OCTOBER 2024

# Pittsburgh Parent

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**www.pittsburghparent.com**

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### Around&About - Calendar of activities & events

This issue of Pittsburgh Parent includes our Around&About calendar of activities and events. Please submit your upcoming events to calendar.pittsburghparent@gmail.com - the deadline for our November 2024 issue is October 3, 2024.

Visit pittsburghparent.com to add your event to our online calendar.

Remember to check all event's websites for further information and clarification.

Our thanks to our readers for your continued patience and partnership as we evolve to meet the needs of our clients and our community!



## My advice – stop and smell (eat) the chocolate!

As much as I love the summer season with trips to the beach, lake and pools, fall has always been my favorite season of the year. I always look forward to the vivid colors of the leaves in western Pennsylvania, chocolate, pumpkins, chocolate, homemade Halloween costumes and chocolate. I guess you might say that I have been a "chocoholic" for a long time.

I am thinking what started as a craving became more like an addiction when I gave birth to our first (and only!) children – boy/girl twins! The twins scenario was truly a tossup between double the blessings and double the trouble as any given moment for this new mom.

Preschool was the beginning of the annual homemade costumes experience – I remember the all-nighter to deck out my daughter as Strawberry Shortcake. Using white, ruffled cottage curtains and lots of imagination, I thought I nailed it! Today, that particular photograpgh reminds me of the Wendy's hot and juice hamburger girl … but she loved it all!

Now when my son was determined to be a Ninja, I had to really reach a lot deeper to produce this one! First question to myself, what does a Ninja look like? Keep in mind, this is happening prior to having the internet for instant resources. Off we went to the local K-Mart for a trip down the toy aisle to show mom what the Ninjas costume should look like. To this day, he will tell you how badly I failed at this one!

But, the bottom line for Halloween for me has always been "Chocolate". I would dress the kids up and send them out through the neighborhood to solicit goods in the neighborhood with their dear dad, I stayed home (where it was typically dry and warm) and handed out the healthy apples from the local farm or pretzels and chips – while the rest of my family collected chocolate. Little chocolate bars and big chocolate bars, chocolate treats mixed with coconut or nuts or both. Malted chocolate and solid chocolate. Chocolate!

Good parents that we were trying so hard to be, we dumped out their goodies on the dining room table when they got home and searched for any nasty surprises that may have sneaked into their bags. Each kid got to pick a piece of candy for the next day's lunchbox and mom put the candy away – in the freezer to keep it nice and fresh! If you mention this to my kids today, they will tell you how I lectured them on the treats that were good for them versus the nutritionally unhealthy ones – most of which fall in the chocolate category!

Now that my kids are grown and have kids of their own, I can reveal my game plan. I knew that things that disappear from sight are quickly forgotten in the daily merry-go-round of life. Between Halloween and Christmas, this mom tended to gain weight – weight that had nothing to do with the Thanksgiving turkey. Everyday I enjoyed reaching into to my cache of frozen and forgotten chocolate bars in the back of the freezer before the kids came home from school. Bad mommy!!!

Fall really is my favorite season. It is such a great time for families to hit the local farms for hayrides and pumpkin patches, try a little homemade apple cider, visit a corn maize or a spooky house and just spend time together as a family in the crisp autumn air! Try an evening bonfire and share some scary ghost stories. Try your hand at carving pumpkins and toasting the seeds for a special treat. Maybe plan a trip to a local farm to pick your own fruit to make, jelly, jam or great pie fillings.

I know that many families are caught up in fall football and soccer games and other school activities this time of the year. During the week it is crazy with homework and sports practices – art, music and dance lessons too!
My best advice is … stop and smell (eat) the chocolate! ■

Pat

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# Want a ride to the mall? Catch me!



Did you ever get an idea that was so smart that you wondered where it came from? May I tell you about mine?

Like many teenagers, Wendy does not especially enjoy doing things with her parents. Gone are the days when she and I would play Rodeo on the living-room rug. I'd be down on all fours and six-year-old Wendy would climb onto my back. I'd be the bull and the announcer, too. "Now here's Wendy Epstein, a young cowpoke from Laramie, Wyoming, taking a ride on Whirlagig, the meanest romper-stomper on the rodeo circuit." Then I'd spring into action, spinning and bucking. I could always throw her, often without injury.

