



# Gateway CAP Fatherhood Times

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## Welcome Back!

Thank you for being an active Male Caregiver!

### *Autism, A Father's Journey*

School is back in action! Yes, it looks different, but what is most important is that you can support your child through this new normal. Yes, the new normal. Virtual meetings are the way to go for now. We hope the medical field develops a vaccine or a treatment soon, allowing us to go back to our regular life. Meanwhile, because of the digital ease of access during COVID-19, dads can use many ways to help our little ones feel safe.



Get organized: Have the materials ready for the virtual call. Anticipate every step of the day. Staying on the task will alleviate added stress from being your child's primary teacher during COVID-19. Remember, you can do this, and we are your support.

Keep a schedule, including breaks: Make a schedule to create routines that help with virtual learning. Having a plan that you and the children can follow is a step to

help you navigate the day.

Practice: This is new for you as well for your children. Practice, practice, practice! Like in sports, the more you get acquainted with a routine, the muscle memory helps to be more agile. The same mind frame will help you and your child. Set up a virtual meeting with another family member and try to make your child feel as comfortable as possible with virtual learning.

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Becoming a father can be scary for some male caregivers, but can you imagine your child diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder at 18 months? This is the case of Ken Mosca, the Co-Founder of Faces4Autism. An organization formed out of the need for parental support for Ken and his wife Isabelle to understand how to care for their beloved child Kyle. While this process must have been a terrifying and new territory to navigate, Ken has been at it for 21 years.

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Here are some tips to support our children while they are learning virtually:

Create a learning space: A space clear of distractions such as television, gaming units, toys, etc. Build quiet places, clutter-free zones where children can concentrate on the task at hand, and what teaching staff is teaching the children.

# Virtual Bring Your Child to School Day

Gateway Community Action Partnership EHS/HS this year celebrated “Bring Your Child to School Day” a little different. Mon-



day, September 14, 2020, we created a virtual gathering through Zoom for Male caregivers and Parents to stop by and chat with us on

how everything is going so far. Mothers, fathers, and children entered the Zoom gathering and spoke about the challenges this Pandemic has brought them. Additionally, children expressed how excited they were to share

with us about their day. One child talked about washing his hands, face, and brushing his teeth. The most important thing of all was seen dads giving their children the support during the times we are living. The next Fatherhood Times edition will have pictures of fathers engaging with our staff and their children in the virtual learning environment. Thank you all who stopped by.

## M.A.S.G. Men Action Support Group

Welcome to Head Start! Especially dads, uncles, grandfathers, stepdads, or male caregivers. We are here to support you as you navigate fatherhood and manhood. We want to make you aware of our support group, where we gather for now virtually through Zoom for an hour to take upon the challenge of defining healthy manhood for ourselves. We come together weekly or biweekly, either on a Tuesday or Thursday at 5:30 p.m. We have been watching the documentary “The Mask we live in” and discussing the documentary. Our meeting is a confidential and judgment-free zone. We hope to hold our in-person meetings soon after COVID-19 is resolved. For more information about our support group, please feel free to contact our Male Initiative Coordinator Michael Cupeles via email at [mcupeles@gatewaycap.org](mailto:mcupeles@gatewaycap.org) work cell 609-246-0333.

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### (Continued:) Welcome Back! Thank you for being an active Male Caregiver!

(Continued from Page 1) Maintain open communication: Being engage with your child’s teacher, family advocate, site director is going to help you and your child to succeed with the goals set for your family constellation. It is crucial to use every line of communication to have the best support possible. Teachers need to make assessments of your child, and you will need to help in this process. Family advocates want to help you and your child reach family goals. Site directors want to ensure that all needs are met, such as food, materials, resources, and any support your family may need.

Show interest and encourage independence: Virtual learning brings some challenges, but we can show generous support by setting things up for the child and staying focused during the virtual call. Allowing them to be more independent day by day as it will become their routine. The goal is to have them engage with the teachers more and more.

Gives your child and yourself some grace: anxiety, frustration, and other emotions are expected as we learn new things. Allow for extra patience as children get used to communicating and learning through digital devices. When you feel that something may be getting out of control, do some breathing exercises. Breathe in deep and excel while counting backward. Have your child do the same as they can sense your tension and act out. Flexibility is key to being able to get through the pandemic

# LET'S PROMOTE HEALTHY HABITS

The month of September is known as Childhood Obesity Awareness Month. According to the CDC, "About 1 in 5 (19%) children in the United States have obesity." (*September is National Childhood Obesity Month 2020*) Due to the information presented above, Gateway Community Action Partnership Early Head Start and Head Start has trained our staff with Choosy Move and Learn Curriculum. Speak with teaching staff about Choosy and ways that you can incorporate routines into the child's



learning day. There is always a way that we, as male caregivers, can help combat obesity.

## **Parents and Caregivers Can Help Prevent Obesity and Support Healthy Growth**

Be aware of your child's growth. [Learn how obesity is measured in children](#), and use [CDC's Child and Teen BMI Calculator](#) to screen your child for potential weight issues.

