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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,
Publisher/Executive Editor
Family@cnglocal.com

STAFF

PUBLISHER / EXECUTIVE EDITOR:

Susan Weiss

PUBLISHER / BUSINESS MANAGER:

Clifford Luster

SALES MANAGER / ADVERTISING:

Sharon Noble

OPERATIONS ASSOCIATE:

Tina Felicetti

SALES REPS:

Alexis Benson, Lori Falco,
Sharon Leverett, Shanika Stewart

ART DIRECTOR:

Leah Mitch

PRODUCTION DIRECTOR:

On Man Tse

LAYOUT MANAGER:

Yvonne Farley

WEB DESIGNER:

Sylvan Migdal

GRAPHIC DESIGNERS:

Arthur Arutyunov,
Mauro Deluca, Earl Ferrer, Cheryl Seligman

MANAGING EDITOR:

Vince DiMiceli

ASSISTANT EDITOR:

Courtney Donahue

COPY EDITOR:

Lisa J. Curtis

CALENDAR EDITORS: Joanna Del Buono,
Jesseca Stenson

CONTACT INFORMATION

ADVERTISING: WEB OR PRINT

(718) 260-4554
Family@cnglocal.com or
SWeiss@cnglocal.com

CIRCULATION

(718) 260-8336
TFelicetti@cnglocal.com

EDITORIAL

(718) 260-4554
Family@cnglocal.com

CALENDAR

(718) 260-2523

ADDRESS

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

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New York Parenting Media has been recognized for editorial and design excellence by PMA.

New York Parenting Media is published monthly by New York Parenting Media/CNG. Subscription rate is \$35 annually. Reproduction of New York Parenting Media in whole or part without written permission from the publisher is prohibited. All rights reserved. Copyright©2014 Readership: 220,000. 2012 circulation audits by CAC & CVC.



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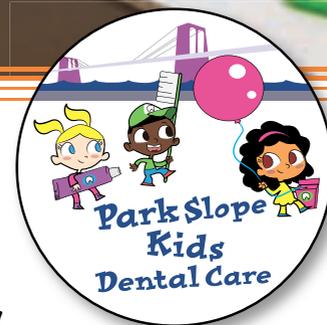
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How to make the most of a doctor's visit

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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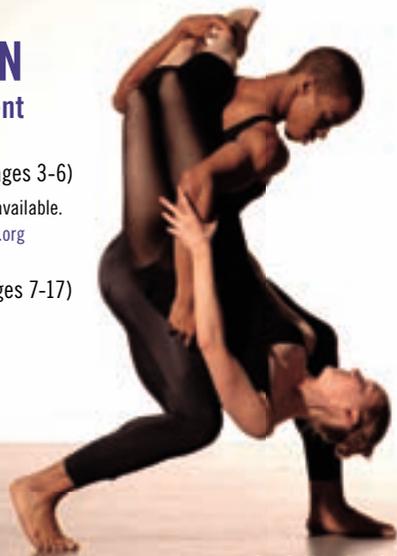
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DANIELLE SULLIVAN



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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MOMMY 101

ANGELICA SEREDA

Entertaining tots during winter days

It's become harder and harder to entertain Olivia as the weather gets colder and we're limited to being indoors.

I have to admit, the past two winters have been relatively warm, at least by New York standards. I remember our first winter together; I took a walk outside with her every single day. We'd bundle up and I'd strap her in my Baby Bjorn. She'd be fast asleep by the time I got up the block, but it was our special time. I look back at that time fondly.

Unfortunately, I don't think I'll be taking too many walks this time around. Not only is it twice as cold as past winters, but I'm also finding it increasingly difficult to convince my toddler that it's time to go inside. I didn't have that challenge when she was just a baby. So, I have to be creative with how we spend our time.

I've been feeling a lot of mom guilt the past few weekends because I'm not doing activities with her, at least not outside of our home. During the week, she's at day care with other toddlers and being stimulated constantly, so I feel like

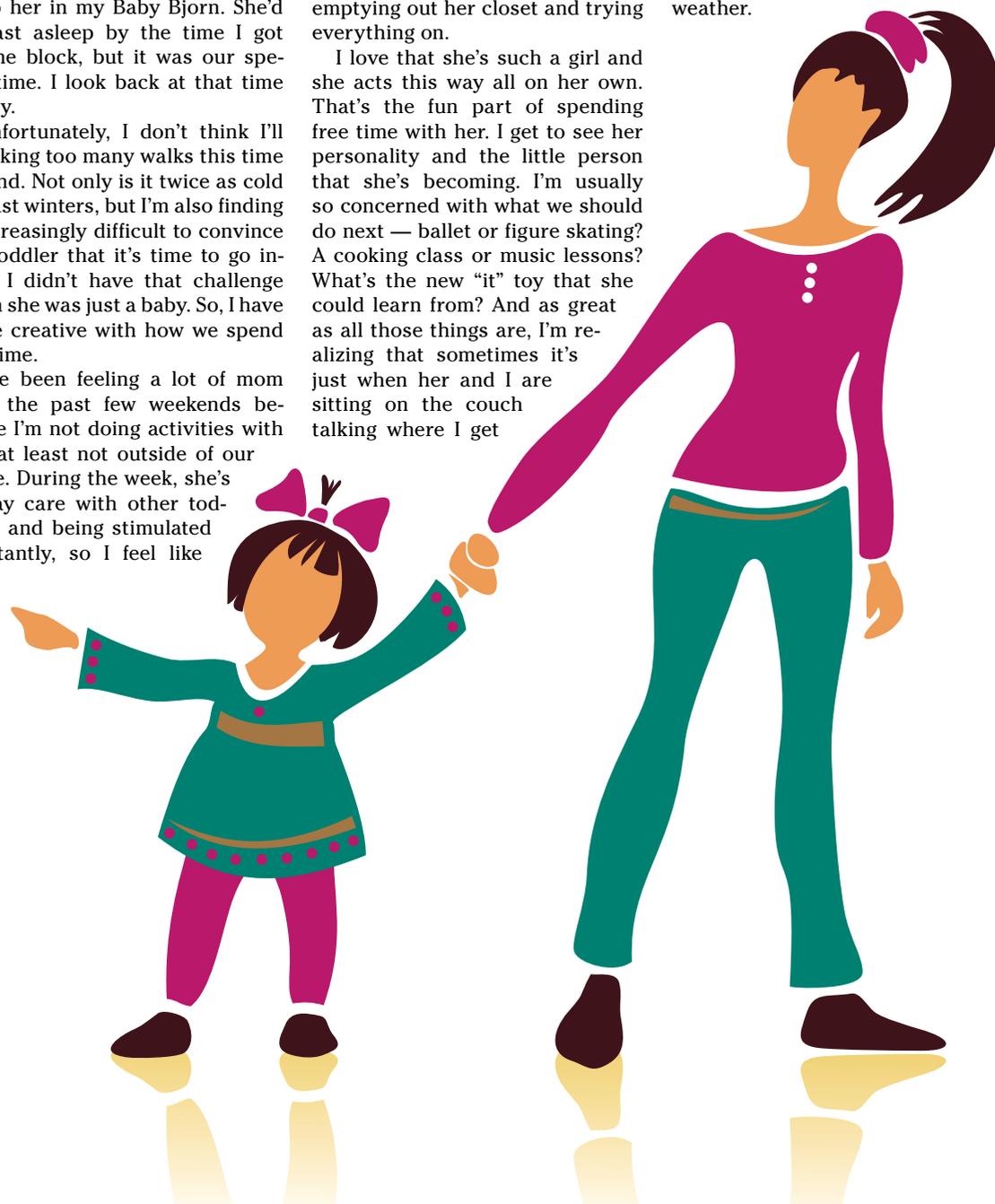
I come up short. There's only so many shows (educational ones, of course) and reading we can do before I feel like a bad mommy.

Last weekend we did a lot of reading, coloring, cooking, and her new favorite game — hide-and-seek. She's also taken an obsessive liking to playing dressing up. From wearing my heels and scarves to emptying out her closet and trying everything on.

I love that she's such a girl and she acts this way all on her own. That's the fun part of spending free time with her. I get to see her personality and the little person that she's becoming. I'm usually so concerned with what we should do next — ballet or figure skating? A cooking class or music lessons? What's the new "it" toy that she could learn from? And as great as all those things are, I'm realizing that sometimes it's just when her and I are sitting on the couch talking where I get

to see how she's really growing. Everyday she surprises me with the things she says and the things she knows.

So, I may look at snow days a little differently now and stop beating myself up for having lazy, winter days, but I'm still looking forward, like the rest of New Yorkers, to some warmer weather.





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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.”



JUST WRITE MOM

DANIELLE SULLIVAN

Worry is inevitable

Before I had kids, I rarely thought about catastrophes and world disasters. I was the typical young and carefree person who really believed that nothing bad would ever happen to me, and thankfully, nothing ever did. So I was surprised at how having my daughter turned me into an instant worrywart.

Once she was born, I worried about sudden infant death syndrome, her sleep schedule, if she was getting enough nutrients, and if I'd be a good enough mother. As she got bigger, I worried about blunt falls, head trauma, and sicknesses. When she was a year old, she came down with a severe case of bronchiolitis, and was hospitalized. At age 7, she took a tumble off her bike, and suffered concussion and a broken tooth. Now that she's older and on her own, I worry

about car accidents and riding the trains late at night. As much as I would like to keep my troublesome thoughts to myself (and I try very hard to do just that), I probably let out my worry from time to time — which is exactly the opposite of what I intend to do.

And then I worry about that!

I keep an open line of communication with my kids, so I feel that I don't really hold anything back. They know exactly who I am, faults and all, as I do them. But I do hold back on random doomsday thoughts that sometimes take over my mind. I'm not alone. I recently heard a psychologist on television explaining how to talk to your kids about tragic events, and he said that worry is not something that is even remotely new with moms. He said he has had several parents in his practice over the years, who admitted to feeling in a state of bliss when they looked at their babies, but then immediately imagined something horrible happening. It's a result of the natural part of the huge and overwhelming abundance of love that comes from being a parent.

I don't know why or how I got this way after having kids, but I would like it to stop. I would love to be that mother who is laid back, and doesn't drum up worst-case scenarios, but I just haven't been able to do it.

Outwardly, you'd probably never know it. I always allowed my kids to take calculated risks, try new things, eat lunch without first basking in Purell, and I don't throw a fit over every cough or sneeze. On the contrary, I have a friend who washes down the entire house at the first sign of a sniffle and won't allow the sick family mem-

ber, including her husband, to touch the phone while under the weather. Other moms worry about terrorism, global warming, getting into a good college, and contracting incurable diseases. I'm not at all that way — but I am on the lookout for the speeding car and falling tree limb.

On the work front, I'm a pro. As an editor, I didn't care if we had 10 blank pages and were going to press in minutes; I knew that together we'd always find a way to make it work. No project was too big or messy to get a hold on. Professionally, I am known as being calm under pressure, and I am — so what is this incessant fear and worry surrounding my kids? The thing is that I just cannot fathom any of my children getting seriously injured or, God forbid, anything worse. I try my best to hide this from them because I don't want them to become worriers themselves.

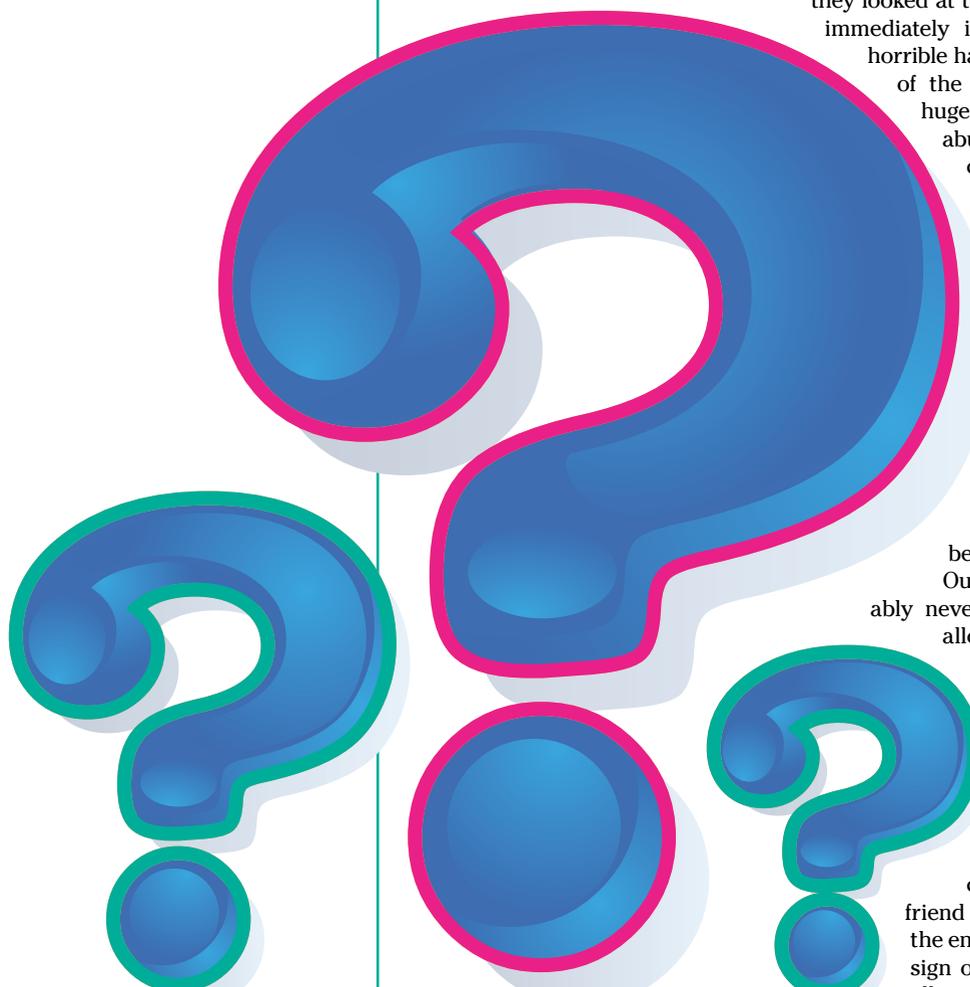
Working in the media has actually helped me recognize just how many news stories are media-driven hype, based so loosely in truth that they should be considered works of fiction rather than news reports. Remembering that fact should help lessen anxiety that comes from television and social media. Of course, anything that can be done to take the edge off of the worry is beneficial: yoga, meditation, a good run, or even a good movie. Sometimes, changing your focus for a while is all you need.