Then she'd climb back on for another round, this time hailing from another Western town and riding another bull – Cyclone or Widowmaker or Hammerhead. But as Wendy got bigger, the game got to be too much for me (and my knees).

We still liked to play rough, so we'd wrestle on the carpet. But at about age ten she didn't want to anymore. I miss the horsing around, although I got a taste of it last year when she beat me at one-on-one field hockey in the yard. I've asked for a rematch, but she never has the time. She's always rushing off somewhere.

Then one day I was in the driveway when Wendy, now 15, came out to ask for a ride to the mall. I knew what she wanted, but as she walked toward me, I walked away – just to be playful. When she broke into a run, so did I. Suddenly it was a fun chase, with both of us laughing. I didn't get far, but I figured I was onto something.

The next day Wendy wanted a ride to a girlfriend's house. I said, "Sure, but you gotta catch me!" and I dashed out the front door.

Determined but amused, Wendy took off after me. For a good time, there's nothing like being chased around and around a parked car by someone you love. Wendy stopped and changed direction frequently, testing my alertness and agility. Then, to finish the workout, I sprinted down the street. She may be a little faster than me, but she didn't want to get all sweaty before going visiting. I only gave it 90 percent myself, not wanting a heart attack.

Our lives will be different now, I thought. As often as Wendy needs transportation, we will have a hilarious romp. The exercise will do me good, and Wendy, having to win a ride, will begin to appreciate my services. Maybe I'd make her chase me for her allowance, too.

I'd write a book about it – "The Rick Epstein Way to Fun and Fitness" – and sell a million copies. But no matter how rich and famous I became, I'd still find time to make Wendy chase me before I'd let my agent drive her anywhere.

Then came the Saturday night she wanted to go visit her boyfriend. She sat in the passenger seat while I stood nearby. "Sorry, but we're not going until you catch me," I said.

If she thought she could out-wait me, she was wrong. I'm 56 and my wife and my TV set weren't going anywhere. Wendy is the one with a dynamic social life that she was dying to get to.

In a few minutes her impatience boiled over and she lunged out of the car yelling, "I'm gonna kill you!" It wasn't the merry call of a playfellow; it was the exasperated battle cry of a taunted teenager. When she caught me, she pounded on my back with her little fists. It wasn't quite domestic violence.

As we trudged back to the car, she muttered, "You are so annoying." My idea of fun was her idea of being oppressed and teased. The Rick Epstein Way to Fun and Fitness lay in the gutter, twitched once, then expired.

When I was Wendy's age, I didn't have much of a relationship with my own father and didn't yearn for one either. Dad spent his free time in an armchair reading the newspaper. Would I have liked to chase him? Sure, but he wasn't that kind of guy. Everybody's different – him, me, Wendy.

I'm disappointed, but not defeated. I'm sure there's another brilliant idea headed my way, although it may be approaching slowly and from a long way off. ■

*Contact Rick at rickepstein@yahoo.com; he's got nothing but time.*

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# Learn about SCIENCE by SKATING ON A CARPET

If you've ever slid, Ferris Bueller-style, across a hardwood floor in stockinged feet, you probably have an idea what it's like to "skate" on carpet. At the Fun Slides Carpet Skatepark, kids attach plastic disks with Velcro to the bottoms of their shoes, which allows them to "skate" across low-pile carpet in a huge, dark warehouse decorated with glowing neon pictures.



According to general manager, Mariah Mangieri, she and Skatepark's owner thought a STEM field trip would be a good way to tap into science, so in 2020, the Skatepark started to offer a STEM program.

"The majority of our STEM program is about blacklight," Mariah explains.

## WHAT IS BLACKLIGHT?

Blacklight is basically a lamp that emits long-wave ultraviolet light, rather than visible light, which are the colors of the rainbow that we normally see.

Think about when you enter an amusement park and the employee at the entrance stamps your hand with "invisible" ink. If you exit the park and return on the same day, the park's staff can flash a blacklight on the back of your hand and see the illuminated stamp to verify that you had entered earlier.

A blacklight may look like a normal lamp or light bulb, but it does something special when you shine it at something that contains a substance called "phosphor." It glows. A lot of things naturally contain this substance, like your teeth. White T-shirts also look extra white under a blacklight because modern detergents contain phosphors.

