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Letter from the publisher

One-Year Later/Newtown

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Happy New Year.

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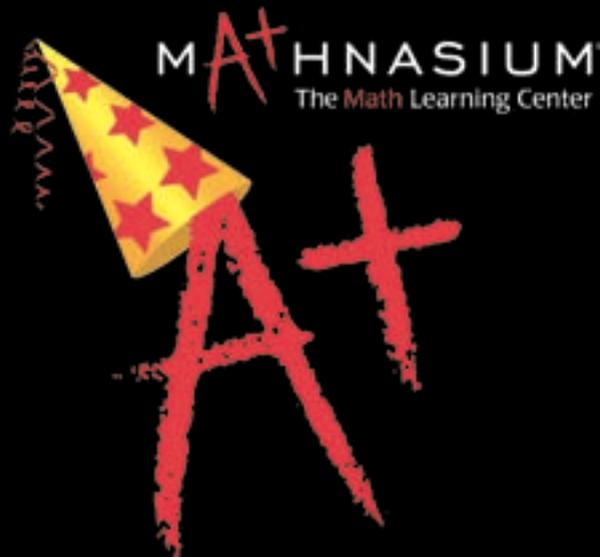
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How to make the most of a doctor's visit

A pediatrician addresses many parents' common concerns

BY KATHY SENA

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

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

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

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

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

- My Medical Records (online and mobile app: www.freehealthtrack.com)
- My Medical (online and mobile app: www.mymedicalapp.com)
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These databases allow you to record medications, procedures, tests, allergies, surgical procedures, diagnoses, injuries, photos, insurance info, and more. Having easily available medical information can lead to a more-efficient and productive doctor's visit.

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

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

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

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

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

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

young child? How does this help?

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

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

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

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



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

KS:What should I do if I

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

New year's eats

Easy ways to avoid weight gain and be healthier in 2014

BY JAMIE LOBER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

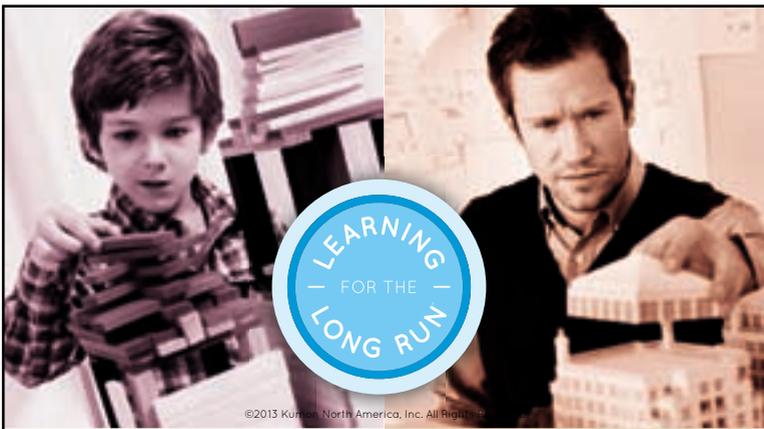
Increasing physical activity also helps. Get in the habit of staying on a regular eating schedule. It is always nice to eat as a family most days of the week. Always eat before you get hungry and never skip breakfast. Chew slowly and enjoy what you are eating instead of rushing through it.

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

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

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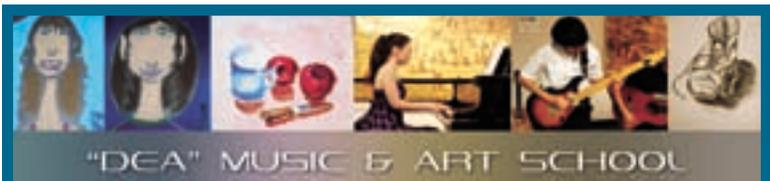
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Road risks

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

BY KERRIE MCLOUGHLIN

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

about and do later.

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

More ideas include:

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

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

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

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

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

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Know the score

Helping kids reap all of sport's benefits

BY JAMIE LOBER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

the risk of traumatic injury.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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DIVORCE & SEPARATION

LEE CHABIN, ESQ.

A low-cost divorce

Community mediation can offer an alternative

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“The process is more fo-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Health insurance STRATEGIES

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

BY SANDRA GORDON

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

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

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

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

While healthcare.gov is getting the kinks out for online applications, you can choose the "Apply by Phone" op-

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

What is a health insurance agent?

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

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

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

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

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

then click on "Find Local Help."

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

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

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

Crunch the numbers

When choosing a plan in general, Woodfield recommends opting for



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Health savings account

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

will cover, which is an added bonus.