Ironically, reading about other moms who worry actually makes me feel better and not so crazy, like this piece from *Parents* magazine:

"Worry is part of the dark underbelly of parenthood, the flip side of joy, pride, and fulfillment. The part they never really warn you about — that you'll discover a fate worse than your own death. Worrying is right up there with providing food and buying cute dinosaur pajamas."

Well, if that's true, I should relax — it is practically a job requirement, and boy, do I excel at it.

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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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 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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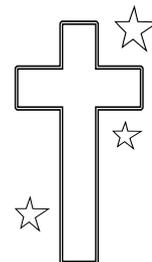
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Broadening your child's horizons

Five ways you
can prepare
your kid for
time away

BY JUDY M. MILLER

My daughter recently went on an exchange trip with her teachers and classmates. She was out of the country for 10 days without her dad, her siblings, or me. She did great. In fact, she was so excited that her bag was packed a full week before her trip. As she calmly hugged and kissed us goodbye, I took time to reflect on how she arrived in that place of calm confidence.

How do parents prepare and toughen up their kids for extended time away from them? What steps can parents follow to ready themselves for the long separation?

•**Start small and build from there.** Encourage your child to explore and challenge herself.

Think of when your child learned to ride a bike; you didn't have her start on a hill. You had her start on a flat surface and, if you were like me, it was grass and training wheels.

I never would have considered sending my daughter out of the



country when she was 8 or 9, but I did send her away to overnight camps so that she could get used to being apart. She was away longer each consecutive year, and her confidence and independence grew. In turn, I learned to let go a little more each time.

• **Admit and face your fears.** Your child absorbs your fears, just like she absorbs your values and sense of humor.

What are you afraid of? Yes, things can happen, however, remember that far more good things happen than bad. Fear can paralyze someone from trying. Growth comes from challenges. How will she test herself and gain confidence in her abilities if she is fearful or not able to overcome real or perceived obstacles?

Try to model confidence and a positive outlook when you face challenges. Your child will likely do the same.

• **Teach your child safety and to look out for others.** Safety is a key issue with all parents. We begin teaching safety as soon as our children join us.

I didn't put my child on a plane and say, "See you later." I prepared her through the years on matters like staying with her group, always having a buddy, not talking to strangers, being aware of her surroundings, washing her hands, looking both ways before she crossed the street — you get the idea. We talked about other situations that might come up.

Kids would be together in close contact for a long period of time and become edgy. There might be issues with privacy or a friend who was homesick.

• **Prepare your child to adapt to new surroundings and to the unexpected.** Talk to your child about what to expect. A well-prepared child has knowledge and options to adapt if necessary.

For example, my daughter was traveling where sanitation could be a problem, and because of that, food safety was a concern. Caution about what she ate and drank was paramount; eating and

drinking like the locals would most likely make her sick. She would have to make the decisions about what she ate and drank.

We researched the common types of food offered and how they were prepared. Fresh and unpeeled vegetables were not going to be an option unless she was assured that they were washed with purified water. We role-played, important reinforcement for my salad-loving girl, since I wouldn't be there to remind her. We also visited and ate at restaurants that had similar foods on their menus; this exposed her palate and helped her discover what she might enjoy when in that country.

• **Try something new.** Doing something for the first time can be scary. It can also be fun, exciting, and empowering.

Show your child how to venture out and explore new by modeling, like trying a new food. Watching you try, explore, and discover instills courage in your child to do the same.

Kids feel a sense of accomplishment when they have tried

something new, whether they like it or not. They grow from the exposure and experience. My daughter is proud that she traveled and experienced a different culture without her family. She's ready to travel to a new destination again.

• • •

One of the many facets of our parenting job is to teaching our children skill sets to navigate their worlds. Knowledge and skills provide kids with a basis for building confidence and resilience that they will require as adults. Skills and confidence take time, but with your help, guidance, and encouragement, they'll happen.

Judy M. Miller works with pre- and adoptive parents, equipping them with new techniques and information and encouraging and empowering adoptive families through difficult times. She is the author of the international-selling "What To Expect From Your Adopted Tween."

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Blade of glory

New York teen
one of top
young fencers
in the world

BY JANE BIANCHI

When Romain Cannone first moved from France to New York in 2005 at the age of 8, swimming and rock-climbing were his two main hobbies. Then in the seventh grade, his cousin Zoe came to visit him from France and wanted to go to a fencing camp.

"I didn't have anything to do, so I tried it," says Cannone, 16, who discovered two things that changed his life.

First, he really enjoyed the sport.

"Fencing is different from most sports, it's very physical — you're

constantly moving," says Cannone. "But there's also a lot of strategy, you're always trying to figure out your opponent, you need to be smart, that's why I like it."

The second was that he was darn good at it.

"My coach at camp said that I was pretty impressive for a beginner," he claims. "It came naturally to me, I didn't know many tricks or moves at the time, but I could see things automatically — I was good at predicting what my opponent would do."

After camp, Cannone took some lessons and his passion for fencing continued to grow. There was no middle school team for him to join, but he won a competition that qualified him to join the French national fencing team.

He started competing in the "age 12 and under" category, then the "age 14 and under" category, and, now in the "age 16 and under" category. When he turns 17, he'll compete as a "junior" until he's 19. After that, he'll reach the highest level of competition, called "Division One." Most Summer Olympians are plucked from Division One.

There are three types of fencing — foil, épée, and sabre. Cannone participates in épée fencing, which means that the tip of your sword can touch your opponent everywhere from the bottom of his or her foot to the top of his head (not just the chest, as is true with foil and sabre styles).

Today, fencing has become more than just a mere hobby for Cannone, it's a huge part of his life. He has a serious training schedule that requires a lot of time and energy. He works out five days a week, three or more hours at a time, splitting his time between the Fencing Academy of Westchester and the New York Fencing Academy in Brooklyn.

He practices his footwork during workouts, and stretches to make sure he doesn't get sore or injured. His coaches place him in various high-pressure situations.

"They'll say, 'There's five seconds left on the clock and you're up by one. What are you going to do?' It gets me used to feeling like I'm in a competition," says Cannone.

Cannone admits that his busy

schedule means that he has to make some difficult sacrifices.

"I don't have a lot of free time and I do lose a little bit of the high school experience," he says. "I have a lot of friends, but I can't go to as many parties as other kids because I have to train."

But his mature focus, discipline, and dedication paid off in a major way just before Thanksgiving, when Cannone traveled to Chalons, France to compete in the most high-stakes competition of his fencing career — a contest commonly dubbed the world cup of fencing.

"It was a big trip, there was a lot of pressure on me to do well," says the teen, who competed against 171 other teenage fencers from 15 countries, some of whom trained differently than Americans, keeping Cannone on his toes — literally and figuratively.

"Germans are strong, Italians are sneaky, so you have to improvise," says Cannone, who came in first among the French fencers, and third overall, behind two other Americans.

He even toppled the defending champion, German fencer Broun Rico.

"I was surprised every time I won, I would say that it was a dream come true, but I never dreamed I'd go that far, it was the best feeling," he says.

Cannone's father, Arnaud, and his New York Fencing Academy coach, Misha Mokretsov, traveled to the tournament to cheer him on. His mom Cecile, who runs three French pastry shops in Manhattan — all of them named Macaron Café — has also been supportive, as has his brother Joshua, 14, he states.

Given Cannone's success so far, it'll be exciting to see what the future holds. Does he dream about competing in the Olympics someday?

"I never really think that far ahead for some reason because I like to live in the moment," he says. "Thinking about the Olympics puts too much pressure on you, you lose the fun of it — I just want to enjoy what I'm doing now."

Jane Bianchi was an editor at Seventeen, Family Circle, and Good Housekeeping, and now freelance writes for a variety of publications. She lives with her husband in Brooklyn.



(Above) Romain Cannone at the Milwaukee North American Cup competing to make it to the top four. (Right) Romain, on far right in back row, being honored with the other fencers in Chalons.



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OBSESSIVE

early childhood testing

This mom won't let a test define her son, or his future

BY NATALIE CANDELA

I received the results of my 5-year-old son's Education Records Bureau exam this past week, and the thought crossed my mind: someone out there is thinking to him or herself that my young son's score means he will never make it to law school.

It was only a brief moment of disquiet. As an educated and analytical thinker, I know that the results of his test are, at best, worthless. However, some parents in New York City may not be as willing to detach from the idea that early childhood tests are accurate. Indeed, many New York parents regard them as a true representation of their child's cerebral capacity.

The Education Records Bureau exam is a test for private pre-K and kindergarten schools in New York City and other areas across the U.S. Also known as the Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of intelligence, it is comprised of several subtests of skills, ranging from vocabulary to hand-eye coordination and numerical reasoning, to the ability to guide a pencil through a maze. The test, admirable in its mission, claims to be testing childhood achievement. But many parents feel as though they've been ensnared and oppressed by a group of numbers that can determine which school their child will attend, and thus, even at such a young age, affect their child's future. But, by seeing the test as merely oppressive, they are missing something much more insidious.

The insidious side of the test is in its ability to deceptively "construct our conceptions of normalcy and deviance," as Susan Bordo writes about society's power over the in-



PERSONAL ESSAY

The author and her son.

dividual in her essay, "Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body" (Bordo, 1993). The test has become not only a malignant imposition by restrict-

ing which school we can send our children to, but it has also become integrated into our everyday lives, dictating something as simple as picking out a game or book with

The test has become not only a malignant imposition by restricting which school we can send our children to, but it has also intertwined itself into all aspects of our children's lives, from the games they play to the amount of time they spend playing them.

our children. It has intertwined itself into all aspects of our children's lives, from the games they play to the amount of time they spend playing them.

The test will be taken by roughly 40 percent of pre-K and kindergarten-age children this fall in preparation for entry into the highly competitive academic sphere of the city's private schools. A bad score is regarded as disgraceful by many parents; they see it as a failure of not only their parenting skills, but also of their young children. Aware of the repressive power, families have turned kindergarten — a year that should be spent knee-deep in play dough, play blocks, and muddy puddles — into a year-long cram session of patterns, vocabulary, and arithmetic. Aware of impending failure, parents start to conform; reshaping themselves and, thus their children, into what they believe makes the best kind of child, a 99-percenter.

The 99ers, a reference to children who score in the 99th percentile on achievement tests, are made up of parents and children who forego the creative and imaginative side of childhood for the rigors of severe academic competitiveness. Parents do this willingly, allowing themselves to be shaped by their ideas of what makes a parent or child successful. Parents consent to live-in preparation for the test, despite the fact that it clearly has no

place in the home — nor does it need to.

Susan Bordo writes in her essay about a force of regulation and control that is impressive in its ability to shape individuals' deepest notions of themselves. In these essays, Bordo presents a cultural and theoretical approach to the female body. She addresses the sometimes "obsessive body practices" in our culture and analyzes the effect our culture has on subjects' notions of themselves. She claims that her intention "is not to portray these obsessions as bizarre or anomalous, but, rather, as the logical manifestation of anxieties and fantasies fostered by our culture" (Bordo, 1993). Bordo's "obsessive body practices" is analogous to the obsessive competitiveness of New York parents, which transforms children and parents into subjects who promote and comply with the standards of the test, which, like Bordo's concepts of the female body image, are dictated by cultural standards and norms.

