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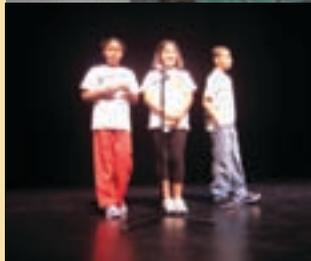
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Letter from the publisher

After hurricane, community

This is certainly not the column I had in mind for this issue just a few weeks ago, but that was before Sandy blew into town and uplifted our surrounding waters. That was before the coastal bliss turned into the home-wrecked nightmare and before the lights went out in so many parts of New York.



Many communities inside our larger New York community are devastated; so many families have lost their homes and their memories; some things just cannot be replaced. Still, in spite of the horror and the punch of this storm and it's aftermath, we have learned that our neighbors will not be abandoned; we have learned that thousands

a hard hit, and the people who inhabit them, the residences, and the businesses will not instantly be reestablished. There will be continued suffering and loss. The beaches of Staten Island and the Boardwalk of Coney Island have become rubble and the families who lived there will not live there anymore for now until we sort this out, rebuild perhaps, and reexamine what we need to do down the road to avoid such catastrophe.

of our citizens will rise to the occasion to lend a hand, a heart, and their energy.

From lower Manhattan to Red Hook, from Sheepshead Bay to Howard Beach, from City Island to the Rockaways, our shoreline and shores have taken

As a larger community we will need to relocate, house, nurture, and be gentle with adults and children who have lost a great deal and who have survived through tremendous upheaval and stress. We are capable of this and we have shown in the past that we can and will do this. We have taken hits before, all kinds of hits and we always find a way to move forward through the trauma, through the darkness and into the light of a new day.

We must remember at this holiday time, this ending of the year that we are all vulnerable and that our neighbors need us and will be needing us for months to come. We must also be thankful for the plenty we have and for the ability we have as a community to bounce back and to survive the difficult times, together and with union.

These magazines have the honor

and pleasure of printing throughout our city. We happily have a parent guide in every borough, going to every neighborhood, in every community. We will continue to support our neighbors in every way we can and New York Parenting Media will be there to bring continued information about our families and our children. We will continue to love each other.

I thank our wonderful staff, for their hard work and creativity, and I wish all of them and all of you a Happy New Year!

Thanks again for reading!

Susan Weiss-Voskidis,
Publisher/Executive Editor
Family@cnglocal.com

STAFF

PUBLISHER / EXECUTIVE EDITOR:

Susan Weiss

PUBLISHER / BUSINESS MANAGER:

Clifford Luster

SALES MANAGER / ADVERTISING:

Sharon Noble

OPERATIONS ASSOCIATE:

Tina Felicetti

SALES REPS: Lori Falco, Sharon Leverett

ART DIRECTOR: Leah Mitch

PRODUCTION DIRECTOR: On Man Tse

LAYOUT MANAGER: Yvonne Farley

WEB DESIGNER: Sylvan Migdal

GRAPHIC DESIGNERS: Arthur Arutyunov,
Charlotte Carter, Mauro Deluca, Earl Ferrer

MANAGING EDITOR: Vince DiMiceli

ASSISTANT EDITOR: Courtney Donahue

COPY EDITOR: Lisa J. Curtis

CALENDAR EDITORS: Joanna Del Buono,
Danielle Sullivan

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS:

Risa Doherty, Allison Plitt, Candi Sparks,
Laura Varoscak, Mary Carroll Wininger

CONTACT INFORMATION

ADVERTISING: WEB OR PRINT

(718) 260-4554

Family@cnglocal.com or
SWeiss@cnglocal.com

CIRCULATION

(718) 260-8336

TFelicetti@cnglocal.com

EDITORIAL

(718) 260-4554

Family@cnglocal.com

ADDRESS

New York Parenting Media/CNG
1 Metrotech Center North
10th Floor
Brooklyn, NY 11201

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From our readers

Dear editor:

I am so glad that your magazine has raised the issue of the amount of homework children receive. The article in your November 2012 issue ("Homework: A conversation with parents and experts"), was very well balanced.

THERE IS MUCH TOO MUCH HOMEWORK! This issue is like the weather: everyone talks about it, but no one does anything about it. Children work hard all day at school. Then, they are expected to get exercise, eat a healthy dinner, and go to bed early after every school day. Those most basic (and most important tasks) cannot be completed given the staggering amount of homework children are given. No wonder there is an obesity crisis! Most of the afternoon and evening must be spent in the sedentary task of homework and study.

Certainly, academic reinforce-

ment is needed. The individual teacher's homework assignment may be reasonable. But place that homework in the context of the six to eight subjects students take, and add in the physical education or after school sports requirement, and the situation becomes untenable and unhealthy. It is spirit-breaking. Children who once loved school became disheartened, frustrated, and exhausted by the workload. I advocate a longer school day, or more specialized assistance after school.

The requirement to do more work at home leads to sad situations, like those discussed in your article. Parents complete the work. Tutors are hired. Dinner is rushed. Bedtime is surpassed. The excessive homework requirement leads to fights and discord between overworked and fatigued parent and child.

I am a tutor, a teacher, and a

EDUCATION

HOMework

A conversation with parents & experts

What is its value, and how much is too much?

BY KIM COBURN
Parents and experts disagree on how much homework is appropriate for children. Some parents think that children should do as much homework as possible, while others believe that children should have a balanced life with time for play and relaxation.

Best homework?
 Parents and experts disagree on what type of homework is most beneficial. Some believe that reading and writing are the most important, while others think that math and science are more important.

Reports from the field
 Parents and experts share their own experiences with homework. Some parents report that their children love homework, while others report that their children hate it.

Parents speak up
 Parents share their thoughts on homework and how it affects their children's lives. Some parents believe that homework is essential for learning, while others believe that it is a waste of time.

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mother. I know children need reinforcement of subjects. However, administrators should craft a cross-disciplinary approach to homework. Can't the science teacher talk to the language arts teacher who talks to the sports coach? Couldn't they devise a reasonable schedule based on the curriculum and the school schedule? I advocate for more reading, which was the paramount emphasis in lower school. Reading is still important (and yes, they must read textbooks).

How about more creative, manageable, even relaxing homework? For instance, a good weekend

homework assignment would be to read a biography of Jonas Salk or articles about homelessness. Children and families need to rest after a long week and a long day.

Every child and every family I know states there is too much homework.

Academics are very important, but a well-rounded student needs time to de-stress, exercise, eat right, get rest, and not battle with family over homework!

Thank you again for your consideration of this topic.

Sincerely,

Carla Warne-Marino, Manhattan



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The holiday

Don't despair!
Tips to keep
on smiling
amidst the
stress of the
seasonal rush

BY CHRISTINA KATZ

Are you excited about the holidays, but dreading the end-of-year rush?

If so, you are not alone. Most parents approach the season with equal parts excitement and trepidation, which can lead to difficulties with decision making from moment to moment. That's why I've created this list of 21 reminders to help you preserve your family's good cheer all the way through the most wonderful time of the year.

• **Go for good enough.** If you have an idea in your mind of the "perfect" holiday, you may be disappointed when your imperfect brood can't uphold your image. Aim for "good enough" instead. You'll smile more if you can let unimportant things — like slightly burnt cookies, lights that won't blink in unison, and late holiday cards — slide.

• **Just hit delete.** If you think your holiday schedule is grossly overloaded, call a family meeting and vote on what to scratch off of your joint to-do list. Decide what you don't want to do first. Then, decide what matters most to each family member. A one-gift-per-family-member tradition might be a sanity-saving plan that sticks.

• **Call in fresh recruits.** Even if you don't normally hire a house-cleaner, you probably could use some help now. Why not call in a

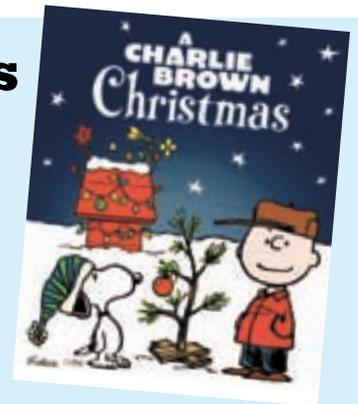
Holiday films

Enjoy these fun family movies with your kids this year:

"A Charlie Brown Christmas"
"Home Alone"
"How The Grinch Stole Christmas"
"A Christmas Story"
"The Polar Express"
"The Year Without A Santa Claus"

And don't miss these movies you can snuggle by:

"Love, Actually"
"Home For the Holidays"
"It's a Wonderful Life"



"A Christmas Carol"
"The Nightmare Before Christmas"
"When Harry Met Sally"

cleaning service in mid December and in mid January to bookend the holidays, even if you don't use one the rest of the year? Consider it a holiday present to yourself.

• **Hum your favorite tunes.** Haul out your seasonal music early before you tire of the omnipresent Muzak that is sure to come. Load up your smartphone or iPod and carry headphones in your purse to jolly things up when you are ticking chores and errands off of your to-do list. If your old faves are getting overplayed, jazz up your playlist with some fresh downloads or albums. (See sidebar.)

• **Shop the plan.** First, the plan: write down the names of everyone you truly want to give to and what you think they would like. Then, shop: keep the list in your wallet to jog your memory when hunting down a gift for each person you cherish. For store shopping, pay cash, so you won't overspend. For online shopping, search for coupons before ordering and act early for cheaper shipping.

• **Sip your way to heaven.** When you are having a hectic day, take a time-out. Warm up or buy an extra-hot cup of chai tea with a spritz of whipped cream on top. The spices will put you back in touch with your

senses, and the warmth will spread through your belly and soothe your frazzled cheer.

• **Get bazaar.** Take the whole family to a local holiday craft bazaar. Look for gifts for teachers and other folks who enrich your family life. Give each child a spending limit and enjoy interacting with the vendors. Plan to spend a couple of hours browsing, so you can soak up all the creative energy.

• **Take 30.** Line up winter reads from the library or download them onto your e-reader. Encourage the whole family to take 30 minutes a day to relax and read. Collections of short stories or essays are good choices for moms with very young or multiple children. This is a great way for everyone to decompress after a busy day.

• **Bring Mother Nature inside.** Pine cones, holly, evergreen boughs, twigs, and poinsettias all remind us that there is life hibernating underneath that blanket of snow or wicked frost. Gather reminders of the season from your backyard or local garden shop and decorate the front hall, mantle, and stairway. Remember: simple is as merry as ornate.

• **Huggy holidays.** Use "Happy holidays!" as an excuse to hug your

Holiday tunes

Tired of those holiday songs you hear over and over? This season, check out these refreshingly different tunes and albums:

"Cool Yule" by Bette Midler
"A Christmas Cornucopia" by Annie Lenox
"O, Holy Night" by Jackie Evancho
"And Winter Came" by Enya
"James Taylor at Christmas" by James Taylor



"A Swinging Christmas, Featuring The Count Basie Band" by Tony Bennett
"A Lovely Way To Spend Christmas" by Kristin Chenoweth

trap

loved ones often. Every time you feel stressed, hug or get hugged. Your holiday stress will melt away.

•**Stay healthy.** Put holiday-scented soaps by every sink and encourage plenty of hand washing. Install a bottle of hand sanitizer next to every box of tissues. Chase every “Ah-choo!” away. (But stock up on cold medicines, just in case, to avoid midnight trips to the market.)

•**Lighten up.** Twinkling lights create a comforting mood. Don't limit shimmery lights to the tree and outdoor eves. If it sounds fun, bring some sparkle into the kid's bedrooms, as well as yours.

•**Take a deep breath.** Bring some uplifting scents into your cleaning routine. Check out the Mrs. Meyers brand of earth-friendly cleaning supplies. Your home and laundry will smell winter wonderful.

•**Enjoy spreading cheer.** Save the annual holiday letter composing and Christmas card address labeling for when you can carve out time to relax and enjoy the process. And don't try to do it all yourself. Break the job down into steps and enlist the whole family. Remember: taking everything on without helpers is naughty, not nice.

•**Question tradition.** Traditions are wonderful, but let's face it — sometimes even the fondest can become tired. So, if you don't feel like tromping around all afternoon hunting for the most splendiferous evergreen on the tree farm or frying the most perfect potato latkes, buy a pre-cut tree at your local grocery store or pick up latkes at the deli instead. Use saved time to enjoy tree trimming or dreidel playing instead.

•**Create classic memories.** Play hooky from holiday prep for the day and go ice-skating or frolic in the snow with your kids. Drink hot chocolate. Take lots of family photos. Build a fire. Goof off. Enjoy the grins.

•**Save it for a heat wave.** If you are really feeling a time crunch, don't

donate time to help the less fortunate during holiday time. Give time later during a less hectic time of year. There are people in need throughout every season, after all.

•**Sock it to 'em.** Don't wait until the temperature hits zero to stock up on slippers and socks. You'll keep your heating bills down and your kids smiling if everyone in your brood has warm tootsies as the mercury plunges.

