

## How Tompkins Schools Promote Healthy, Bully-free Environments

New York State's Dignity for All Students Act (DASA) took effect in 2012. It requires schools to provide students with a safe and supportive environment free from discrimination, intimidation, taunting, harassment, and bullying on school property, a school bus and/or at a school function. Local schools have done a lot to comply with DASA. There has been significant training of teachers and staff. Schools have developed codes of conduct defining acceptable and unacceptable behavior and reporting procedures. Schools have designated a DASA coordinator and provide this information publically. And schools must report incidents to the state annually. Since DASA reporting took effect, the number of reported incidents has risen each year. This is likely due to schools understanding the requirements better, rather than there being more incidents. In the 2014-15 school year, Tompkins schools reported 72 incidents and an additional 10 cyberbullying incidents<sup>1</sup>. Sex and race were listed most often as the reason for a reported incident.

Bullying of any sort is inconsistent with DASA principles of creating a safe and supportive environment. In Tompkins County, 1 in 3 students say they have been bullied at school;<sup>2</sup> this is consistent with national rates<sup>3</sup>. While a majority - 86% - of Tompkins students report that they feel safe at school, 14% report that they do not feel safe<sup>4</sup>.

**What constitutes bullying?** The 3 main elements of bullying are:

- unwanted, aggressive behavior that involves a real or perceived power imbalance
- intentional behavior toward another person
- behavior that is often repeated

Bullying can happen at school and also on the playground, on the bus, in the neighborhood, and on the internet. It can be verbal (saying or writing mean things, threats), physical (hurting a person or their possessions), or social (spreading rumors, embarrassing someone). A significant amount of bullying, especially by middle schoolers, is cyberbullying, using social media and other electronic methods to threaten, hurt, or embarrass another student.

**What can you do?** Parents, school staff and other caring adults have an important role in preventing or stopping bullying.

- Help children understand bullying. Talk about what bullying is, how to stand up to it safely, and how to get help.
- Keep the lines of communication open. Check in, observe, listen.
- Talk to your child, to teachers and school officials to find out more about what's going on. Depending on the severity of the bullying, you might need additional resources, and there are many available online and in our community.
- Encourage kids to always be in the company of others. Bullies tend to target loners.

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<sup>1</sup> [NYS Dept. of Education DASA reports](#)

<sup>2</sup> [2014 Tompkins County Youth Survey](#), given in all public schools, grades 7-12

<sup>3</sup> <http://Stompoutbullying.org>

<sup>4</sup> [2014 Tompkins County Youth Survey](#)

- Encourage kids to do what they love. Special activities and hobbies can boost confidence and help kids make friends.
- Contact your school's Dignity Act coordinator for more information.

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**Love.** That word alone conjures up a myriad of emotions, memories, and hopes in our mind and in our heart. As a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle or someone beloved by a child, it is important the young people in your life know that they have your love. Here are five ways to show your kids you love them:

1. **Unconditionally.** Your son's room is a complete mess. Your daughter refuses to eat anything but chicken nuggets for a month. Your granddaughter is disrespectful and your grandson just bit the dog! All of these things push you to the limits. Through it all, never let that child feel as if your love for them has limits. They may challenge you, but your love is unconditional. These are the moments you let the love shine the brightest.
2. **Time.** Time slips away so fast, doesn't it? One minute you are teaching your son to ride a bike. The next minute he's backing down the driveway with his kids in his car. Were you there enough for all the time in between? A child needs that attention of caring adults, more than any other thing you can provide them.
3. **Tough Love.** Don't shy away from the crucial moments. The hard times. The big decisions. This is when your love is tested the most. A caring adult has to do the right thing to help share our young people and it is not always the popular thing. The love you show now will be reflected back when they are adults.
4. **See them.** We all have ideas of what we would like our kids to be. Chances are those ideas do not match the reality of who they are. Take the time to find out what really makes them the unique and amazing individuals whom you have helped to inspire.
5. **Believe in them.** This is sometimes very hard to do. Adults often want to shelter and protect our young; however, this protection doesn't always help them grow into the people that they will need to become. Young people need to learn how to be independent. Give them the skills, values, and expectations required for success, then let them fly. Believe in your child.

