

valo

helping teens
find balance
2020

strike a balance.

One of the challenges in this time is helping the teens in our life (or ourselves!) strike a balance, and create a rhythm, while so much remains unfamiliar.

We're big fans of teacher, philosopher + entrepreneur, Brian Johnson, who shares his wisdom about balance. Johnson emphasizes the importance of what he calls The Big Three: energy, work, and love. He poses questions for consideration: "Who are you energy-wise at your best? Who are you work-wise at your best? Who are you love-wise at your best?"

Johnson believes that taking action in these three areas leads us to live better versions of ourselves. We may assume that our teens have balance. They may be a bit tipper than we realize.

Johnson invites us to take a moment (literally maybe a minute or two) every morning with our teens to write down one simple thing we want to do that day in each area. {Research shows taking this small moment to record our intentions makes a big difference in actually doing it!}.

Why not give it a try? Grab a scrap of paper, sit down (maybe grab a friend too!) and see where these questions take you.

- Energy - what do you do each day to take care of your body? Maybe it's eating a healthy breakfast. Or getting 8 hours of sleep. Or exercising for 30 minutes.
- Work - how do you want to show up at your work? Collaborate with a colleague. Dive into some deep learning. Try two hours of unplugged flow.
- Love - What do you want to do as a friend and family member? Smile more. Give hugs. Cook a meal. Compliment.

Johnson reminds us that this model isn't about being perfect, but instead about trying. That effort will make the difference in how we feel and show up. Those simple acts can lead us to our sweet spot...without even thinking about it, we'll be riding away. Balancing.





dive deeper.

Whether the teens in your life are in school full-time, or learning remotely, connection with others is undoubtedly looking a little different this year. With less time to chat in the hallways, smiles covered by masks, and social distancing to consider— face-to-face connection has shifted.

Reflecting on these challenges got us thinking about what exactly makes many of our conversations (when we do have them) meaningful. The questions we choose to ask our teens, and each other, are key. Our advice? Invite people to venture below the surface.

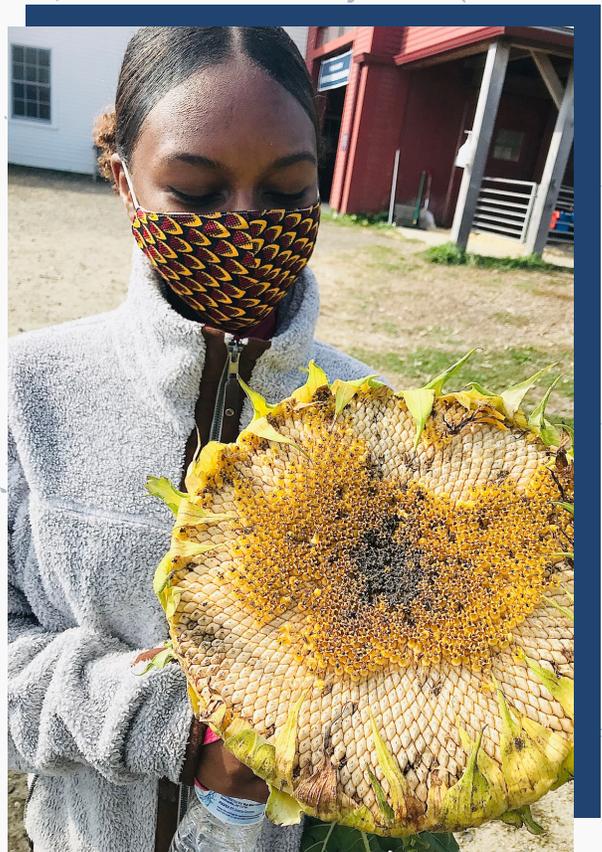
Try giving one of these a try...

- What makes you happy these days?
- What has been hard for you in recent months?
- Who do you feel especially connected to recently?
- What part of school (or work!) is filling you up (in a good way!)?

Aside from a good question, we have three suggestions, which can help us to be present and connected before we even begin the conversation.

Curious? Try to:

1. put your phone out of sight (like literally tucked away) and make eye contact.
2. enter the conversation with curiosity and without assumptions.
3. Consider this conversation as a chance to get to know this person on a new and deeper level.





flip the switch.