•**Hit the hay harder.** There's less light during the winter. Take advan-

tage of it and put the kids to bed an hour earlier than normal. There's the extra hour you need to keep some hustle in your holiday muscle, or at least wrap some presents without interruption.

•**Pop plenty of corn.** Line up holiday movie classics in your mail-order DVD queue. Watch some with the kids and some with your honey in the wee hours. See sidebar for movie ideas.

•**Deck the bathroom.** Hang up some scented pomanders. Bring in lots of little candles (beyond the reach of little hands, of course). Look for winter-scented bath indulges in juniper, cedar, or musk. Sink into a bubble bath wonderland. Forget your name for 10 minutes.

You'll feel more holly jolly if you can get calm and stay centered all holiday season long. Happy holy days!

Christina Katz is a freelance writer who adores the holidays. Her latest book is “The Writer's Workout” from Writer's Digest Books.





Houses on Staten Island after Hurricane Sandy hit the borough.

Holidays after the hurricane

As displaced families rebuild their lives after Sandy, ways New Yorkers can help

BY MARIE HUESTON

The expression “home for the holidays” conjures nostalgic images of family and friends gathered around a bountiful table. But what if your home — and all that was in it — had been badly damaged or destroyed by Hurricane Sandy? This is the reality for thousands of New Yorkers whose homes were in the direct path of the October super storm. As they continue the arduous work of repairing their homes and rebuilding their lives, their situation is made

all the more challenging by the approaching holiday season. This is especially difficult for households with young children.

Imagine yourself in Cathy Borgognone’s shoes. When the mother of two stood surveying her severely water-damaged home in Staten Island’s New Dorp Beach neighborhood, her 5-year-old son Francesco looked at her earnestly and asked, “Will Santa still come to this house?”

Borgognone’s heart sank.

“Of course I told him that Santa would find him and his sister,” she

recalls, “but at times like that it’s hard to put on a brave face.” With the day-to-day logistics of fixing her house foremost on her mind, Borgognone is currently staying in her brother-in-law’s basement and has had little time to wonder what her holidays will look like this year or where she and her family might go to celebrate them. “I’m trying not to think about it,” she says.

It’s a sentiment shared by Red Hook, Brooklyn, resident Jolene Festa, whose family was also displaced by Hurricane Sandy.

“I haven’t made any decisions about the holidays yet,” says Festa. “Our floors, walls, doors, everything was destroyed. We won’t be back in before Christmas.” On the night of the storm, Festa and her husband frantically pushed towels and rolled-up carpets against their front and back doors, trying to keep out the rising tide, only to watch in horror as water began to seep up through the floorboards from their flooded basement.

Now living in a friend’s apartment, Festa is doing her best to

Kids helping kids

All across the city, children have been watching their parents and other adults in the community helping people affected by Hurricane Sandy. In turn, many kids are lending a hand themselves. High School sports teams have gone door-to-door offering to help clean up debris, Brownie troops have organized book collections for schools whose libraries were wiped out, and countless boys and girls have parted with beloved playthings and chosen new ones to donate to toy drives.

"It feels good to do something nice for someone else," says 9-year-old Georgia Fu-

musa, a fourth grader at PS 58 in Carroll Gardens, Brooklyn, and a founding member of the school's charity bake sale club, Cookie Kids. On a single, sunny Saturday last month, the Cookie Kids raised a whopping \$1,300 to support their peers at nearby PS 15, in hard-hit Red Hook.

Of her club's contribution, Fumusa reflects, "It goes to show that kids really can do something to make the world a better place."

In the midst of a tragedy, these children are learning the true meaning of the holidays — that the deepest joy comes from giving to others.

remain positive for her 8-year-old son, River, but admits that her emotions can catch her off guard.

"There are times when I remember what isn't downstairs anymore, like my son's baby clothes or our bins of Christmas ornaments that held so many memories." As for River, he has been buoyed by the generosity of friends, who have reached out not only with invitations for meals and play dates, but also with thoughtful gifts to replace what is gone. "One parent gave River a new Christmas ornament and a gift certificate to Barnes & Noble since most of his books were ruined. Moments like that fill him, and us, with a huge sense of gratitude."

Indeed, the kindness of friends and strangers alike has made an incredible impact on the lives of storm victims throughout the five boroughs.

"People need to understand that many of the hardest-hit areas were multi-generational neighborhoods," says volunteer Kim Shamoun. "If you lived there, then your brother probably lived down the street and your grandmother lived around the corner. So now if your house is gone, your whole support system is gone, too."

Together with nine close friends, Shamoun mans a Facebook page, facebook.com/Giving-BackToThoseAffectedBySandy, that has been tirelessly connect-

ing people who want to help with people who need help since the day after the storm. Their experience has been nothing short of miraculous.

"I can't count how many times we talk with one person who needs something and then a minute later someone calls offering just the kind of supplies that are needed. There's a bigger thing happening here."

As the holidays get closer — and with them the hectic pace that generally ensues — it's important for those of us who were only minimally affected by the storm to keep our neighbors in our hearts and to continue helping in any way we can. Whether you can donate a warm meal, coat, school supplies, gift certificates, toys, or an hour of your time, there is truly no end to the opportunities that make a difference.

"Americans are always incredibly generous when there is a disaster anywhere in the world," Borgognone points out. "It's important for everyone to remember that this time it's in our own backyard."

To find out how you can get involved, visit facebook.com/Giving-BackToThoseAffectedBySandy, nyc-service.org, redcross.org, fema.gov/sandy or call religious institutions or municipal offices in neighborhoods affected by the storm.

Marie Hueston is a freelance writer and a native of Staten Island, who now lives in Brooklyn with her family.



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Stranded at the AIRPORT

Tips for surviving a canceled flight with your family

BY HEATHER VAN DEEST

Flying long distances with young kids, whether cross-country or abroad, is no easy feat. Between security checkpoints, the umpteenth diaper change, and keeping your kids occupied and fed for hours on end, traveling with young kids could qualify as an Olympic sport for many parents. And that's before you see those dreaded words flashing on the nearest airport departure board: "flight canceled."

According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, more than 100,000 flights were cancelled in 2011, affecting 7.5 million passengers. And the demand for air travel is only increasing. Read on for a step-by-step guide to getting you and your family on the next plane

out, and how to prevent a headache or two in the process.

- Reschedule your flight as soon as possible. Don't assume the airline will automatically rebook your ticket. Head to the nearest ticket counter, and while waiting in line, try to reschedule your flight using your Wi-Fi-enabled smartphone or tablet.

- If you're traveling alone with the kids, ask an airline agent about expedited assistance for families with small children. Be polite and assertive. It never hurts to ask!

- Think ahead about your family's needs. How many meals will your family require until your rescheduled flight? What about snacks and extra diapers? Discuss your needs with the ticketing agent, who should be able to provide meal vouchers for the airport.

Some airlines also provide free diapers and baby food to stranded passengers. Be sure to save all receipts for any expenses you incur.

- If you require overnight accommodation, ask an airline agent for details. Does the airline provide hotel vouchers or do you have to pay upfront and submit a receipt later? If so, what is the airline's maximum reimbursement amount? Although airlines are not required to cover hotel costs for events such as inclement weather or traffic control issues, confirm this with an agent. You never know, you might get a hotel voucher just for asking politely.

- Review your updated flight information. Before you leave the ticket counter, check your boarding passes and itinerary. Are you booked on the correct flight? Does

What to consider when your flight is canceled

Your family's needs

- How many meals will your family need before your rescheduled flight?
- Do you have plenty of snacks, baby food, and diapers?
- Does the airline provide overnight accommodation? If so, does it offer a hotel voucher or do you have to pay and submit the receipt to get reimbursed?
- What is the airline's maximum reimbursement amount for a hotel stay?
- Which affordable hotel options are closest to the airport? Does the hotel offer airport shuttle service?



Your rescheduled flight

- Are you booked on the correct flight?
- Does each family member have a seat? Are the seats located next to each other or in different rows?

After the flight

- Did you submit all expense receipts via the airline website?
- Will you provide feedback to the airline about your experience?
- Did the airline respond with any offers of compensation for your inconvenience?



everyone in your family have a seat? Reviewing the details will save you a headache down the road if the agent makes a mistake during the ticketing process.

- Book your family's hotel room. Once you have tickets in hand and a plan for your family's meals and other items, it's time to secure overnight accommodation, should you require it. Unfortunately, penny-pinching airlines often recommend hotels located 30 minutes or more from the airport, adding to your family's inconvenience. Use your smartphone or tablet to book an alternative hotel as close to the airport as possible, or ask airport services for hotel suggestions. Make sure the nightly rate is within the reimbursement amount the airline

agent earlier quoted you. Or, pay the difference, if you don't mind footing some of the bill.

- Follow up. Once you're back home safe and sound, visit the airline's website to submit electronic copies of your receipts and provide feedback about your ex-

perience. Offer details about staff members who were particularly kind or helpful.

Most airlines will offer some sort of compensation for your inconvenience, such as credit in a rewards program or vouchers for future travel.

Flying long-distances with your little ones is challenging, to say the least, especially when your flight gets canceled. These tips will help get you and your family back on track to your destination.

Heather Van Deest is a freelance writer and mother of two young sons.

Before your trip...

- Avoid booking flights with partnering airlines. If possible, try to travel with one airline carrier for the entire flight, including any connections. This helps avoid reticketing issues, should one leg of your flight get canceled.

- Confirm your flight. Up to a week in advance, contact the airline to confirm your itinerary and other details, or visit the airline website. Seating assignments sometimes change without notice, especially for long-distance flights on large aircraft.

- Pack wisely. In a carry-on bag, bring medicines, extra diapers, your cellphone charger, and iPad or tablet charger, a change of clothes for each family member, and any items that will help soothe young children during an unexpected overnight stay, such as a favorite toy or small blanket.



THE BOOK WORM

TERRI SCHLICHENMEYER

A book that will teach and entertain all animal lovers

If your child loves critters of all sorts — and loves learning about them — she might enjoy reading a new book about a woman who shares her home with domestic and wild pets.

In Peg Kehret's latest, "Animals Welcome," Kehret and her husband, Carl, buy 10 wooded acres in Washington state where deer and elk roam, baby fawns are born, bears and 'possums steal birdseed from feeders, and peacocks wander over to snoop. And Kehret loves to watch them all.

She adores the many birds that visit her woods as much as her household pets. She's always shared her home with at least one dog and says that all but one of her tail-waggers has been a rescue. Kehret, you see, is a big supporter of her local animal shelters.

She also writes about her many kitties, including Molly and Pete, who are beloved companions. There is also Mr. Stray — a semi-feral cat, who Carl honored after his death by turning the workshop into a cat room, where the couple fosters cats with the hope that they'll be adopted by loving families.

Animals, it seems, know that the



Kehrets are softies for soft fur.

Other feral cats and kittens that they bottle-raised have also visited the couple. A lost, elderly dachshund showed up one day, missing her owner, and two ponies wandered down Kehret's driveway after escaping from their corral.

"Helping animals," says Kehret, is "a way of life." At her house, "animals will always be welcome."

If your young reader is also a fan

of all things furry and feathered, it's sometimes hard to find books that satisfy her story cravings. Fortunately, "Animals Welcome" fills that void nicely.

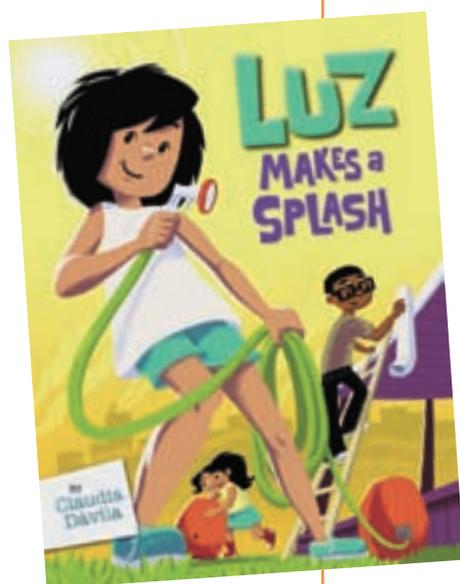
Kehret's words feel like snuggly flannel sheets, resonating with rich, warm tones that respect both subjects and readers. Her curiosity and a keen love of animals meld with an obvious love for children, that makes this book seem undeniably friendly.

I particularly liked that Kehret is careful to teach readers to watch — not touch — wildlife, and to be mindful of all animals. Kids can learn a lot, in fact, from this passionate, creature-minded author.

Though this is a book for 7- to 12 year olds, don't be surprised if you're tempted to read it, too. With its loving tales (or shall we say "tails?") and gentle, flavor, "Animals Welcome" will be welcome on anybody's bookshelf.

"Animals Welcome: A Life of Reading, Writing, and Rescue," by Peg Kehret [175 pages, 2012, \$16.99].

Terri Schlichenmeyer has been reading since she was 3 years old, and she never goes anywhere without a book. She lives on a hill with two dogs and 12,000 books.



