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Living in a 'blue' state

November has been a very upsetting month. The election outcome has made so many people feel down and confused, particularly here in our city which overwhelmingly supported Hillary Clinton. There has been an air of disbelief and shock as settled in. Teachers and parents throughout the city have had to deal with children reacting to the rancor and partisanship of this election cycle, and bitter words and sexual innuendo became a part of the discourse. All ugly stuff and certainly not the kind of example of grown-up behavior we want our children to emulate.



Blue state/red state, I'm getting sick and tired of the mass media dividing us up the way they do. Our votes seem disenfranchised when we are categorized this way. The electoral college is impossible to explain to adults, let alone to children, and why should people in three or four

states be the deciding factor as to who wins such important elections? Isn't it time for our nation to do away with this nonsense and to have a direct vote like other countries? Isn't it also time for us to be voting on Sundays instead of on a work day that almost no one has off? Isn't it also time for all this polling to stop — which I am absolutely certain sways the vote and actually does result in rigged elections.

Millions of new young voters participated in this election and most of them walked away disappointed and disenfranchised and seeing the process as disingenuous. We can only hope they won't be opting out moving forward, thinking that they can't make a difference. We already have enough of our citizens opting out of voting. We need to do everything we can to encourage their participation on every level. Bernie Sanders, thank goodness, is

still out there inspiring and communicating to this very important demographic. Our future depends on them.

Finally, I am blue because my daughter has had to deal with a few surgeries resulting from a recent fall. The fall was bad enough to shatter her ankle, and she will be spending a number of months healing and doing rehab. It certainly has put a crimp in her style and also in mine. Our children are still our children, even when they get taller than us and even when they move out and are on their own. We are parents forever.

I'm very grateful to all the people who help put together these magazines and who manage our website and all our other digital initiatives. I wish them and you, our readers, and all our many advertisers, a very Happy Holiday Season. Thanks for reading and Have a Happy New Year!

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Ho, ho, Hanukkah

Tips on celebrating both Hanukkah and Christmas

BY CHRISTINA KATZ

You don't have to be an interfaith family to celebrate both Hanukkah and Christmas each year. Any family can choose to celebrate whichever holiday traditions they wish. Holiday joy can be doubled, rather than halved, when you choose to light the menorah and decorate the Christmas tree to honor the cultural and religious traditions of both parents.

So forget the "December Dilemma." When it comes to religion, families increasingly run the Judeo-Christian gamut. In our family, we have Orthodox Jews on one side of the family tree and born-again Christians on the other side. But my husband and I both share the same beliefs about diversity, tolerance, and spirituality. And that's what we intend to pass on to our daughter.

As a woman who was raised Catholic and has been happily married to a Jewish man for the past 13 years, I can attest that once you become a parent in an interfaith family, you quickly become accustomed to not being able to please everyone. But since the wisdom of your hearts brought you and your partner together in the first place, why not call on that same source of wisdom to guide you through creating your own version of happy holidays?

Here are a few tips based on what our family has learned from holding the middle ground over the years:

Talk to each other first and last

The bottom line on family celebrations, holiday or otherwise, is to always do whatever you and your spouse deem best for your family. The only way to come to an understanding about what this means is to discuss it with each other first and last.

Be prepared for this to be an ongoing conversation, and probably one that you revisit each year.

Protect your joint point of view

Never let bossy or opinionated family members horn in on conversations that



rightly belong between you and your partner. You only have one spouse, and that's the person whose opinion you should value most. Your kids come next, and the grandparents after them.

Don't treat your parents like children or allow them to treat you like a child. This behavior will only create conflicts between you and your spouse.

Ignore disapproving outsiders

Never apologize for being an interfaith

family, even if people in your extended family or circle of close friends do not approve of your union. You are not seeking their permission — as Perchick expressed so boldly in "Fiddler On The Roof" — you are asking for their blessing.

Creating harmonious and joyful dual holidays in your own home is your parental right and your familial duty, even if it means agreeing to disagree with certain members of your extended family.

Stick to separate but equal

Christmas may be more common and commercial than Hanukkah, but don't let that trump your holiday fun. The nice thing about Hanukkah is that it lasts for eight nights. Light the menorah candles and say the Hanukkah prayer every night, if you possibly can. You may be amazed at how moving and inspiring such simple rituals can be, even on busy school nights.

Look for the quieter, more awe-inspiring moments in Christmas as well, such as ending the day admiring the beauty of the decorated tree and window lights.

Keep both sets of traditions

At our house, we celebrate as much of both traditions as we can, without a worry about whether the holidays overlap or not. For me, this means the

Christmas tree, the presents, the cookies, the big dinner. For my husband this means lighting two menorahs for eight nights (one for him and one for my daughter), having our daughter's friends over for potato latkes, and some lively dreidel games.

Don't double your gift budget

We make an effort to celebrate the bounty of two holidays without going overboard. If you are an interfaith family, your kids' friends may consider them "lucky" because they assume that they get double the gifts every holiday season. However, that's not necessarily the case at our house.

Our daughter typically gets a little present on the first day of Hanukkah and a bigger present on the last day of Hanukkah. One set of grandparents send a couple of

little Hanukkah gifts and a check and the other sends a couple of stocking stuffers and a check. The amount of gifts she receives is essentially the same as it would be if we only celebrated one holiday.

Share the love

Another thing we enjoy about dual holidays is that our daughter can share traditions about both holidays with her friends, no matter what religion they follow, exposing them to a culture they may not have had the opportunity to learn about.

Participate wisely

When invited to join a new or old tradition on either side of the family, give the ritual a chance. We will try just about anything once. But we reserve the right to say “no” to pressure or anything that makes us uncomfortable.

Maintaining an atmosphere where you can say “yes” or “no” to your parents without stern chastisement may not come easily in your extended family system. But start trying it, or you’ll never get there.

Honor the choices of others

We don’t try to protect our family members from our choices. They need to be exposed to what we value, if we expect them

Fun holiday family reads

Hanukkah:
 “Hanukkah!” by Roni Schotter and Marilyn Hafner
 “Lots Of Latkes, A Hanukkah Story” by Sandy Lanton and Vicki Jo Redenbaugh
 “When Mindy Saved Hanukkah” by Eric Kimmel
 “It’s A Miracle! A Hanukkah Story-book” by Stephanie Spinner and Jill McElmurry

Christmas:
 “The Christmas Story” by Jane Werner Watson and Eloise Wilkin
 “’Twas The Night Before Christmas or Account Of A Visit From St. Nicholas” by Clement Clarke Moore
 “How The Grinch Stole Christmas” by Dr. Seuss
 “The Polar Express” by Chris Van Allsburg

Celebrating both:
 “My Two Holidays, A Hanukkah and Christmas Story” by Danielle Novack and Phyllis Harris
 “Light The Lights, A Story About Celebrating Hanukkah And Christmas” by Margaret Moorman
 “Daddy Christmas and Hanukkah Mama” by Selina Alko



to understand and accept our choices. However, we also try to respect the choices that each of our family members make without imposing our life choices on them. The Jewish families get Happy Hanukkah cards and the Christian families get Christmas cards. When we cross over,

we go with “Happy Holidays.”
Author, journalist, and writing coach Christina Katz loves celebrating the winter holidays with her family and friends. Each year her family enjoys exchanging ornaments for the tree and inviting a new group of friends over to play the dreidel game and enjoy potato latkes.



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Rock your resolutions

How to improve your life in 2017

BY GOLDA SMITH

The new year is almost here. What excites you most about it? Maybe it's the idea of wiping the slate clean and starting over. Or perhaps it is the ritual of making those resolutions to achieve more and do better.

According to the *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 45 percent of Americans make resolutions; however, many of those people had abandoned their resolutions after three months. While I am sure most people have great intentions, and want to achieve their resolutions, the stumbling block for most is that they have brought the habits, attitudes, and behaviors that haven't worked in the past year into the present.

If you want something new, you must do something new ... and yes, it can be scary and it is work.

If you are ready to confidently make 2017 YOUR year, then keep reading. What separates the people that achieve their

goals from the those that don't? These four habits, attitudes, and behaviors certainly are not an exhaustive list, but it is a great start. The first habit to leave in 2016 is:

The habit of procrastination

We have all had our moment or two with procrastination. Putting off balancing the check book, cleaning the closet, or getting up an hour early like we promised to go work out. I laugh as I write this paragraph, because it applies to me as well, so let's all have a good laugh.

There are several types of procrastinators, from the drama addict or the angry giver to the neurotic perfectionist, but the bottom line is that prolonged avoidance is an invitation to pain.

To leave procrastination behind, you have to identify the underlying cause of the procrastination. Is it to control a situation, to rebel, to avoid pain, or some other reason? When you can name it, then you can address it and finally put it behind

you, or at least learn how to navigate it.

Stop the comparison game

Social media is my adult playground. I have made some great relationships through Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. At the same time, it was also a source of great discomfort for me and maybe for you, too. Like most of you, I would spend way too much time mindlessly scrolling through Instagram photos and thus, I found myself comparing my body — which did the miraculous job of growing two humans — to the half-naked Photoshopped bodies of 20-something-year-old women. The comparison game is self-inflicted cruelty.

My suggestion? Scroll through your Instagram account and check your feed. If the images in the accounts you follow leave you feeling empty or wishing you had *that* body, un-follow that account now. Life is too short to not feel like you are enough just the way you are, which brings me to the third habit you can leave in 2016:

The daily weigh-in

I know people that weigh themselves several times a day. Did you know that the average person has a five-pound weight fluctuation in an average day? Functions like breathing, sweating, eating, and drinking all influence the number on the scale. I understand that you want to see progress (especially if your goal is to release weight) however, constantly weighing yourself and wishing for the scale to magically show your magic number is not going to make it happen any faster. Instead, focus on the inches you are loosing and how you feel in your clothes.

Negative inner (and outer) dialogue

This is probably the biggest behavior you can leave in 2016 that will have the biggest impact on your life. What you think about yourself or someone else eventually comes out of your mouth! Think about that for a moment. Women are so quick to think and make negative comments about themselves. Let's make a pledge to make a conscious decision to stop talking negatively about ourselves and others — yes, even the nosey neighbor we can't stand. The next time you catch yourself thinking a negative thought, stop and speak a word of gratitude.

I sincerely wish each of you a very happy and prosperous New Year, and while it can be a little scary (let's be honest, it can be downright scary) to let go of the familiar — even if it is dysfunctional — and embrace something new, I know you can do it. Let 2017 be your year of "Yes!"

Golda Smith, a mom of two, is a certified personal trainer and health coach living in Brooklyn. She blogs at FitMommyBlog.com

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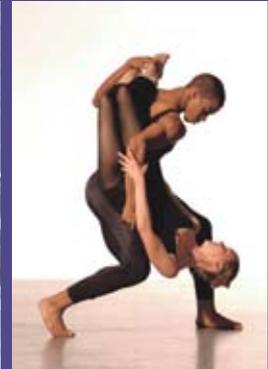
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‘Holiday’ wishes

Celebrating the season with freedom and love

BY CAROLYN WATERBURY-TIEMAN

We are in the midst of what is commonly known as the holiday season. From the end of October to the middle of January, there are numerous special occasions celebrated. Some of these have deeply religious roots, while others have cultural, historical, or national origins. Not everyone celebrates all of them and no two people celebrate or experience any one of them in exactly the same way. We are free to celebrate our religious, cultural, historical, and national heritage. While this freedom guarantees us the right to have and practice our personal beliefs, it does not give us the right to impose our views on others or penalize those who do not share them. That is the foundation upon which this country is built.

The word “holiday” can be traced back to Old English. Holiday is a modern version of the word “haligdaeg,” which historically was reserved for referring to special religious days or “holy days.” Currently, the word holiday is used to indicate any period of time, from one day to several, set aside as a special occasion where we are not expected to go to work, attend school, or follow our ordinary routine. The occasion may or may not be religious in nature and can range from dates of national significance, such as the Fourth of July, to dates of personal significance, such as family vacations.

The generic term, holiday, lends itself to composing an inclusive greeting that acknowledges the festive atmosphere characterizing this time of year, while recognizing and respecting the diversity of celebrations that take place. A simple,

“Happy Holidays,” allows the greeter to express his seasonal cheer without presuming the recipient is celebrating any specific occasion. Yet, this innocent salutation has been at the center of a divisive controversy for the past few years. As someone who associates this season with love, peace, hope, joy, and unity, I find this profoundly troubling.

The usual pleasure derived from preparing for seasonal festivities is marred by reports of ugly exchanges between adults over issues like coffee cup colors and designs. When adults start bickering over whose is the most important or the “real” holiday, I find myself wondering why they are so easily threatened? What difference does it make what or how other people celebrate? How does what others do or don’t do take away from their experience of the holidays?

Is their celebration diminished by others celebrating differently or not at all? Are their beliefs invalid because others don't share them?

The desperate need for others to profess the same beliefs and participate in the same practices in order to validate one's own beliefs and practices suggests an underlying insecurity. If that is the case, perhaps what is needed is a reevaluation of the strength of their convictions.

If we value our freedom to believe and our right to practice those beliefs through our holiday celebrations, then we must extend that freedom to others. We can accept their right to believe and practice as they choose without having to agree with them, approve of them, or adopt those choices for ourselves.

While I am no expert on religion, I have read enough to know that one of the basic tenets of every major religion can be summarized in these words, "Treat others the way you would like to be treated." It doesn't say, "treat others the way you have been treated." It says, treat others the way you would like to be treated. And there is no disclaimer in parentheses after this statement, in any of the holy texts, that says to do so only if others look like you, agree with you, or believe like you. Whatever

What difference does it make what or how other people celebrate? How does what others do or don't do take away from their experience of the holidays? Is their celebration diminished by others celebrating differently or not at all?

holiday we celebrate, and however we choose to celebrate it, we must respect the right of others to celebrate theirs in their own way.

