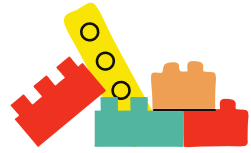


# PROJECT SUN

Helping children flourish



## The Importance of Parenting with Play

ANDREA L. BUSHALA, LCSW, CERTIFIED THERAPLAY® THERAPIST, TRAINER, AND SUPERVISOR

Parenting can be one of the most unrelenting, confusing, challenging jobs you will ever have. Every day, the parenting stakes seem to be higher and higher. And advice comes from everyone... doctors, teachers, your parents, other parents, and strangers on the street (or internet). But one thing is for sure, parenting with play is the best way to connect with our children, build resilience, and create overall family well-being.

Play is the language of children. When adults play with their children, they engage in activities that build better brains and healthier bodies. Play introduces developmentally appropriate challenges, leads to a sense of accomplishment, and allows a child to hone prosocial skills such as turn-taking and impulse control. Connected play helps a child feel secure, cared for, worthy, and understood. Play also provides opportunity for the parent to help the child manage big emotions. When children feel connected to their caregivers, they feel better about themselves. And when they feel better about themselves, challenging behaviors are reduced – sometimes those behaviors even disappear!

During the May Parent Café presentation, **The Importance of Parenting with Play**, you will learn about the components that need to be present in play that help children develop the basis for a lifetime of good mental health and connection to the people they love. Join us to learn how structure, engagement, nurture, and challenge, the four dimensions of [Theraplay](#), support important brain growth in children. And be prepared to join in because we will be practicing lots of ways to have FUN! Project SUN's May Parent Café will be held via webinar on May 21 from 5:00 - 6:30 PM.

[Click here to register by May 20.](#)

### May is Mental Health Month!



During the month of May, Project SUN is posting daily mental-health boosting activities, fun facts, and family activities on our Facebook page. Be sure to follow us and share!

 [Project SUN Kankakee](#)

### Phrase of the Month

## Positive Youth Development

"Positive youth development (PYD) is a **strengths-based** approach used by programs to support the development of young people's **skills**, nurture their **interests and values**, seek and incorporate their **input**, and connect them to positive adults and useful resources."

[www.childtrends.org](http://www.childtrends.org), 2020 - "Embedding a Racial Equity Perspective in the Positive Youth Development Approach"



## Help Identify Youth Development Opportunities

Positive youth development opportunities empower our youth to help them identify their own strengths. Many studies have found that participation in extra-curricular and community-based enrichment activities comes with many positive outcomes. Even greater positive outcomes are achieved when communities have organizations that keep the developmental needs of youth in mind when establishing their programs. Through participation in these programs our youth have better opportunities to flourish.

As parents look for positive activities to help shape their child's behaviors, whether it is strengthening social skills, self-control, or focus issues, many do not know what their communities have to offer. **Project SUN is putting together a list of positive youth development opportunities in Kankakee County.**

*(Article continued on next page.)*



# Helpful Resources

We challenge you to read at least one of these resources!

Visit [projectsunkankakee.wordpress.com/](http://projectsunkankakee.wordpress.com/) to comment and share your thoughts or questions. Also, pass along what you find helpful to a friend or family member!

## FRIENDLY READ - Less Than 5 Minutes

- [Equine, music therapy builds children's confidence](#) - "Using both processes is particularly beneficial for children on the autism spectrum, who have difficulties with sound, touch, communication and socializing."
- ["How to Promote Positive Youth Development"](#) - This article, geared towards professionals who work with youth and their families, describes the 8 key elements of Positive Youth Development and ideas for application.

## REFLECTIVE READ - More than 5 Minutes

- ["Shaping Summertime Experiences: Opportunities to Promote Healthy Development and Well-Being for Children and Youth"](#) - Absence from school's structure can present children with both unique challenges and opportunities.

## ACADEMIC READ - Longer than 10 Minutes

- ["Embedding a Racial Equity Perspective in the Positive Youth Development Approach"](#) - Learn about the importance of growing positive youth development programs that embed a racial equity perspective.
- ["Being Healthy and Ready to Learn is Linked with Preschoolers' Experiences"](#) - Discover which experiences during the preschool years are associated with children's health and readiness for school.

## Help Identify Youth Development Opportunities - Continued

Help us learn about organizations that are doing great work with our youth. We are looking for all kinds of programs – for example: arts, music, theater, dance, athletic, volunteering, church/faith-based youth groups, etc. Send contact information to [augustina@cfkrv.org](mailto:augustina@cfkrv.org) so that she can follow-up and get details.

Duane Brumitt, at Tri-Star Martial Arts Academy, is a great example of someone who stresses an important message to parents about his program. He advertises, "Our program helps with ADD/ADHD. Our classes focus on self-control and self-discipline. Classes are highly structured which additionally helps those with focus issues THRIVE." [Click here to visit his website](#) and learn more about Tri-Star.

## Questions From April's More Than Sad Parent Café

These key questions were answered by Anne King at April's Parent Café presentation of More Than Sad - Suicide Prevention Education for Parents. Additionally, this ["Grief, Loss, & Suicide Resources"](#) document was compiled to help families find relevant mental health assistance, such as **crisis numbers, support groups, counseling services,** and **prevention training.**

How do we help teens when their parents are not taking the issues they are experiencing seriously?

This is a hard but important question! There are a couple options you have in this scenario. First, if you feel comfortable, consider reaching out to the teen yourself and offer to help facilitate a conversation between the parents and the young person. Second, you can reach out to the school that child attends and notify them of your concerns.

If the concern appears to be immediate (for example, you or your child sees a social media post that indicates a life-threatening situation) call 9-1-1. The SASS line (Screening, Assessments and Support Services) at the Helen Wheeler Center is also available at 815-939-3991 for 24-hour support. Your quick response in this situation is vital!

How do I set social media limits that protect my children's mental health?

Social media is constantly evolving! As a result, our kids today can not get away from bullying. Because of phones and social media, cyberbullying can happen 24/7. For young people with risk factors for suicide, including anxiety, depression, and/or low self-esteem, social media can have a negative effect on their mental health. Alternatively, youth can also use social media to reach out for help.

Heavy use of social media, more than several hours per day, can be very unhealthy. But, is hard to set limits now with schools being moved to an online format. One way to set boundaries is barring phones from staying in your child's bedroom overnight. Turning off Wifi an hour before bedtime mitigates your child's blue light exposure and can also help in building better sleeping patterns.

## June Café Topic

[Exploring the Autism Spectrum](#)  
June 18, 5:00-6:30



## Parent & Caregiver Input Needed!

[CLICK HERE](#) to take a brief, 3 minute survey. Your feedback will help us continue to present relevant topics in future Parent Cafés.