The STEM field trip at the Fun Slides Carpet Skatepark allows kids to take part in hands-on activities throughout the park to answer questions like: What is fluorescence? How does it make things glow? What substances react best?

## THE SLIPPY CHALLENGE

Mariah likes to give kids a challenge by handing out crayons, colored markers, highlighters and picture sheets of the Skatepark's mascot named Slippy.

"Get him to glow," she tells the kids, who sit at tables in the party room, which could hold as many as 200 kids. The children have to decide which colors or tools to use to make Slippy as bright as possible because not every coloring tool makes Slippy glow. The "trick" is that only the neon-colored markers will make Slippy glow in blacklight, so the kids have to pay attention to which tools have the most florescence. After the kids finish coloring Slippy, Mariah turns off the lights to do a countdown, then turn on the blacklight to see which colors glow in the dark.

"All the kids go oooooooh," Mariah says. "It's so cute."

The STEM curriculum takes about 20 to 25 minutes, depending on the ages of the children, and after that, the kids spend the rest of their time in the Skatepark enjoying all the activities, like obstacles, a bounce house, carpet hockey and dodge ball.

"It's good for all ages," Mariah says. "We get kids from elementary school to high school, plus a lot of home schooled kids, boy scout and girl scout troops and church groups."

A lot of teachers and groups return every year and Mariah especially likes to customize the program if, for example, a teacher want to highlight a certain scientific topic.

"We have good loyalty," she says.

Fun Slides Carpet Skatepark is also open to the public. ■

*Pittsburgh writer Ann K. Howley is the author of the award –winning young adult novel, The Memory of Cotton.*

# Talking so your teens will listen: *Tips for parents*

*By Tanni Haas, Ph.D.*

Every parent of teens knows how difficult it can be to get through to them, but it doesn't have to be this way. There are many things parents can do - and a couple of things they definitely shouldn't do – to get their teens to listen. Here's what the experts suggest:

## Give good reasons

Teens like to know that their parents are taking them seriously, so if you want them to listen, don't just state your opinions or tell them what to do: "Tell them why those are the right opinions and they should do what you tell them to do," says Rachel Ehmke of the Child Mind Institute. Give good reasons for what you say, and for what you say they should do.

## Allow time for processing

It can take days, even weeks, for teens to process the substance of a conversation, especially an important one. If your teens don't understand what you say at first give them some time and space to reflect on the conversation before you bring it up again. "You might be surprised how your conversation evolves over time," clinical psychologist Dr. Gregory Jantz says.



## Rephrase statements as questions

Teens will reflect more and better on what you're telling them when you rephrase statements as questions instead of commands. "By asking questions," says Josh Shipp, the author of *The Grown-Up's Guide to Teenage Humans*, "you as a parent are getting your children to think critically on their own." Try to ask questions that make your teens reflect on the causes and consequences of their actions.

## Keep it short and simple

Keep it short and simple, says therapist Mendi Baron: "If you're going on and on, your teen is thinking, 'I got the point already, please STOP.' So, stop talking before your teen tunes out." This is difficult advice to follow. As parents, we like to unload whatever is on our minds but doing that can easily backfire.

## Don't lose your temper

Don't lose your temper, even if your teens are rude or aren't paying attention to what you're saying. If you lose your temper, the conversation can escalate into a shouting match. Remember that you're the adult and better able to control your emotions than your teens. Instead of losing your cool, Ms. Ehmke says, "Count to ten or take some deep breaths before responding."