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### **March, 2017 is Youth Arts Month**

**Youth Art Month is a month of promoting art and art education in the United States. It is observed in March, with thousands of American schools participating, often with the involvement of local art museums, civic organizations, and performing art programs.**

In recent years, school curricula in the United States have shifted heavily toward Common Core subjects of reading and math, but what about the arts? Although some may regard art education as a luxury, simple creative activities are some of the building blocks of child development. Learning to create and appreciate visual aesthetics may be more important than ever to the development of the next generation of children as they grow up.

### **Some of the Developmental Benefits of Art Include:**

- **Motor Skills:** Many of the motions involved in making art, such as holding a paintbrush or scribbling with a crayon, are essential to the growth of fine motor skills in young children.
- **Language Development:** For very young children, making art or just talking about it provides opportunities to learn words for colors, shapes and actions.
- **Decision Making:** According to a report by Americans for the Arts, art education strengthens problem-solving and critical-thinking skills.
- **Visual Learning:** Drawing, sculpting with clay, and threading beads on a string all develop visual-spatial skills, which are more important than ever.
- **Inventiveness:** When kids are encouraged to express themselves and take risks in creating art, they develop a sense of innovation that will be important in their adult lives.
- **Improved Academic Performance:** Studies show that there is a correlation between art and other achievement. A report by Americans for the Arts states that young people who participate regularly in the arts are four times more likely to be recognized for academic achievement. <http://www.americansforthearts.org/>

### **Help to promote the arts in your children by:**

- Taking your children to performances and art exhibits and start at a young age.
- Talk with your children about all kinds of art.

- Listen to a wide variety of music in the car – and listen at home, too.
- Watch arts programs, videos, or DVDs together as a family.
- Be an enthusiastic audience for your child’s artistic efforts. Post their drawings on the fridge, wear the clay beads they made.
- Encourage your child to participate in arts activities at school.
- Be accepting and encouraging of your child’s artistic efforts, there is no right or wrong way to draw a tiger, for young people art has no right or wrong answers.

Enjoy “Youth Art Month” and compliment a young artist you know!

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### **April 21<sup>st</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> is Global Youth Service Day!**

*“Global Youth Service Day is the largest service event in the world and the only one dedicated to the contributions that children and youth make 365 days of the year.”*

This service event is spearheaded by Youth Service America, an organization that dedicates its time to the engagement of youth in meaningful service, learning, and leadership opportunities that result in youth leading community change. The service day results in hundreds of youth-lead projects and events happening world-wide during the 3-day time period. There are lots of ways for you and the youth in your life to get involved!

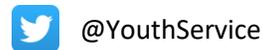
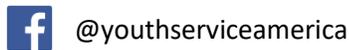
At <http://www.gysd.org/>, youth can plan their own service projects or events by following 4 easy steps:

- **Pick Your Project:** Select a cause that you’re passionate about, such as health, human rights, the environment, etc., and Youth Service America will provide you with service event ideas. They’ll also give you a list of organizations that are invested in that topic. Create your own project or combine your idea with an already existing partner project! You can also search for events happening in your area and join one of them.
- **Plan Your Project:** Once youth have an idea of what they want to do, they are ready to start planning. Youth can take advantage of the many different interactive courses that Youth Service America provides in order to help them turn their idea into an actual event. Even better, the courses are available in multiple languages, including: English, Chinese, French, Arabic, etc.

- **Post Your Project:** After planning an event, you can post it to the Youth Service America database. Here, the details about your event are shared with other users and your event is added to the Global Youth Service Day Map, where it can be viewed worldwide!
- **Promote Your Project:** Now that your event is posted you can promote it through the Youth Service America message boards. You could also share it with your local news sources or personal social media platforms!

There's no project too big or too small! Help the youth in your life recognize their ability to advocate for the causes they feel passionate about.

For more ideas on ways youth in your life can make a difference in their community, follow Youth Service America on their social media platforms:



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May gives us several opportunities to honor and recognize people who are important in the lives of children. We're all aware of Mothers' Day, celebrated this year on May 14. But do you know about these other special May days?

