



NEWSLETTER

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AUGUST 2026

RELATIONSHIPS FIRST: STARTING THE SCHOOL YEAR STRONG

FINANCIAL STRESS & MENTAL HEALTH

Budget Friendly Tips for Back-to-School

- Shop your home before shopping at the store. Reuse backpacks, lunch boxes, binders, and supplies that are still in good condition.
- Check local organizations, churches, and community events for free school supply drives.
- Buy only what is required before purchasing extras.
- Compare prices using store apps and online pickup options to avoid impulse purchases.
- Plan simple weekly meals before school starts to reduce grocery waste.
- Pack lunches when possible and prepare snacks in advance.
- Create a weekly spending limit for "extras" like coffee, fast food, or convenience purchases.
- Remember that children value time together far more than expensive items.



August brings fresh beginnings. For many families, students, and educators, it marks the excitement of a new school year—but it can also bring uncertainty, stress, and financial pressure. Between shopping for school supplies, adjusting to new routines, meeting new teachers, and balancing busy schedules, this season can feel overwhelming.

As we head into another school year, it's important to remember that success isn't built on academics alone. Strong relationships, healthy routines, and supportive communities create the foundation where students, families, and educators can thrive. This month, we're sharing practical ways to care for your mental wellness, strengthen connections, and begin the school year with confidence.

When Money Feels Heavy, So Can Everything Else

Back-to-school season often comes with increased expenses—school supplies, clothes, activity fees, lunches, sports equipment, and transportation costs. Financial stress is one of the leading contributors to anxiety, depression, sleep difficulties, and relationship conflict. When families are worried about paying bills or stretching their budget, it can affect every area of daily life.

It's important to remember that financial strain isn't a personal failure. Many families experience seasonal budget challenges, and small changes can help reduce some of that pressure. Financial stress may not disappear overnight, but creating a plan and asking for help when needed can make challenges feel much more manageable.



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NAVIGATING PHONE-FREE SCHOOL DAYS

Helping Students and Families Feel Confident About the Transition

As schools across Kansas begin the school year with phone-free learning environments, many families are wondering what this change will look like. While it may feel unfamiliar at first, this transition also creates opportunities to build independence, strengthen communication skills, and encourage more face-to-face connections throughout the school day. For many students, a cell phone isn't just a device—it's a connection to friends, family, and daily routines. It's normal for both students and parents to feel some anxiety about this change. The good news is that, with time and support, most students adjust more quickly than they expect.

Phone-free school days encourage students to be more engaged in learning, strengthen friendships, and develop confidence in navigating the school day independently.



Tips for Students

- It's okay to feel nervous. New routines take time, and you're not the only one adjusting.
- Practice being away from your phone. Leave it in another room while reading, doing homework, or spending time with family.
- Know your support system. Teachers, counselors, and school staff are there to help if you need to contact a parent or guardian.
- Stay present. Use lunch and free time to connect with classmates, join conversations, and build friendships.
- Remember—it gets easier. What feels uncomfortable today will soon become part of your routine.

Tips for Parents

- Listen first. Give your child space to share their concerns without immediately trying to solve them.
- Stay positive. Children often mirror the attitudes of trusted adults.
- Review your school's communication plan. Knowing how you'll reach one another if needed can ease everyone's worries.
- Create an after-school check-in routine. Whether it's during the drive home or over an afternoon snack, make time to reconnect.
- Model healthy phone habits. Putting your own phone away during meals or family time shows the value of being present.

Looking at the Bigger Picture

Transitions can be challenging, but they also create opportunities for growth. Phone-free school days encourage students to build stronger relationships, improve communication skills, and stay more engaged in their learning. As families and schools work together through this transition, we can help students develop confidence, resilience, and meaningful connections that extend far beyond the classroom.

Family Challenge - Try a Phone-Free Hour!

Set aside one hour this week where everyone—including the adults—puts their phones away. Use the time to play a game, go for a walk, share a meal, or simply talk about your day. Small moments of connection can make a big difference.



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NATIONAL WELLNESS MONTH

Small Habits Make a Big Difference

National Wellness Month is a reminder that caring for ourselves allows us to better care for others. Wellness isn't about perfection; it's about creating small, sustainable habits that support our physical and emotional health. As school schedules become busier, even simple routines can help reduce stress.

Here are a few simple wellness habits to try:

- Prioritize 7-9 hours of sleep each night.
- Spend at least 15-20 minutes outside each day.
- Stay hydrated throughout the day.
- Schedule intentional breaks from technology.
- Practice gratitude by writing down three good things each evening.
- Take a short walk to reset your mind.
- Connect with someone you trust.
- Give yourself permission to rest without guilt.



Remember: Self-care isn't selfish—it's one of the best ways to build resilience during busy seasons.

Professional Learning Opportunity - Foundations of Connection

Looking to strengthen relationships and create environments where people feel seen, heard, and valued? Project FRONTIER is excited to offer our **Foundations of Connection** professional learning opportunity this September.

- Online Course Opens: September 1
- In-Person Training: September 23

This professional learning experience combines the flexibility of online learning with an engaging, hands-on in-person session focused on practical restorative strategies that participants can immediately apply in their everyday interactions. Together, we'll explore ways to build trust, strengthen relationships, improve communication, and foster environments where connection, collaboration, and belonging can thrive. This learning opportunity is offered at no cost to participants and is eligible for college credit or CEUs, making it an excellent opportunity to grow professionally while gaining practical tools that can make a lasting impact in your work and your community. Contact Project FRONTIER for registration information and additional details.

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RELATIONSHIPS FIRST IN THE CLASSROOM: BUILDING COMMUNITY BEFORE CONTENT

Students learn best when they feel safe, seen, and connected. One of the most effective ways to create positive classroom environments is by intentionally building relationships during the first weeks of school.

Strong classroom communities improve engagement, increase student confidence, reduce behavioral concerns, and create a greater sense of belonging.

Easy Community-Building Ideas

- Greet every student by name each morning.
- Use daily check-in questions or mood meters.
- Learn one new fact about each student during the first month.
- Incorporate partner and small-group activities.
- Celebrate student strengths—not just achievements.
- Create classroom agreements together rather than simply posting rules.
- End the week with student reflections or appreciations.

When relationships come first, learning naturally follows.



closing Thoughts

A successful school year begins long before the first lesson is taught. It starts with caring for ourselves, supporting one another, and building relationships that help students, families, and educators feel connected.

Whether you're preparing a classroom, sending your child to school for the first time, or simply adjusting to new routines, remember that small acts of kindness, patience, and connection create lasting impact.

Here's to a school year filled with strong relationships, healthy habits, supportive communities, and opportunities for everyone to grow together.