

# A BACKPACK FULL OF TIPS

put together by the Backpack  
team in the autumn of 2023

**Hoot, hoot!**

**We all know your head may sometimes spin a little, so in this booklet you can find tips from the Backpack team for the shared everyday life of parents and children!**

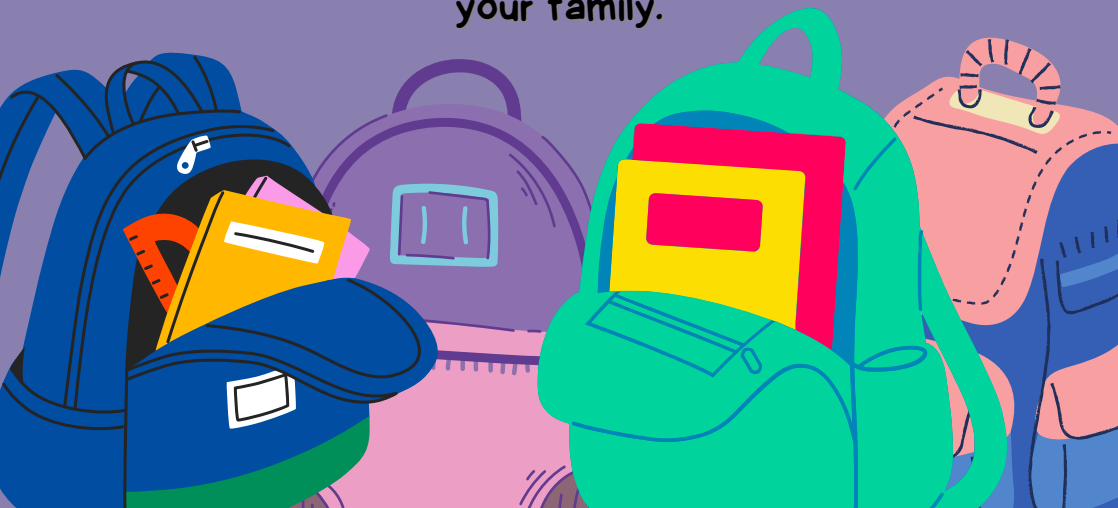
**OPEN-MINDED OWL**



The Backpack team pilot project took place at the Yli-Maaria School from November 2022 to December 2023. The objective of the multi-professional team was to promote the well-being of children and families with children as well as a sense of community in the school environment.

In the autumn of 2023, the team directed “backpack sessions” for the 1st to 2nd graders at the Yli-Maaria school where the pupils practiced interaction, emotional skills, and everyday skills using functional methods.

The themes in this booklet are linked to the themes of the backpack sessions and you can use the materials in the everyday life of your family.



# Holistic wellbeing



## SOCIAL

Family, friends, social skills, belonging to a community and participation (e.g. class)



## PHYSICAL

Physical activity, physical fitness, motor skills, sleeping and eating



## MENTAL

Emotions, thoughts, memory, emotional skills, learning, and cognitive abilities

- Well-being is not divided into simple sub-sections, but forms a complex network in which all sections interact.
- Holistic wellbeing also includes a wide range of skills that we adults are teaching to children every day. Being aware of the existence of the different areas of wellbeing makes it possible to pay attention to supporting them in everyday life.
- Through cooperation between the school and the family, we support children in acquiring wellbeing skills that help them get through life.

# Foundation of well-being



## Nourishment

- The overall situation and good choices in everyday life make a difference.
- A regular meal routine supports the child's natural regulation of eating.
- The child's energy needs and appetite are affected by factors such as growth rate, outdoor activities, changes in daily rhythm, amount of sleep and health. Appetite may vary periodically.
- Food should not be used as a punishment or a reward.



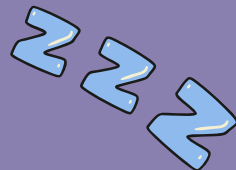
## Sleep

- A child of primary school age needs to sleep for about 9–11 hours a night.
- Sleep is needed to process knowledge and emotions, to learn and remember, to learn new skills and to feed imagination and creativity.

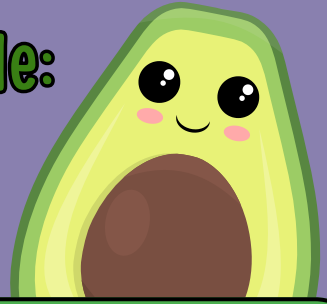


## Exercise

- According to the recommendations of the UKK Institute, children over 7 years of age are recommended to have diverse, energetic and strenuous exercise for at least one hour a day in a manner suited to them.
- Different children like to move in different ways, and not everyone is a natural, but it is possible to learn to find the joy of exercise.
- Physical exercise habits learnt as a child come with you through life.



