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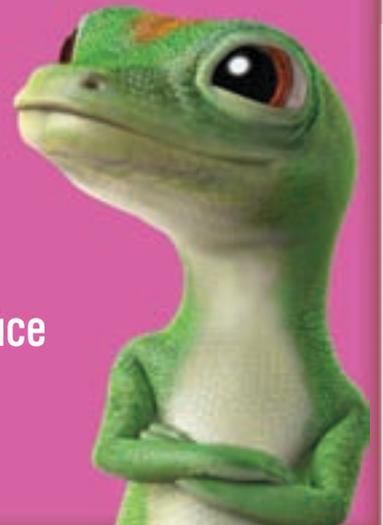
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FEATURES

6 How to make the most of a doctor's visit

A pediatrician addresses many parents' common concerns
BY KATHY SENA

8 New year's eats

Easy ways to avoid weight gain and be healthier in 2014
BY JAMIE LOBER

10 Road risks

Distracted driving can be deadly. What kind of example are you setting?
BY KERRIE MCLOUGHLIN

14 Health insurance strategies

Choosing a family-friendly health plan in the age of Obamacare
BY SANDRA GORDON

16 Value of Catholic schools

Why parents choose this effective alternative
BY CANDI SPARKS

23 Know the score

Helping kids reap all of sport's benefits
BY JAMIE LOBER

24 Health at play

The Children's Museum of Manhattan's new interactive exhibit gets a thumbs up from kids
BY ALLISON PLITT

COLUMNS

12 Healthy Living

BY DANIELLE SULLIVAN

22 Ask an Attorney

BY ALISON ARDEN BESUNDER, ESQ.

26 Dear Teacher

BY PEGGY GISLER AND MARGE EBERTS

22 Good Sense Eating

BY CHRISTINE M. PALUMBO, RD

32 Lions and Tigers and Teens

BY MYRNA BETH HASKELL

34 New & Noteworthy

BY LISA J. CURTIS

CALENDAR

28 January Events

SPECIAL SECTIONS

33 The Marketplace



Letter from the publisher

One-Year Later/Newtown

It's one year since the terrible tragedy at Newtown and although many of us thought it would provoke changes in our gun laws, it hasn't. The lobbies are seemingly too powerful, and the sight and memories of children and teachers dying are not in the forefront anymore. They are yesterday's news as we march onward with more recent headlines.

Astonishingly we heard the sentiment of a segment of the public and media that encouraged more guns and armed guards in schools as the answer to future violence. The emphasis on identifying those



potentially disturbed enough to resort to massacre isn't talked about much anymore.

Proudly, our outgoing mayor, Mr. Bloomberg, has put his money where his heart and intelligence are and has provided funds for candidates

across the nation, who favor restrictions on the manufacture and sale of assault weapons. He is funding the "other side", the mothers and fathers of Newtown who have in spite of their grief been pleading for reason on the issues of guns and mental health.

I think about those children, teachers, and the parents and fami-

lies who in a few short minutes lost their lives and their loved ones. I can't imagine it happening to a child of mine. I can't imagine I would ever get over my grief; that I could ever go on again with a smile on my face. But people do. We do.

I don't want to forget these children, or the children in Columbine, or in Oklahoma City. I want us all to remember the unnecessary loss and insanity of these shoot-ups and bombings, and I want us to be on alert for the next time. I want us to *do* something.

I want people everywhere to give peace a chance by believing that we can accomplish this. I want us as a society to believe that it's not the norm for people to periodically go berserk and kill other children

and that we must find the mentality and the determination to stop it.

A strange way to begin my column for the New Year? No, because I want this year to be free of such tragedies and all the years to come. I want this year and all the years to bring guaranteed safety to our children everywhere. Yes, you can say I'm a dreamer, but as John Lennon said, "I'm not the only one."

Happy New Year.

Susan Weiss-Voskidis,
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How to make the most of a doctor's visit

A pediatrician addresses many parents' common concerns

BY KATHY SENA

As parents, we've all had questions when taking a child to the doctor: what information should I bring? How do I get copies of past lab reports and X-rays? How do I keep track of my child's immunizations and medications?

We shared these common concerns with Dr. Jean Hanley, a board-certified physician with more than 20 years of experience in pediatrics and allergy, asthma, and immunological diseases. Hanley is also the founder of PLANning Health, a non-profit patient-advocacy service that helps people with health problems receive better care in all aspects of their health, such as understanding their symptoms, diagnosis, procedures, treatments, and insurance coverage.

Kathy Sena: When my child is sick, and I'm worried, it's easy to forget to bring the right things to the doctor's appointment. What should I remember to bring to make it an effective appointment?

Dr. Jean Hanley: It's helpful to create a medical history for your child and to update it as needed. This can be done on paper, on a computer document or spreadsheet, or with one of the convenient health-tracking apps for your computer or mobile device. List immunizations, past diagnoses, treatments, lab results, medications taken daily (asthma inhalers, recent antibiotics, etc.), and intermittently (acetaminophen, ibuprofen, etc.).

I highly suggest trying one of the free or inexpensive medical-tracking apps that can be easily downloaded to your phone or computer:

- My Medical Records (online and mobile app: www.freehealthtrack.com)
- My Medical (online and mobile app: www.mymedicalapp.com)
- Hermes (mobile app)
- MyHealth (mobile app)

These databases allow you to record medications, procedures, tests, allergies, surgical procedures, diagnoses, injuries, photos, insurance info, and more. Having easily available medical information can lead to a more-efficient and productive doctor's visit.

If you don't have all of this information available, it's important to bring at least the actual medications that your child has been taking recently.

Write down your child's symptoms: cold, cough, ear pain, etc. When did the symptoms start? If there was an injury, what happened? Where does it hurt? How have the symptoms progressed? Are they getting better, worse, or staying the same? (If the illness or injury happens suddenly, and you have to rush to a doctor's appointment, try to write down this info while in the waiting room.)

KS: How do I get copies of medical records, tests, X-rays, etc. from other doctors to bring for my appointment, if necessary?

JH: Requesting records from hospitals and clinics takes time, and each office has its own procedure for requesting records. Most facilities require that you fill out a special form. Healthcare providers are required by law to share information regarding your child. The requested items can be sent to you by mail, fax, or e-mail, or you can pick them up in person. Procedures such as lab tests, X-rays, etc. will need to be requested from the doctor who ordered them. Most labs do not provide information directly to the patient or guardian.

The smartest step a parent can take is to obtain the records at the time of the visit, so that they have as much information as possible at their fingertips and they don't have to go through the hassle of requesting records.

KS: Should I bring another adult along for the visit if I'm bringing a

young child? How does this help?

JH: I always advocate bringing another adult with you to doctor visits, whether it's for your child or for yourself. A spouse, friend, or other family member often serves as an objective observer and provides what I call the "witness effect." Although I'm a doctor, I get sick, too! As a patient, I often went to appointments by myself. When my spouse would occasionally accompany me, I noticed that more time and attention was being given to me. Although I felt that my care was very good, the "phenomenon" of even more information being disseminated when I had another adult with me was an eye opener. An objective friend or family member also may be able to ask questions that you may forget, or to ask for important details or clarification.

KS: What about communicating with my child's doctor by e-mail? How do I suggest this? Is it common these days?

JH: There has been a very slow, but steady, increase in electronic communications between doctors and patients, but only about five percent of doctors do this currently. One issue is privacy. The Federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act must be complied with in all e-mails, ensuring that any health information sent is secure and truly private. For this reason, many doctors won't use e-mail.

Doctors who do use e-mail will ask their patients to sign forms agreeing to communicate electronically regarding health issues. Some only exchange lab or procedure results or non-urgent follow-up information. For other medical situations, you'll likely be asked to call the doctor's office. I believe that e-mail communications and texting will continue to increase over time. The only way to know if your doctor is actively e-mailing patients is to ask. Many medical groups, such as the American



it's easy to become overwhelmed and confused with the details of a diagnosis, treatment, or the potential side effects of a medication. Medical misinformation from the internet often leads to perplexing concerns about medical conditions. For this reason, it's imperative that parents ask for clarification and confirmation of online information and that the doctor's office provides written instructions regarding your child's diagnosis and treatment.

KS:What should I do if I

differences or the risk and benefits for each. There are numerous areas that may need to be addressed, and this is when a patient advocate can step in and help the parents sort out the issues.

For example, a child for whom I advocated had a rare, potentially fatal rheumatological (arthritis) condition for which the doctor prescribed a lengthy treatment with medications that had serious possible side effects. After researching the illness, doctor, and medications,

The smartest step a parent can take is to obtain medical records at the time of the visit, so that they don't have to go through the hassle of requesting records later on.

don't understand my child's diagnosis or the treatment plan the doctor is suggesting?

JH:Contact the doctor's office right away to get answers to your remaining questions. Often, a nurse will help you understand what you need to know. If you find that you frequently are not given sufficient information about your child's health, then you may want to either prepare and research conditions prior to the doctor's visit or consider finding a new doctor who may be more thorough during the visit.

KS:What should I do if my child is diagnosed with a major illness, and I need help navigating the healthcare system, researching treatment options, dealing with insurance issues, etc?

JH:There are many resources for most childhood illnesses that should be available from your doctor's office. But depending on the severity of the illness, the family may need help in navigating the healthcare system.

Sometimes a diagnosis cannot be established. Other times, a diagnosis has been given, but insurance issues delay proper evaluation or treatment. Several treatment options may be presented and the parents may not understand the

I was able to provide reassurance to the family that they were receiving excellent care and that the benefits of the life-saving medication well outweighed the risks.

Patient advocacy is a growing field, and some hospitals and clinics are beginning to hire their own advocates. If your doctor or hospital cannot suggest a patient advocate, you can find one independently. The Professional Patient Advocate Institute (www.patientadvocatetraining.com) and Health Care Navigators (www.health-care-navigators.com) are two of several organizations that can help you find an advocate. Advocates can be doctors, nurses, other medical personnel, or social workers.

My organization, PLANning Health (www.planninghealth.org), is a non-profit and does not charge for services, although donations, from those who can afford it, are what keep us afloat. Most for-profit patient advocates charge \$50 to \$200 per hour for services.

Patient-advocacy services may include making home visits, developing medication and treatment plans, providing questions for doctor's visits, accompanying patients to the doctor's visit, researching illnesses on reliable medical websites, dealing with insurance issues, and more. The needs of the family may be satisfied by one phone call or they may require more-extensive services.

Kathy Sena has been writing about children's health since her son was born in 1995. She is now learning more than she ever wanted to know about the college-search process. Visit her website at www.kathysena.com.

Academy of Pediatrics, are trying to establish guidelines as to how to incorporate and better serve patients through electronic communications.

It's important to remember that no amount of electronic communication can take the place of a thorough history, a physical exam, and an in-person conversation with your child's doctor.

KS:I'd like to do online research on my child's condition or symptoms before the doctor's visit. How do I share this information with the doctor?

JH:In our information age, many parents want to have a shared decision-making relationship with their child's doctor. The parents may have already researched the illness and may have a fairly good idea of what diagnosis or treatment plans are available. Some parents feel more comfortable accepting the doctor's information as-is. Either way is acceptable, as long as you're comfortable with the relationship: one-way vs. shared.

