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Letter from the publisher

Celebrating love & loving

Kids are starting to date in fifth and sixth grades, I'm told. The crushes of my youth were so innocent, compared to the "stirrings and behavior" of today's preteens. Watching my daughter and her friends when she



was in middle school was a real eye-opener for me, as I'm sure it is for many parents. Dating at that age is a hard one to get a handle on, and control over youngsters is often nonexistent. This month we feature an interesting and informative article about the need for parents to take the lead in discussions and be consistent with their children, in spite of other influences.

Personally, I have spent the last

10 years reeling sometimes as my tween and then teen daughter dealt with the variety of growth spurts — both emotionally and psychologically — that often daunted both of us. During those years there were issues of bullying from other

girls, claiming of friends and former boyfriends, and competition in so many ways that presented both of us with a series of complexities.

How to help our children with all they will encounter and need to deal with is an ongoing education. We need all the expert advice we can get, and here within our magazines we attempt to provide as much good advice as possible in every issue. Love is an important

topic. Learning to love and be loved with ease and delight, and recognizing real love, is what we're all after in life, and what we certainly want for our children.

In February we celebrate love with candy, flowers, cards and other romantic notions and displays.

Personally, I'm for love all the time, every day, in every way and I don't think this planet could possibly have enough of it. There is no possible overdose of true love or true devotion. Real love is displayed in many ways and sometimes it is even disguised behind impatience, arguing, jealousy and



other feelings. Nothing in life is constantly showing its good side, not even love.

Winter is a special time to extend love to the friends, neighbors and family around you who may need your help, assistance or just a good hug, and this year, here in New York, there is no doubt that we are experiencing winter. Bundle up, hug each other, and let's all hug our children in every way, every day.

Here's to love. Thanks for reading!

Susan Weiss-Voskidis, Publisher

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Call it puppy

Preteen dating: trivial terrain or timely talks?

BY DENISE YEARIAN

Boys and girls have always been attracted to one another. But when that attraction begins varies tremendously from one person to another. For some, those feelings start in late elementary school. For others, it's not until high school. Although the age gap varies, experts agree that when a 9- or 10-year-old child begins showing interest in the opposite gender, parents need to sit up and take notice.

"Kids at this age may have a boy- or girlfriend, but still not know what dating means," says Shaunti Feldhahn, relationship researcher and analyst, and author of "For Young Women Only." "They are mimicking what they see played out on TV or by teenagers, but they don't have a full grasp of how a relationship works."

Parents, she says, may have a tendency to dismiss these early re-

lationships as trivial, but they should be taken seriously.

"It's an advanced signal of what is to come and needs to be addressed by mom and dad while they still have a major influence in their child's life," Feldhahn suggests.

"Parents should take the lead in facilitating age-appropriate discussions with their preteen regarding friendships, dating, decision making and sex," advises Jane Bowen, director of a statewide parent education organization. "If your son says he has a girlfriend or is going out with someone, ask what that means."

But, she says, talking about it shouldn't be a one-time deal.

"These conversations need to happen frequently so parents know where their preteens are in relationships and preteens know what their parents' expectations are," she continues.

This is what Patty Ford and her husband David did with their 9-year-old daughter Amber.

"When she was in the fourth grade, Amber would tell me that so-and-so liked her and that other girls in the class

had boyfriends," recalls Ford. "I felt like if she came and shared it with me, it was important that we talk about it."

Ford told her daughter she was too young to have a boyfriend, but she was careful to keep the line of communication open. Two years later, a bigger relational issue cropped up. With the parent-child dialogue already established, Ford was able to help her daughter navigate the sticky



love!



To-do list for parents of dating preteens

situation.

"This past fall, a boy at school gave Amber a necklace," says Ford. "Since it was right before her 11th birthday, we told her if she wanted to keep it, it would have to be a birthday gift."

But on her birthday, the same boy gave Amber a card with \$50 tucked inside of it. Amber didn't know what to do, so she brought the money home and talked it over with her mother.

"I told her there was no way she could keep it, and she understood," Ford explains. "We talked about how accepting a gift like that could make the boy think their relationship could possibly go to the next level — holding hands, giving him a kiss, that kind of thing. We agreed that I would call the boy's parents, explain the situation and tell them the money would be returned the next day."

When parents talk with their children, they should communicate their values and expectations and then lay out boundaries. Equally important is to explain why the boundaries are there.

"Rather than imposing rules preteens may resent, help them understand reasons why the rules are there, so they begin to develop that internal compass," says Feldhahn.

Parents should also try to find out what is influencing their child — be it friends, an older sibling, or some form of media — so they can address the issue as a whole.

"When Amber and I talk about relationships, I find out what is going on not just with her, but with the

entire sixth-grade class," says Ford. "It helps me understand what's influencing her. Is it persuasion from a new friend? Is she trying to fit in? Does she feel pressured?"

Although 10-year-old Jordan Adams isn't yet attracted to the opposite gender, he fell prey to a peer-induced pair off that made him uncomfortable.

"This past fall, Jordan's school organized a dance for the kids," explains his mother Amy. "It was supposed to be a reward for good grades, but things spiraled out of control. Jordan came home one day and told me he didn't want to go to school, because everyone had a date for the dance and he didn't."

Adams called the school and talked with the principal. He informed her that the administration knew nothing about the pair offs — it had been instigated by the students.

"Up to this point, I hadn't discussed boy/girl relationships with Jordan," Adams says. "I didn't think I needed to. But I'm realizing now that even if he isn't thinking about girls, the kid sitting next to him in class may be, so I've got to maintain a constant dialogue with him."

"Attractions are normal and will only increase as children grow," Bowen concludes. "If we want to prepare our kids for healthy dating relationships later on, we need to start communicating and building a trusting relationship with them now."

Denise Yearian is the former editor of two parenting magazines and the mother of three children.

- Do realize that attraction to the opposite gender can happen any time from late elementary school to high school.

- Do take your preteen's relationships seriously and don't minimize her feelings, no matter how trivial they may seem.

- Do realize that the way your preteen views and conducts her relationships now paves the way for future dating relationships.

- Do keep the line of communication open with your preteen. Continue talking with her so you know how her relationships are progressing.

- Do ask your preteen how she defines "dating," "going out" or "having a boyfriend."

- Do let your preteen know that it is OK to express her emotions. This is particularly true for boys who may think they need to suppress their feelings.

- Do monitor your preteen's media exposure. The messages young people receive from music, TV, movies, books and magazines are laden with love, sex and relationships. Make sure these messages line up with the values your family upholds.

- Do know your preteen's friends. They have a tremendous influence on the way your child thinks, talks and acts.

- Do teach your preteen that the way she dresses sends a message to others. Clothing should be modest and should not have provocative messages written on it.

- Do give your preteen guidance with regard to decision-making and what is appropriate. Teach her to make decisions based on careful thought, not heartfelt emotions.

- Do be a good role model in the way you conduct your own relationships.

- Do set boundaries with regard to relationships and communicate these to your preteen. These could include: not being alone with the boy/girlfriend, having parental supervision at home, not being allowed in each other's bedrooms, no touching,

staying in group settings, and having a curfew. Equally important to setting boundaries is to help your preteen understand why these boundaries are there so she begins to develop an internal compass.

- Do set expectations and communicate these to your preteen. These could include staying focused on academics and extra-curricular activities, maintaining current friendships, time on the phone and Internet, etc.

- Do ask your preteen open-ended questions and keep the conversation positive: What do you like about this boy? What do you have in common? How does he treat you? Who are his friends? Do you like them? Do you feel respected by this person? This gets the child thinking about what is important in a relationship.

- Do talk with your preteen about respecting others and oneself.

- Do honor your preteen's privacy, but reserve the right to inspect her backpack or room if she begins to show signs that concern you.

- Do be an emotional support when the relationship ends. Most preteen relationships are short-lived. Your child may or may not be hurt, but your sensitivity and empathy toward the situation will build a healthy trust and bond between you.

- Do realize that preteens may question your values, particularly if they don't line up with media messages or their friends' values. This is normal and means they are questioning but not necessarily rejecting what you uphold.

- Do know when it is time to intervene. If the relationship moves beyond innocent, the preteen becomes obsessive, or you begin to see unhealthy behaviors, contact your school counselor or other professional for advice.

- Do realize this is the beginning of a long journey for your preteen. Continue to communicate and build a healthy relationship so she learns to successfully navigate this facet of life.

Resources

"For Young Women Only," by Shaunti Feldhahn and Lisa Rice

"How to Talk so Kids will Listen, and Listen so Kids will Talk," by Adele Faber

"How to Talk so Teens will Listen, and Listen so Teens will Talk," by Adele Faber

"You and Your Adolescent: Revised Edition," by Lawrence Steinberg, Ph.D.

"Raising a Thinking Preteen: The 'I Can Problem Solve' Program for 8- to 12-Year-Olds," by Myrna Shure and Roberta Israeloff

"Roller-coaster Years," by Charlene C. Giannetti and Margareta Sagarese



NEWBIE DAD

BRIAN KANTZ

School bus stories

Making memories on the iconic yellow ride

Everyone has a memorable school bus story. Here's mine: I must have been in first or second grade at the time. One fall morning, as I walked up to the bus stop at the corner, I watched in curiosity as a bunch of older kids frantically gathered crabapples and layered them in the street. They snatched rotten apples off the ground and picked fresh ones from the tree. Young and naïve, I

bus holds an iconic place in the history of American education. On the one hand, buses have provided essential transportation for generations of children, allowing them to get to school safely from around the block or across the county.

On the other hand, buses have been parked in the middle of some hugely significant legal battles regarding who goes to school where.

They've also been known over the years as the rolling headquarters for bullies and braggarts.

Of course, school buses and school bus

maybe most important, a first bit of independence is established. A new world opens up to a child when he climbs up those bus steps and drives away from home.

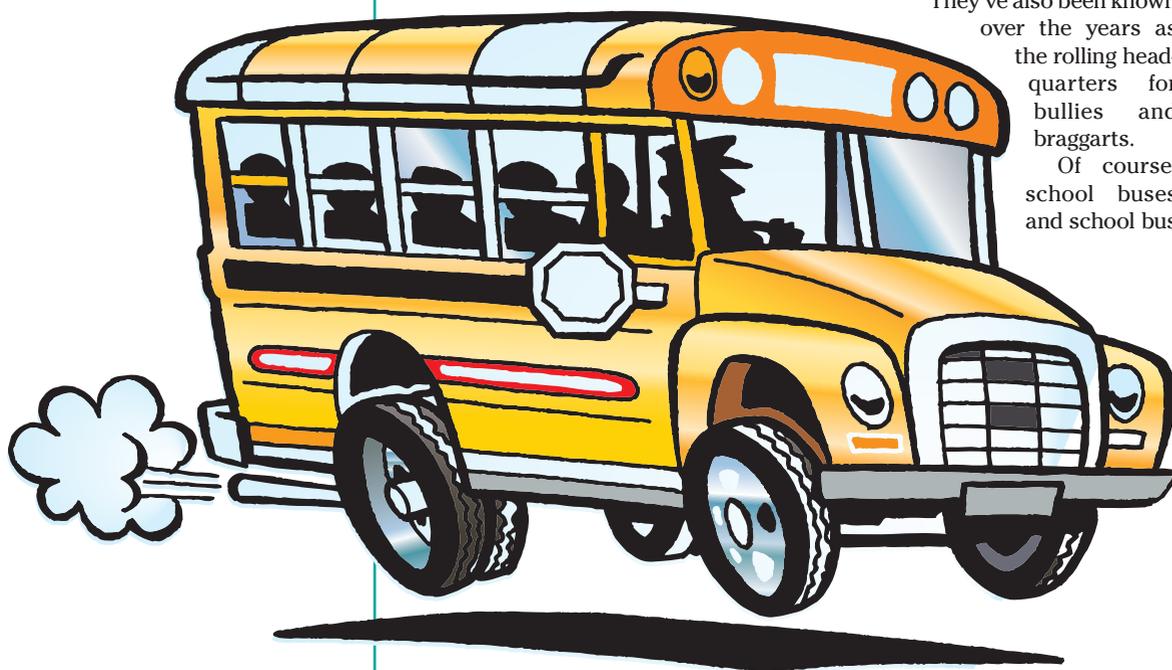
Luckily, our son enjoyed riding the bus right from the start. Within a few weeks, he was telling my wife and I about his new "bus friends" — the kids who he sat with and near. Whenever we went out somewhere around town, from the grocery store to the park, the boy would run into one of his friends from the bus. This happened so often that I began to think that he knew more people than I did.

