

# SEVEN SIMPLE SOLUTIONS

## FOR SMARTER, LESS STRESSED CHILDREN

By Dr. Gail Gross  
Ph. D. Ed.D.

Did you know that simply reading to your children and talking with your children could help boost their IQ by as much as 20 percent? Research shows that providing relaxing home and school environments that are print- and material-rich are likely to reduce stress and, in turn, boost children's achievement in a range of academic subjects, such as reading, writing, arithmetic, literature, science, and civics.

So how do you lower stress levels, better your family's health, improve your child's academic performance, and even potentially boost their IQ? By incorporating some simple solutions into your lives starting today.

There is no need to change your life dramatically. As a human behavior expert with a Ph.D. in Psychology and a Doctorate of Education, I've developed a set of Seven Simple Solutions for Smarter, Less Stressed Kids. This is a set of easy-to-follow tips that you can do with your family to help alleviate stress, strengthen focus, and improve academic performance. Try incorporating one new Simple Solution into your family routine each week for a month, and see what a difference small steps can make.

### EACH SIMPLE SOLUTION INCLUDES:

- **Did You Know?** The research, statistics, and some helpful information about how and why each Simple Solution can help your child.
- **Simple Solution.** One general, simple, easy-to-follow activity that families can do together.
- **Make It Your Own.** Specific tips and ideas on how to adjust each activity based on children's ages and alternate ways of doing the activity.
- **Notes.** A section for you to keep track of what's working and what's not working for your family.

### THE RULES

There are just a few rules that apply to each of these Simple Solutions:

- Turn off all televisions, laptops, tablets, and cell phones for the duration of each activity.
- Remember to treat each family member with deep respect and love.
- Build trust by making eye contact with family members and show you are giving full attention.
- Remember there are no hard rights or wrongs. Each family is different, and each activity can be adjusted to suit your family.



*Dr. Gail Gross*

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# THE FAMILY THAT READS TOGETHER, GROWS TOGETHER



By Dr. Gail Gross, Ph. D. Ed.D.

## SIMPLE SOLUTION #1

### DID YOU KNOW?

You can boost your child's IQ by reading with them, and engaging in active listening: talking about what you just read. Reading achievement, especially in elementary school, forms the foundation for all successive learning pursuits. Based on the findings of a study I conducted in the Houston Independent School District, as well as past research, much of the responsibility lies with not only the school, but also the family, in terms of the environments they provide the student. My research shows that parents need to actively model the importance of reading, by reading to and with their children. When kids see you reading, they will read. When you read with your children, you create an environment in which learning is valued.

### SIMPLE SOLUTION

Spend at least 20 minutes each day reading with your child and talking with them about what you just read.

### MAKE IT YOUR OWN

- For children ages 0-3, this can mean reading to them as they are falling asleep at naptime.
- For older children, this time can be split in half: you read for 10 minutes, and they read for 10 minutes. Then, you talk together for 10 minutes about what you just read.
- Or, you can take turns each day: you read one day, and your child reads the next day.
- For many families, the most natural time for to incorporate reading time is at bedtime, but this can also be broken up into several chunks of time throughout the day.

## NOTES

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# TAKE A BREAK FROM HOMEWORK



By Dr. Gail Gross, Ph. D. Ed.D.

## SIMPLE SOLUTION #2

### DID YOU KNOW?

Brains – especially growing brains – need breaks in order to function at optimal ability. Homework will get done faster and more efficiently with regular breaks. Humans were not made to sit for several hours a day; we were made to be hunters and gatherers, to move around. In terms of homework time, the brain can only learn what the bottom can endure.

### SIMPLE SOLUTION

Instead of sitting down for one entire hour to finish homework, encourage your child to take breaks when they feel their mind start to tire or wander, when they just can't concentrate anymore; then remember to bring them back to finish their work.

### MAKE IT YOUR OWN

- After 20-30 minutes of concentrating on homework after school, encourage your children to take the next 10 minutes at rest.
- Offer your kids a healthy snack such as blueberries, a glass of milk– something good for the brain - during the break to replenish nutrients and recharge the brain.
- Get up and move! Encourage your child to stretch, to play outside, to dance to music, and let the brain roam.
- Get up and move – together! Take a walk around the block with your kids as you talk about their day at school.
- As the parent, be sure to monitor the length of each break and encourage your children to return to their homework after a few minutes.

## NOTES

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# THE BRAIN IS A SYMPHONY



By Dr. Gail Gross, Ph. D. Ed.D.

## SIMPLE SOLUTION #3

### DID YOU KNOW?

Music is a bridge between our right and left hemispheres. When accompanied by music, our behavior becomes relaxed and our minds respond as if we're memory whizzes.

Jannalea Hoffman, a music therapist from the University of Kansas, found that music can help students do better on tests. She created a Baroque piece of music that followed slow sound patterns and played it as background music for a group of nursing students taking a test; the control group did not hear the music. Hoffman found that those listening to the music had lower heart rates and higher test scores than the control group.

In my upcoming book, *Smart for Life*, I write about how Baroque music in particular helps. Because Baroque music moves at 60 beats per minute, it operates as a meditation, and relaxes your brain through scynopation. The music essentially expands the brain, and allows you to use the brain like an orchestra.

### SIMPLE SOLUTION

Make Baroque or classical music the background soundtrack in your home.

### MAKE IT YOUR OWN

- Start early. If you have a baby, play Baroque music during bath times, meal times, and before nap times.
- Play Baroque music while your child is doing homework.
- If your older children protest the idea of Baroque or classical music, begin gently by playing it while cooking dinner or cleaning the house. Keep it on in the background at home as much as possible.