My son and daughter-by-love will be celebrating the holidays for the first time as a married couple this year. They stopped here to visit for a few days following their honeymoon. Before leaving, they asked to take some decorations from our collection to begin their own. How lovely to think of those ornaments adding holiday cheer to their new home. What an honor to be included in this unique way in their celebration as they begin creating their own traditions. Will they be celebrating in exactly the same way we will be celebrating? No. Does that mean they are being disloyal to the traditions they were raised with? No. Does that mean they have the right to think

and choose for themselves? Yes!

As I mentioned before, we are in the midst of the holiday season. The season of giving. My gift to you is a song. One of my favorites from an album with John Denver and The Muppets called "A Christmas Together." The song is titled "A Christmas Wish." The basic message is this — if you believe in love, that is reason enough for us to celebrate together. If we truly believe in and practice love, that will be more than enough to make peace last throughout the coming year.

Carolyn Waterbury-Tieman is a resident of Lexington, Ky. She has been married for 29 years and has two sons. She spent 15 years in various agencies and clinics as a family therapist and parent educator and has written extensively on the topic of parenting. To contact her, please e-mail parent4life@yahoo.com.

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December 21, 2016 8:00 am

P.S. 307
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December 6, 2016 9:30 am
December 12, 2016 6:00 pm
January 10, 2017 9:30 am

P.S. 54
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December 7, 2016 9:00 am & 5:00 pm
December 12, 2016 9:00 am
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For additional information call the schools or contact:
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Applications Accepted for September 2017 Enrollment

Gifts for teacher

Fifteen fabulous ideas, all for \$10 and under

BY DENISE YEARIAN

Finding a gift your child's teacher will enjoy at a price you can afford can be a challenging task. But it doesn't have to be. Here's a list of 15 fabulous \$10-and-under gift suggestions:

You're an angel. Get a list from the teacher of practical things she can use in the classroom, and then create an angel tree. Children who want to give a gift can choose an angel item that will benefit the teacher and the classroom.

Contribute to charity. Teachers like it when families donate to a charitable organization in the student or classroom's name. Suggest names of charitable organizations that focus on helping children, then let your child choose one to give to. Follow up with a note to the teacher letting her know about your giving efforts.

Practical potpourri. Teachers don't often realize what they need to have on hand until it's too late, so an assortment of practical sundries makes a great gift. Ideas include Chapstick, a lint roller, safety pins, Tide-to-Go, Static Guard, and a small tool kit. Or consider a collection of health and wellness items to keep the classroom flu-free this winter: tissues, hand sanitizer, disinfectant spray, and Clorox wipes.

Conference day coupons. Conference times make it difficult for teachers to grab a hot meal or squeeze in a healthy snack. But parents can help by giving post-dated special delivery coupons. Send in a paid-for pizza one night during conference time. Or create a homemade fresh fruit basket and deliver it to the school when teachers are there for 13 hours straight.

Medley of rewards. Create an assortment of rewards and incentives the teacher can use in the classroom such as stickers, character pencils, and mini erasers. Websites such as www.OrientalTrading.com have a large variety of products and may offer free shipping.

Time-honored efforts. Most teachers welcome volunteer efforts. Create a coupon offering your services to make copies, grade papers, or prepare classroom sup-



plies after hours. Or offer to come in once a month to read to the class, help with science projects, or tutor students who need a little assistance.

Crazy about cocoa. Chocolate, either in candy or baked goods, is a top choice amongst teachers. If you make something yourself, include the recipe, so they can duplicate it when they are craving chocolate in the future.

Thumbs-up planter. Purchase a terracotta pot and have your child place random thumbprints on it using different colors of paint. Use a permanent marker to turn the thumbprints into different bugs and flowers. Fill the pot with a live plant and attach a note that says, "Thank you for helping children grow."

Best bet bookends. Every classroom needs bookends, but they can be costly. If

you can't find a set on sale, pick up a couple of bricks from the home improvement store and cover them with a layer of soft foam and school-themed material.

You've got talent! If you have a special skill, talent, or interest, gift it to your teacher. Are you a hair stylist? Offer a haircut. Manicurist? Offer a manicure. If you like to bake, treat your teacher to a baker's choice club membership. Whip up a batch of cinnamon rolls and include a coupon for one baked good every month between now and school year's end. In the future, deliver the baked item on the same day each month so your teacher knows when to expect it.

Take note! Writing supplies are a useful luxury. Purchase a pack of pretty stationery, blank thank you notes, or paper with matching envelopes so the teacher can write letters to her parents. Or personalize the gift by having your child paint a watercolor picture. Scan it on the computer, crop the image, print it on vellum paper and then mount it onto colored cardstock and give it with matching envelopes.

Bestow books. Purchase your child's favorite book and donate it to the school library. On the inside cover, have your child create a sticker that says, "Donated in honor of (teacher's name) by (child's name)," along with the date.

Group project

Need some collective classroom gifts suggestions? Consider these:

- Invite several families to join you in taking out a children's magazine subscription for the classroom. Websites such as www.Amazon.com and www.MagazinesUSA.com offer deeply discounted rates to such publications as Highlights, Ranger Rick, Your Big Backyard and more.

- Pick up a small, flip-style photo album and fill it with crowd-pleasing recipes submitted by other families in the classroom. Title it, "Class of 2017 Cookbook" and package it together with a couple of kitchen accessories: spatula,

mixing spoons, and measuring cups.

- Teachers love to help other students learn. Gather money from other families and purchase a gift certificate to a local cosmetology school for a manicure, pedicure, or haircut. Package it with a comb, brush, deep hair conditioning packet, and the school's brochure of services.

- Gift certificates are a popular present this time of year. Suggest students in the classroom all purchase \$5 gift cards to the same educational, book, or dollar store, or local eatery. Collectively, it will make enough to buy something useful or give the teacher a night out on the town.

Reel fine. Make a movie-themed package and include a \$5 gift card to Redbox movie rentals, a box of microwave popcorn, and Swedish Fish or Milk Duds candy. Stop by a local movie theater and purchase a clean popcorn bucket for a minimal cost to use for themed packaging.

Great games. Keep kids occupied indoors during inclement weather by purchasing classroom games. Find out what games and activities the teacher does

and doesn't have, then watch for sales in store flyers, look online, or find them at a garage sale.

Kid crafted. Teachers agree the best gifts come from the heart, not the pocket. Cards with sincere sentiments or pictures drawn by students are the most cherished presents of all.

Denise Morrison Yearian is a former educator and editor of two parenting magazines, and the mother of three children and four grandchildren.

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65 Park Place, Park Slope,
718-622-1203

www.brooklynpreschoolofscience.com

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800 Gates Ave, Bedford-Stuyvesant, 718-443-2136
www.lacimacharterschool.org

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We are proud to be in our second year of building solid Restorative Justice and Mindfulness practices that includes yoga and other meditative techniques as we prioritize the necessity of school-wide joy and self-care for all change-makers, big and small.

Lightbridge Academy

243 St Marks Ave - Prospect Heights
718.872.8037

www.lightbridgeacademy.com

A new educational childcare center opening in Prospect Heights. Currently under construction we anticipate opening in the fall of 2017. Lightbridge Academy will be "The Solution for Working Parents™". Our goal is to ease the stresses of parents and provide a balance of nurturing care with qual-

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(2 locations)
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Continued on page 16



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Contact: **Dai Jiménez**

Student Information Manager

P (718) 443-2136

800 Gates Ave, Brooklyn

lacimacharterschool.org

admissions@lacimacharterschool.org

*La Cima was given the honor by the academy for Character Education in recognition of their dedication to C.A.R.E. principles in promoting joy and unity as a school and community.



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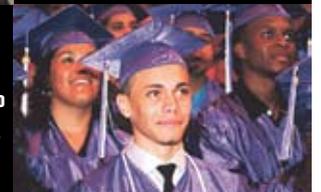


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Continued from page 14

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P.S. 54

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195 Sandford St, Bedford
Stuyvesant, 718-834-6752
www.MagnetSchool54.org

The goal of our school is to help our students develop academic and social skills to become the leaders and achievers of tomorrow. Environmental education and community action are important parts of the every-day lives of P.S. 54 students. Whether working in the classroom or outside of the building, students are encouraged to identify and develop sustainable solutions to the real world problems that affect their community and the world at large through a STEM-infused, project-based learning approach. Students study the connection between physical activity, nutrition and health as components of well-being. The school has a fully developed, award-winning physical education and health program. The goal of technology at the Magnet School is to help all students live, learn and work successfully and responsibly in an increasingly complex, technology driven society. Students learn collaboration, communication, creativity and critical thinking skills by utilizing technology in a variety of ways.

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718-499-5667, ext. 14
www.rivendellnyc.org

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info@wnns.org

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materials and curricula are designed to encourage and enrich this exploration.

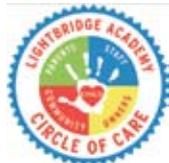
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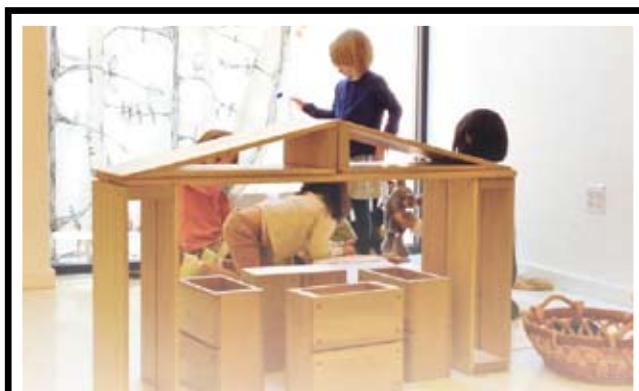
e-mail: admissions@windmontsch.org

website: www.windmontsch.org

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We change diapers too

A dad's take on the Bathrooms Accessible in Every Situation Act

BY SHNIEKA L. JOHNSON

Before becoming a parent, you often receive lots of advice on the best products, nanny services, and even schools. It is not until you find yourself in a bind that you realize that the most-needed advice sometimes comes too late, such as where you can change your infant's soiled diaper when you're not at home.

If you're at a restaurant, dads are usually unable to visit a restroom with a changing table station and assist with the soiled diaper. That's because the law permits public establishments to ignore the fact that men are also dads who care for their children.

But a recent law signed by President Obama addresses just that issue. His new law — the Bathrooms Accessible in Every Situation Act — mandates that all restrooms (yes, for both men and women) in public buildings include baby-changing stations. This will allow men to take on their fatherly responsibilities with less difficulty. Although it seems small, this is a big step in recognizing the importance of parental equality.

Fathers are much more involved in actively parenting their children than they were decades ago, and with the changing face of families, traditional roles are not the status quo. Fathers take pride in the great responsibility of parenting. Surprisingly, many business owners have not realized that something as simple as not having a changing table in a men's restroom can cause hardship to a dad caring for his young child, and cast assumptions that only women actively parent.

Prior to the passing of President Obama's legislation, husband, father, and dad blogger Doyin Richards had worked

with California state Sen. Ricardo Lara to rally another revolutionary bill, the Potty Parity for Parents Act. The bill was the first state-wide measure of its kind, pushing the requirement for baby-changing stations in men's restrooms or designated family restrooms. That bill was later rejected. However, advocates like Richards continue to speak up for dads and parents in general. I wanted to hear his reactions on President Obama's new law and get his take on dads and parent equality. Here's what he had to say.

Shnieka Johnson:

You have a popular blog about your parenting experiences. What drove you to bring fatherhood to the spotlight?

Doyin Richards: When my oldest daughter was born in 2011, I realized that being a dad was the most important job I'll ever have in my lifetime. At first, my Daddy Doin' Work blog started off with me sharing my personal stories about what being a dad meant to me, but eventually I shifted my focus to inspir-

ing other men to embrace fatherhood as well. Once I did that, the blog's popularity began to take off.

SJ: Your picture book was released in the spring, when did your book concept come about?

DR: "I Wonder" is a photo book completely comprised of photos sent into me



by my Instagram followers. The concept is around fatherhood, of course — but the main point is to highlight the many insecurities dads have as we wonder if our kids understand why we do things the way we do. However, the one thing we (dads) never wonder about is how much we love our children. This is a book that will make any parent laugh, cry, and think — and it serves as a great way to bond with our children.

SJ: Recently, the Bathrooms Accessible in Every Situation Act was passed. What was your initial reaction to its passing?

DR: I love it. We tried to pass similar legislation in California a few years ago, but ultimately, Gov. Jerry Brown vetoed it due to his belief that it was a “private sector issue.” I completely disagree. Not too long ago, it was legal for people to smoke cigarettes on airplanes. If the government didn’t get involved, people would still be smoking on flights. If it’s now 2016 and the private sector hasn’t realized that dads need a safe place to change their kids’ diapers, they never will. Sometimes you have to legislate common sense, and this is one of those times. Kudos to President Obama

“If it’s now 2016 and the private sector hasn’t realized that dads need a safe place to change their kids’ diapers, they never will. Sometimes you have to legislate common sense, and this is one of those times.”

for realizing that.

SJ: When you think about fatherhood and your parenting style, who have been your inspirations?

DR: Without question, it’s my dad and my two older brothers. I am so blessed to have been raised by the greatest man I know and be close friends and brothers with the two best modern dads I know. Honestly, fatherhood is the hardest job in the world, but it would be much more difficult if I didn’t have these great men to look up to.

SJ: What resources did you review as a new father that you would recommend to others?

DR: Honestly, I didn’t read any books about fatherhood when I was a new dad. I leaned on the dads I trusted and respected the most to show me the ropes. After a while, I learned to trust my gut when it came to my daughters. Sometimes I made mistakes, but oftentimes, failure is the best teacher. And in parenting, that is absolutely the truth.

