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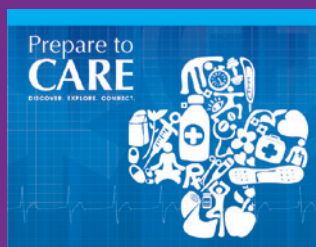
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*A hot topic:
The puzzle of disciplining your child*



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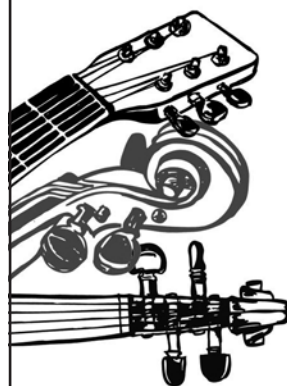
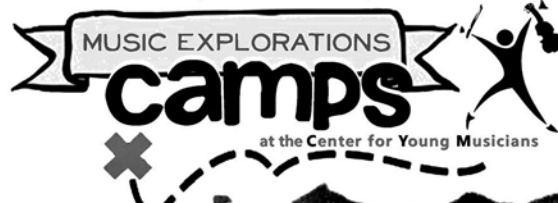


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Speaking of the weather, went to bed last night dreading the drive to the office this morning – after all these years I am still not a confident driver in the snow, and snow is what we get in February in Pittsburgh.

I was hoping for snow over Christmas while our grandson was in from Phoenix. Each time I was shopping for the holidays I came so close to buying a sled just in case the flurries flew. But then I would remember ... my then two-year-old son being pulled around his granny's flat backyard when she let go and he, sitting on his sled in his yellow snowsuit, went flying over the edge of a steep gorge to land still sitting on the sled in the creek below. My absolute horror returns as I visualize this moment – and I never moved so fast to the bottom of that incline to get him in my arms – and back up!

Sled riding accidents bring back another sad, sad memory. During a typical Pittsburgh snowstorm we took Chad to the pediatricians with an ear infection, were sent on to an ear specialist and from there to the hospital for surgery to drain and insert tubes. He was admitted for the night for morning surgery. We spent the night in and out of the waiting room with a family whose ten-year-old was enjoying the snow with her friends until her sled flew into the street and she was hit by a car. I was there when her parents were told she did not make it. I am not a great fan of sled riding!

According to Newsweek.com, "Sledding is dangerous. Each winter, snow-suited children of all ages careen down icy hills on slabs of unsteerable plastic designed specifically to reduce friction — or, in other words, to go as fast as gravitationally possible. Some of them hit trees or fences, or simply land with a brutal thud after taking momentary flight in a city park.

Cities across the country have had enough. Among them is Dubuque, Iowa, whose City Council is moving this year

to ban sledding in 48 of its 50 municipal parks, the Associated Press reports. The council cited two recent major lawsuits that cost other municipalities big money: a \$2 million judgment against Omaha, Nebraska, after a five-year-old girl who hit a tree while sledding became paralyzed, and a \$2.75 million payment in Sioux City, Iowa, when a man sledded into a sign and suffered a spinal cord injury.

According to a study by the Center for Injury Research and Policy at Nationwide Children's Hospital, sledding-related injuries send over 20,000 children to the hospital each year, of whom nine percent suffer traumatic brain injury."

It is looking to me like sled riding may go the way of trampolines in school gym classes – eliminated due to liability. Do the benefits of sledding outweigh the risks? Can we protect our children from everything? Best I can suggest is we as parents teach smart decision making and safety techniques – in the case of sled riding, children should be warned to NEVER, EVER ride head first on a sled and that they assume the risk of injury or permanent physical damage resulting from sledding activities.

According to safety experts – get the right kind of sled. The best sleds can be steered by riders and have brakes to slow them down. Avoid sleds that can't be steered, such as tubes, saucers or toboggans, and never use a sled substitute like a lunch tray or cardboard box. Good sleds are relatively cheap to buy and are well worth the extra money.

Now I ask myself – why did I even consider buying a sled? Always looking for a way to put a positive spin on my grandson living in Phoenix – no snow! ■



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Winter break blues: Cure cabin fever and stay sane

By Malia Jacobson

Your house looks like a toy store explosion inside a wrapping paper factory. In between cartoon marathons and stealthy candy-cane binges, your cooped-up kids shriek "I'm bored!" at top volume. Your holiday decorations (and your sanity) hang by a thread. Sound familiar? You may be suffering from Winter Break Blues.

Brought on by an extended school break smack-dab in the middle of the coldest, darkest season, Winter Break Blues can strike even the most organized and calmest of parents during the post-holiday haze. Symptoms include sudden bouts of indecipherable yelling, empty parental threats ("All your presents are going in the trash and I mean it!"), frenzied bursts of cleaning activity involving equal parts toy shoveling and sobbing, and a desire to bust out of the front door without opening it.

Before locking yourself in the

bathroom with a picked-over tin of Christmas cookies, take heart: winter break is unavoidable, but it doesn't have to be awful. When the blues strike, swift



action can help brighten the bleakest winter break prognosis and yield some fun in the process.

Energy burn

When the kids are bouncing off the walls, load them in the car and beat a path to the nearest bounce house or indoor kids' gym (bonus points if coffee is served for winter-weary parents). Yes, it will likely be overcrowded and germ-ridden, but in this case, the pros (happy, occupied children) outweigh the potential cons. And a little extra hand-washing never hurt anyone.

Gym escape

Even better than an indoor playspace? A gym with childcare. Just imagine: Your children can play happily while you burn off winter stress with a Zumba class or treadmill session—or simply enjoy a smoothie, free Wi-Fi, and a comfy chair. Either way, everyone leaves happier, if not a little healthier.

Opposites attract

Break out of a mid-winter rut with a daycation, at home. If you live in a warm



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climate, treat kids to a snow day with a tub of artificial snow (purchased at your nearest dollar store), paired with some small toys for sensory play. Had enough snow? Dig out your kids' sand toys and create an indoor tabletop beach with kinetic sand, available at craft stores.

Downsize

A glut of new toys – usually holiday gifts – and the resulting chaotic clutter can bring on symptoms of Winter Break Blues faster than you can say “batteries not included.” Announce an old-toy cleanout (hold new playthings hostage until the cleanup is accomplished, if needed). Set reasonable parameters for the purge; say, all of your child's toys must fit in the toy box or have space on the shelf. Choose toys to keep, give away and donate. Hint: blasting upbeat tunes during the cleanup may even trick your kids into thinking that they're having fun.

Drive through

Everyone squirrely and it's miserable out? Drive-through to the rescue. Load up the kids, pop an audiobook CD – or the Frozen soundtrack – into the stereo and hit your favorite drive-up coffee stand. Order a round of hot chocolate for everyone. Then take the scenic route home while everyone unwinds.



Gratis gifts

Put that stack of gift cards to good use. Once old toys are cleaned out and donated, round up the brightly-colored slices of plastic and take the brood shopping to snag winter duds on sale or scoop up lunch essentials for when school resumes. Or donate the gift cards to your favorite charity. Clearing the cards off your kitchen counter will help clear your head and ensure that they don't go to waste (per the Tower Group, around ten percent of gift cards go unused each year, totaling eight billion dollars in lost value).

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Preparing your child for dental visits

By Denise Morrison Yearian

Jane and Drew Tamassia love going to the dentist. They think it is fun.

Perhaps it's words like "tickle toothbrush" and "sugar bug remover" that make these preschoolers giggle. Maybe it's the mini-movie theater or downtown Disney decorations that draw them in.

"I think they like going because I started them early and chose someone who knows how to work with children," says Suzanne Tamassia, whose own childhood dental fears drove her to find a dentist who works specifically with children.

"Getting children in at an early age is key," says Pediatric Dentist Lawrence Louie. "I like to see them when the first tooth erupts. It gives me a chance to get a good look at the child's mouth and lets me share oral health care and nutrition information with the parents."

Jennifer Luzader, pediatric dental hygienist, agrees. "We recommend

children have their first dental exam by their first birthday, and their first dental cleaning by age two."



Even before that first appointment, there are things parents can do to prepare their child for their visit

"Use books, videos and role play at home," says Luzader. "Talk with your child

using good, positive terms and remind him how important it is to take care of his teeth and eat the right kinds of foods."

That is what Susan Magasiny did. "Before Jake's first appointment, we talked about how the dentist was a doctor for his teeth and that to keep them healthy, he needed to have check ups," says the mother of two. "I told him the dentist was going to look at his teeth, count them and maybe take a picture. It was no big deal."

"I remember sitting at home role-playing with Jane," recalls Tamassia. "I would say, 'Open your mouth and let me see your teeth,' then I would pretend to be the dentist. She liked that."

Role-playing did prepare Jane for that first visit, because when she went she knew just what to

expect.

"When a child comes in, we try to make it a fun experience," say Luzader. "They get to pick out things like fluoride flavor, sunglasses for eye protection and a new toothbrush and floss. Then we go through each step of what we are going to do, first on their fingers then in their mouths. We count their teeth, scale those that are covered with plaque and tartar and then polish. We finish with a fluoride treatment and have the dentist come in for an exam."

Louie talks children through the procedures too. "We call it, 'Tell. Show. Do.' First we tell them what we are going to do, show them on our hands, then do it – that way there are no surprises."

Even without so-called "surprises," sometimes anxiety sets in.

"Crying through the first two years is very expected, even at three," says Luzader. "One way to ward off tears is with distraction. We have puppets we use and will talk with children on their level to gain their confidence. We also try to make it fun – 'What kind of animal is down your throat today?' Even when children come in crying, 95 percent of them leave with a smile."

"What is really important is that parents not relay any fears they have about going to the dentist," says Louie. "Every once in a while I see where parents have elaborated on what happened to them and it comes through to the children."

On occasion, dental emergencies arise which cannot be avoided.