We evaluate milestones throughout childhood as if they are natural points in development, rather than the invented and established medians that they truly are. It is not possible to predict the intellectual aptitude of a child at any age. Children are all different, and with those differences come a variety of abilities, on a variety of levels, in a variety of disciplines. We should not strive to fit our children, like round pegs into square holes, into the mold of the 99ers. Rather, we should encourage intellectual curiosity, which is what truly manifests leaders, creative thinkers, and new progressive ideas — inventive and original, inspired and artistic. In opposition to the regulated standards, we should let our children grow and progress on their own terms, developing their strengths and weaknesses with support and guidance.

Natalie Candela is the mother of a 5-year-old boy living in Manhattan, currently studying at Columbia University to complete her bachelor's degree in English, and comparative literature and pre-law studies. After graduation she will attend law school to receive her Juris Doctor in International law. An active member of her community, Candela has received awards for her contributions to academic and community life.

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New year, new you

Giving yourself the gift of 'me time' in 2014

We all hear the saying new year, new you — and what better why for moms everywhere to treat themselves than with a few minutes of much-needed “me time?” Here are some of my favorite out-of-the-juice-box ideas on how to create your own “mommy time out.”

Feel whole again!

Taking a personal trip to a gourmet market like Whole Foods will give you a moment to think about what you love eating, or what you might miss, rather than “what do I need to cook for dinner tonight?” or “What would the kids enjoy?”

The environment alone will bring you into a more relaxed place: with the warm colors of the walls replacing the florescent lighting and white shiny floors, you will be like Dorothy over the natural-foods rainbow, and this will be your Oz where everything is in Technicolor, De-Lysscious — and prepared by somebody else!

You'll feel like a foodie and a health nut by just walking in — everything looks, tastes, and actually IS healthier to eat. It will inspire you to buy organic products, and you can find fun, new ways to incorporate new ingredients like fresh kale or one of 30 different kids of mushrooms into every day dinners that your kids will LOVE.

Take a 'zen 10'

A quick meditation session can cause a stressed-out brain to do a complete 180.

Next time you feel a mommy-meltdown bubbling up inside you, use these steps to bring yourself back down to relaxation.

- Sit up tall at the edge of a chair, and situate your feet hip-width apart.
- Place your hands on your thighs, palms facing down, and close your eyes.
- Inhale and exhale deeply while mentally repeating the mantra, “Breathing in, I calm my body. Breathing out, I smile.” Don't be afraid to smile if it comes naturally.
- After about six minutes, let go of the mantras and observe your breath for a minute until you bring yourself back to reality.

Let it go to your head...

Don't have 10 minutes to spare? Do a quick handstand. It's a sure-

fire way to clear your mind and feel instantly refreshed. If you do this at a particularly stressful moment in your home, you'll feel instant peace.

If you're worried about balance, practice against a wall by leaning your weight forward over your hands and pushing off one foot and swinging the other leg to follow right after towards the wall. Once you feel the blood rushing to your head, just take a few breaths, enjoy the view, and laugh about it if you feel silly. Your happiness is what is most important.

Chocolate indulgence!

What woman doesn't love chocolate? It's the one thing, other than your child's laughter, that is guaranteed to make you melt. If you are ready to live la vida cocoa, then make a point of eating at least a small piece of fine, good-quality dark chocolate. A little bit of dark chocolate every day is good for both your heard and your mind — not to mention your soul.

The best time to eat chocolate is actually in the morning when your pallet is at it's peak and hasn't been sullied by other flavors. To build on the experience and enhance the chocolate, pair it with a warm cup of tea or a glass of wine or champagne.

Ultimate nap

For a really refreshing, indulgent nap, I advise the following:

- Cashmere throw
- Face mask
- Scented candle (optional)

Nothing like a much needed 10 minute “cat nap.” They say a 10 minute nap a day will help your skin glow and will help make the day much easier.

If the baby is taking a nap you can be as well. Get some much-needed ZZZs.

Lyss Stern is the founder of DivaLysscious Moms (www.divamoms.com) and co-author of best-selling book “If You Give A Mom A Martini: 100 Ways To Find 10 Blissful Minutes For Yourself.”



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Gay families

Finding resources & support

Part two of
a series on
lesbian, gay,
bisexual, and
transgender
families

BY ALLISON PLITT

The gay and lesbian rights movement has scored big victories in the last few years, including the legalization of same-sex marriage in several states across the country and the repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act, giving legally married, same-sex couples more than 1,100 protections and rights of marriage that were previously denied to them.

As more states legalize gay and lesbian marriage, more and more same-sex couples are starting to consider marriage and the possibility of having children. As a result, there will be a greater need for support groups and resources for these couples as they begin the process of starting their families. Here are several organizations that offer resources to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals, couples, and spouses.

The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Community Center has been a stalwart organization in its steadfast support of alternative relationships and families for the past 30 years. Located in Chelsea, the Center “provides quality health and wellness programs in a welcoming space that fosters connections and celebrates our cultural contributions. The Center provides a secure place to come together and plan, share knowledge and expertise, and to share our future as a vibrant community in New York and around the world,” according to its mission statement.

The Center offers a program called Center Families, which has been in existence for more than 20 years and serves as a model for same-sex family organizing. In addition to providing opportunities for families to meet and befriend each other, the program has support groups for gay and lesbian parents and prospective parents, individuals and couples, and counseling, free legal clinics,



and other networking opportunities for those living in the tri-state area.

Some of the support groups offered by Center Families deal with foster care and adoption for same-sex individuals and couples. Another support group is called Biological Parenting for Men and is co-led by Howard May, a psychologist who devotes 50 percent of his practice to working around relationship issues with gay men. Married and living in Chelsea, May and his husband, Darren Rosenblum, decided to conceive their daughter through gestational surrogacy, in which one woman is the egg provider and another woman carries the fetus.

“Essentially, it’s a support group

for men who are thinking about biological parenting, so it’s specifically geared towards surrogacy,” says May of his program. “What we do each month is a drop-in group, so whoever wants to come can come. People come in during all different stages of the surrogacy process. Some of the questions people may ask are ‘How do you do surrogacy?’ ‘How do you find a surrogate?’ ‘Are there agencies?’ or ‘I am already into the process, and how do I deal with my agency?’ ‘I have a concern about the health or behavior of my surrogate, how do I deal with that?’ We talk about these kinds of issues.”

May discusses in his group the impact of becoming parents, and

how it affects the relationships of men who are part of a couple. First, the men discuss why each partner wants to become a parent. Then the group members talk about how they have been handling the parenting process, if they have adequate support in raising their children, how they're dealing with the reactions of others, and what impact they think parenting is having on their relationship.

May's advice to couples who are considering starting a family?

"The only really specific advice that I have is talk about it. Vocalize your concerns. Don't be afraid of expressing whatever your fears are, because when you express them...they can be addressed."

Similar to the services his group provides, May also recommends a website called Men Having Babies, a non-profit organization that spun off from a program at the Center. Men Having Babies began as a peer support network in 2005 for biological gay fathers and fathers-to-be. It offers monthly workshops on a broad range of topics and holds an annual global seminar. As its online resources have developed, it has been able to reach out to more than 1,000 men from around the world.

May and Rosenblum used an organization called Circle Surrogacy to conceive their child. Based out of Boston, Circle Surrogacy is one of the oldest and largest surrogacy agencies serving gay parents all over the world. With more than 17 years of experience, the agency thoroughly screens prospective LGBT parents and matches them with gay-friendly surrogates and egg donors. The agency also believes that all parties in the birthing process should openly know and communicate with each other, which will eventually have a healthy impact on the child as he grows up and wants to know about his birth.

Another organization that May refers same-sex families to is The Family Equality Council, which has been in existence for more than 30 years. Originally called the Gay Fathers Coalition, the group in later years came to include lesbian moms and bisexual and transgender parents. The Council says its purpose is to connect, support, and represent this country's three million parents who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, and their six million children.

May and his husband and daughter attended the group's "Family

Week" last summer in Provincetown, Mass. Celebrating its 17th anniversary, "Family Week" has always been a joint venture hosted by the Council and COLAGE, another national LGBT family support group.

"For one week, this kind of gay family resort in Massachusetts on Cape Cod is almost entirely gay people with kids," May recalled. "They just bring people together. There's programming the whole week. There are lectures. There are playgroups for the kids. There are different types of events based on the age of your kid. This was the first time we had gone, and it was really quite amazing. There were people from all over the country."

Another advocate of the Family Equality Council is one of its Board of Directors, William Sherr, who lives near Park Slope, Brooklyn, with his husband, Estevan Garcia, and their three adopted children. For the past 13 years, Sherr and Garcia have opened their home to more than 20 foster children and adopted one of them. Besides taking care of his family, Sherr runs a service called OutbabyNYC, which caters to the needs of same-sex families.

"We work on changing attitudes and policies, so that all families are respected and celebrated," says Sherr. "They really just try to get us to come together and raise our voices to ensure full legal and social equality for all families."

Through the Council, Sherr and Garcia held a mixer for family equality at their home this past November. The couple also chairs an annual dinner at Chelsea Piers in the spring to help raise money for the Council. This year the "Night at the Pier" dinner will be held on May 12, 2014, and tickets can be purchased on the Council's website events page.

How can straight families support same-sex families?

"Talk to your kids about how all families are equal and that all families are different," says Sherr. "If they have the means and wanted to donate to the Family Equality Council, they can see what their works are doing. If they live in New York, plan to attend 'Night at the Pier' in May and show [their] support for the Family Equality Council."

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

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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 Egnog

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.

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Health at play

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-



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.

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.”

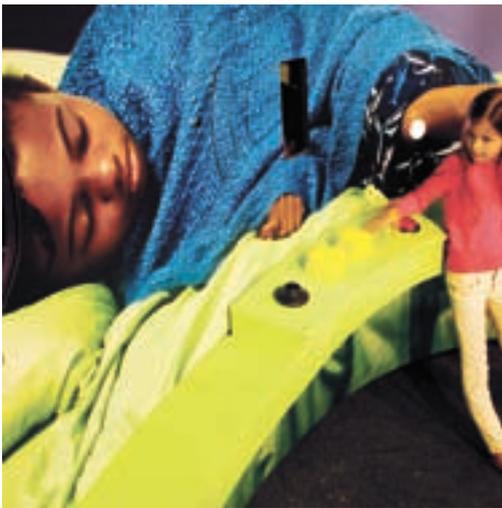
Children can play another game in the Decision Center called “Choices Change YOUR World!” As The New York Times describes, the game “lets them navigate a Central Park landscape as a tiny avatar, a beating heart ... children playing the game at side-by-side video screens could earn points by touching 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.



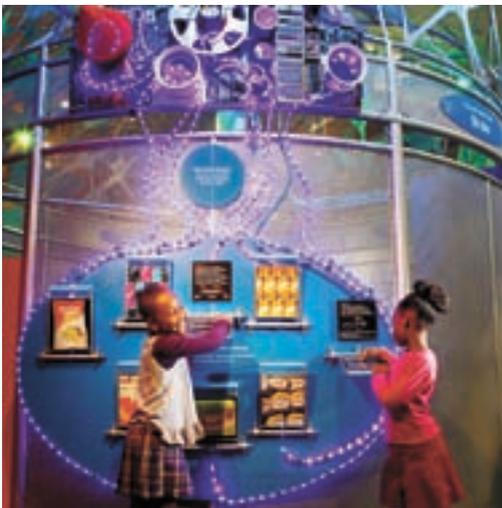
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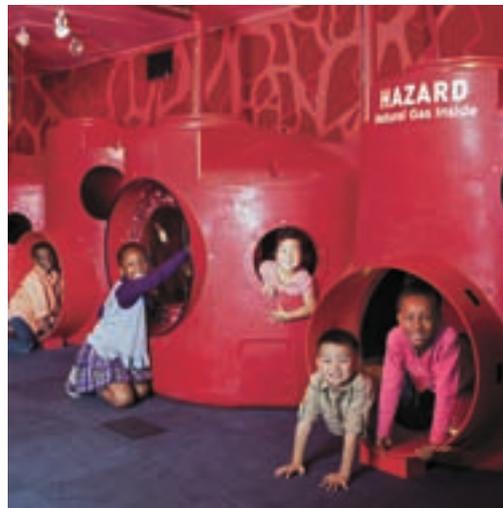
Children can climb right up a giant tongue and into the brain.



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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.



DIVORCE & SEPARATION

LEE CHABIN, ESQ.

A low-cost divorce

Community mediation can offer an alternative

“Chris” and “Eliza” agreed that it was time to get divorced. Chris, who initially hadn’t wanted the marriage to end and who had been saddened by the breakup, was now angry at his wife. He thought — especially since they had children — that Eliza owed it to them to try and save the family.

But Eliza had made her decision: the marriage was over. Her major concern was avoiding a bitter end to it that would hurt their children and poison the future parenting relationship.

Money was a major concern. Chris had lost his job and was now working at another that paid substantially less. Living apart would cost more and add to the strain.

This couple is fictional, but many real ones find answers at Community Dispute Resolution Centers located throughout the state. Community Mediation Services in Queens is

one of them. [Disclosure: I recently began working there as a staff member.] These centers provide numerous services for families and communities, including when it comes to separation and divorce.

