



North Central Health Care

STARTING THE CONVERSATION

A Guide for Fostering Mental Health in Kids

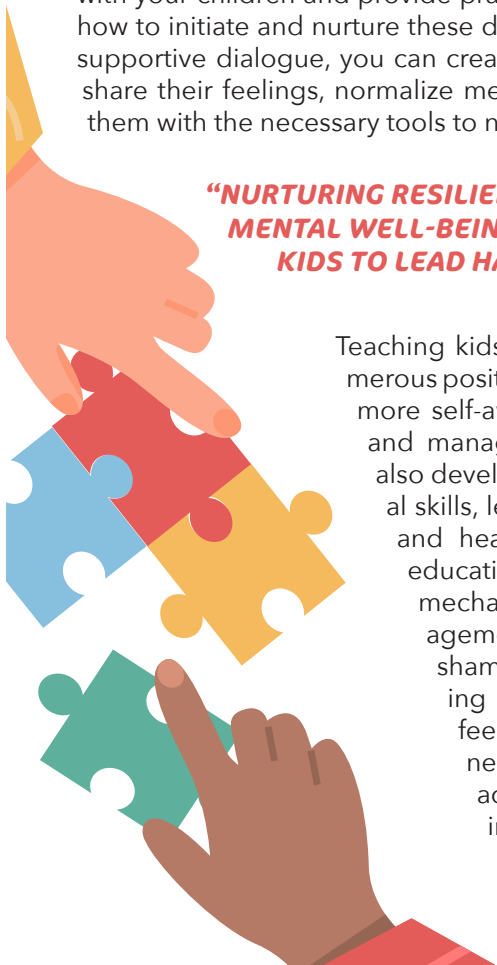


BUILDING STRONG MINDS

Just like we make sure to prioritize our children's physical health by providing them with nutritious food, water, and exercise, it's equally important to prioritize the health of their developing minds! Nurturing resilience, positivity, and a strong mental well-being in our kids is crucial for them to lead happy and healthy lives. In the pages that follow, we'll explore the importance of starting the conversation about mental health with your children and provide practical tips, activities, and insights on how to initiate and nurture these discussions. By creating an open and supportive dialogue, you can create a safe space for your children to share their feelings, normalize mental health experiences, and equip them with the necessary tools to navigate life's challenges.

“NURTURING RESILIENCE, POSITIVITY, AND A STRONG MENTAL WELL-BEING IN OUR KIDS IS CRUCIAL FOR KIDS TO LEAD HAPPY AND HEALTHY LIVES.”

Teaching kids about mental health skills has numerous positive outcomes. It helps them become more self-aware, allowing them to understand and manage their emotions effectively. They also develop empathy and better interpersonal skills, leading to improved communication and healthier relationships. Mental health education equips children with coping mechanisms, resilience, and stress management skills. It reduces the stigma and shame surrounding mental health, creating a safe environment where children feel comfortable seeking help when needed. Additionally, it enhances academic performance, promotes early intervention and prevention of mental health issues, and contributes to their overall well-being.





WHERE TO START

Starting the conversation about mental health with your children may feel daunting, but there are several effective ways to initiate and foster open discussions. Remember, starting the conversation about mental health is an ongoing process. Be patient, be open, and let your child know that you are always there to support and listen to them.

STRATEGIES TO BEGIN THE CONVERSATION

1. Create a safe & non-judgmental space:

Choose a relaxing setting where your child feels secure and can freely express themselves without fear of criticism or judgment.

2. Be an active listener: Show genuine interest in your child's thoughts and emotions. Listen and validate without interrupting. Let them know you are there to support and understand them.

3. Use age-appropriate language: Tailor language and explanations to your child's developmental level. Use simple, relatable terms to help them understand the concepts of mental health.

4. Be open and honest: Share your own experiences and emotions to create a safe space for your child to open up. Talk about times when you felt sad, stressed, or anxious, and how you managed those feelings. This encourages your child to feel comfortable sharing themselves.

5. Use storytelling or media: Books or movies can be great conversation starters. Choose materials that address mental health topics and use them to springboard discussions.

Ask your child what they think about the characters' emotions and how they might handle similar situations.

