies** - Make use of relaxation strategies such as deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation (PMR), and guided imagery. Use these strategies in the weeks leading up to a test, and during the testing situation as needed.

**Stay Healthy** - When faced with multiple tests or exams, you might start to neglect your physical health. Don't fall into this trap!

Regular exercise, adequate sleep, and good nutrition are all important components of a lifestyle that will keep stress at a minimum. On the day of a test, be sure to eat an adequate breakfast and avoid excess caffeine, as this will only contribute to anxiety.

**Arrive Early** - Nothing will heighten anxiety like the feeling of rushing to get to a test. Arrive at least 10 minutes early. If waiting for the test to begin makes you nervous, bring along a magazine or other diversion to keep your mind occupied. Avoid interacting with people who are anxious before a test.

**Focus During the Test** - During the test, do everything you can to maintain focus. If you find yourself becoming anxious, stop and regroup. Sharpen your pencil, ask a question, or focus on taking deep breaths.

Remember to take your time but check your watch to pace yourself. Before starting the test, do a quick review and read directions twice. Start with the easiest questions first.

**Accept a Little Anxiety** - Recognize that a little bit of anxiety before a test is a good thing. If you did not feel nervous at all, you might not be motivated to do your best. It is only when anxiety becomes unmanageable that it becomes a problem.

**Expect Setbacks** - If you have a bad experience and get a grade that's lower than you were expecting, remind yourself that there will always be roadblocks along the way. Plan for a better experience next time and know that one bad test result does not mean that you can't improve in the future.

**Reward Yourself** - Plan a reward for yourself after the test. Take some time to relax and clear your mind. Don't dwell on mistakes you may have made or worry about how you did. Whenever possible, give yourself a break before starting to study for another test.

<https://www.verywellmind.com/test-anxiety>



# Safe and Sound Schools' Guide To Talking About School Safety With Your Young Child



Discussing school safety with your child may seem intimidating, especially if you don't feel like you have all the answers. However, here are a few tips that can help you navigate these conversations in a way that feels natural and effective.

- ✓ **DO YOUR HOMEWORK.** Before you talk to your child about school safety, do a little homework to educate yourself on what safety measures are in place at their school. This will prepare you to respond appropriately to any concerns or questions your child might have. For example, ask your school administration or school safety coordinator what types of drills students are participating in. Learn what instructions are being given and the language used to explain these measures to students. Remember that the more prepared you are, the more comfortable you will feel talking about school safety, ensuring a more positive experience with your **child**.
- ✓ **START BY ASKING YOUR CHILD QUESTIONS.** Probing questions helps you gauge the level of understanding your child already has about school safety and what information they are lacking. Some good opening questions are: What does your school do to help keep you safe? or What are some of the things your school is teaching you about safety? If your child comes to you about a concern they have based on things they have heard on the news or from peers at school, seek to better understand what they heard and what is bothering them specifically. Don't assume. For example, ask: Tell me exactly what you heard? How does that make you feel?
- ✓ **VALIDATE THEIR CONCERNS.** If your child expresses concerns or feelings of being unsafe, reassure them that those feelings are perfectly normal. Empathize with them and maybe share your own personal experience of a time you felt similar feelings.
- ✓ **FOLLOW YOUR CHILD'S LEAD.** It is important when talking to your child about school safety to keep your responses simple, without elaboration. Keep on topic by addressing their specific concerns or misunderstanding with regard to school safety.
- ✓ **STAY FACTUAL.** Keep your responses to your child's concerns as factual as possible, sighting specific safety measures and resources their school has in place to protect and help them. If you don't know the answer, that's okay. There is nothing wrong with saying that you aren't sure and need time to answer the question. Tell your student the steps you plan to take to get answers to the questions.
- ✓ **EMPOWER THEM.** It is important to end these important conversations on a positive note. Invite your child to come up with ideas of their own to help improve safety issues at their school and challenge them to get involved. Let them know how important their role is in school safety and that their voice matters.

[Visit www.safeandsoundschools.org/resources/parents](http://www.safeandsoundschools.org/resources/parents) for more parent resources.

