



Free Your Brain: Change Your Mindset

We have been learning about the power of self-talk. There is a forbidden phrase in SPARK class: "I don't get it." This is a complaint that reflects a non-growth mindset. Instead, we are trying to reframe in a more positive way: "I don't understand this yet" or "The solution eludes me at this time."

Our yearlong focus includes, "The Power of Yet." The mascot for this positive mindset will be a Yeti. If anyone finds stuffed toys, pictures, t-shirts or anything else with a cute Yeti, please let me know—I want to put together a permanent class display.



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Spark Class Update

Our main theme this year is Free Your Brain, Change Your Mindset! Our second unit is "Me On The Family Tree." We will be talking about how our backgrounds impact our learning, and we will celebrate our rich diversity!

HOMEWORK ALERT!

There are THREE parts to this unit homework.

They are all due by December 11th!

1. Work with your child to make a "Heritage Tree." This is like a family tree, but the focus is on the culture of our families. All of the cultures that are part of our background mix to make us who we are.
2. Have your child make a visual representation of one of your family traditions. Be creative! We will share these in class.
3. Food is such an important part of our heritage and traditions. If you are willing, please send me an electronic copy of a family recipe that I could share with our SPARK families. Feel free to send me a sample! 😊



Fun Things To Do On Winter Break

Having kids at home for two weeks can be a challenge for some of us. Here are some suggestions for activities you can do when the holiday doldrums hit.

1. Clean out the clothes closets. This is not necessarily the most fun activity, but it is remarkably satisfying when it is done! Donate anything that is outgrown or that is never worn. I often have things lurking in my closet that I thought I would want to wear, but I never actually do, and those find a new home. This is also a good time to make sure you have school uniforms that fit!
2. Try a new restaurant (I recommend lunchtime for specials). Go all out with an appetizer, entrée and dessert!
3. Give back. There are numerous opportunities to donate time to local charities. My son loves to go to the cat room at the ASPCA and help socialize the cats who are waiting for their forever homes.
4. Cook something new and fun! Get everyone involved in the planning, prep, and cooking!
5. Have a tea party. My family was recently inspired by watching way too many British Mystery tv shows (*Sherlock*, *Rosemary and Thyme*, *Midsomer Murders*, *Murdoch Mysteries* from Canada), so we planned a day with a midafternoon meal of homemade scones, whipped cream, jam, little fancy sandwiches and tea. I will share recipes if you email me!
6. Learn origami! There are lots of online tutorials and the projects are fun and help develop perseverance.
7. Try a new workout. There are hundreds of workout videos on youtube; I enjoy many of the yoga tutorials. Take 30 minutes a day and get moving!
8. Make Thank You cards. Hand made cards are fun to make and receive, and they will be handy after gifts are exchanged. Teach your kids how to write a short note of appreciation.
9. Go Geocaching! There is more information at this address: <http://www.navicache.com/cgi-bin/db/distancedp.pl?lat=36.0602&lon=-95.9212>
10. Celebrate Star Wars! There are several activities in Tulsa in anticipation of the new movie: <http://www.tulsakids.com/Web-2015/Star-Wars-Events-in-Tulsa/>



Calendar of Caring December Focus: Being Together

<http://thefamilydinnerproject.org/newsletter/five-gifts-keep-giving/>

From Mrs. DePalma—I just discovered this website, and I am in love with the idea of changing the world, one family dinner at a time.

FIVE GIFTS THAT KEEP ON GIVING

Happy holidays! Let's keep the giving spirit that started with Thanksgiving and [#GivingTuesday](#) going all through December.

The materialistic hoopla of the holiday season can sometimes make us forget what's really important—and what makes us truly happy. An abundance of research has proven that more than our possessions, it's our experiences that bring us enduring joy (Ever noticed how your child covets a certain toy until he gets said toy and then is quickly done with it?).

Whether we're anticipating an experience or remembering it, time spent with the people we love is often what perseveres in the long haul. Even those best laid plans that don't go as expected. Most of us will agree with the sentiment of James Hamblin, the author of this [Atlantic Monthly](#) article titled "Buy Experiences, Not Things" when he writes: "Even a bad experience becomes a good story."

Here are some ideas for keeping your giving spirit going while creating memories together this holiday season.

VOLUNTEER TOGETHER.

Here's an easy way to do good and spend quality time together as a family. Talk together about what types of volunteer activities you might want to do using [these tips](#). Then research what organizations in your area need help and find out if children are welcome. Our friends at [Doing Good Together](#) may be able to help you identify opportunities in your area. If you can't find anything local for the whole family, come up with something creative you can do from home—like making [Cards for Hospitalized Kids](#). Here are [more ideas for local giving](#).

BE PRESENT.

Often it's not about giving presents, but about *giving your presence* that's truly important. Sometimes we all get caught up in the mire of work and daily responsibilities. Make a conscious effort to turn off your computer or your cell phone and [have a conversation](#). Or [play a game](#) (Of course we think dinner time is a great time to do this—but whatever time works best for you!). Maybe turn this activity into a ritual—every Saturday is game night, for example, which ups the odds even further that you're creating memories and stories for a lifetime.

TO DO OR NOT TO DO?

That is the question! No time of year feels busier than December, which is full of all those "To Do's": holiday cards, teacher gifts, concerts, visits with friends and family, and more. Look at your list,

see what you HAVE to do, and think about what you WANT to do. Then give yourself a gift and cross something off your list. One less project might mean a little less pressure and a little more time for fun with family.

PUMP UP THOSE GIVING MUSCLES.

As the old saying goes, “Charity begins at home.” If you want to begin a habit of giving to others, it’s easiest to start by paying attention to how you interact with family members and close friends. When we regularly offer a helping hand to those closest to us, we’re strengthening our “giving muscles,” making it more likely that we’ll expand on those efforts to do more good works outside of our homes. Here are [some ideas](#) to get you and your family pumping up those muscles together!

FOOD

Start a new tradition (or just try a new recipe) with these [holiday sugar cookies](#) featured in Dr. Anne Fishel’s forthcoming book [Home for Dinner](#). And be sure to make a second batch for giving!

FUN

Twenty Questions

One person thinks of a family memory. Then everyone has to ask questions—up to 20 total combined—to figure it out. *Did it happen during a holiday? A meal? Was it a funny memory? Were there any friends involved?* And so on. It’s a game that also helps us preserve memorable experiences by remembering and talking about them together!

CONVERSATION

Our conversation starters this month are all about the gift of “experience,” real and imagined.

Age 2-7

Do you have a favorite memory of something you did with your family or at school? Tell a story about it.

What’s one new activity you would like to try but are scared to try? Why are you scared?

If you could go anywhere in the world (or out of this world), where would you want to go? What would you do there?

Age 8-13

Talk about a time you tried something new. What was it? What happened?

What was the best vacation you ever had? Or the best you can imagine?

Choose an experience from a book or a movie that you like to be in (e.g. going to Narnia, playing Quidditch, etc.). Explain why you chose what you did.