This tome gets kids thinking

It's easy to think that a kid's tiny voice won't make a difference in this big world. "Luz Makes a Splash" shows your child otherwise.

In the book, there's a heat wave and Luz and her friend Anika go to the mall every day to cool off. But air conditioning is bad for the environment, so they decide to take a cool dip Spring Pond, but when they get to the natural body of water, they are sad to see that it is al-

most dry. They become even more upset when they learn that their local soda pop company is at fault — and they actually liked Top Cola!

Then, Luz sees Mr. DeSouza with a big pickle barrel. He's taking it to the park to catch rainwater, although there hadn't been rain for a long time. Luz asks Mr. DeSouza how wild plants withstood drought, and when he tells her that they survive with groundwater, she starts to think.

Using a fun, comic book style that lightens the tone, author Claudia Dávila illustrates the adventures of a girl who loves the environment, planet, and her neighborhood. I like this book and what it stands for, but

I especially like Dávila's Luz: she's sharp and resourceful as she subtly encourages kids to find their own solutions to environmental issues they might find locally.

Even though this book has a roasting-in-the-summertime theme, I think kids ages 6 to 12 will learn a lot in any season. For them, "Luz Makes a Splash" might get a few ideas cooking.

"Luz Makes a Splash," by Claudia Dávila [96 pages, 2012, \$16.95].

Terri Schlichenmeyer has been reading since she was 3 years old, and she never goes anywhere without a book. She lives on a hill with two dogs and 12,000 books.

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Keep your baby safe at Grandma's house

Don't forget, a new location can mean new dangers

BY KIKI BOCHI

If you are headed to Grandma's house for the holidays, it may feel like you are returning to the safe haven of your youth. But don't let your guard down when it comes to protecting your little one.

You may have put a lot of energy into making your home baby safe, but that is not necessarily the case at the home of an older relative who no longer has little ones underfoot.

Watch for medications that may be accessible to inquisitive little hands, cleaning products that are not secured, sharp edges on furniture, and breakable items that are within your child's reach.

Keep an eye, also, on Grandma herself. She may have raised several children quite adeptly, but today's recommendations when it comes to child safety have changed. In particular, many older adults are unaware of safety recommendations when it comes to appropriate child sleep position, crib safety, and car seat and walker use, according to a study by the American Academy of Pediatrics.

When asked, "What is the best position for a baby to sleep in?" 33 percent of senior respondents chose "on the stomach;" 23 percent, "on the side;" and only 43.8 percent, "the back." The Academy recommends that infants be placed to sleep on their backs to prevent Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. When asked about correct car seat positioning, 24.5 percent responded that a 22-pound, 9-month-old child should be facing forward, and yet the Academy recommends that children remain in a rear-facing car seat until age 2.

Last year, the Academy recommended that bumpers, stuffed animals, and blankets be removed from infant cribs, and yet 49 per-



cent of grandparent caregivers thought these items were acceptable. Nearly 74 percent of respondents stated that a walker is a good device to help babies learn to walk. Yet, the Academy does not recommend walker use, and in fact, urges caregivers to dispose of them because of serious safety concerns.

"Pediatric health and safety

recommendations are constantly evolving," said study author Kathryn C. Hines, MD. "Many recommendations are likely to have changed since these grandparent caregivers parented their own children."

Kiki Bochi, an award-winning journalist, reads hundreds of reports monthly to bring readers the latest insights on family health and child development.

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MOMMY 101

ANGELICA SERADOVA

Oh Christmas tree!

Passing my mother's holiday spirit to my child

My mother lives for Christmas. Every year, the weekend after Thanksgiving, she starts her holiday tradition of decorating the house. But unlike many moms, my mother has mostly done this alone. I'm ashamed to admit that I haven't always shared her enthusiasm for the holidays (I'm more of a Thanksgiving fan than Christmas), and while I'm sure a big part of her did it for me, I just wasn't always so into it. But that never stopped her. She carried on, filling our house with poinsettias and garlands, candy canes and gingerbread houses, and infusing the house with the smell of apple cinnamon and pine cones.

Part of her tradition is displaying one of my children's books around the house, "Twas the Night before Christmas." She reads it to me every year, as if I were still a kid. A proud mama, she even hangs up the Christmas tree I made for her in grade school; out of green construction paper and full of glitter. The poor tree is ripped in several places, but she's kept it all these years, as if it were a masterpiece. She loves Santa Claus, so I started a tradition of buying her a new Santa for Christmas to add to her collection — or a Grinch. She loves the Grinch, too.

It wasn't until I had my own daughter that I realized why she loves Christmas so much. It's a way for her to relive her childhood and feel some magic. I now feel a certain kind of magic around the holidays, too, that wasn't

there before. My mom made Christmas a happy time for me growing up, and I want Olivia to have that, too.

Luckily, I have a husband who loves Christmas as well. He grew up with his own traditions passed on from his

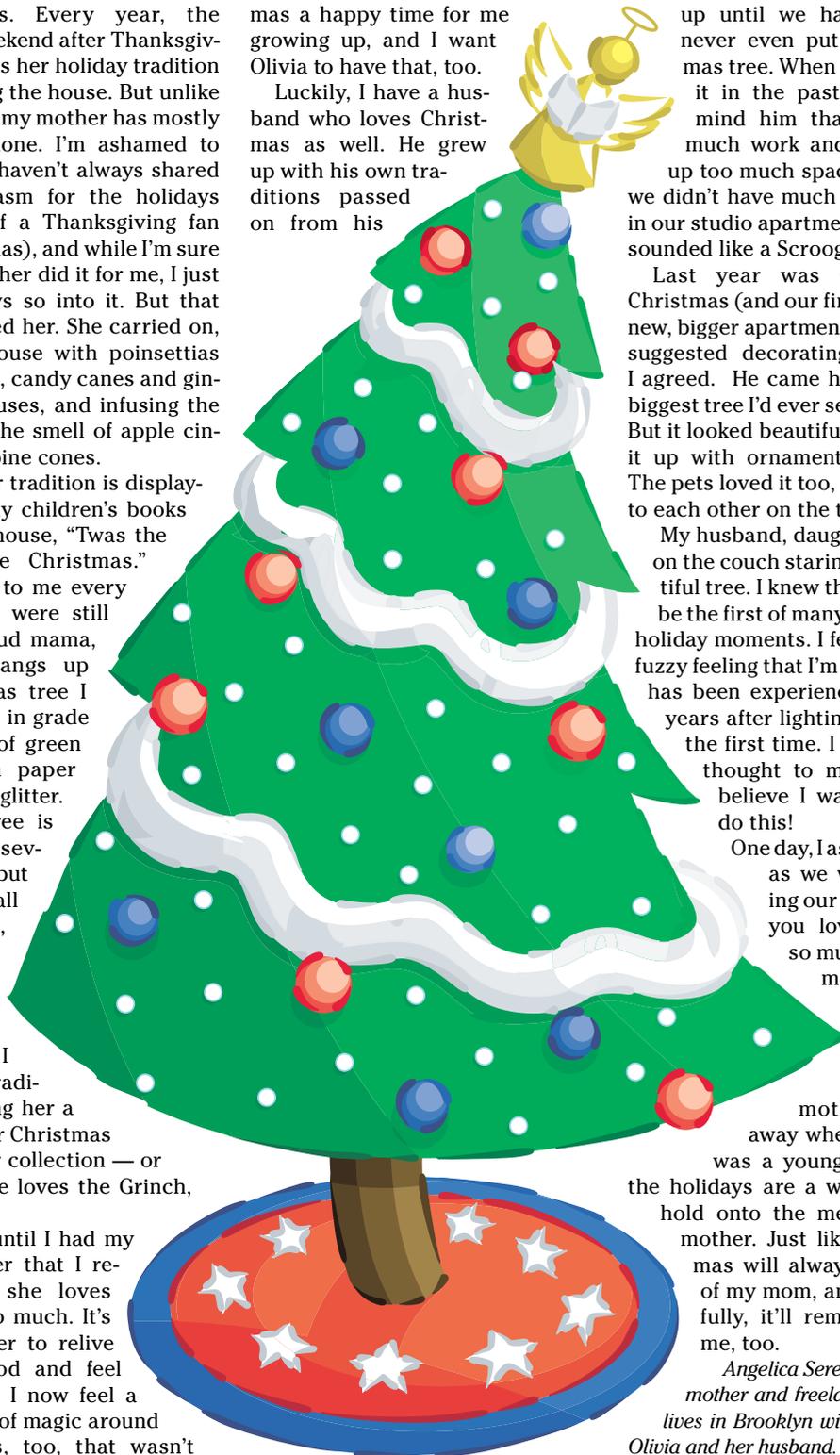
mother, also a single mom. But, up until we had Olivia, we never even put up a Christmas tree. When he mentioned it in the past, I would remind him that it was too much work and that it took up too much space; something we didn't have much of back then, in our studio apartment. I definitely sounded like a Scrooge!

Last year was Olivia's first Christmas (and our first year in our new, bigger apartment), so when he suggested decorating the house, I agreed. He came home with the biggest tree I'd ever seen in a home. But it looked beautiful once we had it up with ornaments and lights. The pets loved it too, cuddling next to each other on the tree skirt.

My husband, daughter, and I sat on the couch staring at the beautiful tree. I knew that that would be the first of many more special holiday moments. I felt that warm, fuzzy feeling that I'm sure my mom has been experiencing all these years after lighting our tree for the first time. I sat there and thought to myself: I can't believe I wasn't going to do this!

One day, I asked my mom, as we were decorating our tree, "Why do you love Christmas so much?" She told me that it was her mother's favorite holiday. My grandmother passed away when my mother was a young girl. I guess the holidays are a way for her to hold onto the memory of her mother. Just like her, Christmas will always remind me of my mom, and now, hopefully, it'll remind Olivia of me, too.

Angelica Sereda is a working mother and freelance writer. She lives in Brooklyn with her daughter Olivia and her husband.



Education

DIRECTORY

Edgehill Montessori School

Edgehill Ave bet W227 & W230
718-601-1056 or www.gila.matalon@gmail.com

Edgehill Montessori is a group family day care that provides full day and half day programs (8-6) for infants, toddlers and preschoolers 3 months to 5 yrs old.

The day care is run by Mrs. Gila Matalon, an early childhood Montessori teacher for over 25 years.

The school, located in a private house with a backyard surrounded by trees, has a multiage setting which gives the children a feeling of a second home.

The children have an enriched curriculum of Montessori lessons alongside crafts, music, movement and outside time.

The staff is loving and attentive, the families are diverse, and the atmosphere brings a supportive environment to all members of Edgehill Montessori.

There is a year-round program from September through June, and a summer program from July to mid-August.

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620 Isham Street
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Riverdale Community Nursery School

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718-543-0050 or www.riverdalecommunityschool.com

The Riverdale Community School is a private nursery school serving the Riverdale, Kingsbridge, and Inwood neighborhoods for more than 30 years.

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Our activities and programs include music, art, outdoor play, cooking, readiness skills, writing and number recognition.

The Riverdale Community School is opened from Monday through Friday and we offer an eight week summer program in July and August. Tuition is paid on a weekly basis, there is no contract and enrollment is open, full and part time schedules are available.

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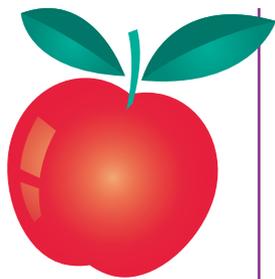
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DEAR TEACHER

PEGGY GISLER AND
MARGE EBERTS

A bored first grader

Dear teacher,

My first grader has become bored in class during the last few weeks. I can see why. His readers are below what he had in kindergarten, and his spelling words are simple three-letter words.

We have tried talking to the teacher, but she becomes aggressive, and says we are attacking her teaching. The principal has agreed to look into this matter. While I am waiting, I have decided to homeschool him. The teacher is definitely not challenging my son enough. What should we do? We pay more than \$20,000 a year for this school, and his education is not appropriate for his abilities.

Dear parents,

Since you are paying, it is easy to deduce that your son is attending a private school. You might want to consider sending him to a public school as many, especially charter schools, have programs designed for gifted children. Also, a different private school could be a better fit for your child. Removing your son from this school and deciding to homeschool him could be the answer to his getting a challenging education. There is also the possibility of his skipping to second grade or taking a few subjects with the second grade class. This is another solution to discuss with the principal.

Keep in mind that school has only been in session for a little over three months. Students enter first grade at all different levels. Some have completed kindergarten and even pre-k, while others never went to kindergarten. It is challenging for the teacher to get everyone up to speed, so they are working as a class. The curriculum could become more appropriate as the teacher gets better acquainted with the students.

Hopefully, the principal will address your concerns soon, so you can make the best decision for your child.

Is this teacher unfair?

