



**SANFORD
HARMONY**

Key Steps for Families to have a Successful School Year

Toolkit for Families | 2026-2027



AVAILABLE NOW!

The Harmony
at Home App

WELCOME

The first weeks of school offer a critical opportunity to set the stage for your child's success. Expert educators from school districts around the country who are part of our national advisory group have been making a difference in the lives of their students, their families, fellow teachers, and their school communities for decades—and we're sharing their encouragement, advice, and practical tips with families this school year.

This isn't your average back-to-school guide filled with to-dos, shopping tips, and been-there-done-that checklists. We're sharing the foundational steps to help parents and caregivers set children up for a healthy, happy, and productive school year.

In this resource, you'll find tools to help your child build strong relationships, strengthen their sense of belonging at school, and feel seen and understood in a way that supports their overall wellness and mental health.

Harmony Academy at National University taps into decades of research and anecdotal evidence from hundreds of educators to improve children's self-confidence, relationships, and sense of connection—foundational factors in their ability to learn and succeed academically and thrive outside of school.

We're excited for you to dive into this toolkit and make it a great year for your family!

Toolkit Resources:

- [**You've Got This!** Video Messages from Educators to Families](#)
- [**Practical Tips:** Six Ways to Help Your Child Thrive This School Year](#)
- [**Mindful Minutes:** Activities to Stay Calm Grounded and Connected to Each Other](#)
- [**Response Prompts:** Simple Phrases to Get Your Child To Communicate More](#)
- [**Harmony Educator Advisors:** The Experts Who Know This Advice Works](#)

YOU'VE GOT THIS!

VIDEO ENCOURAGEMENT FOR THE NEW SCHOOL YEAR

The beginning of the school year is always a time that brings a lot of nerves—and also excitement. The best way to calm those nerves is through community, through relationships, through harmony. In this video, nationally recognized educators offer families messages of encouragement for the new school year.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=shared&v=ANkT5cfVUSc>

TIPS TO HELP YOUR CHILD THRIVE THIS SCHOOL YEAR

A new school year brings new opportunities to help your child succeed academically, socially, and emotionally. Nationally recognized educators with experience supporting all parts of their students' well-being offer practical advice for families. Read their tips below!



Check In with Your Child Every Day.

Take time to really connect with your child each day—whether it's eating a meal together or during your child's bedtime routine. Ask questions, such as, "What was the best thing about today?" or "What do you wish would have gone better?" Provide your own response to the question, then let your child take a turn. Use a [Response Prompt](#), such as, "Please keep going." And be sure to listen! Learning how they feel about school, their teachers, friends, and their class work will help you better support them and shows them that you care.



Build a Connection with Your Child's Teacher.

Communicate with your child's teacher about learning and academic needs—and emotional needs and past struggles. Talk about what classroom strategies they use to build relationships, trust, and confidence—and how you can reinforce those strategies at home. Be sure you understand what is expected from you as a parent. Attend Back to School Night or other parent orientations—and come prepared with questions.



Encourage Your Kids to Value Themselves.

Encourage your child to remember we are all unique, and this uniqueness makes us valuable. Help them engage in specific positive self-talk with the following sentence starters: "I believe that I can..." "I am grateful for..." and "I am proud that I can...." Supporting your child's use of positive self-talk can help them reach their goals and lead to improved self-confidence and happiness.



Focus on Your Child's Relationships.

Tell your child stories about your own friendships and talk about the characteristics he or she looks for in friends and why. Show your child how to be a good friend by modeling these behaviors and encourage your child to exhibit them too. Ask your child to try to step into a friend's shoes during a disagreement to look at the situation from another perspective. If your child is struggling with friendships, encourage them to speak up and show empathy. Also ask your child to consider ways to broaden his or her friend groups by being open to new friends and trying new things.



Work Together to Set Family Goals.

Brainstorm and discuss what family members want to achieve during the school year and what actions will help realize those goals. Consider why people, like athletes, set goals, and talk about the steps to take to set and meet a goal. Have each family member list two to three goals, and then choose three to four to work on as a family. Don't just focus on academic achievement—include social and emotional goals as well. Display the goals where you can see them. Talk together about one step or action you can take right now and in the coming days to make progress on each goal. Write these steps down to refer to and reflect on them later.



Pause and Check In with Yourself.