Our son also told us what he was learning on the bus. That was an eye-opener. At dinner, he matter-of-factly stated that he had learned the "f-word" on the bus. The f-word? Already? Really? Upon further inquiry, it turned out that the f-word he learned on the bus was "fart." Crisis averted and no need to drive him to school yet.

Later in the year, he regaled us with some song lyrics that he had picked up on the bus. He launched into a rendition of that old holiday classic, "Jingle bells, Batman smells, Robin laid an egg, the Batmobile lost a wheel, and the Joker got away! Hey!" It was beautiful. Would that song ever have enjoyed such longevity without the bus? We sang that tune on the bus when I was a kid, and now my son has learned those time-honored lyrics.

Old-timers love to talk about walking to school. Uphill both ways. In the snow. The argument is that hoofing it built character. I'd have to argue that taking the bus builds character, too. A year and a half since my son started riding the bus, it still amazes me that my little boy just jumps right on every morning. As we wave goodbye to each other, I'm proud that he's willing and able to be that independent. I'm proud of this daily act of courage. And I'm proud that he hasn't yet thought of lining the bus's path with apples.

Brian Kantz stopped taking the bus when his family moved one block away from the school. He then had to make the uphill walk, both ways. Visit Brian online at www.briankantz.com or drop him a note at theneubiedad@yahoo.com.



wondered what they were up to.

With their prep work complete, the jokesters stepped back a few feet from the curb and waited in silence. Moments later, our big yellow school bus, driven by a guy named Norm, came barreling down the road — right on schedule.

I distinctly recall the SHHPPPLL-LATTT sound of the bus running over about 200 apples — and spraying applesauce all over the place. I also remember the collective cheer of triumph from the kids who made it happen. And even now, more than 30 years later, I can still see the look on that poor bus driver's face as he shook his head in disapproval. He knew that he'd been had by a bunch of kids. Ah, the school bus.

For better or worse, the school

drivers have made their mark on pop culture, too. Which parent doesn't cringe at the thought of a real-life version of Otto — the headphone-wearing, head-banging driver who gets the Simpson kids to school — driving their own kids? And who couldn't help but laugh when Napoleon Dynamite boarded the bus in that movie's opening scene and tossed an action figure tied to a string out the window so that he could drag it down the dusty road? What a great idea.

Last year, when my oldest son started kindergarten and hopped on the bus for the first time, I was struck by the significance of it all. The school bus really is its own little kids club where friendships are made, legend and lore is handed down from big kids to little kids, and



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GOOD SENSE EATING

CHRISTINE M. PALUMBO, RD

Chocolate: A gift to your heart

Is it any coincidence that two images — hearts and chocolate — are inescapable during the month of February? The gift of chocolate is linked to affairs of the heart, but can it also be healthy for the heart?

Unwrap the science

Much of the research about cocoa's health benefits has been conducted over the last 10 years. Over 740 beneficial bioactive components have been identified in cocoa beans, according to David A. Stuart, PhD, with the Hershey Center for Health and Nutrition. For example, health-promoting sterols, resveratrol, flavan-3-ols and especially flavanols are abundant in cocoa. And the fatty acids in cocoa are either neutral for blood cholesterol, or actually help lower it.

Is dark chocolate truly the best? According to a 2006 study in the "Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry," flavanols are most concentrated in cocoa powder, followed by baking chocolate, dark chocolate, milk chocolate and finally syrup.

And it's no surprise that nearly all the clinical trial studies have been conducted with cocoa powder or dark chocolate. The research suggests beneficial effects on cardiovascular risk factors such as serum cholesterol, blood pressure, vascular reactivity, platelet stickiness and systemic inflammation. However, the research has only been done with adults, and

Q: How much chocolate provides health benefits?

A: According to published research, between one and 10 tablespoons (10 to 100 calories) per day of cocoa. Or two to 20 gram tasting squares (90 calories total) of dark chocolate.

there is no proof of health benefits for children at this time.

Children and chocolate

Children love hot chocolate, right? But is it healthy for them?

"A cup of hot chocolate prepared with real cocoa powder is an excellent way to consume relatively high amounts of chocolate flavanols," states Jeffrey Blumberg, PhD, director of the Antioxidants Research Laboratory at Tufts University.

What about milk chocolate? Many children prefer it, because it's smoother and sweeter to the taste. Blumberg, who along with Stuart, spoke at the American Dietetic Association Food and Nutrition Conference and Expo in November 2010, reassures that milk chocolate does contain the same flavonoids as dark chocolate, but at a 20 to 50 percent lower concentration. (There are no flavonoids in white chocolate, as it is not made from the cocoa bean.)

Stimulant effect?

Parents often worry about the caffeine in chocolate and its stimulant effect on young children. Actually, there are two naturally-occurring stimulants, caffeine and theobromine. Caffeine is present in the same order in chocolate products as flavanols, with cocoa powder being the highest. But the amount is small. For example, a 1.55 ounce milk chocolate bar contains about 12 milligrams of caffeine, the same amount in about three cups of decaf coffee.

Closely linked to caffeine, theo-

bromine has only a mild stimulatory effect. Dark chocolates, unsweetened baking chocolate and cocoa powder contain more theobromine than do milk chocolate and syrups.

When it comes to the amount of chocolate to shoot for, Blumberg notes that consistency is key and that eating it every day is what provides the most benefits. He also reminds us to practice moderation.

"Children need to learn the important lesson that candy — even candy with healthy phytochemicals like the flavonoids — should be consumed in small amounts as a fun, but indulgent, treat. Of course, encouraging kids to expand the horizons of their palate beyond simple sweets to more adventuresome foods (including dark chocolate) is always a good idea."

Christine M. Palumbo is an award-winning dietitian in Naperville, IL. She is a mother of three and the wife of a chocoholic. Herself? Not so much. Contact her at Chris@ChristinePaumbo.com or (630) 369-8495.



Old-fashioned hot cocoa

INGREDIENTS

1 tablespoon unsweetened cocoa powder
Dash salt
1 cup reduced fat milk
1/4 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 tablespoon sugar

INSTRUCTIONS: Mix cocoa and salt in a mug. Heat milk in the micro-

wave on high for 90 seconds or until hot. Gradually add the hot milk to the cocoa mixture in the mug, stirring until well blended. Stir in vanilla and sugar. Makes 1 serving.

NUTRITION FACTS: 190 calories, 27 grams carbohydrate, 9 grams protein, 5 grams fat, 2.5 grams saturated fat, 24 grams sugar (13 grams from added sugar), 270 milligrams sodium, 30 percent daily value calcium, 10 percent daily value vitamin A, 4 percent daily value iron, 12 milligrams caffeine.

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What teeth need

Why fluoride is so vital to your child's choppers

BY PHYLLIS G. MERLINO, DDS

If you use a fluoride toothpaste, drink water with the recommended level of fluoride, and get regular dental check-ups with professional fluoride applications, your teeth have a much better chance of fighting tooth decay and staying where they belong ... in your mouth.

Fluoride is a mineral found naturally in water and many foods. In drinking water, the recommended level is one part of fluoride to one million parts water. Communities

it builds up the resistance of teeth by strengthening the tooth's enamel. It works its way into tooth enamel crystals and makes teeth harder and more resistant to these acids.

Fluoride works two ways: It works systemically by being ingested through drinking water and foods, and by topical application, such as toothpastes, mouth rinses and professional dentist-applied applications. It is the combination of these methods that helps fluoride have its maximum benefit.

It is the fluoridated water that has proven to be the most effective and simplest application. It should be emphasized that fluoride toothpastes are not a substitution for the combination of fluoridation of community drinking water and professional fluoride treatments, which have been shown to significantly reduce the incidence of tooth decay. As a result, some 7,000 communities have chosen to treat their water with fluoride over the past 30 years.

Chicago was the first big city to fluoridate its water supply, and has reported that tooth decay was cut in half among its school children as a result. (An added plus: Chicago parents saved millions of dollars on dental bills.) The city credits the fluoride for this improvement.

New York State's health department conducted one of the first and most rigorously controlled research projects in medical history. Teams of dentists examined the teeth of thousands of school children in two upstate cities, both of which had fluoride-free water. In both cities, the incidence of tooth decay was the same.

Then, fluoride at 1.2 parts per million was filtered into the water supply of one of the cities. Over the next 10 years, physicians and dentists repeatedly checked the children, medically and dentally. When the decade ended, they found only one difference: The children ages 6 through 10 in the city with the fluoridated water had 60 percent fewer decayed, missing or filled teeth than the other city with no fluoride. And,

there were no harmful medical effects noted during the examination of these children.

In the five boroughs of New York City, we have the optimum amount of fluoride supplied to us in our drinking water. But, what if your child does not drink tap water? What if your child drinks bottled or natural spring water? Well, it is advised to switch to tap water or buy bottled drinking water that has fluoride in it, which is readily available at the supermarket.

Don't forget — even the tap water with which we cook allows us to get some fluoride into our system, and most people do cook with tap water.

What if you live in a town that does not contain any fluoride in its drinking water, like many towns in New Jersey? Then, a prescription for a vitamin that contains fluoride can be given from the pediatrician or pediatric dentist, based on the age and weight of the child. This type of treatment is only advisable to those children that have no fluoride in the tap water at all. In areas where the water is not fluoridated, children's teeth can be substantially protected against cavities by this prescription, which is available in drop or tablet form.

Today, fluoridation is accepted and endorsed as a major public health measure in preventing tooth decay by virtually every scientific and health organization in the country. Fluoride in drinking water is the single most effective element we have for preventing tooth decay, particularly for infants and young children whose tooth enamel is in the formative stage. Starting fluoridation at a young age will help your child have a lifetime of good dental health.

Dr. Phyllis G. Merlino is a board-certified pediatric dentist with a private practice in Staten Island and is the proud mother of two young boys. She is active on the teaching staff of Staten Island University Hospital's Dental Residency Program and is involved in many local dental organizations. She spends much of the month of February visiting schools and giving oral health presentations. For more information, visit www.DrMerlino.com.



that don't have a natural fluoride level to meet this standard will add just the right amount of fluoride to the water supply. Why? The reason is simple: fluoride helps prevent tooth decay.

Sugars in the mouth set up a favorable environment for the growth and development of germs. These germs produce acids that cause decay and leave behind deposits that injure the teeth. Fluoride is one of the big defenses against this process, because

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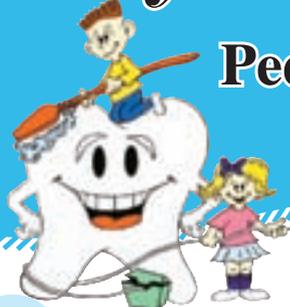
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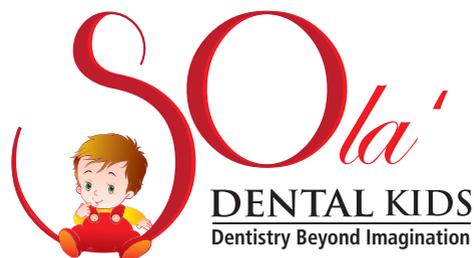
Top 10 dental facts

Dentists explain how to keep baby teeth cavity-free



- 1** Most children have 20 baby teeth by their third birthday.
- 2** Cavities in baby teeth become much more serious faster than cavities in adult teeth.
- 3** Don't be a floss flunkie! It is recommended that parents floss their child's teeth until she is old enough to do so herself, usually at about 6 years old.
- 4** Flossing should be done prior to brushing in order to get food out from between teeth, so that any excess food will be easier to remove with the toothbrush.
- 5** To figure out if a child is old enough to brush her own teeth, go by this dental rule of thumb: If a child is unable to tie her shoelaces, she is not likely to brush her teeth well and will need the help of an adult.
- 6** Permanent teeth appear more yellow in color than baby teeth.
- 7** To prevent tooth decay in young children when food and bacteria get trapped in grooves of teeth, usually the back molars, it might be necessary to place sealants — thin plastic coatings similar to adult fillings — on top of the grooves as an aid in keeping new permanent teeth healthy.
- 8** The average person brushes her teeth 30-40 seconds each day, but dentists encourage teeth to be brushed two times daily for two minutes each time.
- 9** Don't forget about your child's tongue! It is important to clean the tongue as well.
- 10** Beautiful smiles need a great start! Good dental hygiene and regular visits to the dentist are crucial in maintaining a healthy smile your children will be proud to display on picture day!

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Dr Anne Gershkowitz is a proud member of ADA, NYSDA, NYDA and has been named Top American Dentist for 2 years in a row by Consumers' Research Council of America, an independent research company based in Washington D.C.