SJ: As for the Bathrooms Accessible in Every Situation Act, do you think it will have an impact on how fathers are viewed? Do you think it will spread to private establishments soon?

DR: For sure. Nobody wants to be on the wrong side of history. Dads matter, and we aren’t going to tolerate businesses that refuse to take us seriously. The ask here is very simple — if a changing station exists in a women’s restroom, we ask that one exist in an adjacent men’s restroom. Any business owner who can’t agree to that shouldn’t be in business in the first place.

Shnieka Johnson is an education consultant and freelance writer. She is based in Manhattan where she resides with her husband and son. Contact her via her website: www.shnieka-johnson.com.

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A resolution to consider: Start estate planning

I have an initial meeting scheduled with an estate-planning attorney. How can I best prepare for the meeting?

The end of the year (in anticipation of New Year's resolutions!) is a perfect time to meet with an estate-planning attorney and knock this "to do" right off your checklist. It is also very smart to prepare for your meeting in advance so that you can make the best use of your time. Preparing your estate-planning documents is a very personal exercise, so you need to be comfortable with the attorney you choose. Most importantly, your attorney should be able to answer your questions and explain the proposed plan to you so that you understand what your documents mean.

Here are a few issues you, and, if applicable, your partner or spouse, should discuss in anticipation of doing your estate planning. You do not necessarily need to have answers to all of these questions, but you certainly should be thinking about them.

Disposatory plan

The first question to ask is how you want your assets distributed when you die. By assets, I mean real property, bank accounts, and your tangible "stuff." Many couples leave everything to their spouse or partner, and then to their children, but this does not necessarily have to be your objective. Consider whether you have concerns about your spouse remarrying, or whether you want to leave assets to other family members who may require care.

Guardians and alternate guardians of the person your minor children

Who do you want to serve as guardian of your children if you and your spouse or partner pass away? Who do you want to appoint as successor guardian if the primary guardian is unable, unwilling, or unavailable to serve? Do you want the guardian's spouse or another individual to serve as co-guardian? Do you want a different guardian to be appointed for different children (for example, half-siblings)? Do you want the guardian to be required



to post a bond? Where do you want your minor children to live? Do you want your children to live in their guardian's home, or would you like your guardian and his or her family to move into your home? In either case, will there be a need for capital to make improvements to accommodate the new family unit?

Trustee and successor trustee for minor's trust

Individuals under the age of 18 are not legally competent to own property. In your Will, you can set an age before which a person cannot have outright access to the property you leave to him or her. Minor's trustees are effectively guardians of the property left to minor children. The trustee oversees the money left to your children if they are still minors (usually when both spouses predecease).

The trustee does not need to be the same person as the guardian and there are certain objectives that you might appoint a different person (i.e., ensuring checks and balances on the money and distributions; ensuring that both sides of a family are in contact after the parents are deceased). The guardian is usually someone who you feel can impart the most important values to your children, while the trustee is someone who can handle money, be responsible for it, and have a long-term view of preserving principal while balanced against providing



ASK AN ATTORNEY

ALISON ARDEN BESUNDER, ESQ.

for the minor children.

Age at which minor children receive money

If both spouses pass away, you need to specify at what age your children will receive distributions of remaining principal. While the trustee usually has the discretion to distribute both income and principal for the health, education, maintenance, and support for the minors (a fairly broad standard), you need to state at which age the minor children will receive the balance of whatever is left after a certain point. One possibility is to allow for half at age 25 (or 30) and the other half at 30 (or 35). You can break it into thirds (25, 30, and 35). You can also provide an incentive for higher education by allowing for half at age 25 and the other half at 30 if the child graduates from an (accredited) college or graduate school, otherwise at 30 and 35.

Executors

Spouses are often named as the executor for the other's Will. An exception can be in second marriages where there are children of the first marriage and you want to ensure that the assets pass to the children of the first marriage after the death of the second spouse. Some other things to consider in choosing an executor are:

- Do you want your executor to be compensated?
- Do you want to impose a limitation on

the amount of compensation they should receive?

Keep in mind that being an executor (or trustee) can entail a lot of work — it is essentially managing the aspects of your personal life that you manage now, such as balancing bank accounts and maintaining oversight over assets and satisfying liabilities. Should your executor be required to post a bond? (i.e., insurance if the executor loses or absconds with money).

Wills and credit shelter trusts

Each spouse can establish a Credit Shelter Trust in his or her Will up to the maximum amount that can be exempt from Federal or state estate taxes, currently \$5.45 million and \$4.187 million, respectively. A credit shelter trust is a tax-savings device that also allows one spouse to ensure that his or her assets will pass to the children in case the surviving spouse remarries. As noted above, you need to name a trustee of the Trust. As with choosing any fiduciary, you should seek to choose someone who is responsible and a prudent investor, but who will also make distributions to provide for the spouse. You want to choose a friendly trustee that will cooperate so that if you do need access to principal for a reasonable purpose, the trustee will not

deny you that distribution.

Advance directives

These are documents — such as Power of Attorney of Healthcare Proxy — that are effective during your lifetime. Spouses usually name each other to make decisions for them during their lifetime, with successor agents to act in the event that the spouse is unable. While you can name one or more co-agents on the Power of Attorney, only one person can act at a time under a healthcare proxy in New York. Successor agents are critical and should be identified, together with their appropriate contact information.

Living will

A living will is a directive authorizing your agent to withhold certain life-sustaining measures (such as artificial respiration, CPR, resuscitation) in the event that you are suffering from an incurable condition from which you will not recover. The absence of a living will does not mean that the agent cannot make those decisions, but it does give the healthcare agent both the comfort, assurance, and authority to make those decisions in the event of a dispute with another family member or the hospital or healthcare professionals.

Special bequests

You should identify any specific items such as art, valuable books, collections, jewelry, or heirlooms that you want to be given to certain individuals. New York does not recognize personal property memoranda that are outside the Will; the executor has the discretion to honor the list but the list is not binding. Similarly, consider any monetary bequests that you want to make outright.

Taker of last resort and common disaster clause

If both spouses and children pass away in a common disaster, where should the assets go? Typically, it goes to parents, siblings, nieces, and nephews. However, consider the situation of those people — leaving money to your parents could disrupt their own long-term planning needs and any Medicaid or other government benefits they might be receiving.

These are hard questions to face and answer, but they are necessary steps in the estate-planning process. Giving these questions thought before meeting with your attorney will help maximize the effectiveness of your conference.

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Optimize your fertility

Seven dos and don'ts to help women conceive

There are countless bits of advice out there on ways to get pregnant. However, from family and friends to blogs and news pieces, many of these stories are not rooted in reliable medical advice. To separate fact from fiction, we spoke with Dr. Mary Jane Minkin, Clinical Professor of Obstetrics, Gynecology, and Reproductive Sciences at Yale University School of Medicine, and asked her for specific dos and don'ts for women who want to optimize their health in order to get ready to conceive:

Alcohol: Studies focusing on alcohol's effect on conception have produced mixed results, with some indicating that pregnancy is more likely if women give up drinking entirely and others suggesting that those who drink moderately might increase their chances of conception — perhaps because an occasional glass of wine makes them more relaxed. But experts agree that women who give up alcohol will increase their chances of a healthy baby once conception does happen, and that alone is reason enough for most women to quit.

Tobacco: Unlike alcohol, the data on smoking's correlation to pregnancy is undisputed. Both primary and secondhand smoke are detrimental to a woman's chance of conceiving and to a developing fetus as well. Quitting is never easy, but you can take advantage of resources and support to help you find a plan and stick to it.

Caffeine: As the daily substance of choice for most Americans, dependency on those morning cups of coffee or afternoon soft drink is difficult to break. But even if caffeine's link to fertility isn't univer-

sally agreed upon, reputable studies exist that suggest caffeine — especially in excess — can stunt the maturation of an egg or increase the chances of a miscarriage. If giving up your morning cup of Joe can help you get pregnant, the sacrifice is worth it.

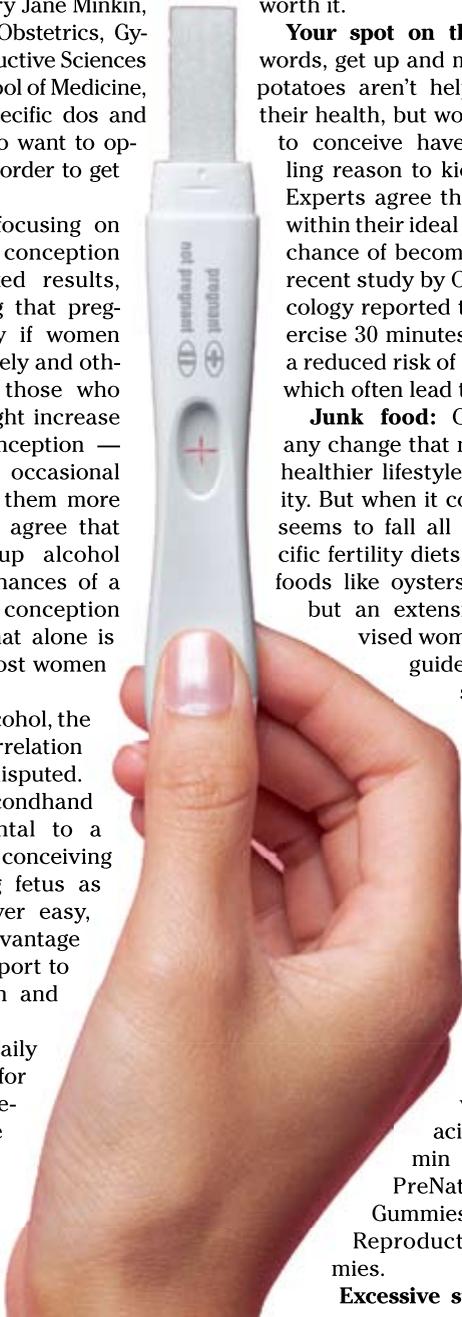
Your spot on the couch: In other words, get up and move around! Couch potatoes aren't helping any aspect of their health, but women who are trying to conceive have an extra compelling reason to kick it into high gear. Experts agree that women who stay within their ideal weight have a better chance of becoming pregnant, and a recent study by Obstetrics and Gynecology reported that women who exercise 30 minutes or more a day had a reduced risk of ovulation disorders, which often lead to infertility.

Junk food: Generally speaking, any change that moves you toward a healthier lifestyle will promote fertility. But when it comes to diet, advice seems to fall all over the map. Specific fertility diets advocate for eating foods like oysters, garlic, and yams, but an extensive 2009 study advised women to follow simpler guidelines — healthy fats,

selective proteins, whole grains, and plenty of iron and other vitamins. And, obviously, putting down the potato chips and the candy bars is an excellent first step toward helping you get pregnant this year. To ensure you are getting your daily dose of necessary vitamins and folic acid, take a multivitamin like First Response

PreNatal and PostNatal Gummies or First Response Reproductive Health Gummies.

Excessive stress: Granted, this



HEALTHY LIVING

DANIELLE SULLIVAN

step is easier said than done, especially when the chief cause of the stress is the infertility itself. But if external factors are causing undue anxiety, a woman's chance at conception can decrease, and the stress of waiting for that positive pregnancy test month after month could be the last straw for her emotional health. Give up extra responsibilities whenever possible, talk to your boss about reducing your job stress, and work in regular "mental health" days to be refreshed by activities and people you enjoy.

Lubricants containing glycerin: According to the American Society of Reproductive Medicine's "Guidelines for Optimizing Natural Fertility," several leading vaginal lubricants (e.g. K-Y) may decrease fertility based on their observed effects on sperm survival. Another study showed that lubricants containing glycerin had an adverse effect on sperm motility.

Fertility experts recommend using a fertility-friendly lubricant like Pre-Seed that is specially formulated without glycerin that will not harm sperm and will allow sperm to swim freely.

"While no checklist guarantees a healthy pregnancy, giving up these seven things can help you get pregnant. It's all about creating the ideal environment for the pregnancy to happen," says Dr. Minkin. "A healthy, happy, and active lifestyle is a solid base, and giving up the aforementioned things will get you there."

Danielle Sullivan, a mom of three, is a writer and editor living in New York City.



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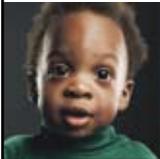
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Forgiveness for the non-sporting soul

Supporting your kids' passions — whatever they are

BY KARA MARTINEZ BACHMAN

I don't care for sports. I never have. During childhood, I spent my time roller skating and riding bikes with kids from the neighborhood. I was active, but it wasn't the competitive, organized sports kind of active.

One summer my mother signed me up for soccer. I spent the practices — the *two* that I actually showed up for prior to dropping out — watching the other kids have fun. I participated slowly and grudgingly, wiping sweat from my brow and constantly checking my watch. I jogged along with lethargy, hoping I'd never actually contact the ball.

I vowed my own children would be more active. My husband and I moved to a semi-rural area when our son was young and our daughter was an infant. We were sure the piney woods and coastal landscapes of the area would inspire all sorts of outdoor activity. We were sure our kids would want to hike, run, play organized sports, swim, and take in all that the outdoors had to offer.