**National Teacher Appreciation Day** falls this year on May 9. It's a day to honor teachers and the lasting contributions they make in the lives of students and families. More important than any gift is a sincere and simple "Thank You" to the special teachers that you know. Also consider posting your thank you on social media at #ThankATeacher.

May 10 is **National School Nurses Day**. School nurses are often the first place a student thinks to go when they don't feel well or have been hurt. They also help those with a chronic condition participate fully in school, administer medication to students recovering from an ear infection, watch over student athletes, educate classroom teachers how to keep a child with food allergies safe, and provide a safe place for a child who needs it. By doing so, they support successful education. Send a thank you to these important men and women who do so much to promote the health and wellness of children and educators. Consider sharing your thoughts or pictures at #NationalSchoolNurseDay.

And last but not least, **Child Care Provider Day** falls this year on May 12. This day gives recognition and appreciation to the millions of people involved with providing care to children of working families. Child care providers spend many hours with your child, teaching them educational, social, and behavioral skills. Use today to let your child care provider know how much they are appreciated. Give them a card, and a big thank you. Also consider a post at #ProviderAppreciationDay.

Suggestions on how to show your appreciation for the teachers, nurses, and child care providers who support you and your child:

- Post a picture of yourself with a special teacher, nurse, or child care provider, past or present.
- Post a picture of your child with his or her teacher or caregiver.
- Post a picture of yourself holding a piece of paper with a simple “Thank You” and why you’re grateful to him or her.
- Give them a “thank you” card with a handwritten note or picture from your child.

To all the mothers, teachers, school nurses, and child care providers out there: THANK YOU for all that you do for our children.

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### **Cooking Up Memories for Kids**

Ever wonder what your kids will miss when they leave home? How would your kids describe the “sounds and smells” permeating the rooms they are growing up in?

Are there “happy smells” coming from the kitchen? Freshly baked cookies once in a while? Popcorn at night? Bacon and eggs occasionally?

How about the sounds your kids will remember? Laughter? Happy music? Singing?

If you hope your children will one day return home to visit, now’s the time to be thinking about the environment they’re growing up in.

Sadly, not all homes are happy ones. Some kids will never know the smell of a “hot breakfast” or the sound of a mom singing or dad cutting the grass. Many of our kids are growing up in homes where they’re on their own for meals and the sounds of the conversations they hear. Are they loving and positive or angry and negative?

Hopefully, not your home! Someday, sooner than you think, they will move out. What will they miss?

This week, may we encourage you to grab some bacon, – or tempeh – turn on the radio, and cook up some “happy memories” for your children?

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Jean Schumm, President of [Operation Parent](#)

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**AUGUST** – the last month of summer! Before you know it, the kids will be back in school and we’ll be hunkering down getting ready for winter.

August is that odd catch-all month – many summer camps are done for the season, friends and neighbors may still be away, days are still long and hot, you don’t want them inside all day watching TV or playing video games, you need to start preparing for the start of school, and older siblings may be heading to or back to college – YIKES!!! But you still need to keep the kids occupied, calm and content.

There is still plenty of time and opportunity to have fun adventures as a family, many at very low cost or for FREE.

Here are some ideas to take advantage of the last few weeks of summer and make some memories.