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

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

Supplemental health products

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

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

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

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

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



HEALTHY LIVING

DANIELLE SULLIVAN



Photo by Aaron Greenwood

The health effects of long commutes

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

Technically, this would categorize Carrera as an extreme commuter.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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THE BOOK WORM

TERRI SCHLICHENMEYER

For pint-sized pioneers

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

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

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

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

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

nity, and they listen very closely.

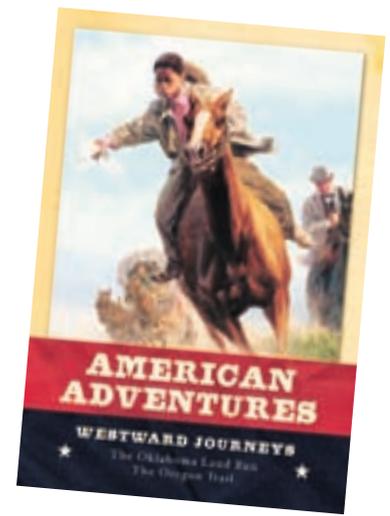
Someone said that on April 22 of that year (1889), any American could stake a claim in the Oklahoma Territory. Owning a farm was a dream for Moses's grandfather, who was once a slave. It wouldn't be easy to get to Oklahoma; in fact, it would be one of the hardest things the family would do. But do it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

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

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

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

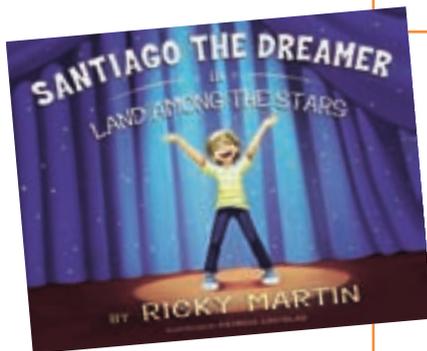
In each of three stories, young readers will see — from several van-



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

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

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



Help your future rock star dream on

Someday, your daughter's going to be something big. She'll be very famous — she's absolutely certain. Lots of people will want her autograph, photographers will scream for her picture, she'll be performing every night, and everyone will clap uproariously.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I liked "Santiago the Dreamer in

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

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

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

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

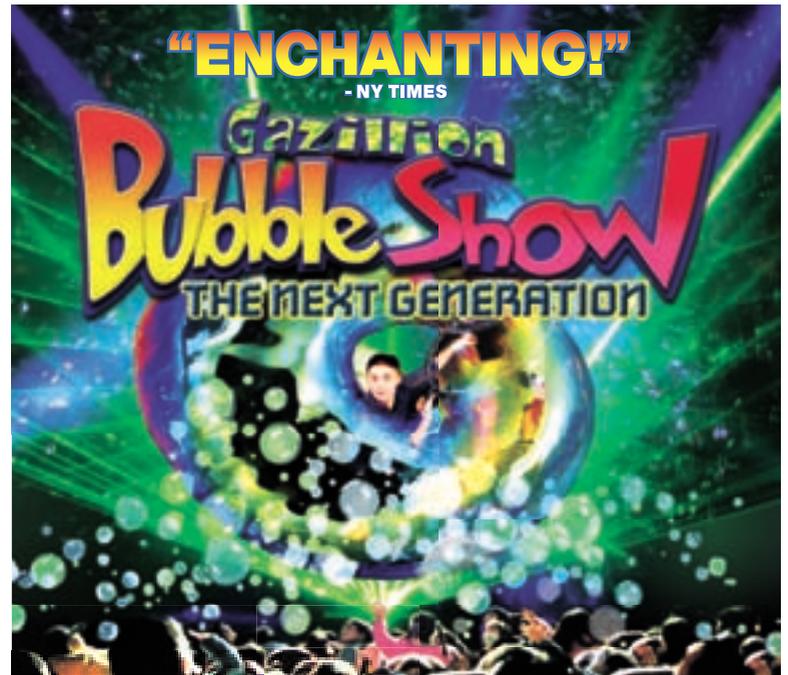
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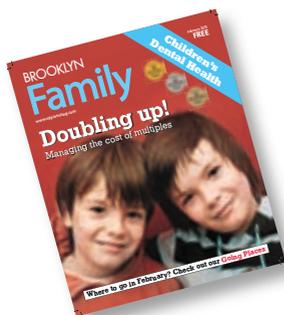
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Behind the Screens

Why parents
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consumption

BY KIKI BOCHI

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

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

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

Child development experts are worried.