A note of caution: With medical information at our internet fingertips,

New year's eats

Easy ways to avoid weight gain and be healthier in 2014

BY JAMIE LOBER

As we kick off the New Year, people tend to become more interested in seeking nutrition advice, whether they are looking to lose a few pounds or just become healthier.

"The holidays are a time that is challenging for a lot of people with their weight and eating healthy," said Despina Hyde, nutritionist at New York University Langone Medical Center. This means that January is the month in which we have to recover and get back on track. But, while it may sound impossible, it is not as hard as you think.

"One of the major issues is just being mindful and tuning in to whether we are really enjoying the food or eating because it is front of us," said Hyde.

Remember, you do not have to eat everything. "I like to tell my patients to pick their indulgences, and when there are a lot of things out there, chose the ones you really love," said Hyde. This can also help with portion control. "You may really love mashed potatoes but stuffing may not be your favorite, so you can do without that," said Hyde.

Food preferences are very individualized. "Everyone has different cultural celebrations and things they do with their families, so some strategies can be applied widely and others are more specific," said Hyde. If each person just takes away one or two tips and follows through with them throughout the year, they will be healthier.

You may have had a few drinks to ring in the New Year, but be sure to tone it down as the month progresses. Doctors stress that alcohol is only okay in moderation.

"One challenge I see a lot of is alcohol, because it adds more calories than people believe it does, and it lowers inhibitions, which leads people to eat more than they were planning on," said Hyde. Mix things up. "If you have a drink, the next drink could be something like club soda or water to space it out throughout the night."

Aim for sugar-free mixers. "Stay away from fattening, high-calorie or high-sugar punches and know that wine is also a good option," said Hyde. It is lower in calories than other drinks, and it is essential that you stay hydrated.

Eating a balanced meal is important. If you are planning to dine at a friend's house or go to a social gathering, plan your actions in advance.

"You should have protein to stabilize the blood sugar before you attend a party, and that way, you will not feel as hungry," said Hyde. If you are going to a get-together, bring a healthy dish to share. "If you are hosting, send stuff home with guests," said Hyde.

Do not let the food take away from the other positive aspects of your event. "Focus on socialization and making time about the family and not the food," said Hyde.

Find alternatives. "Look for ways to swap calories, so if there is a typical dish that is usually traditionally

high in fat or calories, find a way to modify it," said Hyde. This is almost always doable. "One thing I love is swapping mashed cauliflower for mashed potatoes or using apple sauce or a prune puree in baked goods as opposed to butters and oils," said Hyde.

Greek yogurt is another popular choice. There are ways to reduce fat just by cooking slightly differently. Instead of frying, try baking, broiling, microwaving or boiling. To reduce calories, eat fruits canned in their own juice instead of syrup. To enhance flavor, use vanilla, nutmeg, or cinnamon.

You can be proactive at a restaurant by asking questions, such as whether the cook is willing to leave gravy or cream sauces off of dishes, accommodate special requests like swapping fries for a salad, and use less oil. The National Institutes of Health suggests choosing foods that are steamed in their own juice, broiled, baked, roasted, poached, or lightly sautéed. Choose a lower-calorie salad dressing, and do not eat the skin on chicken or turkey. Consider the fact that portion sizes have gotten larger over the years, and remember it is okay to bring leftovers home for the next day. You may also want to share your entrée with someone, eat off smaller plates, or skip buffets.

Gaining a few pounds or more is preventable. "It is about behavior change, eating fewer calories than your body needs, skipping that extra cookie, increasing vegetable intake, and filling up on lean protein," said Hyde.

Increasing physical activity also helps. Get in the habit of staying on a regular eating schedule. It is always nice to eat as a family most days of the week. Always eat before you get hungry and never skip breakfast. Chew slowly and enjoy what you are eating instead of rushing through it.

When you have a game plan in advance, it is easier to follow your own rules and feel good about your diet.

Jamie Lober, author of "Pink Power" (www.getpinkpower.com), is dedicated to providing information on women's and pediatric health topics. She can be reached at jamie@getpinkpower.com.

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Road risks

Distracted driving can be deadly. What kind of example are *you* setting?

BY KERRIE MCMCLOUGHLIN

We hear all the time about teens getting into a car crash because they were texting while driving. We've seen the heartbreaking public service announcements about a teen's last text before running down a pedestrian. Teens get such a bad rap for texting and driving, yet I see so many adults who are driving while trying to dial a phone number, texting, putting on makeup, holding their pet — often with small children in the backseat. What are we teaching our children and teens about distracted driving?

So many of us are multitaskers by nature. Everyone is busy, and some of us are in our car more often than we would like to be. It's tempting to want to pop off a quick text message to let someone know you are running late. It's easy to make a fast phone call to the doctor's office from the car to ask a question you might forget about by the time you get home. And we have to check in with work, don't we?

According to Distraction.gov, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's website, "Distracted driving is any activity that could divert a person's attention away from the primary task of driving. All distractions endanger driver, passenger, and bystander safety. These types of distractions include: texting; using a cellphone or smartphone; eating and drinking; talking to passengers; grooming; reading, including maps; using a navigation system; watching a video; adjusting a radio, CD player, or MP3 player."

So how do you keep your teenager from texting or talking on her cellphone while driving? For starters, you have to be a good example. A teenager recently told me her mother drives with her knee while applying lipstick



and talking on the phone at the same time. It's possible that observing a bad example will make this teenager go the opposite way; maybe not.

One mom I know says, "Oh I'm horrible — I text, but with my voice app more now. I always put on makeup in the car. It's a horrible habit I have, I'm a terrible example; in fact, I have talked to [my kids] a lot about what I do [that] they shouldn't."

Another option is to get a cool app to help you out. Privus Mobile® is a Dallas-based application developer that has come up with a caller ID app that says out loud who a text is from. This way, a person can decide to ignore the text or to pull off to the side of the road to check the text or answer it. With this app, drivers won't have to look at their phone to see who is sending a text and then try to read it and respond while driving. To learn more about this app to help end texting while driving, go to <http://privus-mobile.com/eyesontheroad>.

Realize that being late to your destination is better than not arriving at all, because you had to do last-minute things in your car, instead of at home, and you caused an accident. Thinking, "I can just call or text my friend back while I'm driving the kids to dance class" could be deadly and is something you can make a note

about and do later.

Keep track of when your child is driving places and check it against the phone bill to see if there were any calls or texts during that time. If it turns out your child is practicing distracted driving, decide on the consequences, such as taking away driving or other privileges, etc.

More ideas include:

- Keep snacks and bottles of water in the car for the kids to get into if they need them instead of you digging around for them and passing them back.

- Pull over to soothe your baby instead of reaching back and trying to get a pacifier or bottle in his mouth.

- Rather than adjusting the radio or CD player endlessly, leave it where it is or turn it off entirely.

- Stow your phone somewhere in the car where you can't reach it and won't be tempted to answer it. Turning it off is also a good idea, so you won't hear the ringing or ding of it and get stressed out thinking it might be something urgent. Even using a headset is not necessarily safer, as your mind is still focused on the phone call and not on the road.

Kerrie McLoughlin is the mom of five and author of "Fun, Frugal and Green Christmas." Come and see her at TheKerrieShow.com.

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Photo by Aaron Greenhood

The health effects of long commutes

How long is your daily commute to work? The average commute lasts 25.4 minutes, but many New Yorkers easily beat those numbers day in and day out. Kathy Carrera, a mom of four from Sheepshead Bay, says that her commute includes a bus and a train, and takes about 90 minutes each way — if there is no train traffic, late buses, or stalled subway signals.

Technically, this would categorize Carrera as an extreme commuter.

“It definitely gets harder in the winter and as the temperatures dip, my stress level goes up!” she says.

With so much time spent in buses and cars, not to mention ferries and railroads, commuting can often seem like the ultimate waste in a busy life. Even worse, it can become a factor leading to overall life dissatisfaction and even bad health. A Swedish study finds that couples in which one partner commutes for longer than 45 minutes are 40 percent likelier to divorce. In addition, longer commutes are believed to cause obesity, neck pain, loneliness, stress, and insom-

nia. Today, one in every six workers spends 45 minutes commuting each way, and 3.5 million Americans spend more than 90 minutes and are categorized as “extreme commuters.”

Moreover, the resulting health ramifications combined with the mental stressors can be damaging. People with long transit times suffer from disproportionate pain, stress, obesity, and dissatisfaction.

Economist John Kain wrote back in 1965, that it is “crucial that, in making longer journeys to work, households incur larger costs in both time and money. Since time is a scarce commodity, workers should demand some compensation for the time they spend in commuting.”

But would getting compensated for our long commutes help? Two economists at the University of Zurich — Bruno Frey and Alois Stutzer — actually went about quantifying it, in a now-famous 2004 paper entitled “Stress That Doesn’t Pay: The Commuting Paradox.” They found that for an extra hour of commuting time, you would need to be compensated

with a massive 40 percent increase in salary to make it worthwhile. Imagine that for people who commute three hours a day or more. Not likely happening any time soon.

Carrera finds there are times when she can actually find her commute relaxing.

“When I get a seat on the bus and train, and have time to read a book and zone out, I enjoy it. I guess a lot of it is how you look at it,” she says.

Carrera is right, perspective is everything, and while you may not want to take a job that is very far away, when you already have one, you are faced with two choices: either look for another job closer to home or learn how to accept a longer commute, because allowing yourself to be stressed on a daily basis is never a good health option.

Danielle Sullivan, a mom of three, has worked as a writer and editor in the parenting world for more than 10 years. Sullivan also writes about pets and parenting for Disney’s Babble.com. Find Sullivan on her blogs, Just Write Mom and Some Puppy To Love.



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Health insurance STRATEGIES

Choosing a family-friendly health plan in the age of Obamacare

BY SANDRA GORDON

If you don't get health insurance through your employer, your spouse's employer, or a parent if you're 26 or younger, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, a.k.a. Obamacare, should make getting affordable health care easier. Here's what you need to know.

"Health care reform is awesome," says Katherine Woodfield, an insurance expert and author of "Don't Buy THAT Health Insurance: Become an Educated Health Care Consumer." "It's the first federal oversight of a completely non-federally regulated industry in 100 years." Think of it as consumer protection.

Even though coverage under the plan starts on Jan. 1, 2014, open enrollment, the period when the federal government allows consumers to choose a health plan or to select a different health plan if they already have health insurance, runs through March 31, 2014, for the first year of the Affordable Care Act. The sooner you get your application in, the better, because the longer you delay, the longer you'll have to wait for your health insurance coverage to start.

If you enroll between the 1st and the 15th of the month, your coverage will start the following month. But if you enroll between the 16th through the 30th of the month, your coverage won't start until the month after that. For example, if you wait until the last day of open enrollment (March 31), your coverage won't begin until May 1, 2014. Delaying can cost you. Going three consecutive months in 2014 without health coverage, even during open enrollment, will assess a \$95 penalty on your income taxes. The penalty for going without health insurance for 90 days or more increases over time. By 2016, it will be up to \$695.

While [healthcare.gov](http://www.healthcare.gov) is getting the kinks out for online applications, you can choose the "Apply by Phone" op-

tion at www.healthcare.gov. A navigator will send you a paper application, which you can complete and mail back. You can reach a navigator by calling 1-800-318-2596 or by visiting www.healthcare.gov and clicking "Chat Now" in the bottom right-hand corner.