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Mommy has another name: Tips for reclaiming your identity post childbirth

By Lara Krupicka

While in college, Michele Kus walked out of a jazz band audition, vowing never to play music publicly again. Burnout had pushed her over the edge. Twenty years later, after seven years as a full-time mom and the birth of her third child, she was exhausted from parenting and in need of a territory to call her own. Unexpectedly, she found herself being drawn into playing keyboard at her church. This time music became a lifeline.

"The music is fully mine. It is me being fully me. It is not something I do for my children or for my husband; in fact, they must make sacrifices for me to do it," Kus explains.

Signs you need a break from being mommy

- You're not sure what you'd want to do, given time alone.
- You can't remember the last time you had the house to yourself.
- You're surprised to hear your given name.
- You could practically live out of your car with all of the food, clothing and gadgets in there.
- You don't close the bathroom door any more because why bother?
- You still carry a diaper bag, even though your kids have been potty trained for years.

At the beginning when we are establishing a family, we adopt our new roles wholeheartedly, even calling each other "Mommy" and "Daddy." But as the kids grow and we never hear our given name, it can be discouraging. Limiting our identity to one role has the potential to build resentment. And it can diminish our ability to be our best as a parent. Want to be a better, more fulfilled mom? Try one or more of these seven ideas for reclaiming your self as a whole person:

- **Establish a 'no kids zone' in your house.** They may follow you everywhere

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Mommy has another ... continued from 9

(including the bathroom), but that does not mean you don't deserve a space of your own. Even a chair or nook designated off-limits to everyone but you can provide a respite when the troops are restless.

- **Spend time around people who don't know your children.** It's natural for the majority of our associates during the child-rearing years to be those who play a role in our children's lives: parents of playmates, fellow PTA members, neighborhood moms. However, this limits us to being identified as somebody's mom. When you engage with others minus the kids, you have the chance to express another side of yourself. This can be as simple as going to the gym or a Pilates class once a week.

- **Accomplish a personal goal.** We often have the sense that the world drops off at our doorstep; that we have to put everything on hold for the sake of our children. But the truth is, our kids can appreciate us more when they see us making time for ourselves too. And fulfilling one goal can lead to other opportunities.

For Kus, engaging in music again has spawned new aspirations: making an album, learning how to DJ, writing soundtracks. "It has opened a whole new world for me," she says. "I feel like I have come back to life and my husband and kids have seen the change in me."

- **Have a 'big people dinner' with just your spouse.** Feed the kids a child-friendly meal of chicken nuggets or mac 'n cheese. Then focus your energy on creating a more sophisticated meal for the adults in the house. Pull out the china and light some candles. Once the kids are all tucked in bed for the night, enjoy a peaceful, uninterrupted meal. One caveat? Try not to discuss the kids over dinner.

Instead Kus suggests, "Talk about what gives you energy – your dreams, your desires."

continued on page 39

PUBERTY, EMOTIONS, & THE BRAIN

Is your child 10-13 and healthy? If so, he or she may be eligible to participate in a research study examining changes in brain development during puberty.

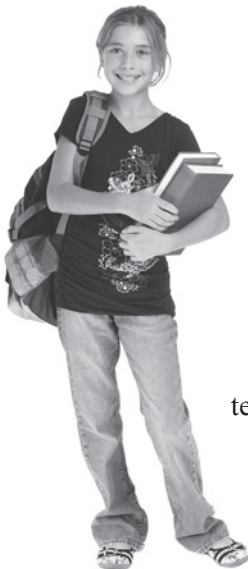
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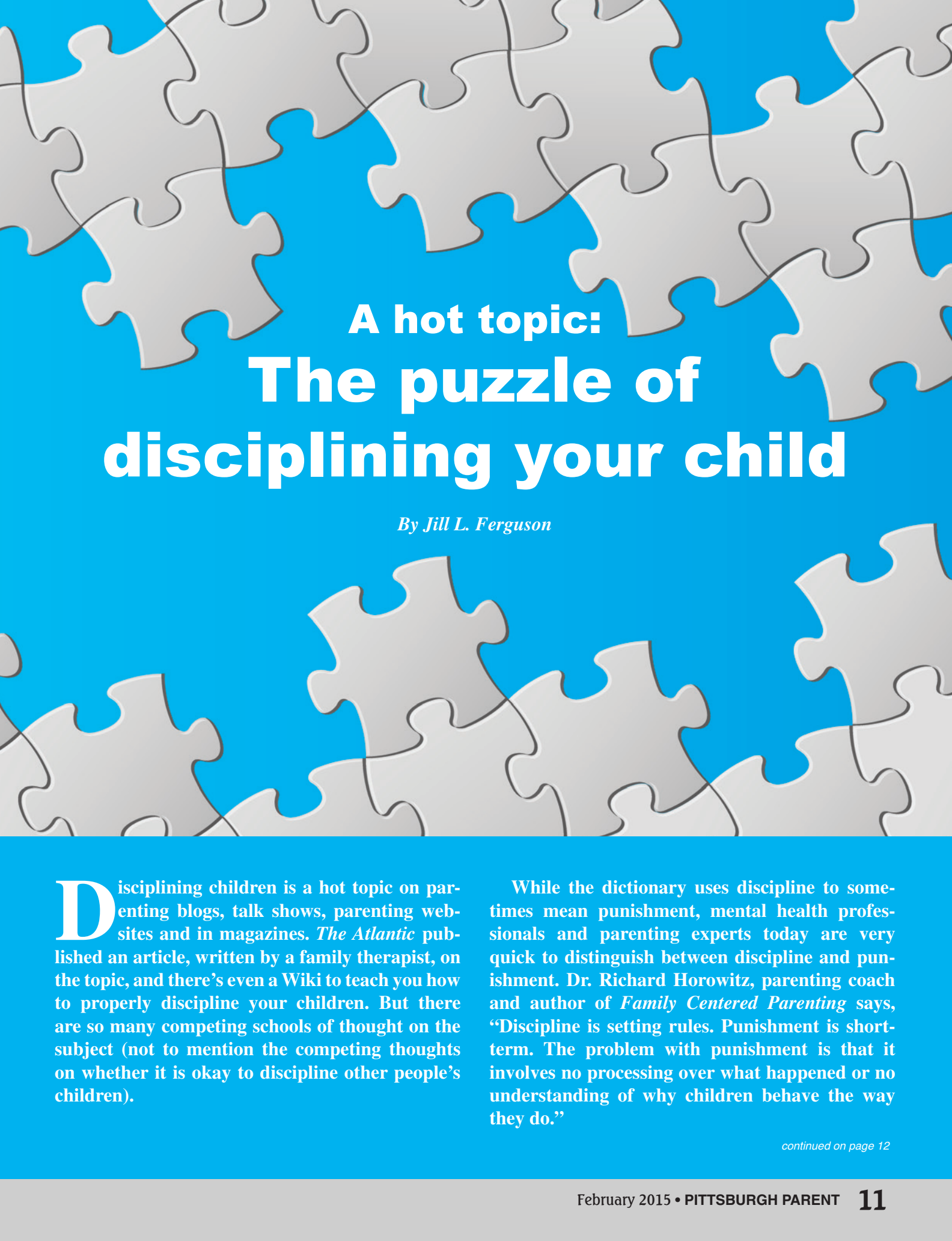
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A hot topic: The puzzle of disciplining your child

By Jill L. Ferguson

Disciplining children is a hot topic on parenting blogs, talk shows, parenting websites and in magazines. *The Atlantic* published an article, written by a family therapist, on the topic, and there's even a Wiki to teach you how to properly discipline your children. But there are so many competing schools of thought on the subject (not to mention the competing thoughts on whether it is okay to discipline other people's children).

While the dictionary uses discipline to sometimes mean punishment, mental health professionals and parenting experts today are very quick to distinguish between discipline and punishment. Dr. Richard Horowitz, parenting coach and author of *Family Centered Parenting* says, "Discipline is setting rules. Punishment is short-term. The problem with punishment is that it involves no processing over what happened or no understanding of why children behave the way they do."

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A hot topic ... continued from 11

But what is discipline and how is it different from punishment? Dictionary.com defines discipline in twelve ways. The first nine are the word as a noun; the last three are using discipline as a verb:

- “
1. training to act in accordance with rules; drill
 2. activity, exercise, or a regimen that develops or improves a skill; training
 3. punishment inflicted by way of correction and training
 4. the rigor or training effect of experience, adversity, etc.
 5. behavior in accord with rules of conduct; behavior and order maintained by training and control
 6. a set or system of rules and regulations
 7. Ecclesiastical. the system of government regulating the practice of a church as distinguished from its doctrine
 8. an instrument of punishment, especially a whip or scourge, used in the practice of self mortification or as an instrument of chastisement in certain religious communities
 9. a branch of instruction or learning
 10. to train by instruction and exercise; drill
 11. to bring to a state of order and obedience by training and control
 12. to punish or penalize in order to train and control; correct; chastise
- ”

Author of *The Parent Playbook* Russell Hyken, Ph.D., EdSp. MA, LPC, LOMHC, NLC agrees, saying, “Discipline is a pro-active structure. It’s conversations on a regular basis about expectations. Punishment is short-term, immediate, and age-appropriate; it’s a consequence of pushing the rules beyond

their boundaries. Consequence is a better word than punishment.”

Dr. Horowitz recommends allowing the children to help set the rules. He says that some parents don’t want to do this because they think negotiating means agreement. “Negotiating means listening, not necessarily agreement. If the child has agreed to the rule then there is no excuse for breaking the rules.”

Dr. Geoffrey Putt, a clinical psychologist who runs the Positive Parenting Program at the Akron Children’s Hospital, says, “Children know what they are supposed to do and not supposed to do. Punishment is by definition a negative thing and it isn’t effective.” His program teaches evidence-based behavioral modification for parents.

“Behavior management (the environment) is what shapes your behavior. If a child finds whining is effective that’s what s/he will do because it’s worked in the past, even if it has only paid off one out of ten times. Think of Vegas odds. People pull the slot machine lever even without those odds. They subconsciously think next time work it longer and harder because it will eventually pay off,” says Dr. Putt. “It is more effective to attend to positive behaviors as this builds credibility in the parent-child relationship.”