Dear teacher,

My eighth grader is very unhappy with his algebra teacher. The teacher gives out demerits all the time for the slightest misbehavior, offers very quick and inadequate explanations of new material, and never reminds the



students about future assignments after they have been assigned. Once, my son got a D for handing in an assignment one day late.

It seems to me that this teacher is handling the students as if they were in high school. I am not alone in complaining. Other parents are complaining about his teaching.

My son is doing well in every other class but only getting a C in algebra. This is not a great grade for someone going onto geometry in high school. I want my son to be a responsible student, but I feel that this teacher is unreasonable. How should I handle this?

Dear parents,

By now, your son should realize that this teacher has high expectations about how students behave in the classroom and does not hold students' hands when it comes to reminding them about future assignments. Your son obviously knows how to behave in order to avoid getting demerits, and it is his responsibility to do so. It is also his responsibility to write down all assignments when they are given and to put long-term assignments on a calendar. This is a habit that will serve him well in high school.

Teachers vary greatly in how they present material. It is possible that this teacher is simply not realizing that eighth graders need more explanation than older students. Unless this teacher changes, your son and his classmates need to study their math textbook very carefully. There are also websites where they can find good ex-

planations of algebraic concepts.

The teacher could change instructing style if a group of students approached him about needing more explanation. If this fails, a group of parents could ask the teacher how their children could improve their knowledge of the material covered in the classroom. The last step is for the parents to discuss this situation with the principal.

Resolutions to boost your children's skills

Dear parents,

It's New Year's resolution time again. Too often, people go overboard in trying to change too much with their resolutions. Sometimes a simple resolution or two can pay unexpected dividends. This year our resolution suggestions center on building your children's academic skills through supporting their interests. One of the biggest assets children can have is an overwhelming interest in something accompanied by a desire to learn more and more about it.

Children who are mad about baseball can improve their math skills through learning how the all-so-important statistics are figured, read more to learn about recent games, and have a great deal of information to use in reports. They can also study the science involved in throwing different pitches. It's the same story for those who are absorbed in hobbies from stamp collecting to photography.

Resolve to support your children's interests.

- Give them books, magazines, and articles to read about their interest.

- Help them get more involved in their interests by finding classes (music, art, photography, golf) for them to take or going to places (baseball games, museums, plays) where they can see their interests firsthand.

- Respect their interests and speak glowingly about them to others.

Parents should send questions and comments to dearteacher@dearteacher.com or ask the columnists on their website at www.dearteacher.com.

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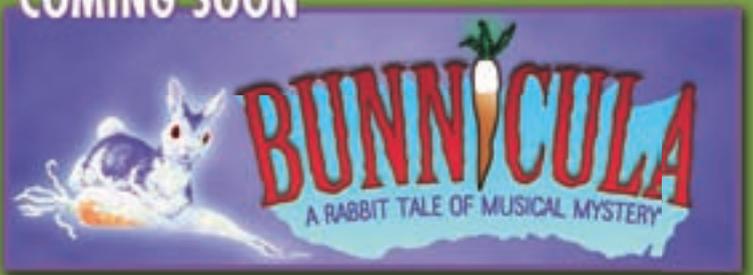
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Longing to be lean

What to do if
you suspect
your teen
has an eating
disorder

BY RISA C. DOHERTY

Eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia seem to be in vogue today. Demi Lovato, Britney Spears, Nicole Richie, Mary-Kate Olsen, Paula Abdul, and Lady Gaga are among the many celebrities who suffered from them. Their disorders are glamorized on magazine covers and professionals wonder what effect stars' disclosures have on our children.

In *Psychology Today's* October 2011 issue, Dr. Judy Scheel distinguished between stars who disclose their ailments for mere publicity and those who share their private struggles to help fans better understand eating disorders. But no matter whether these celebrities are trying to help or not, Scheel tells me that vulnerable teens believe a disorder is no big deal if it helps them lose weight, look like their idols, and garner similar attention.

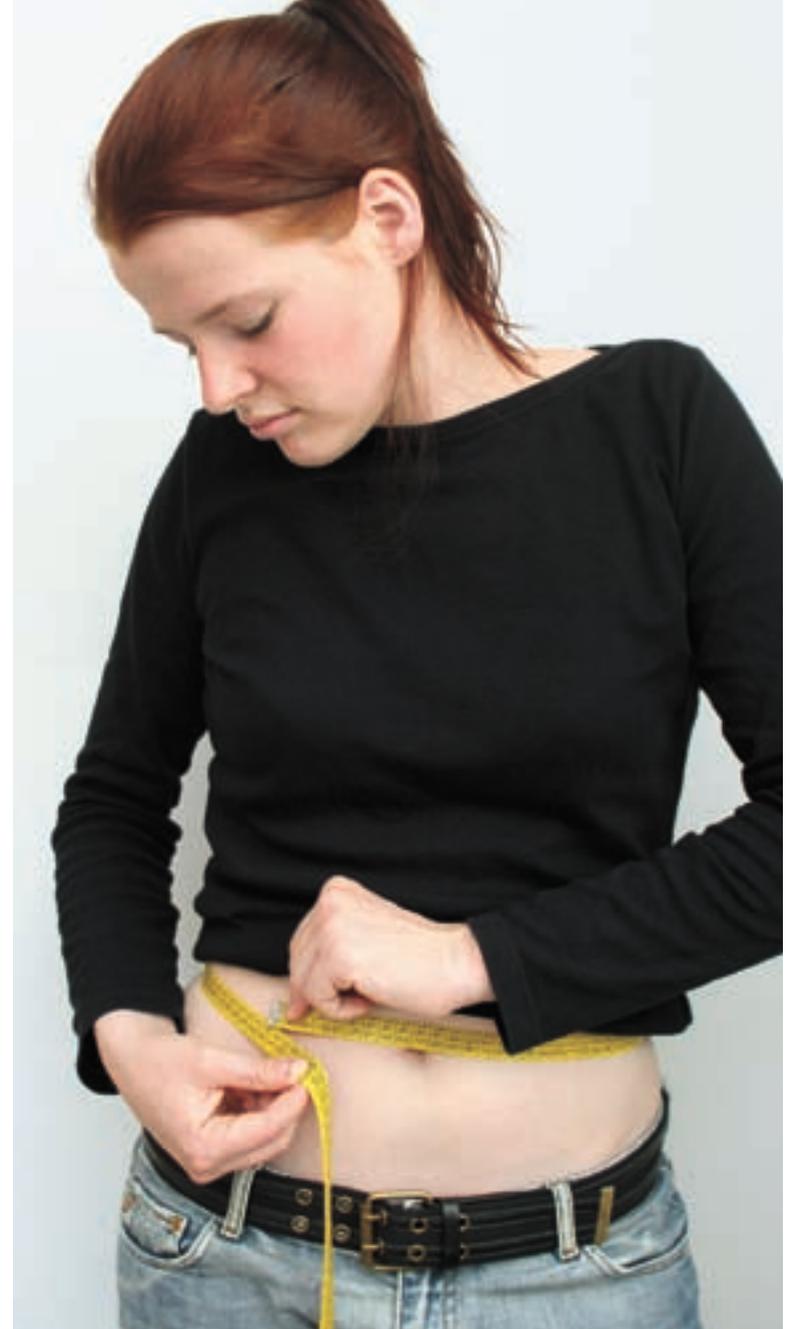
"In our pop-culture existence, teens think if they look a certain way they will feel good, preferring to share their idols' symptoms and behavior, and focusing on someone else's life, rather than tackling their own emotional issues," Scheel explains.

Spotting an eating disorder

Concerned parents often have trouble differentiating between finicky eating and an eating disorder. Eating disorders are illnesses that seriously disrupt an everyday diet, most often characterized by severe distress about weight, according to the National Institute of Mental Health.

"Parents are going to miss the signs," says Dr. Ira Sacker, former director of Eating Disorders at Brookdale University Hospital, who observes that parents' busy lives make the signs almost impossible to spot.

"Eating disorders often start as



weight loss diets," writes Sacker in "Regaining Your Self-Understanding and Conquering The Eating Disorder Identity," but change as body image and exercise become the focal point for girls' anxiety and ultimately their identity. Some common signs include: eating very little or extreme dieting, having a distorted body image (incorrectly believing one is fat), lying about eating, excessive exercise, avoiding social situations where eating is involved, withdrawing from friends, excessive weight loss, a decline in grades, and a sudden penchant for baggy clothing.

Dr. Susan Bartell, author of "Girls-Only Weight Loss Guide," tells me that eating disorders are sometimes misdiagnosed as attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, mood swings, or are overlooked totally.

Still, Bartell notes that bulimics can hide their problem for years. According to "Dying to Be Thin," which Sacker co-authored, "symptoms can develop little by little, day by day. And if you initially approved of the dieting or the exercising, then you may find it difficult to withdraw your approval, especially if your child seems pleased with his or her accomplishments."

Bartell once treated a patient as young as 9, as eating disorders often start before high school.

Rebecca Allen, a 20 year old from Long Island who was treated for an eating disorder, tells me it started in seventh grade when there was a "dieting trend" amongst the girls. As a dancer, she spent hours in front of a mirror daily, which only exacerbated her situation.

One out of every five eating dis-

order sufferers die, according to Sacker. In fact, eating disorders have the highest mortality rate of any emotional disorder, he says. Impressionable adolescents with immortality complexes don't recognize this, as they watch most of their idols recover. More than one patient confided in Sacker that she never realized how sick she was before treatment. And, recovery can take years.

Not just a food thing

Parents may incorrectly assume that an eating disorder is strictly food-related, and that monitoring a child's intake can solve the problem, but that's not the case.

"It's the catalyst, not the cause," says Scheel, who serves as director of Westchester's Cedar Associates Eating Disorder Treatment Centers.

"Eating disorders are complicated," Bartell tells me, and there's never just one trigger, but many, including low self-esteem, poor self-image, and social issues. Sacker agrees, noting that even a fear of bullying can lead to an eating disorder, as adolescents can be critical of peers' weight.

Scheel notes that both nurture and nature contribute, and stresses parents' role in helping their child grow emotionally. Once this is done, a child is able "to weather the storm" by learning to cope with disappointments and negative feelings. In this way, young people are no longer dependent on others to tell them how they feel. She also explains "there is no eating disorder gene, but it is more common amongst those kids with a predisposition to anxiety and depression."

A teen lying about how much food she eats is not a breach of trust, say experts. Sacker explains that an eating disorder patient will not see hiding her disorder as lying, but rather as not being understood, and parents' accusations of mistrust will push her away more. Moreover, eating disorder patients truly believe they need to be thin or they're nothing, adds Scheel.

"As an adolescent becomes more and more restrictive of her food intake, the brain starts to be starved of needed nutrients like fat and protein," Scheel says.

"Being in a state of semi-starvation causes changes in the metabolism and brain chemistry that reinforce the restricting behavior by creating a natural high," writes Sacker. This "dieting success" can be very satisfying and self-perpetuating.

Cover stories?

When my daughter entered 11th

grade, seemingly half of her girlfriends turned vegan or vegetarian, and parents some wondered if these regimens were a gateway to an eating disorder.

Fortunately, parents need not necessarily panic if girls exhibit no other signs of a disorder. Veganism or vegetarianism can be healthy diet options for teens whose diets are balanced with sufficient vitamins and nutrients. But, for others, it can be the start of an eating disorder or orthorexia, which strikes healthy eaters who do not consume enough calories. Significantly, Sacker has treated many patients who have used veganism or

"So trust yourself. If something about the way your child deals with food worries you, then you have nothing to lose by talking with your child, asking a doctor, checking with a specialist, or going to the library or bookstore to find reading material that will give you the information you need to be helpful for everyone concerned-including yourself."

— "Dying to Be Thin" by Ira M. Sacker and Marc A. Zimmer

vegetarianism to help conceal their extreme eating restrictions.

Parents' words can reinforce dangerous behavior

Parents who always demand perfection think they are protecting their children against feeling vulnerable, but instead they are running the risk of contributing to a possible eating disorder.

"Young people really need help dealing with life's disappointments, including not looking like a celebrity," Scheel advises. "There's beauty in imperfection."

Allen warns against complimenting girls on how they look when they lose weight, lest they suffer from a disorder. "You are losing weight," can be received as a compliment and motivation to lose more. Unfortunately, many girls already have strong peer reinforcement for their behavior, as friends undoubtedly tell them they look great and ask them how they did it. Additionally, comments normally considered criticism, like "you look too thin," continue to reinforce the behavior, says Sacker. Bartell advises parents to refrain from criticizing or complimenting their daughter's body,

but instead talk about what she is eating.

Eating disorder incubators

As girls' bodies develop curves, their clothes tighten uncomfortably and the media bombards them with size zero airbrushed images, all of which can make them particularly vulnerable to eating disorders. In addition, girls' preoccupation and anxiety about their bodies are magnified by the technology that is now a permanent fixture in their lives. The 24-seven Internet and Facebook world permeates their lives everywhere, and photos, videos, and tweets can

be unforgiving and relentless.

