

Safe and Calm Over Winter Break and Beyond: Building Routines, Reducing Stress, and Managing at Home

Presented by Carole W. Sebenick, PhD
for Formed Families Forward with funding from the
Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services
December 2024

Holidays and Winter Break

- Hopeful?
- Dreadful?
- Competing expectations?

- Week before break
- 15 days of break
- Week of transition back

15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	🔔 Winter Break (No School for Students)	🔔 Winter Break (No School for Students)	28			
29	🔔 Winter Break (No School for Students)	🔔 Winter Break (No School for Students)	4			
5	6	7	8	🔔 School Board Meeting 🕒 6:00 PM 📍 SCHOOL BOARD MEETING ROOM, 1340 BRADDOCK PLACE, ALEXANDRIA VA 22314	10	11



Program Goals

1. Reflect on concerns and needs for you and your children before, during, and after Break.
2. Learn about ideas and strategies to manage stress, prevent overwhelm, and create more calm.
3. Become acquainted with professional resources and free tools and training to keep kids safe.

Checking in on current knowledge

“pre-test”



You've Survived ½ of the School Year: The Joys!



The good things

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Savor Gratitudes: Research shows it's good for your mood

School Days: What Were the Challenges

Your top sources of strain

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What's come up so far for you and your kids that have stood in the way of feeling good about things?



Since the start of the school year, how much of a problem was each of the following DUE TO THE DEMANDS OF CAREGIVING FOR A CHILD?

You felt tired, lethargic, fatigued.

- None Little Some Significant Extreme

You had problems connecting with your child.

- None Little Some Significant Extreme

You worried about your family's future.

- None Little Some Significant Extreme

You worried about your child's future.

- None Little Some Significant Extreme

You felt isolated from peers or experienced problems in your social life.

- None Little Some Significant Extreme

Based on the Caregiver Strain Questionnaire, developed by A.M. Brannan, C.A. Heflinger, & L. Bickman (1997)

You lost personal time (for exercise, medical/self-care appointments, relaxation, etc.).

- None Little Some Significant Extreme

Daily life felt chaotic; it was hard to maintain a sense of control over home routines.

- None Little Some Significant Extreme

You worried about physical safety in your home.

- None Little Some Significant Extreme

You dealt with your child getting in trouble (at school, in the community, with law enforcement).

- None Little Some Significant Extreme

You worried about other family members experiencing distress/negative feelings or behaviors.

- None Little Some Significant Extreme

Your family experienced financial strain/problems.

- None Little Some Significant Extreme

You felt sad, angry, resentful, embarrassed, or guilty.

- None Little Some Significant Extreme

Based on the Caregiver Strain Questionnaire, developed by A.M. Brannan, C.A. Heflinger, & L. Bickman (1997)

What will the next
month bring?

Can we handle it?!



Expectations vs. Reality Stress!

- The *shoulds*
- History of Crisis and Trauma
- Chronic External Stressors
- Individual Stress of Transitions
- Unique needs and demands of children—based on age, development, personality, history, skills and support
- Unique needs and demands of adults—based on age, development, personality, history, skills and support



How Do We Manage Stress and Risk?