Creating a Parenting Plan

One way ensure you attend to positive behaviors is by proactively incorporating that into your parenting plan. (Court systems often require a written one of divorcing couples but creating a philosophy and a plan is equally beneficial for all parents.) Television personality Dr. Phil has written hundreds of articles on the subject of parenting and on discipline, everything from discipline mistakes to what to do if you disagree as a couple about the way to discipline to specific disciplinary scenarios (the violent child, the lying child, etc.). He writes that whether parents are together or separated or divorced they should still have a plan as to how they want to raise their children.

Or as Dr. Horowitz says, “Parents need to come up with a philosophy of how to treat their children. Many follow the Golden Rule or they think of a boss they liked and one they hated and the reasons why: not over-managing, feeling a sense of respect. That’s just how your children want to be treated.”

Part of that parenting plan could involve creating a family mission statement and establishing values, ideas that Dr. Horowitz advises his clients to do. The parenting plan also includes rule-setting and establishing a structure for the family (including a possible schedule for when homework should be done, when meals will be served, when bedtime is, etc.). Consequences for breaking the rules should also be a part of the

plan so that everyone in the household knows if a curfew is broken or a tantrum is thrown what the results of that behavior will be.

The experts are divided on whether or not children should be involved in the process or not. Dr. Horowitz says, "Allow the children to help with that" while Dr. Putt says, "You don't invite the other team into your huddle."

Dr. Putt says that once the rules have been set, the structure should include:

- No negotiations
- No asking for things (i.e. Don't say, "Pretty please put your shoes away" if the rule is shoes must be put in a specific place after being worn.)
- No discussion or debate as to why something needs to be done.

Dr. Putt says, "Family rules should be short and simple and understandable. 'Respect people and their property.' 'Treat people the way you want to be treated.' Two or three rules could cover everything and be very positive."

Family lifestyle expert, frequent TODAY show guest, and owner of *TheLadyWithTheAlligatorPurse.com* Donna Bozzo recommends creating a family mantra. "Parents should do this to establish the direction of the family," Bozzo says, admitting she got the idea from her brother. "The family mantra should cover a lot of things, like acting out at the movies or smoking when the parents aren't around; it should also apply to behavior on social media." Bozzo says she repeats the family mantra "Make the Family Proud" every time her three daughters leave the house. Another family uses the mantra "Make Good Decisions" and has the caveat that if the children or their friends do not make good decisions, the children are to call their parents immediately and the parents will offer a safe haven. Bozzo said, "This shows respect for the kids and lets them figure out their behavior."

Guidelines for creating a family mantra include: short, sweet, broad, effective, and as automatic as "brush your teeth," according to Bozzo.

Dr. Hyken says, "Parents need to have regular conversations with their children about academics, behavior and social



expectations. Then it comes down to the child's choice about how he reacts or behaves in situations" knowing full well what the consequences of actions might be since it was determined beforehand when the parenting plan was created.

Dr. Hyken says to deliver expectations of behavior in a loving way, but he also admits that guilt can be a good motivator since kids know what is right and wrong and want to please their parents.

Common Mistakes Parents Make

A friend is the great-aunt of a temperamental six-year-old girl. When my friend was visiting her brother and his wife, the child's grandparents, she watched the girl throw a fit because her grandparents wouldn't give her ice cream for breakfast. When told she had to eat her eggs and toast, the girl stormed out of the room and slammed a bedroom door behind her. My friend questioned the girl's behavior and her brother's response: "She knows we'll give in eventually."

This one of the most common parenting mistakes: giving in as to avoid a further tantrum or crying. The only thing this does is reinforce the bad behavior even if you only give in a fraction of the time and not all of the time (think of Dr. Putt's slot machine analogy at the beginning of this article).

Another parenting mistake, related to the previous one, is bribery. Once family rules are in place in a household, no room exists for bribing. The rules are followed or they are not. (This goes back also to Dr. Putt's structure on not saying "pretty please" or negotiating.) If the rule is "everyone eats what is on his or her plate", then a parent or grandparent saying, "if you eat your vegetables you can get dessert" is unnecessary and counter-productive. That phrase would undermine the family's



continued on page 14



A hot topic ... continued from 13

discipline structure.

Parents need to be in control of themselves. Tricia Ferrara, M.A., author of *Parenting 2.0: Think in the Future Act in the Now*, says, “Parents need to be in control of him or herself, even in escalating situations. If the parent is not in control of him or herself, the child looks at the parent as an emotional peer instead of as a leader.” Ferrara says when this happens it causes the child to be blocked from learning in the situation as s/he gets caught in fight or flight mode instead.



Do you spank or punish your child with no reflection or question of why the rule was broken? Spanking misbehaving children is part of some families’ cultures though almost all mental health professionals are against corporal punishment because it is seen as impulsive and either makes children live in fear (which in turn can stunt their development of empathy) or just teaches them not to get caught.

Ferrara says, “We have a tendency to do to our children what was done to us, thinking we turned out okay. But we need our children to do better than okay. Spanking is usually done out of anger. We need to be more deliberate in our actions. The root word of discipline is disciple. Punishment is rooted in pain and causes children to be a disciple of using pain to get what they want. Spanking is a wasted opportunity to help a child learn.”

Dr. Horowitz says, it is better for children to take respon-

sibility for their actions and for parents and their children to understand why they behave the way they do. “What need is the child trying to meet in doing that behavior? What were the consequences to fulfilling the need the way the child tried to? Then the parents and child can come up with a plan as to how to meet that need in the future without the child breaking the rule.”

Ferrara echoes the need to understand why the child is breaking a rule. “Often behavioral challenges signal the child cannot coordinate language and behavioral needs.” She gives the example of a child saying, “I hate Joey.” Parents typically respond with something like “Don’t say hate, honey.” This kind of comment doesn’t help the child at all because it doesn’t help the child resolve the issue. “It’s better to explore why the child uses that phrase,” Ferrara says. Maybe Joey steals the child’s toys or pokes him annoyingly during circle time or says mean things to other kids. Find out exactly what the child is expressing.

Hundreds of psychological studies over the last few decades have shown that spanking causes shame, anger and anxiety. Dr. Putt says, “If you are very punitive it will damage the relationship and may increase aggressiveness.”

Don’t punish too late or too long. Along with making sure there is reflection on why the rule was broken, the punishment needs to come immediately after the infraction and be suitable to the child’s age and to the offense. Bozo says, “The punishment should depend on the child and the intent.... We did a lot of talking about things, removing them from the situations, and sitting on the steps in a time out in our household. Consistency is important.”

Ferrara says, “Spanking and timeouts aren’t as effective when kids become older.” Losing electronics for a week or driving privileges might be more fitting.

Dr. Hyken emphasizes that it is important for the child to understand when the consequence will end. “Children need to understand what they did wrong and that the consequence is age appropriate and short-term.” Overlong consequences (grounding for months, for example, when a curfew rule has been violated once) are ineffective as punishment and tend to reinforce the notion of “figure out a way to not get caught next time”.

Parents should act as a united front. The old adage of “wait until your father gets home” no longer applies. First, because consequences to rule-breaking should be immediate. Second, because in a two-parent household that has a parenting plan both parents have authority to exercise the judgment of consequence, plus the children already know what the consequence

will be because it has been discussed beforehand. As Dr. Hyken says, “Discipline is not in a vacuum; it takes parental teamwork.” Not acting like a united front in front of the kids when it comes to discipline causes both parents to lose credibility and the child’s trust.

But that’s not to say parents can never argue around their children. Arguing about appropriate topics (not about discipline) is helpful, according to Dr. Hyken. “A disagreement—not yelling or screaming—models for children that arguments can be capped, resolved or neutral corners can be taken for a period of time. This teaches kids to have a backbone and to stand up for themselves.”

Parents need to be specific enough in communications. Negative phrases such as “Don’t do that” or even positive phrases such as “Good job” aren’t as effective when talking to children (or to adults) as more specific language. If a young child is trying to convey his fear, desires, needs, or wishes by doing a behavior that his parent finds objectionable, saying, “Don’t do that,” doesn’t meet the need, show any understanding of what is going on, and can be interpreted by the child as “don’t do this action, don’t have this want, or don’t do this in front of mom.”

Likewise, saying “Good job” doesn’t feel as uplifting to child as specific compliments that booster self esteem and show the parent is really paying attention. “You chose beautiful colors for that picture” or “Thank you for nicely asking Tommy to give back to your toy when he took it” provide more information to help a developing child process what the parent means.



Bozzo says, “Even a 30- or 60-second interaction with your child can be powerful. A lot of behavioral issues can be eased by time spent together, even short amounts of it, if it involves eye contact, no distractions, and actually listening to your child. It can even be fun.”

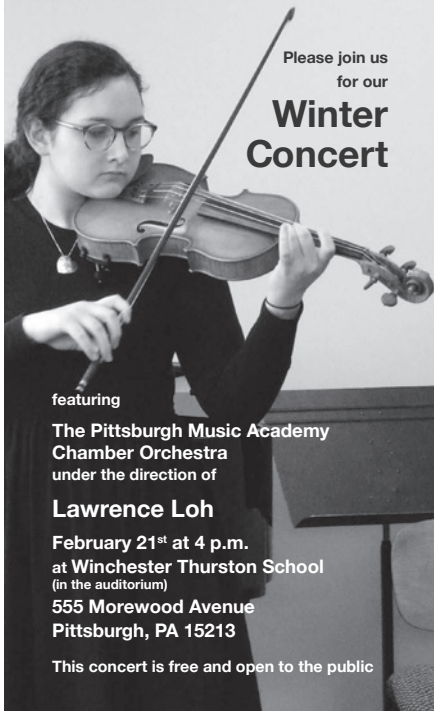
Dr. Putt offers this mantra for parents (the same as the TV show Survivor): Outwit. Outlast. Outplay. After all, he says, “Parenting doesn’t come with a manual. The short-term effort using evidence-based principles of behavioral modification will pay off in the end.” Be a good behavioral role model as kids pick up on whether you get stressed or remain calm and they will tend to do the same.