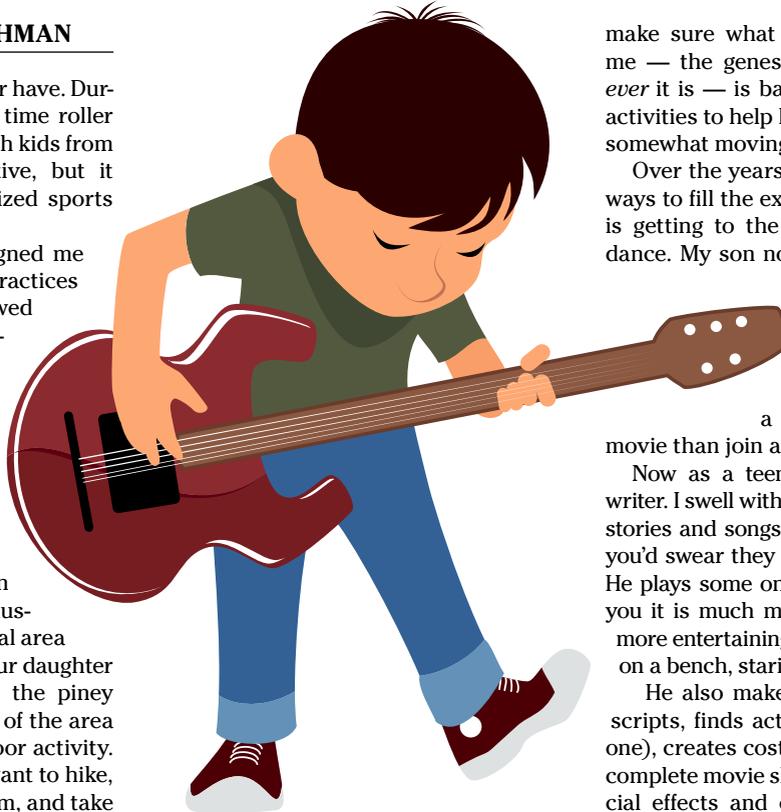
Nope.

Our son "played" basketball at his elementary school. He spent most games meekly planted on the bench. He watched the others, waiting for his two or three moments with the ball, which would always be brief and mostly fraught with disappointment.

After the basketball fiasco, we thought: surely, baseball is the way to go. What kid doesn't like standing at the mound, adjusting his cap just so while staring down the enemy? What kid doesn't like taking team pictures with big trophies, then eating delectable and unhealthy hot dogs?

Our kid, that's who.

Yeah, he'd play along, for sure. He'd say he liked it, no doubt to make his father proud. But the watery sadness in his eyes said something else, and his lack of



enthusiasm pre-game spoke the words he never could.

When younger, my husband had been the opposite: he was a star of the basketball team. He had his picture in the papers often. He still has a collection of old, yellowed newspaper clippings, showing his younger self sliding into home or crossing a finish line with a baton. So it wasn't my husband's genes or attitude that shaped my son's distaste for sport — it was mine.

It took some time to come to grips with this, and I've finally forgiven myself. I have. Although exercise is important to well-being, there's probably no blame to be placed for a child not wanting to hit balls, kick goals, or wrestle people to the ground. Sometimes it just is. Every child has his talents, his proclivities.

On the other hand, it's still my duty to

make sure what my kids inherited from me — the genes, the attitude, the *whatever* it is — is balanced by other healthy activities to help keep their bodies at least somewhat moving.

Over the years, we've found alternative ways to fill the exercise void. My daughter is getting to the age where she likes to dance. My son now takes long bike rides, sometimes trekking with his dad 15 or 20 miles at a time. He swims with friends. But he'd rather read a book or watch an old movie than join any sort of team.

Now as a teen, my son is a beautiful writer. I swell with pride when he shares his stories and songs that can be so touching, you'd swear they were written by an adult. He plays some on his guitar, and I can tell you it is much more joyful for me — and more entertaining — than watching him sit on a bench, staring at a gymnasium floor.

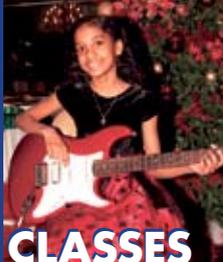
He also makes short films. He writes scripts, finds actors (his sister is a great one), creates costumes, and puts together complete movie shorts, including cool special effects and carefully selected music soundtracks. His father, the former athlete, beams with pride that his son has found his calling.

We don't gather on bleachers for his movie screenings, but when the final credits roll, the cheers are just as good as those delivered on a ball field. And the look of pride in his eyes — now that he's not just pretending to have fun — is 100 percent real.

Kara Martinez Bachman is author of the humorous essay collection for women, "Kissing the Crisis: Field Notes on Foul-mouthed Babies, Disenchanted Women, and Careening into Middle Age." She has read her work on NPR radio and it has appeared in dozens of magazines, newspapers, and literary journals, including The Writer, Funny Times, the New Orleans Times-Picayune, and many parenting magazines. Find out more at KaraMartinezBachman.com or follow her on Twitter, @80sMomKara.



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CAPE MAY



Historic winter wonderland

BY THOMAS C. DAUS

Year after year, as the holiday season approaches, I find time to spend a weekend in the beautiful beach town of Cape May, New Jersey. Cape May in November and December has the charm of a spectacular winter wonderland!

The number of activities of this seaside town in December may surprise you! Cape May caters to revelers of all ages with a variety of family-based events.

Children will simply love the opportunity to meet Santa Claus at the annual Christmas parade on Dec. 3. Congress Hall, a hotel which dates back to 1816, has an adorable train ride for kids that circles around the perimeter of the property.

And you can stop by vendor stalls adjacent to that attraction and purchase charming gifts such as handmade scarves, porcelain items, and a variety of jams. The Cape May Arts and Humanities Center offers trolley tours. When dusk sets in, dazzling holiday lights transform the town.

The 43rd annual Christmas Candlelight House Tour will be in full swing on Saturdays, Dec. 3, 10, and 17. For a nominal fee, guests can tour about a dozen historical, Victorian homes. The Cape May homeowners generously allow visitors into their cozy and warmly decorated residences. Hospitality stops are also incorporated into this unique event; enjoy complimentary homemade cookies, apple cider, and hot chocolate!

If you plan to visit historic Cape May, make reservations in advance. The following is just a sampling of the heartwarming holiday offerings that await you:

“An Old-Fashioned Christmas Exhibit:” An exhibit of holiday traditions complete with model trains, toys, and much more! At the Carroll Gallery at the Emlen Physick Estate. The gallery is open daily (except Thanksgiving and Christmas).

Emlen Physick Estate [1048 Washington St. between Madison Avenue and St. James Place in Cape May, (609) 884-5404] Now through Jan. 1, 2017. Hours vary. Free admission.

Physick Family Christmas House Tours: Take a guided daytime, living-historical tour of the 1879 Emlen Physick Estate, decorated in Victorian style for Christmas, presented through the eyes of a Physick family member from the early 1900s. The tour includes a visit to the Carroll Gallery where you can see “An Old-Fashioned Christmas” exhibit.

Emlen Physick Estate [1048 Washington St. between Madison Avenue and St. James Place in Cape May, (609) 884-5404] Adults, \$12, children ages 3-12, \$8. Offered daily, hours vary. No tours Dec. 25.

Ghosts of Christmas Past Trolley Rides: Take this 30-minute evening trolley ride through the festively decorated Historic District as you listen to a Victorian ghost tale told by a member of the East Lynne Theatre Company. (Tours leave from Washington Street Mall, except for Nov. 19 tours, which leave from the Physick Estate.) Advance reservation strongly recommended.

Washington Street Mall (401 Washington St. between Jackson and Decatur streets in Cape May) Sundays, Now-Dec. 18; Fridays, Dec. 2-Dec. 23; and Monday, Dec. 26-Saturday, Dec. 31. Hours vary. Adults, \$12; children ages 3-12, \$8.

Emlen Physick Estate [1048 Washington St.

between Madison Avenue and St. James Place in Cape May, (609) 884-5404]

Holiday Lights Trolley Rides: Take a ride on the jolly red trolley through Cape May’s Historic District and delight in seeing festive Christmas decorations of inns and homes as guides touch on Victorian Christmas traditions, lead sing-alongs, and play Christmas music. (Tours leave from Washington Street Mall, except for Nov. 19 tours, which leave from the Physick Estate.)

Washington Street Mall (401 Washington St. between Jackson and Decatur streets in Cape May) Nightly, Now 25-Dec. 31. Hours vary. No tours Dec. 3, 10, 12, 17, 24, and 25. Adults, \$12; children ages 3-12, \$10.

Emlen Physick Estate [1048 Washington St. between Madison Avenue and St. James Place in Cape May, (609) 884-5404]

Santa’s Trolley Rides: Bring the kids to the Physick Estate on weekends for a trolley ride around Cape May with stories and songs led by Mrs. Claus. Then, Santa will greet children with a sweet in the Carriage House. Advance reservation strongly recommended.

Emlen Physick Estate [1048 Washington St. between Madison Avenue and St. James Place in Cape May, (609) 884-5404] Saturday, Nov. 19; Saturdays and Sundays, Now-Dec. 17. Hours vary. Adults, \$10; children ages 3-12, \$8.

Evening Yuletide Tour: Revel in the sparkling lights of Cape May’s beautiful Victorian homes decorated for Christmas on this 30-minute trolley ride followed by a guided tour of the first-floor rooms of the 1879 Emlen Physick Estate, decorated for a Victorian Christmas. Then visit the Carriage House for



The holidays are an exciting time in Cape May, New Jersey. (Clockwise from top left) The "Old-Fashioned Christmas" exhibit features plenty of lights, trains, and toys. The tree on the Physick estate is a must-see. The Candlelight House Tour is the main attraction of Cape May's holiday season — giving visitors a look back in time. See Cape May's Historic District lit up with festive decorations.

Mid-Atlantic Center for the Arts & Humanities

holiday refreshments and a visit to "An Old-Fashioned Christmas" exhibit. Tour begins and ends at the Ocean Street trolley stop.

Now-Dec. 30, except Dec. 3, 10, 12, 17, 24, and 25. Hours vary. Adults, \$22; children, ages 3-12, \$14. Admission for house tour only, adults, \$12; children ages 3-12, \$8.

Lamplighter Christmas Tours: Take this self-guided evening tour of Cape May's inns or private homes, specially decorated for the holidays. Hear a holiday presentation by the owner at each location. The tour includes a visit to the Carriage House Gallery at the Emlen Physick Estate where you'll receive warm beverages and holiday treats and see "An Old-Fashioned Christmas" exhibit.

Fridays, Dec. 2-23; and Dec. 28 from 7 pm to 9 pm. Dec. 31 from 1 to 3 pm. Adults, \$20; children ages 3-12, \$15.

Holiday Inns Tours: Get into the Christmas spirit and visit three of Cape May's inns or private homes at your own pace on these self-guided tours. Enjoy the festive décor.

Mondays through Thursdays, Now-Dec. 15 from 1 to 3 pm. Adults, \$15; children ages 3-12, \$10.

Christmas Traditions Lecture: Learn how Prince Albert brought Christmas traditions to England from Germany when he married Queen Victoria, and how these traditions spread to America in this richly illustrated lecture at the Episcopal Church of the Advent. Much of what we associate with the celebration of Christmas comes from the Victorian era.

Episcopal Church of the Advent [612 Franklin St. at Washington Street in Cape May, (609) 884-3065] Dec. 3 at 2 pm. \$10.

The 43rd Annual Christmas Candlelight House Tour: This self-guided walking tour, the main attraction of Cape May's festive holiday season, features homes, inns, hotels, and churches decorated for the holidays, plus caroling, strolling musicians, and good old-fashioned cheer. Hospitality centers offer warm beverages and traditional treats. Includes admission to the Physick Estate and "An Old-fashioned Christmas Exhibit" in the Carroll Gallery.

Limited shuttle service.

Dec. 3, 10, and 17 from 5:30 to 8:30 pm. Adults, \$30, children ages 3-12, \$20.

Chocolate Lover's Feast: Enjoy seven plated courses of chocolate desserts and hear how each was created from the chef who prepared it at The Blue Rose Inn.

The Blue Rose Inn [653 Washington St. between Franklin and Ocean streets in Cape May, (609) 435-5458] Dec. 4 at 1 pm. \$40.

•••

The holidays are a busy time for all of us, but why not add to lasting memories with a visit to the historic town of Cape May? It is indeed a town worth visiting during the most wonderful time of the year, and perhaps this will become your family's holiday tradition for many years to come!

For further tour information, and assistance in planning your holiday visit to Cape May, visit the Mid-Atlantic Center for the Arts and Humanities at www.capemaymac.org or call (609) 884-5404.

Purchase tickets for these events at the Washington Street Mall Information Booth or at the Physick Estate.

Giving back

Opportunities for kids to volunteer in New York City

BY SHNIEKA L. JOHNSON

The winter holiday season is the perfect time to involve the whole family in giving back to your local community. Make it known to your children that it's not only adults that can lend a hand, but rather, kids who can be just as involved in making a difference in someone's life. This is an empowering message to instill early in life, having children take ownership of their community and make a difference whether it is direct or indirect.

Many local organizations are looking for assistance year-round, such as nursing homes, nonprofit organizations, or animal shelters. Your location, child's age, and interests will be a factor in the decision-making for a family volunteer project during the winter holidays. If you are seeking ideas for what your family or group of friends can do, here are a few examples:

Feed a family

Many members of our local communities struggle to put food on their tables regularly. Collect non-perishable foods to donate to a local organization. Your donations can help to keep shelves stocked at area soup kitchens, food pantries, and other community food programs.

By running a food drive with your family or group of friends, you'll help provide many New Yorkers with good food that they normally would not have.

Give gifts

The winter months can be difficult for families and individuals living in New York City. Maybe the cold weather caused high heating bills or an illness such as a cold or flu resulted in missed work. Any number of things can affect income and cause holiday gifts to be cut from the budget.

By shopping for and delivering gifts to those in need, you and your family can bring more cheer to children and families who may not otherwise receive holiday gifts.

Start a coat drive

We all know what it's like to be cold for short periods of time, but imagine no chance of getting warm due to a lack of appropriate winter gear. Help ensure that every New Yorker stays warm, healthy, and safe over this winter by hosting a coat



drive. Your family, group of friends, colleagues, or even your child's school, can run a coat drive.

There are always so many opportunities to volunteer around the city. A number of community resources help make it easy to find a program or organization to support. Given your family make up, your volunteer project can range by location or interest, but big or small, you are making a difference.