Yvonne Rinchere, case coordinator and court liaison, runs the Queens center’s divorce mediation program.

The program, Rinchere says, “allows couples who have decided that they are separating to have a discussion and possibly come to agreements. Parties can reach their own decisions.”

Mediation “considerably lowers the cost of divorce,” she continues, noting that divorce clients at the Queens center (and perhaps at other centers elsewhere) pay according to a sliding scale.

The program is open to anyone, pending approval after an initial screening process to determine the case’s suitability for mediation. Most cases are completed within six hours, consisting of three two-hour sessions.

The mediators, who may or may not also be lawyers, have been certified at Community Mediation Services, and have taken advanced training in divorce there. Most have been mediating with the center for more than two years, handling a variety of cases that come in. The quality of service they provide is high.

Peggy Russell, Director of Mediation Services, oversees all of the Queens center’s mediation programs, including its newest one, created to assist veterans and their families deal with interpersonal issues that frequently exist after a soldier has returned home, following a tour abroad.

In her mind, a benefit of all of the mediation programs is that the cases are less contentious than those battled in the courts.

“The process is more fo-

cused on maintaining relationships within families. Mediation is self-determinative; you get to decide what is best for you, your children and your family, and not the court.”

“Litigation seems to me about taking sides, whereas mediation offers the opportunity to work together rather than against each other, and to speak for yourself rather than have an attorney speak for you,” Russell adds.

Andrea Hirshman, Esq., is a mediator who has handled Community Mediation Services cases. She says that participants are “happy to have a place to be heard, to have time and space to say what is important to them, and have the other one hear it,” without that resulting in a battle.

“People can get the emotional relief that they’re looking for, as well as lasting agreements because they come to their decisions on their own,” she says. “People expect the legal system to right the emotional injustices. That does not happen, and so they become and remain bitter, and mediation can avoid that.”

One woman who went through mediation said it was an unexpected positive experience.

“I didn’t think [mediation] would work for us, we were both so hurt and angry,” but the mediator helped us talk about the future, what we each needed, and to keep thinking about what is best for our son,” she shares. “It worked for us.”

Community Dispute Resolution Centers can be an invaluable resource. Find one at www.nycourts.gov/ip/adr/ProgramList.shtml.

Contact Community Mediation Services’ Yvonne Rinchere at (718) 523-6868 or yrinchere@mediatenyc.org.

New York City and Long Island-based divorce mediator and collaborative divorce lawyer Lee Chabin helps clients end their relationships respectfully and without going to court. Contact him at lee_chabin@lc-mediate.com, (718) 229-6149, or go to <http://lc-mediate.com/>. Follow him on Facebook at www.facebook.com/lchabin.

Disclaimer: All material in this column is for informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice.



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A smart blanket

A New York mom creates a nursing tool with many uses

BY TAMMI SCILEPPI

The old adage, “Necessity is the mother of invention,” perfectly describes a Brooklyn mom-turned-entrepreneur’s experience, shared by many breast-feeding moms.

After having her first child, Miosoty Melucci said she was “unprepared for the challenges that a new mother faces, such as nursing her baby.” She and her friends agreed that it should be done in a discreet, respectful manner, but felt strongly that the beautiful bond between mother and baby should be stress-free — unhindered by onlookers’ prying eyes and unfriendly vibes that were felt in certain public places.

“I wanted to give my baby the best nutrition possible, and I knew nursing was the way I could do so, though I encountered difficulties nursing in public,” Melucci said. “I was not able to be a part of my daily public interactions and nurse at the same time, without



the fear that I’m being watched.”

As founder and chief executive officer of Me Beau Bébé Multi-Functional Nursing Blanket, Melucci’s out-of-the-box thinking fueled her desire to launch a unique yet practical concept in 2011, while her motivation and moxie turned it into a profitable small business, online. Now, her product is also being sold in six retail stores in Brooklyn and Manhattan.

Made in New York

Hand-cut and stitched in a local textile factory, the 36-inch-by-36-inch “smart” blanket is made of soft, yet durable 100 percent organic cotton, and was thoughtfully designed to ease the stress of not only nursing in public, but also the need to carry multiple items, such as burping blanket, changing blanket, baby blanket, and stroller cover.

Created by moms for moms, it’s currently available

in six contemporary designs, and Melucci says the spring collection will feature five new prints. Turns out both mothers and babies love it for its comfort, convenience, and cuteness factors. The sizeable open and close window allows for maximum viewing of baby, as well as ventilation, even when used over a stroller. And its patented breakaway design allows mothers to use the top portion as a burping blanket, while the unique neck design allows for optimal coverage and modesty.

Melucci pointed out that the company has received “a large amount of feedback from new moms after they fell in love with the blanket, indicating that it has helped them continue living their day-to-day lives in public,” while being able to nurse their babies peacefully and privately.

“They feel safe and secure knowing they are not being exposed or forced to stay inside to have the nursing experience. Every mother should have the right and the option to nurse anytime and anywhere, without the fear of being exposed,”





Me Beau Bébé owner and Brooklyn mom Miosoty Melucci with husband Daniel, 9-year-old son Daniel, and 7-year-old daughter Hailey.

she insists. "All mothers go through many challenges bonding with their baby, but nursing should not be one of those."

Did you know?

Under the Fair Labor Standards Act employers are required to provide "reasonable break time for an employee to express breast milk for her nursing child for one year after the child's birth, each time such employee has need to express the milk." Employers are also required to provide "a place, other than a bathroom, that is shielded from view and free from intrusion from coworkers and the public, which may be used by an employee to express breast milk."

However, employers are not required to compensate nursing mothers for breaks taken for the purpose of expressing milk. However, where employers already provide compensated breaks, an employee who uses that break time to express milk must be compensated in the same way that other employees are compensated for break time. In addition, the general requirement that the employee must be completely relieved from duty or else the time must be compensated as work time applies.

'Her everything'

Melucci got her hard work ethic at a young age. Emigrating from the Dominican Republic at age 16, with her parents and siblings, Melucci recalled that she started working at a very early age. At 7, she would

get up at 4:30 am and travel to the farm to sell tomatoes and vegetables.

"I didn't know much about running a business, but I loved working alongside my parents, so this became my first venture."

She believes in perseverance but also in her amazing team, and is grateful to her professional partner, Issary Alba, who has been working with her "from idea to inception and creation," to get Me Beau Bébé off the ground.

"Issary has taught and helped me a great deal with the back end support of the business," says Melucci. "Her motivation is the same as mine — family, and our vision of an enhanced experience for all mothers and their loved ones."

Melucci had to overcome many obstacles on her journey.

"Coming from selling tomatoes in the streets of the Dominican Republic to now being the founder and CEO of a business, and having my product sell in well-known retailers, makes me feel that everything in life has been well worth it."

She credits her husband and two kids, Daniel, 9, and Hailey, 7, as her support team.

"My husband and I have been together for over 10 years and he has been my rock. With his support, as well as the support of my entire family and friends, I have been able to move forward with my company and dream. I consider myself a very lucky woman to have so much love and support in my life."

The entrepreneur says she does this for all the other moms out there.

"For all the mothers that have felt lost, I want them to know that I was there, and I know how it feels, and that in today's world they can overcome and fight for their dreams, just as I am," she says.

Visit mebeaubebe.com or online retailer and support site *The Pregnant New Yorker*, thepregnantnewyorker.com.

Find Me Beau Bébé at your local baby retailer: Albee Baby (715 Amsterdam Ave. between W. 94th and W. 95th streets on the Upper West Side), Z' Baby Company (100W 72nd St. at Columbus Avenue on the Upper West Side), Soho Baby (251 Elizabeth St. between Prince and E. Houston streets in SoHo), Gumbo (493 Atlantic Ave. between Nevins Street and Third Avenue in Boerum Hill), and Lullaby Baby (488 5th Ave. between 11th and 12th streets in Gowanus).



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FAMILY HEALTH

DR. PRAMOD NARULA, MD
Chairman of Pediatrics
New York Methodist Hospital

Value of vitamins

When I was growing up, a vitamin supplement was the cornerstone of every breakfast. But, now that I have my own children in early elementary school, I'm reading conflicting information about vitamins — multivitamins in particular. Are vitamins really important, and, if so, what's the best way to make sure that my children get the vitamins that they need?

From a very young age, most children are taught that vitamins are important for their health. There are 13 essential vitamins that the human body requires — vitamins A, C, D, E, K, B1, B2, B3, B5, B6, B7, B9, and B12, to be exact — and, many popular children's vitamin supplements promise the so-called "recommended daily allowance" of more than half of these vitamins. The suggestion is that a pill in the morning will keep your child well on the way to the vitamin-packed day that he needs.

However, in recent years, an ever-increasing number of studies has shed light on the benefits of specific vitamins, the pitfalls of overconsumption, and the overall lack of evidence that taking multivitamins has any long-term benefit to children's (or adults') health.

At the most basic level, a vitamin is the name given to a group of molecules that are responsible for maintaining specific functions. Vitamin A, for example, helps spur growth in various parts of the body, such as the skin and bones. Vitamin C promotes healing in damaged tissues. Vitamin D helps your body absorb calcium. Each of these vitamins has numerous additional roles beyond the ones listed above, but what's most important to understand is that each type of vitamin has a distinct role, and is necessary to maintain health.

With the exception of Vitamin D, which the human body can synthesize on its own when exposed to sunlight, our bodies cannot "manufacture" their own vitamins. But it is not difficult to get them through the foods we eat.

And that's the problem with multivitamins: in all likelihood, a



child's body already has a steady supply of many of these essential vitamins, through the food that he normally eats.

Fruits and vegetables are great sources, and should be a staple of a child's diet, but as just one example, take a dinner that includes a chicken drumstick. That drumstick isn't simply a source of protein. For the typical 6-year-old child, the National Institute of Health estimates that each ounce of meat on that drumstick will contain about 25 percent of a day's worth of vitamin B3, which helps the digestive and nervous system; 15 percent of a day's worth of vitamin B6, which helps the body maintain nerve function and produce antibodies that keep illness at bay; and about 13 percent of a day's worth of vi-

tamin B12, which helps form red blood cells.

Because essential vitamins are in all types of food, there's no reason to start your child's day by providing a complete supply of many of the vitamins that he will consume anyway.

Furthermore, new research is showing that, aside from having no positive impact on long-term health, excess vitamin consumption can actually have serious health consequences, including an increased risk for certain types of cancer and heart disease.

The best way for children to get their vitamins is through the food in a healthy, well-balanced diet. But if you are concerned that your child may have a vitamin deficiency, you should consult his pediatrician.

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Behind the Screens

Why parents need to monitor their children's media consumption

BY KIKI BOCHI

Technology is turning up in some surprising places these days. First there was the iPotty, launched last year so toddlers could play with an iPad while conducting the oh-so-boring business of, well, doing their business. More recently, Fisher-Price created a furor when it unveiled the iPad Apptivity Seat, a bouncy seat that suspends an iPad directly in front of a newborn baby's face.

Smartphones and tablets have become today's pacifiers, keeping babies and kids quiet and occupied in the car, at the store, and while waiting for food at the restaurant. But in the bathroom?

And do babies really need technology before they can even sit up?

Child development experts are worried.

"Although it is tempting for parents to offer their babies and toddlers an iPad, it is not a replacement for the important relationship building that occurs through playful parent-child interactions," says Dr. Roni Cohen Leiderman, dean of the Mailman Segal Center for Human Development at Nova Southeastern University.

As children grow, the television is not only entertainment, it is also the babysitter, the best friend, and the reward system. In many homes the television is often on all day and evening, whether or not anyone is watching.

If you are an average parent, none of this is any big surprise to you. But the nation's pediatricians want to warn you — again — that kids need clear limits on media use. If nothing else, it certainly is something to think about as you make your New Year's resolutions.

Excessive media use has been associated with obesity, lack of sleep, school problems, aggression, and other behavior issues.

The American Academy of Pediatrics has advised for quite some time that babies and toddlers get no exposure at all to television and video screens, and that kids above age 2 be allowed to have no more than two hours of screen time daily.

"For nearly three decades, the

A 'media-use' family plan

The American Academy of Pediatrics urges parents to make a "media-use plan" for their families and set clear rules about TV, cellphones and other devices. Their suggestions include:

- For children under age 2, substitute unstructured play and human interaction for screen time. The opportunity to think creatively, problem-solve, and develop reasoning and motor skills is more valuable for the developing brain than passive media intake.
- For older children, take into ac-

count not only the quantity, but the quality and location of media use. Consider TVs, phones, tablets, and computers. The rules should be

written down and agreed upon by all family members.

- Screens should be kept out of children's bedrooms. Put in place a "media curfew" at mealtime and bedtime, putting all devices away or plugging them into a charging station for the night.
- Take an active role in your children's media education by

co-viewing programs with them and discussing the shows. Look for media choices that are educational or teach good values — such as empathy, racial, and ethnic tolerance. Choose programming that models good interpersonal skills for children to emulate.