As Ferrara says, “Parent is a verb, not just a noun. How you handle the difficult moments has an enormous imprint on how your child will handle life...on whether to use you as a resource or treat you as the enemy. The stakes are high.” ■

Jill L. Ferguson is a freelance writer from Renton, WA. Formerly from Pittsburgh, PA.



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Hey, Cupid! Your holiday's been hijacked!

By Lara Krupicka



Dear Cupid, forgive me for butting in on your business, this being a hectic time of year for you and all. But I had to write you about something that has been bothering me in the years since I became a mom: if you haven't noticed, your holiday has been hijacked. By other little people who don't sport wings and a bow and arrow. Three of them reside in my house and they're not remotely ready for the idea of romance (okay, so maybe the fourteen year-old thinks she is). Yet they've co-opted what should be a celebration between couples for their own purposes.

For instance, on February 14th my husband hurries to leave love notes on the breakfast table for our daughters and in his haste forgets to even tell me goodbye? And the grandparents send along cards and candy hearts for the kids while the love of my life gives me... nothing?

It seems your powers of attraction have been redirected to cause parents to overexert themselves in being sure on this day of days that their children know they are cherished. They're moved to gush over their offspring, whom they already cuddle and coddle. They shower them with hugs, gifts, attention and at the end of it all, they give their conspirator in the scheme called "family" an exhausted peck on the cheek and a quick, 'love ya, hon!'

I'm not sure that's what you're aiming for, Cupid.

I've been a victim in this hijacking myself. Reduced to tucking frilly cards in lunch boxes, writing chalk marker messages on our patio window and decorating heart-shaped sugar cookies. Oh yes, and I've been swayed into spending hours coaching my children to squeeze their names on the cheap character-themed greetings they exchange with classmates. I guess I should be grateful they haven't convinced me to do it all for them. In the name of



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love, of course.

By the way, I'm pretty sure the kids don't mean any of the sappy sentiments on those cards, except maybe for the ones they give to their best friends. But this isn't a "friendship" holiday, is it? Or did I miss that chapter on the history of St. Valentine?

For once, dear Cupid, I'd like to wake to flowers on my dresser and champagne in the fridge. I'd be thrilled to break out a dress and heels for dinner on the town at a restaurant that doesn't serve chicken fingers or macaroni and cheese. I could use a special day where the cards and wishes flowed only between me and my sweetheart.

Actually Cupid, what I really wish is that you had given me a warning about the influence over endearment held by babies and children. A heads-up for what was to come. I would have squeezed in more romantic fondues or steak-and-seafood dinners. I would have taken more chilly moonlit strolls and splurged on that carriage ride. I would have fussed more over gifts of tenderness in that brief span of years.

Then again, in those days I probably wouldn't have believed your warnings, my cherubic friend. After all, I was too smitten to imagine bringing little people into our lives could do anything but multiply our devotion to each other.

Which in a way, it has. I have so much more to appreciate about my husband now. Like the way he can create a fishtail braid in a young girl's slippery tresses. Or how he gently glues the heads back onto tiny plastic princess dolls to restore them for his own princesses. And have you seen how he bristles with a show of manly protection over the mention of a boy by our tween-aged daughter?

See, it somehow always comes back to those kids!

Yet for all the devotion and love flowing in our household, I wish I could, for one Valentine's Day again, be the center of someone's world. To attract again all that affection to myself. Which is why you should do something to reclaim your holiday for romance.

So what do you think? Will you take back Valentine's Day from the youngsters?

If not, I guess I'd settle for a box of chocolates, a candlelit dinner at home with my husband and a snuggle in front of the lit fireplace, while the kids wash the dishes and clean up the kitchen. After all, we have to give them some way of participating in the holiday they've hijacked. In the name of love. ■

Lara Krupicka is a parenting journalist and mom of three, who enjoys doting on her husband of 18 years when she's not focused on the kids.



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Just keep swimming: The surprising benefits of winter swim lessons

By Alyssa Chirco

The American Red Cross estimates that over 90 percent of families spend at least some time in the water during the summer months, so it makes sense that summer is the prime season for children's swim lessons. But don't be so quick to pull your kids out of the water just because the temperature has fallen outside.

"I'm a big proponent of year-round swimming at least until it becomes like riding a bike," says Coach Ruthie Zarren, a certified swim instructor, water safety educator and owner of Little Fishes Swim School. "Being in the water and swimming safely should be second nature for every child, but kids are rarely able to develop the skills they need when they only spend a few months of the year in the water."

Surprised that now might be the right time to sign your child up for swim lessons? Consider the following ways in which kids can benefit when they 'just keep swimming' throughout the winter season.

Where your family can swim this winter

Most outdoor pools are closed from Labor Day through Memorial Day, but there are still many indoor facilities that offer group or private swim lessons throughout the winter season. Even if you choose not to sign your kids up for classes this winter, an indoor pool is still the perfect place to take the entire family when it's too cold to play outside.

Look for winter swim opportunities at the following locations in your area:

- A private swim school with an indoor pool
- A local high school or community college (especially one with a swim team)
- A private fitness club
- A nearby community center
- Your local branch of the YMCA

Winter swim lessons build the skills kids need to stay safe in the water.

According to a 2009 study from the *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, formal swim lessons can significantly reduce the risk of drowning, particularly in children between the ages of one and four. And while summer class will certainly help to build the strong swimming and water safety skills kids need,

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year-round lessons allow them to better retain those skills and move on to mastering more advanced skills faster.

"I like to use the analogy of playing an instrument," says Aquatics Director Kyle Fetick. "You wouldn't expect to take piano for a few months out of the year and be a proficient pianist. Swimming is very much the same. While it may be a typical summer time activity, the more you learn in the winter and the spring, the more prepared you are to be a confident and safe swimmer during the summer."

Winter swim lessons keep kids active.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend that children and adolescents get at least 60 minutes of physical activity each day. But parents often struggle to keep kids active, particularly during the winter months, when colder temperatures and fewer hours of daylight limit outdoor playtime and lead to a more sedentary lifestyle. Weekly swim lessons provide built-in insurance that children are going to get moving (and splashing) on a regular basis.

Swimming works most of the body's major muscle groups and carries a low risk of injury, making it an excellent form of exercise for growing children. And since swimming is an activity that almost all kids enjoy, they are likely to jump into the pool without protest.

Winter swim lessons can cure cabin fever.

It's common for children (and adults) to become bored and restless during the long winter months. Indoor activities like reading and playing video games can only provide so many hours of entertainment before kids feel the urge to run and jump and play and parents begin to feel like they are going to lose their minds. When it's too cold to head to the playground, a trip to an indoor pool makes for the perfect escape.

During swim lessons, kids get to expend all of the excess energy that builds up after too much time spent indoors. They have an opportunity to see their friends, interact with their teachers and move their muscles as much as they need. Once class is over, they should be ready to rest – or at least play quietly – upon returning home.

Bottom line: routine winter swim lessons keep kids moving and also allow them to develop the strong swimming skills needed to stay safe in the water. Maybe even more importantly, they give the entire family a reason to get out of the house – before cabin fever sets in. ■

Alyssa Chirco is a freelance journalist and mother of two. In an effort to avoid cabin fever, she and her children spend much of the winter at their local indoor pool.



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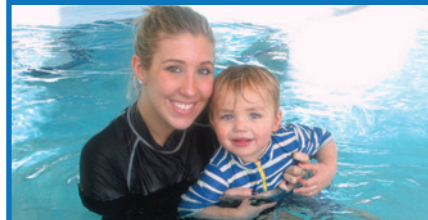
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Dear Teacher

By Peggy Gisler and Marge Eberts

Signs your child may have a writing problem

Q: *My kid does not like to write. How do I know if he has a problem with writing? – Puzzled*

A: The nature of writing is changing, with children texting and emailing friends throughout the day. Writing is a very important part of their lives.



Not liking to write does not necessarily mean that your son actually has a writing problem. By studying his written work and talking to his teachers, you can get a good idea of if he actually has a writing problem. If it appears that he does have a problem, it may be related to one of these causes:

- Reading and writing are tied closely together. Good readers are usually good writers and vice versa. Is your child currently reading on grade level?

- Can he talk about what he knows but cannot express it well in writing? He is losing points on his work because of an inability to state what he knows in writing.

- His writing is unreasonably slow. He is writing a couple of sentences when other students are writing ten times that number.

- He is trying to pack too much information in a single sentence.

- He is a perfectionist trying to write the perfect sentence or paragraph.

- He is easily distracted after writing for a short period of time.

- He avoids writing — even using it in social media.

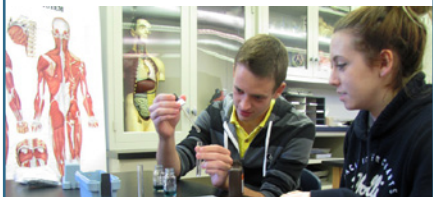
- He makes a lot of mistakes in spelling, punctuation and grammar in his writing.



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Improving children's reading comprehension

Q: *My son, a fifth-grader, is a good reader; however, he does not comprehend what he has read. He cannot tell you what a story is about after he has finished reading it. How can I help him comprehend what he has just read? – Needs to Understand*

A: Reading comprehension is the number one reading skill you want your children to have. Your son does not have this skill, so he cannot be considered a good reader. Here are some things that you can use to help him improve his reading comprehension:

- Preview a story and then read it to your son, or have him read it to you. Before reading the story or part of a story, ask him to find the answer to a question about the setting, characters or problems that the characters are facing. This will help him learn to focus more on the content.

- In order for him to learn how to read school textbooks, teach him the SQ4R study technique, which is explained in great detail under "SQ4R" on our website, dearteacher.com. It involves surveying what is to be read, writing questions to be answered, reading content, answering the questions aloud and then writing the answers and finally reviewing what has been read. Because this technique involves a lot of steps, your child will need to practice it many, many times to master it. If you use the technique with him, he will master it faster and quickly see the advantage of using SQ4R.