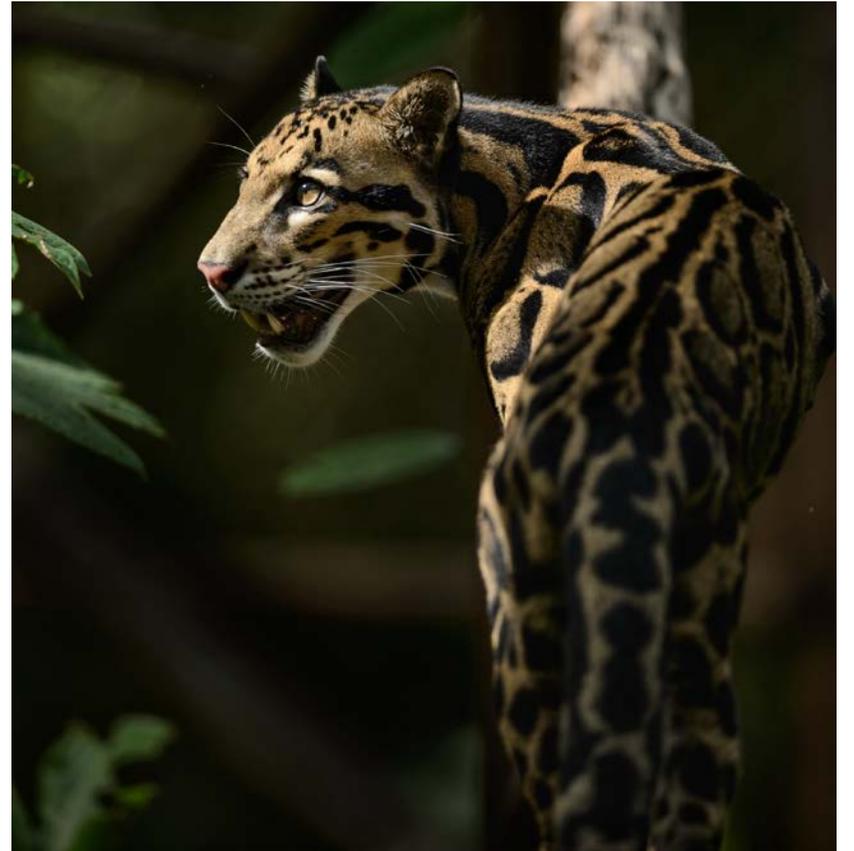
1. Understand how stress works.
 - Understand how it's different for adult and for kids.
 - Understand how it's different for people exposed to traumatic events and loss.
2. Learn strategies to prevent tragedy, establish routines and structure at home (esp. when the external structure of school is disrupted), and reduce stress and regulate emotions when stress ramps up.

What is Stress?

A normal reaction to any threat

Stress response involves predictable stages:

1. Alarm reaction to help us:
 - Fight
 - Flee
 - Freeze
2. Perceive threat is over
3. Relax and return to normal body function
OR
Stay on high alert and suffer over time



Brain Development and Our Kids

Emotions/Fear = Amygdala (fully developed at birth)

Planning, problem solving, “executive functioning” = PreFrontal Cortex (fully developed by age 17-25)

- During teen years, amygdala plays more of a role in reasoning (emotion-based decision-making); in adult years, cortex plays central role (rational decision-making)
- For all ages, stress “hijacks” PFC; amygdala in control



The Trauma-Sensitized Brain



For another good metaphor, see:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kx7PCzg0CGE&t=4s>

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Balance of Structure and Support

- Winter *Break* from demands but also from external structures.
- Holidays involve changes to routines and changes to family interactions.
- This creates stress—Some is good but it can be overwhelming (esp. for the trauma-sensitized brain and the less mature brain).



6 Steps to Calm: Responsive & Preventive Routines to Calm the Barking Dog and Invite the Wise Owl *(i.e., emotion regulation)*



Steps 1 & 2: Interrupt and Release the Energy

Stop, Take 5

- Present-moment awareness
- 5 senses

Find the tension/energy

- Physically let it go



Steps 3 & 4: Identify Feelings & Thoughts

- Label and accept/honor feelings.
- What's the negative thought behind the feeling? How can you change it?
- Talk about expectations. Build the positive into the REALITY.



Step 5: Breathe Deeply

Long exhale activates the “vagus nerve” and signals relaxation

- “Box Breathing” (4-4-4-4, or 4-4-6-2)
- “5 Finger Breathing”
- Lots of other techniques for kids (search YouTube videos!)



Step 6: Practice Gratitude

- Science shows it's linked to increased happiness
- Before bed can be a very effective routine to help sleep quality!
- It can be built into holiday rituals



Communicate the “Game Plan”

As a family, develop a plan for each day of Break (and return back to school). We often assume that kids adapt to *off*-time better than *on*-time and don't need help during breaks.

Build in transition time and down-time for each person (from tasks *and* from the excitement). Be patient with stress that arises with any change.



Communicate Expectations Clearly, and Reward For *Steps Toward* Success

- Importance of structure
- Importance of consistency
- Importance of rewards (especially moving toward “intrinsic”/internal/personal) ... *much more effective in shaping behavior than punishment!*





Involve kids in doing for others

It is better to give than to receive

You are in charge, but you can't and shouldn't do it all!