What is a health insurance agent?

One caveat: "A navigator isn't allowed to give you an opinion," Woodfield says. If you want that kind of help, consider working with a health insurance agent, a licensed and certified professional who has gone through federal training to understand the act and the financial implications of the various choices, including off-exchange plans, which are designed for consumers who aren't eligible for federal subsidies.

A health insurance agent can help you choose the best plan for your family and offer plan recommendations.

"Having someone assist you who is licensed, educated, and experienced releases you from the burden of having to do it yourself," says Mike Stahl, a senior vice president at Healthmarkets.com, a national health insurance agency that employs more than 3,000 agents throughout the U.S. and offers more than 80 insurance carriers from which consumers can choose. An agent can help you compare your best options both on and off the exchange, help you determine if you're eligible for a tax credit, and even complete the health insurance application process for you.

Agents receive a commission from insurance companies for their services, which are free to consumers.

"There's no discount by skipping an agent, so you might as well take advantage of the expertise," Woodfield says. To find a licensed health insurance broker in your state, visit www.healthmarkets.com or www.healthcare.gov, and click on "Contact Us" at the bottom of home page,

then click on "Find Local Help."

There's a lot to know about the Affordable Care Act, so be sure to visit www.healthcare.gov if you're in the market for health insurance. In the meantime, here are more tips for simplifying the health care shopping process, whether you choose the federal plan or a plan that's not offered on the exchange.

To save on health care costs, focus on a health plan with the highest deductible. The act is designed around cost sharing. It offers four plan types: Bronze, in which 60 percent of health care costs are covered by insurance companies with 40 percent of health care expenses paid by consumers, with the lowest monthly premium; Silver (70 percent covered, 30 percent paid for by consumers); Gold (80 percent, 20 percent paid for by consumers); and Platinum (90 percent of costs covered, with 10 percent paid for by consumers, with the highest monthly premium).

For each of these plan types, the essential health benefits are standard. Under the act, all health plans must include coverage for ambulatory patient services (outpatient care you get without being admitted to a hospital), emergency services, hospitalization (such as surgery), maternity and newborn care (before and after your baby is born), mental health and substance use disorder services, including behavioral health treatment (this includes counseling and psychotherapy), prescription drugs, rehabilitative and habilitative services and devices (services and devices to help people with injuries, disabilities, or chronic conditions gain or recover mental and physical skills), laboratory services, preventive and wellness services and chronic disease management and pediatric service.

Crunch the numbers

When choosing a plan in general, Woodfield recommends opting for



the health insurance plan with the lowest annual cost to you.

“More often than not, that’s the plan with the lowest premium,” Woodfield says. Her motto: “Keep fixed expenses low,” so you’ll have the least amount of money automatically going out of your pocket every month. When you pay the lowest monthly premium possible, you’ll generally pay less overall in overall medical care expenses.

Skeptical? Do the math. Woodfield suggests adding up the total annual premium of the Affordable Care Act or other health plans you’re considering plus the total cost of your predictable medical expenses per year. Keep in mind that under the act, preventive health services for you and your children, including your annual mammogram and wellness visit and their routine immunizations and well-child visits are free with no copay or coinsurance required, for all U.S. health plans.

“Go online to your current carrier and look at your claims last year for medical tests, you and your family’s doctor’s visits, and prescriptions,” Woodfield says. If, for instance, your total medical costs for the year added up to \$6,000, on the (60-40) Bronze

plan, you’ll have to pay 40 percent of those costs, or \$2,400 and your premium, at say, \$100 per month, will be \$1,200 annually, for a total of \$3,600. If you’re on the (70-30) Silver plan, with a \$200 monthly premium, you’ll pay \$1,800 in medical costs and \$2,400 in premiums, for a total annual cost of \$4,200, and so on.

Get the idea? In general, the higher your premium, the more you’ll pay out of pocket overall for medical coverage. Still, plug your numbers into the various plans options and see for yourself.

“Go with the plan that is predictably going to cost you the least,” Woodfield says.

Health savings account

Sign up for a Health Savings Account. Consider allocating what you’d otherwise pay in a monthly premium into a health savings account, which is a fund that must be used for qualified medical expenses. Then, pay for health care as you go, just like you do for groceries or gas. The IRS deems what’s an acceptable medical expense for a health savings account, but its list is much more comprehensive than the services a health insurance company

will cover, which is an added bonus.

For example, “The IRS allows you to deduct acupuncture, chiropractic care, and orthodontic care,” Woodfield says. Many health insurance plans don’t cover them. For more information about health savings accounts, visit the website for the IRS: www.irs.gov/publications/p969/index.html. If you’re not eligible for an HSA, a personal savings account designated for medical expenses will do.

Consider add-on products. Monthly health insurance premiums never go away, but medical service costs do. Even if you have a major medical expense you can’t predict, like having an emergency C-section or a child who needs to be hospitalized, the maximum you’ll have to personally pay for all of your medical expenses on all Affordable Care Act plans is \$6,350 for an individual or \$12,700 for a family annually. The Platinum plan is an exception. It has an out-of-pocket annual maximum of \$4,000 for an individual and \$8,000 for a family.

Supplemental health products

“For many people, \$8,000 or \$12,700 could be a significant per-

centage of their after-tax income,” Stahl says. Still, a large percentage of Healthmarket’s customers choose low-premium, high-deductible plans. “For those customers, we often counsel them to add supplemental health products, like an accident, disability or a hospitalization plan, which can very inexpensively offset a whole host of out-of-pocket expenses, including that big deductible they took on,” he says.

Choose a plan with providers you currently use. To keep medical costs low, it pays to stay in-network. If your doctor or your child’s pediatrician isn’t listed as a provider for a health plan you’re considering, call the doctor’s office to double check. Because of the Affordable Care Act, physicians are re-evaluating the health insurance options, too.

For more information about the Affordable Care Act and health insurance in general, visit The Alliance for Health Reform, www.allhealth.org.

Sandra Gordon is an award-winning freelance writer who delivers expert advice and the latest developments in health, nutrition, parenting, and consumer issues. Her most recent book is “Save a Bundle: 50+ Ways to Save Big on Baby Gear.”

Value of Catholic schools

Why parents choose this effective alternative

BY CANDI SPARKS

At a time when the New York City public school system is under so much criticism and revision, working families have found an alternative in the Catholic school system. These schools have historically been the ones to reach out to and support communities in need.

Years ago, hundreds of thousands of immigrants came to the New World to have a fresh start. They put in long hours at low-level jobs, striving for greater opportunity and a better life for their children. It was a financial sacrifice for these immigrants to send their children to Catholic schools, rather than through the public school system, but to them, it was well worth it.

The public schools in their working-class neighborhoods were largely overcrowded and not necessarily providing top-notch education. In order to be more assured that their children would be taught their values — including discipline, which was a rigorous part of their children's life at home — they decided to send their children through a parochial school system, even if it meant struggling to find the extra money to pay for it.

In the early days of the immigration wave, it was primarily Irish and Italian immigrants that sent their children to Catholic parochial schools. As the years went by and new immigrants came from more



countries and continents, the demographic shifted and one didn't necessarily have to be Catholic to choose this educational option. As a result, many Catholic schools throughout the city have continued as an integral part of our citywide school landscape.

Currently, Catholic schools serve more than 160 nationalities. With each wave of immigration — Hispanic, Asian, Slavic and many others — Catholic schools offer diversity. These schools are not just racially diverse; there is also religious diversity in the Catholic school system. In fact, non-Catholics comprise about one quarter of the student body.

"Catholic schools are not just meant for the faithful. We are here to grow faith by building community and reaching out to those in need," says Tom O'Brien, of the Brooklyn Diocese, which is involved in raising scholarship funds to help families offset tuition. "But not every Catholic school family is in great economic need. Our demographic is changing. We have seen an influx of middle income families who choose Catholic school because of the class size, excellence in education, and for a safer environment than what most par-

ents think the neighborhood public school would offer."

Patty, a public school teacher from the Bronx, sends her son Ronald to a Catholic elementary school.

"The environment stresses academics and doing the right thing," she says. "The teachers set high standards for the children. They are expected to do well and they rise to the occasion."

Many Catholic school students are the first ones in their families to graduate from college. In low-income neighborhoods, this means that the school is providing the lion's share of educational support for children who do not have access to private tutoring or help at home.

There is a 99 percent graduation rate for Catholic high schools, followed by a 97 percent college graduation rate for those who graduated Catholic high school. Compared to the 41 percent public high school graduation rate, Catholic school students have a better success rate. They are guided up the ladder of growth and achievement, making a real difference for present and future generations. Overall, Catholic school seems to outperform public school and is a viable, less-expensive sys-

tem of education in the private sector.

In fact, the only two private schools in New York State that were designated by the U.S. Department of Education as Blue Ribbon — a program that honors public and private elementary, middle, and high schools whose students achieve at very high levels, or schools that make significant progress in closing the achievement gap — in 2011 were both Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of New York. The honorees were St. Ignatius Loyola School on E. 84th Street in Manhattan and St. Ignatius on Mott Street in Manhattan. This year's honorees show the excellence in education and the diverse population served by Catholic schools. The incentives for getting a Catholic school education are different than what they used to be, and this is changing the demographics of Catholic school students.

"Families that don't have money don't usually have many choices. We needed to find a school with the right mix for Benny. He really wanted to play baseball. The only school that we could find to bridge the gap was a Catholic school. We are all very happy with the switch," says Elizabeth, a Brooklyn mother of two, who chose to send her son to a Catholic school with solid academics and a baseball program.

Likewise, Patty, of East Harlem, sends her daughter Amber to a bilingual Catholic school.

"My daughter goes to a school that gives her [education] in both languages," says Patty. "Sure, they speak the same languages in the public school around the corner, but it is unofficial. The public school does not have the same structure." Amber's Catholic school is also closely related to other parish activities and offers bilingual masses, events and service projects for the community. This makes the Catholic school a great way for Patty and Amber to meet people of similar backgrounds and build a community. Parochial schools celebrate the tradition of faith, family and community.

Unfortunately, keeping these schools open has become a challenge. The Catholic school sector is no different than any other, and closings have been publicized. In response, Catholic schools are researching and developing new educational business models. Some Catholic schools have closed their

doors, only to reopen as academies. For example, in South Ozone Park, the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary School and St. Stanislaus Bishop and Martyr School closed their doors, only to be succeeded by the Divine Mercy Catholic Academy. Because the school involves more than one parish, the school is called an academy to differentiate it from a single-parish school. Since 2005, the Brooklyn Diocese has opened many Catholic academies in Brooklyn and Queens.

The Brooklyn Diocese has also implemented the program "Preserving the Vision." The name means exactly what it says: preserving the vision. The name means exactly what it says: preserving what has always been an integral part of Catholic life: the education of children. This vision includes developing schools that will be better able to meet the diverse and changing needs of students and parents, and providing competitive compensation and benefits to teachers and staff.

Even though two schools in the Archdiocese of New York have won the 2011 Blue Ribbon Award, the organization is still committed to improving. The Archdiocese has initiated the "Pathways to Excellence" program, aimed at professional development for principals, teachers and staff at schools that already do outstanding work. Because of the diverse population, there is still more than can be done to close the achievement gap. The program is aimed at raising standardized test scores and providing teachers with new classroom tools, such as the digital teaching program for fourth and fifth grade math, "Time to Know," which provides online learning, data collection and feedback for the school.