How to handle a possible learning disability

Q: *What should you do if you suspect that your child has a learning disability? – Need to Know*

A: First of all, keep in mind that children with learning disabilities usually have normal IQs; their problem lies in how their brains process and use information. They could have an auditory processing, visual perception, communication or other disorder. There is no one description that describes all children with learning disabilities.

If you suspect that your child could have a learning disability, your very first step is to find out as much as you can about what learning disabilities are. This is quite easy to do because many websites will give you good descriptions of learning disabilities. Two helpful sites are: LDonline at ldonline.org and the National Center for Learning Disabilities at nclld.org.

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Camp Guide



Kid to kid: Advice from the seasoned campers

By Kimberly Carlson

When we were kids, summer camp meant something different to us than it does to our children. For us, camp meant camp: cabins or tents,

very dynamics of summer camp have changed. Camps offered now are much more focused and detail oriented. There's soccer camp, art camp, violin camp, space camp, leadership camp, paleontology camp, etc.

But there are some things about camp that truly haven't changed, like the general apprehension your son or daughter might feel the first time they attend camp. Here's what seasoned camp veterans had to say to children that are going off to camp for the first time.

Everyone gets homesick

Some kids handle being away from home better than others. In a dorm room with nine other campers, fourth grader Dakota Lopez recalls 2-3 kids that got homesick. "We felt bad for them, but we all tried to make them feel better. We brought them junk

food and soda." It's a great opportunity for the kids that don't get homesick to step up and show their sympathy and their new friendship skills. And the ones

that do get homesick learn just how much they can rely on their peers to get them through difficulties. It's a great learning experience for all campers. "I didn't like missing my mom," said ten-year-old Michael. "But when the kids cheered me up instead of teasing me, I felt better."

Learn something new

As a sixth-grader, Elise Finlinson is a seasoned camper. She's been attending summer camps since she was in first grade. "Camp is great because you get to explore things you wouldn't get to do in school or learn about," she says with a smile. Elise has found a new love of art that wasn't cultivated during the school year, but has stuck with her since last summer's camp. She has since expanded her knowledge and delved into different artistic mediums with the help of an art teacher she sees outside of school.

Dakota reminisced about the sketches she and her roommates were tasked with writing and performing at soccer camp last summer. "It was SO COOL!" she said. "We got to perform it in front of all the other campers and the coaches."



canoeing, hiking, singing songs around a campfire and general camaraderie. Children today are much more active, much more schedule-oriented and generally just busier. Consequently, the



That was the best part of camp.” It was also unexpected. She was expecting all things soccer. But her favorite memory from soccer camp had nothing to do with soccer.

Have fun

This sounds like a pretty straightforward bit of advice, but sometimes children need to be reminded to have a little fun, lest they get caught up in the stress of the “new.” A new environment, new rules, new daily activities and routines. “I love camp!” says five-year-old Anna Finlinson. “I don’t ever miss my mom because I’m too busy having fun.” Anna attended princess dance camp last summer and is looking forward to “more and more and more camp” this summer. “I didn’t think I would like the hiking, but it ended up being pretty cool,” said Michael.

Don’t be shy

One of the best parts about summer camp is the ability to “make new friends,” says Dakota Lopez, a fourth grader. “Some of them I’m still friends with from last summer’s soccer camp.” Every child I asked had the same bit of advice right from the start: don’t be shy. “Camp only lasts a week and if you wait until the last few days of camp to make friends, you’ve missed out on half the fun,” says Elise.

Regardless of the type of camp you and your children have chosen, make sure they make the most of it. It will go by faster than either one of you expect. If your child can embrace the opportunities presented before him, he will have a much more enriched experience. Elise says that “summer camp is much cooler than regular school because although we’re still learning stuff, we’re not stuck behind a desk all day.”

Even Michael, who was the most apprehensive about attending summer camp, says he would “do it again” this summer. He found confidence and security in knowing he can rely upon himself and trust in his peers to help him if he feels homesick. “Riding horses was pretty cool too,” he proffered.

While summer camp may only last a week or so, the memories really do last a lifetime. See for yourself: ask any child you know about their summer camp experiences and you’ll see their faces light up with the memories. Have your first time camper talk to other children that have already attended. They are more than willing to share their experiences and their energy and excitement about it can be quite contagious! ■

Kimberly Carlson is a published author, blogger and mother of two. One of her kids loves camping in the mountains and snow while her other kid loves camping in the forest – in the summertime, of course!



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AMERICAN CAMP ASSOCIATION * 5000 State Rd. 67 North Martinsville, IN 46151	campparents.org	All	All Year Round	Varies	Give your child the gift of camp – learn about the value of the summer camp experience and find camps here. Free information and Resources.
ANDY WARHOL MUSEUM SUMMER CAMPS, THE 117 Sandusky Street Pittsburgh, PA 15212	412-237-8300 warhol.org/camps	Ages 8-13	June 8 thru Aug 14	\$140- \$175 per wk	The Warhol is offering summer camps weekly for children ages 8-13, from June 8 through August 14, M-F 9am-1pm.
ANIMAL FRIENDS SUMMER CAMPS & CLASSES 562 Camp Horne Rd. Pgh, PA 15237	Dana Schultz 412-847-7035 thinkingoutsidethecage.org/camp	K-11th grd	June 23 thru Aug 15	Varies	Half-days; 3-5 day weekly sessions; ideal for students who love dogs, cats and rabbits.
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CAMP AGAPE 72 Agape Rd. Hickory, PA 15340	Deb Jandt 724-356-2308 campagape.org	Ages 5-15	July 6-31	Varies	Campers enjoy the fun of swimming, fishing, exploring nature and making new friends while improving their reading & math skills.
CAMP DEER CREEK P.O. Box 305 Indianola, PA 15051	Wes Weitzel 412-757-8414 campdeercreekonline.com	Co-ed ages 4-15	June 15 thru Aug 7	\$300 per wk	Camping experiences in a rustic outdoor setting • Pgh's oldest and finest day camp • Riding • Swimming • Archery • Zip Lines • Crafts • Field games • Climbing Wall.
CAMP INVENTION Hosted by local schools in Southwestern Pennsylvania	800-968-4332 campinvention.org	Grades 1-6	Varies by Site	Varies	Boys & girls collaborate during competitions, taking apart electronics & assembling one-of-a-kind prototypes & pushing the limits during high-energy games.
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CARLOW UNIVERSITY SUMMER CAMPS 3333 Fifth Avenue Pittsburgh, PA 15213	Laurie Petty 412-758-8851 carlow.edu/summerworkshops	Ages 13-18	July 7-9 and July 14-16	\$249 to \$265	Healthcare, Science & ECO career residency camps. Faculty-led workshops in anatomy, dissection, DNA & chemicals. Meet professionals. Meals & T-shirt included.
CARNEGIE MUSEUMS OF ART AND NATURAL HISTORY ♥ 4400 Forbes Avenue Pittsburgh, PA 15213	412-622-3288 artandnaturalhistory.org/camps	Ages 4-18	June 8 to Aug 21	Varies	Nowhere else can you get this much art, science, architecture and culture all in one place! Weeklong camps go behind-the-scenes and offer unique field trips.
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CHILDREN'S MUSEUM OF PITTSBURGH 10 Children's Way Pittsburgh, PA 15212	Elise Oberdick 412-322-5058 x 244 eoberdick@pittsburghkids.org	Ages 8-11	Aug 10-14 17-21	\$225- \$250 per wk	Two interactive, hands-on, Children's Museum summer camps: Camp Art Studio, Aug 10-14, and Camp MAKESHOP®, Aug 17-21.
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MATTRESS FACTORY 500 Sampsonia Way Pittsburgh, PA 15212	Felice Cleveland 412-231-3169 mattress.org	Ages 7-13	June 24 thru July 31	Varies	Make ART! Experience awesome installations taught by world-class artists. Super affordable.
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PITTSBURGH CENTER FOR THE ARTS, SUMMER CAMPS 1047 Shady Avenue Pittsburgh, PA 15232	Rachel Cooper 412-361-0455	Ages 4-18	June thru Aug	\$140 and up	Full-day & half-day camps, ages 4 - 13 • High School Summer Program, grades 9 - 12 • Weekend Family Workshops, ages 4 & up • Extended Care Available.
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WATSON INSTITUTE, THE ♥ 301 Camp Meeting Road Sewickley, PA 15143	Kristine Gorby 412-749-2894 thewatsoninstitute.org	Ages 5-21	Varies	N/A	Various camp experiences for children with special needs at local camps and at Watson sites. Visit our website for more info.
WINCHESTER THURSTON SUMMER PROGRAMS North Hills Campus/Allison Park City Campus/Shadyside	Dionne Brelsford 412-578-7533 winchesterthurston.org/summercamp	Ages 3-18	June 15 thru Aug 7	Varies	Half and Full-day programs in arts, academics, athletics, adventure & play • Transportation, lunch & ext. day care available.



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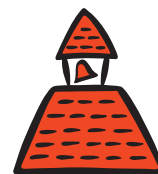
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Play at camp: A powerful learning experience

By Ellen Warren

The old proverb “All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy” was never truer than today. After decades of research by experts in child development, neuroscience, psychiatry, evolutionary biology and psychology, we now know that play is fundamental to creating happy, healthy people. Studies show that the presence or absence of unstructured play in a child’s life can be a predictor of success in adulthood. Yet despite the proof that play is good for kids, today’s kids have less time for the right kind of play and often don’t know how to play without supervision.

“Over the last two decades alone, children have lost 12 hours a week of time to engage in self-initiated activity. Eight of those lost hours were once spent in unstructured outdoor play,” noted Tufts University professor Dr. David Elkind in a 2007 article on *The Power of Play* for the American Camp Association. “Children now spend twice as much time participating in organized sports and even more time as passive spectators. The public schools don’t help, as an increasing number of elementary schools are eliminating recess.”