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

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

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

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

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

"For nearly three decades, the

A 'media-use' family plan

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

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

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

written down and agreed upon by all family members.

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

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

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

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

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





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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



MOMMY 101

ANGELICA SEREDA

Entertaining tots during winter days

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

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

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

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

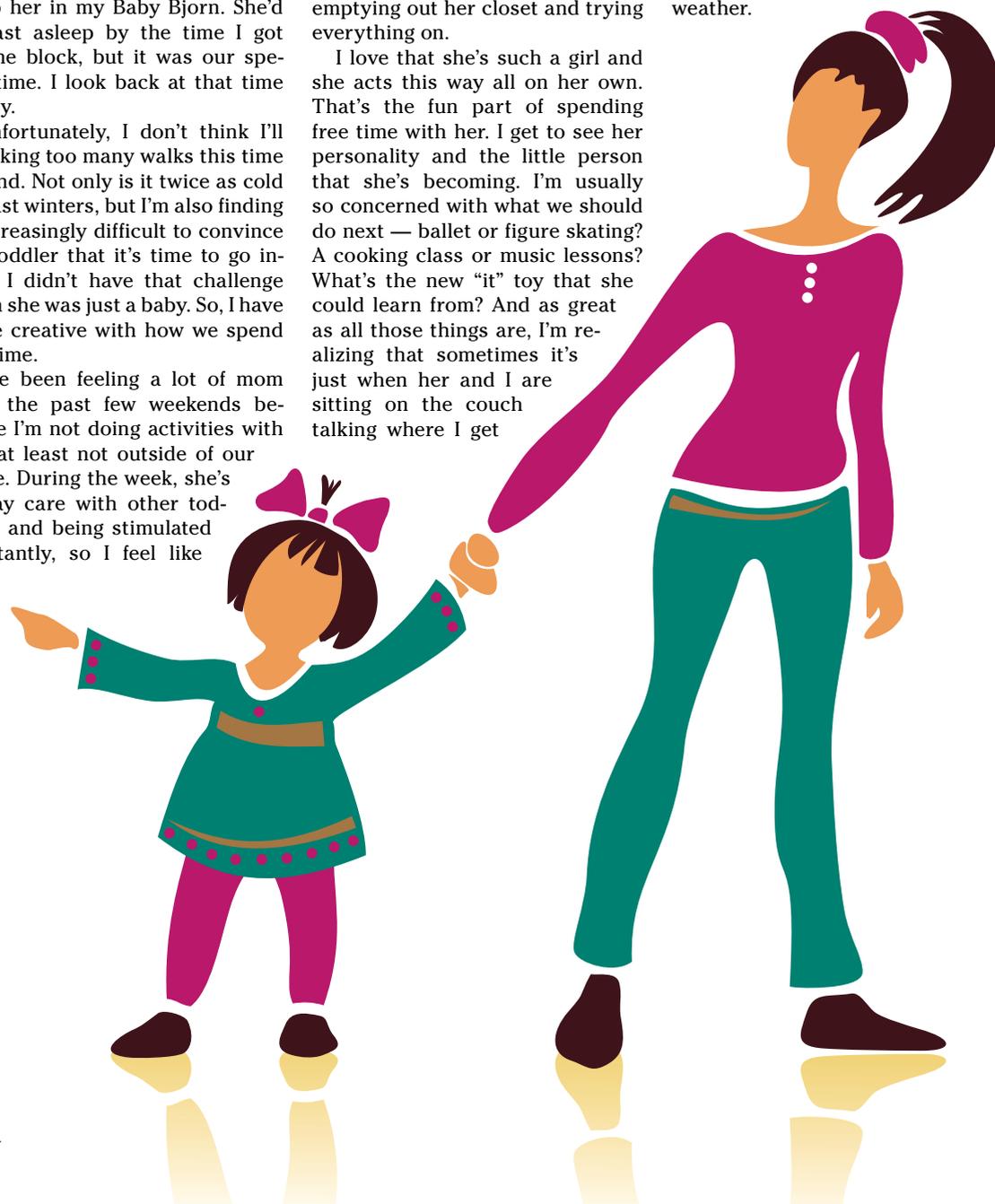
I come up short. There's only so many shows (educational ones, of course) and reading we can do before I feel like a bad mommy.

