First 5 California Launches “Dragon Song” Campaign Aimed at Supporting Young Children’s Mental Health

Dragon Song and campaign offers strategies in managing children’s stress

(SACRAMENTO, CA - October 11, 2022) - In a proactive effort to help families manage everyday stressors, First 5 California (F5CA) is launching a new campaign that aims to educate on the importance of breathing as a powerful tool to help families and children deal with stress.

From school shootings to inflation to a global pandemic, families across the world have experienced a number of stressful situations in the last couple of years. Combined with everyday stressors, such as food insecurity, health care issues, or unreliable transportation, these events can have a significant impact on families, changing home dynamics that can adversely affect a child's mental health.

The goal of F5CA’s Dragon Song campaign is to demonstrate to parents and caregivers of children ages 0-5 how to model a fun breathing technique in the form of a dragon roar to help children self-soothe when experiencing stressful emotions that may show up as tantrums. By showing caregivers how to teach children to self-regulate emotions, they can be better equipped to support the fight-or-flight response that children often experience with certain stressors.

“Understanding and supporting the emotions of young children can be challenging for many parents and caregivers,” said Jackie Thu-Huong Wong, First 5 California Executive Director. “Through the Dragon Song campaign, we hope to equip families with helpful self-regulation tools, like deep breathing, that can be educational and interactive while helping model behaviors that can de-escalate or reverse stressful situations.”

Biologically, stressful events trigger anxiety that then impact the sympathetic nervous system, a network of nerves that helps activate the fight-or-flight response in humans when faced with demanding situations. To balance the impact, the parasympathetic nervous system — the network of nerves that relaxes the body during periods of stress — activates to help with relaxation through deep breathing exercises, like those included in the Dragon Song campaign. Additionally, research shows different emotions have different breathing patterns, and changing breathing patterns can help regulate emotions.

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The campaign will kick off with the release of the Dragon Song and webpage covering the importance of managing everyday stress in young children and how breathing exercises can help parents teach kids to self-soothe and avoid tantrums, all while encouraging bonding.

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**ABOUT FIRST 5 CALIFORNIA**
First 5 California was established in 1998 when voters passed Proposition 10, which taxes tobacco products to fund services for children ages 0 to 5 and their families. First 5 California programs and resources are designed to educate and support teachers, parents, and caregivers in the critical role they play during a child’s first five years—to help California kids receive the best possible start in life and thrive. For more information, please visit www.ccfc.ca.gov.