



Illinois Extension
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Connection Corner Kits Provided Tools That Helped Families with Emotional Connectedness

The social and emotional health of youth and families are critical pieces of overall health, and never more so than with the unusual challenges of 2020. CEO of the [CASEL Initiative](#) (Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning) Karen Niemi stated, “when physical distancing is deemed necessary, social and emotional connectedness is even more critical.” University of Illinois Extension 4-H staff in Fulton, Mason, Peoria, and Tazewell counties responded to this critical need by providing expertise and resources that assisted individuals and families in processing their stress and strong feelings, as well as fostering positive connections.

4-H Youth Educators [Judy Schmidt](#) and [Emily Schoenfelder](#) spearheaded the Connection Corner project that included the creation and distribution of 125 kits in January 2021, plus a new blog that launched in late 2020. Each kit was filled with engaging tools and strategies to help families cope with stress and anxiety.

“We chose activities that families could easily do together, would foster communication, and help families deal with big emotions during this challenging time,” said Judy. Activities in the kits included:

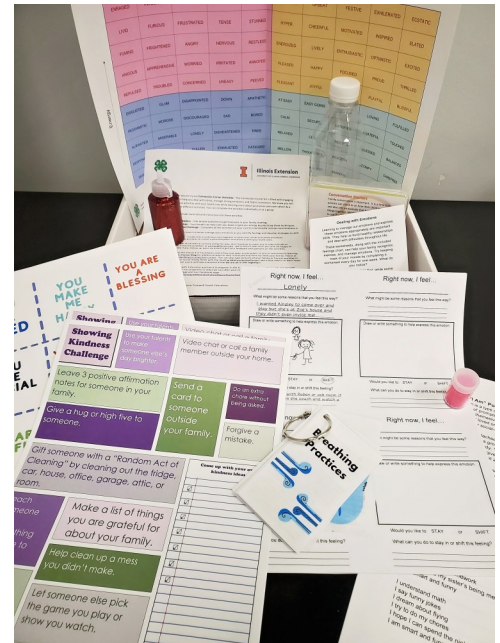
- conversation starters
- a kindness challenge
- calming glitter jar
- breathing practices
- emotion tracker
- poetry prompts

To expand the reach and continue the education, Emily and Judy write weekly articles for the [Connection Corner](#) blog. It focuses on timely information, activities, and resources to help people stay connected to loved ones, the world around them, and themselves. The blog includes topics such as outdoor family activities, journaling, family conversation starters, breathing exercises, and more.

Thanks to the Illinois 4-H Foundation, families received the Connection Corner kits for free. When asked to evaluate the effectiveness of the activities, 91% of the respondents found that all of the activities were useful and 85% said that the activities were both enjoyable and filled a need. One parent expressed that the calming glitter jar was a favorite of her son’s and that he seemed more mindful and willing to use his words to express his frustrations.

One of the most popular activities was the [Conversation Starters](#). 100% of families responding to the survey said the activity helped them jumpstart conversations and 94% reported that it helped build connections with others.

No matter at what level a family’s stress may be, the information available through the Connection Corner projects can help strengthen the family unit and support individuals.



Connection Corner kits were given to 125 families to help people strengthen their social and emotional health. The kits were filled with materials for hands-on activities, such as calming glitter jars and kindness cards.

Connection Corner Blog

extension.illinois.edu/blogs/connection-corner

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