Personally, I am proud to share that my fondest childhood memories revolve around a humble beginning, in a humble neighborhood. My siblings and I attended a Catholic elementary school, Our Lady of Victory, for eight years. I am pleased that Catholic schools are committed to remaining vibrant institutions for generations to come.

Candi Sparks is the author of children's books about money including "Can I Have Some Money? Educating Children About Money," "Max Gets It!" and "Nacho Money." She is a Brooklyn mother of two and is on Facebook (Candi Sparks, author) and Twitter (Candi Sparks, author). Her website is www.candisparks.com.

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Get organized in 2014

Without fail, my busiest months are January and December. In January, clients want to get started on their New Year's resolution to get their legal documents prepared and signed. In December, clients who resolved to "get prepared" in the New Year can't believe that year has gone by, and are determined not to let another year go by without fulfilling their promise!

In addition to getting your estate planning documents in order or up to date (your will, health care proxy, and power of attorney, among others), this month's column is dedicated to some other manageable resolutions to make for 2013.

January: Max out your flexible spending accounts. Recover the funds you spent in 2013. You can submit for reimbursement for expenses up until March 31 for expenses incurred prior to Dec. 31, 2013. Take a moment to schedule your annual appointments with your primary care physician, pediatricians, dentist, eye doctor, and others.

February: April 15 will be here before you know it. Make an appointment with your accountant and start gathering all the documents you'll need. If you have money management software, start running reports and cleaning up your data. The sooner you file, the sooner you'll get a refund.

March: Go looking for hidden treasure. Find some money you didn't know you had, just in case you owe taxes! Banks, insurance companies, utilities, and other businesses are required by law to surrender inactive accounts which are "lost," "abandoned," or "unclaimed" to the state. The state comptroller serves as custodian of the money, and if you can prove you're entitled to it, it's yours. Search your name to see if the state is holding your money and to complete the necessary forms at www.osc.state.ny.us/ouf/index.htm

April: Insure your peace of mind. Review your life, disability, homeowners, and auto policies to make



sure they're sufficient for your needs and that your beneficiaries are correctly named and up to date.

May: Are your passports up to date? Do you have passports for your children? You need passports for your infant children if you are planning to travel overseas in the summer months. In addition to other requirements, the process for children requires the children to be present with both parents (or for one parent to have a properly signed authorization and a copy of the other parent's driver's license). Check http://travel.state.gov/passport/get/get_4855.html for more.

June: Medical authorizations. Make sure all your children's camps, child care facilities, and care givers have a medical authorization in the event that you or your spouse or partner cannot be reached. Parents should also have a "stand-by guardian" form for instances where they are unable to communicate due to emergencies. Adults should also have their health care proxies up to date.

July and August: Relax at the beach knowing you've crossed so many important items off your list.

September: Back to school! Purge the clutter. It's a good idea to keep tax returns and back-up documentation for five years. Insurance policies should be kept indefinitely. Utility bills should be tossed within one month. All the rest can go.

October: Tax loss and profit selling. Don't wait until Dec. 31 to sell un-

der-performing investments as tax-losses to offset capital gains, such as those that accrue from mutual fund dividends at year-end. You can purchase the same or a similar asset 31 days after the sale, keeping in mind that purchasing at a lower price will re-set your cost basis. At the time of writing this month's column, no decision had yet been made as to the "fiscal cliff" and the fate of the capital gains and dividend tax. Nonetheless, the last quarter of any year is a good time to consider selling profitable stocks that can be set-off against losses and re-purchased in 31 days.

November: Make annual gifts. The federal government allows tax-free gifts of \$13,000 (\$26,000 if you are married and "split gifts") to each individual per year (including your own children!) This is a good opportunity to start shifting some of your own assets to your children — preferably by setting up a minor's trust that dictates how and when the money gets spent and distributed to the children. Don't forget grandparents who may be inclined to take advantage of this exemption as well, but also may want to protect the gift from creditors and spendthrift children by placing it in a trust.

December: Spend wisely. While in the mode of holiday shopping, consider some tax-smart purchases, such as charitable contributions, paying tax-deductible expenses such as real estate taxes, quarterly state or local income taxes, investment-related expenses, and dues before year end. December is also a great time to evaluate how close your spending went compared to plans for the year, and set a new budget for the year ahead.

Alison Arden Besunder is the founding attorney of the law firm of 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.

Disclaimer: This column is provided by the Law Offices of Alison Arden Besunder P.C. and New York Parenting Media as a public service to inform readers of legal issues. It is not intended to advise. Since legal issues vary with an individual's situation and needs, one should consult with an attorney. It is impossible to cover all aspects of the law in an article. Please be advised that the laws are constantly changing. The content in this article reflects the current law. Nothing contained in this article is intended as advice and does not create an attorney-client relationship between the reader and the firm. Individual consultation with an attorney is required to determine the specific facts and circumstances of any particular situation. A written retainer agreement between you and the firm is required before any attorney-client relationship may be created. Circular 230 Disclosure Notice: To ensure compliance with Treasury Department rules governing tax practice, we inform you that any advice contained herein (including in any attachment) (1) was not written and is not intended to be used, and cannot be used, for the purpose of avoiding any federal tax penalty that may be imposed on the taxpayer, and (2) may not be used in connection with promoting, marketing or recommending to another person any transaction or matter addressed herein.

Know the score

Helping kids reap all of sport's benefits

BY JAMIE LOBER

Whether you are the parent of an athlete or a parent coach, the concept should be the same — to make sure kids are having fun, developing skills, and staying safe.

“My simple message is for the kids to have fun and know that it is not about winning,” said Joseph Amatore, president of the Dyker Heights Athletic Association. The organization’s purpose and main objective is to cherish, sustain, and promote good citizenship, sportsmanship, loyalty, honesty, and character in the youth, and Amatore finds that sadly, it can be a challenge. “You see a lot of coaches, parents and kids forgetting that it is about fun and not just about winning.”

He suggests that parents not overdo things and to plan to have at least one day off per week from a sport to allow the body to recover.

Getting back to basics comes easy when you put health and safety

first. This means understanding the alarming statistics and taking appropriate action like educating your child, teammates, and coaches about the importance of making sure he has the right attitude and protection to do his best.

“We know that 2.6 million kids up through age 19 will have to receive medical treatment for some kind of sports or recreational injury, and that is too many,” said Rosemarie Ennis, director of New York State Safe Kids. By maintaining open dialogue with your child, you can eliminate some troubles right away. “The parent has to know to encourage their child to communicate any pain, injury, or feelings of illness that he may have during or after any sports played or practiced.”

Speaking up can be tough for kids. “They have to be smart enough to know that if they are not feeling well, that they need to tell the coach to stay out of the game,” said Ennis. It is always better to miss one game than an entire season.

Hydration is essential and parents should be attentive to that. “Water is always the best, but I encourage plenty of fluids 30 minutes before the activity and at least every 15 to 20 minutes during the game,” said Ennis.

Quenching thirst is just one task to check off your to-do list before the game.

“If it is a physical sport, parents should be able to make sure there is time set aside before any practice or game for the child to warm-up, which should include stretching before and relieving muscle tension to help prevent such injuries as muscle tears, sprain, strain and fracture,” said Ennis. Coaches should promote stretching as well.

Do not be afraid to talk about concussions with your child — and whoever is coaching the sport must know the signs and symptoms.

“Any head injury should be closely watched and monitored for slurred speech, any indication of dizziness, or vomiting, since those are signs of concussion and anybody who is involved in sports should know CPR and basic first aid,” said Ennis. Let your child know that accidents do happen and, obviously, the more contact in a sport, the greater

the risk of traumatic injury.

“Children should not hide concussions from their parents, and they should be given time to recover,” said Ennis. Complications can be serious.

“Adults should look for any kind of balance problem, double vision, sensitivity to light, concentration problems or confusion,” advised Ennis. Concussions should never be taken lightly, and the child should always consult with a physician before returning to the field.

Preparedness makes a difference. “Have the appropriate sports gear and equipment and know how to utilize it,” said Ennis. It should fit properly and include pads for the neck, shoulder, elbow, chest, knee, and shin. Wear helmets, mouthpieces, face guards, and eyewear as appropriate for the sport. Conditioning exercises during practice strengthens muscles used in play but does not protect you from injury. Stretching can keep you in better shape and increase flexibility. Always follow these rules: stop the activity if there is pain, wear light clothing, and stop practices or competitions during high heat or humidity. Heat-related illness is a common problem that athletes encounter.

It is perfectly acceptable to take time outs when needed. “Make sure that if your child has a concussion that he does not return to play until such time as a healthcare professional has given approval for him to return, because he needs time to recover,” said Ennis. Any time a child is not feeling well, he should not be questioned and should be allowed to sit out.

Remember that you play a vital role as a parent and should keep sports pressure-free. A lot of kids feel that they must win, which can be a big burden with lots of undue emotional stress. The American Academy of Pediatrics said that kids should be rewarded for trying hard and for improving their skills rather than punished or criticized for losing a game or competition, because the main goal should be to have fun and learn lifelong physical activity skills.

Jamie Lober, author of Pink Power (www.getpinkpower.com), is dedicated to providing information on women's and pediatric health topics. She can be reached at jamie@getpinkpower.com.

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Health at play



The “EatSleepPlay” exhibit at the Children’s Museum of Manhattan uses activities like dancing, running, bouncing, and jumping together as a family to promote a healthier lifestyle.

The Children’s
Museum of
Manhattan’s
new interactive
exhibit gets
a thumbs up
from kids

BY ALLISON PLITT

The Children’s Museum of Manhattan announced the release of a new educational curriculum that was created with the help of the National Institutes of Health last month.

Designed specifically for children from the ages of 2 to 5 and their parents, the program uses creative strategies to show kids how to make healthy lifestyle choices. Although the curriculum itself is called EatPlayGrow, the \$1.2 million exhibit on the first floor of the museum has a more enticing name for its younger visitors — “EatSleepPlay: Building Health Every Day.”

Other curriculum development partners of the museum were the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute and Let’s Move!, First Lady Michelle Obama’s childhood obesity initiative.

In a press statement from the White House, the First Lady thanked the Children’s Museum of Manhattan for working on the EatSleepPlay program, which she had just seen implemented at the Louisiana Children’s Museum in New Orleans.

“Museums inspire us to stretch our imaginations and play an im-

portant role in exposing Americans of all ages and backgrounds to new ideas,” she wrote. “They can also teach our children new skills and ways of thinking and even promote lifelong wellness.”

The exhibit has a big agenda to push.

Within the last 30 years, the prevalence of childhood obesity has more than doubled among children ages 2 to 5, and has almost tripled among children ages 6 to 11 and adolescents ages 12 to 19.

“The rise of obesity in children is a serious public health concern,” said Dr. Francis Collins, director of the National Institutes of Health. “This unique partnership brings the latest NIH childhood obesity science to life through fun and familiar kids’ activities like art, storytelling, music, and dance.”

Although the display is set-up to educate 2- to 5-year-olds and their parents, I brought my 7-year-old daughter to the exhibit, and she loved it. First, she walked up the tongue of a child and into his brain.

Decision Center

According to a description of the exhibit in The New York Times, when the child enters “the brain chamber, labeled ‘Decision Center,’

children can compete in a digital game to achieve the longest life span.”