- Be firm about not allowing your child to view content that is not age appropriate, such as shows or movies that feature sex, drugs, violence, etc. Movie and TV ratings exist for good reason, and online movie reviews also can help parents get informed about content and stick to their rules.
- The internet can be a wonder-

ful place for learning. But it also is a place where kids can run into trouble. Keep the computer in a public part of your home, so you can check on what your kids are doing online and how much time they are spending there.

- Talk to your children about being good "digital citizens," and discuss the serious consequences of online bullying. If your child is the victim of cyberbullying, it is important to take action with the other parents and the school, if appropriate. Attend to children's and teens' mental health needs promptly if they are being bullied online, and consider separating them from the social media platforms where bullying occurs.





A.A.P. has expressed concerns about the amount of time that children and teenagers spend with media, and about some of the content they are viewing,” Dr. Victor Strasburger said in a statement when the report was released. “The digital age has only made these issues more pressing.”

In today’s world, the average child spends about eight hours in front of screens each day, according to the pediatrician’s organization. That makes screen time the leading activity for young people after sleep.

The pediatricians — many of whom are parents themselves — are trying to be realistic about the situation. There are many positives that can come from media use, they concede. Educational television such as “Sesame Street” can be stimulating to young minds, while other shows such as “Dora the Explorer” expose young children to Spanish. Educational television for older kids can help teach about history, nature, geography, and other cultures.

The internet is a critical tool for homework, and social media helps older kids feel connected. But when it comes to products such as the iPotty and iPad bouncy seat, experts urge parents to approach with caution.

“Nurturance is the key to developing your child’s healthy emotional intelligence and that requires time, attention, and touch with a caring adult,” Leiderman says. “Watch a small child with an electronic device and you will see a mesmerized focus on the screen. At first blush that may seem appropriate — and for short periods of time it may be. Children may, in fact, be learning some concepts and are certainly giving parents time off, but they are not getting the full dimension of learning [that] takes place with a caring adult.”

For example, Leiderman says, a story “read” by a computerized voice on an iPad cannot match the tonal quality and warm interchanges that happen when family members have their baby cuddled in their lap as they read the book with pauses, questions, pointing, and responses to their baby’s giggles and interests.

If parents simply can’t resist putting such gadgets in front of their child, restraint is key.

“Think of it like a treat for your baby or toddler,” Leiderman advises. “Once in a while is fine, but you wouldn’t want to make steady diet of it.”

KiKi Bochi is a freelance writer and editor who specializes in family health and child development.



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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.

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Reflections on this Christmas past

After a hectic season, finding the true meaning of the holidays



NEW DAD

BY TIM PERRINS

Now that the season of excessive eating, stress-drinking, and trampling our friends and neighbors to get our hands on cheap electronics is over, I find myself wondering what the holidays really mean to people. We're so caught up in getting things, and getting a "good value," that our real values are being crushed in the process. Fortunately, my daughter Hazel is here to remind me of what's truly important — in her own roundabout way.

This past December my wife and I took 22 month-old Hazel on a pilgrimage into the epicenter of Christmas commercialization — to see Santa at Macy's on 34th Street. Hazel had no idea who this weird old guy was, mind you, but it seemed like a good excuse for a family outing.

After the trek into Manhattan and a long wait to get into "Santaland," we were finally ushered into a room for our photo-op with Mr. Claus. Santa was jolly and all, but Hazel wasn't too sure about him. She did, however, find the camera-and toy-wielding elves wildly entertaining, so the session went well enough. Then we were on our way — which in Santaland means, "on our way to the cash registers," where we were met with a lengthy menu of picture-packages with different size prints, matting options, digital photos on CD, and so on. Not that I'm complaining — there was no obligation to buy anything, and the store has to make money on the deal somewhere. Santa's appearance fee must be astronomical.

After escaping from Santaland we still had eight floors of department store between us and the street, and my wife wanted to look around. Funny thing: after being rushed out of the

Then we were on our way — which in Santaland means, “on our way to the cash registers.”

house early to beat the crowds, riding the subway from Brooklyn to midtown, standing in line for an hour, and then posing with some stranger in a red suit while 22 year olds with striped tights snapped flash-bulbs in her eyes, Hazel was just a little bit restless. In the open expanse of Women’s Casuals, she took off. For a skinny, little 22 month old, she’s surprisingly fast. Not to mention willful — I tried picking her up to prevent any sales-floor collisions, but she squirmed like an eel and shouted, “Walk! Walk!” until I released her. I realized I would have to assume full baby-wrangling duties if my wife was going to have any chance of getting some shopping done.

Hazel burrowed into a rack of sweaters, emerged for a moment and then disappeared into the pantsuits, squealing and giggling while I tried to catch her. Carrying a winter coat and my stylish, manly diaper bag made navigating tight spaces difficult, so when Hazel veered into the cramped discount racks, I had to strategically circumvent several rows of coats to head her off at the pass. This all might have been stressful, if not for the fact that it was so much fun to watch her antics: stomping across the floor, flailing her arms to keep balance, and stopping only occasionally to point at oversized Christmas ornaments hanging from the ceiling — “Red ball! Red Ball!” — before taking off again into the crowd of holiday shoppers.

She tottered through Calvin Klein, knocked Charter Club sweaters to the floor, and ran circles around Alfani evening wear. She couldn’t hide from me in the “Intimates” department (not much cover to be found there), but moments later I lost her in the Michael Kors section. When finally I flushed her out of hiding by shaking a rack of overcoats and making silly monster noises, she shrieked and ran through a gaggle of 10-year-old girls who were taking cellphone pictures with a life-size cardboard display of the

band One Direction. I kept my head down, apologizing for the interruption while wending through their ranks in pursuit of my bounding toddler. And then I did that three more times, as Hazel kept looping back through the coterie of chattering boy-band fans.

Eventually my wife finished her shopping, but Hazel wasn’t done with her escapades. She evaded us by running behind an unused bank of cash registers, but a fleet-footed employee intercepted. Upon being returned to us, she wriggled and cried, “Walk! Walk!” all the way down the remaining escalators, out of the front door, and down to the subway platform.

The following weeks included all of the traditional holiday activities: scrambling to find presents, buying a few sale-items for myself along the way, eating, drinking, and the giving and receiving of gifts. While I enjoyed all of that, looking back, the high point of the holidays was an hour spent running in circles at a department store with my abundantly joyful daughter.

It’s easy to attach your happiness to the things you have or want. In recent years, though, more and more people are finding their ability to acquire things isn’t so certain. Many have found themselves slipping down the financial ladder because a bunch of greedy charlatans drove our economy into a ditch. It’s no wonder we’ve become obsessed with finding bargains — working hard builds character, but it may not build a nest egg anymore.

What I learned from Hazel this past season is that the most worthwhile things don’t have to cost much. Whether you have money to burn or not, it’s good to remind yourself of the value of time well spent. Stop buying stuff — or worrying about stuff — and just give your loved ones the gift of your full attention. Take a family portrait with Santa, whether or not you intend to buy it. Play hide-and-seek in the Michael Kors casuals, even if they’re out of your price-range. Just get out into the world with the people you care about. If you want your kids to learn about value, just show them what’s truly important to you. Happy New Year!

Tim Perrins is a part-time, stay-at-home dad who lives with his wife, their toddler, and two ravenous dogs in Park Slope, Brooklyn. More of his thoughts about babies and other things that confuse him can be found at www.RevoltOfTheImbeciles.blogspot.com.

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DEATH BY CHILDREN

CHRIS GARLINGTON

Father-son bonding via text messages

I suffer from acute, proactive, energy conservationism (aka: laaaaziness). Until recently, this malady has affected only me. However, it has become clear that my wife suffers from a temporary onset during her recovery from a torn rotator cuff, and my son is showing signs of a strong genetic predisposition toward multi-slacking.

All of this may best be illustrated by our new obsession with texting.

It may be important to introduce some working vocabulary here so you can follow:

- **Fetch-text:** When your wife texts “bring me a diet coke” because she’s watching Chaz Bono drop-kick Nancy Grace on “Dancing with the Stars.”

- **Cease-and-desist-text:** When you text “stop yelling Booyah!” to your son because you can’t hear Gordon Ramsey curse over the boy’s gleeful celebration of perfect head shots in Call of Duty 3.

- **Text-of-denial:** Texting “I’m in the shower” after your son texts “get mom a diet coke” after she texts “DIET COKE!”

- **Remote parenting:** During an important meeting (at Vaughn’s Pub):

Dad: r u ok?

Son: on fire

Dad: srsly

Son: it burns.

Dad: YOU BETTER ANSWER ME

NOW &^%\$#!

Son: what’s the number for 911?

Dad: there’s pizza in the freezer.

- **Remote bonding:**

Dad: just played shart in Words with Friends!

Son: IN CLASS!

Dad: like a boss!

Son: OMG stop txtng me!

Dad: Love you!

Son: Block you!

- **Wireless banking:**

Son: Hey, dad? Can I get the \$20 you owe me for my A in biology?

Dad: My phone is dead.

Son: Lol, dad. You’re so funny. But seriously, I did get an A in biology and I could use that \$20.

Dad: But you got a D in math.

That’s -5 against the 20 leaving you 15 and you didn’t take out the trash this year, -120, so you owe me \$100.

Son: Birthday check from Aunt Dora. You only gave me half. You owe me \$70.

Dad: Review your invoice for taxi services in the amount of \$532.19.

Son: I was telling my friends how funny you are. I love you dad.

Dad: Well played. Here’s 20 bucks. Are you on the back porch?

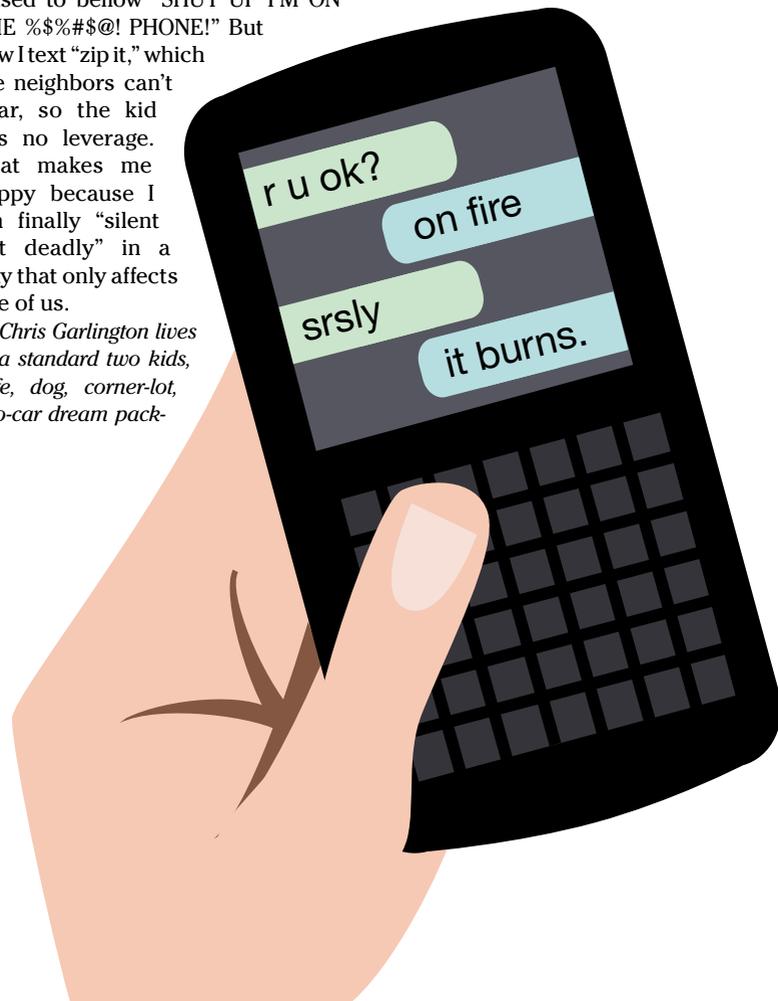
Son: I’m on the couch next to you!

• • •

On the plus side, we’re a much quieter house. We now text silently, speaking almost entirely with our minds, as our alien overlords prefer. I used to bellow “SHUT UP I’M ON THE %\$%#@\$@! PHONE!” But now I text “zip it,” which the neighbors can’t hear, so the kid has no leverage. That makes me happy because I am finally “silent but deadly” in a way that only affects one of us.

Chris Garlington lives in a standard two kids, wife, dog, corner-lot, two-car dream pack-

age. He drives a 2003 Camry, sports a considerable notebook fetish, and smokes Arturo Fuente Partaga Maduros at the Cigar King as often as possible. His stories have appeared in Florida, Orlando, Orlando Weekly, Catholic Digest, Retort, Another Realm, The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature, South Lit, and other magazines. His short story collection, “King of the Road,” is available on Amazon. His column “My Funny Life,” was nominated for a national humor award. He is the author of the infamous anti-parenting blog, Death By Children; the anti-writing blog, Creative Writer Pro; and co-author of “The Beat Cop’s Guide to Chicago Eats.”