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

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

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

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





DEAR
DR. KARYN
DR. KARYN GORDON

Help kids open up

Dear Dr. Karyn,

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

Dear parent,

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

Pay attention to timing

The most important thing to consider before approaching your kids

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

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

Ask direct questions

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

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

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

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

Get comfortable with silence

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

Talk sideways

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

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

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





ASK AN ATTORNEY

ALISON ARDEN BESUNDER,
ESQ.

Get organized in 2014

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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GOOD SENSE EATING

CHRISTINE M. PALUMBO, RD

What is 'natural' food?

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

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

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

'Naturally' vague

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

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

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

What may be surprising is this:



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

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

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

little chance of success, however.

Until the FDA acts

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

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

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

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

Winter Egnog

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

Makes four servings (2/3 cup each)

INGREDIENTS:

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

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

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

Calendar

JANUARY



Photo by V. DiMiccil

Take a hike through the Greenbelt

Take a hike and commune with the great outdoors at the Greenbelt Nature Center on Jan. 18. Children 8 years and older can enjoy a fun, Winter Wonderland trek through the trails and search for animal tracks, squirrel drays, woodpecker holes, and other signs of wintering animals.

So what are you waiting for? Get on your snow boots, winter

jacks, and mitts, and travel to the country without leaving the city.

Winter Wonderland hike on Jan. 18 at 10 am. The hike is approximately 90 minutes, weather permitting. Free, but registration is required.

Greenbelt Nature Center [700 Rockland Ave. at Brielle Avenue in Blood Root Valley, (718) 351-3450; www.ny.govparks.org].

Submit a listing

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

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

TUES, DEC. 31

ON STATEN ISLAND

Bracelet workshop: Dongan Hills Library, 1617 Richmond Rd. at Liberty Avenue; (718) 351-1444; www.nypl.org; 3:30 pm; Free.

Make a friendship bracelet.

FURTHER AFIELD

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

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

THURS, JAN. 2

FURTHER AFIELD

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

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

FRI, JAN. 3

ON STATEN ISLAND

Baby Rhyme Time: New Dorp Library, 309 New Dorp Ln at Clawson Street; (718) 351-2977; www.nypl.org; 10:30–11 am; Free.

From birth to 17 months old, parents and caregivers enjoy simple books, gentle movements, lively songs, and meet other babies in the community.

SAT, JAN. 4

ON STATEN ISLAND

"Cinderella III": New Dorp Library, 309 New Dorp Ln at Clawson Street; (718) 351-2977; www.nypl.org; 2–4 pm; Free.

This animated film offers a new twist on Princess Cinderella's life



Museum sing-a-long with Patrick

Join Patrick Rafferty for a sing-a-long concert and a dragon march at the Staten Island Children's Museum on Jan. 26.

The resident sing-a-long troubadour shares new songs and old favorites that are sure to chase away the winter blues.

Children complete the day by

making a dragon puppet and celebrating the Lunar New Year with a march around the museum.

Patrick Rafferty on Jan. 26 at 2 pm. Free with museum admission.

Staten Island Children's Museum [1000 Richmond Ter. at Tysen Street in Randall Manor, (718) 273-2060; www.stateniskids.org].

after the ball.

FURTHER AFIELD

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

Music, entertainment, and fun activities.

SUN, JAN. 5

ON STATEN ISLAND

Clouds and more clouds: Blue Heron Nature Center, 222 Poillon Ave. between Amboy Road and Hylan Boulevard; (718) 967-3542; www.nycgov-parks.org; 1 pm; Free.

Urban rangers present a lesson in understanding climate and scientific concepts related to our weather and future. Recommended for older children.

MON, JAN. 6

ON STATEN ISLAND

Teen Cafe: New Dorp Library, 309 New Dorp Ln at Clawson Street; (718) 351-2977; www.nypl.org; 2–4 pm; Free.

Hang out with friends, bring snacks, soda, homework or share the internet and browse the web. For tweens and teens, 12 to 18 years old.

TUES, JAN. 7

ON STATEN ISLAND

Tutoring: New Dorp Library, 309 New Dorp Ln at Clawson Street; (718) 351-2977; www.nypl.org; 3:30–5:30 pm; Free.

Children in Pre-K through 8th grade get homework help in math and English. First come-first served.

Bracelet workshop: Dongan Hills Library, 1617 Richmond Rd. at Liberty

Avenue; (718) 351-1444; www.nypl.org; 3:30 pm; Free.

Make a friendship bracelet. For ages 7 to 12 years old.

Resources for teens: Dongan Hills Library, 1617 Richmond Rd. at Liberty Avenue; (718) 351-1444; www.nypl.org; 4–5 pm; Free.