More ideas

Don't know where to begin? Here are a few organizations that can give you a start:

City Harvest: City Harvest is the world's first food rescue organization, dedicated to feeding hungry New Yorkers. The organization has served New Yorkers for more than 30 years. Visit www.cityharvest.org to find out more on how to donate or volunteer.

Doing Good Together: This Minnesota-based organization aims to help parents raise compassionate and socially conscious children through family volunteerism. It was founded on the belief that when parents engage with their children in community service, they pass along the spirit of giving. For New Yorkers, www.doinggoodtogether.org/family-volunteering-nyc offers listings and information on family-friendly volunteer and service opportunities in the metro area.

New York Cares: New York Cares

runs vital programs for nonprofits, public schools, and city agencies to help people in need throughout the five boroughs. Since 1987, New York Cares has made it easy for all New Yorkers to work together to strengthen the city. Getting started is easy: just attend orientation, then you can search and sign up for any project. Visit www.newyorkcares.org.

No Kid Hungry: This organization works hard to make sure no kid in America grows up hungry by collaborating with community groups, activists, and food programs. The goal is to identify children facing hunger and surround them with nutritious food where they live, learn, and play. Visit www.nokidhungry.org.

Toys For Tots: This organization collects and distributes toys to families in need. You and your family can help in your community by collecting new, unwrapped toys to be distributed. Your donations will serve as Christmas gifts to less fortunate children in the community. The primary goal of Toys for Tots is to deliver, through a new toy at Christmas, a message of hope to less fortunate youngsters that will assist them in becoming responsible, productive, patriotic citizens. Visit <http://toysfortots.org>.

Shnieka Johnson is an education consultant and freelance writer. She is based in Manhattan where she resides with her husband and son. Contact her via her website: www.shnieka-johnson.com.

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Got nutrition?

Tips for handling picky eaters

Along with 10,000 of my colleagues, I recently attended the Food and Nutrition Conference & Expo in Boston, the world's largest annual meeting of food and nutrition professionals.

The evidence-based educational sessions covered the entire life cycle from conception to end-of-life, and there were many presentations pertaining to children and adolescents.

Digestive health was a major theme at the meeting. Probiotics and fermented products were featured at the expo. And there were educational sessions on feeding your microbiome and influencing the gut-brain highway.

Other topics included reducing plate waste in schools; where kids fit into the new 2015 Dietary Guidelines for Americans; the management of life-threatening food allergies in early childcare and school settings; food insecurity; integrating cooking and tasting activities into nutrition education programs; and the health effects of natural foods high in saturated fat, such as coconut and butter.

Let's zero in on a fascinating presentation that may be of interest if your child is an extremely "picky eater."

The topic of avoidant or restrictive food intake disorder was presented by registered dietitian nutritionist Jill Castle, creator of The Kids Healthy Weight Project (an online nutrition and feeding course for parents)

and The Nourished Child Podcast.

Your child may have the disorder if she experiences the following: Refusal of foods with certain characteristics — such as wet or slippery foods — or entire food groups; poor feeding or eating skills; problems with chewing, swallowing, or choking; delayed fine motor skills; underweight; anxiety with new foods or a new eating environment; or avoids social eating situations.

Children with the disorder often suffer from constipation, iron-deficiency anemia, vitamin C and vitamin A deficiency, low bone density, delayed puberty, and slowed growth. Perhaps not surprisingly, about half of these cases co-exist with other medical conditions such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, autism, anxiety, and depression.

What can you do if you are a parent or grandparent of a child you suspect has avoidant or restrictive food intake disorder? Diagnosis is made by a mental health provider and a team approach is used including a psychologist or psychiatrist, registered dietitian nutritionist, speech language pathologist, and occupational therapist.

Therapy often includes cognitive behavioral therapy, exposure and desensitization therapy, self-comfort techniques, and family-based treatment where the family takes complete ownership of the feeding process.

Nutrition therapy may include:

- Food challenges where the child is en-



GOOD SENSE EATING

CHRISTINE M. PALUMBO, RD

couraged to take one bite at a meal three nights in a row, then moving on to the next food challenge.

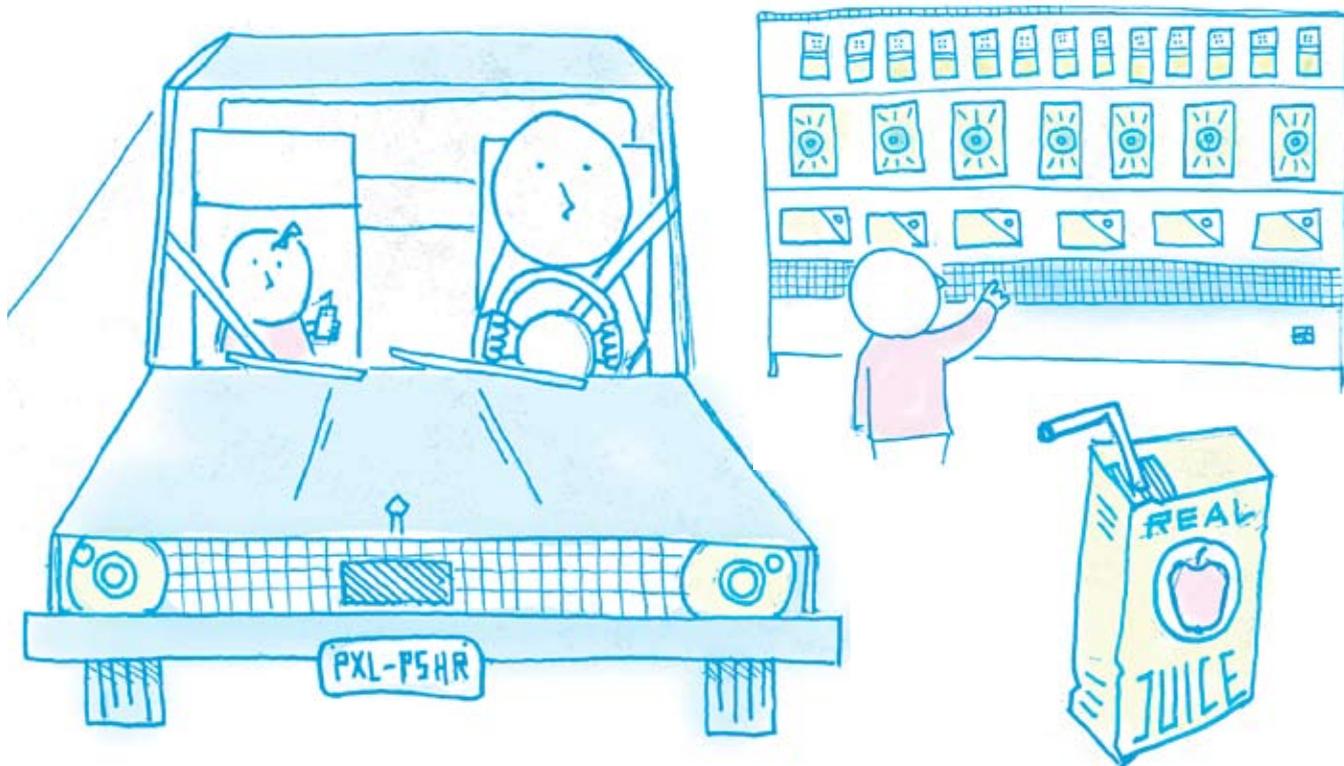
- Food chaining (e.g. rice cake to rice cracker to Rice Krispie Treat to rice).
- Three new foods every day after school for two weeks.

- A food log of trials and the encouragement of the child to evaluate her progress.

What does not work is pressure to eat, offering rewards, and unproven special diets, i.e. gluten-free, casein-free.

Ultimately, the goal is to provide the child with food courage, eating confidence, and a meaningful acceptance of food.

Christine M. Palumbo, a registered dietitian nutritionist and Fellow of the American Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, practices in Naperville, Ill. She has firsthand experience with avoidant or restrictive food intake disorder with a young family member who is still "working on" his feeding skills. Follow her on Twitter @PalumboRD, Facebook at Christine Palumbo Nutrition, or Chris@ChristinePalumbo.com.



What does Daddy do?

How I explained graphic design to my 5 year old

BY RYAN BUYNAC

Kids are naturally curious about what their parents do for a living, and when we try to explain it to them (or even some adults), our explanations generally fall into one of two categories: lengthy and overly informative, or hasty and placating. You have to find the middle ground.

This is even more important when you have to explain a job that's a bit more abstract, like an artist or psychologist. You have to go big with color and candy wrappers to keep them listening.

This dialogue is loosely taken from a conversation I had with my daughter while driving to the grocery store:

Daddy, what exactly do you do?

I'm a graphic designer, honey.

I know, but what is a graphic designer?

Graphic designers make pictures for things.

What kind of things?

See your juice box right there, someone like Daddy designed that. Things like board games, posters, candy wrappers,

and book covers, and a bunch of other cool stuff.

You mean like my "Spider Book"?

Yes, exactly. The cover of every book is designed.

Why do you need to design them?

Because people like when things look nice and are easier to understand.

What people?

I work with businesses to design cool things for them and solve problems.

How do you do that?

I use colors and letters and pictures. Then, I arrange them to make people feel a certain way. See that stop sign right there? That is designed to let us know that we have to stop to let other drivers go ahead of us. Someone like me designed that.

Why is it red?

It is red because the color red is easy to see. If it were blue, it would blend in with the sky. That's what designers have to think about.

That sounds like fun.

Design is a fun way to help people communicate with each other. Graphic design is everywhere you look and nearly everything has some design on it. Daddy gets to

help decide what to put on those things.

Did you design this store?

No, but do you see that package of cookies right there? The pictures and letters on the package is what daddy does. Same with the soup and the chocolate milk.

Daddy, what are you going to do today at work?

<Sigh> I'm going to make someone's logo bigger.

Design is everywhere

Graphic design is problem solving and communication in visual form. Like a piece of a puzzle, graphic design — from logos to advertisements — should make the world a little easier through which to travel. By teaching your kids about design, you are giving them a glimpse into art, creativity, problem solving, business, and branding.

Next time your child asks you what you do for a living, take a breath and try to explain in the simplest of terms. Explaining it in the most uncomplicated way can even help you see it in a new light.

Ryan Buynak is a creative strategist at AR Design.

Mediation and custody concerns

In my previous article, I introduced Bill and Angela, who had decided to get a divorce. Angela called and learned more about mediation, and shared the information with Bill. After further discussion, they decided (Bill, a little reluctantly) to schedule a consultation, at which they got a sense of who the mediator is, and had more of their questions answered. Here, I continue with their first working mediation session.

Note that while this first session deals with parenting matters, the session could focus on different issues. For instance, let's say that the mediator had learned during Angela's initial phone call or at the consultation (see previous article) that there is a pressing financial concern. For example, if one spouse said that he didn't have enough money to get through the next week or month, the first session would probably address that issue, rather than parenting.

Dec. 6 — Session 1

The mediator asks about the parties, their children, and the Thanksgiving holiday.

With the spouses' permission, the mediator then turns the discussion to parenting issues.

Angela says that she wants full custody. Bill becomes defensive. They argue for a few minutes. The mediator listens and considers whether the verbal exchange is constructive, and then raises a question.

The mediator asks Bill and Angela, "What do you mean when you say 'custody?'"

The mediator listens to each person and checks that he understands what each has said. The mediator then suggests that maybe the question isn't "Which of you will have custody?" but rather, "What agreements can you reach so that you can be the kind of parents you want to be to your children?"

There is further discussion, some of it angry. The mediator helps the spouses to fully express their concerns, and asks clarifying questions.

The mediator believes that, though Bill is having difficulty listening to Angela directly, he is hearing her indirectly, through the mediator's restatements of what she is saying.

The focus is forward looking. Each parent acknowledges that the other has an important role to play in the children's lives; neither wants to "take" the children from the other. With his fear of losing the children alleviated, Bill especially becomes less tense, and the conversation is less strained.

Bill and Angela agree to talk about parenting arrangements; at least for now, they are willing to leave the legal designations (custody) aside.

Angela and Bill talk about the children: where they attend school, what they enjoy doing, their usual routines, and so forth.

The mediator helps them to set out different possible parenting plans, which are discussed.

They talk about Christmas and New Year's, which are coming up, and which they have agreed on.

The parents reach a tentative agreement on a schedule for the children, as well as on how decisions involving medical, educational, and religious matters will



DIVORCE & SEPARATION

LEE CHABIN, ESQ.

be handled in the future. (The latter comes easily for them.)

The mediator gives each spouse a blank form for setting out financial information. Angela and Bill are both confident that they can fill in the information about their respective incomes and expenses within a week to two weeks. Both want to have another session before the Christmas holiday. If either needs more time to complete the income or expense parts of the form, they will let each other and the mediator know, so that the date of the next session can be rescheduled.

The session ends after two hours, and Bill and Angela each pay \$300 of the \$600 fee.

Next time: Income and expenses

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.





The art of saying 'no' to your child

As a parent, you want to give your children everything! But when is everything too much?

I would argue that you're giving too much — either leeway or physical objects — to your small being if he has an inability to hear “no.”

A common pitfall is when parents give their child everything he wants the moment he asks for it. This puts your kid on an express train to becoming a spoiled brat, akin to Veruca Salt of Willy Wonka fame. Remember her screeching around the room, demanding things from her father and ordering him around? Do not let this become your reality. This is not a pleasant scenario to consider, but these unfortunate transformations hap-

pen every day.

Accepting “no” is a critical skill for all children. You must teach them this so that they can be productive adults. Start saying “no” more often. The only way to learn to accept “no” is to experience it.

Proactively decide to satisfy your small being's needs, many of his wants, and some of his desires. This pattern creates a child who is balanced and embraces the world with all of its ups and downs.