# Tips for the dinner table:



## MENU

Mon: Chicken Bolognese (yhteishyva.fi)

Tues: Oven peppers with vegetable filling (meillakotona.fi)

Wed: Oven-baked meatballs (yhteishyva.fi)

Thurs: Chicken coconut soup (k-ruoka.fi)

Fri: Home-made fish fingers (meillakotona.fi)

Sat: Oven-baked pita-nachos (liedella.fi)

Sun: Sweet chili Mifu wok (valio.fi)

- Plan the menu for the week together in advance so that the child can also have a say while learning what diverse everyday food looks like and what is “food for special occasions”.
- Try out a recipe that is new for everyone every week!
- Put all the family's daily recipes into a jar from where you can draw meals and thus make it easier to come up with meals.
- Together with the child, make ready-made snacks that you put in boxes in the fridge. A 1st or 2nd grader can pick their own snacks from there.

When you're not inspired to come up with meals!



## Reminders to support a healthy relationship with eating

- Eating together: a pleasant moment together, non-rushed chatting.
- Flexible attitude, food should not be labelled as banned or allowed.
- Thank, give a compliment and encourage, positive talk about food.
- Also think about your own relationship with food.

# A BACKPACK FULL OF EXERCISE TIPS

Yard and housework  
picnics for the whole family in the outdoors  
games of imagination in the local nature

Safe trip to school by walking or cycling

Outdoor games, tag, ball games with friends

Using stairs instead of lifts

Local events organised by various actors and free clubs

Exercise sessions for the whole family

An athletic hobby that the child likes

Parents' example

Tips for exercise and playing at and of the home: [Neuvokasperhe.fi/en/](http://Neuvokasperhe.fi/en/)



Physical activity does not always mean guided hobbies, but it may be part of everyday routines.

# SLEEP TIPS

Try to be present for the child before bedtime and talk about the events of the day.

"What happened during the day that was fun?"

"Do you have something on your mind?"

Occasional sleep difficulties are a part of everyone's lives at times!

ZZZ



## Breathing exercises

Start the exercises with the child by listening to your breathing together and reflecting on it. What is breathing? Or where do you feel it?

You can tell the child that inhaling brings energy to the body and alertness for the mind, whereas exhaling helps the body calm down and soothes the mind.

When carried out regularly, calming games strengthen the ability to stop, focus attention and calm the mind.

## CHALLENGE

At least one hour before going to bed, the whole family puts their phones and other screens on park!



## Evening routines

Each family has their own kind of evening routines that fit them the best.

The same evening routines and daily routines should also be followed on weekends.

Children may find routines boring, but what if you drew a comic strip about the routines together?

ZZZ

Draw and colour or print pictures from Papunet of your child's evening routines with one activity in each square. In this way, the child will also learn to do the evening routines more independently. In the appendices at the end, you can find an example of a routine comic strip and a "belly waves" breathing exercise.





# SUPPORTING THE WELL-BEING OF THE MIND

Exercise and doing  
things together

Sufficient sleep  
and rest

Play and  
creativity

Being seen and  
heard

Regular daily  
routine

Relationships  
and feelings

Nutrition and  
eating together



# Everyday emotional skills



When you read books together, guide the child to notice the emotions of the characters and think together about how the characters are feeling and how emotions make them act.



Say your own feelings out loud as well. Think about how you express and show how you feel.



Notice the good things about the child and say it out loud!



When a child experiences a strong emotion, it would be good for an adult to help the child identify the emotion, and to verbalize and accept it. This makes the child feel better and makes them feel that they have been accepted and heard with their emotions.



# COMMUNITY AT THE SCHOOL

## Threat or opportunity...?

The role of school is particularly important as a centre of social life for children and young people. It is a place to meet new people, create friendships, and practice working with others.

The school offers the opportunity to belong to a community also outside the home and hobbies.

Practicing interaction skills is just as important for adults as for children!



How to create a community - tips for parents:

- Get to know other pupils' parents
- For example, start a WhatsApp group chat for the parents
- Agree on common rules: friends' visits and birthday parties
- How do you make sure that no one is left alone?