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761-2090 or www.DrMerlino.com



Dr. Merlino is a native of Staten Island and continues to live here. She's a graduate of Susan E. Wagner High School- NYU College of Arts and Science, Manhattan, and went onto NYU College of Dentistry where she earned a Doctor of Dental Surgery degree in 1994. After a one-year general practice residency at Staten Island University Hospital, Dr. Merlino decided to specialize in pediatrics. She attended and graduated from a two-year specialty training residency program at

Brookdale University Hospital and Medical Center, Brooklyn, in June of 1999. Within six months of receiving her specialty certificate, Dr. Merlino started her own private practice limited to Pediatric Dentistry. Dr. Merlino is board certified by the American Board of Pediatric Dentistry, a division of the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, and is a member of the Attending Staff in Pediatric Dentistry in the Department of Dentistry at Staten Island University Hospital. She is a teaching doctor for the residents in the Dental Clinic and in the Operating Room while the patients are under general anesthesia. She is also the Pediatric Dentist on the Cleft Lip and Palate Team of Staten Island University Hospital and treats many children with oral and facial deformities. During Children's Dental Health Month and throughout the school year she visits many schools to educate children on the importance of good dental hygiene and how their diet can affect the health of their teeth.

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Get smarter about pediatric dentistry

BY LISA LAZZARA

It's important to teach children the proper way to take care of their teeth, but it's just as important that they learn that going to the dentist can be FUN!

What is a pediatric dentist?

In the same way that a pediatrician is trained to meet a child's medical needs, a pediatric dental specialist is uniquely qualified to protect your child's oral health, using the most advanced techniques in our delightfully friendly treatment areas.

In addition to four years of den-

tal school and four years of college study, pediatric dentists have two years of training in child psychology and comprehensive dental care for infants and children of all ages — including those with physical and mental disabilities.

They learn to deal with the behavioral aspects of children, how to make them feel comfortable, and to make the experience pleasant.

Pediatric dentists help children, teens, young adults, and those with special needs. They also follow the growth and development of your child's mouth in terms of alignment of the teeth, and refer your child to the orthodontist at the appropriate time to manage concerns or

problems early.

Why are baby teeth so important?

Primary (baby) teeth are important because they help with proper chewing and eating, help in speech development, and add to an attractive appearance — adding to the child's self esteem. A child who can chew easily, speak clearly, and smile confidently is a happier child.

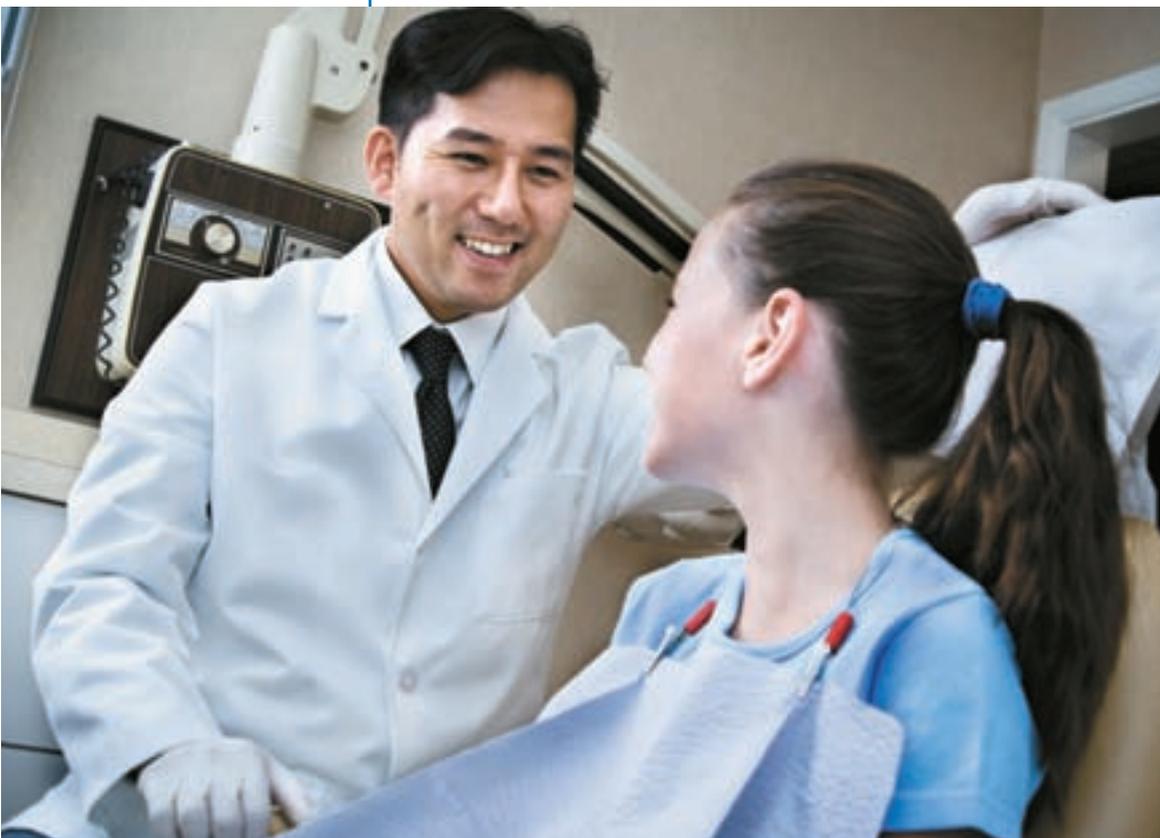
Healthy primary teeth allow normal development of the jawbones and muscles, as well as save space for the permanent (adult) teeth to come into place. If a baby tooth is lost too soon, permanent teeth can come in crooked. Decayed baby teeth can cause pain, abscesses and infections that can spread to the permanent teeth. Also, your child's general health can be affected if diseased baby teeth are not treated. Remember, some primary molars are not replaced until ages 10 to 14, so they must last for years.

When should my child visit the dentist?

According to the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, a child's first dental visit should be as soon as the first tooth erupts, or at least by the first birthday, whichever comes first.

A pediatric dentist is a specially trained dentist who has the experience and expertise to examine and treat children with all their needs in mind. It is recommended that children have routine well exams to check on developmental milestones for their teeth and gums, similar to well checks at the pediatrician's office.

Lisa Lazzara is a board-certified pediatric dentist at Kids Dental of Staten Island [1839 North Railroad Ave. in Oakwood, (718) 667-5437].



Preventing cavities

An easier way to give kids healthier teeth



Everyone wants to know how to prevent cavities, and the answer is simple — practice good oral hygiene and eat foods that don't contain too much sugar. But getting kids to do either of those is next to impossible. Luckily, there is a better choice available — it's called xylitol and it is a type of sugar that has been proven to help prevent cavities.

A cavity is a result of a disease process, just as diabetes is a disease process. If your children get cavities, they have Strep cavity-causing bacteria and they probably acquired it from you. Brushing teeth and limiting sugar will help stop the bacteria from

proliferating, thereby stopping cavities in their tracks.

Xylitol, pronounced zeye-li-tall, is a natural sugar found in fruits and vegetables like berries and corn, and is usually extracted from birch bark. It helps prevent cavities by changing the environment of the mouth to hinder the growth of the bacteria.

Xylitol is organic and was approved by the FDA in 1963. It can be found in chewing gum, breath mints, tooth wipes, lollipops and many other types of candies. We can bake with it and even sweeten our coffee with it. It is on the shelves of health food stores and is widely available on the Internet.

Xylitol must be used consistently

for it to be effective. If we use too much, it may cause a laxative effect, like mannitol or sorbitol, and studies show that if we use too little, it has no effect. It has fewer calories than cane sugar (2.4 calories versus 4 calories per gram, respectively) and it is recommended for diabetics.

Children crave candy and sugary snacks throughout the year. Xylitol is a guilt-free choice for parents to allow their children to eat treats.

Now, all we have to do is focus on the brushing! Sweet.

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A weighty matter

How you can prevent childhood obesity

Obesity is defined as having excess body fat, and has become a serious public health issue for children, adolescents, and adults. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 97 million people in the U.S. are obese or overweight. Over the last 20 years, the prevalence of obese children has doubled, and that of adolescents has tripled, according to the centers. This accounts for approximately 11 million children and adolescents. So what does this mean for you and your family?

In children and adolescents, obesity significantly increases the risks of health problems that continue into adulthood, particularly high cholesterol and triglycerides, elevated blood pressure, and glucose intolerance and insulin resistance, which can lead to type 2 diabetes. In addition, it also increases risks of other chronic diseases such as coronary heart disease, stroke, fatty liver disease, gallstones, asthma, skin conditions, orthopedic problems, menstrual disorders in adolescent girls and women, and an increased risk of certain types of cancer — such as breast, uterine, and colon.

How do you know if you or someone in your family is overweight or obese?

Obesity is assessed by calculating the body mass index from a person's height and weight. An adult with a body mass of 30 or greater is obese. For children 2 years of age and older, as well as for adolescents, the number can also be calculated from the child's height and weight, and plotted on the center's mass index-for-age growth chart to obtain a percentile ranking (mass index charts for children and adolescents are age and sex-specific). Children and adolescents with a body mass between 85-95 percentiles are overweight, and those with a body mass greater than the 95 percentile are obese.

What can you do to prevent obesity for yourself and your family?

Although these risks are real and serious, there are some very simple



lifestyle changes that can get you and your family on the way to improving your overall future health. Most experts agree that the road to success begins with developing healthier eating habits, such as:

- Eating more fruits, vegetables, and whole grain foods
- Eating fewer foods that are high in sugar and fat
- Eating leaner meats, poultry, and fish
- Eating more lentils and beans
- Drinking more water and limiting sugar-sweetened drinks and soft-drinks
- Drinking low-fat or non-fat milk and other dairy products
- Encouraging breast feeding in infants

Talk to your primary healthcare provider about a referral to a nutritionist for nutritional counseling and education, from which you and your family can learn about portion control for servings and how to read nutrition labels.

Try to promote increased physical activity in your family by making it a group activity. It's recommended that children and adolescents participate in some form of moderate physical activity for about one hour a day, such as brisk walks, jumping rope, playing tag, swimming, playing

soccer or basketball, dancing, and much more. Your child doesn't have to participate in team sports — she just needs to have fun and be active.

And beware of the sedentary lifestyle: too much time watching TV or going online promotes inactivity and frequent unhealthy snacking. Reduce the time children spend on sedentary activities by limiting the time they spend watching television, playing video games, and computer time to less than two hours a day. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children not have televisions in their rooms, and children less than 2 years of age not watch television at all.

Lastly, keep informed. There are a variety of resources available for obtaining information about your child's health and maintaining healthy lifestyles:

- www.letsmove.gov
- www.cdc.gov (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- www.aap.org (The American Academy of Pediatrics)
- <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/home/home.shtml> (New York City Dept. of Health and Mental Hygiene)

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Both faculty and students work in collaboration with St. John's University and Wagner College.

We invite all interested in our school to visit our open house Feb. 2, 9-11am-12:30-2 pm or schedule a private tour.

Continued on page 22

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Catholic Schools

DIRECTORY

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Never say never

Even young kids are at risk for eating disorders

BY MONICA BROWN

"I began as an anorexic when I was 11 years old. Then I discovered bulimia when I was 15 and struggled with the disease until I was 36 years old. This disease robbed me of my health, life, and relationships," a middle-aged woman with a history of eating disorders posted on an online forum. "I am now 44 years old. I now have cardiomyopathy (weakening of the heart muscle) ... unstable blood pressure ... I have constant heart palpitations, and I'm on a ton of meds that I have to live on the rest of my life just to live a close-to-normal existence. All for anorexia/bulimia. All to be in control and all to be thin."

Thirty-three years ago, when her struggle began as a young girl, this woman's case may have been an anomaly. But today, it's a far different story. While experts believe the predominant onset of illness is between 12 and 18 years of age, recent studies suggest younger children are more at risk these days than ever before.

In a new clinical report from the American Academy of Pediatrics,

published in the December 2010 issue of "Pediatrics," it is estimated that 0.5 percent of adolescent girls in the U.S. have anorexia, and one to two percent meet criteria for bulimia. There is now an increasing recognition of eating disorders in males, which now represent up to 10 percent of all cases of eating disorders, as well as in children of younger ages. An analysis by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality revealed that from 1999 to 2006, hospitalizations for eating disorders in children under 12 years of age increased by 119 percent.

Experts say it's difficult to measure the reasons for such an increase in younger children. But doctors continue to study the causes of the illness, in hopes that they can change those rising statistics. While there are different factors that contribute to each individual case, some constants remain across the board.