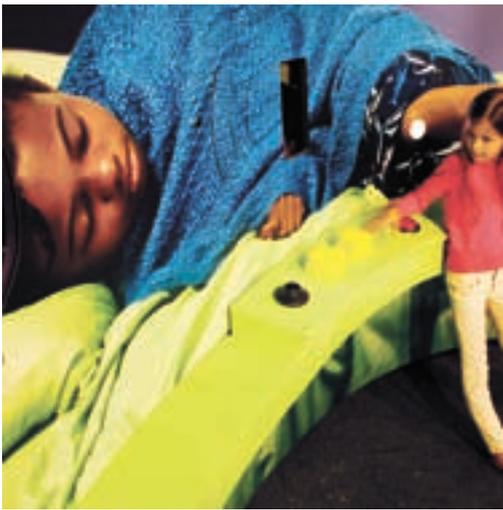
Children can play another game in the Decision Center called “Choices Change YOUR World!” As The New York Times describes, the game “lets them navigate a Central Park landscape as a tiny avatar, a beating heart ... children playing the game at side-by-side video screens could earn points by touching healthy choices — a banana or apple as a snack — or lose them by selecting, say, soda or a cupcake. The heart and the Central Park scene visibly brightened as points accumulated.”

If a child chooses cigarettes, the Central Park landscape plunges into a dark winter.

Consequences

My daughter then crawled into a long row of red septic tanks that appeared to be the intestines of a stomach.

Once inside, she could push a handlebar that fills the virtual stomach up with spaghetti. Crawling through the rest of the digestive system, she could hear noises imitative of food being digested, and exit right next to a toilet, which she flushed multiple times to observe its very realistic contents.



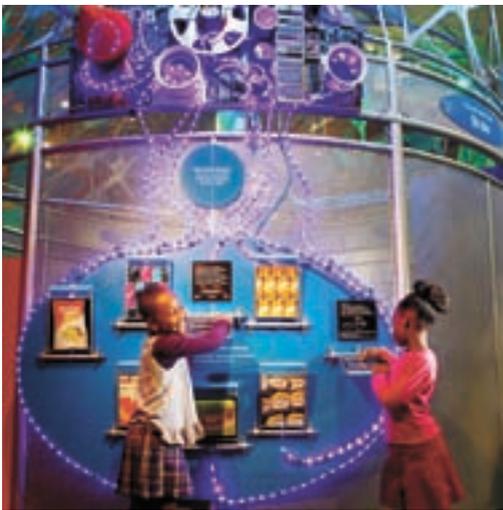
Discover why nothing can replace sleep for good health and disease prevention.



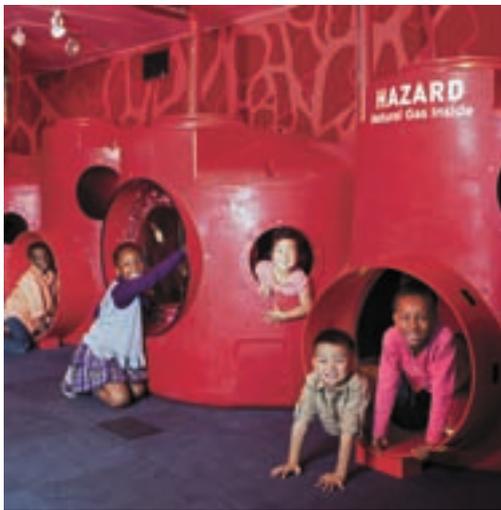
Children can climb right up a giant tongue and into the brain.



Learn the power of exercise and what it does for your heart.



Discover the truth in advertising to make healthier choices.



Crawl through a giant digestive system, follow nutrients into the body, and pump a giant heart.



Meet the Super Sprowtz and explore the super powers of fruits and vegetables.

Children's Museum of Manhattan

Eat

Following her experience with the toilet, my daughter rushed over to a two-storied space that represented a New York City Green Cart.

While putting plastic fruits and vegetables on a conveyer belt, she ran up to the second tier to find a toddler pulling the belt. She then picked up her vegetables and fruits, threw them down a narrow chute, and then slid down a slide to the floor to fetch them again.

Sleep

EatSleepPlay is the first exhibit ever to stress the importance of sleep for overall good health. In the sleep area, my daughter played push-button games to learn about what happens when she sleeps and see the negative effects of too little slumber.

By playing a memory game, she

discovered good bedtime routines and spent a few minutes trying her hand at a foosball table, but then figured that the “well-rested” team is rigged to always beat the “tired” team.

Play

In the play area, there was a stationary bicycle that entranced my daughter. While riding the bike, she would push a button with a name of a food on it and then the bike would tell her how many calories each food had and how long she had to ride the bike to burn up the calories. She kept pushing the button that read “potato chips,” allowing her to pedal non-stop for five minutes.

Next, my daughter went on to a Whac-A-Mole-like arcade game where, if she held onto an electronic bar before and after playing the game, she could see

how her pulse rate increased when she exercised.

She also ran through a small, dark pathway emitting laser beams. Reacting to this environment, she created a fun zigzag way of walking — a form of exercise.

• • •

After we visited the other floors of the museum and finally exited on to the street, my daughter told me she wanted to go through the “Eat-SleepPlay” exhibit again.

She has rarely asked me to take her back to an exhibit right after leaving.

The EatPlayGrow curriculum has been tested and implemented in New York City and New Orleans community centers, children’s museums, childcare providers, and home-based childcare providers.

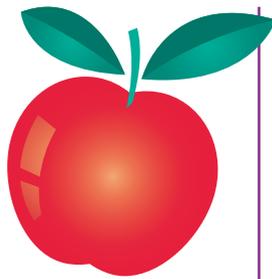
The Michael Cohen Applied Research Group, the Dynamic Research Corporation, and the CUNY

School of Public Health at Hunter College conducted evaluations of the participants and presented a summary of their findings.

According to their summary, “Evaluation findings to date show that across multiple settings and with varying audiences, participants made clear changes to their purchasing preferences and food habits; show positive shifts in attitudinal and behavioral changes about food, physical activity and sleep; and the importance of working with children at a very early age.”

“EatSleepPlay” at the Children’s Museum of Manhattan [212 W. 83rd St. between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue on the Upper West Side, (212) 721-1234, www.cmom.org].

Allison Plitt is a freelance writer who lives in Queens with her husband and daughter. She is a frequent contributor to New York Parenting.



DEAR TEACHER

PEGGY GISLER AND
MARGE EBERTS

Help kids to complete homework themselves

Dear teachers,

How do you get a child to want to do homework independently?

Dear parents,

Getting a child to want to do homework independently is much like getting a child to want to set the table or clean his room without a parent helping. Like these other tasks, homework cannot be classified as something that is genuinely fun to do most of the time. However, a child can gain a lot of satisfaction from handling a task by himself, and build pride in his efforts.

The sooner homework becomes the child's responsibility rather than the parent's, you are on the right track. At the fourth-grade level, you certainly should not be hovering over a child doing homework. One of the easiest ways to accomplish this is to use a homework contract like the one on our "Dear Teacher" website. It can spell out the times and places where homework will be done. You also might want to include a reward clause in the contract as your child learns to do most of his homework independently.

At the fourth-grade level, parents can look over the homework assignments at the start of the homework time with a child, and help the child decide which work will be done first. During this time, directions for doing the homework should be discussed. It is also helpful to show children how to use their textbooks to answer questions about homework assignments. For example, in math, children can rework problems that are similar to those in the assignment. Following these steps gradually teaches children how to handle homework by themselves.

Homework is easier for children to do if they have an assignment notebook to write down all assignments and a calendar to write down long-term assignments so that study time can be planned.

Auditory-processing

Dear teachers,

My child's teacher says my daughter may have an auditory-processing problem. Who is the professional



who could help her?

Dear parents,

An auditory-processing problem occurs when sounds traveling through the ear get adversely processed or interpreted by the brain. Children with this problem do not recognize the slight differences between sounds in words. Most speech and language therapists or pathologists are able to properly diagnose and provide appropriate therapy for this problem.

Check kid's progress

Dear parents,

It is the middle of the school year. This is a good time to take a very close look at how your children are doing in school. Their report cards should answer these questions:

- Is my child working up to her academic potential?
- Is my child working on grade level (elementary school)?
- Does my child have any behavioral problems in school?

If their report cards don't give you a good picture of your children's progress or you know that there are problems, schedule conferences with their teachers now. It is better to deal with a problem as soon as you know of its existence. Plus, the school year is only half over — giving you and teachers plenty of time to turn things around. When there are problems, always ask your children's teachers how you can help eliminate or improve them.

If your child has an Individualized Education Program or 504 plan, be

sure to check her progress and to make sure that the child is receiving all the accommodations that the special education team suggested. Often, children with either an Individualized Education Program or 504 plan are still failing a class, and it turns out they are not getting the required accommodations, such as having the questions read to them or getting a formula sheet for math tests.

E-books vs. books

Dear teachers,

Are e-books better for my child than books?

Dear parents,

The more children read, the better they will read and the better they will do in school.

There is no conclusive evidence that shows that e-books are better than books. Some studies are being done, but it is likely to be awhile before there is a definite answer. Nevertheless, more and more schools are turning to e-books for textbooks. And some teachers now consider books a thing of the past. Parents often endorse their children using e-books, claiming the e-books motivate their children to read and are fun for them to use.

Not all teachers are sold on e-books. Some are concerned that all the animations distract from the story line. And children do move away from reading to playing games on electronic devices.

Whether children are reading e-books or books, they still need interaction with adults to make sure that they are actively reading. They must be able to answer questions about what they have read and be able to do some predicting about what will happen next. One major concern is that parents are backing away from reading to their children and expecting e-books to do most of the work in helping children learn to read.

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

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GOOD SENSE EATING

CHRISTINE M. PALUMBO, RD

What is 'natural' food?

It's important for Jamie Steckler to serve her growing family a natural diet.

"Eating naturally means eating more fresh, whole foods, and fewer processed foods and artificial ingredients. It means paying more attention to what our foods are made with," she says.

It's a hot marketing tool. According to research by the International Food Information Council Foundation, 36 percent of consumers buy food and beverages because they are advertised as "natural" on the label.

'Naturally' vague

Some people say the term "natural" has been so overused and misused it has lost its meaning. Is frozen pizza "natural?" And how natural can hot dogs, iced tea, ice cream, salad dressing, or snack chips be?

Unlike "organic" foods, which must adhere to a strict set of rules, the Food and Drug Administration has yet to define the term "natural" on food labels. A vague informal policy written more than 20 years ago defined it to mean "nothing artificial or synthetic ... is included in, or has been added to, the product that would not normally be expected to be there."

In contrast, the U.S. Drug Administration, which regulates milk and meat, has defined it. Fresh meat or poultry labeled "natural" cannot contain artificial flavorings, colors, chemical preservatives, or artificial or synthetic ingredients. It can only be "minimally processed," although flavor injections are allowed.

What may be surprising is this:



Winter Eggnog

Here's a lightened-up festive drink to enjoy with your children.