# SUPPORTING THE CHILD'S ALERTNESS AND EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS WHILE DOING HOMEWORK



- Agree with the child on the homework hours and breaks. You can also write down instructions for the activity with pictures of the different stages of the activity.
- You can use a timer for help, such as an egg timer or Time Timer. Do homework in stages; for example, by taking a break after ten minutes of homework. If following a timer does not feel natural, you can agree that the child can take a break every three math problems or after reading a paragraph.
- A suitable break is very short, such as a small walk and drinking a glass of water.

Time-perception apps for your phone or iPad, such as Mouse Timer or Time Timer visual.

Measure the time that the child can continuously concentrate on work and pause doing homework accordingly!

Avoid mobile devices during the break!



## Common tips to take into account for homework:

- Do one thing or step at a time. Give the child time to react or act as instructed.
- Remember! The assignment may be clear to you, but the child needs time to understand what they are expected to do in the assignment. Please provide instructions only after making sure the child is listening to you.
- Reduce disturbing factors in the environment, such as noise and visual stimuli.
- Keep the necessary tools out (e.g. a pencil and eraser) but as few other items as possible on the work desk.
- Use headphones and/or music to help focus. It is a good idea to only play music that the child is already familiar with so that they don't focus too much on listening to the lyrics.
- Verbal instruction is not always enough: use pictures, checklists, or show an example.
- Reading the task out loud and thinking out loud can help you concentrate and progress in the task.
- Make sure that the assignments vary: the child can alternate between math assignments and reading tasks.
- If necessary, talk with the teacher to ensure that the amount of homework is reasonable.



# REGULATING ALERTNESS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

## What does it mean?

Alertness describes a person's fluctuation in attentiveness, learning ability, and energy. It is normal for our alertness to fluctuate countless times during the day. During the day, regulation often takes place automatically, for example when a tired person does small movements.

When hyperactive, it is difficult for a person to sit still, concentrate or be quiet. Falling asleep as well as starting or continuing an activity might also feel difficult.

When unenergetic, a person is tired, slow and does not necessarily want to be around other people. In this case, it is also not possible to get started on a task or successfully continue it in a planned manner.

## Why?

The ability to regulate your alertness is important from the perspective of learning. Learning and better regulation of your activities are only possible in the right state of alertness.

The child is still learning regulation skills and adult support is necessary.

The body and mind do not calm down when told to do so, meaning that this requires physical activities that an adult can guide the child to find and practice.

High alertness



Suitable



Low alertness



Factors increasing alertness:

How to regulate?

Factors that lower alertness:

- Drinking cold water
- Chewing gum or eating crunchy food
- Brightening the lights and colours in the room
- Listening to music with high or bright voices or fast-paced music
- Ventilation of the space
- Jumping
- Putting hands in cold water

These actions may also help stabilise the level of alertness in both directions



- Dimming lighting
- Reduction of sound stimuli
- Calming sounds
- Tightly wrapping up in a blanket
- Strong hug
- Cold/hot drinks
- Hot shower
- Being near a pet or a stuffed toy and stroking it
- Interacting with a stress toy
- Petting

# Low-threshold help

- Varha: Ask for help button: <https://www.varha.fi/fi/tietoa-varhasta/asiakkaana-hyvinvointialueella/sahkoinen-asiointi/pyyda-apua>
- The Family Federation of Finland's Hyvä kysymys website: <https://www.hyvakysymys.fi/kohderyhma/perheet/>
- Mannerheim League for Child Welfare: e.g. friends activity, chat services, parents' helpline
- PikkuHelppi by parishes: <https://www.turunseurakunnat.fi/lapset-ja-perheet/tukea-vanhemmuuteen/pikkuhelppi>
- Guide to low-threshold support services for children, young people and families: [https://www.turku.fi/sites/default/files/atoms/files/matalan\\_kynnyksen\\_palvelut\\_19042021.pdf](https://www.turku.fi/sites/default/files/atoms/files/matalan_kynnyksen_palvelut_19042021.pdf) (in Finnish)

It's good to be able to cope,  
but do you always have to?