Children 13 to 18 years old, learn all about what the library has to offer.

WED, JAN. 8

ON STATEN ISLAND

Teen club: New Dorp Library, 309 New Dorp Ln. at Clawson Street; (718) 351-2977; www.nypl.org; 2–4 pm; Free.

Young adults 12 to 18 years old discuss anime, draw, play games, and even do homework.

Teen tech time: Dongan Hills Library, 1617 Richmond Rd. at Liberty Avenue; (718) 351-1444; www.nypl.org; 3:30–5:45 pm; Free.

For children 13 to 18 years old.

Read aloud: New Dorp Library, 309 New Dorp Ln. at Clawson Street; (718) 351-2977; www.nypl.org; 4–4:30 pm; Free.

Children 3 years old and up finger play, learn action rhymes, and color.

THURS, JAN. 9

ON STATEN ISLAND

Family matinee: Huguenot Public Library, 830 Huguenot Ave. at Drumgoole Road East; (718) 984-4636; www.nypl.org; 3 pm; Free.

Enjoy a film for the whole family.

Read aloud: Dongan Hills Library, 1617 Richmond Rd. at Liberty Avenue; (718) 351-1444; www.nypl.org; 4–4:30 pm; Free.

For children of all ages.

FRI, JAN. 10

ON STATEN ISLAND

Toddler Time: Dongan Hills Library, 1617 Richmond Rd. at Liberty Avenue; (718) 351-1444; www.nypl.org; 11:30 am; Free.

Little ones 3 to 5 years old enjoy play time with a caregiver and/or parent.

FURTHER AFIELD

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

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

A Night at the Museum Slee-

Continued on page 30

Calendar

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

Continued from page 29

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

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

SAT, JAN. 11

ON STATEN ISLAND

Winter hearth stories: Greenbelt Nature Center, 700 Rockland Ave. at Brielle Avenue; (718) 351-3450; www.nycgovparks.com; 1 pm; \$8 (\$6 members).

Join the rangers and listen to tales of the seasonal frost. Children 4 to 8 years old with guardian will take a walk outside if the weather permits, and then have hot cocoa. Pre-registration and pre-payment required.

MON, JAN. 13

ON STATEN ISLAND

Teen Cafe: 2-4 pm. New Dorp Library. See Monday, Jan. 6.

Science time: Dongan Hills Library, 1617 Richmond Rd. at Liberty Avenue; (718) 351-1444; www.nypl.org; 4-5 pm; Free.

Children 5 to 12 years old learn about experiments.

TUES, JAN. 14

ON STATEN ISLAND

Tutoring: 3:30-5:30 pm. New Dorp Library. See Tuesday, Jan. 7.

Resources for teens: 4-5 pm. Dongan Hills Library. See Tuesday, Jan. 7.

WED, JAN. 15

ON STATEN ISLAND

Pre-school storytime: New Dorp Library, 309 New Dorp Ln. at Clawson Street; (718) 351-2977; www.nypl.org; Noon; Free.

Children listen to a classic story book.

Teen club: 2-4 pm. New Dorp Library. See Wednesday, Jan. 8.

Teen tech time: 3:30-5:45 pm. Dongan Hills Library. See Wednesday, Jan. 8.

Read aloud: 4-4:30 pm. New Dorp Library. See Wednesday, Jan. 8.

'Awake' at New Victory



Photo by Elizabeth Honey

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

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

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

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

THURS, JAN. 16

ON STATEN ISLAND

Read aloud: 4-4:30 pm. Dongan Hills Library. See Thursday, Jan. 9.

FRI, JAN. 17

ON STATEN ISLAND

Toddler Time: 11:30 am. Dongan Hills Library. See Friday, Jan. 10.

Teen Advisory Group: New Dorp Library, 309 New Dorp Ln. at Clawson Street; (718) 351-2977; www.nypl.org; 2-4 pm; Free.

Children 13 to 18 years old get hands-on experience by attending monthly meetings and volunteering for the library.

FURTHER AFIELD

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

SAT, JAN. 18

ON STATEN ISLAND

Wonderland hike: Greenbelt Nature Center, 700 Rockland Ave. at Brielle Avenue; (718) 351-3450; www.nycgovparks.com; 10 am; Free.

Children 8 and older will enjoy this walk along the trails of the central Greenbelt and search for animal tracks, squirrel drays, woodpecker holes, and other signs of wintering animals. Registration required.

MON, JAN. 20

ON STATEN ISLAND

Cool School holiday: Staten Island Children's Museum, 1000 Richmond Ter. at Tysen Street; (718) 273-2060; statenislandkids.org; 10 am - 4 pm; Free.