In addition, academic hypercompetition and overscheduling, coupled with often unrealistic expectations, plague teens caught in limbo between childhood and adulthood. Some feel the only control they have is over their bodies.

And parents can be clueless, as Scheel notes, "we live in a quick-fix culture, which fosters the white-washing of underlying problems, encouraging parents to buy things for their kids instead of allowing them to feel bad when they need to."

How to help

Concerned parents should not hesitate to follow-up on reasonable suspicions for fear they are "invading their teen's privacy" by checking if their child is purging or hiding food. Bartell equates a parent's need for surveillance with that of drug or alcohol issues, as these disorders too can present a mortal danger.

She adds, "it our responsibility as parents to keep our kids healthy and safe."

Sacker tells me that parents should not assume they are paranoid merely because eating disorders seem so commonplace now.

"If you are not a parent who is

forearmed, then you are an ostrich with your head in the sand," he advises. "Parents need to be cautious and aware."

Still, micromanaging every morsel can backfire.

"If parents suspect an eating disorder, they should never assume they can handle it on their own by monitoring food. If they take that approach, then their child will go underground," according to Bartell.

Instead, Sacker encourages parents to create an ongoing non-threatening dialogue with their teens.

"Parents need to understand their child's interests, although not necessarily be part of them," Sacker tells me. Moreover, he emphasizes the need for parents "to give up the guilt and the blame" in order to help.

The first step in treatment would be to locate an eating disorder specialist, preferably a medical doctor, to do a physical and mental evaluation, notes Sacker.

This decision may likely need to be made despite protestations from your child, Allen points out. If the patient is not medically stable, then inpatient treatment by a pediatrician, nutritionist, and a psychologist may be required. Although a parents' first reflex might be to consult her trusted pediatrician, Sacker notes that pediatricians have varying levels of experience diagnosing and dealing with eating disorders. He reminds parents that they have to be prepared to ask their pediatrician about his background in these, if they are to rely on his advice or referrals.

Bartell also points out "the longer an eating disorder patient waits for treatment, the harder the recovery and cure."

If one could say there is any benefit to having an eating disorder, Scheel would say it is that treatment can be instructive in helping patients and their families begin to concentrate on the real underlying problems.

Now that you know what to look for and what to do, pay attention to your kids and be aware of the signs. Parenting can be very challenging, but watching out for our children is just part of the job description.

Risa C. Doherty is a parent, attorney and award-winning freelance writer. Read more at www.risadoherly.com.

For more information contact the National Eating Disorders Association [(212) 576-6200; Helpline (800) 931-2237; www.nationaleatingdisorders.org]; Academy for Eating Disorders [(847) 498-4274; www.aedweb.org].



ASK AN ATTORNEY

ALISON ARDEN BESUNDER,
ESQ.

Preparing yourself for disasters to come

The aftermath of Hurricane Sandy has made me concerned about what I would do if my home were flooded or destroyed. How can I be better prepared to keep my family safe and minimize the impact of the aftermath of a natural disaster?

Hurricane Sandy and its devastating aftermath have once again reminded us of the need to implement a crisis plan for ourselves and our families. Having a crisis plan gives us peace of mind that we can act calmly under pressure and to expect the unexpected. Here are some quick and easy steps you can take in your quest to be prepared.

Create a plan

Develop a written crisis plan. Samples and guidelines are available on the city's Office of Emergency Management website located at www.nyc.gov/html/oem/html/get_prepared/prepared_plan.shtml.

Share the plan with your family. Better yet, upload the plan to a document share site on the "cloud" like Dropbox or Google docs, and download it to your phone, so you and others can access it even if the computer goes down. Your plan should cover:

- Where your household and family members will reunite after a disaster. Identify two places to meet: one right outside of your home and another outside of your neighborhood, such as a library, community center, or place of worship.
- Identify all possible exit routes from your home and neighborhood.
- Designate an out-of-state friend or relative who your household members can call if separated during a disaster. If New York City phone circuits are busy, long-distance calls may be easier to make. Your out-of-state contact can help you and your



Photo by Paul Marinka

family communicate when local land lines and cell towers are down.

- Identify a place where you could get to in the event of a flood.
- Account for everyone's needs, especially seniors, people with disabilities, and non-English speakers.
- Ensure that household members have a copy of your household disaster plan and a "short form" card with emergency contact information to keep in their wallets and backpacks.
- Pack a "go" bag that has sufficient emergency supplies for all household members and pets. Make sure your bag includes cash for immediate money needs. (Like gas stations, ATMs do not operate in power outages.)
- Decide how you will handle caring for any pets and whether you will take them with you. Have a copy of your veterinarian's contact information and any pet insurance policies in your "go" bag.
- Your children are never too young to review the plan with you. Instruct them on exit routes in the event of a fire and reinforce the neighborhood meeting place.

Evacuate when you're told to do so

Too many people stayed where they were during Hurricanes Irene and Sandy, despite clear evacuation orders. This was also what was so

disastrous with Hurricane Katrina in 2005. The issue is not just surviving the storm, but being able to weather the aftermath if rescue teams cannot get to you.

Know your flood zone and those around you. (To see if you are in a flood zone, check www.freeflood.net.) The saying "better safe than sorry" is all too applicable. During Hurricane Sandy, a family reportedly remained in the evacuation zone, because its house was

looted during Irene, only to have the mother and son perish in the flood.

You can replace the stuff. You can't replace a life. Be smart, be safe, be prepared to leave when necessary.

Make a personal financial crisis management plan

Mitigate the mess. Are you insured? Where are your insurance policies (homeowners, life, auto, disability)? Are they up to date? Are all your valuables on your homeowner rider? Are you covered in cases of flood or hurricane, or do you need a separate rider?

Confirm that you do not need any additional insurance to protect you. Take an inventory of all your home, auto, disability, and life insurance policies, put it in writing, upload it to the cloud and keep written copies in your "go" bags. You should also keep a detailed list of your bank accounts, investments, trusts, titles and deeds, mortgages and home equity loans, credit and debit cards, and tax records in a safe and secure place, together with all contact information and online passwords.

Make a legal plan

Everyone should have a Last Will and Testament, Healthcare Proxy, and Power of Attorney. For those

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with children, an appointment of a Standby Guardian and Medical Authorization is also helpful to have. Review the documents every few years or anytime you or a close family member experiences a significant life change such as marriage, divorce, or the birth of a new family member. Every review should ensure appropriate beneficiary designations and titling of assets are up to date. Keep copies in your "go" bags and online.

Put it online

Many companies offer "online vaults" to give you secure access to your legal and financial documents from any location with an internet connection. Many financial service companies and financial planners offer this as a courtesy to their customers and clients. Putting everything in a secure online database is a great way to back up your original and photocopy records.

Mind your business

If you own a business, you must have a business disaster plan. It should include the following:

- A business continuity plan. Make sure your business can continue to run as smoothly as possible in the event that you or your employees cannot get to there, or when the power goes out at the business or your employees' homes.

Organize your contact database, keep a regularly updated client and customer list and open items; have a written procedure manual detailing the normal workflow of your business and all emergency procedures; keep your billing and time records up to date if applicable; and execute estate planning documents for your business such as limited powers of attorney or appointing a successor managing member in your corporate operating agreement. You may want to consider moving your files or at least an automated backup in the cloud, so that you can access files remotely even if power goes out in your office.

- Insurance information. Hurricane Sandy caused significant damage to many businesses. Without the right insurance, you might not be able to recoup those losses. The owner of powerHouse Books in DUMBO was reported to have as much as \$100,000 in inventory losses. Without insurance to cover such loss, your business might not be able to survive.

If you are (hopefully) properly

insured, should any of your business assets be affected by a natural disaster, you need to be able to contact your insurer immediately to ensure maximum coverage under your policy. You should also take photographs of any and all damaged assets, and save receipts for any work done in repairing or replacing business assets. Now is the time to make sure you have the right insurance in the event your business is flooded or inaccessible. Look into business interruption insurance, which can help cover losses incurred as a result of natural or unanticipated disasters.

- Loan information. If you need a business loan following a disaster, you can contact the SBA Office of Disaster Assistance at (800) 659-2955 or e-mail disastercustomerservice@sba.gov for loans that may be available to your business.

- Additional support. Additional support for businesses can be found at the Department of Small Business Services (www.nyc.gov/html/sbs/html/home/home.shtml) and the Economic Development Corporation (www.nycedc.com/bactobusiness).

- Contact information maintenance. Be sure to retain all contact information in a safe and accessible location so that you can act quickly and efficiently towards business recovery. This should include not only all disaster-related recovery services, but also alternative and emergency contact information for your employees. In our age of smartphones, there is no excuse for not having your contacts synched to your password-protected device.

It is worth the investment of time to prepare a reliable strategy that allows you to be prepared when faced with economic and natural disasters. Be well, stay safe, and do not get lulled into complacency that we won't see a storm like Sandy again.

More information about how you can be prepared and make a plan is available on the Office of Emergency Management website located at www.nyc.gov/html/oem/html/get_prepared/prepared_plan.shtml.

Alison Arden Besunder is the founding attorney of the Law Offices of Alison Arden Besunder P.C., where she assists new and not-so-new parents with their estate planning needs. Her firm assists clients in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, Nassau, and Suffolk Counties. You can find Besunder on Twitter @estatetrustplan and on her website at www.besunderlaw.com.

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When a child is sick for the HOLIDAYS

How to adapt your family celebrations in times of illness

BY LARA KRUPICKA

It starts out with your child being tired and looking a little under the weather.

But it's a holiday, so you chalk it up to the extra activity and some richer foods than normal. Soon enough, you realize what's really happening: your child is sick and tomorrow is another celebration.

Most families face illness during a major holiday at some point in time. Given the right attitude and a good Plan B, you can still make holiday memories.

Here are a few tips on celebrating through (and in spite of) varying degrees of illness.

Short-term illness

Sarah Williams's family enjoyed a holiday with relatives, but they still had a special event on the calendar when two of her children came down with the stomach flu.

"We had tickets to a play that my aunt had given them. They were going to be gone the whole day," she explains.

Instead, they stayed home to allow the sick children to recuper-

ate. But rather than mope around the house, Williams planned a special activity: game day. Her three children each picked a favorite game and together they played all three.

"It was fun. It actually forced us to do something we would not have done on a normal day," Williams says.

Not every family may be able to have a game day with sick children, but the holiday doesn't have to be a complete bust.

Follow your regular traditions, albeit in a more subdued form, out of respect for the person who is ill. Include her as much as possible, while giving her space to simply be sick.

Your Plan B could include a second celebration once the child (or parent) has recovered. Because it's not the actual holiday, it won't be exactly the same. So don't try to make it that way. Find opportunities to make it uniquely special — like the Williams's game day.

Hospital stays and more serious illness

No one wants to consider a hospital stay during a holiday. But sometimes it can't be avoided, whether due to an accidental injury or chronic illness.

The best resource for coping with a special date on the calendar while in the hospital is the hospital's staff. Find out from your child's doctor or the medical center's social worker what activities are planned for the holiday. And discuss the expectations your family might have.

"We work with families on an individual basis to encourage them to continue their traditions, just looking a little different," says Rose Seelenbinder, a child life specialist at

Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

Different is an operative word in this case. There's no getting around the fact that your child or other sick family member won't be at home for the holiday. Don't try to ignore it. Instead, address kids' hopes for the holiday.

Seelenbinder urges parents to be appropriately honest with their children.

"We recognize it's hard to be away from home, and these are hard conversations for parents to have."

Encourage your child that "different" doesn't have to be bad. In fact, with some planning on your part, it can be exceptionally memorable.

"Think about 'how can we translate what we do at home,' in a different environment," Seelenbinder says.

It's also important not to go overboard to compensate. It may seem like a good idea, but often ends up backfiring during the transition back home.

Remember to give yourself space. Holidays can be crazy even without a sickness. Add on the challenges of caring for your home while making frequent hospital visits, and you'll be primed for a meltdown.

"What we really encourage parents to do is take a moment for themselves and look at their whole family and how they can support everyone," says Seelenbinder.

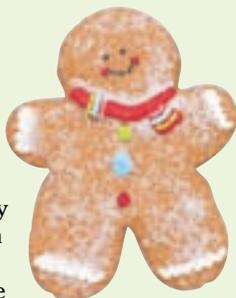
This may mean leaving the holiday preparation to someone else. Your Plan B could include engaging in the activities available through the hospital and keeping the bedside celebration simple.

Focusing on the meaning behind the celebration and not the calendar date can also free up your family to observe the holiday in a more

Holiday to go

Create a holiday basket that takes your tradition to the sick room, whether in your house or at a hospital. Include these elements to make the day special:

- A traditional symbol of your family's holiday (a cornucopia at Thanksgiving, or a menorah for Hanukkah)
- A holiday story book, particularly if it's one you've enjoyed together before
- A gift that can be enjoyed in bed, such as a new CD or music download
- If the patient can eat, include one or two of her favorite holiday foods that are easy to transport, like a plate of cookies.





traditional sense once the hospital stay ends.