City of Alexandria, Virginia

Routines and Practices for Safety

Basic steps to prevent tragedy
for our children and children
who visit our homes

Staying Safe and Calm Over Winter Break and Beyond

December 16, 2024



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Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition of Alexandria (SAPCA)



- Created in 2007 as part of the Partnership for a Healthier Alexandria
- Our mission: To engage diverse sectors of the community in collaborative, cross-cultural and comprehensive substance abuse prevention efforts that result in a reduction of underage substance use and abuse in the City of Alexandria

Opioid Work Group



- Formed in 2015 to respond locally to the effects of the opioid crisis
- This multi-agency partnership comprised of representatives from a range of city services and community partners takes a multi-dimensional approach to attacking the crisis.



OPIOID WORK GROUP
CITY OF ALEXANDRIA

Community Resources & Supports



- Lock and Talk
- Safe Medication Disposal
- Naloxone Training
- Tips for Celebrating Safely
- Resources for Supporting Youth

Lock and Talk



- **Lock Meds. Lock Guns.**

- Limiting access to lethal means for a person in crisis is one essential strategy for preventing suicide.
- Residents can obtain free cable and trigger locks and free locking medication boxes through this program.

- **Talk Safety.**

- Talking about the problem of suicide saves lives, reduces stigma, encouraging help seeking behaviors, and aids survivors in their personal healing.

Safe Medication Disposal



- Dispose of unwanted or unused pills, liquids or other medication at one of three permanent medication drop boxes that provide year-round access to safe disposal:
 - Neighborhood Pharmacy of Del Ray
 - Inova Alexandria Hospital Emergency Department
 - Alexandria Police Department Headquarters
- Needles are not accepted at permanent medication drop box locations. Dispose of needles and syringes using a separate sharps disposal container located in the Emergency Department at Inova Alexandria Hospital.



Opioid Overdose



Opioid Overdose
Signs and symptoms of an opioid overdose include:

 <p>Unresponsiveness or unconsciousness.</p>	 <p>Pinpoint pupils.</p>
 <p>Snoring or gurgling sounds coming from mouth.</p>	 <p>Blue lips or fingernails.</p>
 <p>Shallow, slowed or stopped breathing.</p>	 <p>Cold or clammy skin.</p>

What happens during an opioid overdose?

- An individual is unconscious
- Shallow, slow or no breathing
- Blue, grey or ashen appearance
- Gurgling noises
- Pin-point pupils



Narcan (Naloxone)

Types of Opioids

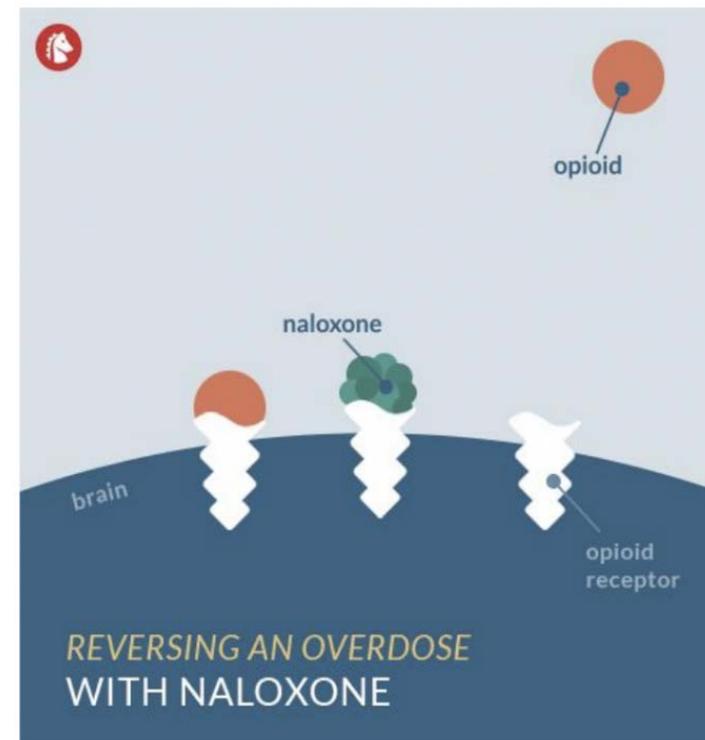
- Herion, fentanyl, prescription pain killers (hydrocodone, morphine, codeine) etc.