Children enjoy a day off from school at the museum with fun activities. Sponsored by Macys.

TUES, JAN. 21

ON STATEN ISLAND

Bracelet workshop: 3:30 pm. Dongan Hills Library. See Tuesday, Jan. 7.

Resources for teens: 4-5 pm. Dongan Hills Library. See Tuesday, Jan. 7.

WED, JAN. 22

ON STATEN ISLAND

Read aloud: 4-4:30 pm. New Dorp Library. See Wednesday, Jan. 8.

THURS, JAN. 23

ON STATEN ISLAND

Fun time: New Dorp Library, 309 New Dorp Ln. at Clawson Street; (718) 351-2977; www.nypl.org; 4-5 pm; Free.

Children play board games, bottle bowling, and more.

Read aloud: 4-4:30 pm. Dongan Hills Library. See Thursday, Jan. 9.

"Despicable Me 2": Huguenot Public Library, 830 Huguenot Ave. at Drumgoole Road East; (718) 984-

4636; www.nypl.org; 5 pm; Free.

The sequel is just as funny as the original.

FRI, JAN. 24

ON STATEN ISLAND

Toddler Time: 11:30 am. Dongan Hills Library. See Friday, Jan. 10.

FURTHER AFIELD

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

SAT, JAN. 25

ON STATEN ISLAND

Penguin Pals: Greenbelt Nature Center, 700 Rockland Ave. at Brielle Avenue; (718) 351-3450; www.nycgovparks.com; 11 am; \$8 (\$6 members).

Children 2 to 4 years old with an adult chaperone make a penguin companion to take home. Pre-registration and pre-payment required.

SUN, JAN. 26

ON STATEN ISLAND

Learn about the Lego Movie: Barnes & Noble, 2245 Richmond Ave. at Travis Avenue; (718) 982-6983; www.barnesandnoble.com; Noon; Free.

Warner Brothers has provided activity sheets and giveaways for participants in this educational event. The film is scheduled for release on Feb. 7. Reservations strongly suggested.

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

Gung hay fat choy - it is the year of the horse and children 5 years old and over with adult chaperone will celebrate the ancient holiday. Create fun crafts, and enjoy traditional snacks. Pre-payment and pre-registration required.

Sing-a-long with Patrick: Staten Island Children's Museum, 1000 Richmond Ter. at Tysen Street; (718) 273-2060; statenislandkids.org; 2 pm-3 pm; Free with museum admission.

Patrick shares his new songs and some old favorites.

Dragon March: Staten Island Children's Museum, 1000 Richmond Ter. at Tysen Street; (718) 273-2060; statenislandkids.org; 4-5 pm; Free with museum admission.

The children will create their own paper dragon to celebrate the Lunar New Year — and march through the museum.

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

MON, JAN. 27

ON STATEN ISLAND

Teen Cafe: 2–4 pm. New Dorp Library. See Monday, Jan. 6.

Movie time: Dongan Hills Library, 1617 Richmond Rd. at Liberty Avenue; (718) 351-1444; www.nypl.org; 3:30–5 pm; Free.

Movies the whole family can enjoy.

TUES, JAN. 28

ON STATEN ISLAND

Tutoring: 3:30–5:30 pm. New Dorp Library. See Tuesday, Jan. 7.

Resources for teens: 4–5 pm. Dongan Hills Library. See Tuesday, Jan. 7.

WED, JAN. 29

ON STATEN ISLAND

Greenbelt peepers: Greenbelt Nature Center, 700 Rockland Ave. at Brielle Avenue; (718) 351-3450; www.nycgovparks.com; 10–10:45 am; \$4 per session.

Children 2 years old with adult chaperone enjoy hands-on activities, stories, and finger play. Classes take place in side and outside, weather permitting.

Teen club: 2–4 pm. New Dorp Library. See Wednesday, Jan. 8.

Wii gaming: Dongan Hills Library, 1617 Richmond Rd. at Liberty Avenue; (718) 351-1444; www.nypl.org; 3:30–4:30 pm; Free.

Children 5 to 12 years old play video games.

Read aloud: 4–4:30 pm. New Dorp Library. See Wednesday, Jan. 8.

THURS, JAN. 30

ON STATEN ISLAND

Safety workshop: New Dorp Library, 309 New Dorp Ln. at Clawson Street; (718) 351-2977; www.nypl.org; 4–5 pm; Free.