6. Normalize emotions: Help your child understand that it is normal and healthy to experience a range of emotions. Teach them that emotions, both positive and negative, are a natural part of being human. Encourage them to express their feelings and to ask for help when needed.

7. Incorporate daily check-ins: Establish a routine of asking your child about their day and how they are feeling. This can be during mealtime, bedtime, or any dedicated moment for connection. Encourage them to share both the positive and challenging aspects of their day.

THE FOUNDATIONS OF **MENTAL HEALTH**

At the core of mental health and well-being lies a set of foundational skills that empower individuals to navigate life's challenges, cultivate resilience, and nurture their overall emotional well-being. **These essential skills provide the building blocks for managing emotions, fostering positive relationships, and promoting self-care.** By developing and honing these skills, we can equip our children and ourselves with the tools necessary to thrive in an ever-changing world.



COMMUNICATION

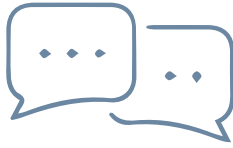
RESILIENCE

SELF-CARE

EMPATHY & COMPASSION

PROBLEM-SOLVING

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE



COMMUNICATION

Expression, Healthy Relationships & Conflict Resolution

Effective communication skills are vital for healthy relationships and personal growth. As parents, we play a crucial role in helping our children develop these skills from an early age. By engaging in fun and interactive activities, we can create opportunities for our children to practice and strengthen their communication abilities. From storytelling to role-playing, these activities not only encourage active listening and clear expression but also foster empathy, collaboration, and understanding. Explore the variety of engaging activities below that parents can do with their children to cultivate effective communication skills, enabling them to navigate the complexities of interpersonal interactions with confidence and grace.

SKILL BUILDING ACTIVITIES

Storytelling: Take turns creating stories together. Each person adds a sentence or paragraph to the story, building on what the previous person said. This activity promotes active listening, collaboration, and creative communication.

Family meetings: Hold family meetings where everyone can speak and be heard. Encourage everyone to share their thoughts, concerns, or ideas. This promotes respectful communication, problem-solving, and collaboration.

Collaborative drawing: Sit down with your child and a piece of paper or a whiteboard. Take turns adding elements to a drawing, building on what the other person drew. This activity promotes active listening, clear communication, and cooperation.

Reflective listening: Set aside dedicated time to practice reflective listening with your child. One person shares their thoughts or feelings while the other listens attentively. Then, the listener summarizes what they heard to ensure understanding. This activity enhances listening skills and empathy.

Conversation starters: Use conversation starter cards or create your own. Each person takes turns picking a card and answering the question or sharing their thoughts. This activity helps children develop their verbal communication skills and fosters meaningful conversations.

RESILIENCE

Adapt, Persevere, & Maintain Positive During Challenges

Building resilience in children is crucial for their emotional well-being and ability to navigate life's ups and downs. As parents, we can play an essential role in helping our children develop resilience by engaging them in various activities and experiences. This list of activities is designed to provide parents with practical ideas to practice resilience with their children. From obstacle courses that encourage perseverance to mindfulness exercises that promote emotional regulation, these activities foster skills such as problem-solving, positive self-talk, adaptability, and gratitude. By incorporating these activities into our daily lives, we can empower our children to bounce back from setbacks, face challenges with confidence, and cultivate a resilient mindset that will serve them throughout their lives.



SKILL BUILDING ACTIVITIES

Obstacle course: Create an obstacle course using pillows, hula hoops, or other household items. Encourage your child to navigate through the course, overcome challenges, and persist even if they stumble or fall. This activity promotes perseverance, problem-solving, and bouncing back from setbacks.

Positive affirmations: Teach your child to practice positive self-talk and affirmations. Together, create a list of affirmations or empowering statements. Encourage your child to repeat these affirmations daily or whenever they face difficulties. This activity helps build resilience by fostering a positive mindset and self-belief.

Reflecting on past successes: Sit down with your child and reflect on their past accomplishments and successes. Talk about the challenges they overcame and the skills they used to overcome them. This activity helps your child recognize their resilience and builds their confidence in facing future obstacles.

Gratitude practice: Cultivate a gratitude practice with your child. Each day, encourage them to identify and express gratitude for three things they are thankful for. This activity helps shift focus to positive aspects of life, fosters resilience by cultivating a sense of appreciation, and promotes a more optimistic outlook.