Makes four servings (2/3 cup each)

INGREDIENTS:

1-1/3 cups low fat milk
 1/2 cup fat-free liquid egg substitute
 2 tbsp sweetened condensed milk
 2 ice cubes
 1 tsp vanilla extract
 Optional: 1/4 cup brandy or rum for adults only

DIRECTIONS: Place all the ingredients in a blender. Cover and blend until frothy. (Or place into a large bowl and use a stick blender.) Pour into glasses and sprinkle each with a little freshly ground nutmeg.

NUTRITION INFORMATION: 90 calories (120 with brandy), 11 grams carbohydrates, 7 grams protein, 1.5 grams fat (1 gram sat fat), 5 milligrams cholesterol, 115 milligrams sodium, 260 IU vitamin A, 142 milligrams calcium, 1 milligram iron

Products containing genetically modified organism ingredients may be labeled as "natural." For example, some natural breakfast cereals contain genetically modified corn, soy, canola, or sugar beets. Keep in mind that there is no actual evidence genetically modified organism ingredients pose a health risk, although it remains controversial among consumer groups and scientists alike.

A bill proposing sweeping changes to food labeling laws covering "natural" claims and more was introduced in September. It says manufacturers should not describe as "natural" products that contain artificial ingredients.

This includes flavors and colors or ingredients that have undergone chemical changes. Examples given are corn syrup, chemically modified starch, and cocoa processed with alkali. Legal experts say the bill stands

little chance of success, however.

Until the FDA acts

"Start making one change at a time, not a complete food overhaul. Trade up your current foods for better choices," advises Steckler, who is also a Chicago-based registered dietitian nutritionist specializing in families and pediatrics.

Ignore most front-of-pack claims and look at the ingredients instead.

"If you are looking to cut out processed foods, start by reading the ingredient label. If you see capital letters, colors, or numbers listed, skip it," she says.

Christine Palumbo is a Chicago-area registered dietitian nutritionist who is a new Fellow of the American Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Follow her on Twitter @PalumboRD, Facebook at Christine Palumbo Nutrition, or Chris@ChristinePalumbo.com.

Calendar

JANUARY



Leaps and bounds above the rest

Technically trained dancers from all backgrounds ascend to lofty heights at the Lehman Center for Performing Arts on Jan. 25.

Performers from “Grounded Aerial” — an innovative synthesis of modern dance and rigged aerial elements — leap, twirl, and execute extraordinary, aerial ma-

neuvers that will excite, delight, and surprise thrill seekers of all ages.

“Grounded Aerial” on Jan. 25 at 8 pm. Tickets are \$25–\$35, and \$10 for children under 12.

Lehman Center for the Performing Arts, [250 Bedford Park Boulevard West, (718) 960-8833; www.Lehman-Center.org].

Calendar

Our online calendar is updated daily at www.NYParenting.com/calendar

Submit a listing

This calendar is dedicated to bringing our readers the most comprehensive list of events 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!

TUES, DEC. 31

IN THE BRONX

Ice carving: Bronx Zoo, 2300 Southern Blvd. at Boston Road; (718) 220-5103; www.bronxzoo.com; 10 am-4 pm; Free with zoo admission.

Professional ice carvers demonstrate the art and make wildlife-themed sculptures, interactive play area and an ice-carving contest.

THURS, JAN. 2

FURTHER AFIELD

Astronomy Live: Celestial Polar Express: American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th Street, Manhattan; (212) 769-5200; www.amnh.org/calendar/celestial-polar-express; 6:30 pm; \$15, \$13.50 (seniors & students), \$12 (members).

This lecture will discuss Polaris, and the difference between the poles.

SAT, JAN. 4

IN THE BRONX

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

Listen to Native American stories and then make a wingspan out of feathers, and participate in an "owl-pow-wow."

Mythical Beasts: The Cloisters, 99 Margaret Corbin; (718) 923-3700; 1-2 pm; Free with museum admission.

Children learn about the myths of the middle ages. Registration required.

Riverdale read-aloud: Kingsbridge Library Center, 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd. at Briggs Ave.; (718) 579-4244; www.nypl.org; 1-2 pm; Free.

Children 5 to 12 years old enjoy a story.



Whimsical winter art

Brrr-ave the splendors of Jack Frost, when the Poe Visitor Center presents a Whimsical Winter Wonder art exhibition through Jan. 31. The eye-pleasing works are a take on a classic winter theme, and showcase the paintings, photos, sculptures, animations, illustrations, and other visual celebrations of

16 artists from around the world.

Whimsical Winter Wonder at Poe Park Visitor Center. The gallery is open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from 8 am to 4 pm. Free. All ages welcome.

Poe Park Visitor Center [2640 Grand Concourse at E. 193rd Street in University Heights, (718) 365-5516; www.nycgovparks.org].

FURTHER AFIELD

Target First Saturday: Brooklyn Museum, 200 Eastern Pkwy. at Washington Avenue, Brooklyn; (718) 638-5000; www.brooklynmuseum.org; 5-11 pm; Free.

Music, entertainment, and fun activities.

SUN, JAN. 5

IN THE BRONX

Family Art project: 10 am-1 pm. Wave Hill. See Saturday, Jan. 4.

The Medieval Artist: The Cloisters, 99 Margaret Corbin; (718) 923-3700; 1-2 pm; Free with museum admission.

Children learn about the arts of the middle ages. Registration required.

MON, JAN. 6

IN THE BRONX

Game Day: Kingsbridge Library

Center, 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd. at Briggs Ave.; (718) 579-4244; www.nypl.org; 4-5 pm; Free.

Children 5 to 12 enjoy games.

WED, JAN. 8

IN THE BRONX

Toddler time: Kingsbridge Library Center, 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd. at Briggs Ave.; (718) 579-4244; www.nypl.org; 11 am-11:30 am; Free.

Children 18 months to 36 months old enjoy play time with a parent-caregiver.

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

Young ones watch an age appropriate film.

THURS, JAN. 9

IN THE BRONX

Baby time: Kingsbridge Library Cen-

ter, 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd. at Briggs Ave.; (718) 579-4244; www.nypl.org; 10:30 am-11 am; Free.

From birth to 18 months old with parent-caregiver. Fingerplay, songs, stories and puppets.

FRI, JAN. 10

FURTHER AFIELD

Take Wing!: American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th Street, Manhattan; (212) 769-5200; www.amnh.org/calendar/take-wing!-grades-1-and-2; 4:30 pm; \$125, \$115 (Members).

Children in grades 1 & 2 will observe live butterflies in an indoor tropical rainforest.

A Night at the Museum Sleepover: American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th Street, Manhattan; (212) 769-5200; www.amnh.org/calendar/a-night-at-the-museum-sleepover-friday-january-10-2014; 6 pm; \$145 per person, \$135 (Members).

This unique sleepover will delight children ages 6 to 13 and their caregivers. The night includes tours of live-animal exhibitions, Museum Quests, and more.

SAT, JAN. 11

IN THE BRONX

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

Children listen to music by Arturo Toscanini and then play with tempera paint.

SUN, JAN. 12

IN THE BRONX

Family Art project: 10 am-1 pm. Wave Hill. See Saturday, Jan. 11.

WED, JAN. 15

IN THE BRONX

Happy birthday Edgar: The Bronx County Archives, 3313 Bainbridge Ave.; (718) 881-8900; www.nycgovparks.org; 6:30-7:30 pm; Free.

Society educator Angel Hernandez celebrates the birthday of Edgar Allen Poe at his home.

FRI, JAN. 17

FURTHER AFIELD

Take Wing!: 4:30 pm. American Museum of Natural History. See Friday, Jan. 10.

Continued on page 30

Calendar

Our online calendar is updated daily at www.NYParenting.com/calendar

Continued from page 29

SAT, JAN. 18

IN THE BRONX

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

Children draw a secret map of places they want to go. Children also learn about Dr. Martin Luther King and use cloth, yarn and felt to embellish their own project.

SUN, JAN. 19

IN THE BRONX

Family Art project: 10 am-1 pm. Wave Hill. See Saturday, Jan. 18.

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

Urban rangers provide the 411 on everything weather related. Recommended for older children.

WED, JAN. 22

IN THE BRONX

Toddler time: 11 am-11:30 am. Kingsbridge Library Center. See Wednesday, Jan. 8.

Movie day: 4-6 pm. Kingsbridge Library Center. See Wednesday, Jan. 8.

THURS, JAN. 23

IN THE BRONX

Baby time: 10:30 am-11 am. Kingsbridge Library Center. See Thursday, Jan. 9.

FRI, JAN. 24

FURTHER AFIELD

Take Wing!: 4:30 pm. American Museum of Natural History. See Friday, Jan. 10.

SAT, JAN. 25

IN THE BRONX

Family Art project: Wave Hill, W. 249th Street and Independence Ave.; (718) 549-3200; www.wavehill.org; 10 am-1 pm; Free.

Children learn about local hibernators through sleepy tales of the season.

Pop-in weekend: Wave Hill, W. 249th Street and Independence Ave.; (718) 549-3200; www.wavehill.org; 10 am-3 pm; Free.

Children enjoy a slew of activities; starting with a winter wake-up, an in-

'Awake' at New Victory



Photo by Elizabeth Honey

The enchanting tale of Miss Ivory Tinklefinger comes to the stage at New Victory Theater in "Still Awake Still!" from Jan. 18 to 20.

A great grand piano and her voice are all she needs to lull even the most rambunctious children to sleep, until her piano starts producing more than melodic notes, much to her dismay and to the audience's delight. This show is just the latest in a series of family-friendly productions offered by New Victory Theater, and is sure to keep your family laughing and singing long after the show is over.

Jan. 18-20 at 11 am and 3 pm on weekends, and at 11 am on Monday. \$14-\$25.

The New Victory Theater [209 W. 42nd St. between Seventh and Eighth avenues in Times Square, (646) 223-3010, www.newvictory.org/Show-Detail.aspx?ProductionId=5190].

teractive performance of Tales of the Hibernators, and of course loads of crafting. Sponsored by Target.

Grounded Aerial: Lehman Center for the Performing Arts, 250 Bedford Park Boulevard West; (718) 960-8833; www.LehmanCenter.org; 8 pm; \$25-\$35 (\$10 any seat children under 12).

Modern dance and rigged aerial elements to excite, surprise, and delight every age.

SUN, JAN. 26

IN THE BRONX

Family Art project: 10 am-1 pm. Wave Hill. See Saturday, Jan. 25.

Pop-in weekend: 10 am-3 pm. Wave Hill. See Saturday, Jan. 25.

MON, JAN. 27

IN THE BRONX

Pajama night: Kingsbridge Library Center, 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd. at Briggs Ave.; (718) 579-4244; www.nypl.org; 5-6 pm; Free.

Children 5 to 12 years old read aloud, and have light refreshments. Pre-registration is required.

WED, JAN. 29

IN THE BRONX

Toddler time: 11 am-11:30 am. Kingsbridge Library Center. See Wednesday, Jan. 8.

Science project: Kingsbridge

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

Children 5 to 12 years old learn about science. Pre-registration required.

THURS, JAN. 30

IN THE BRONX

Baby time: 10:30 am-11 am. Kingsbridge Library Center. See Thursday, Jan. 9.

SAT, FEB. 1

IN THE BRONX

Family Art project: Wave Hill, W. 249th Street and Independence Ave.; (718) 549-3200; www.wavehill.org; 10 am-1 pm; Free with admission to the grounds.

Children collect twigs, leaves and seeds to use to make a collage.