Your small being accepting “no” is an art form, and it will take you some practice to be good at it, especially if your child is used to hearing “yes.” You have to stand through negotiations, ranting and raving, and possibly hitting. He may compare you to his friend's parents.



BEHAVIOR & BEYOND

DR. MARCIE BEIGEL

Stand firm. When you decide to say “no,” stick with it.

When you stand firm, you are teaching that yelling, screaming, or hitting will not change your “no” to a “yes,” and are not acceptable forms of protest. Your child must accept your decision.

True happiness comes from working hard, accomplishing goals, and celebrating each step it took to cross the finish line. It comes from anticipating future adventures. Having all you want handed to you leads to entitlement and dissatisfaction.

As you integrate “no” into your communication, consider the following:

- Have confidence when you say “no.”
- Say “no” when you have time in case problem behavior arises while refusing a small being's request.

- Integrate “no” into scenarios where the request is possible, like ice cream for dessert, but you know it is not best.

- Practice “no” when you have a preference to uphold. For example, your small being wants to paint at the kitchen table but you would rather she color with markers.

- When you say “no,” you have to mean it! Do not change your mind.

- Pick your battles.

It is hard to see your small one disappointed or angry, but ultimately, it will be worth it. Refusing to let your child paint now is easy, but in five years, it will be much more difficult when his fighting with his teachers about doing schoolwork.

Let's stop the aspiring Verucas in their tracks. You can do this!

Dr. Marcie is a behavior specialist based in Brooklyn. She has worked with thousands of families for over 20 years. Her book, “Love Your Classroom Again,” is a bestseller.

To nap or not to nap?

Variations in napping toddlers

My first daughter was a sleeper. She woke every four hours as a baby and then settled into a fairly regular routine, quickly sleeping throughout the night and taking two naps per day. Gradually, it slowed to one afternoon nap until she was about 4. My son had a similar schedule, and like his big sister, he also enjoyed sleeping. My second daughter, however, was a whole other matter.

She barely slept and scarcely ate. It was always a struggle to get her to eat enough at mealtime as a baby. Then she'd settle down for an afternoon nap only to wake up 15 minutes later. I tried to enforce nap time as long as possible, but by age 2, it just wasn't happening anymore.

Pediatrician Dr. Perry Klass has written quite a bit about the complexity of kids taking naps, and notes the process is entirely more multifaceted than most of us would ever think.

"Napping in children actually is a complex behavior, a mix of individual biology, including neurologic and hormonal development, cultural expectations and family dynamics," she says.

Infants sleep between feedings, and older babies generally take a morning and

afternoon nap, which slowly whittles down to one afternoon nap. While this is the general pattern, she points out "individual children's sleep needs and sleep patterns tended to be consistent through age 10. In other words, children who slept less than their peers as infants grew into older children [who] seemed to need less sleep."

A study done by Dr. Monique LeBourgeois, a sleep scientist at the University of Colorado at Boulder, questioned how napping affects the cortisol-awakening response, which is a burst of hormone secretion that occurs shortly before waking in the morning. It showed that children produce this response after short naps in the morning and afternoon, though not in the evening, and it may be adaptive in helping children respond to the stresses of the day.

By experimentally restricting sleep in young children, and then analyzing their behavior in putting puzzles together, Dr. LeBourgeois's group quantified how napping — or the lack of it — affects the ways that children respond to situations.

"Sleepy children are not able to cope with day-to-day challenges in their worlds," she said. When children skip even a single nap, "We get less positivity, more negativ-



JUST WRITE MOM

DANIELLE SULLIVAN

ity, and decreased cognitive engagement."

Yet through all the sleep research, there isn't anything that can show parents exactly when a child should stop napping. When should a parent let a toddler who refuses to sleep give up her nap? When should a parent discourage a child from napping if he is approaching full-time school age?

And let's not forget the social and family issues that play a part in nap time. Sometimes, I would finally get one of my toddlers into a long nap only to have to wake them to pick up an older sibling from school. Also, many moms need a break in the day, so an afternoon nap is a matter of great importance. It helps moms recharge.

Yet often, the more we want our baby to nap, the less he will, and for some children, naps are just too difficult to do on a regular basis. My second daughter never became accustomed to taking naps, and I couldn't figure out why, but I did try as much as I could to go with the flow. I'd still try to get her to nap each day, but after a half hour, when I knew it wasn't going to happen, I just let her play quietly or thumb through a book.

Perhaps Dr. LeBourgeois sums it up best: "I think there's a dire need for adults in general to be in tune with individual children's physiology. What are the capabilities, and what are the limits? If you know your child will be stressed, cranky, and miserable without a nap, set aside time every day for that nap, but if your child starts to resist napping, another method of relaxation might be better for them."

Danielle Sullivan, a mom of three, is a writer and editor living in New York City.





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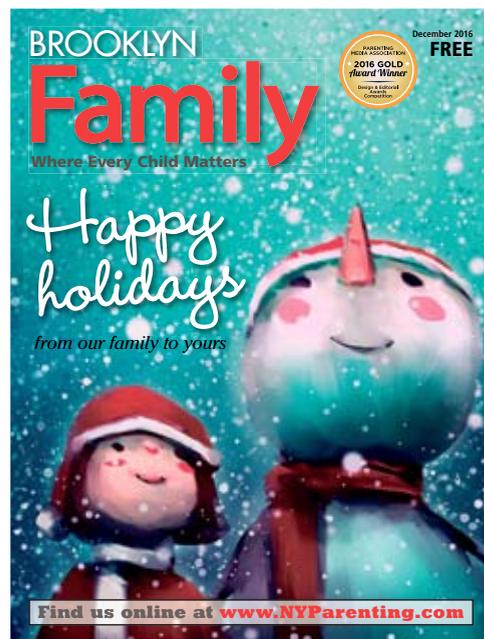


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Avoid choking hazards during the holidays

My son is 3 years old, and he is a little rambunctious. He runs around, touches everything, and, more often than not, everything winds up in his mouth. With the holidays coming up, I am worried about the potential choking dangers — toys, decorations, treats. I don't want to be too over protective, but what can I do to make sure my son stays safe?

The holidays are an exciting time for young children, with treats, festive activities, and, of course, the presents. That being said, you are right to want to be careful, as children under the age of 5 are at the highest risk for choking on small objects. Your son's trachea (the "windpipe" that connects the throat to the lungs) is much smaller than that of an adult or older child, with a diameter approximately the same size as that of a drinking straw. However, by

knowing the risks and the precautions you can take, you and your son can have a happy — and safe — holiday season.

Toys are an integral part of children's play. However, they can pose a significant risk of choking, especially for children ages 3 and younger. It is best to avoid toys that have loose parts that are smaller than one-and-a-quarter inch in diameter and shorter than two-and-a-quarter inches long. Legos, dolls, or figurines with small attachments that break off, marbles, pen and marker caps, crayons, erasers, and toy cars with wheels that come off can all pose a risk of choking. Broken latex balloons and the beads often used as filler in stuffed animals can also lead to suffocation if inhaled.

Pay attention to toy labeling, especially the suitable age range. If a toy is meant for an older child, it can wait for a few years. Even when your son plays with toys appropriate for his age, it is important to keep an eye on him.

During your holiday feasts and celebrations, be mindful of the kind of food being served to your child, as well as of treats that may be left out in the open and within his reach.

Many foods that are safe and even healthy for adults and older children can be serious choking hazards for children under 5. Whole grapes, raw vegetables, raw peas, fruit with skin, seeds, carrots, celery, and cherries can all pose a risk. Your son can still eat these foods as long as he is supervised and they are mashed, cooked, or otherwise softened.

Dried fruits, sunflower seeds, nuts, peanuts and spoonfuls of peanut



FAMILY HEALTH

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

butter or peanut butter on soft bread, popcorn, and bony fish can also easily block the airway. Candy, always tempting to children, can be particularly hazardous — especially small, hard candies.

Even when these objects are kept out of reach, it is still important to supervise your son. Little things that you may not even notice or be aware of — coins in the couch cushions, small lights falling off of a tree — can also pose a danger to young children. Make sure to keep floors and surfaces within your son's reach free and clear of any small objects. If you bring your son to a relative or friend's house that is not child-proofed, request ahead of time that they be mindful of small objects and be extra watchful while you are there. You can also teach your son safe habits — chewing slowly, not talking while eating, and not putting foreign objects (including toys) in his mouth — which can reduce the risk of choking.

If, despite all precautions, the worst happens, be prepared with knowledge of how to perform the Heimlich maneuver and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). In a choking situation, as with any medical emergency, call 911 immediately.



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Calendar

DECEMBER



Juliana Cervantes

The Nutcracker goes a little wild

“The Hard Nut,” dances into the BAM Howard Gilman Opera House from Dec. 10 to 18.

“The Hard Nut” is an exhilarating New York City tradition. BAM and Mark Morris Dance Group once again present the holiday classic — a cheeky yet reverent homage to “The Nutcracker.” For this updated classic fairytale, Morris sets the action in the groovy ’70s, complete with go-go boots, G.I. Joe soldiers, a dancing Barbie doll, and inspired gender-bending casting. “The Hard Nut” takes its title

from the story-within-a-story from Hoffman’s “The Nutcracker and the Mouse King,” wherein an evil Rat Queen promises to restore the Princess Pirlipat’s beauty if a young man can crack the “hard nut” with his teeth.

“The Hard Nut,” Dec. 10, 2 pm and 7:30 pm; Dec. 11, 3 pm; Dec. 14, 15, 16, 7:30 pm; Dec. 17, 2 pm and 7:30 pm; Dec. 18 at 3 pm. Tickets range from \$25 to \$135.

BAM Howard Gilman Opera House (30 Lafayette Ave. between Ashland Place and St. Felix Street in Fort Greene, www.bam.org).

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Calendar

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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!

FRI, DEC. 2

IN BROOKLYN

"The Most Miserable Christmas Tree"

Fort Hamilton Army Base Theater, 101st Street and Fort Hamilton Parkway; (718) 482-3173; www.narrowcommunityTheater.com; 8 pm; \$25 (\$20 seniors and students; \$15 children under 12).

This fun-filled family musical centers on a Christmas tree named Douglas Fir, who lives his happiest day as he's decorated for Christmas, but soon becomes miserable as he's tossed to the curb after the festivities. The play is presented by the Narrows Community Theater.

SAT, DEC. 3

IN BROOKLYN

Soul Incribed: BAM Cafe, 30 Lafayette Ave. between Ashland Place and St. Felix Street; www.bam.org/programs/bamcafe-live; 10:30 am and 2 pm; \$10.

Fusing poetic hip-hop lyrics and soulful vocals with funk and dub-influenced production, artists Baba Israel, Duv, Sean Nowell, and Yako 440 spin a dance party for the whole family. Hip-hop dancer Ken Fury will join to showcase his skills, while also giving volunteers from the audience the chance to explore theirs. For children 6 to 11 years old.

F.A.D. Holiday Market: St. Paul's Church basement, 190 Court St.; (917) 775-4636; www.fadweekend.com; 11 am to 6 pm; Free admission.

This chic curated indie market will showcase more than 45 independent artists, designers, and makers. Discover local handmade goods directly from the makers and one-of-a-kind gifts for this holiday season. There will be jewelry, accessories, vintage finds, fashion, art, and photography, home and kitchen items, bath and body essentials, and much more. Don't miss out on this hip retail outpost.

Wild Mushroom Hunt: Grand Army Plaza, Union Street between Flatbush Avenue and Prospect Park West; (914) 835-2153; www.wildmanstevebrill.com; 11:30 am; \$20 (\$10 for children under 12).

Join "Wildman" Steve Brill and discover the



Julie Larsen Waizer

Breakfast with penguins

Come share a delicious breakfast with the animals at the New York Aquarium on Dec. 10.

Participants will enjoy a light breakfast along with child-focused activities while the marine mammals, including sea lions and otters, enjoy their own morning meals. The program includes an animal encounter with sea creatures including horseshoe crabs or

urchins, and, of course, the black-footed penguins that call the aquarium home.

Breakfast with the Animals, Dec. 10 from 9:30 am to 1:30 pm. Tickets are \$40 and \$45 for non-members.

New York Aquarium [602 Surf Ave. between W. Eighth and W. Fifth streets in Coney Island, (718) 265-3448; www.nyaquarium.com].

great abundance of edible and medicinal wild plants and mushrooms in the park. This foraging tour is perfect for kids. Pre-registration is required.

Visiting the solar system: Fort Greene Park Visitor Center, enter park at Myrtle Avenue and Washington Park; (718) 722-3218; 1 pm to 2:30 pm; Free.

Our Urban Park Rangers will be your guides to the solar system, discussing the science, history, and folklore of the universe. Discover the mysteries of the solar system and take a closer look at the sun.

Historic Games: Lefferts Historic House, 452 Flatbush Ave. between Empire Boulevard and Eastern Parkway; (718) 789-2822; www.prospectpark.org; 1 pm to 3 pm; \$3.

Join the Prospect Park Alliance at Lefferts Historic House for some great indoor fun. Learn how to play Nine-Man Morris and make your very own playing board to take home.

"The Most Miserable Christmas Tree": 2 pm and 8 pm. Fort Hamilton Army Base Theater. See Friday, Dec. 2.

Moscow Ballet's "Great Russian Nutcracker"

Kings Theatre, 1027 Flatbush Ave. between Beverly Road and Tilden Avenue; www.kingstheatre.com; 3 pm; Starting at \$45.

Direct from Russia, this classic will entertain the whole family this Christmas. Experience exceptional dancing, a 60-foot growing Christmas tree, hand-made costumes by resident designer Arthur Oliver, and stunning sets hand-painted in Russia.

FURTHER AFIELD

Breakfast with the Animals: Bronx Zoo, 2300 Southern Blvd. at Boston Road, The Bronx; (718) 220-5103; www.bronxzoo.com; 9 am to 10:30 am; \$60 (\$65 non-members).