How Naloxone Works

- Naloxone has a stronger affinity to the opioid receptor, knocking the opioid off the receptor for 30-90 minutes.

Safety and Side Effects

- Only works on opioids
- No abuse potential



How to Respond in an Overdose



Check for responsiveness



Call 911



Administer Narcan



Check for breathing



Wait for help

Good Samaritan Laws



Safe Reporting of Overdose Law

No individual shall be subject to arrest or prosecution for:

- Simple possession of a controlled substance, marijuana, or controlled paraphernalia
- Intoxication in public
- The unlawful purchase, possession, or consumption of alcohol if the evidence for the charge was found as a result obtaining emergency medical attention.

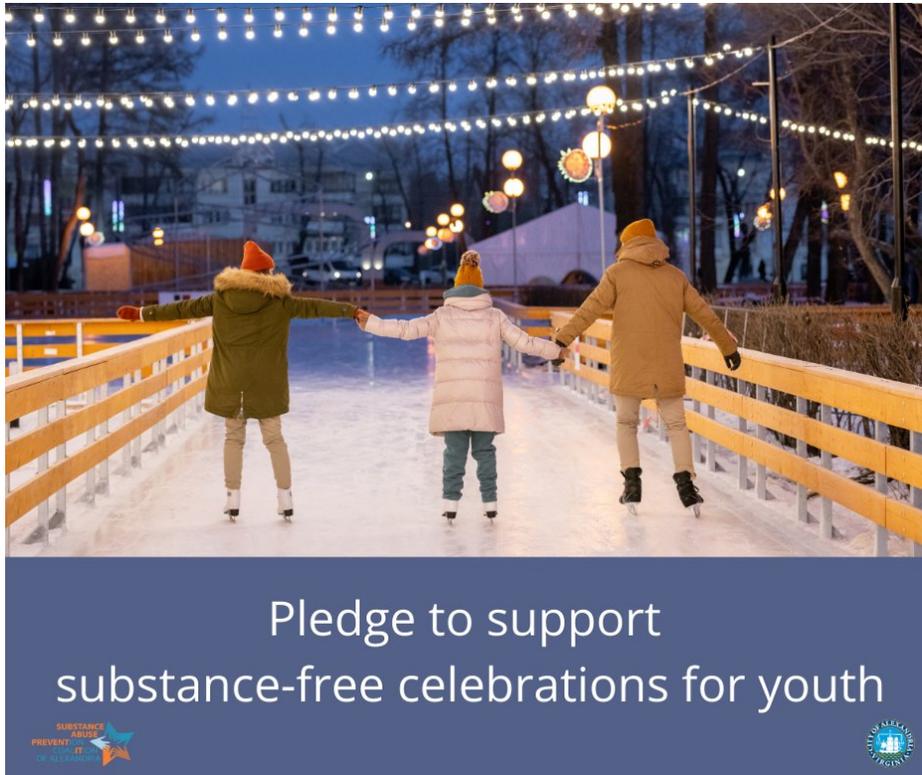
To qualify you must (a) seek emergency medical attention, for yourself or someone else (b) remain at the scene or with the person until law enforcement arrives and (c) identify yourself to the responding law-enforcement officer.



Civil Liability

Grants “a person who in good faith... administers naloxone...for overdose reversal in an emergency to an individual who is believed to be experiencing or about to experience a life-threatening opioid overdose shall not be liable for any civil damage for ordinary negligence in acts or omissions resulting from the rendering of such treatment.”