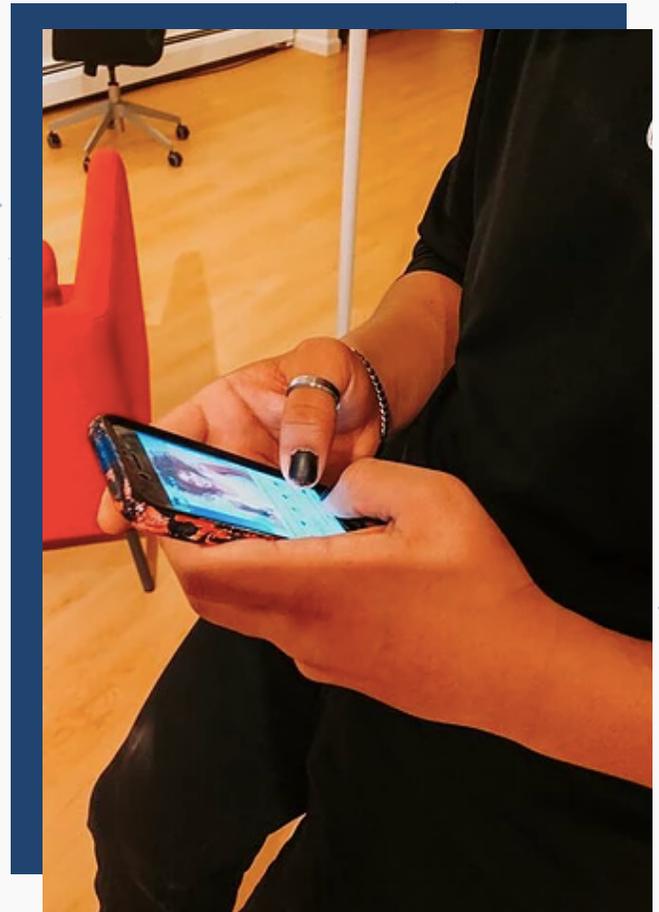
“Do you know what the best part of the big storm was?” one teen asked at a retreat following a multi-day power outage. “It was when my phone’s battery died. So great! No pressure to reply to texts or check status or count likes. No way to check my feeds. Instead, I got time to hang out—unplugged—and do whatever I wanted.”

Surprised? Believe it or not, everyone agreed. It’s easy to assume that teens want to be tethered to their technology. But stories like this remind us how burdensome constant digital connection can feel—no matter our age.

While teens appear happy to stare at their strings of texts and streaks on snapchat, they may feel much differently inside. Many of us, young and old, are so busy swimming in this fast-moving current, we aren’t even aware how its pull wears us out. The silver lining is that we’re all a bit stuck in this current together. And we can help each other climb onto the bank from time to time to rest.

What if, for a few minutes each day, we could nap, play, create? When we remember to put our phones down, we can hear our imaginations instead.

And so can everyone else. If technology is captivating, creativity is contagious. As you strum a guitar or knit in a nearby room, don’t be surprised if your teen picks up her sketchbook. With the simple flip of a switch, canvases and journals and instruments tempt us to tap into our creativity rather than our Instagram accounts.





It may take a bit of imagination—literally—for each of us to recognize that we really like creating. Our capacity to make something new, to transfer an idea from our minds to clean paper, raw wood, or an empty skillet, is universal. When we turn it on, we reap the benefits right away. Creating is good for us. And it's not about producing anything tangible, nevermind remarkable. The process of creating is the point.

When we create, we feed a part of our brain that can lay dormant without our even realizing it. In his Huffington Post article "Make More Art: The Health Benefits of Art," James Clear highlights findings from the American Journal of Public Health's review titled, The Connection Between Art, Healing, and Public Health. Clear explains that creating was proven to:

- reduce stress and anxiety
- increase positive emotions
- reduce the likelihood of depression

Clear shares the benefits of art (including writing) on our physical bodies. A groundbreaking study published in the Journal of Psychosomatic Medicine used writing as a treatment for HIV patients. Researchers found that the exercise of writing impacted cells inside the patients' bodies. It actually improved their immune systems.

Is it our imagination—or is it not? Painting, carving, cooking, and countless other creative pursuits refresh us in a way few day-to-day activities do. Consider this your invitation to flip the switch. Tuck your phones away and strike out on your own creative adventure. Maybe it's a new recipe, a watercolor illustration, or something else! After your creation is complete, snap a pic and share it with us using @valomaine. We can't wait to see!