"With young kids, it's a fear element. It's an irrational fear element, and it could be that there's an enormous amount of emphasis (in the home) on dieting and weight, which could produce fear in a suscepti-

ble child," says Dr. Katherine Halmi, a board-certified pediatrician and clinical researcher at Weill Cornell Medical Center. "Remember, the child(ren) who get this, tend to be highly anxious, highly perfectionistic, insecure kids. They are psychologically and, probably, biologically vulnerable to develop anorexia when the environment is provocative."

A provocative environment that includes, she says, mothers who obsess over dieting and exercise. While there's widespread disagreement over theories like that one, nutritional experts say that, because of those rising statistics, and because obesity rates in children — another type of eating disorder — are on the rise, it's more important than ever for parents to reinforce healthy eating habits at home.

"Be a good role model. This is especially critical for mothers with their daughters. Eat well, choosing a variety of foods. Enjoy an occasional dessert, pizza or bag of chips and enjoy them without guilt," says Christine M. Palumbo, a registered dietician and adjunct faculty member at Benedictine University in Naperville, IL. "Don't criticize the size of your thighs or belly. And by all means, never suggest to your child that she is overweight. Don't count calories or exercise just to burn calories you've just eaten. Be physically active, because it's fun and makes you feel good afterward."

Early intervention and treatment can be lifesaving

There's one thing experts can agree on: early intervention and treatment is the key to getting a child or teenager with anorexia and/or bulimia the help needed to eventually save her life. Kidney and other organ damage, heart problems, bone loss, and a host of other health issues can plague a child with an eating disorder well into adulthood, if intervention doesn't take place early on.

Parents who suspect their child might have an eating disorder should

What is anorexia?

According to medical experts, anorexia is an eating disorder in which people intentionally starve themselves. It causes extreme weight loss, which the National Institute of Mental Health defines as at least 15 percent below the individual's normal body weight.

Food and weight become obsessions. Compulsiveness may cause strange eating rituals or the refusal to eat in front of others. It is not uncommon for people with anorexia to collect recipes and prepare gourmet feasts for family and friends, but not partake in the meals themselves. They may also adhere to strict exercise routines to keep off weight.

The cause of anorexia is not known. It can begin as innocent di-

eting behavior, but gradually progresses to extreme and unhealthy weight loss. Social attitudes toward body appearance, family influences, genetics, and neurochemical and developmental factors are considered possible contributors to the cause of anorexia.

Doctors say people who develop anorexia are more likely to come from families with a history of weight problems, physical illness, and other mental health problems, like depression or substance abuse. They may come from families that are challenged by appropriate problem solving, being too rigid, overly-critical, intrusive, and overprotective. Those with anorexia may also be dependent and immature in their emotional development, and are likely

to isolate themselves from others. Other mental health problems, like anxiety disorders, are often present in anorexia patients.

What is bulimia?

Bulimia is defined as uncontrolled episodes of bingeing (excessive overeating) that are usually followed by purging (self-induced vomiting), misuse of laxatives, enemas, fasting, or excessive exercise to control weight. When an individual with bulimia binges, she usually will eat much larger amounts of food than would normally be consumed within a short period of time (usually less than two hours). Eating binges occur at least twice a week for three months and may occur as often as several times a day.

first schedule a thorough exam with the family pediatrician, who can chart the child's proper weight and height, and rule out any other medical issues. The next step is to find a trained psychotherapist who can begin to work with the child, and in many cases, the family.

Maudsley therapy

Traditional therapies have focused on treating the patient individually, but a newer approach has emerged in recent years, and some experts believe this can be much more effective for young children and adolescents.

The Maudsley Technique is an intensive outpatient treatment that focuses on the family unit — parents play an active and positive role in order to focus on three key elements of treatment:

- Helping to restore their child's weight to normal levels expected given her age and height.
- Giving the control over eating back to the patient.
- Encouraging normal child/adolescent development through an in-depth discussion of these crucial developmental issues as they pertain to their child.

"Families should be involved," says Dr. Evelyn Attia, Director of the Center for Eating Disorders at New York-Presbyterian Hospital, a program that is known for being the only specialized, psychiatric inpatient unit dedicated to eating disorder patients in New York state. "We know that (family therapy) will improve the likelihood of success."

For young children in treatment, the concerns go beyond just specific medical and psychological care. Children in this program also meet with a certified teacher each weekday for classroom time and spend the afternoons completing homework assignments. The hospital works closely with local school districts to ensure the continuity of their coursework. During a patient's stay at the facility, families can undergo treatment, using some of the Maudsley techniques.

"Eating disorders affect the entire family, especially when the patient is young," says Attia.

And while doctors say they have learned to incorporate some of the methods used in Maudsley therapy during inpatient care, they also stress that Maudsley is critical to outpatient care, where families have



to do the hard work every day to see the results.

While treatment options can vary from program to program, doctors say there's one thing every family must do: get help quickly — mainly because they want their child to be healthy as soon as possible, but also, because forcing children into treatment before they are old enough to decide for themselves could save their lives.

"The real emphasis needs to be on diagnosing and treating children and teenagers before they reach the age of 18," Halmi emphasizes. "Once they reach the age of 18, they're a

legal citizen, and they can refuse care. And it's impossible to commit somebody for treatment, unless they're near death."

For more information on the Eating Disorder Center at New York-Presbyterian, visit nyp.org.

For more information on the Maudsley Technique, visit maudsleyparents.org.

Monica Brown is a cable television news anchor and freelance writer. She also conducts public speaking workshops for both children and adults. Monica lives on Staten Island with her husband and two children and can be reached at monicabrown@gmail.com.

Early intervention and treatment is the key to getting a child or teenager with anorexia or bulimia the help needed to eventually save her life.

Improving school for disabled kids

Overturing Rowley, the Kryptonite of special education

BY MARILYN SCATTOREGGIO

With the release of “Waiting for Superman,” a documentary film that attempts to give answers to a very complex problem, everyone is talking about education and what we, as a nation, need to do to raise the standards so that our children can compete in the 21st century. But these discussions leave out a very important demographic of children and the education problem they face.

For all the talk about raising national standards for education, we keep forgetting that there are more than 6.5 million kids with disabilities who receive services based on a federal law, known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. This law entitles all students with disabilities to receive a free appropriate public education — which means an individualized education program designed to meet the student’s needs.

The problem lies in the case of *Board of Education v. Rowley* — which the United States Supreme Court passed in 1982. In *Rowley*, it was determined that the Act only guarantees a “basic floor of opportunity,” meaning that public schools only need to provide disabled students with an education that allows them to make “some progress.”

The individualized program need not be the best one, nor one that will maximize the child’s educational potential corresponding with the opportunity offered to non-disabled students — rather, it need only be a program that the child will somehow benefit from.

What this means, in practice, is that all this talk about excellence in education does not apply to disabled students.

Every parent knows that a fourth-grade reading level will not translate into academic success at the college level. But when parents of disabled students question the education their children receive in public schools, the schools usually cite *Rowley*.

“We don’t have to give you the best education — your child only has to make ‘some progress;’” is a familiar refrain to any parent of a disabled child who seeks to address a lack of significant progress — whether in reading, writing, math, critical thinking, or life skills.

And advocates and attorneys who work in the trenches have seen the impact of this low standard. We have seen schools — even in high wealth areas — graduating students who cannot adequately read, write or do basic math calculations. We have seen schools place many students on a non-

diploma “individualized education program track” that, too often, does not give children the useful instruction they need to lead productive and independent lives.

We have also seen the passage-way between schools and the criminal justice system grow so large that it is almost as if there is a pipeline to juvenile detention, as schools increasingly use the courts to circumvent their responsibility to identify and provide an education to students with disabilities.

It is time we did better for all children. We need to discover strengths in every child and nurture them, even if it means redesigning the curriculum to accommodate the unique abilities and talents of each and every child. We need to teach all children how to think, question, and be creative to the best of their abilities.

We, as a country, need to ensure that all children are entitled to excellence in their education. It is time for Congress to amend the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and say “goodbye” to *Rowley*. Equal opportunity is a bedrock principle in the United States. Upon this principle rests the hopes and dreams of all of our children.

While the average child in this country is “Waiting for Superman” to save her education, we must remember that more than 6.5 million students with disabilities are also waiting for us to do something. Unless we change the standard — now — our children will still be left in the basement while we talk about educational excellence for everyone else.

Marilyn Scattoreggio has been an education advocate for more than 20 years. She works as the supervisor of education advocacy at the Long Island Advocacy Center, Inc., in Suffolk County. This essay is her personal opinion and not that of her employer.



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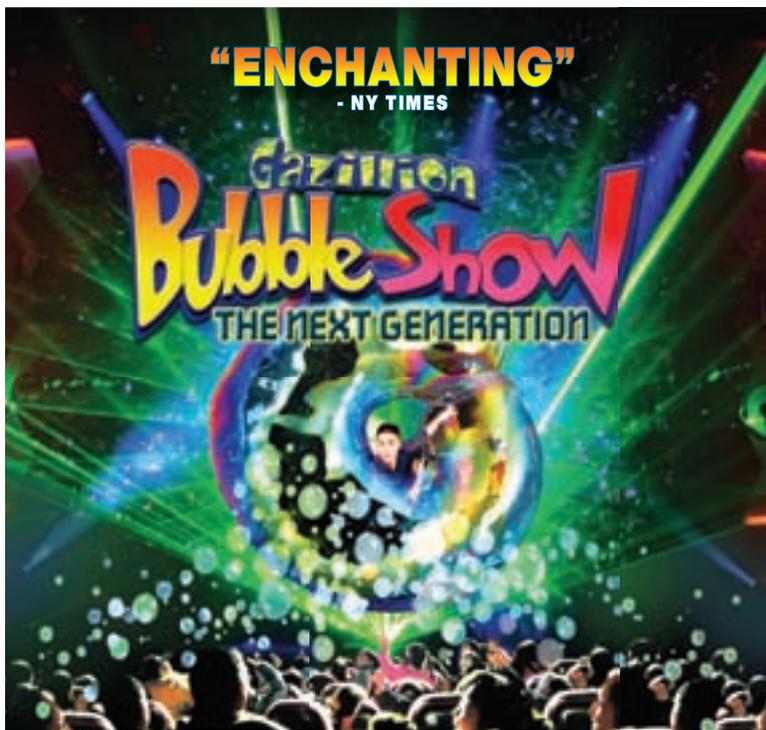
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Stopping bullies

City schools advise on how to help victims and tormentors

BY ALLISON PLITT

There has been a national trend in bullying within the last decade, with several events with tragic results in the last few months alone. Now, the city's Department of Education is taking steps to give teachers and parents ways to recognize and stop bullying.

The Department has launched seminars in schools citywide, which teach parents and teachers about the symptoms a child may display if she is being bullied by classmates, and ways to stop it.

"This is a school-wide initiative we are working on together. It's everybody's job to become involved," Rivky Broyde, a coordinator of Early Intervening Services told teachers and parents in a recent workshop.

In Broyde's opinion, violence on television shows and video games is a contributing factor to the increasing number of cases of bullying in the U.S. She also believes that as more children spend time on the Internet and social networking websites, there has been an inclination for students to cyberbully. Without necessary parental supervision, children have been able to post inappropriate comments online.

As a result of this trend, more schools have been teaching social and emotional education, although no mandated laws require it.

"Studies have really shown that social and emotional education actually has a positive affect on academics," Broyde stated. "It doesn't take away from the academics in any way. It only enhances it."

The department's workshops draw upon information gathered by the US Department of Health and Human Services and the National Association of School Psychologists. In accordance with their research, bullying is defined as "an imbalance of power in which the victims have difficulty defending themselves." Most bullying takes place when children are middle-school age or teenagers.

Profile of a bully

Despite the common conception that bullies are loners, most children who bully make friends easily and have a group of peers who support or encourage their bullying. Children who bully other students tend to be impulsive, lack empathy, have difficulty following rules, view violence in a positive way, and have average or above-average self-esteem.

"Boys are more straight-forward and physical about bullying, while girls are more sly and underhanded about it," Broyde observed. Gossiping, cliques and social exclusion are forms of non-verbal, emotional bullying that girls tend to use.

Effects of bullying

Children who have been bullied show signs of depression, loneliness, and anxiety. They lack self-esteem and an interest in school and often feel sick, are absent from school, and, in the worst-case scenarios, are suicidal.

Enrolling your child in activities in which she can enjoy and excel can help boost her self-confidence, which can help her be more assertive when she is being bullied.

"Parents can help build their child's self-confidence by encouraging their talents and making them feel good about themselves," Broyde explained. "Bullies usually have too much self-esteem or think too highly of themselves, so they put others down. We need to build the self-esteem of the victims than that of the perpetrators to bring the bullies down a notch."