## NOTES

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# PRACTICE THE EMPATHIC PROCESS



By Dr. Gail Gross, Ph. D. Ed.D.

## SIMPLE SOLUTION #4

### DID YOU KNOW?

Conversation is a natural way we connect with each other, but often we're doing more talking than listening. Practicing the empathic process strengthens your family bond by building mutual relationships and reduces stress by opening the heart rather than contracting against it.

The rules of engagement in the empathic process include both intimacy and respect; it teaches collaboration and compromise. When children are invested in the rules, they are invested in the consequences of violating those rules, therefore they are more likely to follow the rules. This is how we build confidence and competence. Each person takes a turn speaking, and while that person is speaking, everyone else is silently but actively listening.

### SIMPLE SOLUTION

Make family meeting times a priority. Set aside 10 minutes at the same time each day or 30 minutes at the same time each week.

### MAKE IT YOUR OWN

- Meet in the kitchen, the heart of the home, where nurturing happens and alchemy. Here, cooking occurs and things are transformed.
- Do not hold these meetings in a specific person's place of power: no bedrooms, offices, or even playrooms.
- Give each member of the family an equal opportunity to speak.
- If you have younger children who find the concept of waiting for their turn difficult, try using a neutral family symbol, such as an apple or a bookmark, and teach them that only the person holding the symbol is allowed to speak.
- Topic idea: ask each family member to share one high and one low point of the day.

## NOTES

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# PROGRESSIVE RELAXATION



By Dr. Gail Gross, Ph. D. Ed.D.

## SIMPLE SOLUTION #5

### DID YOU KNOW?

Something as simple as monitoring and paying attention to your breathing, and relaxing into your breath, can help lower stress levels. By lowering your stress levels, and that of your children, you can bring daily health benefits to the whole family. Progressive relaxation techniques, such as the ones I use in my meditation audio downloads, can lower blood pressure, improve circulation, and pump more blood to prefrontal cortex, which allows us to process our thoughts better.

We get the best of who we are when we put ourselves in what is known as this relaxed alpha state, because instead of being blocked by anxiety and stress, we have access to who we really are. We are not altering our brain structure through cortisol and stress hormone.

### SIMPLE SOLUTION

Have each family member, either together or individually, incorporate my stress reduction exercise at least once daily.

### MAKE IT YOUR OWN

- Make sure you practice this exercise in a quiet room, with no distractions.
- Schedule the time for this exercise into your day as you would any other commitment. The start of the day and as you are ending your day are the best times.
- Set a timer so you are not distracted by wondering if your 20 minutes is up.
- Find a room where you have plenty of space to lie down where you do not feel cramped by nearby objects.
- What you resist, persists: therefore, when you have distracting thoughts, invite them into your meditation. Don't fight them.

## NOTES

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# FREE PLAY



By Dr. Gail Gross, Ph. D. Ed.D.

## SIMPLE SOLUTION#6

### DID YOU KNOW?

In our busy world, over-scheduling and over-stimulating our children may be hindering their intelligence rather than helping. Many of the world's greatest discoveries happened during relaxed states. Albert Einstein came up with the theory of relativity when daydreaming while doing repetitive work at a patent office. James Watson claims his sudden insight during a good night's sleep led to the discovery of the double-helix, our DNA. Isaac Newton is said to have come up with his theory of gravity after seeing an apple fall from a tree while lounging in his mother's garden.

Our natural state is to be creative; we need to give children time to access their natural states and find their gifts. While children are young, parents should provide free play opportunities in safe, print- and material-rich environments, that foster elements of observation and creativity. By age four, a child's brain is 50% developed; by the teenage years, 80% of the brain is developed. Instead of constantly making sure your child is "doing something productive," give them time to themselves...and watch the amazing ways they will use that time.

### SIMPLE SOLUTION

At least once each day, set aside Free Play time for your children.

### MAKE IT YOUR OWN

- With babies and toddlers, give them a safe space that is somewhat confined. Let them explore the playroom, for instance, while you are nearby reading a book.
- Remember: safety first. Before giving babies, toddlers, and young children free play time, be sure to remove potentially dangerous items such as hot tea and coffee, knives, and other sharp objects from the area.
- With tweens and teens, allow them an allotted amount of time outside of homework, after-school activities, and hanging out with friends – 30 minutes or 1 hour – where electronics are off and you are nearby. Ensure they have plenty of tools such as paper, pen, pencils, books, gardening or cooking supplies, and other non-electronic activities that they can choose from.

## NOTES

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# MORNING REVISE



By Dr. Gail Gross, Ph. D. Ed.D.

## SIMPLE SOLUTION #7

### DID YOU KNOW?

Morning is the time that we have a great opportunity to open to our fullest potential. By meditating first thing in the morning, we are opening our minds by lowering stress and allowing the brain to use its optimal capacity. It is in this way that we set the intention for our day. When you help your family start the day off in a relaxed and stress-free environment, you set the tone for a vital, balanced, and productive day.

### SIMPLE SOLUTION

Make a conscious effort to set aside enough time each morning to create a relaxing start to the day for you and your family.

### MAKE IT YOUR OWN

- Awaken calmly versus being jolted out of bed by changing morning alarms to tranquil nature sounds or soothing music.
- Eat breakfast and drink your morning coffee or tea near a natural light source. Natural light enhances muscle relaxation.
- Begin the day with a daily meditation practice. You can download one of my audio books at [www.DrGailGross.com](http://www.DrGailGross.com).
- While getting dressed, take a few moments to pull your brain back from the tasks and responsibilities of the day and visualize your personal intention.

## NOTES

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