SELF-CARE

Healthy Habits That Support Overall Mental Health

In today's busy and demanding world, teaching children the importance of self-care is essential for their overall well-being. Engaging in self-care activities not only helps children relax and recharge but also cultivates life-long habits of self-nurturing and self-awareness. As parents, we can play a vital role in guiding our children towards practicing self-care. This list of activities offers a variety of enjoyable and age-appropriate options for parents to do with their children. From mindful coloring to nature walks and DIY spa days, these activities promote relaxation, mindfulness, and emotional well-being. By incorporating self-care into our children's routines, we empower them with the tools to prioritize their mental and physical health, fostering resilience and a positive relationship with self-care throughout their lives.

SKILL BUILDING ACTIVITIES

Mindful coloring: Set aside dedicated time for coloring with your child. Provide coloring books or print out coloring pages with intricate designs. Encourage your child to focus on the coloring process, allowing their mind to relax and unwind.

Nature walks: Take a leisurely walk in nature with your child. Encourage them to observe and appreciate the beauty of the natural environment. Encourage conversation and connection with nature.

DIY spa day: Create a mini spa experience at home with your child. Set up a relaxation area with soothing music, scented candles, and a bowl of warm water for foot soaks. Take turns giving each other hand massages, applying face masks, or practicing simple relaxation techniques.

Journaling or drawing feelings: Provide your child with a notebook and encourage them to express their thoughts and emotions through writing or drawing. Set aside time for journaling together, allowing your child to freely explore their feelings..





EMPATHY + COMPASSION

Supportive Relationships Through Kindness & Understanding

Developing empathy and compassion in children is essential for fostering positive relationships and creating a more empathetic and caring society. As parents, we play a crucial role in nurturing these qualities in our children. Engaging in activities that promote empathy and compassion allows children to understand the perspectives and feelings of others, cultivate kindness, and develop a sense of social responsibility. Take some time to practice the exercises below. Through these activities, children can learn to appreciate diversity, show empathy towards others, and make a positive impact in their communities. By incorporating these activities into our family routines, we can help our children grow into compassionate individuals who contribute to a more empathetic and inclusive world.



SKILL BUILDING ACTIVITIES

Random acts of kindness: Encourage your child to perform small acts of kindness throughout the day. This could include helping a family member with a chore, writing a thoughtful note for a friend or neighbor, or showing gratitude to someone who has been helpful. Discuss the positive impact of these actions and how they make others feel.

Volunteer together: Find local volunteer opportunities that are suitable for children and participate as a family. This could involve serving at a food bank, participating in a community cleanup, or visiting a local nursing home to spend time with the elderly. Engaging in acts of service helps children understand the needs of others and develop empathy.

Cultural exploration: Explore different cultures with your child by trying out traditional recipes, learning about customs and traditions, or visiting cultural festivals or museums. Discuss the importance of respecting and appreciating diverse cultures, fostering empathy and cultural sensitivity.

Animal shelter visit: Visit a local animal shelter together and spend time interacting with the animals. Talk to your child about the needs of the animals and how they can show compassion towards them. Encourage gentle interactions, such as petting and playing, while discussing the importance of empathy towards animals.

PROBLEM-SOLVING

Approach challenges with a positive and proactive mindset

Teaching children the art of problem-solving is an essential skill that empowers them to tackle challenges, think critically, and find creative solutions. As parents, we can foster problem-solving abilities in our children through engaging and interactive activities. The following list provides a range of activities that parents can do with their children to practice problem-solving skills. From puzzles and scavenger hunts to role-playing and science experiments, these activities not only promote critical thinking and decision-making but also make learning enjoyable and exciting. By actively participating in these activities, parents can nurture their children's problem-solving abilities, fostering their resilience, adaptability, and confidence in approaching and overcoming obstacles.