If you're uncomfortable with the types of friends your children are spending time with, you can initiate play dates with other students. Forming new friendships also increases a child's self-assurance in social situations.

Intervention

If you suspect your child is being bullied, help her calm down, because it will be easier to gain her trust. Even if you disagree with how

she handled a situation, don't criticize her or assume that she did something to provoke the bullying.

"Getting a child to calm down and trust that you're on their side will really help the conversation later on," suggested Broyde. "This helps parents obtain as much information as possible about the bullying. The next step in the conversation would be 'How might you have handled this differently' or 'Let's problem solve this together.'"

Many times, children don't tell their parents about being bullied, because they don't want to be tattletales.

"Often bullies will say, 'What are you going to do, tell on me?'" Parents need to explain to their children the difference between tattling and the appropriateness of telling an adult for a purpose."

Don't advise that your child ignore the bully, because it makes the situation more serious.

"If a child doesn't learn how to speak up for himself, the bullying will not end," Broyde warns.

But a child should never hit back, because once he does, he's at fault because physical retaliation is not tolerated in schools, even if a child is provoked.

"The statements victims make cannot be antagonistic, because if the victim starts to make fun of the bully, the situation will escalate," says Broyde. "One idea about how to diffuse the tension in a confrontation is to use humor or make an irrelevant remark to throw the bully off guard."

Victims should not show fear or anger, but rather, calmly tell the bully to stop. Because children bully for attention, Broyde believes that sometimes the best solution is to tell the bully to stop and then walk away. The best advice for children being bullied is to avoid bullies as much as possible.

School intervention

When a child is too afraid to confront a bully, the parents should immediately contact the school, not the parents of the bully. The school



should act as a mediator by bringing both parents together to assist them in resolving the problem.

Once a parent is notified that their child has been bullying, the parent should enforce consequences for their behavior, such as less free time watching television or playing on the computer.

"If the punishment is too severe, it can lead to a more antagonistic relationship between the child and the parent," says Broyde.

Preventing a bully

The best way to prevent a child from becoming a bully is to make an effort to speak and act considerately and resolve problems in a non-violent manner.

"When children are around, parents need to think about what type of models they should be setting for them," Broyde remarked. "By demonstrating respectful behaviors, such as not making fun of somebody's outfit at a party, parents are being that model so their children can see those positive behaviors at home."

Since bullies have a tendency towards delinquency, it is suggested

that parents enroll them in athletic activities as an outlet for their extra energy.

One of the ways parents can teach their children values such as compassion, caring and respect, is by reading books to them with these messages.

"Reading books to your children is one of the easiest and also one of the most powerful ways for children to learn about values," Broyde said. "The message isn't coming at them directly, and they're not getting a speech from mom and dad. Sometimes indirectly going through stories, kids can identify with characters that they really love, so the message gets imbued in those ways."

While there are ways schools can counsel parents whose children bully, parents of victims can also work with the school to help their own children in social situations.

"If a parent notices their child is impulsive, hyperactive or inappropriate with social skills, the bully might be annoyed with this type of behavior," Broyde stated. "If you mention this to the school and the

teacher also notices the child having difficulty socially among friends, there can be a joint effort between the school and the parents in working on some of those social skills."

Peer intervention

If your child notices a bully picking on another student, the best thing to do is not laugh with the bully, as this only fuels the taunting. If your child feels safe confronting the bully, he should tell the bully to stop, as this shows the bully that no one thinks he's funny.

However, if your child does feel he would be in danger of being bullied himself, Broyde suggests two ways he can assist in the situation.

"First, by not participating in the taunting, the other students are sending a message that they aren't supporting the bully's behavior. If they do not laugh at the bullying, they take the power away from the bully who is acting out for attention. Second, the bystander should tell an adult about the bullying, or offer to accompany the victim to an adult to advise them of the situation."

The Department of Education has

also created its own peer mediation program, which is being taught to students. Children role play from a script and learn how to resolve conflicts between students.

"The strategy has proven effective, as peer pressure encourages students to respect each other instead of blaming an intervening teacher for taking sides," Broyde explained.

In implementing seminar and workshops, the department is making concerted efforts to tackle a problem that is now being addressed by schools across the nation.

"We can have these straight-A college students, and if they lack a socially emotional side, it doesn't bode well for our future. We really have to not only educate the mind but the heart at the same time," says Broyde.

For more information about bullying, visit www.stopbullyingnow.com.

Allison Plitt is a staff writer for Family Publications New York and a mother living in Queens with a preschool-age daughter. If you have any ideas you'd like to share with her about resources for families in Queens, please feel free to contact her at allisonplitt@hotmail.com.



LIONS AND TIGERS AND TEENS

MYRNA BETH HASKELL

In the mood

Teens and emotional swings

No, I'm not talking about the Glenn Miller song our parents used to swing to. I'm talking about those pesky mood swings for which our teenagers are infamous — one minute she's in a fabulous mood, the next, she's Cruella D'Evil with a hangover!

Save your breath. These are the times you need to find your sense of humor — and make a beeline to your cabinet where you store the herbal tea.

Why the drama?

Many experts say it's normal for teens to have mood swings. We're told we can blame them on those nasty little hormones.

"Hormones do play a part in moodiness. In the teen years, there is a perfect storm of physiologic, social, academic, family, and developmental challenges," says Robin Goodman, PhD, director of A Caring Hand bereavement center, and a consultant to Allegheny General Hospital. "It's a tough time for navigating the many choices and social pressures out there, which can create a great deal of stress."

In addition, teens are also moving away from family and parents as their main source of support as they try to solidify their identity. On top of the many social and physical changes teens are coping with, many are also dealing with academic expectations and pressures due to the college search process. All of this can wreak havoc on your teen's mood.

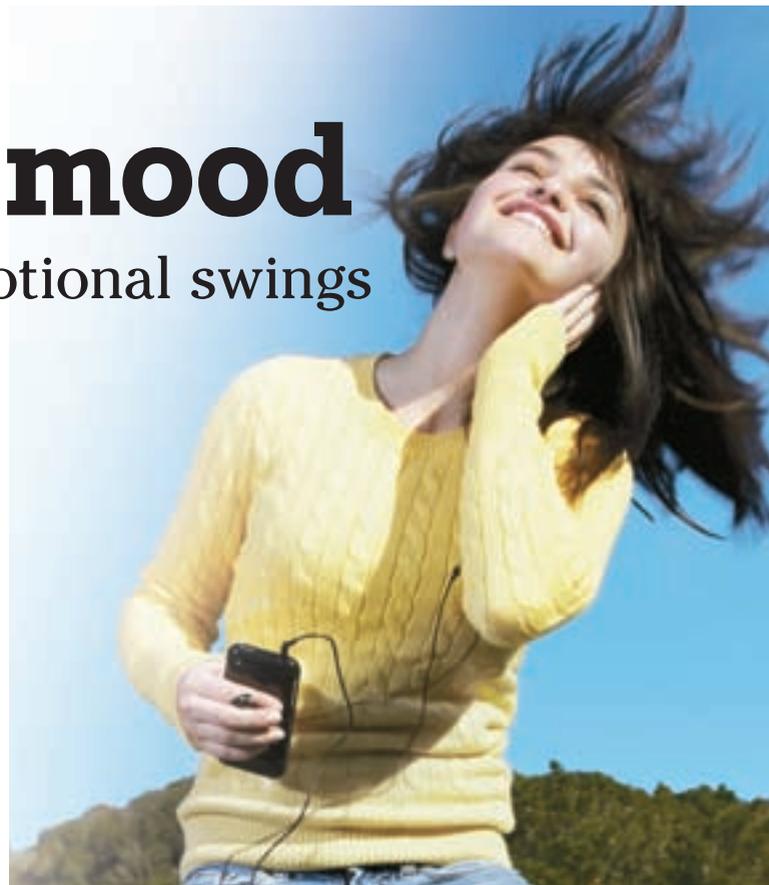
Goodman suggests talking "with," not "at" your teen.

"Keep in mind that teens want to feel heard and understood," she advises.

Don't minimize your teen's feelings by saying things like, "It will get better." Remember that limits are good and help keep your teen grounded.

Time to worry ... or walk away?

My daughter is full of extremes. She is either an excited chatter box, or she's down in the dumps and re-



fuses to tell me about her day. If she comes home from school in a dumpy mood, I've learned to give her space. I wait before trying to speak with her about what's going on, and, oftentimes, if I don't barrage her with questions, she'll eventually want to discuss what's bothering her, because she won't be able to hold it in any longer.

There are times, however, when parents should not assume that the latest drama is a typical teen mood swing. Always rely on your instincts.

"Parents have a history with their teens. If they are worried, there is a good chance that there's something of concern," says Goodman.

She instructs parents to pay attention to signs of real difficulty, including the following behaviors, which may indicate that your teen is in trouble and might need professional help: withdrawal, isolation, low energy, worrisome changes in eating and sleeping habits, acting out physically or sexually, a sudden drop in grades, and signs of suicide, such as giving away possessions, extreme euphoria or agitation.

"When a teen's mood is interfering with functioning at school, with friends, and with family, parents need to get to the bottom of what is going on," she says.

On the other hand, if you sense

that your teen is just going through her typical ups and downs, no need to fret. After all, you made it through those "terrible two" tantrums fairly unscathed. This, too, shall pass.

Tips and tales

"Don't try to reason or argue with him. It will only aggravate the situation. If your teen swung into a bad mood, chances are he'll swing out soon. Just walk away."

Polina Banelos, Watertown, NY

"I remind myself that teenage peer pressure is difficult. Then, I attempt to determine what has triggered my daughter's mood swing. When all else fails, I head to Starbucks and purchase her a soothing tea latte."

Clarissa Goins, Poughkeepsie, NY

Share your ideas

Upcoming topic:

Your teen has a bad case of spring fever. How do you help him stay focused?

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

Myrna Beth Haskell is a feature writer and columnist specializing in parenting issues and children's development. Her work appears in publications across the United States and Canada. She is the mother of two teenagers.

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PEPINO MARINO



Stay-at-home dads

The benefits of this working model for modern family life

BY CANDI SPARKS

The recent influx of stay-at-home dads is creating a new model for the modern family. The stay-at-home dad is a more involved partner for his wife and a more involved parent for his children. His presence provides a level of comfort and protection for the family, and many men seem to enjoy staying at home and find

pleasure in parenting their children and caring for the home. It can be a respite from the pressures of the working world and the bleak job market. Their contributions to the home and family in this new capacity are priceless.

At a time when fathers are known to be absent from the home because of long hours on the job, separation, divorce, work or military duty, it is a plus to have a man around the

house. A father who is physically and emotionally available builds better relationships with his children — and with his wife.

Brett, a stay-at-home dad from Queens, says he enjoys taking care of his daughter Ava full-time, because it is a relief from the pressures of his previous job in finance. He decided to stay at home, because his experience trying to find a job was disheartening, and the



A father who is physically and emotionally available builds better relationships with his children — and with his wife.

family needed to save the monthly \$2,000 they paid for childcare.

But he is happy to be a stay-at-home dad, because he and Ava are bonding more than they would have under other circumstances. Ava is confident that he is there for her when she needs him, and even feels special that she is the only child at her nursery school who is not picked up by a mother or nanny.

“Brett can handle any situation that comes up with Ava and doesn’t have to consult with me before making decisions, the way a babysitter normally would,” says his wife, Marie.

Marie appreciates having Brett at home because she can focus at work with few interruptions. With Brett keeping things running smoothly, she knows that their “love bank” is full.

Although men may need time to develop the skill set it takes to keep a home and care for the family, they can learn how to do it in their own way, and often enjoy doing so. There is a learning curve to preparing children for school in the morning and getting a meal on the table in the evening, but fathers can be innovative in performing each task and their results may help their children in the long run.

Danielle, a first-grade teacher in Brooklyn, can always tell when fathers dress kids for school, especially when it comes to girls’ hairstyles. One of her students, Jenn, would have her hair in neat parts with bows, beads or ribbons, thanks to her mom. Other days, she would arrive with bows,

ribbons and multiple ponytails all at once, which meant her dad had let her do the styling herself. Regardless of how her hair was fashioned, Jenn was confident in her appearance, and Danielle thinks it was because father and daughter worked on creating a masterpiece together.

Some fathers choose to stay at home, because they don’t want to miss a minute of their children growing up.

“It is important to put first things first, and the children come first,” says David, who stays at his home in the Bronx. “Their personalities change and grow so quickly that you have to be there while they’re young, or you’ll miss it. Once they get to high school and college, they naturally pull away. Get as many moments as you can while they’re young.”

He says that he is not the best cook, but he is the best interactive listener and homework helper. As far as he is concerned, the quality time with his kids is more important than feeding them gourmet meals.