Terminal illness

More than 1.6 million people use hospice services each year. So it's not uncommon for a person to be approaching death before or during a holiday.

This doesn't make it any easier, but there are approaches parents can take to help. The first is to acknowledge the situation and how that impacts the holiday.

"Don't expect it to be the same as every other year," says Dr. Don Schumacher, president and CEO of the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization. "You have to acknowledge that some change is coming. With every death, a new family is born. You have to figure

out how to go forward."

Schumacher suggests starting a new tradition right away. You don't need to scrap your old traditions, but it is important to begin the transition.

Talk with your children about how life will be changing and ask their input on what new tradition they would like to start. And if possible, include the ill person in creating the plan.

"Incorporate them in the discussion without saying they'll be gone," says Schumacher. "It shows them that you're taking on the burden."

Make sure to include visits with the sick family member in your holiday observances. Schumacher points out how this can particularly aid children as they work

through issues of separation. Holiday traditions provide a great avenue for sharing memories. Talking about those memories and the role the family member has played can be powerful for enabling the child to walk toward closure as death nears.

•••

When it comes to holiday preparations, accepting that there might come a time for Plan B can be a helpful process. Then, when you encounter a sickness in your family, you won't have to waste energy on shifting gears.

You'll be ready to find your own Plan B for adapting your celebration.

Lara Krupicka is a freelance writer who found new ways to enjoy a holiday during a daughter's bout of bronchitis.

Follow your regular traditions, albeit in a more subdued form, out of respect for the person who is ill.

The joy of getting

Learning why receiving is important for giving

BY MEAGAN J. MEEHAN

When I was a child, I loved presents; getting gifts was the focal point of my birthday and Christmas. Whenever it was a friend's birthday, my parents came to the toy store with me and helped me select a gift that would suit my friend's personal tastes. We wrapped the gift carefully and enjoyed watching the receiver smile as she un-

wrapped her present, but to me, all of that was purely a formality. The real joy was the thrill of opening my own gifts and getting my own things.

I can still recall the crinkling sound of the wrapping paper, the anticipation of opening the box, and the elation of revealing some wonderful new toy that was all for me!

And that was only part of the fun — the real joy was the hours I got playing with my new toys. Most of the presents I received were cherished for years. I especially got untold hours of fun out of my dollhouses, Legos, and video games, and all of those fond memories began as soon as I tore open the wrappings. As a child I could not fathom that ridiculous adult adage: "It is better to give than to receive." I used to snicker when I heard it, assuming that all adults were insane.

Alas, as I got older, the appeal of receiving gifts faded. I still smile if I get a gift, but the difference is that as I grew up, the thrill of presents gradually lessened. I learned there was no Santa (except for the goodwill of others — a concept I actually find more touching) and then I started to lose that "I want it, I want it, I want it!" drive that most small children possess.

As I got into my teens, I started appreciating the other aspects of the holidays more: decorating the house, touring around neighborhoods looking at lights, marveling at store windows in the city, baking, giving to charity, listening to the endless stream of Christmas songs on the radio — all the festive, yet, gift-free aspects to the season. Now, instead of presents being the focal point of the holiday, they are merely a delightful extra.

Some people see children's love of presents as an indication of a shallow, consumer-driven culture. These same individuals view children as bratty and ungrateful, and even go so far as to discourage parents from buying their children presents. Granted,

some children do behave ungratefully and they should be reprimanded before their poor attitudes develop into bigger problems. However, the majority of children are excited AND grateful to receive gifts, and should not be painted with the same brush as those who are unappreciative.

Similarly, I agree that the spirit of Christmas — goodwill — should always be conveyed to a child first and foremost. However, gift giving and receiving are integral parts of the celebration process that actually motivate children to be more generous and giving later in life.

The human mind is a complex thing, and it largely bases its processes upon past experiences. Thus, if someone recalls the joy that receiving gifts gave them in their younger years then, as adults, they are far more likely to have the desire to create the same sense of joy for younger generations. Likewise, someone who has no good memories of receiving presents is less likely to partake in the seasonal custom due to long-standing feelings of isolation, bitterness, and regret.

We learn from memory, and our personalities are molded from our experiences. A vast portion of our memory relies on the recollections of the emotional reactions that we experienced during certain events or times. In short, if we recall pleasant things about the holidays, then we are more likely to enjoy them every year.

Parents must realize that what seems like children being selfish is actually a normal foundation-laying process for what will later become the basis of selfless and giving behavior. All of that starts with making holidays special, both materially and spiritually.

Meagan Meehan is a published author of poems, short stories, novels, and articles in numerous publications. She is also a cartoonist and an award-winning modern artist. Meehan holds a Bachelors degree in English Literature from New York Institute of Technology and a Masters of Communication from Marist College.





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GROWING UP ONLINE

CAROLYN JABS

Getting the most out of gift cards

Gift cards have become the go-to present for parents who have run out of time, ideas or, let's be honest, holiday spirit. The National Retail Federation estimates that each holiday, eight out of 10 shoppers turn to gift cards for at least some of their purchases. Maybe that's because the cards make especially good gifts for teachers, teens, tweens, and other people who are hard to please. Easy as they are to purchase, getting the most from gift cards requires a bit of savvy. Here are a few tips:

- **Choose the right card.** A closed-loop gift card can be used only at the store or restaurant that issues it, so be sure the recipient likes what they have to offer. Prepaid bank gift cards can be used wherever a debit card would be accepted, but there's a fee for that convenience. The American Express website, for example, charges \$3.95 per card, regardless of the amount.

- **Don't buy off the rack.** When cards are easily accessible, crooks can collect identifying numbers, using pocket scanners or old-fashioned pencil and paper. By calling the toll-free number, they find out when the

card is activated and spend the balance while your present is waiting to be given. To avoid this problem, purchase cards that are kept behind the counter. Look for a scratch off pin number, and be sure it is intact.

- **Look for discounts.** Legitimate discounts on gift cards are available from resellers such as Plasticjungle.com, Giftcardrescue.com, and Cardpool.com. Before buying, be sure the website guarantees the value of the card. Check shipping charges, too, because they can quickly offset discounts. Another way to find safe discounts is to visit scriptsmart.com, a website that rates gift cards based on their features. The site also provides information about how laws governing gift cards vary from state to state.

- **Skip the plastic.** Ten billion gift cards are produced each year. Not only do they contain toxic petrochemicals, but they also create disposal problems. Some companies allow you to bypass plastic by sending an e-card directly to a mobile phone or even a Facebook page. Because this is a relatively new way of giving, be sure to alert the recipient with a card or some other tangible reminder that he has received a virtual gift.

- **Get a receipt.** No matter how you buy your giftcard, get a receipt that includes the number on the card. If the card is lost or stolen, you can recover its value if you have documentation. Should you have a problem with a card, contact the company that issued it. If it can't or won't resolve the problem, complain to the Federal Trade Commission [(877) FTC-HELP] about cards issued by retailers or Comptroller of the Currency [(800) 613-6743] about cards issued by banks.

If you become savvy about buying giftcards, you may actually want to use them to save money on your own purchases. The important thing

is to treat the cards as cash, because that's exactly what they are. Don't leave them lying around. Don't tuck them into a drawer and forget about them.

For the same reason, be sure to spend cards received during the holidays. Bankrate.com estimates that \$40 billion dollars in gift card purchases went unused in the past decade. That's like loaning money to the sponsoring companies without ever asking that it be paid back. Look for opportunities to use cards on things you or your kids really want. Take advantage of after holiday sales both on and offline. If there's an expiration date, mark it on your calendar.

For cards you really can't use, turn to websites that will help you convert them into something more valuable. Cardhub.com has a Facebook application so people can swap cards with friends. Swapagift.com pinpoints local companies that buy giftcards for cash, usually at a deep discount.

The websites that sell discounted gift cards buy them back, too. Before shipping off a card, review the frequently asked questions to be sure you understand exactly what you'll receive in return (and how you'll complain if there's a problem). For example, plasticjungle.com converts cards into cash, credits on Amazon, or even a donation to a favorite charity. Of course, the holidays are a terrific time to convert the odd balances on all of last year's gift cards into donations to organizations that will make the season bright for others. Now that's a way to rekindle holiday spirit!

Carolyn Jabs, MA, raised three computer-savvy kids, including one with special needs. She has been writing Growing Up Online for 10 years and is working on a book about constructive responses to conflict. Visit www.growing-up-online.com to see past columns. © Copyright, 2012, Carolyn Jabs. All rights reserved.



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The busy season

How to
prepare your
special-needs
children for
the holidays

BY REBECCA MCKEE

Yes, it's true, Halloween has crept up and slithered away. The stores will be bypassing Thanksgiving and zooming towards Christmas before we know it! For those of us who share our lives with someone who has autism spectrum disorder or another special need, we know the feelings of experiencing the haunts of Halloween months before autumn arrives and hours spent listening to Christmas carols while we still don shorts. Aah, the anticipation of it all.

For many, this idea of happy holiday happenings can quickly turn into too much too soon and lead to a downward spiral. Here are some simple strategies that may ease the overwhelming excitement and allow families to celebrate holidays in a timely, successive order.

- Using a calendar works for many reasons. Some include appointments and birthdays, but they also list unwritten social rules. This may mean what others generally speak about during special times of the year and what activities people partake in. For example, in October, I may write at the top of the calendar page: "People decorate their homes with pumpkins. Maybe we can visit a farm and pick apples. People talk about baking, eating pies, and pumpkin bread. We can watch 'The Wizard of Oz' and scary movies like (fill in your child's favorite). Everyone looks at Halloween costumes and buys bags of candy." Try to continue this throughout the year.
- When each holiday ends, begin groundwork for the next. Once Thanksgiving is over, your family member can self-talk through writing: "Our family will start taking down Thanksgiving decorations. We will start talking about (Christmas, Hanukkah, etc.). We will get out the ornaments."

- Include your family member in household chores during the holidays as much as possible, such as creating a grocery list pertaining to Thanksgiving dinner or mixing Christmas cookie dough. Having



him push the cart and locate the items in the supermarket or load the dishwasher after the meal, which will alleviate that over-abundance of liveliness. In other words, direct his excitable, nervous energies towards a meaningful goal.

- As each holiday ends, have your family member recycle the wrapping paper, catalogs, and magazines. This is a physical and definite ending.

- Limit the choices of music and movies to a seasonal selection or to those that are relevant all year. Display the television listings as a visual cue. Recognizing that our relatives do not want to watch a Passover movie on Thanksgiving is using nice manners. Manners are a learned social skill.

- Proactively preparing each per-

son about the upcoming changes in his schedule is the best bet! Information regarding the location of the holiday dinner is a must. If visitors are expected, please provide details. Social scrapbooks work wonders.

- Make available items and activities to keep your family members occupied during these holiday meals. Luckily, we can amuse ourselves with active conversation, passive listening, and daydreaming. Let's be sensitive to others who struggle with intrapersonal and interpersonal skills.

Follow this holiday prep guide to avoid bumps in the rum cake road! You'll be helping these special needs individuals move through the holiday season as we do, with a purpose. Cheers and be merry!

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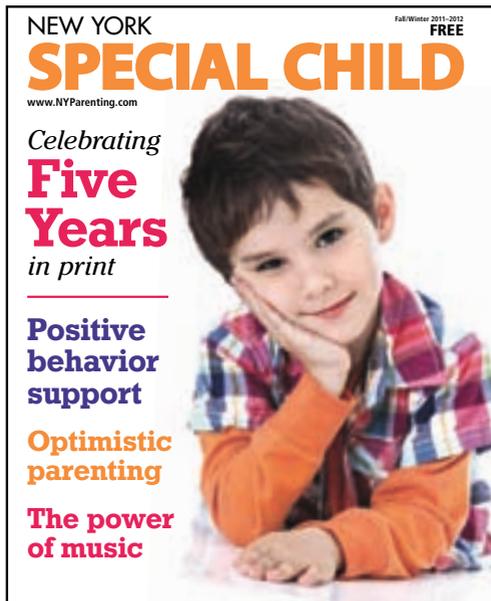
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Calendar

DECEMBER



All aboard the Holiday Train Show

Hop aboard and see the annual Holiday Train Show at the New York Botanical Garden now through Jan. 13, 2013.

The enchanting setting of the Enid A. Haupt Conservatory features more than 140 scaled iconic buildings and structures under thousands of twinkling lights. Crafted by Paul Busse's team at Applie Imagination, the landmarks are made of natural materials such as bark, twigs, stems, fruits, and seeds. It's a sight to behold the miniature Penn Sta-

tion, Yankee Stadium, Radio City Music Hall, and St. Patrick's Cathedral — among others — as the model train zips through the scaled-down city.

The exhibit is open Tuesdays through Sundays from 10 am until 5 pm through Jan. 13, 2013. Visit the website to purchase tickets to the annual holiday show.