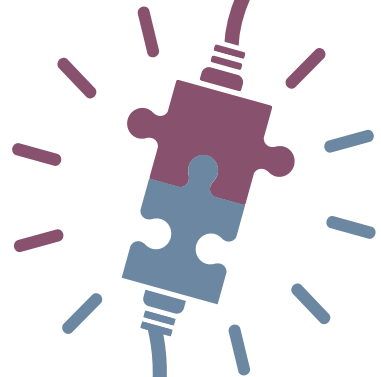
SKILL BUILDING ACTIVITIES

Scavenger hunts: Organize a scavenger hunt where your child needs to solve clues and overcome challenges to find hidden objects or reach a specific goal. This activity promotes critical thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving skills while making it fun and engaging.

Building projects: Engage in building projects with your child using building blocks, Legos, or other construction materials. Encourage them to design and build structures or solve design problems along the way. This activity fosters problem-solving, spatial awareness, and logical thinking.

Science experiments: Engage in simple science experiments with your child that require problem-solving and critical thinking. Encourage them to make predictions, observe, and analyze the results. Discuss the steps taken and the problem-solving strategies used during the experiment.

Real-life problem-solving: Involve your child in real-life situations that require problem-solving, such as planning a family outing, organizing a household chore schedule, or finding solutions to common household problems. Involve them in the decision-making process, encourage them to think critically, and discuss the strategies used.



EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Proper mental health encompasses various aspects that significantly contribute to our overall well-being and satisfaction in life. One vital component that we can actively develop within ourselves and teach our children is emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions and the emotions of others.

NURTURING YOUR CHILD'S EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE PLAYS A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN PROMOTING THEIR MENTAL WELL-BEING AND RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF LIFE'S CHALLENGES

As a parent, cultivating emotional intelligence in your children is essential. By focusing on your children's emotional intelligence, you empower them to develop a deeper understanding of themselves and others. This promotes healthier relationships, effective communication, and better decision-making skills. Furthermore, nurturing their emotional intelligence plays a significant role in promoting their mental well-being and resilience in the face of life's challenges. As a parent, you have a vital role in supporting and guiding your children to cultivate emotional intelligence, laying a strong foundation for their overall development and success in life.

THE 4 PILLARS OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

SELF-AWARENESS

SOCIAL AWARENESS

RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

SELF-REGULATION



ENCOURAGING SELF-AWARENESS

Help your children recognize and understand their own emotions, strengths, weaknesses, and values. By fostering self-awareness, you empower them to better navigate their inner world and develop a strong sense of self.

HIGH/LOW EXERCISE

Foster Self-Awareness & Supportive Family Connections

Encourage your child to share the best part (high) and the worst part (low) of their day, along with the corresponding emotions they felt. Discussing these experiences with your child is a wonderful way to engage in meaningful conversations while promoting self-reflection, empathy, and emotional intelligence. The goal is to foster open communication and create a supportive environment where your child feels comfortable expressing their emotions. By regularly engaging in these conversations, you deepen your bond, enhance their emotional intelligence, and strengthen their ability to articulate their feelings effectively.

Here's a simple approach to facilitate this discussion:

Create a comfortable and relaxed environment: Find a quiet and cozy space where you and your child can have a one-on-one conversation without distractions. This could be during mealtime, before bedtime, or during a dedicated family chat time.

Begin with open-ended questions: Start the conversation by asking, "What was the best part of your day?" This allows your child to reflect and share something positive that stood out to them. Encourage them to describe the experience in detail.

Show genuine interest and active listening: As your child shares, give them your full attention. Maintain eye contact, nod, and provide verbal cues to let them know you're actively listening. Avoid interrupting or offering immediate solutions.

Explore their emotions: Once they've shared the best part of their day, follow up by asking, "How did that make you feel?" This question encourages your child to connect their experiences with their emotions. Help them explore and identify the emotions they felt during that particular moment.

Use additional prompts: If your child needs guidance, ask more specific questions like, "Why did that make you happy/excited/proud?" or "How did that experience affect your mood?"

Validate their feelings: Regardless of the emotion expressed, validate your child's feelings. Let them know it's normal to experience a range of emotions and that all emotions are valid. Avoid dismissing or trivializing their emotions.

Reflect and share: After your child has shared their thoughts and feelings, take a moment to reflect and share your own experiences and emotions. This helps create a safe and open space for dialogue, promoting a sense of connection and understanding.