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GROWING UP ONLINE

CAROLYN JABS



Texts bring us closer

By now, parents of kids with cellphones understand that texting has created new possibilities — and problems. Although research is sparse, a few preliminary studies suggest that, like other forms of communication, texting has the power to bring people closer.

Depending on how it is used, it can also create and exacerbate conflict. In one recent, much publicized study, researchers at Brigham Young University found that couples who argued with text messages felt less happy about their relationships, while couples who used text to coordinate plans and send thinking-of-you messages were convinced texting brought them closer together.

Of course, the study wasn't able to say whether texting was cause or effect. In all likelihood, the people who felt good about texting also had strong face-to-face relationships. Perhaps the best way to think about texting is as a snack that tides you over until you can get real nourishment. Face-to-face conversation is a full-course meal in which you can communicate not only with words but also with tone of voice, eye contact, and facial expressions.

Teens, in particular, may need help to understand this distinction. A young person who is willing to call fries and a sweet drink lunch may also be confused about the role that texting plays in rewarding relationships. Here are some suggestions that will help both parents and kids get more satisfying results from the time they put into texting.

- Choose your topic. Texting is ideal for rapid, simple communication and what used to be called small talk. Use it to coordinate plans or to let someone know you'll be late. Share quick observations, inside jokes, and how's-your-day

updates. Texting is not well suited to complicated negotiations or anything emotional. If you need to ask for advice, work out a problem or make an apology, pick up the phone, or arrange to see each other.

- Be concise — and comprehensible. Part of the appeal of texting is that a message can be read in a moment. Keeping communication brief shows respect for the other person who is, after all, being interrupted by a buzzing phone. Acronyms can speed things along — if the other person doesn't have to puzzle them out. Remind your child that code isn't a form of communication unless both people know what it means. A quick proofread before pressing send is also a good habit if only because auto-correct is so often clueless about what you were trying to say.

- Be positive. Texting is most likely to build relationships when it's used for funny, encouraging, or friendly messages. Like everyone else, kids will have thoughts that are mean, rude, or snarky. Encourage your child to think before putting those thoughts into a text. The best test: How would you feel if you received this message? If the text is going to a friend, how might it impact the friendship? If the person on the other end isn't a friend, why are you even sending a text? With a little updating, grandma's rule still applies: "If you don't have anything nice to say, don't text anything at all."

- Don't overreact. Because text messages are so short, they are easily misunderstood, so it's especially important to give other people the benefit of the doubt. If a message seems unclear, unkind, or out of character, don't shoot back an angry response. Instead, the best reply is probably "WNTT" (We Need to Talk).

- Be sensibly responsive. Because texting can be impulsive, it may lead to impatience or even aggression. Teens, in particular, often expect an instantaneous response, especially from a romantic partner. Parents may need to help their children think about the pace of texting, so they can set appropriate boundaries. What is a reasonable response time for messages from parents, other family members, friends, acquaintances?

Answering every text instantly monopolizes your time; waiting too long makes it seem like you are ignoring the other person. Point out that friends are less likely to be upset if they know, in advance, that you'll be off the grid for a family dinner, homework, or another obligation. You may also want to help your child disable the "message received" feature on the phone. If other people don't know when a message is read, they may be less adamant about an instant response.

- Learn how to stop. Develop guidelines about when texting is appropriate. Many young couples send each other good night messages. Because there aren't generally accepted guidelines about how to "hang up" on a text conversation, these exchanges can go back and forth long after parents assume their teen is asleep. Help your child set limits by, if necessary, putting the phone out of reach after bedtime.

- Finally, be sure your child has plenty of opportunities to develop a full repertoire of communication skills including face-to-face conversation. One intriguing study by researchers at the University of Essex found that simply having a phone in the same room made conversations less meaningful, perhaps because participants were thinking about all the other people they could be texting instead of giving full attention to the person in front of them. The authors concluded that "interacting in a neutral environment, without a cellphone nearby, seems to help foster closeness, connectedness, interpersonal trust, and perceptions of empathy — the building-blocks of relationships."

The goal for parents, of course, is to raise children who are aware of those building blocks and understand that texting is just one of many ways to construct durable relationships.

Carolyn Jabs raised three computer-savvy kids, including one with special needs. She has been writing Growing Up Online for 10 years and is working on a book about constructive responses to conflict. Visit www.growing-up-online.com to read other columns.

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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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A LETTER FROM COLLEGE

AGLAIA HO

Support your peers

The college experience comes with its own special set of challenges. Life away from home can be stressful, lonely, and even frightening at times. Between schoolwork, parties, daily chores, and extracurricular activities, one may feel swept up in the dynamics of college. To add to this, being far away from the support of family and familiar faces can be difficult. Nevertheless, you are not expected to navigate college by yourself. Friends and peer support can help you weather even the toughest storms.

For me, I have always been the type of person who has trouble opening up to others. I have a strong sense of self-consciousness that can often impede my ability to make quick, close friends. Friendships for me are not magically created. Rather, they are developed over the course of years. Additionally, I can be somewhat irrationally emotional, which often feeds into my fear of burdening others with my personal issues. Because of this, in the past, I have often reached out most to family and one or two really close friends whenever I needed a little extra boost of confidence or support. Yet, being at college, I could not rely on my close network of family and hometown friends. It was terrifying to lose a support network that I had depended on for most of my life.

Thankfully, I quickly learned that my college was a very different atmosphere than what I was used to. Coming from a specialized public high school in the heart of New York City, I had grown used to intense competition that, at times, morphed into backstabbing to get ahead

and overall paranoia of being not good enough. However, college presented itself to be a tiny, close-knit community. Rather than being competitive, I found students more supportive. In college, with students spread out over a variety of majors with a wide range of different goals, I quickly learned that my biggest competition was myself. Additionally, living with other students, I also realized that — not to be particularly cheesy of anything — we are really all in this together.

Never in my life have I experienced so much support or genuine compassion from my peers and friends. Everyone takes care of each other. They truly seem to be able to sense how I feel, and their responses have helped me cope through the ups and downs of my first semester in a strange new world. To them, no problem is too big, too trivial, or too all-around ridiculous to be pushed aside. At the beginning of the school year, I bought a large, second-hand, stuffed penguin at a college tag sale, which I quickly became attached to. Unfortunately, my stuffed friend was stolen. Though it was a good-natured, immature prank (and my penguin eventually was returned), I was still devastated. I felt a bit silly when I reported my stolen penguin to security, but I was relieved that school officials were extremely supportive. They assured me that no stolen item was ever unimportant for them to look into. I also received plenty of kindness from two girls in my dorm. They understood that my penguin had been a security blanket for me and had helped me get through the stress of adjusting to a new school. Thus, they bought me a new smaller penguin with their own money, just to cheer me up.

Even in competitive extracurricular activities, there is a support group to be found. For me, being a part of a team was somewhat of a novelty. Having never competed on the college level, I found my teammates especially helpful. They guided me, and explained everything I needed to know. Some of the older students even took me under their wing. Their support truly

shone through when I emotionally broke down during the competition and my team was there to comfort me, even in the ladies room (yes, even a guy decided to check in on me).

The college community itself is truly supportive. I have seen complete strangers offer to make someone's day better. During finals, I spent a whole day at the library studying for exams. I had spent maybe five hours in the same spot and I was probably going a little bit nuts by then. Suddenly, a random student came over and offered me some cookies. I was shocked, half expecting the cookies to be drugged or poisoned or something. Seriously, I thought, no one is that nice, but I was wrong. Yes, he was actually offering freshly baked, gingerbread cookies to people studying in the library. When I asked why he was doing it, he shrugged as if it was commonplace and remarked that he thought it would brighten someone's day. Well, he totally succeeded.

The support that I have seen during my time in college has been truly inspiring. It has taught me that just a little bit of my time, and keeping the needs of others in mind, can go a long way. I have grown to be part of this community of giving back to your peers. I am now quick to offer a friend a cold can of ginger ale or some warm chicken soup. I have brought back midnight snacks for dorm mates who were up late studying. I try to make time in my day to attend my friends' art shows, recitals, and performances. I have learned that even the smallest gestures never go unappreciated in my college community.

It is funny, though, because the world tends to be so selfish. In the past, I have been told that I need to be more selfish and self-serving or else I will never be able to compete in the world. Yet, in my small college, there is something to be said about being compassionate. Everyone needs and appreciates support, especially in a competitive world. Giving one's time and thought can make all the difference.

Aglaia Ho is a freshman at Williams College and a native New Yorker.



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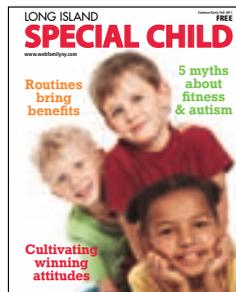
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LIONS AND TIGERS AND TEENS

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 often-times 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.

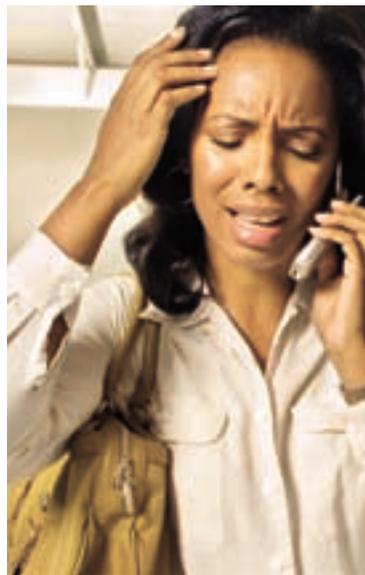
Is the behavior something that endangers the teen's — or someone else's — well-being, health, or safety? Substance abuse, self harming, relationship violence, and gang activities are behaviors that have potential life-threatening consequences and should be reported.

"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

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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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Is your little cowpoke searching for the next good read about the pioneers of America?

They'll love reading "American Adventures: Westward Journeys," which tells three fictional stories of America's westward expansion from a child's point of view.

In "Minnow and Rose: The Oregon Trail" by Judy Young, Rose and her family are on the Oregon Trail, and Rose is surprised to see a girl with the pitch-black hair by the river.

Meanwhile, Native-American Minnow sees a trail of wagon trains, and she knows what that means: strangers crossing the prairie again. As she goes to tell her father, she spots a girl with red hair. The two girls want to meet, though neither one's father likes the idea. But when tragedy strikes, there is no other choice.

"Pappy's Handkerchief" by Devin Scillian tells the story of a young African American named Moses whose family fish stall in Baltimore almost never pays the bills, which makes Moses's father very sad — but Moses and his father hear the other African Americans talking about opportu-

nity, and they listen very closely.

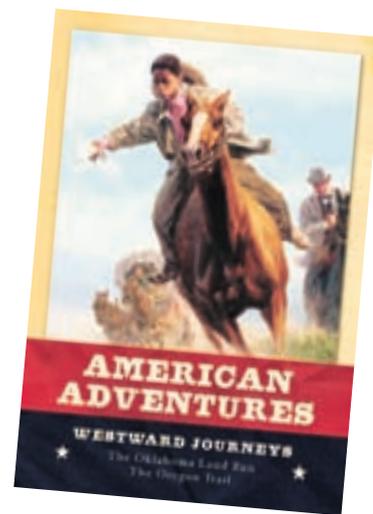
Someone said that on April 22 of that year (1889), any American could stake a claim in the Oklahoma Territory. Owning a farm was a dream for Moses's grandfather, who was once a slave. It wouldn't be easy to get to Oklahoma; in fact, it would be one of the hardest things the family would do. But do it they would — Moses would make sure of that.

In "A Book for Black-Eyed Susan" by Judy Young Cora and her family are leaving their home in Missouri and going west. But tragedy strikes, and Pa tells Cora that Aunt Alma and Uncle Lee are going to raise her new baby sister.

That makes Cora unhappy. She might never see her sister again, so she makes a special gift for Susan that Cora, too, will remember forever.

Sometimes, it's fun to imagine what life might have been like as a pioneer. This book helps your child understand the hardships and joys of a time more than a century ago that defined the American experience.

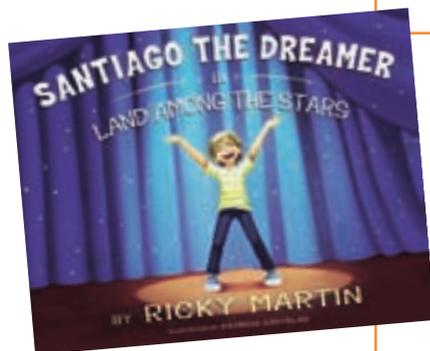
In each of three stories, young readers will see — from several van-



tage points — the bravery it took to travel cross-country before automobiles were invented. They'll learn that it wasn't always fun, and that danger and death were constant companions. And they'll see that kids their age made a difference, even in the smallest ways.

What's nice about a book like this is that the subjects of these stories are the same age as its intended readers. So if your 7-to-9-year-old young Wild West fan is searching for the next good read, then finding "American Adventures: Westward Journeys" should be his or her next project.