A stay-at-home dad is not only good for the kids, but can be good for his wife as well. Men can become much more involved in the communication aspect of the relationship when their focus is shifted from the workplace, leading to a renewed intimacy that is good for both partners.

A dad staying at home is not a feminization of the male, but rather a chance for the man to bring his special touch to what was formerly considered a woman’s world. A man who understands what it takes to run a home and take care of kids can make both partners feel better appreciated, and leave more time for both of them to build on their relationship.

Candi Sparks is the author of the “Can I Have Some Money?” book series. You can follow her on Twitter and Facebook as Candi Sparks (writer).

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GROWING UP ONLINE

CAROLYN JABS

What's beneficial about video games

What used to be called cabin fever has morphed into video game virus. Symptoms include staring at a screen with occasional whoops of triumph or outbursts of dismay.

Parents often think of video games as little more than virtual babysitters, something to be tolerated and occasionally encouraged when parents have to meet a deadline or need some downtime. But new research suggests that some games can pro-

mo-
mote the development of valuable skills, much as sports does.

They've also discovered that action games create distinct benefits.

Daphne Bavelier, professor of brain and cognitive sciences at the University of Rochester, runs a lab that has conducted more than 20 studies on video games and concluded that action games are may give kids an advantage in several areas including:

- **Attention:** Playing video games may teach youngsters focus on the task at hand. Tests showed gamers were able to detect new information quickly and integrate it into their thinking efficiently. Bavelier's research also suggests that gam-

ers can switch from task to task much faster than non-gamers, making them better multitaskers.

- **Vision:** Researchers found that a gamer's vision is more acute. After non-gamers were tested, then trained to play video games, then tested again, not only did their visual acuity improve, but the improvement was durable over as much as two years.

- **Spatial cognition:** The ability to mentally manipulate 3D figures helps students succeed in math and engineering. Researchers have found that scores improve after students have experience with video games, especially action games in three dimensional environments. Perhaps this is because gamers use the frontal cortex of the brain in the same the way musicians do. MRI studies done at York University in Toronto found that gamers use much less brain power than non-gamers when they do small motor tasks.

- **Social skills:** Most teens play games with other people, and games that require strategy and problem-solving often promote conversation. Researchers have found that games which require cooperation to achieve a pro-social goal actually encourage people to help each other in real life.

- **Emotional release:** Dr. Christopher Ferguson of Texas A&M University gave 100 young people a frustrating task and then randomly assigned them to do one of four things: play a non-violent game, play a violent game as the "good guy," play a violent game as the "bad guy," or not play video games at all. The young people who played the violent game from either point of view reported being less "hostile and depressed."

- **Self confidence:** In the book "Grand Theft Childhood?," Cheryl K. Olson, a researcher at Massachusetts General Hospital's Center for Mental Health and Media, found that games can be a source of self-esteem and pride, especially for children who are challenged in other areas.

For children to get these benefits, parents have to pay attention to the games they play. The most important step is researching any game before it comes into the house. Although there are many websites for gamers, reviews tend to overlook issues that matter to parents. Instead, compare comments on family-centered sites like www.common sense media.com, whattheyplay.com or grandtheftchildhood.com, a site run by Olson.

Basic information about video game ratings is available at ESRB.org, a website which explains the reasoning beyond the ratings for each game.

Once a game is in the house, be aware of what's happening when your child plays. Keeping the game system in a public part of the house gives you a chance to see the game as it unfolds and observe your child's responses. Encourage your child to share favorite parts of the game and, if you can, learn a little bit about how to play. Being more involved allows you to establish gaming rules that make sense. Parents often make the mistake of giving a child a two-minute warning before gametime ends. For the child immersed in a complicated role-playing game, that really isn't enough time. You may also want to be more flexible about time when children are playing games with friends.

One rule should remain firm: video games should never be allowed to crowd out other activities that are important for healthy child development. Kids need adults help in creating balanced lives that include exercise, homework, chores, reading, family time and other activities. If parents are committed to that kind of balance over the long-term, it won't matter one bit if there's an extra hour of gaming on a dreary winter day.

Carolyn Jabs, MA, has been writing about families and the Internet for over 15 years. She is the mother of three computer-savvy kids. Other Growing Up Online columns appear on her website www.growing-up-online.com.

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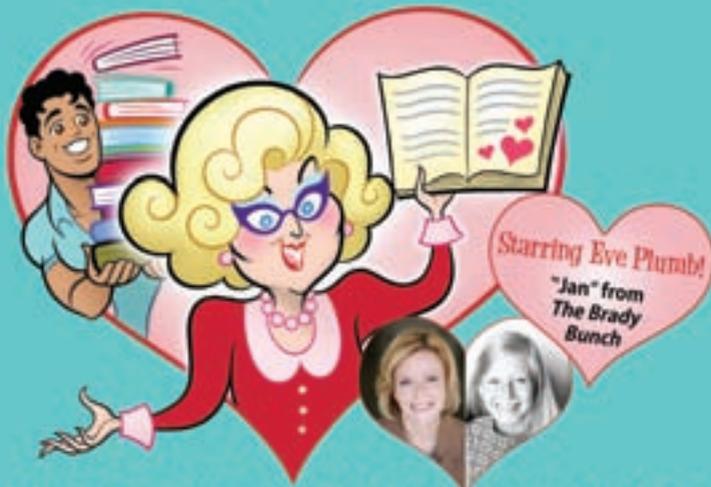
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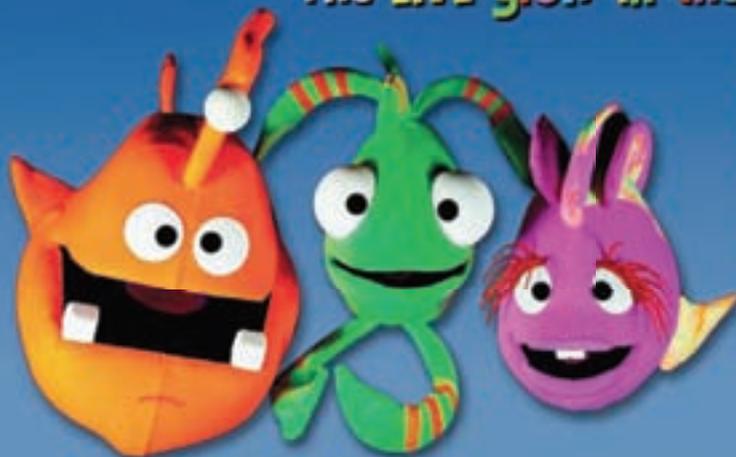
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Going Places

LONG-RUNNING

Toddler storytime: Barnes & Noble, 2245 Richmond Ave. at Travis Avenue; (718) 982-6983; www.barnesandnoble.com; Tuesdays, 10:30 am–Noon, Free.

A different book and songs each week.

Tot's time plus: Staten Island Children's Museum, 1000 Richmond Terrace; (718) 273-2060; Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11 am–1 pm, Now – Thurs, March 31; Admission plus \$5 per child.

Parent and child enjoy activities.

Clay day: Staten Island Children's Museum, 1000 Richmond Terrace; (718) 273-2060; Wednesdays, 11 am–1 pm, Now – Thurs, March 31; Free with admission.

Children work with ceramics.

After school club: Historic Richmond Town, Clarke Avenue at Gilbert Street; (718) 351-1611 X 281; reservations@historicrochmondtown.org; www.nycgovparks.org. Wednesdays, 3:30 pm; Free (cost of book additional).

Students in grades four through seven read and discuss selected books.

"The Ohmies, Morning Wish Garden": The Daryl Roth Theater, 101 E. 15th St. at Park Avenue South; (212) 239-6200; ohmies.cmail1.com; Thursdays – Sundays, 11 am and 1:30 pm, Now – Sun, Jan. 30; \$36.

Children ages 3 to 8 enjoy an interactive musical experience.

Tavern concerts: Historic Richmond Town, Clarke Avenue at Gilbert Street; (718) 351-1611 X 270; Saturdays, 7:30 and 9 pm, Now – Sat, April 23; \$15 (\$12 members).

Featuring local talent. Reservations required.

Income tax prep: Dongan Hills Library, 1617 Richmond Rd at Four Corners Road; (718) 351-1444; www.nypl.org; Thursday, Feb. 3, 11 am; Monday, Feb. 7, noon; Thursday, Feb. 10, 11 am; Monday, Feb. 14, noon; Thursday, Feb. 17, 11 am; Thursday, Feb. 24, 11 am; Monday, Feb. 28, noon; Free.

Tax counseling for seniors and low-income persons.

MON, JAN. 24

Read aloud: Huguenot Park Branch Library, 830 Huguenot Ave.; (718) 984-4636; www.nypl.org; 4 pm; Free.



Photo by Chard Radman/NY Post

Groundhog glory

It's Chuck's time to shine. Bring the whole family down to the Staten Island Zoo this Feb. 2 for that grand old tradition of finding out whether we will have six more weeks of winter or an early spring.

The Staten Island Zoo's Groundhog Day Celebration will feature an appearance by Staten Island Chuck, the city's only weather forecasting groundhog.

There will be music and fun

while the crowd waits until 7:30 am for Chuck to decide the duration of this chilliest of seasons.

Guests are also invited to have breakfast with Chuck, but you must pre-register.

Groundhog Day Celebration at the Staten Island Zoo [614 Broadway at Colonial Court in West Brighton, (718) 442-3101], Feb. 2 at 6 am. Breakfast is \$10 for adults, \$5 for children under five. For info, visit www.statenislandzoo.org.

Submit a listing

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

All you have to do is send your listing request to calendar@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!

Librarian shares her favorite picture books.

TUES, JAN. 25

"Knickerbocker Holiday": Alice Tully Hall, 1941 Broadway; (646) 202-9623; www.collegiatechorale.org; 8 pm; \$25.

Staring Ben Davis, Christopher Fitzgerald, Victor Garber, David Garrison, Kelli O'Hara and Bryce Pinkham and presented by the Collegiate Chorale.

WED, JAN. 26

Lunch and learn: Oriental Plaza Restaurant, 1845 Richmond Ave. (718) 727-1135; www.statenislandmuseum.org; Noon; \$26 (\$22 for members).

Celebrate Chinese New Year - the Year of the Rabbit.

Teen art: New Dorp Library, 309 New Dorp Lane; (718) 351-2977; www.nypl.org; 3 pm; Free.

Art projects.

"Knickerbocker Holiday": 8 pm. Alice Tully Hall. See Tuesday, Jan. 25.

THURS, JAN. 27

Wii: Tottenville Branch Library, 7430 Amboy Rd. (718) 984-0945; www.nypl.org; 2:30 pm; Free.

Teens compete through video games.

SAT, JAN. 29

Biscuit storytime: Barnes & Noble, 2245 Richmond Ave. at Travis Avenue; (718) 982-6983; www.barnesandnoble.com; 10:30 am; Free.

Enjoy a story about everyone's favorite dog, Biscuit.

Going Places

Camp Fair: Church of St. Paul the Apostle, Columbus Avenue at West 60th Street; (212) 677-4650 X 20; www.resourcesnyc.org; 11 am–3 pm; Free.

Parents and caregivers of children and teens with disabilities obtain information from 70 New York City day camps and sleepaway camps and receive a Camps 2011 Directory.

Forest tunes with Patrick

Raferty: Greenbelt Nature Center, 700 Rockland Ave. at Brielle Avenue; (718) 351-3450; www.nycgovparks.org; 12:30–1:30 pm; Free (cost of book additional).

Kid-friendly acoustic guitar and vocal performance. Registration required.

Oil pastel workshop: Staten Island Children's Museum, 1000 Richmond Terrace; (718) 273-2060; 1, 2 and 3 pm; Free with admission to the grounds.

Children learn how to use this medium with Janice Patrignani.

Winter storytime: Greenbelt Nature Center, 700 Rockland Ave. at Brielle Avenue; (718) 351-3450; www.nycgovparks.org; 1:30–2:30 pm; Free (cost of book additional).

Children ages 3 to 6 with chaperone hear a winter tale. Registration required.

Musical Chairs Chamber Ensemble: Staten Island Museum, 75 Stuyvesant Pl.; (718) 907-3488; mcensemble.org; 8 pm; \$15, (\$12 members, \$5 students under 22).

Featuring Amanda Romano, harp; Tamara Keschecki, flute and Elizabeth McCullough, soprano.

SUN, JAN. 30

Oil pastel workshop: 1, 2 and 3 pm. Staten Island Children's Museum. See Saturday, Jan. 29.

