



## **Back to School...or Back to Stress?**

By Lisa Flynn

*The Weekly Sentinel*, 9/21/06

It's almost back to school for many of our children—exciting for some and daunting for others. Families can easily become overwhelmed with thoughts of school supplies, getting the 'right' sneakers and backpack, packing nutritious lunches in the age of packaged snacks, getting to school on time, excelling on the soccer field, organizing carpools, and so on. It can be exhausting just thinking about it all...Imagine how our children must feel at times—especially when we, the parents, are the ones racing around with our heads spinning!

Most children are too young to understand what 'stress' is but, according to the experts, children today suffer from stress now more than ever. In addition to hectic lifestyles, they are bombarded with news of terrorism, war and violence. Sometimes, it's just too much for young, developing minds and bodies to absorb. With little to no coping mechanisms, children often end up suffering chronic stress, which can then lead to all kinds of health issues. Stress can manifest itself in many ways in children: night terrors, acting out, hyperactivity, feigned (or real) illness, lethargy, fearfulness, eating issues, bed-wetting, etc.

What can we do as parents to ensure that our families stay calm and healthy? One suggestion would be to keep things simple and allow for downtime—limiting after-school activities, for example. Parents may opt to save time and energy during the ultra busy school/work-week by making freezable dinners ahead of time over the weekend. How about sorting, ironing and lining up school and work outfits for the week on Sunday afternoon? Are missing shoes and backpacks typically an issue during your household's morning rush? A cubby organizer system may be a worthwhile addition to your entryway area. Try working together as a family to find opportunities to simplify and save time and energy. Inevitably, this will lead to more time for play, rest and rejuvenation — essential elements for stress reduction.

As health and wellness initiatives increase in importance throughout the school arena, school administrations and teachers are seeking ways to short-circuit tensions in the classroom as well. After all, schoolwork, testing and ever-changing standards are stressors for teachers and students alike. In an effort to decrease tensions and anxieties, more and more teachers are recognizing the benefits of relaxation techniques in the classroom. Conscious breathing exercises, visual imagery and yoga poses are reportedly not only proving fun for children, but by accounts, extremely beneficial as well.

The idea of using 'yoga tools' in the classroom is the brainchild of Tara Guber and Leah Kalish, respectively founder and director, of Yoga Ed.<sup>TM</sup>, an organization based in L.A.

whose mission it is to bring yoga to today's increasingly stressed schoolchildren. As highlighted in this month's issue of *Yoga Journal Magazine*, Yoga Ed.'s Kalish "believes yoga can teach physical health in an engaging way while providing emotional and psychological benefits." Teachers at Central School in South Berwick agree and have actually taken steps recently to incorporate Yoga Ed.'s Yoga Tools into their upcoming class days.

Whether it's yoga and breathing exercises, improved time management, fewer after-school activities or packing school lunches the night before, there are many 'small things' that can be done to reduce stress during the hectic school year. For more information or if you have an idea you'd like to share about managing school time stress, e-mail Lisa at [lisa@childlightyoga.com](mailto:lisa@childlightyoga.com).