

# **Simple Everyday Ways to Improve a Child's Behavior and Mood**

## **Operation Hydration**

After learning the massive effects hydration has on not only our bodies but our brains, we try our best each day to consume 8 ounces of water together both before and after school. Dehydration has been shown to decrease focus/cognition and cause fatigue which affects mood and performance.

Children are more at risk of dehydration as they are dependent upon others for the provision of fluids, and are more active.

## **Rested kids are happy kids**

You've likely heard the term circadian rhythm but never realized just how important it is to your child's mental and emotional functioning.

Circadian rhythm (our bodies 24-hour biological sleep-wake cycle) is integral to mental health as it greatly affects the hormone cortisol which underlies mood, sleep stress pain and depression.

When a child doesn't get enough sleep or has their sleep disrupted this affects both neurotransmitters and hormones posing to impair thinking and emotional regulation skills and underlying many child behavior problems.

## **Nature power**

Studies show that being in nature can help a child regulate emotionally and have positive impacts on mood, cognition, working memory and anxiety through decreased neural activity in the area of the brain responsible for anxious thoughts.

“It was found that nature programs (for children living in urban environments) resulted in an increase in mastery (improved self-efficacy and coping skills) and relatedness (more comfortable interacting with others) and a decrease in emotional reactivity (ability to manage emotions when upset).”

If we want to take a big step in improving child behavior problems, it’s time to give up some screen time for some ‘green time’ each day.

### **Pump those proteins**

Not only did we discover the secret to improving our daughters morning meltdowns was eating more frequently to keep her blood glucose levels consistent, we also realized she would struggle greatly with her emotions and impulses when she didn’t get enough protein in her diet.

Brain cells communicate with one another via chemical messengers called neurotransmitters, which are made of amino acids, the building blocks of protein. Essentially all hormones and enzymes that cause chemical changes and control all body processes are made of proteins.

Being intentional about incorporating healthy proteins into your child’s meals each day will go far to improve both their mood and behavior.

### **Mindfulness magic**

“Kids! Time to head upstairs to put on pajamas, brush your teeth and do your mindfulness!” Clinicians and practitioners tapped into the research on mindfulness are convinced that when science catches up to culture (usually a 10-20 year lag) doctors will prescribe mindfulness daily as health maintenance for our brains.

Practicing kids mindfulness activities with your child exercises the ‘brain muscles’ responsible for self-control, calming skills, and focus.

## **Yoga pants aren't just for moms**

“If you can control the breath, you control the mind”. Yoga not only incorporates stretching, resistance training and balance (which improve mental clarity, stability, and flexibility) but allows a child to regulate their breathing.

In fast-paced life it's common for our breathing to become too fast or too slow, causing physiological stress and anxiety. Children's yoga exercises are not only fun for kids but allow them to practice controlling and regulating their emotional state through their breath.



## **Discover the 'brain bow' diet**

You are what you eat. Increasing the consumption of real foods with quality nutrients can go a long way in improving your child's ability to pay attention, feel calm and manage emotions and behavior.

Dr. Leslie Korn offers principles she refers to as the ‘brain bow diet’ which includes:

- reducing artificial sugars and regular sugar which can alter mood
- plenty of colored foods giving your child the whole range of vitamins and nutrients
- both raw and cooked foods
- observing what foods make your child feel yucky/crabby/moody as well as the ones that make them feel good

### **Use nature’s perfume**

Turns out the brain areas responsible for smell (olfactory processing) overlap with those responsible for emotion and memory and the chemical messengers in the nasal cavity have direct access to our brain’s emotion center.

Especially through the long months of winter, essential oils are such an amazing mood lifter and a fantastic way to help your child relax for bedtime for focus during homework.

These are the essential oils we love best (after researching both quality and price point).

### **PE is not enough**

Research indicates cardiovascular health plays a major role in mental health by boosting neurochemical reactions that balance mood and energy. The key is engaging in an aerobic exercise which gets the heart pumping.

Explore different types of aerobic exercise with your child and make room for this in your weekly routine. When my daughter gets finished with soccer practice I notice a drastic change in her mood (often for the remainder of the evening!).

## **Kick dyes and processed foods to the curb**

Research with a group of three-year-olds found they were more likely to lack concentration, lose their temper, interrupt others and struggle to get to sleep when they drank fruit juice dosed with colorings and preservatives.

There's a reason the standard American diet is referred to as the SAD diet. Overconsumption of refined, overly processed foods loaded with chemicals, hormones, antibiotics, and synthetic preservatives are known to alter the biological processes that underlie mood and behavior (aka inflammation and neurotransmitter imbalance).

I know this one is hard as processed food is at all the places, is much cheaper and more convenient for busy parents, but trying your best where and when you can, will pay off greatly.

Improving child behaviors and moods starts with small changes

Now when the beast visits we know what to do- I give her the universal 'uh-oh this seems like the beast, and not my kind daughter' look and we make a beeline straight for the kitchen.

Small changes over time in your child's daily habits will not only translate to better behavior in the present but also lead to healthy life habits that have a big pay off on emotional health in the future.