Eddie Eagle and officers from the 122nd Police Precinct will be on hand offering safety tips, a video, and a contest.

Read aloud: 4–4:30 pm. Dongan Hills Library. See Thursday, Jan. 9.

FRI, JAN. 31

ON STATEN ISLAND

Toddler Time: 11:30 am. Dongan Hills Library. See Friday, Jan. 10.

SAT, FEB. 1

ON STATEN ISLAND

Night sky: Wolfe's Pond Park Comfort Station, Cornelia Ave. at Hyland Boulevard; (718) 967-3542;

'Pattern Palooza' family day

Pattern Palooza Family Day at the Jewish Museum guarantees fun for the whole family on Jan. 26. Celebrate wearable art and the power of patterns, inspired by the museum's current

fashion exhibition "threeASFOUR." Spend the afternoon making memories and creating your own wearable work of art while listening to a world music mix from Oran Etkin. Jan. 26, 2014, from noon to 4pm.

Free with museum admission.

The Jewish Museum [1109 Fifth Ave., at 92nd Street on the Upper East Side, (212) 423-3200 www.thejewishmuseum.org/specialfamilydays#sthsh.IUEmBSyt.dpuf].

nycgovparks.org; 6 pm; Free.

Take out your binoculars and view the winter stars. Urban Rangers discuss the history, science, and folklore surrounding our universe.

LONG-RUNNING

ON STATEN ISLAND

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

Children listen to a different story each week.

"War and Peace": Alice Austen House, 2 Hylan Blvd. at Edgewater Street; (718) 816-4507; Tuesdays – Sundays, 11 am–5 pm, Now – Tues, Dec. 31; \$3.

The exhibit by Melissa Cacciola features Tintype portraits documenting the armed forces from the Civil War to the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

Up4Art: Staten Island Children's Museum, 1000 Richmond Ter. at Tysen Street; (718) 273-2060; [\[kids.org\]\(http://kids.org\); Saturdays and Sundays, 1, 2 and 3 pm, Now – Sun, March 2, 2014; Free with museum admission.](http://statenisland-</p>
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Children create fun projects.

Kidz cook: Staten Island Children's Museum, 1000 Richmond Ter. at Tysen Street; (718) 273-2060; statenisland-kids.org; Saturdays, 2, 3 and 4 pm, Now – Fri, Feb. 28, 2014; Free with museum admission.

Children experiment with all types of food.

Tree tots: Greenbelt Nature Center, 700 Rockland Ave. at Brielle Avenue; (718) 351-3450; www.nycgovparks.com; Thursday, Jan. 16, 10 am; Thursday, Jan. 23, 10 am; Thursday, Jan. 30, 10 am; Thursday, Feb. 6, 10 am; Thursday, Feb. 13, 10 am; Thursday, Feb. 20, 10 am; Thursday, Feb. 27, 10 am; \$6 (\$8 non-members).

Four year old children with a caregiver do activities, observe nature, play games, and hear stories. Registration required.

FURTHER AFIELD

Train show: Grand Central Station,

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

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

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

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

Holiday train show: New York Botanical Garden, 200th St. and Kazimiroff Blvd., The Bronx; (718) 817-8700; www.nybg.org; Tuesdays – Sundays, 10 am–6 pm, Now – Sun, Jan. 12, 2014; \$20 (\$8 children).

Large scale model trains cover a wide variety of ground and features fa-

Continued on page 32

Continued from page 31

avorites, including the Statue of Liberty, Rockefeller Center, the Brooklyn Bridge, and many others.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Space Junk 3D: New York Hall of Science, 47-01 111th St., at Avenue of Science, Queens; (718) 699-0005 X353; www.nyscience.org; Tuesdays - Sundays, 10 am-5pm, Now - Tues, Dec. 31; \$6 (\$5 children) plus museum admission.

Winter family day

Get ready for a high-energy concert, courtesy of rocker and Jewish educator Naomi Less, at a "Winter Family Day" at the Museum of Jewish Heritage on Jan. 12.

Sing along, take museum tour, and don't forget the crafting session — all included in the price of the concert ticket. Children ages 3 to 10 and their families can enjoy this afternoon of fun-filled activities.

Jan. 12 at 2 pm. Crafts and tours, will begin at 1 pm. \$10 and \$7 for children age 10 and under. \$7 for museum members and \$5 for kid members age 10



and under.

The Museum of Jewish Heritage [36 Battery Pl., off of West Street in Battery Park, (646) 437-4202, www.mjnhyc.org].