Tips for Celebrating Safely



Pledge to support
substance-free celebrations for youth

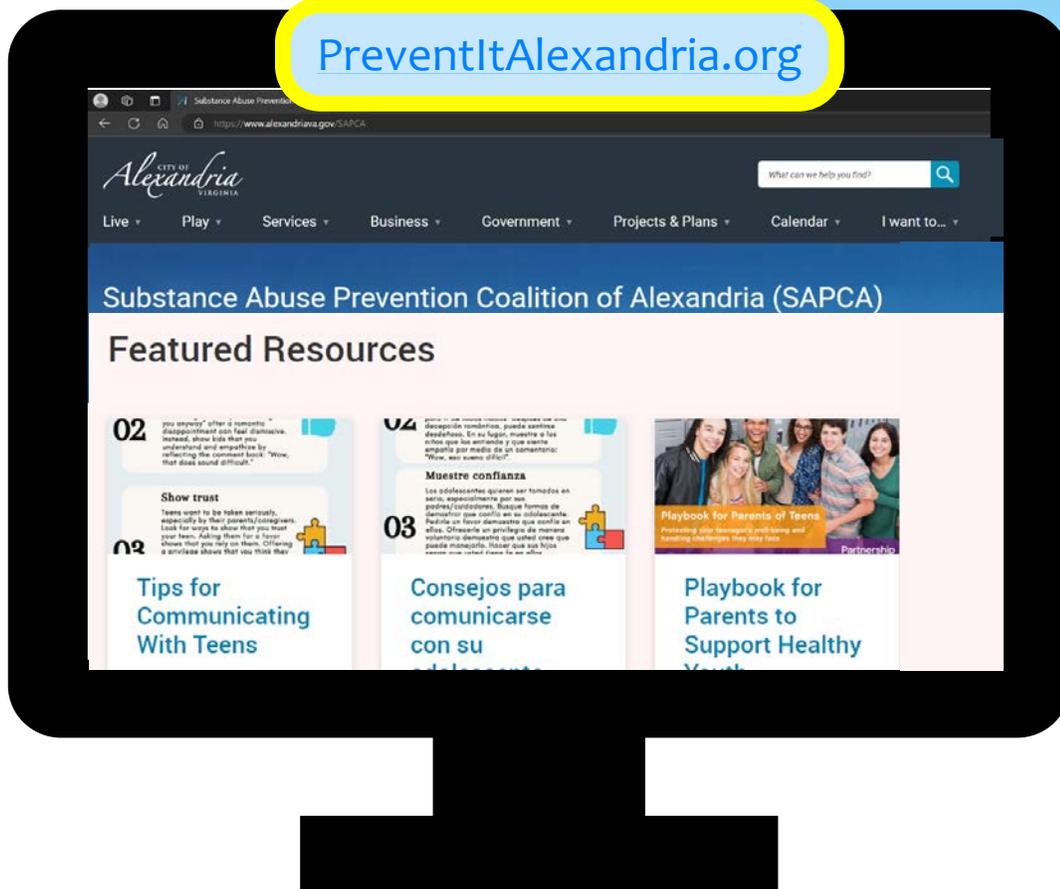


- Secure medications and alcoholic beverages
- Host alcohol-free celebrations
- Is your teen hosting or attending a party? Plan ahead!



Where to Find Resources

PreventItAlexandria.org



Alexandria Teen Text Line



 MESSAGES now

Alexandria Teen Text Line
Text TEEN, SEX, DRUGS, or GANGS to **571.640.2898** to get answers to non-urgent questions about health, relationships, pregnancy, drugs, alcohol, violence, and gangs within 24 hours, Monday through Friday.

To report an emergency, please call 911.