Spend a few minutes each day to stay grounded, calm, and ready to connect with your child. Talk with your child about the importance of taking time to check in on yourself and how you are feeling. [Mindful Minutes](#) are a great way to encourage this pause. (An example of a Mindful Minute activity used in the classroom is to guide children to stand up tall, reach their fingertips to the ceiling, and stretch up. Say, "Close your eyes and relax your face. Loosely cross your arms and hold your elbows. Sit loosely for a few seconds." Have children sit loosely, holding their elbows. Talk about how it feels to relax after you've been active for a while).

MINDFUL MINUTE

ACTIVITIES

Use these mindfulness activities yourself or with your child anytime throughout the day to help you both stay calm, grounded and connected to each other.

- Breathe in and then blow your breath out slowly, imagining the shape of an ice sculpture that your breath is creating in the air.
- Sit up straight in your chair, or lay down on the floor, and put your right hand on your heart and your left hand on your belly. Press the heels of your feet together. Close your eyes, clear your mind, and just focus on the rise and fall of your chest and stomach.
- Be very quiet and still, and just pay attention to all of the sounds in the environment around you. If possible, open a window and listen to the sounds of nature outside.
- Think about one thing you feel that makes you happy. Focus on picturing that thing in all of its details.
- Think of something specific that you feel grateful for and take a moment to give silent thanks for it.
- Focus on tensing and then relaxing body parts one at a time—starting with the top of your scalp, and then moving down to your forehead, eyes, mouth, neck, shoulders, arms, fingers, legs, toes—until your entire body is relaxed.
- Color a peaceful scene for a few minutes without talking.
- Use the **STOP** skill to check-in with yourself. **Stop** what you are doing. **Take** a deep breath and slowly release it. **Observe** and notice what is happening. How does your body feel? What are your emotions and thoughts? What is happening around you? **Proceed**. Keep doing what you were doing, or don't and make a change. Use what you have noticed to decide.
- Take a silent, short walk around the school and pay attention to your surroundings and your five senses. What details do you observe that you have never noticed before?
- Think of your "happy place." Imagine that you have suddenly been transported there. What do you see? What do you hear? What do you smell? What do you feel? What do you taste?
- Think of a room in which you have felt calm and safe. Some examples might be your previous classroom, a cozy spot in the library, or a community center. Concentrate on remembering as many details about the space as you can.
- Hug yourself tight and take a slow, deep breath in. Bring the breath all the way down to your belly. Then very gently release the breath. As you let the breath out, loosen your hug but don't let go.

RESPONSE PROMPTS

FOR SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD'S COMMUNICATION

When children share ideas, stories, or feelings with you, they may need support or encouragement to say more. To get you started, here are some response prompts that you can use to get them talking!

To note a point:

- Nice idea, ____!
- Thank you for saying that, ____.
- That's a good point because...
- What ____ just said was important to our group because...
- ____ made a good point when they said...
- I would like to add that ...

To clarify a point:

- I think I heard ____ say...
- I think you're saying ... Is that right?
- That was an interesting story. I'm curious about...
- I'm a little confused by ...Can you give me some additional details?
- I'm not sure I understood what you meant when you said ... Can you explain more?

To extend a conversation or get more information:

- Please keep going, ____!
- What happened next?
- Please tell me more about
- Is there more you'd like to share about ... ?
- I'm sorry that happened to you. How do you feel now about ...?

To express agreement:

- I agree because ...
- I think that's a good idea because ...
- I agree with you, and I think ...
- I agree with what ____ said because ...
- I have the same point of view because...

To express disagreement:

- I disagree because...
- I respectfully disagree because...
- You make a strong point, but to me ...
- I have a different point of view because...
- I understand your perspective, but I think...

EDUCATOR ADVISORS

ABOUT HARMONY ACADEMY

Creating a sense of belonging sets the stage for wellness and academic success. For more than a decade, Harmony Academy has been a leader in life skills and relationship-building strategies, offering dynamic solutions for teachers, families, and communities that are research-backed and grounded in rigorous evaluation. Today, Harmony is transforming the lives of more than 22 million students in 57,000 schools and organizations across 50 states and 88 countries.

The Harmony Academy Educator Advisory Group brings together diverse perspectives and a broad range of teaching experience to the Harmony experience. Special thanks to those who contributed to this toolkit.



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