Walkabout in the Outback: Greenbelt Nature Center, 700 Rockland Ave. at Brielle Avenue; (718) 351-3450; www.nycgovparks.org; 2–4 pm; Free.

Join educators for a walkabout through the center and then enjoy a celebration of Australian poetry and music, presented by Doris Nielsen and OutLoud.

MON, JAN. 31

Let Freedom Ring: Enrichment Through the Arts, 11 Borman Ave.; (718) 982-5678; 10–11:30 am; \$8 (\$7 group).

Students experience history through theater.

TUES, FEB. 1

Teen-tech time: Dongan Hills Library, 1617 Richmond Rd at Four Corners Road; (718) 351-1444; www.nypl.org;



It's a live mousical!

Get ready to sing along and learn about dance with Angelina Ballerina, the small mouse with big dance dreams!

The St. George Theatre brings the popular PBS cartoon to life on stage with "Angelina Ballerina: The Musical" on Feb. 12.

Join Angelina and her friends Alice, Gracie, AZ, Viki and dance teacher Ms. Mimi, as they anticipate the arrival of a famous dancer to their dance school, Camembert Academy.

Always the one to show off her dance skills, will Angelina impress the visitor? Bring your tiny dancer to find out as the cast performs hip-hop, modern dance, the Irish jig and, of course, ballet! Afterwards, bring a camera for a special "meet and greet" with Angelina and the gang in the Grand Lobby.

"Angelina Ballerina: The Musical" at the St. George Theatre [35 Hyatt St. at Central Avenue in St. George, (718) 442-2900], Feb 12 at 11 am and 3 pm. Tickets \$15-\$22. For info, visit stgeorgetheatre.com.

3:30 pm; Free.

For children 13 to 18 years old.

WED, FEB. 2

Groundhog day: Staten Island Zoo, 614 Broadway; (718) 442-3100; www.statenislandzoo.org; 6:30 am; \$10 (\$5 for children under 5).

Spend the day with Staten Island Chuck, and find out if it's six more months of winter or not. Special breakfast with Chuck.

Arithmetickles: Enrichment Through the Arts, 11 Borman Ave. (718) 982-5678; 10–11:30 am; \$8 (\$7 group). Math made fun.

Teen-tech time: 3:30 pm. Dongan Hills Library. See Tuesday, Feb. 1.

Traditional Chinese music: Dongan Hills Library, 1617 Richmond Rd at Four Corners Road; (718) 351-1444; www.nypl.org; 4 pm; Free.

For all ages.

THURS, FEB. 3

Wii: 2:30 pm. Tottenville Branch Library. See Thursday, Jan. 27.

Read aloud: Dongan Hills Library, 1617 Richmond Rd at Four Corners Road; (718) 351-1444; www.nypl.org; 4 pm; Free.

For children ages 3 to 5.

SAT, FEB. 5

Teen Environmental Club: Staten Island Museum, 75 Stuyvesant Pl.; (718) 727-1135; www.statenislandmuseum.org; 10 am–noon; Free.

Spot storytime: Barnes & Noble, 2245 Richmond Ave. at Travis Avenue; (718) 982-6983; www.barnesandnoble.com; 10:30 am; Free.

Special guest Spot comes to visit.

Chinese New Year: Greenbelt Nature Center, 700 Rockland Ave. at Brielle Avenue; (718) 351-3450; www.nycgovparks.org; 1–2 pm; \$6 (\$8 non-members).

Gung Hay Fat Choy, celebrate the Year of the Rabbit with traditional snacks and crafts for children ages 5 and up with adult chaperone. Registration and prepayment required.

Nature myths: Blue Heron Nature Center, 222 Poillon Ave. between Amboy Road and Hylan Boulevard; (718) 967-3542; www.nycgovparks.org; 2 pm; Free.

Separate the fact and fiction of nature.

Tracy Morgan: St. George Theater, 35 Hyatt St.; (718) 442-2900; www.ticketmaster.com; 8 pm; \$50, \$40, \$20.

"Black and Blue" comedy tour featuring one of the stars of NBC's "30 Rock." For mature audience.

MON, FEB. 7

Wii: Dongan Hills Library, 1617 Richmond Rd at Four Corners Road; (718) 351-1444; www.nypl.org; 3:30 pm; Free.

For all ages.

Read aloud: 4 pm. Huguenot Park Branch Library. See Monday, Jan. 24.

"The Hidden Reality: Parallel Universes and the Deep Laws of the Cosmos": Hayden Planetarium Space Theatre, American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th Street; (212) 769-5100; www.amnh.org; 7:30 pm; \$15 (\$13.50 students, members and seniors).

Author and Columbia University professor Brian Greene leads lecture on quantum mechanics and the cosmos. Book signing to follow.

TUES, FEB. 8

Arts and crafts: Dongan Hills Library, 1617 Richmond Rd at Four Corners Road; (718) 351-1444; www.nypl.org; 4 pm; Free.

Teens make a Valentine's day project.

WED, FEB. 9

Book discussion: Dongan Hills Library, 1617 Richmond Rd at Four Corners Road; (718) 351-1444; www.nypl.org; 3 pm; Free.

Young adults ages 13 to 18.

Origami club: Dongan Hills Library, 1617 Richmond Rd at Four Corners Road; (718) 351-1444; www.nypl.org; 4 pm; Free.

All ages are welcome to help fold 1,000 cranes to be given out at local hospitals.

THURS, FEB. 10

Read aloud: 4 pm. Dongan Hills Library. See Thursday, Feb. 3.

Continued on page 38

Going Places

Continued from page 37

FRI, FEB. 11

Arts and crafts: 3:30 pm. Dongan Hills Library. See Tuesday, Feb. 8.

Valentine's Doo Wop Concert: St. George Theater, 35 Hyatt St.; (718) 442-2900; www.ticketmaster.com; 8 pm; \$65 (VIP); \$55, \$49, \$25.

Featuring Fred Parris and the Satins, The original Shantels, Emil Stucchio and the Classics, Johnny Farina of Santo and Johnny, The Devotions, and John Kuse and the Excellents.

SAT, FEB. 12

"Ruby Valentine Saves the Day": Barnes & Noble, 2245 Richmond Ave. at Travis Avenue; (718) 982-6983; www.barnesandnoble.com; 11 am; Free.

Read Ruby stories by Laurie Friedman.

A dog's mind: American Museum of Natural History, Linder Theater, Central Park West at 79th Street; (212) 769-5100; www.amnh.org; 11 am–noon and 1–2 pm; \$10 children and \$12 adults, (\$8 members children and \$10 adults).

Author Alexandra Horowitz discusses her new book "Dog: What Dogs See, Smell and Know" and live interactive demonstration.

Hearts and crafts: Blue Heron Nature Center, 222 Poillon Ave. between Amboy Road and Hylan Boulevard; (718) 967-3542; www.nycgovparks.org; 11 am; Free.

Let your creativity flow and make an eco-friendly Valentine's project. Materials provided.

Teen Environmental Club: Staten Island Museum, 75 Stuyvesant Pl.; (718) 483-7015; www.sim-teenenvironmentalclub.ning.com; 11 am–1 pm; Free.

Meet with Michael Riser from GrowNYC.

Angelina Ballerina, The Musical: St. George Theater, 35 Hyatt St.; (718) 442-2900; www.ticketmaster.com; 11 am and 3 pm; \$22, \$18, \$15.

Meet everyone's favorite animated mouse. Bring your camera for a meet-and-greet following the performance.

"Cinderella": Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. between Madison and Park avenues; (800) 982-2787; www.nytb.org; 11 am and 1 pm; \$40, (\$35 children).

Children's classic performed by the New York Theatre Ballet.

SUN, FEB. 13

Sweetheart Day: Staten Island Zoo, 614 Broadway; (718) 442-3100; www.statenislandzoo.org; 10 am–4:30 pm; \$8 adults (15 and older), \$6 seniors (60 and older), \$5 children ages 3 to 14, Free for kids under 3 and members.



Easy being 'Green'

Elmo and his friends are back for a whole new "Live" adventure.

From Feb. 17 to 21, "Sesame Street Live: Elmo's Green Thumb" turns Madison Square Garden into a true-blue Sesame Street, with all of the familiar faces and some fresh blooms, too.

In the show, Elmo helps a new sunflower friend, Sunny, find a new home after she's outgrown her flowerpot.

Along the way, they encounter some trouble as Abby Cadabby, a fairy-in-training, casts a spell that makes Elmo and all of his friends

shrink. As they explore Big Bird's garden from a smaller perspective, they learn some big lessons about how important little critters are to our ecosystem.

Like all "Sesame Street Live" performances, "Elmo's Green Thumb" is filled with laughs, dancing and, most important, lessons for the young and old.

"Sesame Street Live: Elmo's Green Thumb" at Madison Square Garden [4 Pennsylvania Plaza in Manhattan, (212) 465-6741], Feb. 17-21. Tickets are \$23-\$143. For info, visit www.sesamestreetlive.com/shows/elmos-green-thumb.

Buy one/get one free admission. Bundle up and bring your sweetie.

"Caps for Sale" and The Three Billy Goats Gruff": Tilles Center for the Performing Arts, CW Post Campus, Route 25A; (516) 299-3100; www.tillescenter.org; 11 am and 1 pm; \$20 (\$12).

Performed by the Hudson Vagabond Puppets.

"Cinderella": 11 am, 1 pm and 3:30 pm. Florence Gould Hall. See Saturday, Feb. 12.

TUES, FEB. 15

Teen-tech time: 3:30 pm. Dongan Hills Library. See Tuesday, Feb. 1.

African American Entrepreneurs: Wagner College, Spiro Hall, One Campus Rd.; (718) 727-1135; www.statenislandmuseum.org; 6–9 pm; Free.

Panel Discussion.

WED, FEB. 16

Shirazad's Children: Dongan Hills Library, 1617 Richmond Rd at Four Corners Road; (718) 351-1444; www.nypl.org; 4 pm; Free.

For all ages.

THURS, FEB. 17

Coffee talk: Dongan Hills Library, 1617 Richmond Rd at Four Corners

Road; (718) 351-1444; www.nypl.org; 11 am; Free.

For adults.

Wii: 2:30 pm. Tottenville Branch Library. See Thursday, Jan. 27.

Read aloud: 4 pm. Dongan Hills Library. See Thursday, Feb. 3.

SAT, FEB. 19

Junior Science Club: Staten Island Museum, 75 Stuyvesant Pl.; (718) 727-1135; www.statenislandmuseum.org; 10 am–noon; \$8 (\$5 members).

Explore the world of magnets. For children ages 8 to 13.

Teen Environmental Club: Captain's Quarters, Corner of Bayview Ave. and Johnston Terrace; (718) 483-7105; <http://sim-teenenvironmentalclub.ning.com>; 10 am–noon; Free.

Help clean up Prince's Bay Beach.

Storytime: Barnes & Noble, 2245 Richmond Ave. at Travis Avenue; (718) 982-6983; www.barnesandnoble.com; 10:30 am; Free.

Celebrate President's Day and Black History Month by reading stories and creating a craft.

Saluting jazz elders: American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th Street; (212) 769-5315; www.amnh.org/globalweekends; 1–5 pm; Free with museum admission.

Celebrate African-American History month by learning about trailblazing artists and musicians and enjoy a concert performed by the New Amsterdam Music Association.

"Cats": Tilles Center for the Performing Arts, CW Post Campus, Route 25A; (516) 299-3100; www.tillescenter.org; 8 pm; \$75, \$60, \$45.

Broadway musical.

SUN, FEB. 20

Concert: St. Alban's, 76 St. Alban's Pl.; (718) 984-7756; www.MusicatSaintAlbans.org; 3:30 pm; \$25 (\$20 seniors and students).

Pianist Jose Ramos Santana performs Spanish music.

MON, FEB. 21

President's Day: Staten Island Children's Museum, 1000 Richmond Terrace; (718) 273-2060; 10 am–5 pm; Free.

Kids week: Blue Heron Nature Center, 222 Poillon Ave. between Amboy Road and Hylan Boulevard; (718) 967-3542; www.nycgovparks.org; 10 am and 1 pm; Free.

Children ages 12 and younger learn about nature and history.

Art workshops: Staten Island Mu-

Going Places

seum, 75 Stuyvesant Pl; (718) 727-1135; www.statenislandmuseum.org; 1-3 pm; Free with museum admission (children under 12 free).

Dinosaur facts: Staten Island Zoo, 614 Broadway; (718) 442-3100; www.statenislandzoo.org; 1:30-3:30 pm; Free with museum admission.

Join Richie Mirissis and learn some amazing information.

Dinosaurs and more: Staten Island Zoo, 614 Broadway; (718) 442-3100; www.statenislandzoo.org; 1:30-3:30 pm; Free with regular admission (donation requested).