Learn more about youth resources at alexandriava.gov/go/3856

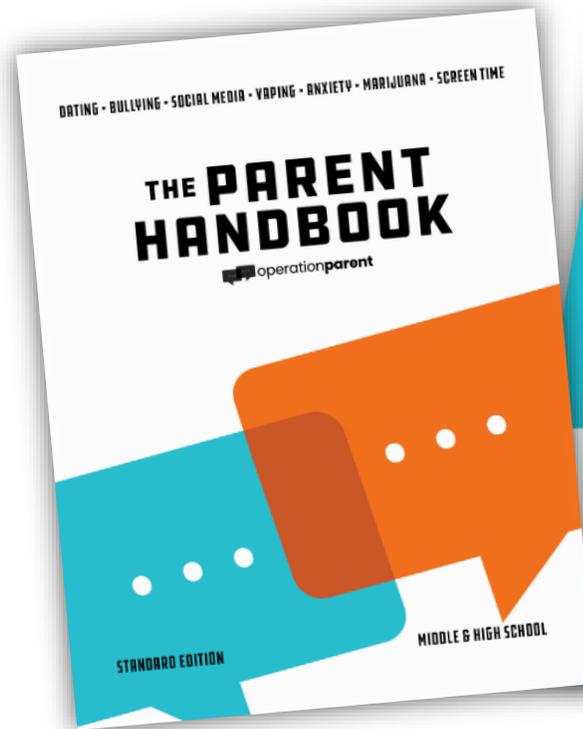
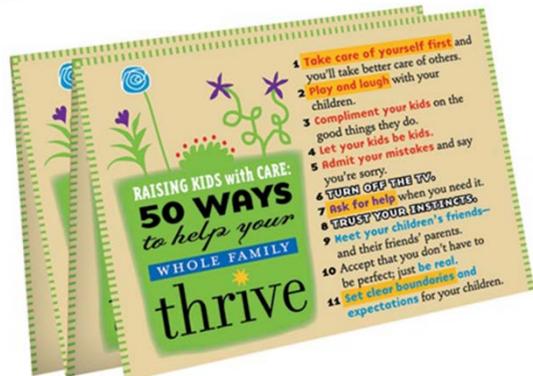
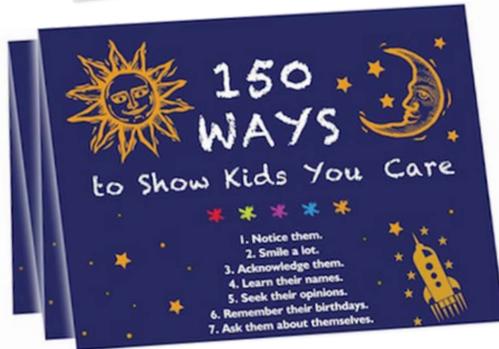
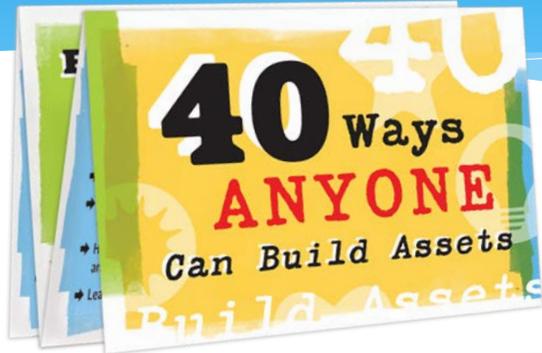
 SUBSTANCE ABUSE PREVENTION COALITION OF ALEXANDRIA

 Alexandria Campaign on Adolescent Pregnancy

 CITY OF ALEXANDRIA VIRGINIA
Department of Community and Human Services

- The Teen Text Line answers questions from teens and parents about alcohol, drugs, health, relationships, pregnancy, violence, and gangs.
- **Text TEEN to 571.640.2898** to get answers to non-urgent questions within 24 hours, Monday through Friday.

Exploring resources as a family



Seeking Help: Community Resources



- Youth with mental health or substance use concerns can contact Child and Family Behavioral Health Services
 - 571.213.7963 | DCHSYouthIntake@alexandriava.gov
- 24/7 support is available from the Crisis Text Line
 - Text "HOME" to 741-741 or visit [CrisisTextLine.org](https://www.CrisisTextLine.org) to chat with someone

Thank You!



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Learn more about SAPCA at
PreventItAlexandria.org

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Learn more about efforts to
address the opioid crisis at
alexandriava.gov/Opioids

Summary

You might be dealing with typical parenting stressors *plus* repercussions of trauma

Good stress management is result of building skills and maturing

You can teach your children 6 Steps to Calm (and you can practice with them!)

Building structure of daily routines reduces stress for all and promotes joy and connection

Taking steps to reduce access to household dangers keeps everyone safer and calmer

You and your families CAN experience a safe and (relatively) calm Winter Break and continued success!!



Checking in on what you learned

“post-test”

Best wishes for a safe and calm Winter Break!

Please provide feedback on this presentation