- Take a walk on one of the many area trails: Taughannock State Park, Treman State Park, Cass Park Trail, Jim Schug Trail in Dryden, Cornell Plantations just to name a few.
- Take a swim in natural water, making sure it is a location where swimming is permitted and a lifeguard is present: Taughannock State Park, Treman State Park.
- Visit the Farmer's market: Steamboat Landing on Saturday, Sunday and Thursday nights; DeWitt Park on Tuesdays; East Hill Plaza on Wednesdays.
- Pack up your dinner and have a picnic in the park.
- Go Camping – even if it's in your own back yard!
- Make s'mores as an unexpected and extra treat one night.
- Go to an Outdoor movie: Chamber of Commerce offers FREE movies at Stewart Park on 12, 19, & 26. Also check with your local public library – many offer free movie nights.
- Attend one of the FREE outdoor concerts offered on the Commons.
- Play a board or card game outside enjoying the night air.
- Find an ice cream truck and indulge in a cool sweet treat on one of those hot humid nights!
- Make a collage of activities you've done as a family during the summer break.
- Don't ignore the fact that school will be starting soon – talk about it, this will help alleviate some of their anxieties.
- Start getting the kids back on a “school” schedule – back to normal wake-up and bedtimes.
- Rainy day – go shop for school supplies; let the kids pick out their new backpack and or lunch box and don't forget our many amazing vintage stores for inexpensive and fun items.
- If your child is moving to a new school or new grade – talk about that, what are their concerns, drive by the school, check to see if they are open – maybe you could meet their new teacher or take a walk through the school so the first day won't be so scary and unfamiliar.
- Most of all – HAVE FUN together as a family!!

*“We didn't realize we were making **memories**, we just knew we were having **fun!**”*

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Developmental research shows that having one or more caring adults in a child's life increases the likelihood that they will flourish, and become productive adults themselves.<sup>1</sup> In many cases,

these caring adults are the child's parents, but other relatives, neighbors, friends of parents, teachers, coaches, religious leaders, and others can play this role.

How can you be a caring adult for the young people in your life?

Here are a few examples of ways to show you care -

1. Learn the names of the kids in your neighborhood and say "hi" to them by name when you see them.
2. Hire teens to do odd jobs at your home. Ask friends or neighbors to suggest teens if you don't know any.
3. Organize a neighborhood block party so everyone gets to know each other.
4. Be a mentor in your workplace - or offer a placement for a volunteer student intern - or have a student "spend a day on the job" with you.
5. Encourage your employer to sponsor a sports team or give a scholarship to a player.
6. If you work in a retail store, bank, restaurant, or anyplace that serves the public, treat all young customers respectfully, regardless of their age, race, gender, or appearance.
7. Share your talents with a youth group: hold a beginners knitting group, cooking class, gardening group, teach fly fishing, make gingerbread houses – the sky's the limit
8. Advocate for youth by telling funders you value their support of youth programs.
9. Invite young people to your groups - elected town boards, not-for-profit boards, etc. - to ask them to talk about how issues your group is grappling with concern them.
10. Open your venue (firehall, church, restaurant, café, etc.) for youth open mic nights or concerts.

As the Tompkins County Youth Services Department marks our 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary we believe it is extremely important to acknowledge the caring adults that shape our lives. To learn more about the #40CaringAdults and ways to acknowledge the caring adults in your life, please visit us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/ToCoYouth/>

<sup>1</sup> Scales, P. C., & Leffert, N. (1999). Developmental assets: A synthesis of the scientific research on adolescent development. Minneapolis: Search Institute. Rhodes, J., Ebert, L., & Fischer, K. (1992). Natural mentors: An overlooked resource in the social networks of young, African American mothers. American Journal of Community Psychology, 20(4), 445-461.

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The following monthly message has been contributed by David Autovino, friend of the Tompkins County Youth Services Department. While slightly different than our usual tips to

support youth, this message takes a look at self-care and parents as it serves as a reminder that as the first week of school hits, it's not just the kids experiencing big changes.

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One of the most important relationships in my life ended today. Well, was forever altered. For the best, of course, I know that. But if you don't mind, I'd like to eulogize it here.

For five years, I had a sidekick. A constant companion, a little buddy who went with me everywhere, by necessity. And there was nothing I didn't know about her, or any part of her life, because we were almost always together. And when everything is new, that joy of discovery, and the love we had for each other, I know it sounds cliché but, it was so pure. Unadulterated by nuanced concerns. Innocent, in the most literal meaning of the word. When it was just the two of us, it was like we were living our own private little Garden of Eden.

That level of intimacy is often both wonderful and infuriating. There have been just as many screams as there have been snuggles, believe me. There was, and is, nothing I wouldn't do for her, but the large presence she occupied in my life meant that my career, my life's passion, had to change shape in order to fit around her. Occasionally I resented her for that, if I'm being completely honest.