Join Richie Mirissis as he presents fossils, three dimensional models and memorabilia. Make a clay fossil.

TUES, FEB. 22

Kids week: 10 am and 1 pm. Blue Heron Nature Center. See Monday, Feb. 21.

Wii: 2 pm. Dongan Hills Library. See Monday, Feb. 7.

Teen-tech time: 3:30 pm. Dongan Hills Library. See Tuesday, Feb. 1.

WED, FEB. 23

Kids week: 10 am and 1 pm. Blue Heron Nature Center. See Monday, Feb. 21.

Arts and crafts: Dongan Hills Library, 1617 Richmond Rd at Four Corners Road; (718) 351-1444; www.nypl.org; 2 pm; Free.

Children ages 5 and older make a President's day project.

Origami club: 4 pm. Dongan Hills Library. See Wednesday, Feb. 9.

THURS, FEB. 24

Kids week: 10 am and 1 pm. Blue Heron Nature Center. See Monday, Feb. 21.

Art workshops: 1-3 pm. Staten Island Museum. See Monday, Feb. 21.

Read aloud: 4 pm. Dongan Hills Library. See Thursday, Feb. 3.

FRI, FEB. 25

Nursery time: Dongan Hills Library, 1617 Richmond Rd at Four Corners Road; (718) 351-1444; www.nypl.org; 10 am-12:30 pm; Free.

For children ages 3 to 5.

Kids week: 10 am and 1 pm. Blue Heron Nature Center. See Monday, Feb. 21.

SAT, FEB. 26

Dinosaur Storytime: Barnes & Noble, 2245 Richmond Ave. at Travis Avenue; (718) 982-6983; www.barnesandnoble.com; 10:30 am; Free.

Learn about different pre-historic creatures.

"The African Drum": The National Black Theater, 2031-33 Fifth Ave. between 125th and 126th streets; (212) 724-0677; www.shadowboxtheatre.org; 2 pm; \$15 (\$20 at the door).

African-American folk tales.

TUES, MARCH 1

"The African Drum": 10 and 11:30 am. The National Black Theater. See Saturday, Feb. 26.

WED, MARCH 2

"The African Drum": 10 and 11:30 am. The National Black Theater. See Saturday, Feb. 26.

THURS, MARCH 3

"The African Drum": 10 and 11:30 am. The National Black Theater. See Saturday, Feb. 26.

FRI, MARCH 4

"The African Drum": 10 and 11:30 am. The National Black Theater. See Saturday, Feb. 26.

SAT, MARCH 5

"The African Drum": 2 pm. The National Black Theater. See Saturday, Feb. 26.

American Idols and Motown: St. George Theater, 35 Hyatt St.; (718) 442-2900; www.ticketmaster.com; 8 pm; \$25, \$35, \$45, \$55.

David Hernandez, Michael Sarver, Gina Glocksens and Lakisha Jones perform the best of Motown.

Musical Chairs Chamber Ensemble: 8 pm. Staten Island Museum. See Saturday, Jan. 29.

MON, MARCH 7

Pre-K free day: Staten Island Children's Museum, 1000 Richmond Terrace; (718) 273-2060; 10 am-5 pm; Free.

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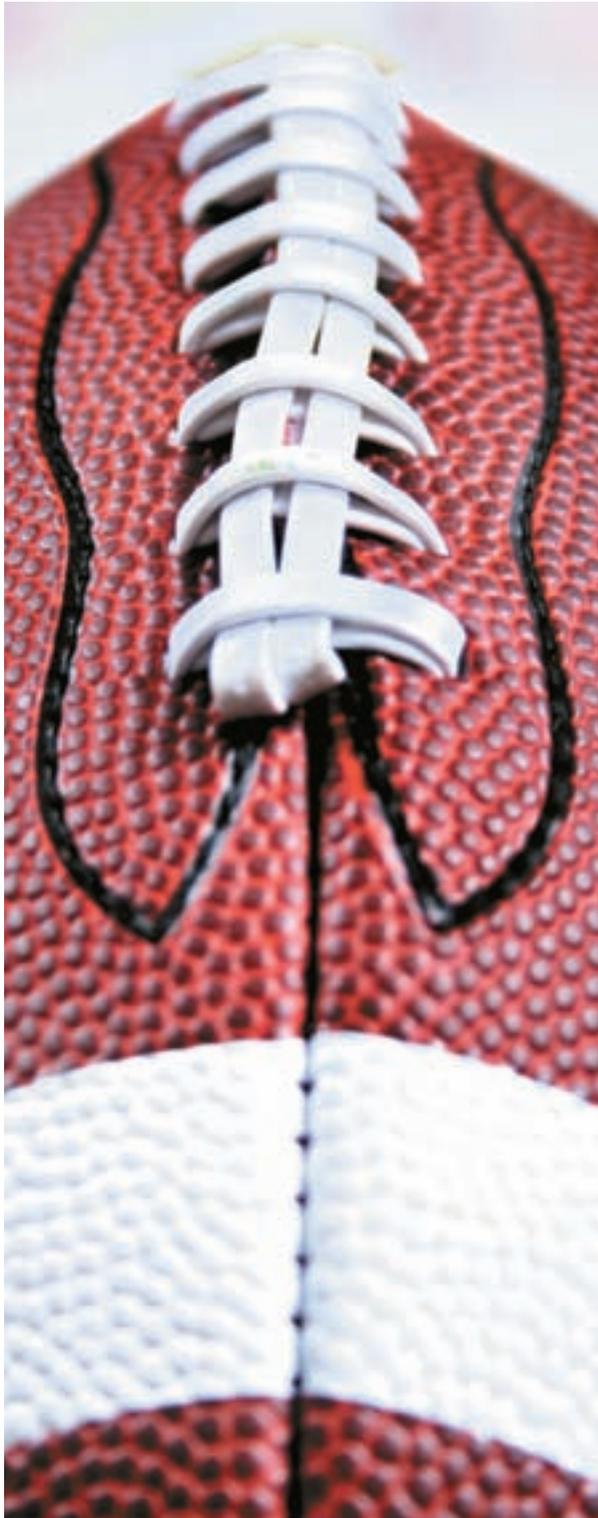
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It figures

BY CYNTHIA WASHAM

CELEBRATIONS & SPORTS



80 Percent of mothers with children younger than 18 who say they watch the Super Bowl, scheduled this year for Feb. 6 in Arlington, TX.

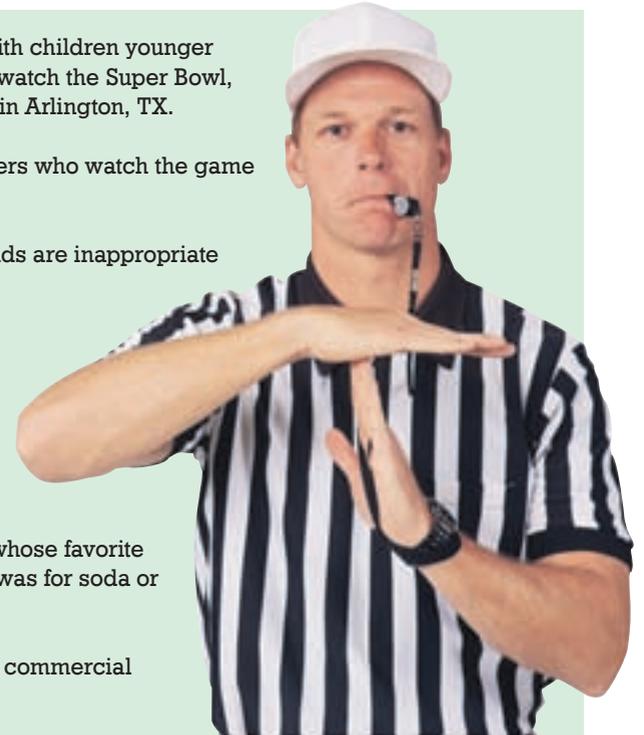
61 Percent of those mothers who watch the game with their children.

45 Percent who say the ads are inappropriate for children.

\$3 million
Amount advertisers will pay for a 30-second spot on the 2011 Super Bowl.

52 Percent of viewers of the 2009 Super Bowl whose favorite commercial during the game was for soda or junk food.

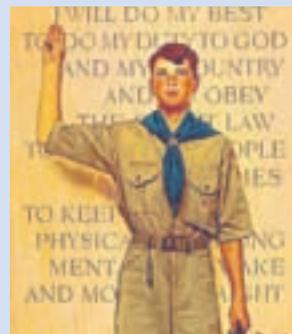
11 Percent whose favorite commercial was for beer.



101 Years since the Boy Scouts of America was founded on Feb. 8.

25 cents
Annual fee for Boy Scouts in 1913.

\$15 Annual fee today.

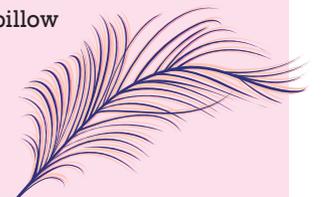


3 Percent of pet owners who give Valentine's Day gifts to their pets.

13.5
Average age of first French kiss in the United States.

\$30,000

Cost to clean up wet feathers following a massive pillow fight organized by word of mouth in San Francisco on Valentine's Day 2009.



Sources: Corsinet.com, Reason, CalculatorsLive.com, bsmmedia.com, Spike.com, USA Today, Reuters

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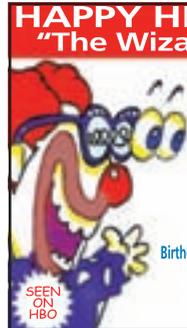
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New & Noteworthy



Beary fun

Get ready to shake, rattle and roll. BambooZoo's soft shakers may be the perfect companion for your baby. These huggable toys come in a chunky style that's easy to grasp, with ears and knobs that are also tough enough for tugging and teething. And, of course, it's a rattle, so she'll have fun making a ruckus.

Materials-wise, they are filled with natural corn fibers, and they're machine washable.

The pastel, adorable designs include all of the zoo favorites: giraffes, monkeys and bears!

BambooZoo rattles by Dandelion for Baby. \$12.95. For info, visit www.dandelionforbaby.com.

What baby eats

While there's no shortage of literature out there for new parents, one notable new book helps you to better navigate the confusing waters of good nutrition for your infant and toddler.

"Great Expectations: Best Food for Your Baby and Toddler, From First Foods to Meals Your Child Will Love," by Jeannette L. Bessinger, features advice to help ensure your baby gets the best, most wholesome, and natural food possible at home.

The newest entry in the "Great Expectations" series focuses on easy preparation of nutritious baby and toddler meals — from the first fingerfoods to more than 130 kid-tested recipes. Bessinger also offers tips on

how to select the right food, set up a pantry, establish smart eating routines, and introduce a wide variety of tastes and textures. They're lessons you, and your child, will benefit from throughout your lives.

"Great Expectations: Best Food for Your Baby & Toddler, From First Foods to Meals Your Child Will Love," by Jeannette L. Bessinger. \$14.95. Available on Amazon.com.



Get 'One Step Ahead'

Just because it's play time, it doesn't mean they can't bone up on their ABCs!

With these interlocking foam puzzle mats from One Step Ahead, your child — and a friend — can get interactive with letters as they build cubes and play with these cushy pieces.

If letters don't suit your fancy, the cushy mats also come in solid color or number sets. You can stick with one, or buy

one of each and mix and match.

They're durable, too, so you'll have them long after they've learned their 123s.

Interlocking Foam Puzzle Play Mats from One Step Ahead. \$29.95 per set. For info, visit www.onestepahead.com.



This hat's a hoot!

Your little one will look even more adorable than she already does in this crocheted owl hat.

The colorful piece is made using four-ply baby yarn, so it's nice and soft. The avian-themed head covering is available for bird brains sized newborn to adult. Colors include pink, brown and green, or blue,

brown and green combinations. Prefer different hues? Got Tutus invites you to choose your own color variations.

It'll make for great photos, while keeping her head warm in a hat she'll want to wear.

Owl hat by Got Tutus? \$25. For info, visit www.etsy.com/shop/gottutus.

Diapers dressed up

These are sure to be a hit at the next baby shower.

Diaper Cupcakes by Twosies Baby Boutique make for cute, cleverly designed gifts for the expectant mother.

In your own specially crafted cupcake box, you'll find soft baby washcloths, Pampers disposable diapers and cotton socks.

The pretty bakery box package is easy to give and fun to receive. Available colors include pink, blue, yellow and green, and the boxes can be fur-



ther customized to suit your needs.

Diaper Cupcakes, set of four for \$17.95. For info, visit www.etsy.com/shop/twosieskidboutique.

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