"American Adventures: Westward Journeys," by Judy Young and Devin Scillian [96 pages, 2013, \$6.99].



Help your future rock star dream on

Someday, your daughter's going to be something big.

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Teach your future "American Idol" contestant that it's going to take a bit of practice to reach her dreams with "Santiago the Dreamer in Land Among the Stars" by Ricky Martin.

From the time he was just a tiny boy, Santiago wanted to be a star.

He wanted to sing onstage, and maybe act. He wanted to see his name in lights. So when auditions were held for the annual school play, he decided to try out.

When he got there, another boy was auditioning and that kid was good. When it was Santiago's turn to perform, he felt nervous. Everyone laughed at him, and he was embarrassed.

That night, Santiago was sad when he told his father that he didn't get the part. But his father wasn't worried.

"Never give up," Papa said. "And no matter what you choose, always reach for the moon!"

Santiago fell asleep, thinking about what his father said. That night, he dreamed that he was a teacher, helping kids and inspiring them. Then he was a pilot in a "big jet," flying across the sky. He was a doctor, then an astronaut, then a famous dinosaur hunter, and a world-class baseball player. And then the best part of the whole night — Santiago dreamed that he was in front of a big crowd that was chanting his name!

It was all so amazing that he decided to practice the things he loved doing. He practiced dancing every chance he got. He sang at home and at school, inside and outside. He practiced so much that when something unexpected happened, Santiago the Dreamer had his eyes wide open!

I liked "Santiago the Dreamer in

Land Among the Stars." Martin offers his readers a feel-good story, and artist Patricia Castelao adds some of the most appealing illustrations I've seen in a good long while. The problem, I fear, is that the ending of the book — which seemed like it was lifted off a motivational poster — might be lost on fans of picture books. Will your 3-to-6-year-old grasp the meaning here? Would an older child consider a picture book to be too babyish?

Still, I keep looking at the illustrations and this story and I can't not recommend it. Kids with imagination and vision might like it just fine. For them, "Santiago the Dreamer in Land among the Stars" could be the start of something big.

"Santiago the Dreamer in Land Among the Stars," by Ricky Martin [32 pages, 2013, \$17.99].

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



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**DEAR
DR. KARYN**
DR. KARYN GORDON

Help kids open up

Dear Dr. Karyn,

I'm struggling to get my kids to talk to me. As a single parent, I have little time, so I want to maximize the time I do have to have meaningful conversations with them, but when I ask them anything they give one-word answers. What can I do to encourage my kids to talk and open up?

Dear parent,

I think that learning how to get our kids to talk to us is one of the most important skills we, as parents, can learn. When our kids share with us, we get a glimpse into their world. We earn the privilege to learn about their dreams, fears, hopes, and goals. So what can we do to encourage such a fruitful conversation? Here are four tips to get you started:

Pay attention to timing

The most important thing to consider before approaching your kids

is timing. Timing is everything — especially for teenagers! I've learned that for most kids, the best time to talk is after school or in the evening. Mornings are usually a disaster for meaningful conversations because kids are still waking up and most families are rushing out the door. Also, pay attention to your mood and theirs. I did research with 1,500 students and asked them a simple question: "If your parents did one thing different to encourage you to talk to them more, what would it be?"

The answer was, "Talk less, listen more, and be relaxed." Kids are very perceptive to their parents' emotions and moods!

Ask direct questions

Try focusing on asking fewer, but more direct, questions. Asking too many questions leads kids to feel interrogated (which most find annoying). So ask fewer, but more mean-

ingful open-ended questions (those that can't be answered with a yes or no). Some of my favorite open-ended questions are:

- "What was the best part of your day?" and "What was the worst part of your day?"

- "What was the funniest thing that happened?" and "What surprised you the most today?"

Get comfortable with silence

When silence happens in conversations, many people feel uneasy, stressed, and responsible to fill in the gaps. However, to cultivate great conversation, it's important to get comfortable with silence. Hundreds of times I've asked kids and teens questions and they simply did not know the answer right away. It wasn't until after I gave them time (and silence) to think it through that they would come up with the most thought-provoking answers. So remember to ask your question, pull back, and give your kids space to ponder their response.

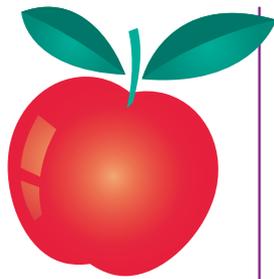
Talk sideways

Try talking sideways with your kids. What's this? It's one of my favorite strategies for getting kids to talk (this works particularly well for guys). I learned early on in my coaching practice that most of my male teen clients opened up significantly more if I didn't force eye contact with them. Since then hundreds of parents have told me that the "best conversations" they've had with their kids are in the car. Why? Because this environment naturally encourages sideways communication!

Other sideways environments include: walking, running, cooking, shopping, etc. Look for opportunities when you can "talk sideways," and enjoy connecting!

Dr. Karyn Gordon is one of North America's leading relationship and parenting experts. She is a regular contributor to "Good Morning America," founder of dk Leadership, best-selling author of "Dr. Karyn's Guide To The Teen Years" (Harper Collins), and motivational speaker to a quarter of a million people. Visit her at www.dkleadership.org and on Twitter: @DrKarynGordon.





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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Calendar

JANUARY



BBG celebrates Mother Nature's evergreens

Magnificent winter greens will be the topic of the day when Brooklyn Botanic Garden presents a “Light in Winter Discovery” workshop on Jan. 19.

Children are invited to celebrate the sights and smells of evergreen plants, and find out how they retain their colors all winter long. Little ones will dig into the science of evergreen leaves, learn fascinating facts, and identify pine trees by

counting their needles and sorting through a giant pinecone collection. Make a pillow of pine needles to take home, too.

“Light in Winter Discovery” workshop on Jan. 19 from 2 to 4 pm. Suitable for all ages. Free with admission.

Brooklyn Botanic Garden [1000 Washington Ave. at Eastern Parkway in Crown Heights, (718) 623-7220; www.bbg.org].

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 brooklyncalendar@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 BROOKLYN

Countdown: Brooklyn Children's Museum, 145 Brooklyn Ave. at St. Marks Avenue; (718) 735-4400; www.brooklynkids.org; 11:30 am and 2:30 pm; Free with museum admission.

Learn about the traditions behind the party and make a party hat to welcome in the new year.

New Year's Eve: Grand Army Plaza, Union Street between Flatbush Avenue and Prospect Park West; 11 pm; Free.

Celebrate the new year Brooklyn-style with a concert, refreshments, and the annual fireworks display.

FURTHER AFIELD

Ice carving: Bronx Zoo, 2300 Southern Blvd. at Boston Road, The Bronx; (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, with an interactive play area and an ice-carving contest.

THURS, JAN. 2

IN BROOKLYN

Tales of wonder: Brooklyn Children's Museum, 145 Brooklyn Ave. at St. Marks Avenue; (718) 735-4400; www.brooklynkids.org; 2:30 pm; Free with museum admission.

Children 5 years old and younger travel to far away places in their imagination by listening to stories from around the world.

SAT, JAN. 4

IN BROOKLYN

Blooming Babies: Brooklyn Children's Museum, 145 Brooklyn Ave. at St. Marks Avenue; (718) 735-4400; www.brooklynkids.org; 11:30 am-12:30 pm; Free with museum admission.



Rock out with Pop Ups at BAM

Hop to BAM Kids and see Brooklyn indie crooners Pop Ups rock the stage on Jan. 11.

Chase away the winter blues and enjoy a special, multimedia,

musical adventure with Jason Rabinowitz and Jacob Stein, who will perform songs from their new album, *Radio Jungle*, and debut album *Outside Voices* — sure to be a hit with the 3-to-10-

year-old set.

The Pop Ups on Jan. 11 at 11 am. \$7 for kids and \$9 for adults.

BAM Kids [30 Lafayette Ave. at Ashland Place in Fort Greene (718) 636-4129; www.bam.org].

It's a snowy day! Children 18 months to 2 years old learn about the season through finger play, stories, and fun activities.

Subway Safari: New York Transit Museum, Boerum Place at Schermerhorn Street; (718) 694-1600; www.mta.info/mta/museum; 11:30 am-12:15 pm; Free with transit museum admission.

Children 2 years and older learn about the trains through stories and games.

Owl pellets: Brooklyn Children's Museum, 145 Brooklyn Ave. at St. Marks Avenue; (718) 735-4400; www.brooklynkids.org; 1:30 pm; Free with museum admission.

Children 4 years and older learn about owls, what they eat, how they eat, and how do they digest their food.

Transit mysteries: New York Transit Museum, Boerum Place at Schermerhorn Street; (718) 694-1600; www.mta.info/mta/museum; 1:30 pm;

Free with transit museum admission.

Children of all ages have fun being a detective, seeking clues, and uncovering fun facts about transit history.

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

Music, entertainment, and fun activities.

SUN, JAN. 5

IN BROOKLYN

Blooming Babies: 11:30 am-12:30 pm. Brooklyn Children's Museum. See Saturday, Jan. 4.

Owl pellets: 1:30 pm. Brooklyn Children's Museum. See Saturday, Jan. 4.

Transit mysteries: 1:30 pm. New York Transit Museum. See Saturday, Jan. 4.

Melissa Guion: Word Bookstore, 126 Franklin St. between Milton and Noble streets; (718) 383-0096; www.wordbrooklyn.com; 2 pm; Free.

Author of "Baby Penguins Love Their Mama." Recommended for ages 3-5, though all ages welcome.

The Sleepy Garden: Brooklyn Botanic Garden, 1000 Washington Ave. at Eastern Parkway; (718) 623-7220; www.bbg.org; 2-4 pm; Free with admission to the gardens.

Drop-in workshop where children will learn where flowers, leaves, and bees go in the winter, as well as which animals hibernate and how they come back in spring.

MON, JAN. 6

IN BROOKLYN

Blooming Babies: 11:30 am-12:30 pm. Brooklyn Children's Museum. See Saturday, Jan. 4.

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Calendar

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

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TUES, JAN. 7

IN BROOKLYN

"Passionaries": PowerHouse Arena, 37 Main St. at Water Street; (718) 666-3049; www.powerhousearena.com; 7-9 pm; Free.

Young adult author Tonya Hurley launches her new book. RSVP required. For older teens.

THURS, JAN. 9

IN BROOKLYN

Tales of wonder: 2:30 pm. Brooklyn Children's Museum. See Thursday, Jan. 2.

FURTHER AFIELD

Baby time: Kingsbridge Library Center, 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd. at Briggs Avenue, the Bronx; (718) 579-4244; www.nypl.org; 10:30 am-11 am; Free.

From birth to 18 months old with parent or caregiver. Features finger-play, songs, stories, and puppets.

SAT, JAN. 11

IN BROOKLYN

Icky fest weekend: Brooklyn Children's Museum, 145 Brooklyn Ave. at St. Marks Avenue; (718) 735-4400; www.brooklynkids.org; 10 am-5 pm; Free with museum admission.

Children learn all about what is gross, gooey, yucky, and icky with fun activities.

The Pop-UPs: BAM Kids, 30 Lafayette Ave. at Ashland Place; (718) 636-4129; www.bam.org; 11 am; \$7 (\$9 adults).

The group performs Radio Jungle, a comedic multimedia musical adventure.

Subway Safari: 11:30 am-12:15 pm. New York Transit Museum. See Saturday, Jan. 4.

The Pop Ups: BAM Fisher, 321 Ashland Pl. at Hanson Place; (718) 636-4100; www.bam.org; 1 pm; \$10.

"Inside Outside": New York Transit Museum, Boerum Place at Schermerhorn Street; (718) 694-1600; www.mta.info/mta/museum; 1:30 pm; Free with transit museum admission.

After reading the book, children create inside-outside pictures of the subway.

Get icky with the Trummy-tones: Brooklyn Children's Museum, 145 Brooklyn Ave. at St. Marks Avenue; (718) 735-4400; www.brooklynkids.org; 4 pm; Free with museum admission.

After spending all day with yucky stuff, listen to the Trummytones, led by Vinny Nobile. The high-energy con-



The Year of the Horse!

Gung ho fat choy! Celebrate the Chinese New Year — the Year of the Horse! — at the Brooklyn Children's Museum on Jan. 25 and 26, and Feb. 1 and 2.

Make crafts, watch a puppet show, listen to traditional folk tales, and participate in a dragon

march through the museum.

Chinese Lunar New Year from Jan. 25-26 and Feb. 1-2 at 11:30 am. Free with museum admission.

Brooklyn Children's Museum [145 Brooklyn Ave. at St. Marks Avenue in Crown Heights, (718) 735-4400; www.brooklynkids.org].

cert is just the thing to wash all the yucky, icky away. Presented by Met Life Early Learners.

SUN, JAN. 12

IN BROOKLYN

Icky fest weekend: 10 am-5 pm. Brooklyn Children's Museum. See Saturday, Jan. 11.

Story time: powerHouse on 8th, 1111 Eighth Ave. between 11th and 12th streets; (718) 666-3049; www.powerhousearena.com; 11:30 am; Free.