But she also changed the shape of ME, as a person, and that I wouldn't trade for anything. The difference between the love you have for your spouse and the love you have for your child is that you are responsible TO your spouse, but you are responsible FOR your child. And being responsible for every aspect of someone else's life also serves to inform the most important aspects of your own. If I am to be her constant guide through this new world, what do I have to become in order to deserve that honor? And if I'm not happy with the world I'll be showing her, what can I do to change it?

She taught me how to be a parent, with every unbidden giggle and with every shriek of frustration. She made me a feminist. She made me more patient with other people's struggles, and less patient with those who would seek to do harm to this beautiful world she'll inherit. She reminded me that fart noises are funny, and that sometimes it's entertainment enough just to be outside.

And she doesn't even need me anymore. At least, not 24/7. She's a self-confident, fully-formed person, and she's ready to interact with the world without me holding her hand.

If you're an experienced stay-at-home parent, it's okay if you're rolling your eyes a little at my naïveté, as I experience this early parental heartbreak. I know. It's okay. And I'm okay. I have a new little buddy with me at home now, and she's every bit as amazing as her sister. But if you've been where I am now, do me a solid and think kindly of us new-Kindergarten-parents who feel like they've lost their best friend this week.

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**October 16 to 22 is National Baking Week, why not bring your kid(s) into the kitchen for some fun and hands on learning. According to Jill Castle MS, RD there are many benefits of getting kids involved in the kitchen; here are seven benefits:**

1. Math Skills: Doubling a recipe requires addition (or multiplication) skills, halving it requires division, and recipe fractions like 1/2 cup and 3/4 teaspoon bring math applications into the kitchen. Often, kids don't recognize they are practicing math!
2. Comprehension: Reading and understanding step-by-step directions, adding ingredients in sequence, and techniques such as folding and blending, are all important components to yielding the finished food product. Helping your child fine tune his reading comprehension skills at the same time doesn't hurt!
3. Real Life Science: Cooking is a science experiment. Too much salt, baking powder, not enough flour, or the wrong timing and you're likely to have a flop on your hands. Cooking provides an opportunity for kids to get hands-on experience with basic science.
4. Self-Esteem: Cooking allows kids to get instant feedback, which helps them learn and grow in self-knowledge. Learning a new skill, such as baking or cooking, is known to help grade school children with healthy self-esteem development.
5. Communication: A relaxed atmosphere in the kitchen offers an opportunity to talk, about anything! Parents can take advantage of this, especially with teens, as communication is a key element to raising a well-adjusted, healthy child.

6. Life Skills: Cooking is a life skill, much like driving a car, learning to read, or swimming. As children grow and get closer to adulthood, the job of feeding becomes theirs. Start the cooking lessons at a young age so the transition to adult cook is easy later on.

7. Fun! Last but not least, cooking is fun! Having fun with your child in the kitchen builds positive memories, good vibes, and good food. With all the benefits of teaching kids to cook, and no limits with starting, what are you waiting for?

So what are you waiting for, spend some quality time with you kids and whip up something delicious in the kitchen, they will learn to cherish the time in the kitchen with you.

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As Thanksgiving approaches this month, we often think of what are thankful for. By definition, being thankful and having gratitude is the feeling of appreciation. Far too often, we get caught up in our busy lives to achieve something new or better. Take a moment to pause and brainstorm what you appreciate at this point in time.

You can create your own gratitude list with the young people in your life by answering these questions:

1. Who are you thankful for knowing?
2. What material object are you thankful for having?
3. What song are you thankful to hear?
4. What sight are you grateful to see?
5. What memory are you thankful to remember?
6. What food are you thankful to eat?
7. What book are you thankful to read?
8. What technological advancement are you thankful for?
9. What knowledge are you thankful to know?
10. What are you most thankful for?

"When asked if my cup is half full or half empty, my only response is that I am thankful to have a cup."  
Sam Lefkowitz

Make sure you share your list with others! If you share on social media, use the tag #TCYSDisThankful so the Tompkins County Youth Services Department can follow your gratitude list!

Follow us on Facebook to watch our gratitude list grow! @tocoyouth

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