## 2021-2022 FALL PROMISING PRACTICE WINNERS

**Levelland ISD**  
**Migrant Mother's Day Presentation**



**Klein ISD**  
**Kaiser Elementary & Eiland Elementary**  
**Texas A&M Project Moopil Group**



**Laredo ISD**  
**Parental Skills & Development Courses**



## SUGGESTED IDEAS FOR PARENTS TO PROMOTE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL)



Parents need to fill a child's  
Bucket of self-esteem so high that the rest of the world  
Can't poke enough holes to drain it dry.  
Alvin Price

Developing the social and emotional skills of children is a critical way to ensure that they grow up into healthy, well-adjusted adults. Many schools are now integrating Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) into their lesson plans. Parents also play a role in promoting SEL! Parents have a dual role to play in raising a self-aware, respectful child who knows how to manage his or her emotions, make responsible decisions, and resolve conflicts non-violently. At home, you should strive to create an environment of trust, respect, and support. Remember that modeling “emotionally intelligent” behavior at home is the first step in nurturing emotionally intelligent children. At school, you can work with other members of your school community to create a climate that supports social and emotional learning—in and out of the classroom.

Here are some specific steps you can take to nurture an emotionally intelligent child, and additional resources you can use to learn more about social and emotional learning.

1. Visit a local library and read a book with a SEL component. You can use stories that you read with your children to help them understand SEL concepts in action. Let your child choose a book and then sit down and read it together. Make sure you discuss the motivations and actions of the characters.
2. Create cooperative learning games that your child can play with siblings or friends. Playing games among peers with a cooperative goal is a great way to reinforce SEL concepts like understanding and patience. Some great examples of these games include “Cross the River” or “Human Knot.”
3. Set a goal for the summer and help your child keep track of it. Agree on an age-appropriate summer goal with your child and help them track their progress. For example, your child may set a goal of being able to read thirty new words by the end of the summer. Help them create a graph to track their progress to reinforce concepts like determination and help children learn to deal with emotions like frustration.

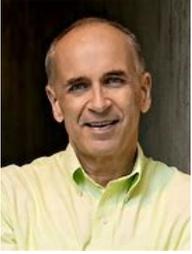
4. Model the behavior you seek. Whether it's apologizing when you're in the wrong or treating others with respect and kindness, children learn a great deal about relationships from observing the behavior of their parents.
5. Start a summer journal. Buy some cheap notebooks for your child and encourage them to keep a journal of their thoughts and feelings over the summer. Whether they choose to draw pictures or free-write, journaling can help children keep sense of their thoughts and feelings and express them in a healthy manner.
6. Create core lists for each week of summer break. Age-appropriate chores can teach children responsibility and the importance of follow through. Parents can change which chores their child is responsible for from week to week while keeping the routine constant.
7. Nurture your child's self-esteem. A child with a good sense of self is happier, more well-adjusted, and does better in school. Strategies for fostering self-esteem include giving your child responsibilities, allowing her to make age-appropriate choices, and showing your appreciation for a job well done.
8. Respect differences. Every child has his or her own unique talents and abilities. Whether in academics, athletics, or interpersonal relationships, resist the urge to compare your child to friends or siblings. Instead, honor your child's accomplishments and provide support and encouragement for the evitable challenges he faces.
9. Check in with your child's feelings. Simply asking “how are you feeling?” every day shows your children that their emotions matter. This also helps children learn to label their emotions and learn to deal with them in an appropriate way.

Integrating social and emotional learning concepts into your child is a great way for parents to reinforce the concepts children are already learning at school. The more time that parents dedicate to these concepts, the better equipped children will be for a future full of learning!

Excerpts from *Social and Emotional Learning: Strategies for Parents by Edutopia* and *Suggested Ideas to Promote Social and Emotional Learning by Prevent Child Abuse*.

# 5 Tips to Jump Start Family Engagement in the New Year

By: Steve Constantino



*The New Year is a time for celebration, renewal and creating resolutions to guide us throughout the year. Even though the pandemic rages on, there still exists a spirit of optimism amongst us. Understanding that COVID-related schooling issues still plague many districts, here are some COVID-proof tips to engage with families as the new year starts.*

## 1. Make a Call to Just Say 'Hello'

Over the years, I have heard countless stories from appreciative families who receive a phone call from a teacher, for no other reason than to say hello or check in. The New Year gives us an opportunity to reach out to those families that have been disengaged and may not know how to engage or reengage. Just say hi and Happy New Year. No academic agenda, no negative news, just "Hi. Happy New Year! I'm looking forward to a great 2022!" Pledge to make one call a day.

## 2. An Interactive Lesson

Interactive lesson design incorporates families into the daily learning of students. More than just checking homework or going over vocabulary words, an interactive lesson allows families to engage with learning and gives students an opportunity to teach their families what they have learned. Keep it simple. Maybe a short interview about New Year's customs, or a fun puzzle or number game based on 2022. The trick is to keep it simple and fun. Encourage pictures or videos to be sent in.