GUIDING RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

Support your children in developing and maintaining healthy relationships. Teach them effective communication skills, problem-solving techniques, and conflict resolution strategies. By providing guidance in relationship management, you equip them with the tools to navigate interpersonal challenges and foster positive connections.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION ROLE PLAY

Practicing Essential Relationship Management Skills

This interactive exercise allows children to express their thoughts and feelings while actively listening to others' perspectives. Through role play, children can develop crucial skills such as active listening, assertiveness, empathy, and problem-solving. By reflecting on the strategies used and discussing alternative approaches, children gain experience navigating conflicts, fostering healthier relationships, and managing interpersonal challenges in a positive, respectful manner.

Set the stage: Choose a quiet and comfortable space where you and your child can engage in the role play without interruptions. Create a supportive environment that encourages open communication and active participation.

Define the scenario: Discuss different scenarios that involve conflicts or disagreements. It could be a situation they have encountered before or a hypothetical scenario such as:

SHARING TOYS: Two friends want to play with the same toy at the same time. They both strongly believe it's their turn to play with it.

CHORES DISTRIBUTION: Siblings need to divide household chores, but they have different opinions on how the responsibilities should be distributed. They need to find a fair and balanced arrangement.

GROUP PROJECT: A group of students is working on a project together, but they have different ideas about how to approach it. They need to find a way to collaborate and reach a consensus.

FRIENDSHIP MISUNDERSTANDING: Two friends have a misunderstanding that has caused tension between them. They need to communicate and work through the issue to restore their friendship.

Assign roles: Decide on the characters in the scenario and assign different roles to each other. You can take turns playing different characters or have one person play the role of the child while the other takes on the role of a peer, sibling, or friend.

Act it out: Encourage your child to fully immerse themselves in their role and express their thoughts, emotions, and reactions during the role play. Focus on using effective communication techniques such as using "I" statements, active listening, and seeking mutual understanding.

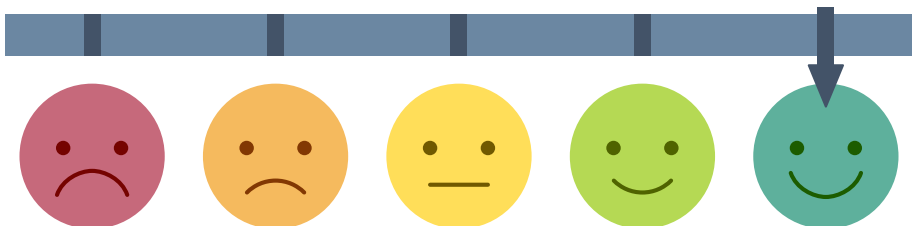
Reflect and discuss: After the role play, take some time to reflect on the strategies used and the outcomes. Discuss what went well and what could have been done differently. Encourage your child to think outside of the box and share their insights and ideas for alternative approaches.

Practice and reinforce: Encourage your child to apply the skills learned from the role play in real-life situations. Offer support and guidance as they navigate conflicts or disagreements in their daily interactions. Provide positive reinforcement when they demonstrate effective relationship management skills.



TEACHING SELF-REGULATION

Support your children in managing and regulating their emotions, impulses, and reactions. By providing them with tools and strategies to cope with challenging emotions, adapt to change, and maintain a balanced emotional state, you help them develop resilience and emotional well-being.



CALMING GLITTER JAR

A Tangible Tool to Find Inner Calm Amidst Life's Challenges

The Calm Down Jar is a simple yet effective tool that parents can create with their children to promote self-regulation and emotional well-being. By using a clear, plastic jar or bottle filled with water and glitter, parents can visually demonstrate how emotions can become chaotic and then settle over time. This activity provides children with a tangible representation of their emotions and teaches them the importance of finding inner calmness amidst life's challenges.

Gather the materials: Collect a clear, plastic jar or bottle with a secure lid, water, and glitter. Choose a size and shape that is suitable for your child to hold and observe.

Set the scene: Find a quiet, comfortable area where you and your child can sit down together without distractions. This could be a cozy corner of the house or a designated calm space.

Explain the purpose: Sit with your child and explain that the jar represents their emotions. Shake the jar, demonstrating how emotions can feel chaotic and overwhelming at times.