LONG-RUNNING

IN THE BRONX

Whimsical Winter: Poe Park Visitor Center, 2640 Grand Concourse at E. 193rd Street; (718) 365-5516; www.nycgovparks.org; Tuesdays - Saturdays, 8 am-4 pm, Now - Fri, Jan. 31, 2014; Free.

Artists from around the globe take on the winter theme and showcase their works that delight the child in all of us. Closed Christmas Day.

Holiday train show: New York Botanical Garden, 200th St. and Ka-

zimiroff Blvd.; (718) 817-8700; www.nybg.org; Tuesdays - Sundays, 10 am-6 pm, Now - Sun, Jan. 12, 2014; \$20 (\$8 children).

Large scale model trains cover a wide variety of ground and features favorites, including the Statue of Liberty, Rockefeller Center, the Brooklyn Bridge, and many others.

Ice skating: Van Cortlandt Nature Center, (V.C.N.C.), W. 246th St. at Broadway; (718) 548-0912; www.nyc.gov/parks/rangers; Mondays - Wednesdays, Noon-4 pm, Thursdays and Sundays, Noon-8 pm, Fridays and Saturdays, Noon-10 pm, Now - Fri, Jan. 31, 2014; \$5 weekday (\$8 weekend) plus skates.

Open skating season has begun so strap on your blades and get sliding.

Storybook Christmas: Bartow-Pell Mansion Museum, 895 Shore Rd.; (718) 885-1461; www.bartowpellmansionmuseum.org; Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays, Noon-4 pm, Now - Sun, Jan. 5, 2014; \$5 (\$3 students and seniors; Free for members).

Trees decorated by artists inspired by contemporary children's Christmas storybooks.

Artist workshop: Poe Park Visitor Center, 2640 Grand Concourse at E. 193rd Street; (718) 365-5516; www.nycgovparks.org; Saturdays, 1-3 pm, Now - Sun, Jan. 26, 2014; Free.

Artists share ideas, work on their art and enjoy the new exhibit.

FURTHER AFIELD

Train show: Grand Central Station, 87 E. 42nd St., Manhattan; (718) 694-1600; Mondays - Thursdays, 8 am-8 pm, Fridays, 8 am-8pm, Saturdays and Sundays, 10 am-6 pm, Now - Sun, Feb. 23, 2014; Free.

The annual show features Lionel's new limited edition model of Grand Central Terminal, as well as illustrations from Next Stop Grand Central.

31st Annual Wreath Interpretations: Arsenal in Central Park, 830 Fifth Ave., Manhattan; (212) 360-8163; www.nycgovparks.org/events/2014/01/01/wreath-interpretations; Weekdays, 9 am-5 pm, Now - Thurs, Jan. 9, 2014; Free.

This exhibition features wreaths made of unconventional items, through the eyes of 46 different artists.

The Butterfly Conservatory: American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th Street, Manhattan; (212) 769-5200; www.amnh.org; Daily, 10 am-5:45 pm; \$27, \$16 (children).

This annual favorite features up to 500 live, free-flying, tropical butterflies from Central, South, and North

Calendar

Our online calendar is updated daily at www.NYParenting.com/calendar

America, Africa, and Asia.

Origami Holiday Tree: American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th Street, Manhattan; (212) 769-5200; www.amnh.org; Daily, 10 am-5:45 pm; Now - Sun, Jan. 12, 2014; Free with museum admission.

An annual museum tradition, the Origami Holiday Tree and two 19-foot Holiday Barosaurs welcome visitors to the museum throughout the holiday season, inspired by the new exhibition, "The Power of Poison."

Playground: New York Hall of Science, 47-01 111th St., at Avenue of Science, Queens; (718) 699-0005 X353; www.nyscience.org; Weekdays, 10 am-5 pm, Saturdays and Sundays, 10 am-6 pm, Now - Tues, Dec. 31; \$4 per person plus museum admission.

Children explore, discover, and have fun in this outdoor playground with slides, seesaws, and pits, as well as fog machines. Each session lasts 45 minutes; weather permitting.

Space Junk 3D: New York Hall of Science, 47-01 111th St., at Avenue of Science, Queens; (718) 699-0005 X353; www.nyscience.org; Tuesdays

- Sundays, 10 am-5pm, Now - Tues, Dec. 31; \$6 (\$5 children) plus museum admission.

Children experience collisions, soar 22,000 miles above the earth, and explore the challenges faced in protecting our planet, without ever leaving Queens.

"Album Tracks: Subway Record Covers": New York Transit Museum, Boerum Place at Schermerhorn Street, Brooklyn; (718) 694-1600; www.mta.info/mta/museum; Tuesdays - Fridays, 10 am-4 pm, Saturdays and Sundays, 11 am-5 pm, Now - Sun, Jan. 12, 2014; \$7 (\$5 children and seniors).

Exhibition celebrates album artwork that features the New York City subway and elevated system.

Frogs - A Chorus of Colors: American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th Street, Manhattan; (212) 769-5200; awang@amnh.org; www.amnh.org; Daily, 10 am-5:45 pm; Now - Sun, Jan. 5, 2014; Suggested admission \$19, \$10.50 children, \$14.50 seniors and students.

See more than 150 live frogs, including 10 species of colorful dart-

poison frogs. Learn about their importance to ecosystems and the threats they face in the wild.

Flight of the Butterflies in 3D: New York Hall of Science, 47-01 111th St., at Avenue of Science, Queens; (718) 699-0005 X353; www.nyscience.org; Tuesdays - Fridays, 11 am, Noon & 2 pm, Saturdays and Sundays, Noon, 1, 2 & 3 pm, Now - Fri, April 11, 2014; \$6 (adults,) \$5 (children, students & seniors), plus N.Y.S.C.I. admission.

Join millions of real butterflies on an amazing journey to a remote and secret hideaway in this award-winning film.

Arty facts: Brooklyn Museum, 200 Eastern Pkwy. at Washington Avenue, Brooklyn; (718) 638-5000; www.brooklynmuseum.org; Sundays, 11 am and 1:30 pm, Sun, Jan. 5 - Sun, March 30, 2014; \$10 materials fee plus museum admission.

Children 4 to 7 years old explore the galleries, enjoy an activity, and take an art class.

Beginner Hockey Clinic: Lasker Pool & Rink, 110 Malcolm X Blvd., Central Park, Manhattan; (212) 348-4867; www.nycgovparks.org

events/2014/01/06/beginner-hockey-clinic; Mondays, 4 pm, Mon, Jan. 6 - Mon, March 10, 2014; Free.

Children ages 6-9 can practice skating and puck control drills, as well as scrimmage play.

After School Ice Skating: Lasker Pool & Rink, 110 Malcolm X Blvd., Central Park, Manhattan; (212) 348-4867; www.nycgovparks.org/events/2014/01/08/after-school-ice-skating; Wednesdays and Fridays, 4 pm, Wed, Jan. 8 - Fri, March 14, 2014; Free.

Children ages 5-7 learn the basic elements of ice skating through group and individual instruction.

Bessie's Big Shot: Swedish Cottage Marionette Theater, 79th & West Dr, Manhattan; (212) 988-9093; Tuesdays - Fridays, 10:30 am & Noon, Saturdays and Sundays, 1 pm, beginning Tues, Jan. 14; \$10, \$7 (children under 12).

It's a bird, it's a plane, no-it's Bessie the cow! Based on the PuppetMobile show of the same name, this popular production is making its debut at the Swedish Cottage Marionette Theatre.

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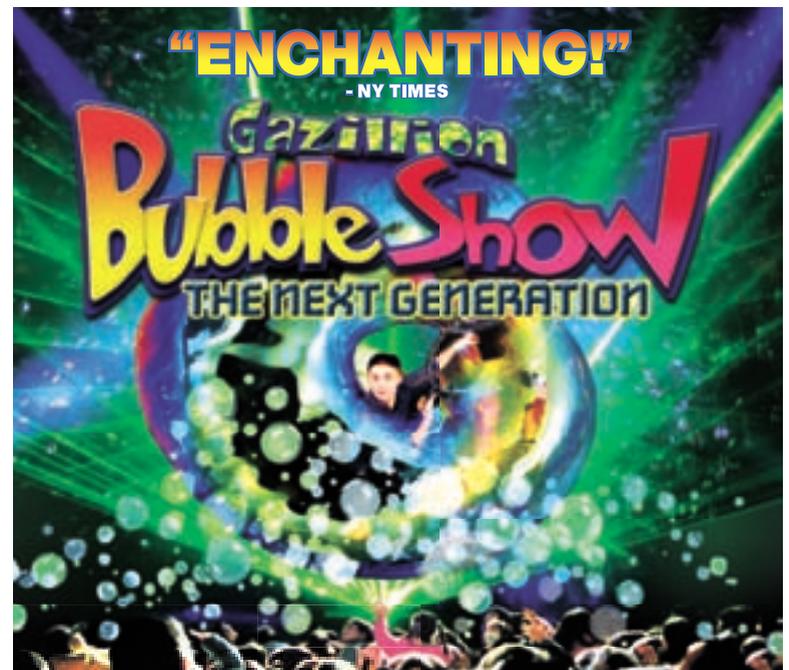
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LIONS AND TIGERS AND TEENS

MYRNA BETH HASKELL

Tattletale parents

When to approach a parent about her teen

Many parents have been privy to someone else's teenager engaging in destructive or illicit behavior. Is it appropriate to report such behavior to that parent?

When I've discussed this issue with close friends, most have responded, "I would say something if the parent were a friend of mine, because I would want to know."

These situations are always delicate, though, and parents are oftentimes unsure about playing the role of informant.

Is it okay to report?

Parents need to separate hearsay from fact. Even if a parent believes the source is reliable, he should have solid evidence before approaching another parent with disturbing news about her child.

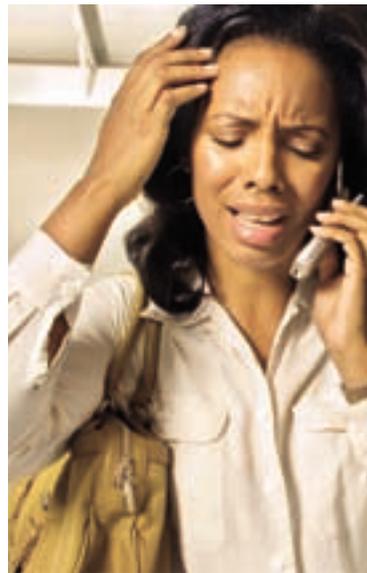
Is the behavior something that endangers the teen's — or someone else's — well-being, health, or safety? Substance abuse, self harming, relationship violence, and gang activities are behaviors that have potential life-threatening consequences and should be reported.

"If you become aware of a teen's destructive behavior, it is important to communicate these concerns to that teen's parent," says Dr. Rebecca L. Hashim, an attending psychologist on the Behavioral Consultation Team at the Children's Hospital at Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx.

She says that parents often talk themselves out of reporting such information, because they believe it's not their problem or they convince themselves that maybe they're just imagining it. However, if a parent truly believes a behavior will risk the teen's well-being, it's best to say something.

"If what you have seen or have been told is actually happening, and you don't share that information, you run the risk that the destructive behavior continues or even escalates, which can lead to serious consequences," she adds.