## 3. A Weekly Question

Those of you who know me, know about my famous "Two Question Test." Let's help families avoid questions like "what did you do in school today?" or "Do you have any homework?" Instead give them a question they can ask their child and encourage them to report back to you. For example: *"This week we studied three classifications of dinosaurs. Scientists have complex ways of classifying dinosaurs, but most people separate them into three groups: carnivores, herbivores, and omnivores. See if your child can remember these three categories. Let me know the outcome!"* It's a way to give families a discussion topic and a great way to check for understanding!

## 4. Make a Visit

While COVID has made it difficult to continue the practice of in-home visits, there are other ways to stay connected to families. Curbside visits, front porch visits and virtual visits are three options that are being used successfully by many educators across the country. You can even create a virtual time to share a cup of coffee or tea and just chat with parents. A short, informal, and personable virtual visit can go a long way toward building support and trust.

## 5. A New Year's Resolution: Believe in Engagement

As you think about your resolutions for this year, consider a resolution that reaffirms your commitment to engaging every family. Just the mere act of committing to this idea will begin to change perspectives and improve relationships. It doesn't (or shouldn't) take extensive time or energy. A quick hello, a fun short family lesson, a question, and a visit can make a huge difference on how this school year ends and how the next one begins.

# 7 Things You Need Before Filling Out the 2022–23 FAFSA® Form

If you need financial aid to pay for college, complete the *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA®) form. The 2022–23 FAFSA form is now available. Fill it out as soon as possible on or after Oct. 1 at the official government site, [fafsa.gov](https://fafsa.gov).

It's easier to complete the FAFSA form if you gather what you need ahead of time. Here are a few items to help you fill it out.

- Your FSA ID**—If you haven't done so already, create an FSA ID, which is your account username and password. The FSA ID is a digital legal signature that lets you complete and update the FAFSA form, so create your own and keep it safe. Parents of dependent students will need to use their own FSA ID to complete the FAFSA process. We recommend creating your account early—even before you're ready to complete the FAFSA form. This extra step can avoid delays in the process especially since it can take up to three days before you can use your FSA ID.
- Your Social Security Number**—You can find your Social Security number (SSN) on your Social Security card. If you don't have access to it, or you don't know where it is, you can request a new or replacement card from the Social Security Administration. If you are not a U.S. citizen, but meet other eligibility criteria for federal student aid, you'll also need your Alien Registration number. Both parents and students need this information for the FAFSA form.
- Your Driver's License Number**—You'll need to enter your driver's license on the FAFSA form. If you don't have a driver's license, then don't worry about this step.
- Your Federal Income Tax Return**—On the 2022–23 FAFSA form, you (and your parents, if you are a dependent student) will report your 2020 income. Since you probably filed your 2020 income tax return by the time the FAFSA form is available, you may be eligible to transfer your tax information into the FAFSA form right away using the IRS Data Retrieval Tool (DRT).
- Records of Your Untaxed Income**—The FAFSA questions about untaxed income, such as child support, interest income, and veterans' noneducation benefits may apply to you. On the 2022–23 FAFSA form, you'll report 2020 tax or calendar year information when asked these questions. Find specific details for parents and students.
- Records of Your Assets (Money)**—This section includes savings and checking account balances, as well as the value of investments, such as stocks, bonds, and real estate (excluding your primary residence.) Report the current amounts as of the date you sign the FAFSA form, rather than reporting the 2020 tax year amounts.
- List of the School(s) You Are Interested in Attending**— Be sure to add any college you're considering, even if you haven't applied or been accepted yet.
  - Even if it's only a slight chance you'll apply to a college, list the school on your FAFSA form. You can always remove a school later if you decide not to apply, but if you wait to add a school, you could miss out on financial aid.
  - The schools you list on your FAFSA form will automatically receive your FAFSA results electronically. They will use your FAFSA information to determine the types and amounts of financial aid you may receive.
  - If you add a school to your FAFSA form and later decide not to apply for admission to that school, that's OK! The school likely won't offer you aid until you've been accepted anyway.
  - You can list up to 10 schools at a time on your FAFSA form. Find out what you can do when you apply to more than 10 schools.

**TIP:** Several states require you to list schools in a particular order to be considered for state aid. For instance, you might need to list a state school first. Find out whether your state has a requirement for the order in which you list schools on your FAFSA form. <https://studentaid.gov/articles/things-you-need-for-fafsa/>

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The Parent and Family Engagement Connection is posted on our website four times a year for parents and educators of Texas. This newsletter is available in Spanish, Vietnamese, German, Tagalog and Korean.

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