Melissa Guion, author of "Baby Penguins Love their Mama," leads this week's session for children. RSVP requested.

"Inside Outside": 1:30 pm. New York Transit Museum. See Saturday, Jan. 11.

"Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day": Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts at Brooklyn College, 2900 Campus Rd., between Amersfort Place and Kenilworth Place; (718) 951-4500; www.brooklyncenteronline.org; 2 pm; \$7.

Have you ever had a really bad day? Alexander has, and he has to learn to deal with it. This musical is suitable for

children 4 years and older.

Get icky with the Trummy-tones: 4 pm. Brooklyn Children's Museum. See Saturday, Jan. 11.

THURS, JAN. 16

IN BROOKLYN

Tales of wonder: 2:30 pm. Brooklyn Children's Museum. See Thursday, Jan. 2.

SAT, JAN. 18

IN BROOKLYN

Let's March: Brooklyn Children's Museum, 145 Brooklyn Ave. at St. Marks Avenue; (718) 735-4400; www.brooklynkids.org; 11:30 am; Free with museum admission.

Children learn about the Civil Rights movement and hear stories about Martin Luther King, Jr., and his famous march on Washington.

Subway Safari: 11:30 am-12:15 pm. New York Transit Museum. See Saturday, Jan. 4.

Walking tour: Fort Greene Park Visitor Center, Enter park at Myrtle Avenue and Washington Park; (718) 722-3218; 1 pm; Free.

Join Urban Rangers for a tour of his-

toric sites of the American Revolution. Wear appropriate clothing.

Junior Engineers: New York Transit Museum, Boerum Place at Schermerhorn Street; (718) 694-1600; www.mta.info/mta/museum; 1:30 pm; Free with transit museum admission.

Children dig up fun facts and treasures about the transit system.

SUN, JAN. 19

IN BROOKLYN

Let's March: 11:30 am. Brooklyn Children's Museum. See Saturday, Jan. 18.

Junior Engineers: 1:30 pm. New York Transit Museum. See Saturday, Jan. 18.

Winter greens: Brooklyn Botanic Garden, 1000 Washington Ave. at Eastern Parkway; (718) 623-7220; www.bbg.org; 2-4 pm; Free with admission to the gardens.

Children celebrate the sights and smells of the season, dig into science of evergreen trees, and make a fragrant pine needle pillow. Drop-in workshop open to all.

THURS, JAN. 23

IN BROOKLYN

Tales of wonder: 2:30 pm. Brooklyn Children's Museum. See Thursday, Jan. 2.

FURTHER AFIELD

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

SAT, JAN. 25

IN BROOKLYN

Lunar New Year: Brooklyn Children's Museum, 145 Brooklyn Ave. at St. Marks Avenue; (718) 735-4400; www.brooklynkids.org; 11:30 am; Free with museum admission.

Celebrate and learn all about the Year of the Horse through art activities, a puppet show, and folk tales.

Subway Safari: 11:30 am-12:15 pm. New York Transit Museum. See Saturday, Jan. 4.

Transportation inventions: New York Transit Museum, Boerum Place at Schermerhorn Street; (718) 694-1600; www.mta.info/mta/museum; 1:30 pm; Free with transit museum admission.

Use your imagination and create blueprints for trains with wacky materials. For children 4 years and older.

Astronomy: Salt Marsh Nature Center, 3302 Avenue U; (718) 421-2021; 6 pm; Free.

The urban rangers will be your guide

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

to the solar system, discussing science, history and folklore.

SUN, JAN. 26

IN BROOKLYN

Special day for special kids:

New York Transit Museum, Boerum Place at Schermerhorn Street; (718) 694-1600; www.mta.info/mta-museum; 10 am-1 pm; Free with transit museum admission.

For families with special-needs children. Enjoy activities and stories.

Lunar New Year: 11:30 am. Brooklyn Children's Museum. See Saturday, Jan. 25.

Understanding climate: Salt Marsh Nature Center, 3302 Avenue U; (718) 421-2021; 1 pm; Free.

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

Transportation inventions: 1:30 pm. New York Transit Museum. See Saturday, Jan. 25.

Lunar New Year celebration: Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts at Brooklyn College, 2900 Campus Rd. between Amersfort Place and Kenilworth Place; (718) 951-4500; www.brooklyncenteronline.org; 3 pm; \$30 (\$15 children).

Join with the Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company to celebrate the year of the Horse.

"Hollow City": PowerHouse Arena, 37 Main St. at Water Street; (718) 666-3049; www.powerhousearena.com; 5-7 pm; Free.

Second novel in the Miss Peregrine's Peculiar Children book series by Ransom Riggs. RSVP requested.

MON, JAN. 27

FURTHER AFIELD

Pajama night: Kingsbridge Library Center, 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd. at Briggs Avenue, the Bronx; (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.

THURS, JAN. 30

FURTHER AFIELD

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

SAT, FEB. 1

IN BROOKLYN

Lunar New Year: 11:30 am. Brooklyn Children's Museum. See Saturday, Jan. 25.



Brooklyn Ice

Prospect Park's new skating school

Olympic dreams are a somersault away when the after-school, figure-skating school opens on Jan. 13 at the new LeFrak Center at Lakeside in Prospect Park.

Students in first-through-eighth grades are eligible for the Brooklyn Ice-run program, offering skating instructions, plus homework help, educational activities, workshops on nutrition, college readiness courses, and off-ice exercises, including Pilates.

Krasnoyarsk National Dance Company of Siberia:

Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts at Brooklyn College, 2900 Campus Rd. between Amersfort Place and Kenilworth Place; (718) 951-4500; www.brooklyncenteronline.org; 8 pm; \$36-\$45.

More than 55 dancers and musicians incorporate colorful folklore costumes, songs, and customs to celebrate the heritage of Siberia.

LONG-RUNNING

IN BROOKLYN

"Album Tracks: Subway Record Covers": New York Transit Museum, Boerum Place at Schermerhorn Street; (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 sub-

way and elevated system. Free for kids who qualify for the free or reduced lunch program, but there is a deposit for skates and a refundable registration fee. Participants must commit to attend the twice-weekly sessions, held on Mondays and Wednesdays, from Jan. 13 through March, 2014, from 4 to 6:15 pm (weather permitting). Register through Dec. 31.

LeFrak Center [Lakeside, Ocean Avenue at Parkside Avenue in Prospect Park (718) 594-7439; www.brooklynice.org].

way and elevated system.

Sensory room: Brooklyn Children's Museum, 145 Brooklyn Ave. at St. Marks Avenue; (718) 735-4400; www.brooklynkids.org; Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays, 11:30 am-12:30 pm and 2:30-3:30 pm, Now - Sun, Jan. 26, 2014; Free with museum admission.

For children with autism spectrum disorder and their families. Space is limited. First come, first served.

Bug out!: Brooklyn Children's Museum, 145 Brooklyn Ave. at St. Marks Avenue; (718) 735-4400; www.brooklynkids.org; Tuesdays, 11:30 am-12:30 pm and 2:30-3:30 pm, Now - Tues, Jan. 28, 2014; Free with museum admission.

Children of all ages meet grasshoppers, worms, and Madagascar hissing cockroaches.

Touch tank: Brooklyn Children's Museum, 145 Brooklyn Ave. at St. Marks Avenue; (718) 735-4400;

www.brooklynkids.org; Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays, 11:30 am-12:30 pm and 2:30-3:30 pm, Now - Sun, Jan. 26, 2014; Free with museum admission.

Children of all ages touch a starfish, a horseshoe crab, or a sea snail.

Ballroom dance classes: FIAO Beacon Community Center at IS 96, 99 Avenue P between W. 11th and W.12th streets; (718) 232-2266; Wednesdays, 6-9 pm; Free.

For beginners of all ages.

Arty facts: Brooklyn Museum, 200 Eastern Pkwy. at Washington Avenue; (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.

After-school skating: Prospect Park Wollman Rink, Ocean Avenue at Parkside Avenue; (718) 594-7439; www.brooklynice.org; Mondays and Wednesdays, 4-6:15 pm, Mon, Jan. 13 - Wed, March 26, 2014; Free.

At the newly minted LeFrak rinks at Lakeside, students are offered skating, homework help, education activities, and off-ice exercises. These are just a few of the programs in the winter program. Children can also attend workshops on nutrition, college readiness, and so much more. Students must commit to the twice per week sessions. There is a refundable registration fee and a skate deposit due at registration through Dec. 31, 2013.

TheatreSports: The Gallery Players, 199 14th St. between Second and Third avenues; (718) 595-0547; Sunday, Jan. 26, noon; Sunday, Feb. 16, noon; Sunday, March 23, noon; Sunday, April 27, noon; Sunday, May 18, noon; Sunday, June 15, noon; \$10.

Competition improvisational show for children of all ages.

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.

Holiday train show: New York Botanical Garden, 200th Street and Kazimiroff Boulevard, the Bronx; (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

Continued on page 68

Calendar

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

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wide variety of ground and features favorites including the Statue of Liberty, Rockefeller Center, the Brooklyn Bridge, and many others.

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 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 X 353; www.nyscience.org; Weekdays, 10 am-5 pm, Saturdays and Sundays, 10 am-6 pm, Now - Tues, Dec. 31; \$4

'Awake' at New Victory



Photo by Elizabeth Honey

The enchanting tale of Miss Ivory Tinklefinger comes to the stage at New Victory Theatre 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 Theatre, 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 weekdays, and at 11 am on Monday. \$14-\$25.

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

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 X 353; 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.

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 X 353; 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 NYSCI admission.

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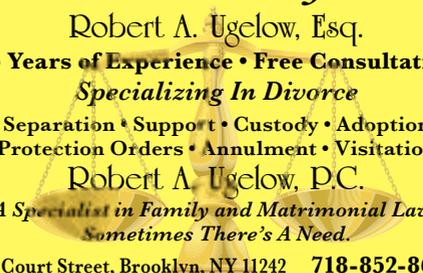
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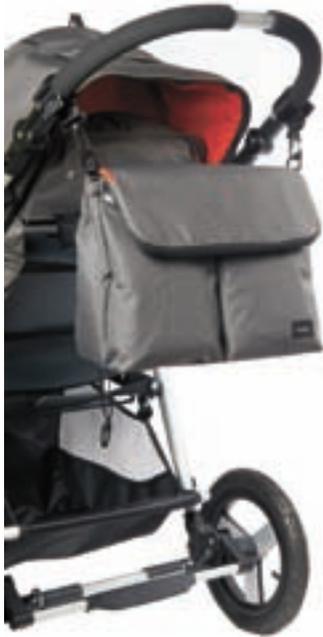
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New & Noteworthy

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!

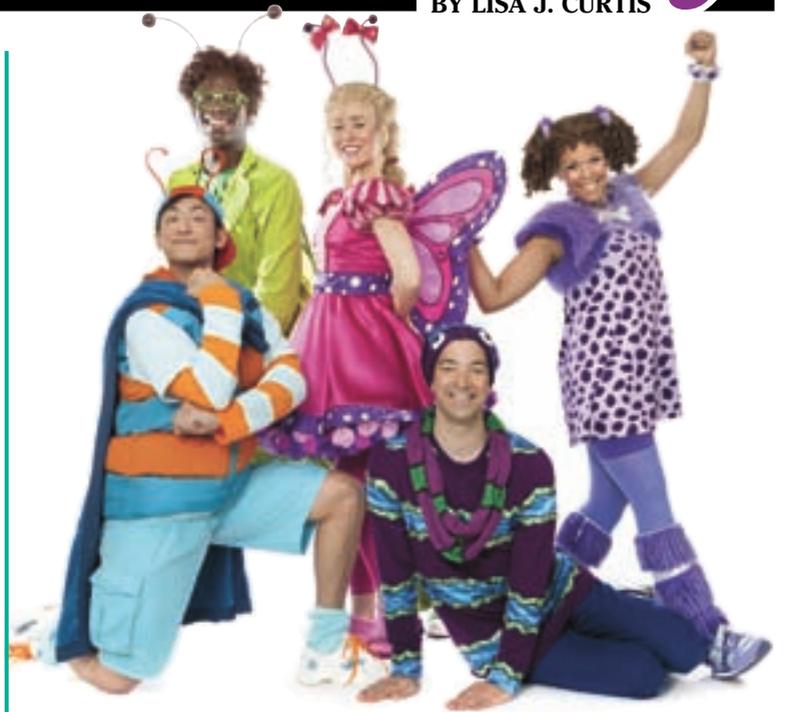
5-Ounce Bouche Baby Take N' Shake with Integrated Feeding Compartment, \$17.99, www.bouchebaby.com.

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.

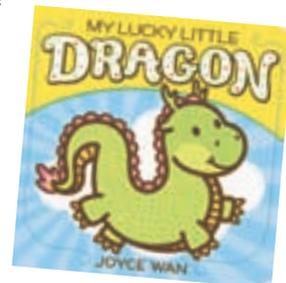
"Morning Wish Garden" CD by The Ohmies, \$12, www.theohmies.com.

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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