Participants will learn more about the zoo's penguins, meet their keepers, and watch the birds eat their seafood breakfast. This program is for children of all ages. Ticket price includes one adult and one child.

Calendar

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

SUN, DEC. 4

IN BROOKLYN

F.A.D. Holiday Market: 11 am to pm. St. Paul's Church basement. See Saturday, Dec. 3.

Outdoor skills: Prospect Park Audubon Center, enter park at Lincoln Road and Ocean Avenue; (718) 287-3400; www.prospectpark.org/audubon; 1 pm to 2:30 pm; Free.

Our Urban Park Rangers are well-versed in outdoor lore. Learn tips and tricks that will enhance your knowledge of the natural world, and might just save your life. All programs are family-friendly, but are recommended for ages 8 and older.

"The Most Miserable Christmas Tree": 2 pm. Fort Hamilton Army Base Theater. See Friday, Dec. 2.

Dumbo Family Holiday Party: PowerHouse Arena, 28 Adams St. at Water Street; (718) 666-3049; www.powerhousearena.com; 3-5 pm; Free.

Join the festivities with holiday and winter-themed book readings and meet kids' books illustrators as they battle each other in a good-natured drawing competition based on holiday-inspired suggestions from the audience!

Klezmer concert: On Stage at Kingsborough, 2001 Oriental Blvd. at Oxford Street; (718) 368-5596; www.onstageatkingsborough.org; 3 pm; \$32 to \$37.

Celebrate Hanukkah with the musical group Golem. Witness their wild energy combined with a boundless love of tradition as they share songs of Hanukkah and beloved favorites as well as original material in Yiddish, Russian, English, and French. Post-performance CD signing with the artists!

TUES, DEC. 6

IN BROOKLYN

Christmas Tree Lighting: Owl's Head Park, 68th Street and Bliss Terrace; acebook.com/owlshheadvolunteers; 7 pm to 8:30 pm; Free.

Join in the fifth annual event hosted by the Owl's Head Park Horticulture Group. There will be music, hot cocoa, and a visit from Santa.

"The Winter's Tale": BAM Harvey Theater, 651 Fulton St. at Rockwell Place; (718) 636-4100; www.bam.org; 7:30 pm; Tickets start at \$25.

The William Shakespeare play, performed by Cheek by Jowl, was originally conceived to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the Bard's death. With actors in casual modern dress and the intelligent use of simple sets, director Declan Donnellan, who won a Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement at the Venice Biennale this summer, renders the time- and location-shifting storyline fluidly and clearly.



David Behl

The holidays with Grace

The Grace Chorale of Brooklyn celebrates 40 years with a holiday concert at Grace Church on Dec. 9 and Dec. 11.

Come hear this joyous selection of holiday music, featuring Christmas music from the 20th Century including the "O Magnum Mysterium" by Morten Lauridsen, followed with the brass ensemble playing Giovanni Gabrieli's "Canzona per sonare No. 2," and then the chorus' "Hope for Resolution" by Paul Caldwell and Sean Ivory, "Christmas Cantata" by

Daniel Pinkham, "O Magnum Mysterium" by Morten Lauridsen, "Gloria" by John Rutter, and "Joy" (from "The Preacher's Wife"), arranged by David Maddux and featuring soloist Mykal Kilgore.

Holiday Concert, Dec. 9 at 7 pm and Dec. 11 at 3 pm. Tickets are general admission for \$15, and \$12 for students and seniors.

Grace Church [254 Hicks St. in Brooklyn Heights, (718) 707-1411; www.gracechorale.org].

WED, DEC. 7

IN BROOKLYN

"The Winter's Tale": 7:30 pm. BAM Harvey Theater. See Tuesday, Dec. 6.

THURS, DEC. 8

IN BROOKLYN

"The Winter's Tale": 7:30 pm. BAM Harvey Theater. See Tuesday, Dec. 6.

FRI, DEC. 9

IN BROOKLYN

Grace Chorale's Holiday Concert: Grace Church, 254 Hicks St. at Grace Court; www.gracechorale.org; 7 pm; \$15 (\$12 students and seniors).

A holiday choral celebration featuring works for brass and organ, including "O Magnum Mysterium" by Morten Lauridsen and "Christmas Cantata" by Daniel Pinkham.

"The Winter's Tale": 7:30 pm. BAM Harvey Theater. See Tuesday, Dec. 6.

"The Most Miserable Christmas Tree": 8 pm. Fort Hamilton Army Base Theater. See Friday, Dec. 2.

SAT, DEC. 10

IN BROOKLYN

Breakfast with the Animals: New York Aquarium, 602 Surf Ave. between W. Eighth and W. Fifth streets; (718) 265-3448; www.nyaquarium.com; 9:30 am to 1:30 pm; \$40 (\$45 non-members).

Participants will enjoy a light breakfast along with child-focused activities while the marine mammals, including sea lions and otters, enjoy their own morning meals. The program includes an animal encounter with sea creatures such as horseshoe crabs or urchins.

Coming in from the cold: Lefferts Historic House, 452 Flatbush Ave. between Empire Boulevard and Eastern Parkway; (718) 789-2822; www.prospectpark.org; 11 am to noon; Free (reservations required).

This event is for children with autism spectrum disorders so they can learn how the family of yesteryear would spend the cold winter months making and playing toys and games through sensory-based exhibits and activities. In addition, attendance is limited, light and sound reduction for those with noise sensitivity, and a downloadable pre-trip story is available. Registration is required.

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

F.A.D. Holiday Market: 11 am to 6 pm.
St. Paul's Church basement. See Saturday,
Dec. 3.

"The Most Miserable Christmas Tree": 2 pm and 8 pm. Fort Hamilton Army Base Theater. See Friday, Dec. 2.

"The Winter's Tale": 7:30 pm. BAM Harvey Theater. See Tuesday, Dec. 6.

SUN, DEC. 11

IN BROOKLYN

Nature Exploration: Prospect Park Audubon Center, enter park at Lincoln Road and Ocean Avenue; (718) 287-3400; www.prospectpark.org/audubon; 10 am to 1 pm; Free.

Learn to appreciate the beauty of nature and develop self-reliance, creativity, and problem-solving skills through different outdoor play-based activities; get inspired by nature with the new Discovery Packs, a ready-to-go kits filled with nature activities for families; and learn how to identify birds and use binoculars and field guides in an intro to bird watching.

F.A.D. Holiday Market: 11 am to 6 pm.
St. Paul's Church basement. See Saturday,
Dec. 3.

Bones of an Old Dutch House tour: Lefferts Historic House, 452 Flatbush Ave. between Empire Boulevard and Eastern Parkway; (718) 789-2822; www.prospectpark.org; Noon to 1 pm; \$10.

Examine the white oak timbers (the bones) of Lefferts Historic House and the many layers that were added, subtracted, and changed over the past 230 years. Climb the staircase for a view of the attic's smokehouse and descend into the cellar for a look at the foundation. This event is for adults and teenagers, and is limited to 10 people. Reservations required.

"The Colonial Nutcracker": Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts at Brooklyn College, 2900 Campus Rd. between Hillel Place and Avenue H; (718) 951-4500; www.brooklyncenter.org; 2 pm; \$15.

An annual holiday favorite, Dance Theatre in Westchester performs its family-friendly, full-length version of Tchaikovsky's ballet set in wintry colonial Yorktown, complete with a red-coated mouse army, an enchanted nutcracker prince, and simultaneous narration to help young audience members enjoy this timeless classic.

"The Most Miserable Christmas Tree": 2 pm. Fort Hamilton Army Base Theater. See Friday, Dec. 2.

"The Winter's Tale": 3 pm. BAM Harvey Theater. See Tuesday, Dec. 6.

Grace Chorale's Holiday Concert: 3 pm. Grace Church. See Friday, Dec. 9.

Handel's "Messiah": Good Shepherd



Viktor Miloslavsky

Hear Hanukkah favorites

Dance in the aisles and celebrate Hanukkah with the musical group Golem at On Stage at Kingsborough on Dec. 4. The band — with a combination of fearlessly wild energy and a boundless love of tradition — shares songs of the holiday and beloved favorites as well as original material in Yiddish, Russian, English,

and French. And don't miss a post-performance CD signing with the artists!

Golem on Dec. 4 at 3 pm. Tickets are \$32 to \$37.

On Stage at Kingsborough [2001 Oriental Blvd. at Oxford Street in Manhattan Beach, (718) 368-5596; www.onstageatkingsborough.org]

Church, Avenue S between Brown and Batchelder streets; (718) 998-2800; 6 pm; Free.

Come and listen to the choir, soloists, and orchestra perform this seasonal tradition.

The Geminids Meteor shower: Salt Marsh Nature Center, 3302 Avenue U; (718) 421-2021; 7 pm to 8:30 pm; Free.

Our Urban Park Rangers will be your guides to the solar system, discussing the science, history, and folklore of the universe. See one of the best meteor showers in the heavens, producing up to 120 multi-colored meteors per hour at its peak, which is predicted to take place on Dec. 14. Meteors are best viewed on cloud-free nights, but this program is rain or shine. For tweens and teens.

FRI, DEC. 16

IN BROOKLYN

"The Nutcracker": On Stage at Kingsborough, 2001 Oriental Blvd. at Oxford Street; (718) 368-5596; www.onstageatkingsborough.org; 7 pm; \$32 to \$37.

The State Ballet Theatre of Russia presents the full act of the holiday classic with Tchaikovsky's story of a little girl's fantasy into the world of fairies, toy soldiers, and an army of mice!

SAT, DEC. 17

IN BROOKLYN

F.A.D. Holiday Market: 11 am to 6 pm.
St. Paul's Church basement. See Saturday,
Dec. 3.

Gowanus Holiday Marketplace: Brooklyn Colony, 274 Fourth Ave. at Garfield Place; www.brooklyncolony.com; 11 am to 7 pm; Admission is free.

More than 40 vendors, artists, crafters, brunch, and foodie stuff are on display.

Scavenger Hunt: Herbert Von King Park, Clifton Place and Marcy Avenue; (718) 421-2021; www.nycgovparks.org; 1 pm to 2:30 pm; Free.

Our Urban Park Ranger hiking guides will introduce you to the hidden gems of New York City. On our hikes, you may explore nature, discover our city's urban forests, or just unplug from the world to clear your head. Bring your own digital camera or smartphone.

SUN, DEC. 18

IN BROOKLYN

Nature Exploration: 10 am to 1 pm.

Calendar

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

Prospect Park Audubon Center. See Sunday, Dec. 11.

F.A.D. Holiday Market: 11 am to 6 pm. St. Paul's Church basement. See Saturday, Dec. 3.

Gowanus Holiday Marketplace: 11 am to 7 pm. Brooklyn Colony. See Saturday, Dec. 17.

Brooklyn Symphony Orchestra: Brooklyn Museum, 200 Eastern Pkwy. at Washington Avenue; (718) 638-5000; www.brooklynmuseum.org; 2 pm; \$20 (\$10 members).

Start the afternoon with Tchaikovsky's musical depiction of Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet" — soaring love theme and sword fights included! The concert continues with three Spanish-flavored works, the highly colorful "Capriccio Espagnol" by Rimsky-Korsakov, de Falla's "Love, the Magician" ballet suite, and Ravel's "Boléro."

SUN, DEC. 25

IN BROOKLYN

Hanukkah Art Festival: Jewish Children's Museum, 792 Eastern Pkwy. at Kingston Avenue; (718) 907-8833; www.jcm.museum; 10 am to 5:30 pm; Free with museum admission.

Children celebrate the holiday with fun activities including an olive oil art workshop, game show, doughnut decorating, and more.

MON, DEC. 26

IN BROOKLYN

Hanukkah Art Festival: 10 am to 5 pm. Jewish Children's Museum. See Sunday, Dec. 25.

Christmas and New Year: Prospect Park Audubon Center, enter park at Lincoln Road and Ocean Avenue; (718) 287-3400; www.prospectpark.org/audubon; Noon to 4 pm; Free.

Join the Prospect Park Alliance for family programming to ring in the new year.

TUES, DEC. 27

IN BROOKLYN

Hanukkah Art Festival: 10 am to 5 pm. Jewish Children's Museum. See Sunday, Dec. 25.

Christmas and New Year: Noon to 4 pm. Prospect Park Audubon Center. See Monday, Dec. 26.

WED, DEC. 28

IN BROOKLYN

Hanukkah Art Festival: 10 am to 5:30 pm. Jewish Children's Museum. See Sunday, Dec. 25.

Christmas and New Year: Noon to 4



Just wild for mushrooms

It's a wild time in Prospect Park with "Wildman" Steve Brill and daughter Violet on a Wild Mushroom Hunt on Dec. 3.

Violet, an excellent foraging teacher (and bird expert), is showing the way and co-leading this fun foraging tour with her dad that is suitable for children of all ages.

Come and discover the great abundance of edible and medicinal wild plants and mushrooms in the park. Even this late in the season the park is a great place to find interesting edibles.

Wild American persimmons are one

of the best-tasting fruits on Earth, and three of these trees are near the southwest corner of the lake. Smaller than commercial Asian persimmons, this native fruit is sweeter and creamier, and the trees in this park are still small enough for you to shake down any ripe fruit that's not already lying on the ground.

Wild Mushroom Hunt, Dec. 3 at 11:30 am. Tickets are \$20 and \$10 for children under 12. Pre-registration is required.

Meet at Grand Army Plaza [Union Street between Flatbush Avenue and Prospect Park West, (914) 835-2153; www.wildmanstevebrill.com].

pm. Prospect Park Audubon Center. See Monday, Dec. 26.

THURS, DEC. 29

IN BROOKLYN

Hanukkah Art Festival: 10 am to 5:30 pm. Jewish Children's Museum. See Sunday, Dec. 25.