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

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

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

Frogs — A Chorus of Colors: American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th Street,

Manhattan; (212) 769-5200; awang@amnh.org; www.amnh.org; Daily, 10 am-5:45 pm; Now - Sun, Jan. 5, 2014; Suggested admission \$19, \$10.50 children, \$14.50 seniors and students.

See more than 150 live frogs, including 10 species of colorful dart-poison frogs. Learn about their importance to ecosystems and the threats they face in the wild.

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

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

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

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

Beginner Hockey Clinic: Lasker Pool & Rink, 110 Malcolm X Blvd., Central Park, Manhattan; (212) 348-4867; www.nycgovparks.org/events/2014/01/06/beginner-hockey-clinic; Mondays, 4 pm, Mon, Jan. 6 - Mon, March 10, 2014; Free.

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

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

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

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

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

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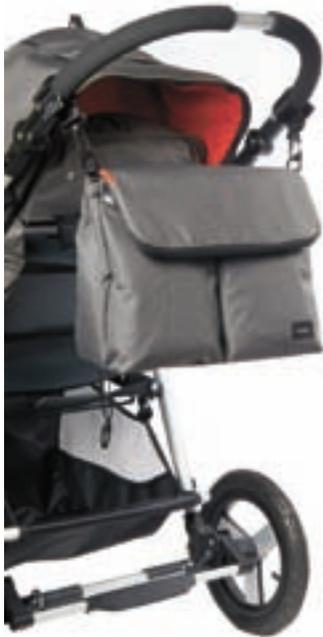
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New & Noteworthy

BY LISA J. CURTIS



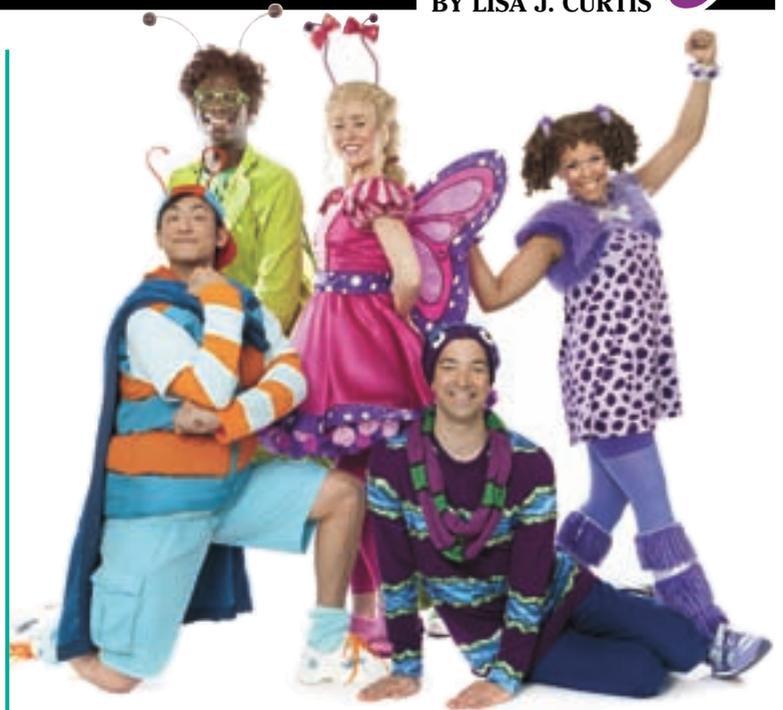
It's in the bag

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

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

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

Bumbleride Diaper Bag, \$59, www.franklin-goose.com.



Get moving indoors

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

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

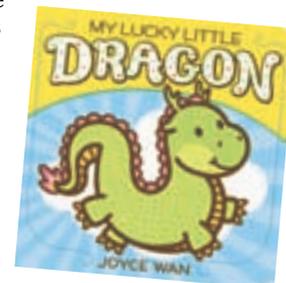
"Morning Wish Garden" CD by The Ohmies, \$12, www.theohmies.com.

Animal attraction

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

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

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



Bottom's up!

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



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

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

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

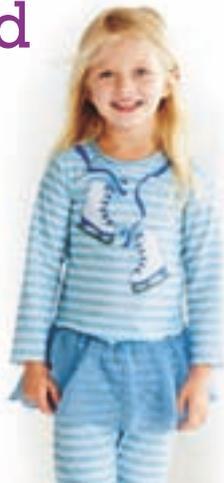
5-Ounce Bouche Baby Take N' Shake with Integrated Feeding Compartment, \$17.99, www.bouchebaby.com.

Off the ice, into bed

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

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

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



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