Addressing the play-deficit children experience at home and school, summer camps typically blend structured activities with plenty of time for kids to just be kids. Any camper knows that some of the best memories are made in the unscheduled time that is usually built into the camp day. At many day and resident camps, “free play” is actually on the schedule – a time when campers may create their own games and engage with each other and their imaginations.

“Play is an essential part of YMCA Camp Kon-O-Kwee Spencer,” says Tim Murphy, Director of Camping Services at the resident camp in Fombell, PA. “Play is so important to us that we

have built it into the structure of camp. We have trained our staff to be mentors for each of our campers and to allow for free play in all aspects of camp. Besides looking for opportunities to promote free play in our activities, we have also designed our schedule to allow for a minimum of three hours of unstructured play time.”

Quantity and quality of play

How children play is as important as how much they play. “Play at camp is designed for a child’s self-discovery,” Murphy adds. “Play is the most natural way to learn. Play promotes a higher level of thinking where children have to be creative, solve problems and self-regulate. Play allows children to discover themselves on their own terms. At home and school children are often given the answers to their questions, but at camp, children have mentors and tools to discover the answers for themselves.”

Amy Goodrich, Manager of Camp Redwing in Butler, PA, a resident camp operated by the Girl Scouts of Western Pennsylvania, says, “Play is undeniably important to youth development, but with the rise of smart phones, handheld gaming devices and electronics in general, kids don’t exercise their ability to entertain themselves the way children used to, before technology was so readily available to them. Play time at camp helps children develop social skills, critical thinking abilities and many other valuable tools and abilities that will not only help them once they return to school, but also throughout their lives into adulthood.”

Summer camp has always been a place where children discover much about themselves and the world around them. Whether testing their limits in a new

activity, solving problems with friends or simply playing, camp gives kids a safe haven under the guidance of nurturing adults to practice life and social skills. It’s



the reason that many educators consider camp to be the “third leg” of the “stool” – built with home and school – that supports positive growth and is equally important in raising healthy kids.



Learning to play

Murphy ensures that kids play at YMCA Camp Kon-O-Kwee Spencer by teaching counselors how to facilitate play in pre-camp staff training. “First, we teach our staff to play. We use play to teach our staff the same concepts we teach our campers. We show them how to be an active participant during free play rather than a referee, instructor or on-looker. Lastly, we teach our staff how to debrief play by talking to campers about what they learned during free play,” he says.

“Free play is the means by which



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children learn to make friends, overcome their fears, solve their own problems and generally take control of their own lives," says Boston College professor Peter Gray in his book, *Free to Learn: Why Unleashing the Instinct to Play Will Make Our Children Happier, More Self-Reliant and Better Students for Life*.

"At Camp Redwing the girls help develop their own weekly schedule, so campers gain organizational skills while also ensuring that they will enjoy their activities. They are also given periods of free time. We strive to make all of our camp activities as fun as possible, but sometimes unstructured play time gives rise to more creativity, newly



invented games and some of the best camp memories for girls to look back on," Goodrich says.

Stuart Brown, M.D., founder of The National Institute of Play, believes that play is a biological drive as integral to our health as sleep or nutrition. In *Play: How it Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination and Invigorates the Soul*, he says, "Play is essential to our social skills, adaptability, intelligence, creativity, ability to problem solve and more. Particularly in tough times, we need to play more than ever, as

it's the very means by which we

prepare for the unexpected, search out new solutions and remain optimistic... play just might be the most important work we can ever do."

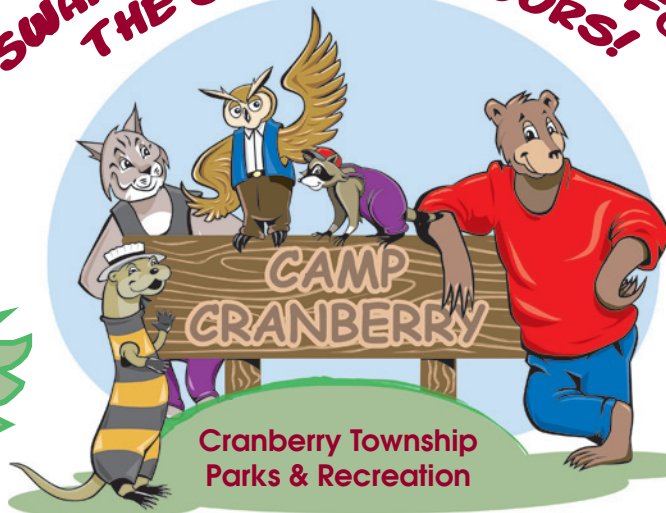
Gray adds, "Play is the primary means by which children practice and acquire the physical and intellectual skills that are essential for success in the culture in which they are growing. Nothing that we do, no amount of toys we buy or 'quality time' or special training we give our children, can compensate for the freedom we take away. The things that children learn through their own initiatives, in free play, cannot be taught in other ways."

If, as Gray says, "Playing is learning," then summer camps are state-of-the-art classrooms. Seeking some summer enrichment for your children? Consider the value of the summer camp experience. ■

Ellen Warren writes for the American Camp Association (ACA) Keystone regional office serving Pennsylvania and Delaware. Learn more at acacamps.org/keystone and campparents.org.



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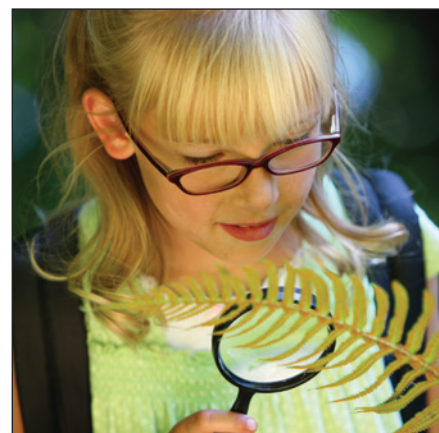


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Benefits of special needs camps

By Denise Yearian

At age six, Kim Kelly paid her first visit to a special needs' residential camp. It was an experience she and her family will never forget. Up to this point, she had lived a pretty sheltered life, her mother Ruth explains. "Because she has a hearing loss and an orthopedic problem, it was natural for me to want to hold her close." By bringing Kim to camp, her mother realized two things: "My daughter needed to learn to do things on her own and I needed to let go a little." For the Kellys, it was a positive experience.



There's a host of benefits children derive from attending camp, but for kids with special needs, those benefits are amplified, says Sandy Cameron, editor of the *Camping Magazine*, "Traditional camps do a great job mainstreaming special needs' children into their programs, but a special needs camp lets them be with other kids who have similar disabilities. The programs are pretty much the same, but may be altered to meet the children's needs."

Heidi Haldeen, summer program specialist for Easter Seals, agrees. "At a special needs camp, kids have the same opportunities they have at traditional camps. The only difference is the activities are modified according to the campers' needs. This gives them a chance to shine."

That's what nine-year-old Tiffany Wells found when she attended a special needs camp. During the school year, Tiffany, who has cerebral palsy and asthma, played on the children's softball team



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and a community bowling league. But because none of the children she played with were disabled, the competition wasn't always equal.

"Attending a special needs camp allowed Tiffany to compete on more even ground because all the other kids were playing with some kind of disability," reports her mother, Linda. The result? "Tiffany saw that she could actually win and come out on top."

One of the beauties of a special needs camp is that the kids can learn and experience new things with others who have similar disabilities, says Cameron. "It's like a camaraderie. It gives them the confidence they need to try new things they might not have otherwise tried."

This was the case with Kim Kelly. When she first went to camp, Kim was afraid of the water. "She cried just getting her face wet," reports her mother, Ruth. Through the encouragement of the trained staff, Kim slowly edged her way into the water. "By summer's end, she was jumping in the deep end and had received her first American Red Cross swimming certificate."

While some see summer camp as an outlet for fun and recreation, others use it to continue education, therapy goals and teach life skills. This is accomplished one-step at a time. "It may mean being ten minutes late for breakfast so Timmy can learn to tie his shoes by himself," says Haldeen.

Developing new skills isn't the only thing kids glean at a special needs camp. They learn about friendships, too. Last year when Tiffany went to camp, there was a girl in her cabin with a more severe case of cerebral palsy than Tiffany had. Because Tiffany had spent her whole life with people helping her, she naturally wanted a chance to help others. "When we went to the dance, I got to push my new friend around in her chair," says Tiffany. "I also got to help her eat."

"One of the best things to be said about camp – any camp – is the opportunity for the children to make friends. And for children with special needs, it's especially important. They find out they are not alone, that there are others with similar disabilities," says Cameron.

When camp is over, what do the children take with them? For some, new skills. For others, new friends. And for many more, simply a fond memory of having had a break from their normal routine.

Many campers look forward to returning year after year, says Haldeen. "For many, we are their summer vacation. The minute they drive away, they are making plans to return next year." ■

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

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There's a camp for every child

By Ellen Warren

Does your child like sports, science, the arts or everything? Can your child sleep comfortably at a friend's or relative's house? Do your children need academic enrichment? What kind of camp experience would you like your child to have this summer?

There are more than 12,000 day and overnight camps in the United States, offering a wide variety of programs and fees that range from under \$100 to more than \$1,500 per week. With so many camps to choose from, there is a camp for every child and every family's budget, but finding that perfect program can be challenging.

Start by asking the right questions of your family, friends and camp directors, searching programs online and at camp fairs and using resources like campparents.org, a website of the nonprofit American Camp Association (ACA), to better understand the value of the camp experience and prepare your child for camp.

Different camps for different kids

Fr. Anthony Yazge, Camp Director of Antiochian Village, an Orthodox faith-based resident camp in Bolivar, PA, suggests that parents first consider the type of experience they are seeking for their child and let that decision help drive the search. "A 'one size fits all' traditional camp is great for an overall camp experience," says Fr. Yazge.

For parents considering day camps, finding a "one size fits all" camp may be difficult, advises Alicia Danenberg, Director of Chatham Music and Arts Day Camp in Pittsburgh. "Children's needs and interests come in many shapes and sizes. At Chatham, we try to provide a variety of options for campers to partake in music, art and traditional camp activities, while still meeting their social and cognitive developmental needs."