Watch the settling process: After shaking the jar, place it on a flat surface and observe as the glitter slowly settles to the bottom. Encourage your child to pay attention to the glitter as it moves and gradually comes to rest.

Practice deep breathing: Guide your child to take deep breaths as they watch the glitter settling. Encourage them to focus on their breath and the calming motion of the glitter, helping them understand the concept of self-regulation.

Integrate into daily routines: When your child is feeling overwhelmed, upset, or in need of a moment of calm, suggest they take a few moments to observe the Calm Down Jar and practice deep breathing. Encourage them to hold the jar, shake it if needed, and watch as the glitter settles, visualizing their emotions finding a state of calmness.

Reflect and discuss: After your child has spent some time observing the Calm Down Jar, engage in a conversation about their experience. Ask questions such as, "How did watching the glitter settle make you feel?" or "Did you notice any changes in your emotions as you focused on the jar?" This allows your child to reflect on the activity and its impact on their emotions.

PROMOTING SOCIAL AWARENESS

Help your children develop empathy and an understanding of the emotions and perspectives of others. Encourage them to recognize social cues, be considerate of others' feelings, and develop strong interpersonal skills. This will support their ability to build healthy relationships and navigate social interactions effectively.

TAKING AN EMPATHY WALK

Fostering inclusive and compassionate outlooks on the world

The "Empathy Walk" exercise is an engaging activity that parents can do with their kids to teach valuable social awareness skills. By choosing a safe and public place, such as a park or a busy street, parents can take a walk with their child while encouraging them to observe and empathize with the people around them. This activity prompts children to imagine the thoughts and feelings of others, fostering empathy and perspective-taking. By actively engaging in the activity and discussing different scenarios, children develop a deeper understanding of others' emotions and experiences, nurturing their social awareness and empathy skills. Through the "Empathy Walk," children gain a greater appreciation for diversity, kindness, and the importance of considering others' perspectives in their interactions and relationships.

Choose a suitable location: Select public place where you and your child can take a walk together. It could be a park, a busy street, or any other place with a diverse range of people.

Explain the purpose: Before starting the walk, explain to your child the objective of the activity. Inform them you will be observing the people around you and trying to imagine their thoughts and feelings. Emphasize the importance of empathy and understanding others' perspectives.

Start the walk: Begin walking with your child, encouraging them to observe the people they encounter. Prompt them with questions like, "What do you think that person's day has been like?" or "How might that person be feeling right now?" Encourage your child to take notice of body language, facial expressions, and other non-verbal cues.

Foster empathy and perspective-taking: Engage your child in discussions about different scenarios. Ask questions like, "If you were in that person's shoes, how would you feel?" or "What might be some challenges that person is facing?" Encourage your child to think deeply and empathize with the experiences of others.

Reflect and discuss: After the walk, find a quiet spot to sit down with your child and reflect on the activity. Ask them to share their observations and insights. Discuss the importance of empathy, understanding, and considering others' perspectives in our interactions and relationships.

Encourage action: Encourage your child to apply empathy and social awareness in their daily lives. Encourage acts of kindness, understanding, and inclusivity towards others. Reinforce the value of diversity and the positive impact empathy can have on individuals and communities.



ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

Looking for additional ways to invest in your or your child's mental well-being? At North Central Health care, we are here to support you as your mental health advocate and provide you with the necessary tools to enhance yourself, your parenting, and assist in your child's mental health. Mental health is an ongoing journey that can always be nurtured, strengthened, and improved. We encourage you to explore the additional mental and behavioral health resources and programs available at North Central Health Care, tailored for both children and adults. Together, we can prioritize mental health and work towards a healthier and happier future.

CALL 715.848.4600 FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

MENTAL & BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES

Outpatient Services

Therapy, counseling, psychiatric and psychological appointments

Community Treatment

Youth support services in a home, community or school setting

Counseling in schools

Individualized mental health services to kids in a school setting

Youth Behavioral Health Hospital

Short term inpatient therapeutic intervention and stabilization

Crisis Services

Support and stabilization of acute mental & behavioral health symptoms

CRISIS HOTLINE

715.845.4326 OR 800.799.0122.

THERE IS NO *HEALTH* WITHOUT *MENTAL HEALTH*



North Central Health Care

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715.848.4600