



FAIRFAX COUNTY TIMES

PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Your Guide to Private Education in Fairfax County & Beyond

# Helping kids develop confidence and become more resilient

Courtesy of  
Brandpoint Media

While the past two years have been tough on everyone, they’ve been especially hard for children living with challenging family circumstances or in communities hit hardest by health and economic difficulties. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and the Children’s Hospital Association recently declared children’s mental health a national emergency due to the serious toll COVID-19 has taken on families. According to the CDC, between March and October 2020, the percentage of emergency department visits for children with mental health emergencies grew by 24% for children ages 5-11. The pandemic also caused a decline in children receiving primary care and behavioral health services, which can negatively impact their well-being.

**What can adults do to help children cope?**  
Supporting children facing unprecedented changes and challenges is key to help-



ing them develop emotional skills - like resilience - that will last a lifetime, according to Dr. Arethusa Stevens Kirk, national senior medical director at UnitedHealthcare. Children and adolescents have faced unprecedented stressors in their environments: quarantines, illness in families and other disruptions. The pandemic has affected the stability and structure of families, with over 140,000 U.S. children experiencing the death of a parent or grandparent from COVID-19, according to the AAP. According to AAP research, children of racial and ethnic minority families are at 4.5 times greater risk of losing a caregiver. “I grew up in and out of foster care starting at age 4, so I understand how important it is to help children re-

main resilient in the face of challenging environments. Knowing how to talk with children and demonstrate compassion helps reduce stress in their lives,” said Kirk. “As a pediatrician, I see how vital it is that we teach them skills like resilience, flexibility, confidence and persistence.” **Resources to support children’s mental health and development** To help children develop critical life skills, Sesame Workshop, the non-profit organization behind the children’s program “Sesame Street” has introduced new resources to help children build resilience. Made possible by UnitedHealthcare, the new content includes three online storybooks and an online course for providers. The content helps teach con-

fidence and how to encourage practicing persistence and dealing with change - all key ingredients to resilience. **For providers:** The “Roads to Resilience” online course is designed to help providers including healthcare workers, educators, and housing and social service providers use the new resources, along with tools and new ideas to foster professional development. **For children:** Three storybooks feature the “Sesame Street” Muppets Karli, Lily and Alex. • **“The Monster Dash: A Story about Resilience and Flexibility”** explores dealing with change. Because of her mom’s struggle with addiction, Karli has spent time in foster care, living with a lack of predictability and control. But caring adults have given

her tools to build resilience. Being flexible and pivoting when circumstances change is a big part of resilience. • **“Looking for Special: A Story about Resilience and Confidence”** teaches children about confidence. Lily and her family haven’t always had enough food, and for a while they didn’t have a home of their own - but they’ve endured hard times and are stronger for it. • **“Bounce Back: A Story about Resilience and Persistence”** shows Alex practicing persistence. When Alex’s father was incarcerated, Alex and his family faced big challenges, and he had to cope with hard feelings like fear and anger. Persistence is another part of resilience and, like everyone, Alex needs to find ways to manage his frustration and

practice patience. “Resources and skills like these help children cope with difficulties. Anyone involved in a child’s care holds power, and they can use that power to help children feel safe, seen - and hopeful,” added Kirk. “By working together, we can improve children’s overall health and well-being.” For over 10 years, UnitedHealthcare and Sesame Workshop have worked together to improve the well-being of children and families - especially those most vulnerable - by providing tools to build a strong foundation for lifelong healthy habits. This partnership includes the “Growing Every Day, Every Way” program, which provides families and caregivers with resources to address topics including food insecurity, physical activity, developmental milestones and healthy habits, to help kids everywhere grow smarter, stronger and kinder. These resources are available in English and Spanish for parents and providers to access and download at [SesameStreetInCommunities.org](https://SesameStreetInCommunities.org).

# Emotional safe spaces help children express their big feelings

Courtesy of  
Family Features

Many internet memes have been made about toddlers and their temper tantrums. While the outpouring of oversized emotions can be amusing when viewed from afar, most parents and caregivers simply want to know what they can do to help children express their feelings in less dramatic ways. According to child development experts, one of the keys to helping children learn to regulate their emo-

tions is to develop emotional literacy; the ability to identify feelings. This can help children learn to recognize those feelings and apply coping strategies to (hopefully) calm down before their feelings overwhelm them. One way to help children work on their emotional literacy is to talk about emotions other people feel. “Sometimes it’s difficult to process our own emotions because that puts you in a vulnerable position,” said Taunya Banta from KinderCare’s Inclusion Services team. “When we’re able to find some detachment from

the immediate emotion, like talking about characters in a story - ‘How do you think they feel?’ or ‘Why do you think they feel that way?’ - it opens an opportunity for kids to safely process their own emotions because they’re not in the spotlight.” Another way to help children work through their emotions before becoming overwhelmed is doing what many early childhood teachers do and create a space filled with things that allow children to find emotional release in a safe way. If space allows, Banta recommends creating both a quiet

area and an active area. Quiet areas allow children to work through their emotions using fine motor or listening skills. Items in this space could include blankets or pillows to cuddle up in or headphones to listen to relaxing music or audiobooks. Some children may find comfort in expressing their feelings through art, so consider including some drawing materials or a journal. For young children, a set of pictures or cards showing faces expressing different emotions can help them as they learn to identify their own feelings.