Traditional or specialty camp? Set programs or electives?

Although traditional camp activities – swimming and boating, arts and crafts, archery and challenge or ropes courses – haven't changed much since the first American camp was founded in 1861, "traditional" camps today have been rapidly expanding their offerings to accommodate the diverse interests and needs of 21st century families. A

continued on page 34

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There's a camp for ... continued from 32

2013 ACA survey of camps nationwide found that in the past two years, 35 percent have added family camp options; 31 percent provide environmental education and 28 percent have camper gardening programs that often provide food for the dining room. Some camps have also tried to keep pace with specialty camps by adding new programs in technology and digital media; cooking; yoga, wellness and fitness electives; college planning and a wide range of community service programs.

Yoga is one of the many classes that Chatham campers entering grades five through nine may choose, along with technology, swimming, sports and more. Sign language and general music remain popular with younger children every summer, while older campers enjoy art classes, "Chatham School of Rock" and the camp's musical theater program. Danenberg annually surveys parents to learn what classes

she might need to add for the following summer. "We are always changing our course offerings to follow children's interests and the desire of our camp community," she says.

Antiochian Village is typical of many

have not found a need to keep up with trends because, "we are who are and that meets the needs of our families and campers. Our most popular activities are still horseback riding and our challenge course."



Because camps differ in their philosophies and programs, it's important to ask camp directors how your child's day will be structured. At many camps including Chatham, children in pre-K through fourth grade divisions do not choose electives, but instead follow a set schedule of activities that "gives them a little bit of everything from sports to art to music," says Danenberg. In general, older children will have more opportunities to select their activities because camp directors know that making choices is a valuable developmental skill.

Stemming the summer slide

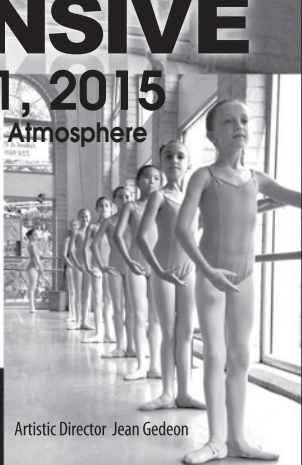
Camps have also been proactive in responding to parents' and educators' concerns about summer learning loss. Forty percent of camps surveyed by ACA in 2011 reported some relationship to school curricula and that same year ACA

continued on page 40



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Camp counselor: The perfect job for your teen

By Gayla Grace

Kids love to go to camp and experience new adventures, enjoy a break from everyday life and make new friends. But as our kids get older, we want them to experience a summer job and the benefits that go along with earning an income. Why not consider the perfect blend of both: a camp counselor job?

Teens can begin working as camp counselors during their high school years and continue during college as summer jobs if they choose. Some camps offer the opportunity for younger teens to begin as counselors-in-training during their junior high years. Our 13-year-old son will be working as a JCT (junior counselor-in-training) for two weeks this summer at a camp close to home and can't wait to get started.

A camp counselor job has a lot to offer your teen other than just an income. Here are a few life skills your teen will acquire as a camp counselor or counselor-in-training:



1. Responsibility. A camp counselor is assigned a group of kids and asked to look after their needs and help manage their schedule. Responsibilities include ensuring they're at activities on time, helping with needs as they arise such as minor first aid or sunscreen application, playing with kids at activities and being a friend on a bad day or a homesick moment. Teens gain maturity as they help young campers with needs that arise.

2. Endurance. Camp schedules are

continued on page 40



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Photo courtesy of the Carnegie Science Center

*(PR): Pre-register

1 Sunday

Pittsburgh Parent Virtual Summer Activity & Camp Expo Visit our website pittsburghparent.com and click on Virtual Summer Activity & Camp Expo, thru July

Beauty and the Beast Presented by Gemini Children's Theater, S & S, thru Feb. 8, Point Breeze • 412-243-5201

Disney's The Little Mermaid Presented by Pittsburgh Musical Theater, Byham Theater • Pittsburghmusicals.com

Slide & Glide Olympic-size ice rinks, Tue.-Sun. until mid-March, don't miss Family Skate every Wed. from 4:30-7:00pm, North Park & South Park • alleghenycounty.us/winterfun

Imagine Nation Open Studio All ages, enjoy a free themed art project, 12:30-5pm, every S & S thru March 29, Westmoreland Museum of American Art • wmuseumaa.org

The Civil War in Pennsylvania Heinz History Center traveling exhibit as well as an expansion of the museum's exhibit on the war's local influences, thru Feb. 3, Harmony Museum, Harmony • 724-452-7341



2 Monday- Groundhog Day

For Foodaholics Can you control your eating? Are you obsessed with food? Mondays, 7:00pm, Squirrel Hill or Fridays, 10:00am, Highland Park • foodaddicts.org

Story Time Soergel Orchards, every Monday, 10:30am, Wexford • soergels.com

Tech Smart 4 Kids: Internet Safety Offers internet and technology safety for your children, 6-7:30pm, CCP-South Hills, Pittsburgh & Feb. 25, CCP-South Hills, McMurray • (*PR) classes.upmc.com

4 Wednesday

Zap Mama & Antibalas Presented by the Cohen & Grigsby TRUST PRESENTS Series, 7:30pm, Byham Theater, Pittsburgh • 412-456-6666

Winter Fun Wednesdays Half price lift tickets at the Boyce Park Ski Slopes, Wednesdays, 3:30-9:30pm, Boyce Park; Families of up to 6 skate for a discounted price, Wednesdays, 4:30-6pm, North Park & South Park ice rinks • alleghenycounty.us/winterfun

5 Thursday

Project Star Informational meeting on adopting children with disabilities, 6:30-8:30pm, Children's Institute, Pittsburgh & Feb. 19, Project Star office, Monaca, Beaver Co. • 412-244-3048

ParentWISE ACT Raising Safe Kids, Thursdays thru March 12, 6:30-8pm, Family Services of W PA, Greensburg • (*PR) 724-837-5410

6 Friday

Beauty and the Beast Presented by the Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre, thru February 15, a sensory-friendly performance on Friday, February 13 at 11am, Benedum Center • 412-456-6666

National Wear Red Day Help fight women's No. 1 killer— heart disease, join the movement nationwide and learn how you can honor women like you on this important day • goredforwomen.org

Yo, Vikings! A children's musical mini-saga of 10-year-old Emma Katz and her quest for real adventure, inspired by her homework assignment to write a report on Erik the Red, Fri. Feb. 6 & 18, 7:30pm; Sat. Feb. 7 & 14, noon & 4pm; Sun. Feb. 8 & 15, 2pm, Stage 62, Carnegie • stage62.org

7 Saturday

Sundance Arena Rodeo An evening of family fun, Bullriding, Bronc Riding, Barrel Racing, Bull Hockey, kid's events, first Saturday of every month thru May, 7:30pm, Fredonia • sundancearena.com

Winterfest Explore Ohiopyle at its frozen best, try snow shoeing, cross country skiing or go on a horse drawn sleigh ride, 11am-4pm, Sugarloaf Sledding Area, Ohiopyle State Park • 724-329-0986

Butler County Symphony Orchestra Rachmaninoff's Second Symphony, 7:30pm, Butler Intermediate H.S., Butler • 724-283-1402

8 Sunday

CPR: Infant, Child & Teen 9am-noon, UPMC East, Monroeville; Feb. 14, Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC (*PR) classes.upmc.com

13 Friday

The Duquesne University Tamburitans 8pm, The Succop Theater, Butler • bc3.edu/theater/events.asp

Lend Me a Tenor Presented by the Valley Players of Ligonier, Feb. 13, 14, 20 & 21 at 7:30; Feb. 15 & 22 at 2:30, Ligonier Theater • 724-238-6514

Daddy Daughter Dance Dancing, dinner & refreshments, for ages 5 & up, 6-8pm, Pine Community Center, Wexford • (*PR) twp.pine.pa.us

B E Taylor Valentines Concert An Intimate Acoustic Show, Feb. 13 & 14, 8pm, The Strand Theater, Zelienople • 724-724-0400



14 Saturday - Valentine's Day

Free Entrance Days in National Parks Free Entrance to all National Parks, thru Feb. 16 • nps.gov

"Sweetheart Couples Skate" For couples of ALL ages, each couple will receive a carnation, while supplies last, 7:30-9pm, North Park Ice Rink, North Park • 724-935-1280

RSG1's Fifth Annual Valentine's Day Race 5K, 10K & 15K Race in North Park to support Brain Tumor & Cancer Fund, 7:30am, Pearce Mill Road (Boat House-Rose Barn), North Park • RSG1foundation.com

Windows Through History 1890's Victorian, a hands-on historical series for girls ages 7-14, dress, eat, weave, sew, play and cook like girls in the past, 10am-1:30pm, Beaver County Historical Society • (*PR) 724-775-1848

Valentine Making Workshop For ages 7-14, printmaking, painting, collage and more to create a beautiful collection of valentines, 11am-2pm, Trust Arts Education Center, Liberty Avenue • 412-471-6079

Brown Bag Concert A Pittsburgh Opera FREE performance, noon-1pm, Pittsburgh Opera Hdq. in the Strip • pittsburghopera.org

Cupid's Undie Run Put the hilarity in charity while running in your undies, in the streets of Pittsburgh, to fundraise for the Children's Tumor Foundation, 2pm, Buckhead Saloon, Pittsburgh • (*PR) cupid sundierun.com

15 Monday

Tamburitans 2pm, Legacy Theatre, Allison Park • duq.edu

16 Monday - President's Day

17 Tuesday

Growing Up Together Sons Three hour in-depth young male approach to accepting puberty's impact on your 8-11-year-old son,

6-9pm, Magee-Womens Hospital of UPMC, Pittsburgh • (*PR) classes.upmc.com

Mothers of Multiples If you are a mom or mom-to-be of twins, triplets or more, please join us, 7:30pm on the third Tuesday of every month, North Hills Community Baptist Church, Pittsburgh • NPMOMS.org

