

Naples Players actors Joseph Byrne, left, and Alyssa Haney rehearse a scene for "The Wedding Singer," Monday at the Sugden Community Theatre in Naples. JON AUSTRIA/NAPLES DAILY NEWS

Singer

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everything.

Its two stars also stepped way out of their comfort zones.

"I've been playing guitar since I was 16, but I've never played it in front of a live audience," said Joseph Byrne, who will play his own guitar accompaniment onstage as Robbie Hart, the conflicted hero. "I've never been in a band. It's always been my little passion project.

"What's really cool about this musical is that it's not a juke box musical," he continued. "But the music is so clearly drawn from the '80s ballads, the hits, the charttoppers that it really does set a cool tone."

For Alyssa Haney, who plays Robbie's true love-tobe, Julia Sullivan, "The Wedding Singer" was boot camp. Haney hadn't been onstage in five years.

"I wanted to get onstage this summer. It seemed like a really fun show, but I just wanted be in the ensemble," she explained. She admitted she was annoyed when Lebrecht-Fornara spotted her and asked her to return for a reading of Julia: "I thought, there's no way

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I'm going to get this part, and now I have to learn all this music."

But Haney, who first came to Naples Players as a member of its pit orchestra, said she trusted Lebrecht-Fornara's instincts.

"She would not waste my time considering me for this part," Haney said. And then she watched clips from the musical, "And I said, I have to have this role."

It's been heavy lifting after five years, Haney conceded.

"Not that I'm old, per se, but my career is very busy. The challenge is it's not coming as easily as it used to the memorization, the energy, even my voice," she said. "It's really kind of dusting myself off."

Haney agreed with an assessment of it as stage boot camp — "but a fun boot camp!"

Haney looks for the message in the work she does, and this one had a winner to her. She saw that lesson in Robbie's attempt to go into finance to impress Julia, and her hasty decision, in her anger, to marry the wrong guy, when she knows she loves Robbie.

"You have to be true to yourself. Be honest with yourself," she said.

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Prevent Summer Slide for Children with Blue Zones Power 9®

By Sebastien Saitta

It's the last day of school and that oh-so-sweet sound of the bell fills the air. As adults, we can recall the overwhelming feeling of excitement and freedom that came with it. For so many kids, this sound means it's time to kick back and enjoy life without homework, bedtime curfew, and that early morning rise and rush to get to school on time. As great as this all may seem, there is a drawback that parents need to be aware of known as summer slide.

Although this term typically refers to the loss in academic knowledge throughout the summer, there is also a physical and mental health component. A study published in International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity found that lack of the school day during summer vacation negatively impacts sedentary behaviors, sleep timing, and screen time for elementary-aged children. The study goes on to suggest that these behaviors contribute to accelerated body mass index which could lead to childhood obesity. The trouble with obesity in children is that it could lead to health problems like diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and even poor self-esteem. To make matters worse, all that extra screen time among young people is more likely to lead to depression and anxiety according to a new study published in the journal Preventive Medicine Reports.

The good news is, The Blue Zones Power 9®, a set of principles followed by the world's longest-lived people provides an easy-to-follow way for parents to help school-age children avoid summer slide and improve their well-being for a happier and healthier upcoming school year.

1. Move Naturally

Rather than spend time indoors where smartphones, video game consoles, and computers are readily available, encourage your child to safely play outdoors or ride their bike. Or, sign them up for summer camp that offers a lot of outdoor activities. Have a gardening project that you need help with? Invite your child to dig in the dirt and plant some fruits, herbs, and vegetables. Not only is gardening one of the best ways to move naturally, kids can enjoy the fruits of their labor, literally!

2. Purpose

Okinawans call it ikigai or "reason for being" and Costa Ricans call it "plan de vida." Providing your child with a sense of purpose can impact their well-being in a big way! We're not necessarily talking about your child discovering their life purpose, but rather small, meaningful activities that positively impact their self-esteem and autonomy. This could include making a healthy dessert together and surprising your neighbor or your child's nearby grandparents by delivering it to them. Or, go to the grocery store together, purchase some non-perishable food items, and deliver them to a local food pantry for those in need.

3. Down Shift

It may be tempting to fill up your child's schedule with activities. Instead allow play time or practice mindful activities together like meditation or drawing. It's important to allow your child some time to recharge for the fall in order to avoid burnout and be more motivated for the school year.



4.80% Rule

"Hara hachi bu!" Okinawans use this term to remind them to stop eating when their stomachs are 80 percent full. The 20 percent gap between not being hungry and feeling full could be the difference between maintaining proper weight or gaining it. Encourage your child to eat more slowly and avoid overfilling their plates. Better yet, use smaller plates for the meal. This will help your child to consume less, therefor lessening their chance of unnecessary weight gain.

5. Plant Slant

Your mom told you to "eat your veggies". Now it's time to take those words of wisdom and pass them on to your children. The current 2020-2025 U.S. Dietary Guidelines recommend that children ages 2 to 18 eat between one to two-and-a-half cups of vegetables per day (depending on overall calorie intake) and between one and two cups of fruit a day (again, depending on overall caloric intake). Invite your child to prepare the meal with you. Often, children are more likely to eat their veggies because they helped make it and it's a great way to spend time together.

6. Friends @ 5

The school year provides constant social interaction which is important for a child's development. Unfortunately, this can be lost all too easily during the summer. More time at home and away from other kids often means more time with social media, video games, and electronics that can increase social isolation and loneliness. Make it a point to get your child to socialize with others whether it's through summer camp or organize play time with their friends.

7. Belong

Belonging to a faith-based community has many benefits for all ages that include a sense of peace, support, and acceptance. Check with your faith-based organizations to see if they offer summer activities for children. Perhaps they offer volunteering opportunities. This is a two for one that provides purpose and a sense of belonging. Amen to that!

8. Family First

The family is the child's primary social group and is the single most important factor that determines their development. Whether it's summer vacation, taking a bike ride together, or even having meals together, family engagement goes a long way in optimizing a child's well-being. It's important to practice family first not just during the summer but all year round.

9. Right Tribe

As a parent, it's no secret that you want your child spending time with the right people as they can have a big influence on their behavior. Be sure to get to know who your child is spending time with during the summer. It often helps to also get to know their parents.

Brought to Southwest Florida by NCH Healthcare System, in collaboration with Sharecare, Inc., Blue Zones Project is a vital part of Southwest Florida's well-being improvement initiative that encourages changes in the community that lead to healthier options. For more information about Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida, visit southwestflorida.bluezonesproject.com.