"When a parent personally believes that there is a credible and reasonable threat to the life, safety,



or well-being of her teen as a result of another teen's behavior, the first and most important consideration should be the safety of her teen," explains Dr. Gilberto Velez-Domenech, chief of adolescent medicine at Maria Fareri Children's Hospital in Westchester Medical Center.

Some situations are not so clear-cut, such as issues involving sexual behaviors.

"I would advise parents to think twice before ever discussing their own teen's or someone else's teen's sexuality with another parent. The source of the information about a teen's sexuality is almost always second-hand and intrinsically unreliable," Velez-Domenech says. He also states that perceptions and opinions about teen sexuality differ greatly among parents. "The potential for misunderstanding is very high."

How to approach

Dr. Velez-Domenech states, "One parent should approach the other directly, and with total privacy and discretion. The conversation should be straight to the point and non-judgmental, making reference only to the actions of the teen involved and not to his or her person or values."

However, he also says that a parent should not be apologetic.

"Protecting their own children is

every parent's right and duty. Protecting other parents' children is a very noble act," he points out.

Repercussions

Reporting distressing information to another parent may result in a loss of a friendship, strained relations between families, or the other parent not believing that her teen would do such a thing.

Hashim warns, "You do run the risk of the other parent not believing you or becoming upset that you would 'accuse' her child." She reminds parents to weigh the possible consequences and seriousness of the behavior. "If the behavior is potentially serious, it's better in the long run to make the parent aware of it and let him or her handle it as he or she sees fit."

Tips and tales

"I would only tell my friends. Things are not the same as when we were growing up. So many parents today are driven by the 'self-esteem' method of parenting. They might not believe such horrible tales about little Johnny!"

Debbie Naccarato Bango, Ivoryton, CT

"When I was growing up, if an adult in the neighborhood saw any 'bad behavior' our parents knew about it before we got home. As kids, this made us think about whether or not the chance of our parents finding out was worth it. The information should be immediate and before the behavior gets out of hand."

Judi Glazer Strong, Tillson, NY

Share your ideas

Upcoming topic: What have you heard about hookahs, and do you feel it's worse than smoking?

Please send your full name, address, and brief comments to myrnahaskell@gmail.com, or visit www.myrnahaskell.com.

Myrna Beth Haskell is a feature writer, columnist, and author of "Lions And Tigers And Teens: Expert advice and support for the conscientious parent just like you" (Unlimited Publishing LLC, 2012), available at Amazon.com.

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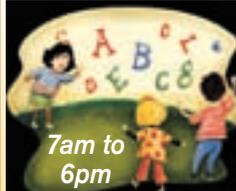
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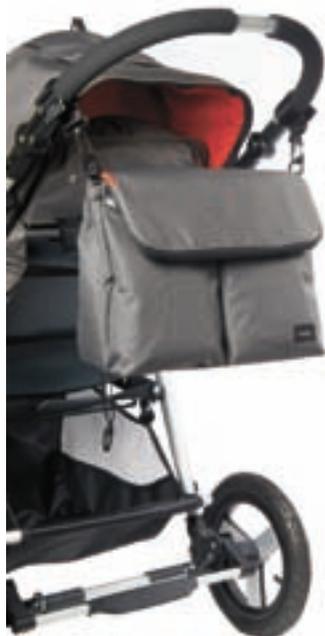
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New & Noteworthy

BY LISA J. CURTIS



It's in the bag

Looking for a versatile diaper bag that holds all of baby's needs and still lets you look cool? Bumbleride's new messenger-style bag does both, with exterior diaper pockets boasting quick-release magnetic closures and another handy pocket for the coordinating, cushioned changing pad. It has a large, zippered compartment in the flap perfect for stowing a back-up outfit, and interior, elasticized pockets for bottles.

The wide shoulder strap can be slippery, but the bag also has stroller hooks with Velcro closures, so you can give your shoulder a rest while you take baby for a spin.

This sleek bag is available in seven colors in a polyester made from recycled water bottles and bamboo charcoal fiber.

Bumbleride Diaper Bag, \$59, www.franklingoose.com.

Bottom's up!

Why hasn't someone thought of this sooner? Bouche Baby's Take N' Shake bottle has an attached formula container that makes it easier than ever to feed baby on the go. When mealtime arrives, unscrew the formula compartment, flip it over, and screw it back on, which allows for the powdered formula to slip through the sieve and mix with the water in the second compartment.



Then, as the name implies, just shake and serve.

Baby will enjoy the bottle's colorful design while he's slurping away on the "colic prevention nipple" made from soft, medical-grade silicone.

Later, the bottle can transform into a sippy cup with the purchase of a conversion kit that includes a handle and mouth piece to replace the nipple. We'll drink to that!

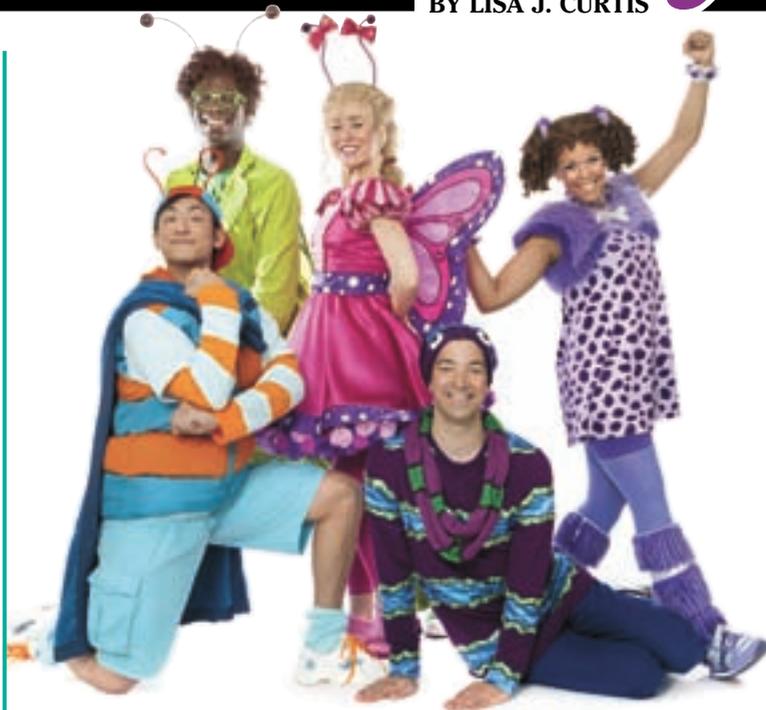
5-Ounce Bouche Baby Take N' Shake with Integrated Feeding Compartment, \$17.99, www.bouchebaby.com.

Off the ice, into bed

They'll forget to protest and triple-axle right into bed with Sara's Prints new figure-skating-themed Tutu Flannel Pajamas. Sweet dreams are made of these blue-and-white-striped cotton jammies with a fluttering blue tutu sewn into the waistband. A graphic of ice skates is screen-printed onto the top.

Thrilling ruffles adorn the cuffs of the top while oversized ruffles draw attention to your little skater's fancy footwork as they glide away to brush their teeth. We recommend tucking your little Dorothy Hamill into bed with a reading of "Olivia and the Ice Show" by Tina Gallo, to be followed by dreams of Olympic gold.

Sara's Prints Tutu Flannel Pajamas, \$38, www.garnethill.com.



Get moving indoors

In the bleak, sunshine-bereft, post-holiday daze of Janu-weary, you and your child may need a little extra oomph to get up and get moving, and The Ohmies' new CD, "Morning Wish Garden," provides just such sunny motivation for kids ages 2 to 8. With instructions on how to "Butterfly Fly," "Grasshopper Hop," or brush off their worries with the "Shake 'Em off Shuffle," the cast members of the New York City musical get kids

grooving. There are a world of musical influences to enjoy in this eclectic mix of songs. Whether it's the Spanish-flavored "Come Slither With Us" or the percussion-rich "Wag Your Tail," your little couch potato won't be able to resist the charms of Baily Butterfly, Carlin Caterpillar, and friends. Oh me, oh my, fun with the Ohmies sure feels good.

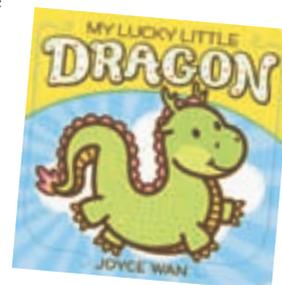
"Morning Wish Garden" CD by The Ohmies, \$12, www.theohmies.com.

Animal attraction

Looking for a fun way to celebrate baby's first Chinese New Year? Ring in the holiday, which falls on Jan. 31 in 2014, by reading Joyce Wan's latest board book, "My Lucky Little Dragon," to your little fortune cookie. Her book features all of the zodiac animals, such as the "silly little monkey" and "chatty little rooster," on pages filled with bold illustrations, color, and words in

a wonderful variety of fonts. The cover is fun to touch, with its combination of smooth and rough, sparkly textures. "My Lucky Little Dragon" has a happy ending, too, proclaiming, "Baby, I'm lucky to have you" alongside a heart-shaped mirror, so your little reader can see what all the fuss is about.

My Lucky Little Dragon book by Joyce Wan, \$6.99, www.scholastic.com.



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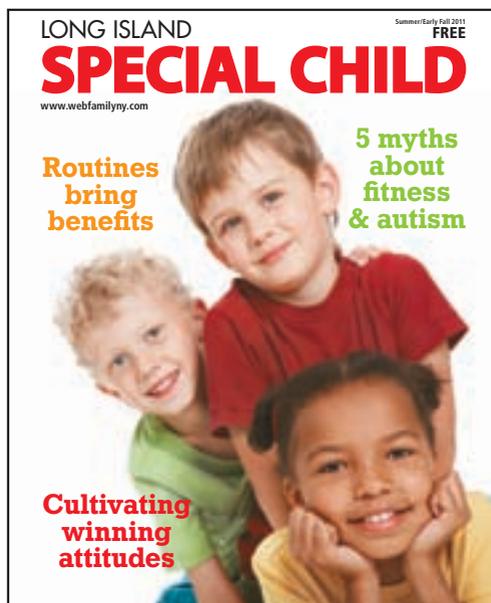
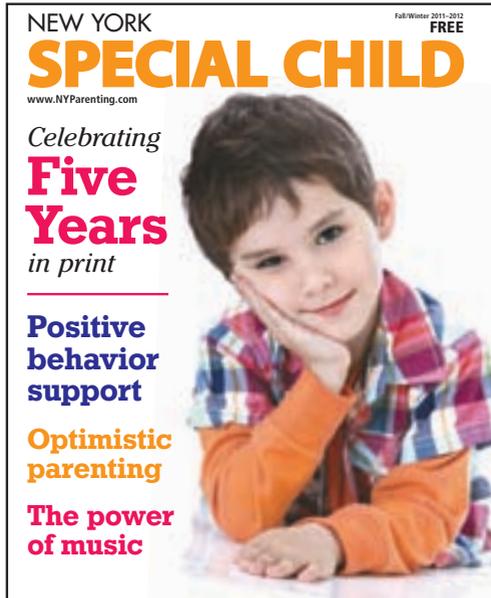
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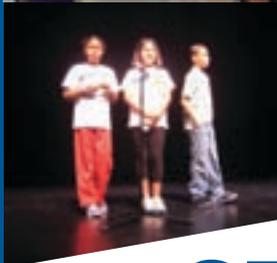
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