Active areas provide children opportunities to use their gross motor skills to work through emotions. If outdoor space is easily accessible, encourage your children to go outside and jump, stomp or run when they start to feel the urge to “let it all out.” An indoor active space could include pillows to scream into or hit and plastic bottles or bubble wrap to stomp on or squeeze. The action and noise can help get out the desire to hit or punch. Watch how your children show their emotions and give them safe alternatives.

For example, if they tend to yell and hit when they’re upset, give them pillows to scream into or hit. You can also help them designate a box or a specific spot on the wall or floor that they can throw beanbags, wadded up socks or any soft object at. Acknowledge the emotions your children are experiencing and reassure them that while it’s fine to feel that way, it’s just as important they find a safe outlet for their emotions. For more tips to help children identify and regulate their emotions, visit [KinderCare.com](https://KinderCare.com).



# PRIVATE SCHOOLS

## An easy DIY activity to get kids excited about STEM

Courtesy of  
Brandpoint Media

Most parents typically tell their children not to go to the pantry for a snack before dinner but what if letting your kids into the pantry could help ignite their passion for science, technology, engineering and math (STEM)?

STEM learning can be accessible and right at children's finger tips no matter their age or background. It can even be as easy as walking into the kitchen and looking around for inspiration. Igniting a curiosity for

STEM early can help drive youth into a future including STEM, enabling them to take advantage of a field where jobs are projected to grow 9% by 2029, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

To help close the STEM opportunity gap, Boys & Girls Clubs of America and Raytheon Technologies are partnering together to enhance Boys & Girls Clubs of America's DIY STEM curriculum so that it's culturally relevant and focused on diversity, equity and inclusion.

The organizations want



to get kids excited about STEM, inspiring youth to start seeing STEM in their everyday surroundings (like through food!), providing more access and opportunity to STEM learning.

"By integrating a diversity, equity and inclusion framework into the new Boys

& Girls Clubs of America DIY STEM curriculum, we are able to create a program that inspires all youth and highlights the possibility of a STEM career," said Susan Cody Ciavolino, director of educational STEM foundation at Boys & Girls Clubs of America.

Boys & Girls Clubs of America, an expert in youth development, suggests this fun, hands-on DIY STEM activity, aimed to surprise and excite kids while also building important social-emotional skills needed to succeed in STEM, both at school and within the workforce.

### DIY STEM Activity: Bridge Building

• **Items needed:** Various materials that can be found in the kitchen - use your imagination! From gum drops or marshmallows as the "glue" to dry spaghetti noodles, graham

crackers and pretzel sticks as the connectors, encourage kids to use their imagination as to what materials will best create a bridge.

• **Directions:** Play around and try different methods to build a home-made bridge between two tables or surfaces. Encourage youth to test the weight of their bridge with everyday items like a toy car.

Enjoy this DIY activity and continue to encourage the kids in your life to look at their surroundings and have fun with DIY STEM, as it can lead to a great future.

## Westminster celebrates 60 years of excellence in education

Courtesy of  
Westminster School

Celebrating 60 years of excellence in education, Westminster's overall program is based on the belief that children between the ages of three and fourteen are naturally dominated by curiosity and enthusiasm. To satisfy and

stimulate this appetite for learning and accomplishment, Westminster presents a well-rounded, challenging curriculum steeped in the classics and enhanced by the arts. The purposeful classroom environment emphasizes thorough mastery of subject, high standards of achievement, good study habits, and personal respon-

sibility.

Art, music, and STEAM classes are part of the weekly schedule for all grades and dance is included as a regular part of the PE program. A unique aspect to Westminster School is its drama program. All students participate in theater, performing in a class play every year, culmi-

nating with a Shakespeare play in the 7th grade and a Broadway musical in the 8th grade.

This rich and varied program is supported by extensive optional extracurricular clubs and activities, including K-Kids and Builders Club (community service), Chess, Chorus, Orchestra, French Club, Math Counts, Odyssey

of the Mind, Science Olympiad, as well as team sports in basketball, soccer, softball, and track and field. Athletic competitions, art exhibitions, math contests, science fairs, and talent shows provide many opportunities for students to explore and share their talents.

Westminster parents appreciate that the daily school

life is supported by an array of programs, including small-group teacher-provided academic support which is built into the school day, extended care, summer and intersession camps, frequent field trips, after-school enrichment classes, door-to-door bus service, and an optional lunch program.



# Westminster School

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