FRI, DEC. 30

IN BROOKLYN

Christmas and New Year: Noon to 4 pm. Prospect Park Audubon Center. See Monday, Dec. 26.

SAT, DEC. 31

IN BROOKLYN

Christmas and New Year: Noon to 4 pm. Prospect Park Audubon Center. See Monday, Dec. 26.

New Year's Eve fireworks: Grand Army Plaza, Union Street between Flatbush Avenue and Prospect Park West; www.prospectpark.org; 11 pm to 1 am; Free.

Join the Prospect Park Alliance and Borough President Adams for this annual fireworks celebration with a special twist this year as we kick off the park's 150th anniversary celebration. Locations for viewing the fireworks include Grand Army Plaza, the park's West Drive, and along Prospect Park

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

West between Grand Army Plaza and Ninth Street. RSVP to let us know if you are joining, and receive a special prize.

SUN, JAN. 1

IN BROOKLYN

Hanukkah Art Festival: 10 am to 5:30 pm. Jewish Children's Museum. See Sunday, Dec. 25.

LONG-RUNNING

IN BROOKLYN

"Birding": Plymouth at Brooklyn Bridge Park, 99 Plymouth St. at Anchorage Place; www.brooklynbridgepark.org; Daily, 8 am–11 pm; Now – Sat, Dec. 31; Free.

To represent the abundant birdlife and environment of Brooklyn Bridge Park, Hilary Lorenz has arranged the richly colored and textured prints along the hallway in groups of aquatic birds including Canada geese, mallard ducks, wood ducks, mergansers, seagulls, and more.

Ice Skating: LeFrak Center at Lakeside, 171 East Dr. at Ocean Avenue; (718) 462–0010; www.lakesidebrooklyn.com; Mondays – Thursdays, 10 am to 6:30 pm, Fridays, 10 am to 9 pm, Saturdays, 11am to 9pm, Sundays, 11 am to 9 pm, Now – Tues, Feb. 28, 2017; \$6 (\$9 weekends: Skate rentals extra).

Lace up those skates and get sliding across the ice.

Craft Room: Jewish Children's Museum, 792 Eastern Pkwy. at Kingston Avenue; (718) 907–8833; www.jcm.museum; Sundays – Thursdays, 12:30 pm to 2:30 pm, Thurs, Dec. 1 – Thurs, Dec. 29; Free with museum admission.

Get creative with a variety of Jewish-themed crafts to choose from!

Religious services: No Limit Beulah Sabbath Pentecostal Church, 5417 Avenue N between E. 54th and E. 55th streets; (718)241–8100; www.nolimitbeulah.org; Saturdays, 11 am.; donation.

Sabbath school for children.

"Hansel and Gretel": Puppetworks, 338 Sixth Ave. at Fourth Street; (718) 965–3391; www.puppetworks.org; Saturdays and Sundays, 12:30 pm and 2:30 pm, Now – Sun, Dec. 18; \$10 (\$9 kids).

A marionette version of the fairy tale, with folk songs from Humperdinck's opera. Suitable for children 3 years and older. Reservations suggested.

Train Operator Workshop: New York Transit Museum, Boerum Place at Schermerhorn Street; (718) 694–1600; www.mta.info/mta/museum; Saturdays and Sundays, 3:30 pm to 4:30 pm, Now – Sat, Dec. 24; Free with museum admission.

Drop by our Computer Lab to take control of a city subway car and operate it over virtual miles of track, using some incredibly



Burst into the new year

What better way to sweep out the old and ring in the new than to see a fantastic fireworks display and enjoy live entertainment at Grand Army Plaza on Dec. 31?

The festivities begin at 11 pm with entertainment and hot refreshments, followed by a phantasmagorical pyrotechnic display that lights up the winter midnight sky.

Enjoy all the "oohs" and "aahs" at the annual celebration presented by Borough President Adams and the Pros-

pect Park Alliance.

Plan on getting there early so you can claim the best spot to watch the show, and then gawk at the booms and bursts above. It's the most happening place in the city and it's all free.

New Year's Eve on Dec. 31, 11 pm at Grand Army Plaza.

Prospect Park at Grand Army Plaza (Union Street between Flatbush Avenue and Prospect Park West in Park Slope, www.prospectpark.org/calendar/event/1471647).

realistic software! Space is limited, recommended for children 10 years and older.

"The Hard Nut": BAM Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave. between Ashland Place and St. Felix Street; www.bam.org; Saturday, Dec. 10, 2 pm; Sunday, Dec. 11, 3 pm; Wednesday, Dec. 14, 7:30 pm; Thursday, Dec. 15, 7:30 pm; Friday, Dec. 16, 7:30 pm; Saturday, Dec. 17, 2 pm; Sunday, Dec. 18, 3 pm; \$25 - \$125.

An exhilarating New York City tradition, BAM and Mark Morris Dance Group once again present the holiday classic "The Hard Nut" — a cheeky yet reverent homage to "The Nutcracker." For this updated classic fairytale, Morris sets the action in the groovy '70s.

FURTHER AFIELD

"Christmas Spectacular": Radio City Music Hall, 1260 Avenue of the Americas between 50th and 51st streets, Manhattan;

(212) 247–4777; www.radiocity.com; Daily, various times; Now – Mon, Jan. 2, 2017; Starting at \$37.

The Rockettes are kicking up their heels for another fabulous season of ho, ho, ho. This holiday tradition begins when the curtain rises, the music swells, and the dancers kick their way onto the stage. Enjoyable for every age.

Holiday Train Show: New York Botanical Garden, 2900 Southern Blvd. at Fordham Road, The Bronx; (718) 817–8700; www.nybg.org; Tuesdays – Sundays, 10 am to 5:30 pm, Now – Mon, Jan. 16, 2017; \$20 (\$10 children) (Weekends \$30; \$18 children).

More than 150 New York City landmarks are recreated in miniature out of bark, nuts, leaves, and other plant parts. Large-scale model trains zip around such familiar sites as the Statue of Liberty and Rockefeller Center. A recent addition of

Calendar

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

3,000-square-foot of exhibition has made room for new trains, bridges, and tracks. Reservations strongly recommended.

"The Three Bears Holiday Bash":

Swedish Cottage Marionette Theater, W. 79th Street and West Drive, Manhattan; (212) 988-9093; Mondays, 10:30 am, noon, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, 10:30 am and noon, Wednesdays, 10:30 am, noon, and 2:30 pm, Saturdays and Sundays, 1 pm, Now – Fri, Dec. 30; \$7 (children under 12) \$10 for all others.

Presented by the Swedish Cottage Marionette Theatre, this show celebrates the holiday season with song, dance, and puppetry. See what happens when Baby Bear invites Santa to star in Mama and Papa's annual show. Interactive participation, too! Reservations are strongly advised. Closed on Dec. 24 and 25. Special times for Dec. 26, 27, 28, 29, and 30.

"Hanna and the Moonlit Dress":

The Theater at the 14th Street Y, 344 E. 14th St., Manhattan; (212) 780-0800; www.14streety.org/tickets; Fridays, 4 pm, Saturdays and Sundays, 10 am and noon, Fri, Dec. 2 – Sun, Dec. 18; \$18 (\$12 children; \$35 family of 5).

Based on the Izhak Scheiger-Dmi'el book, this is a magical and interactive musical for children about the power of good deeds. Children will help create the world of the play by crafting paper masks, costumes, and set pieces with the actors. The show is 50 minutes with no intermission.

Holiday Handmade Cavalcade: Chelsea Market, 410 W. 16th St., Manhattan; www.handmadecavalcade.com; Daily, 10 am to 7:30 pm; Mon, Dec. 5 – Sun, Dec. 11; \$2 at the door.

The Etsy team is hosting its first week-long shopping event, offering greeting cards, art, beauty products, clothing, sweets, and so much more.

Stories & Songs: 6 River Terrace, 6 River Terrace, Manhattan; (212) 267-9700 X 9363;



Telling the tree's story

This fun-filled musical, "The Most Miserable Christmas Tree," is brightening the stage at the Fort Hamilton Army Base Theater on Dec. 2, 3, 4, 9, 10, and 11.

Presented by the Narrows Community Theater, this production centers on a Christmas tree named Douglas Fir. Douglas enthusiastically tells the audience about the joys of being decorated and his happiest days leading up to Christmas. Unfortunately, on Dec. 26, Douglas is soon stripped of adornment, thrown to the curb, and left in a pile of trash. Determined to remain a decorated Christmas tree, Douglas heads back home to Mistletoe Mountain and Miss Balsam's Finishing School for

Christmas Trees to get the diploma he never received. Douglas only succeeds in becoming more miserable and turns his back on Christmas until an important discovery allows him to understand his true purpose and the real meaning of the holiday season.

"The Most Miserable Christmas Tree," Dec. 2, 3, 9, and 10 at 8 pm; Dec. 3, 4, 10, and 11 at 2 pm. Tickets \$25, \$20 for seniors and students, and \$15 for children under 12.

Visitors must present proper ID for admittance onto the base.

Fort Hamilton Army Garrison [101st Street and Fort Hamilton Parkway in Bay Ridge, (718) 482-3173; www.narrowscommunitytheater.com].

registration@bpcparks.org; bpcparks.org/event/stories-and-songs-age-13mths-3-5yrs-old/2016-09-14/?s=stories%20and%20songs; Wednesdays, 9:40am, Now – Wed, Dec. 14; \$335.

Share the joy of live music performed

weekly by exciting professional musicians together with your infant, toddler, or preschooler. Enjoy movement, dancing, singing, and music-making. The program introduces and integrates musical performance into young children's lives

Fun Hanukkah crafts

Children celebrate the Jewish Festival of Lights with these fun activities at the Hanukkah Art Festival from Dec. 25 through Jan. 1 at the Jewish Children's Museum.

Children can experiment with olive oil and discover their artistic talents in a creative painting workshop, play an interactive game show, decorate doughnuts, and snap away in the Macca-

bee photo booth. Closing out activities include lighting the Menorah.

Hanukkah Art Festival, Dec. 25 through Jan. 1, 2017, Mondays through Thursday 10 am to 4 pm, Sundays 10 am to 5:30 pm. Free with admission to the museum.

Jewish Children's Museum [792 Eastern Pkwy. at Kingston Avenue in Crown Heights, (718) 907-8833; www.jcm.museum].



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New & Noteworthy

BY LISA J. CURTIS



Feet-uring friendship

During this time of post-presidential election anxiety, Hannah Lavon's line of mismatched socks that encourage kids to get to know others who are "different" seems like an especially timely holiday gift.

The Brooklyn entrepreneur's Pals Socks make unlikely pairings from their line of charming, vividly hued characters as a reminder to kids to see past the outside and get to know the person on the inside, because they just might find a friend. For instance, a red-and-black ladybug is matched with a bright green caterpillar with blue stripes.

Pals Socks are a blend of combed cotton, polyester, nylon, and spandex, and the bottoms have silicone skid-free grips. They range in size from infant to 4-8 for kids, and they offer adult versions, too, so the whole family can "defeat the norm" together.

Pair of Ladybug and Caterpillar Socks by Pals Socks, \$9, www.palsocks.com.

Delicious real estate



Cookies from Dancing Deer Baking Company make the holidays even sweeter.

Consider their Hanukkah Stars or their pre-baked Gingerbread Cookie House kit for delightful hostess gifts. Its responsible list of ingredients make a parent's heart sing: unbleached flour, cage-free eggs, food color derived from red cabbage extract, etc.

Dancing Deer's kosher "Hanukkah Star Cookies" package includes eight pretty, star-shaped buttery treats drizzled with slate-blue icing and sprinkled with sparkling sugar crystals. Oy vey, it's hard to nosh just one!

Dancing Deer's pre-Baked Gingerbread Cookie House Kit is a wonderful traditional craft, made much easier by using the cardboard container as the house, and adhering the pre-baked gingerbread cookies with the included royal icing mix and piping bag. The kit allows families to craft a charming "house" in a kid-friendly amount of time.

Hanukkah Star Cookies by Dancing Deer Baking Co., 4 oz., \$5.99, Gingerbread Cookie House by Dancing Deer Baking Co., 31.5 oz., \$19.99, Whole Foods Markets.

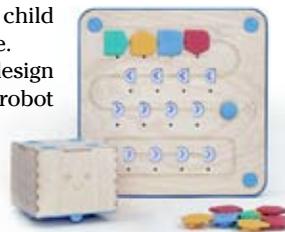


Baby's first robot

This blockhead will teach your child to be smart about coding in no time.

Primo Toys masterfully pairs design and function in Cubetto, a wood robot that takes direction from kids as young as 3 to 6 years old! Amazingly, children who are not yet able to read and write are able to learn the basic concepts of programming when they place wood coding blocks into the Bluetooth-enabled interface board. Children can create their own journey for Cubetto as he travels along the included fabric map, or an adult can read Cubetto's story, which prompts the child to direct the wood cube to specific locations on the map. Parents will love that this skill can be honed without screentime!

Cubetto by Primo Toys, \$225, www.primotoys.com.



Unique family tree

"The Great Spruce" is a new, charming children's picture book about a grandfather and his grandson who share a love for a tree that's wonderful for climbing. Author John Duvall and illustrator Rebecca Gibbon — with her Ludwig Bemelmans-esque illustrations — demonstrate that a tree's life doesn't have to end when it becomes a Christmas decoration. The story takes a surprising turn when the young boy courageously saves the majestic tree from a man wielding a chainsaw. Grandfather and grandson then accompany the enormous conifer — rootball intact — on a journey to the big city, where the spruce is decked out in holiday finery. After the celebration, the tree is replanted. Perhaps "The Great Spruce" will also sprout respect for nature in your young reader's heart.

The Great Spruce book by John Duvall, \$17.99, www.penguin.com/youngreaders.





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