The Holiday Train Show at the New York Botanical Garden [200 Street and Kazimiroff Boulevard in the Bronx; (718) 817-8700; www.nybg.org].

Submit a listing

Going Places is dedicated to bringing our readers the most comprehensive events calendar in your area. But to do so, we need your help!

Send your listing request to bronxcalendar@cnglocal.com — and we'll take care of the rest. Please e-mail requests more than three weeks prior to the event to ensure we have enough time to get it in. And best of all, it's FREE!

WED, DEC. 5

Get your game on: Kingsbridge Library Center, 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd. at Briggs Avenue; (718) 579-4244; www.nypl.org; 3–4 pm; Free.

Teens have fun playing with Wii, Xbox 360, and Playstation 3.

Urban stages: Kingsbridge Library Center, 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd. at Briggs Avenue; (718) 579-4244; www.nypl.org; 4 pm; Free.

Teens explore theater, by researching, writing and creating.

THURS, DEC. 6

Ice Skating: Van Cortlandt Park Conservancy, Broadway and 241st Street; (718) 430-1890; vcpark.org; 6–10 pm; \$30 for new members and renewals (\$15 children; free for members).

Members come for an evening of skating, and non-members can become a member.

FRI, DEC. 7

Holiday First Friday: Bartow-Pell Mansion Museum, 895 Shore Rd. (718) 885-1461; www.bartowpellmansionmuseum.org; 5:30–8:30 pm; \$10 (\$8 seniors and students; members free.)

Enjoy the sounds of the Metropolitan tones, an a cappella group. Then do a little shopping and sighting. Registration requested.

Navigating Early Intervention: GiGi's Playhouse/Down Syndrome Awareness Centers, 106 W. 117th St. at Lenox Avenue; (606) 801-7529; www.gigisplayhouse.org; 6:30 pm; Free.

Hilda Chusid, LCSW, an Early Intervention Supervisor at Life Start (YAI), answers questions and offers up-to-date information on the realities of navigating the Early Intervention system. Childcare available.

SAT, DEC. 8

Family Art project: Wave Hill, W. 249th St. and Independence Avenue;



Don't miss 'The Bronx Messiah'

The angelic voices of the Bronx Opera Chorus will be raised high when they perform Handel's "Messiah" in a performance of "The Bronx Messiah" on Dec. 9 at the Lehman Center for the Performing Arts.

The holiday staple, composed by George Frideric Handel in 1741, will be performed by members of the chorus, accompa-

nied by members of the Orchestra of the Bronx. The moving piece sets the tone for the holiday season for every age.

"The Bronx Messiah" on Dec. 9 at 3 pm. Tickets range from \$10 to \$25; \$10 for children 12 years old and younger, any seat.

Lehman Center for the performing Arts [250 Bedford Park Blvd. West; (718) 960-8833; www.lehmancenter.org].

(718) 549-3200; www.wavehill.org; 10 am–1 pm; Free with museum admission. Make holiday pop-up cards.

Family time: Kingsbridge Library Center, 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd. at Briggs Avenue; (718) 579-4244; www.nypl.org; 11 am–noon; Free.

Parents with children 3 to 6 years old are invited to read stories and do crafts. Pre-registration required.

Holiday workshop: Wave Hill, W. 249th St. and Independence Ave. (718) 549-3200; www.wavehill.org; 11 am–3 pm; \$20 (\$30 non-members) per project.

Make your own gifts and holiday decorations inspired by the gardens and galleries.

Holiday party: The Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1040 Grand Concourse at 165th Street; (718) 681-6000 X 127; <http://bit.ly/msetmg>; 1–4 pm; Free for children 12 and under.

Celebrate with the museum with art-making, food and fun activities. Pre-registration requested.

"A Christmas Carol": Kingsbridge Library Center, 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd. at Briggs Avenue; (718) 579-4244; www.nypl.org; 2 pm; Free.

Children 3 to 12 years old see a live performance of the holiday classic presented by the Traveling Lantern Theater Company.

Creating an Effective Individual Education Plan: GiGi's Playhouse/Down Syndrome Awareness Centers, 106 W. 117th St. at Lenox Avenue; (606) 801-7529; www.gigisplayhouse.org; 6:30 pm; Free.

Dr. Kelley A. Lassman explores ways to advocate for your student through effective Individual Education Plan development. Parents are encouraged to bring a current or recent past copy of their student's plan. Childcare available.

SUN, DEC. 9

Family Art project: 10 am–1 pm. Wave Hill. See Saturday, Dec. 8.

Holiday workshop: 11 am–3 pm. Wave Hill. See Saturday, Dec. 8.

"The Bronx Messiah": Lehman Center for the Performing Arts, 250 Bedford Park Boulevard West; (718) 960-8833; www.LehmanCenter.org; 3 pm; \$10-\$25 (\$10 any seat children under 12).

Handel's perennial holiday staple performed by the Bronx Opera Chorus and the Orchestra of the Bronx.

Santa pajama time: Van Cortlandt Nature Center, W. 246th St. at Broadway; (718) 548-0912; www.nyc.gov/parks/rangers; 6–7:30 pm; Free.

Children 4 to 12 years old enjoy reading a holiday story and a visit from St. Nicholas. Children can wear their pjs. Parents, please bring your own camera.

TUES, DEC. 11

Movie day: Kingsbridge Library Center, 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd. at Briggs Avenue; (718) 579-4244; www.nypl.org; 4–6 pm; Free.

Children see age-appropriate flicks.

WED, DEC. 12

Urban stages: 4 pm. Kingsbridge Library Center. See Wednesday, Dec. 5.

Get your game on: 4:30–7 pm. Kingsbridge Library Center. See Wednesday, Dec. 5.

THURS, DEC. 13

Ornament craft: Kingsbridge Library Center, 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd. at Briggs Avenue; (718) 579-4244; www.nypl.org; 4–5 pm; Free.

Children 5 to 12 years old use a variety of materials to make a holiday craft.

SAT, DEC. 15

Reimagining the Waterfront with the Neighborhood Explorers: Museum of the City of New York, 1220 Fifth Ave. at 103rd Street; (212) 534-1672; mcity.org; 1–3 pm; \$10 admission fee for adults; Free children 12 and under.

Join middle school students from the Neighborhood Explorers program to hear their ideas for the waterfront and share your own through hands-on model-making activities. Recommended for ages 5–17.

Holiday concert: Bartow-Pell Mansion Museum, 895 Shore Rd. (718) 601-7399; www.bartowpellmansionmuseum.org; 1–3 pm; \$10 (\$8 seniors and students; members free).

The Bronx Arts Ensemble performs seasonal tunes. Call the Ensemble for tickets.

Gingerbread house: Kingsbridge Library Center, 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd. at Briggs Avenue; (718) 579-4244; www.nypl.org; 2 pm; Free.

Children 4 years old up, along with

Continued on page 34

Calendar

Continued from page 33

caregiver or parent, are invited to build and decorate their own gingerbread houses. Pre-registration required.

SUN, DEC. 16

Family Art project: Wave Hill, W. 249th St. and Independence Avenue; (718) 549-3200; www.wavehill.org; 10 am–1 pm; Free with museum admission.

Visiting artist Esperanza Cortes teaches how to make ornaments out of pine boughs and foil.

Posadas Y Pastorelas: Museum of the City of New York, 1220 Fifth Ave. at 103rd Street; (212) 534-1672; mcny.org; Noon–5 pm; \$10 admission fee for adults; Free children 12 and under.

Join a posada, a singing holiday procession; watch a pastorela, the traditional shepherds' play; and take part in a party with pinatas. This family celebration promotes the popular traditions of the city's Mexican community.

Holiday concert: 1–3 pm. Bartow-Pell Mansion Museum. See Saturday, Dec. 15.

MON, DEC. 17

Family Art project: 10 am–1 pm. Wave Hill. See Sunday, Dec. 16.

TUES, DEC. 18

Movie day: 4–6 pm. Kingsbridge Library Center. See Tuesday, Dec. 11.

WED, DEC. 19

Get your game on: 3:30–5 pm. Kingsbridge Library Center. See Wednesday, Dec. 5.

Urban stages: 4 pm. Kingsbridge Library Center. See Wednesday, Dec. 5.

SAT, DEC. 22

Family Art project: Wave Hill, W. 249th St. and Independence Avenue; (718) 549-3200; www.wavehill.org; 10 am–1 pm; Free with museum admission.

Participants make baskets out of unusual materials for the holidays.

SUN, DEC. 23

Family Art project: 10 am–1 pm. Wave Hill. See Saturday, Dec. 22.

Eco crafts: Pelham Bay Ranger Station, Pelham Bay Park, Bruckner Boulevard and Wilkinson Avenue; (718) 885-3467; www.nyc.gov/parks/rangers; 1 pm; Free.

Children connect with nature and then make an eco-friendly craft.

WED, DEC. 26

Holiday hands-on activities: Museum of the City of New York, 1220 Fifth



Photo by Paul Kolnik

Plum production

Sugar Plum Fairies like you've never seen before are performing now in the New York City Ballet's production of "The Nutcracker," at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts' through Dec. 30.

The holiday favorite features a one-ton Christmas tree that grows

from 12- to 40-feet-tall, an on-stage snowstorm and hundreds of fanciful costumes. In addition to 90 dancers and 62 musicians, this production also boasts more than 60 performers from the School of American Ballet, twirling and leaping across the stage.

Tickets begin at \$29; check the website for performance times, now through Dec. 30.

David H. Koch Theater, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts [10 Lincoln Center Plaza, Upper West Side, (212) 875-5374; www.lincoln-center.org].

Ave. at 103rd Street; (212) 534-1672; mcny.org; 10:30 am–3:30 pm; \$10 admission fee adults; Free for children 12 and under.

Children can choose one of three activities in this school vacation drop-off program, or participate in each: Winter Wonderland: Collages; Chet the Secret Agent Architect; or Pushing Buttons: Activist New York.

Get your game on: 3–5 pm. Kingsbridge Library Center. See Wednesday, Dec. 5.

Urban stages: 4 pm. Kingsbridge Library Center. See Wednesday, Dec. 5.

THURS, DEC. 27

Holiday hands-on activities: 10:30 am–3:30 pm. Museum of the City of

New York. See Wednesday, Dec. 26.

Craft day: Kingsbridge Library Center, 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd. at Briggs Avenue; (718) 579-4244; www.nypl.org; 4–5 pm; Free.

Children 5 to 12 years old make a magnet.

FRI, DEC. 28

Holiday hands-on activities: 10:30 am–3:30 pm. Museum of the City of New York. See Wednesday, Dec. 26.

SAT, DEC. 29

Kwanzaa Celebration: American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th Street; (212) 769-5200; www.amnh.org; 10 am–5:45 pm; \$24

(\$14 children, \$18 seniors and students).

Family-friendly all-day event offers African dance, spoken word, live musical performances, and traditional crafts.

Family Art project: Wave Hill, W. 249th St. and Independence Avenue; (718) 549-3200; www.wavehill.org; 10 am–1 pm; Free with museum admission. Make your own hanging calendar.

Survival workshop: Van Cortlandt Nature Center, W. 246th St. at Broadway; (718) 548-0912; www.nyc.gov/parks/rangers; 1 pm; Free.

Park Rangers teach you how to be prepared in any situation. Suitable for children 8 years and older.

SUN, DEC. 30

Family Art project: 10 am–1 pm.

Wave Hill. See Saturday, Dec. 29.

LONG-RUNNING

Fair: Soho, 100 Varick St. (914) 295-4794; varicksflea@gmail.com; www.meetup.com/varicks; Daily, 10 am–4 pm; Now – Sat, Dec. 29; \$55/Space.

Enjoy shopping and schmoozing in the all day market.

Winged Tapestries Moths at

Large: American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th Street; (212) 769-5200; www.amnh.org; Daily, 10 am–5:45 pm; \$24(\$14 children, \$18 seniors and students).

This exhibition features 34 striking and dramatic images of moths, displaying the arresting beauty and surprising diversity of moths from Ottawa-based photographer Jim des Rivières. Runs through September 2013.

Creatures of Light: American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th Street; (212) 769-5200; awang@amnh.org; www.amnh.org; Daily, 10 am–5:45 pm; Now – Sun, Jan. 6, 2013; \$24, \$14 children, \$18 seniors and students.

This interactive exhibit explores organisms that produce light, from the flickering fireflies to alien deep-sea fishes.

The Butterfly Conservatory: American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th Street; (212) 769-5200; awang@amnh.org; www.amnh.org; Daily, 10 am–5:45 pm; \$24, \$14 children, \$18 seniors and students.

The annual exhibition, “Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter” returns and celebrates its 15th year.

Holiday Train Show: New York Botanical Garden, 200th Street and Kazimiroff Boulevard; (718) 817-8700; www.nybg.org; Tuesdays – Fridays, 10 am–6 pm, Saturdays and Sundays, 10 am–7 pm, Now – Sun, Jan. 13, 2013; \$20 (\$25 holiday pricing) – \$10 (\$15 holiday pricing).

