

HEALTHY HABITS

Dear Trinitas Families,

We've compiled a list of "best practices" or "Healthy Habits" that we have observed contribute significantly to the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual health and growth of our students (and parents too). Each family, and each person within a family, has strengths and weaknesses; none of us can practice all of these well all of the time. We provide this list as an opportunity to pause and intentionally examine life at home and focus on the most needed categories. We recognize that external pressures can cause us to neglect these important things. Sometimes making the effort to establish or re-establish them is the best strategy for handling those pressures.

Sleep

Make it a priority. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) provides these guidelines:

- Ages 4-12 months: 12-16 hours (including naps)
- Ages 1-2 years: 11-14 hours (including naps)
- Ages 3-5 years: 10-13 hours (including naps)
- Age 6-12 years: 9-12 hours
- Age 13-18 years: 8-10 hours
- Adults: 7-9 hours

Family Meals

Strive for daily (or nearly daily) dinners together (even just 15 minutes); adjust time as needed so everyone can be there. Breakfasts together are a good way to start the day (they can take as little as 5 minutes).

Family Devotions

Make time daily for scripture, prayer, discussion, and/or song (even just 5-10 minutes).

Reading Time

Make time for reading alone and together; young children should be read to daily. Many families have found that reading together can be an enjoyable practice even through the teen years. Choose material that is life-giving, that is true, good, and beautiful.

Unstructured Playtime/Downtime

Daily unstructured playtime or downtime (without screens) is important for the development of imagination and problem-solving skills and simply to re-charge and have fun. Be sure to get outside often!

Screen Time (not including homework)

Screens have a big impact on our lives. AAP guidelines:

- No screen time at all for children until 18 to 24 months (except for video chatting)
- Ages 2-5: an hour or less/day
- At Trinitas, we recommend an hour or less/day for children ages 5 and up, as well as days with no screen time. Occasional movies (preferably shared with others) are an exception.
- Turn screens off at dinner, during family and friend outings (even car rides), and at least 60 minutes before bed.
- Keep screen usage (including phones) limited to public spaces in the home.
- It may be hard to imagine, but people used to live without screens. Pick a non-screen option whenever possible, e.g., bring toys, books, and coloring supplies to occupy your child when you go places.

Screen Content and location

Philippians 4:8 is a good guide. Is the material uplifting? And, does it leave you energized or drained? Keep screen usage in public spaces in the home.

Social Media

We strongly recommend not allowing your child to access social media. U.S. and international studies have consistently revealed the negative and manipulative impact of social media on children and teenagers, especially when it comes to anxiety, depression, body image, and the ability to have and maintain friendships. Girls are disproportionately affected.

Phones

We strongly recommend not giving your child a phone until high school. If it is necessary before that, choose a simple phone that does not connect to the internet. As a family, build the habit of being present—do not be on your phone when you should engage with other people. And especially, no phones at mealtimes. Keep phones in public areas of home (not bedrooms). Remember to put them away at least 60 minutes before bed.

Exercise

Exercise is important for both physical and mental health. AAP and CDC guidelines:

- Ages 3-5 years: at least 180 minutes of physical activity throughout the day (approximately 15 minutes of every hour while awake)
- Ages 6-17: 60 minutes/day, including vigorous-intensity, muscle- and bone- strengthening activities at least three days/week
- Adults: at least 150 minutes/week, including moderate and vigorous-intensity, muscle- and bone- strengthening activities; some exercise is better than none—try to move more and sit less

*Even starting with just 10-15 minutes each day is beneficial. Fresh air can be an added bonus!

Chores

Regular chores are important for building executive function skills, independence, responsibility, confidence, and consideration of and service to others.

Checklists

Having checklists for after school, bedtime, and morning routines can be very helpful. Regarding mornings—the more you can prepare the night before, the better!

Homework

Have a consistent time and place, free of distractions, to do homework. Schedule rejuvenating breaks.

Family and Friend Time

Schedule regular time for meals, outings, games, and other activities to share together as a family and with friends. They're great ways to form warm bonds and to cultivate the virtue of hospitality.

Discipline

Consistency and follow-through are essential, as is combining high standards with warmth. It's also good to use both positive and negative reinforcement ("carrots" and "sticks"). As kids grow, "Keep Calm and Talk On". Keep communication open and help your child process situations, perceptions, and emotions, and work together toward appropriate responses and desirable habits.