Provide nutritious, lower-calorie foods such as [fruits and vegetables](#) in place of foods high in added sugars and solid fats. [Try serving more fruit and vegetables at meals and as snacks.](#)

- Make sure drinking water is always available as a no-calorie alternative to sugary drinks and limit juice intake.

Help children get the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity each day. [Regular physical activity](#) can have immediate health benefits like better sleep, better academic achievement, and reduced anxiety and stress. Look [here](#) for age-appropriate activities your child can do.

Make sure your child has [healthy sleep habits](#). Sleep helps improve attention and reduces the risk of developing type 2 diabetes and even obesity later in life. Get your child to bed at the same time each day, including the weekends; remove electronic devices from the bedroom; and keep their bedroom dark and cold. Your child needs at least 8 hours of sleep, maybe more depending on age. Find out [how much sleep](#) your child needs.

Be a role model! Eat healthy meals and snacks, [and get the right amount of physical activity every day.](#)

Learn what you can do to help [shape a healthy school environment.](#)

*September is National Childhood Obesity Month.* (2020, August 13). <https://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpao/features/childhood-obesity/index.html>.

Content source: Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

# Back to School: Children's Anxiety and Worries!

It's September and we are getting ready to see our children return to school or they have already returned to school. This can become a time that children may be feeling worried and anxious. As male caregivers we want to be able to help our children feel safe and not have to worry about anything. But, this year has added an extra element of stress as we still have COVID-19 amongst us.



Following are some ideas on how to be able to reduce the anxiety and worries our children may be feeling as they return to school:

**Break the Ice** – Children may be feeling worry about liking their new teacher. A way to help them feel worry free is to attend the Parent Orientation virtual even and allow for the child to interact with their teacher. Additionally, we can schedule a one-on-one meeting so that the child gets to know the teacher.

**Tour the School** – I know; I know; we really

can't do this in today's environment. But, you can work with your teacher to see if a virtual tour may be a possibility so the child can see the new atmosphere where they will be spending a large portion of the day. On a side note, being creative is one of the major skill sets needed to problem solving during this pandemic.

**Connect with friends** – Maybe you are aware of other family friends that are going to be attending the same center. Schedule some time together to talk about going back and being in the school. Talking about going to school with a friend will build on a support group and the child will feel comfortable because of familiar faces being with them through this process.

**Chat about it** – Talk about what the child will be doing for the day and what he will be doing the next day. This will help them know that there is a schedule to follow creating a safe atmosphere. It will also help with easing in to new routines.

It is our hope these tips can help you and your child through this time. If you feel that you may need extra support please always feel free to reach out to our staff who are able and willing to help all parents get through this process with the less stress possible.

## *(Continued:) Autism, A Father's Journey*

*(Continued from Page 1)* What is autism? According to American Psychological Association, “Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) refers to a neurodevelopment disorder characterized by difficulties with social communication and social interaction and restricted and repetitive patterns in behaviors, interests, and activities. By definition, the symptoms are present early on in development and affect daily functioning. The term ‘spectrum’ is used because of the heterogeneity in the presentation and severity of ASD symptoms, as well as in the skills and level of functioning of individuals who have ASD.” (APA, Autism spectrum disorder 2013)

While speaking with Ken, he recalls when he found out for the first time that Kyle had a problem. Ken came home to his family, and Isabelle asks him to call Kyle. After several attempts with no response, Ken thought the his son had hearing problems. Little did Ken knew that everything was about to change. Isabelle and Ken had Kyle tested, finding out that Kyle was autistic. Ken shared with us that he froze, his knees became weak as he became terrified. Ken recalls the one thing that has kept him moving



forwards. Isabelle said to him, “Ken, this is not a death sentence.” At that time, minimal support was available for families who had autistic children. But, Ken reaches out to Denise Levinson, who placed him in contact with professionals from the health department to form the foundation of what today has become Faces4Autism.

Ken told us, “as a father having an autistic son; it has not been easy. I know of many couples that have divorced due to having an autistic child. For most cases, it was the father who broke the marriage because they couldn’t handle it.” Ken continue sharing that at one point, they were so hopeful because Kyle was doing so good. But Kyle commenced having seizures that worsen his condition. Ken shared that about two years ago, doctors were able to help get the episodes under control but leaving Kyle with permanent and severe brain damaged. Additionally, Kyle has developed mild Tourette Syndrome.

Ken told us that faith keeps him sane, healthy, and focused. The support of his beloved wife Isabelle, their family of origin, and very close family friends have kept him moving forwards. Ken wanted dads to know the following; “Don’t give up on your child, they need you now more than ever. Keep your faith, and be there for your child.” Ken finished by saying, “You are not alone, you can build a support system, and Faces4Autism is here to help any father, mother, family who has an autistic child.” For more information, please visit [www.Faces4Autism.org](http://www.Faces4Autism.org)