The annual show is celebrating its 21st year of showcasing a spectacular display of iconic landmarks in miniature. New this year, the exhibit has cable cars that travel over vignettes in the conservatory’s reflecting pool. Children delight as the miniature train (set to scale) travels through the meticulous diorama of the city. Closed Christmas Day (Dec. 25).

George Balanchine’s “The Nutcracker”: Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, 10 Lincoln Center Plaza; (212) 875-5374; www.lincolncenter.org; Daily, 1, 2 and 8 pm; Now – Sun, Dec. 30; \$29 and up.

This acclaimed holiday tradition features a one-ton Christmas tree that grows from 12 to 40 feet, an onstage snowstorm, and hundreds of elaborate costumes, as well as more than 60 chil-



Photo by Rob Blackburn

Aus-some circus

Straight up from the land down under, the Aussies of Circus Oz have returned to the New Victory Theater for a month-long stay.

Shout out “g’day” and “welcome back” to the mob from Melbourne as they present their bold, bodacious, and brassy brand of big top zaniness. Featuring live rock music

and larrikin irreverence, musicians double as acrobats, acrobats double as jugglers, jugglers double as trapeze artists, and everybody is a comic. You can’t sit still when the Hammond Brothers jump across the stage in their juggling jubilation or stifle a gasp as Shane and Mason swing atop the audience in a death-defying catch-and-release

trapeze act.

“Circus Oz Holiday Show” at the New Victory Theater, Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays through Dec. 30. Tickets are \$14-\$36. Performance times are 2 and 7 pm.

The New Victory Theater [209 W. 42nd St. between Seventh and Eighth avenues in Midtown; (646) 223-3010; www.newvictory.org].

dren from the School of American Ballet, the official school of New York City Ballet.

“The Little Engine that Could”: New York Botanical Garden, 200th Street and Kazimiroff Boulevard; (718) 817-8700; www.nybg.org; Tuesdays – Sundays, check for times, Wed, Dec. 5 – Thurs, Dec. 27; Check website for pricing.

Puppet show presented by master puppeteer Ralph Lee.

“Visual Appearance”: The Poe Park Visitor Center, 2640 Grand Concourse and E. Kingsbridge Road; (718) 365-

5516; www.nycgovparks.org; Tuesdays – Saturdays, 9 am–5 pm, Wed, Dec. 5 – Sat, Dec. 15; Free.

Latin American artists are highlighted in this exhibit including, Miguel Trelles, Leenda Bonilla, Rodolfo Edwards alsmael Checo, among others.

Zumba: Bronx House, 990 Pelham Pkway. S; (718) 792-1800; www.bronxhouse.org; Wednesdays, 4–4:45 pm, Now – Wed, Dec. 5; \$100 (per 10 sessions; \$25 insurance fee; Free for members).

Teens 13 years and older burn off mega calories while shaking their bon-

Tabata: Bronx House, 990 Pelham Parkway South; (718) 792-1800; www.bronxhouse.org; Thursdays, 4–4:45 pm, Now – Thurs, Dec. 6; \$100 (per 10 sessions; \$25 insurance fee; Free for members).

Teens 13 years and older use the various equipment in the fitness room.

“Thomas and Friends”: New York Botanical Garden, 200th Street and Kazimiroff Boulevard; (718) 817-8700; www.nybg.org; Tuesdays – Sundays, check for times, Tues, Jan. 1 – Sun, Jan. 27, 2013; Check website for pricing.

Thomas the Train and all his friends will be making an appearance and chugging into the park.



GOOD SENSE EATING

CHRISTINE M. PALUMBO, RD

Bake up memories

Moms are about making holiday memories, and there's no better activity for instilling them than baking with your children. Revel in this sweet-smelling activity and invite the aunts and cousins over for even more fun.

Benefits of baking with children

If you're worried about your children's literacy and math skills, break out the mixing bowls. Baking helps reinforce what they're learning every day. It also covers a wide array of life skills including shopping for ingredients, sequence of steps, measuring, and even cleaning up.

Reading

"Your kids will actually become more literate just by reading and going thru the recipe," explains Sharon Davis, a family and consumer sciences educator who teaches for HomeBaking.org and WheatFoods.org.

Science and math skills

Explain the role of baking soda and powder in baked goods and how they differ from yeast. Recipes may involve multiplication or fractions.

Self-sufficiency

You can prepare your own baked goods, and they can be better for you.

Problem solving

What happens when you run out of an ingredient? Perhaps you can substitute another similar ingredient. Or you may lack the exact sized pan the recipe recommends. Your child will learn how to solve these little problems, which is practice for tackling bigger ones later in life.

Healthful ingredients included

Davis says a higher nutrition profile is one of the principal reasons people bake at home. Take sodium, for example.

"In general, food companies are trying to reduce it in soups [and] baked goods." She suggests using unsalted butter and halving the salt in most recipes with the exception of yeast breads.

•Portion control is easier at home. Davis says, "They'll see an option [that is] not like what they see when they're eating out. You can cut that piece of pie into the right size."

•Any recipe you make yourself can be made with whole grains. In addition to wheat, whole grains include oatmeal and whole-grain cornmeal. It's easy to substitute whole grain for half the flour. Consider white whole-wheat flour or the new ultra-grain whole-wheat flours

if taste and texture flags go up.

•For liquids, consider substituting 1/4 to 1/3 cup of pumpkin, cooked sweet potato or squash, grated carrot, apple or zucchini, or pureed banana.

•Add dried fruits to almost anything including yeast or quick breads and cookies.

•Sprinkle toasted nuts on top of pancakes or muffins, or knead into yeast breads.

Tips for getting started

1. Pick out a recipe and read it together during story time the night before.

2. Get tools that are easy to use with young children. Look for large numbers, visible lines, and sturdy spoon handles. A whisk, two baking sheet pans, three nested mixing bowls, nine-by-13-inch cake pan, nine-inch square cake pan, 12-cup muffin tin, and two bread loaf pans can get you started. A rolling pin is helpful, but a one-inch by one-foot dowel rod works just as well for kids.

3. Store the tools in a low cupboard or drawer and let the children help you get them out. Allow time to read the recipe together and assemble the ingredients and pans before you start.

4. Teach your children the difference between dry and liquid measuring cups. Measure liquids flat on the counter with a liquid measuring cup. To measure dry ingredients, fluff into dry measure cups, then level off.

5. The website www.homebaking.org provides over 130 "how-tos" for getting started baking, ingredients, methods and pans.

Baking is about making memories, which is reason enough to risk getting flour onto your kitchen floor. Yet it's also about literacy and life skills. And nothing beats the smell of freshly baked goods emanating from your kitchen — especially during this magical time of year.

Christine Palumbo is a dietitian from Naperville, Ill., who plans to bake her usual repertoire of ethnic Christmas cookies using real butter. Follow her on Facebook at Christine Palumbo Nutrition, on Twitter @PalumboRD or Chris@ChristinePalumbo.com.

Country Fruit Cobbler

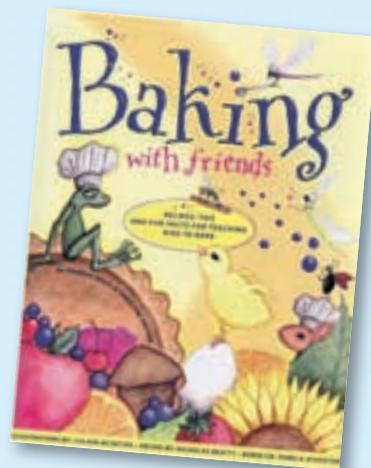
PREP TIME: 30 minutes

BAKING TIME: 50 minutes

Makes eight servings

INGREDIENTS

- 4 cups sliced fresh or frozen peaches (about 8)
- ½ cup fresh or frozen blackberries
- 1 cup sugar, divided
- 1 tablespoon corn starch
- ¼ teaspoon cinnamon
- ½ cup whole wheat flour
- ¼ cup all-purpose flour
- ¼ cup yellow cornmeal, whole grain
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 cup 1 percent milk
- ¼ cup unsalted butter, melted



DIRECTIONS: Preheat oven to 350° F. Grease or spray a 13- by nine-inch pan, baking dish or cast iron skillet. In a large mixing bowl, combine peaches and blackberries with a

mixture of ½ cup sugar, cornstarch and cinnamon. In a separate medium mixing bowl, combine remaining ½ cup sugar, whole wheat flour, all-purpose flour, cornmeal, baking powder, and salt. Combine and add milk and melted butter to dry mixture. Blend just until all dry ingredients are moistened. Pour or spoon batter over peach mixture. Bake for 50 to 60 minutes until crust is crisp and golden brown. Serve hot with whipped cream or ice cream.

NUTRITION FACTS: Each 6 ounce/174 gram serving provides 257 calories, 4 grams protein, 48 grams carbohydrate, 3.5 grams dietary fiber, 6 grams fat (4 grams saturated), 72 milligram calcium, 182 milligram potassium, 229 milligram sodium.

Source: Adapted from "Baking with Friends: Recipes, Tips and Fun Facts for Teaching Kids to Bake" by Sharon Davis and Charlene Patton.

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New & Noteworthy

BY LISA J. CURTIS

Fit for a queen

If your little diva has been very good this year, why not give her a holiday dress fit for a queen? Queen Elizabeth I, that is.

The pleated bodice of Laura Ashley's red taffeta dress evokes none other than the British Tudor queen, fruit cake, and Christmas crackers.

With lovely details such as velvet ribbon at the waist, your little one will be the belle of the yuletide ball in this dress, which comes in sizes 2T, 3T, 6, and 6X.

Pleated bodice with velvet ribbon toddler dress, by Laura Ashley, \$52, www.laura-ashleyusa.com.



Keep them forever warm



Handmade gifts are often the best, especially when it comes to accessories that keep little ones warm and healthy, like the infinity scarf for children knitted by Julie Giustino for her Frayd Clothing Company on Etsy.com. Because the Massachusetts-based textile artist uses a "super soft" yarn to crochet the thick, chunky V-pattern stitch, Giustino's scarves are both stylish and practical. The scarves are available in pink or purple marble, but the designer can accommodate requests for your little fashionista's favorite hue. And don't despair, Frayd Clothing Company sells them in Mom's size, too, for \$38.

Children's Infinity Cowl Scarf by Frayd Clothing Company, \$28, www.etsy.com.

Sweet read

Start a new family tradition this December with the help of Bakerella's "Cake Pops Holidays" cookbook. Bakerella, aka Angie Dudley, takes these balls of crumbled cake and frosting coated with candy melts to amazing holiday heights. And you can, too, with the help of her clear, encouraging instructions on how to form, store, decorate, display, and wrap your pops. Even small children will enjoy helping to roll the balls, but it will take a



more patient, older child to pop them on the lollipop sticks and help you transform these confections into the fantastic polar bears, ornaments, snowmen, or dreidels depicted in the gorgeous photographs.

"Cake Pops Holidays" book, by Bakerella, \$14.95, www.barnesandnoble.com.

Merry mix hits high note

Santa will be filling those stockings a little faster this year with the help of Laurie Berkner's new Christmas CD. Her renditions of 15 holiday classics like "Jingle Bells," "Little Drummer Boy," and "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" are joined by three original tracks, such as the lively "Candy



Cane Jane" and short-but-sweet "Christmas Lights." All are sure to win the hearts of little ones who will recognize Berkner's voice from her music videos that play on the Nick Jr. television channel. Do you hear what I hear? The sounds of an even merrier Christmas!

"A Laurie Berkner Christmas" CD, by Laurie Berkner, \$10.79, www.amazon.com.

Share the joy of 'One' story

Parents are their child's first storytellers, so why not be the best you can be with the "Little One Inch Story Box." Designed by educator-artist Steve Light, the keepsake wooden box (measuring 8-inches wide by 11.25-inches deep by 3-inches high) holds a story booklet and five hand-painted, resin characters that enable the storyteller to act out the classic Japanese folktale, "Little One Inch," about a little boy who is short on stature but long on courage as he battles his way out of the belly of the "oni," or demon. Visit www.guidecraft.com/SteveLight to watch Light show you how



it's done. For ages 4 and older.

Little One Inch Story Box by Guidecraft, \$50, www.cricketmag.com.

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Find out more at ny529directplan.com. Or call 1-800-420-8580.

[†] USA Today, "Average cost of 4-year university up 15%," Christine Armario, June 13, 2012.

Investment returns are not guaranteed, and you could lose money by investing in the plan.

* *May be subject to recapture in certain circumstances — such as rollovers to another state's plan or nonqualified withdrawals.*

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For more information about New York's 529 College Savings Program *Direct Plan*, obtain a Program Brochure and Tuition Savings Agreement at www.ny529directplan.com or by calling 1-800-420-8580. This includes investment objectives, risks, charges, expenses, and other information. You should read and consider them carefully before investing.

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