18 Ash Wednesday

The Phantom of the Opera Presented by PNC Broadway Across America, thru March 1, Benedum Center, Pittsburgh • 412-456-6666

20 Friday

Science Sleepovers! Engineering, themed activities, late night snack, continental breakfast & much more, 6pm-9:30am the following day, Carnegie Science Center • (*PR) carnegiesciencecenter.org or 412-237-1637

Into the Woods Presented by Vincentian Academy, Feb. 20-21 & 27-28, 7:30pm; Feb. 22, 2pm, Vincentian Academy, Pittsburgh • vamusical.org

Youth Make: Wear Your Heart on Your Sleeve (10+) Hang out with other youth and Teaching Artists while participating in a variety of activities and enjoying an assortment of snacks, 5:00-7:00pm, Children's Museum, Pittsburgh • pittsburghkids.org/events

21 Saturday

The Pittsburgh Music Academy's Winter Concert At the Winchester Thurston School auditorium, Free, 4pm. pghma.com • 412-429-2122

Fiddlesticks Winter Dreams Presented by the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, 11:15am, Heinz Hall, Pittsburgh • pittsburghsymphony.org

Winter Special Needs Family Fun Day Crafts, food, sports and fun regardless of abilities, noon-2pm, Cranberry Twp. Municipal Bldg. • 412-364-4115

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Renaissance & Baroque Presents Gabriel's Voice, 8pm, Synod Hall, Oakland • 412-361-2048

22 Sunday

Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse Presented by Pittsburgh International Children's Theater, for ages 4-10, thru March 1, visit our website for various locations and times • trustarts.org/kids

PA & L Kids & Teens Meet the author, Andrea Pinkney, 2:30pm, Hillman Auditorium, Hill House Kaufmann Center • pittsburghlectures.org

28 Saturday

Hillman Performing Arts Series Presents Arc Attack: Tesla Coil Music, the band uses tesla coils to perform a full rock concert while electrocuting the stage...and some lucky volunteers, Hillman Center for Performing Arts, Shady Side Academy Senior School, Fox Chapel • 412-968-3040

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Pittsburgh Zoo & PPG Aquarium Visit the Kids Kingdom and the PPG Aquarium, 9am-4pm, adults-\$12; 60 plus-\$11; Ages 2 thru 13-\$11; under age 2 & Zoo Members-Free; parking is free, Highland Park • 412-665-3640

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Lynch Field, Greensburg • 724-834-4880

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Schenley Park • 412-422-6523

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Boyce Park • 724-733-4665

Mystic Mountain • 800-422-2736

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Whitetail • 717-328-9400

Willowbrook • 724-929-2294

WV

Alpine • 570-595-2150

Canaan Valley • 800-622-4121

Snowshoe • 877-441-4386

Timberline • 800-776-9464

Winter break blues ... continued from page 7

Holiday redux

You know that holiday bucket list you didn't manage to check off in the busy weeks leading up to Christmas or Hanukkah: perusing your town's holiday lights, volunteering at a soup kitchen, delivering fresh-baked treats to neighbors? The post-holiday lull is a great time for traditional seasonal activities; attractions like lights displays and skating rinks are still open, but less crowded, and local organizations still need volunteers after the holiday do-gooders head home.

Everyday merry

Even the shiniest new playthings become ho-hum when kids stare at them all day. Quiet the "I'm bored!" chorus and swap out toys for everyday household items. Take a cue from Trish Kuffner, author of *The Preschooler's Busy Book*: set up a "beauty parlor" using makeup brushes, curlers, and old cosmetic compacts, or a "restaurant" with kid-designed menus, tablecloths and serving utensils.

Misery loves company

Your friends and their children are probably stir-crazy too. Do what Tacoma, WA mom of four Christina Kindt does: after the holiday craze dies down, round up some pals and kids for a playdate and re-gift exchange (cocktails for parents optional, but encouraged). With luck, you'll clear out a few unwanted items and perhaps score something the kids actually want. Winter Break Blues, be gone!

And if these tactics fail to banish your blues, don't fret, winter warrior. School starts next week. ■

Malia Jacobson is an award-winning health and parenting journalist and mom of three. Her latest book is Sleep Tight, Every Night: Helping Toddlers and Preschoolers Sleep Well Without Tears, Tricks, or Tirades.

Preparing your child ... continued from page 8

"One week after Jake's first appointment, he fell into a picnic table and had a severe dental injury. His gum was pushed up to the top of his mouth and his whole front tooth was exposed," recalls Magasiny. "I called the dentist and they took us in right away."

But it was a wait-and-see injury. In the months to follow Jake had to return several times so the dentist could evaluate the situation.

"I started to prep him about losing his tooth early, which he did about six months later," she continues. "But through it all, Jake built trust and confidence in the dentist."

So much so, if you asked him today he would tell you he looks forward to his dental visits. His mother does too.

"What I appreciate most about our dental practice is that they have given me tools to teach my children preventative dentistry," says Magasiny.

Tamassia agrees. "I like how our dentist takes a sincere interest in children," she says. "Everything is catered to them—there's an indoor climbing playhouse, video room and lots of books. They even get to take-home a goodie bag and report card!"

"The goal is to have the child enjoy his first, second, third—whatever visit it is," says Luzader. "Because if he does, he'll want to return again and again." ■

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

Mommy has another ... continued from page 10

• **Find a job.** Consider looking for work as your children reach school age. Even a few hours each week can make a difference in your attitude toward yourself.

Kathleen Wolf, a mother of two, started as a substitute teacher before going back to teaching full-time. The results for her have been positive. "I feel more confident and that my kids are not my whole world," she explains. "I have a purpose again."

• **Make a date – with yourself.** Arrange for someone to take child duty (spouse, grandparent, friend), then escape for a day doing what you like best – reading, napping, shopping. Not sure what to do? Pick a day and jump in the car to see where it takes you. You may be surprised.

• **Get physical.** Engage in a sport or activity you enjoyed as a youth. Whether through drawing, playing tennis or playing piano, using your body to do something once very familiar can be emotionally satisfying. Unlike our memory of information, muscle memory (or what scientists call "procedural memory") sticks much longer-term. The result is that we can connect with our identity prior to motherhood through actions we learned long ago.

As many women have found, motherhood can be an all-consuming profession. But it does not have to claim our personal identity too. Given a bit of attention... and intention, we can be ourselves and Mommy. And we should.

As Kus says, "No one can be you. No one carries the unique gifts, skills, passion and heart that you do." ■

Lara Krupicka is a parenting journalist, mother of three and author of Bucket List Living For Moms: Become a More Adventurous Parent.

Your second step is to gather as much information as you can about your child that makes you think that he or she may have a learning disability. Then take your concerns to your child's teacher. If the teacher agrees with your concerns, the next step is to ask for a formal evaluation of the child. Should the teacher not agree, talk with the principal.

The next step is an observation of your child in the classroom. On the basis of this report, a decision will be made on whether or not the school will have a psychometrist test your child for a learning disability. When the testing has been completed, you will receive a copy of the results and a meeting will be scheduled to completely go over everything in the written report. At this meeting, you will find out whether or not your son has a learning disability and if the child qualifies to receive special education services. ■

Parents should send questions to Dear Teacher, in care of this publication, PO Box 395, Carmel, IN 46082-0395.

There's a camp for ... continued from 34

launched its "Explore 30" Camp Reading Program to encourage 30 minutes of daily reading at camp.

If your child needs academic enrichment, ask if the camp participates in Explore 30 or provides opportunities for S.T.E.M (science, technology, engineering, math) learning during the camp day, but be sure that children still have plenty of time to play.

Other considerations

As you consider your camp options, remember to ask about session length, introductory sessions or shorter days for young and first-time campers, transportation and lunch for day campers, staff training – particularly for campers with special needs and financial aid. With the right questions and a little homework, you can make your child a happy camper this summer. ■

Ellen Warren writes for the American Camp Association (ACA) Keystone regional office serving Pennsylvania and Delaware. Learn more at acacamps.org/keystone and campparents.org.

Camp counselor ... continued from page 35

packed with activities to allow the kids opportunity to experience as much fun as possible in a short amount of time. Camp counselors must keep up, even on days

they feel tired or unmotivated. Counselor Jamie Newman says, "The schedule is exhausting – you have to learn how to endure long days and persevere through exhaustion."

3. Selflessness. The teen years typically include spells of sour attitudes and selfish behaviors. A camp counselor role forces a teen to remove his self-indulgent attitude and replace it with empathy and understanding for others. It shows teens how to put others' needs before their own, a valuable life skill that many teens never acquire.

4. Relationship skills. Camp counselors are thrown together with other counselors they don't know, some whom they might not like. They're forced to learn how to get along with others while working toward a common goal. Meaningful relationships are built as counselors work alongside one another day after day.

5. Overcome fears. Camp is all about new adventures, for campers and counselors both. Newman says, "We were constantly pushed outside our comfort zone. I had to encourage kids to be adventuresome and try new things, which meant I had to do that too. Sometimes I felt ridiculous but I had to let go of my pride." Counselors gain self respect as they overcome their fears and push themselves outside their comfort levels.

6. Humility. Camp counselors learn how to work under someone else's leadership and follow directions. Counselors must do what's asked of them in taking care of kids and following a pre-determined schedule.

7. Self-esteem. What a great feeling to know you're investing in others. That's the feeling a camp counselor experiences every day at camp. Whether it's one week or ten weeks, camp counselors go home knowing they've made a difference in young children's lives and that's something to be proud of!

If your teen needs a job that offers life skills with an income, consider a camp counselor position. Camps of all varieties fill their staff with teenagers that offer fun and camaraderie with young campers. Match the interests of your teen – sports, music, education, etc. – with an appropriate camp and watch your teen blossom. As camp counselors, our teens gain valuable experience that offers lifelong lessons and memories in the process. ■

Gayla Grace a freelance journalist and mom to five kids, She loves sending her teens to camp as counselors.

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