Put together by the Backpack team in the autumn of 2023:

Jenni Honkamaa, Community artist/Project coordinator, Dance teacher, Bachelor's degree

Noora Käkönen, Project Coordinator, Nurse, Bachelor's degree

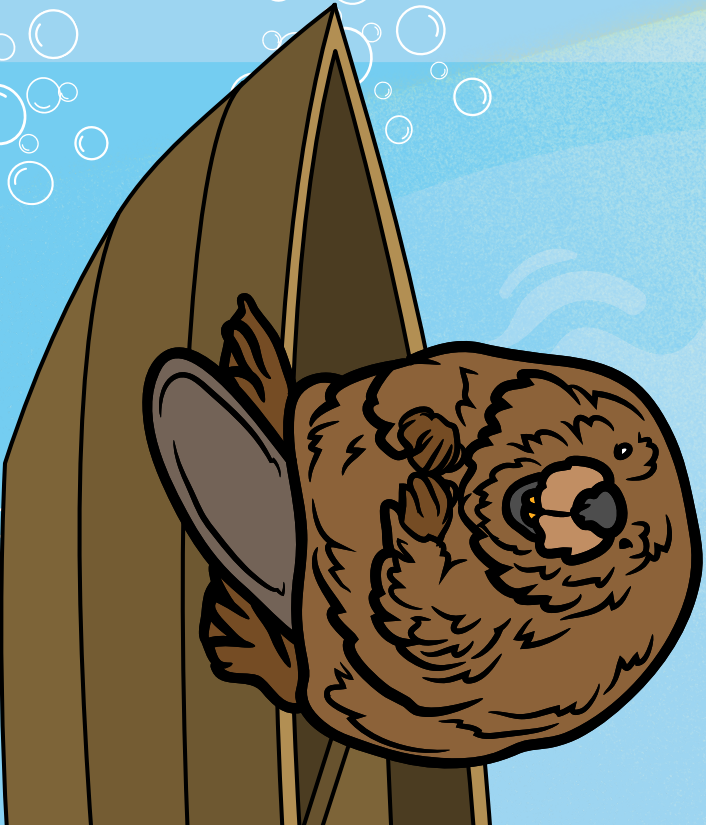
Reetta Kouki, Project Coordinator, Occupational therapist, Bachelor's degree, Master of Education

The Backpack pilot was implemented by the social and health care centre project for the future of Southwest Finland. Involved in cooperation is the City of Turku's Cultural Spearhead Project.

## Annexes:

- Belly waves breathing exercise
- Comic strip of evening routines
- First-then activity card

# Belly waves - breathing exercise



Do you see how the stuffed toy goes up and down on the tummy in time with breathing? Imagine it floating steadily and calmly on top of gently rolling waves, rising up with inhalation and lowering down with exhalation. The stuffed toy dreams on the lovely waves of breathing at a calm pace. Where is the stuffed toy travelling to on the belly waves?



# Instructions for the breathing exercise

In the belly waves exercise, the child is asked to choose a favourite cuddly toy to help with the exercise. First, you lie on your back, after which the toy is placed as a passenger on top of the stomach or chest.

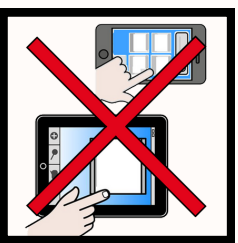
If the passenger falls off, that is okay. It can be placed right back to continue the journey on the waves of breathing. This calm and relaxing breathing exercise can continue for as long as the child feels comfortable.

Dimming the lights and creating a calm atmosphere support concentration on the game.

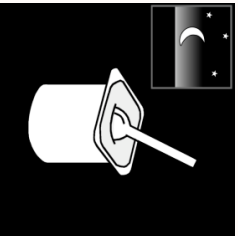
# ROUTINE COMIC STRIP

You can print out the routine comic and put it on the wall so that the child can cover the part with paper which they have already completed. This way, the child learns self-guidance at the same time. You can find more pictures suitable for your family's evening routines online on Papunet or you can draw/take the pictures yourself.

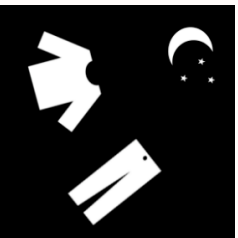
## Evening routines



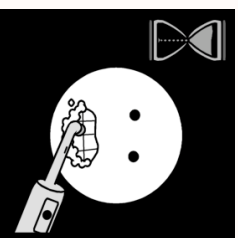
Screens on  
standby at  
night



Evening  
snack



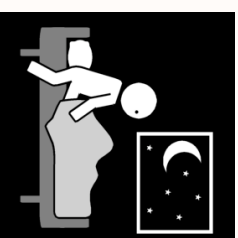
Changing into  
pajamas



Tooth brushing  
2 min.



Bedtime story,  
calming down



To bed

# First-then

First the assignments,  
then the fun



**DONE**

First I do

First I do

First I do

Then I get