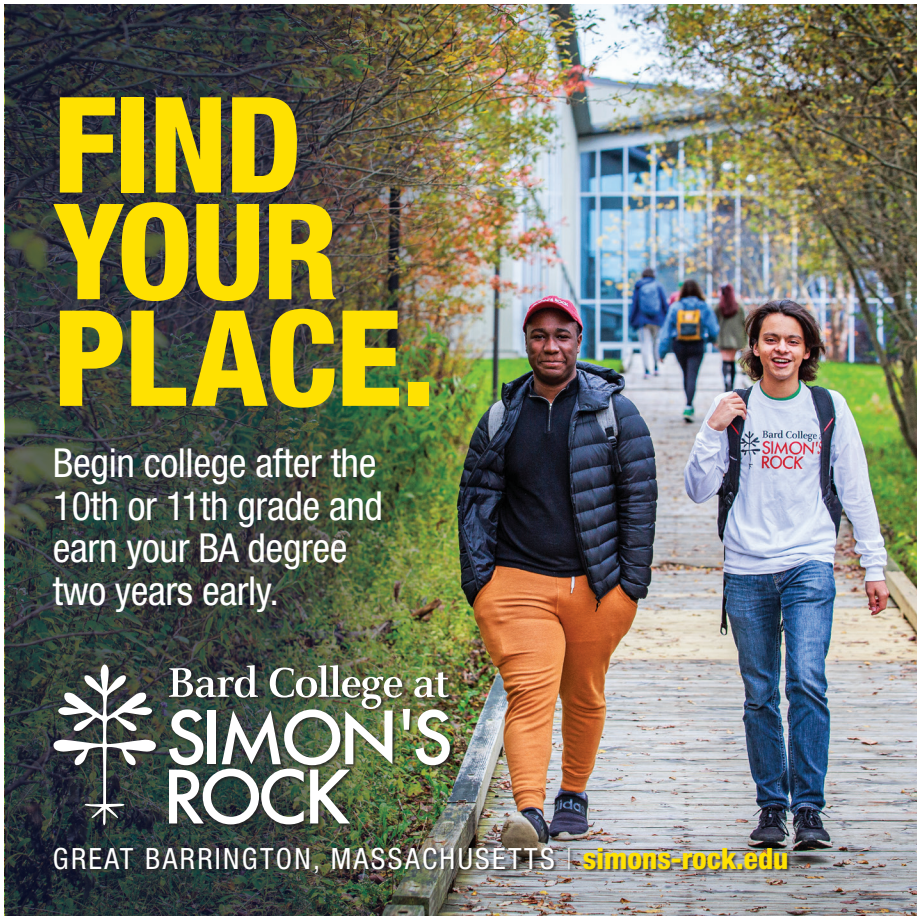
## Don't lecture

Don't lecture. "If you lecture," Mr. Shipp says, "your teen tunes you out. And when that happens, you become the boy who cried wolf. You could have the most pertinent information, but your teen won't hear a thing you say." Also, a lecture is a monologue where only you get to talk and not a dialogue between you and your teen where both get to speak.

## Don't use judgmental language

"No one likes to feel judged," says professional counselor Trudy Griffin. "If you come off as critical or judgmental, your teen may shut down." Try to say what you want to say in as neutral a way as possible. When you "remove judgmental phrases from dialogue with your teen," Ms. Griffin adds, you'll be surprised by how much more they're willing to listen to you." ■

*Tanni Haas is a Professor in the Department of Communication Arts, Sciences & Disorders at the City University of New York – Brooklyn College*

# Listen up teens — While you still can



**Parents:** Are you looking for a way to talk to your teens about hearing loss? You should be. One in five teens now suffers from hearing loss, most of which is noise-induced, which is 100 percent preventable. It is hard to get through to teens who often feel physically invincible and more concerned with peer pressure than parental guidance. Yet, they need to understand the serious risks. Hearing damage is irreversible. There is no cure.

Here's the letter that Shari Eberts used with her children. Feel free to share it with your own. Shari has a hearing loss and has worn hearing aids since her 20's so she truly understands the tremendous downside to not being able to hear well even with the best possible hearing aids.

*Dear Kids,*

Did you know that 20 percent of you now have some form of hearing loss? Surprising, I know. You probably thought it was only for old folks, or people born deaf. But hearing loss is real, and growing and there is currently no cure.

The statistics are frightening and the repercussions are permanent. But it's not really your fault. You haven't been educated about hearing loss.

Here is a quick lesson.

### Your hearing is fragile

Noise-induced hearing loss occurs when the sensory cells inside the cochlea of your inner ear are damaged. These cells are very sensitive, which allows us to hear a full range of tones, but also very delicate. When exposed to loud noise on a frequent basis, these cells weaken and eventually die, and once they do, they are gone for good. Scientists have not yet found a way to regenerate these cells, although organizations like Hearing Health Foundation and Stanford Initiative To Cure Hearing Loss are working on it.

### What are the facts?

Prolonged exposure to any noise at or above 85 decibels can cause gradual hearing loss. This is the level of heavy city traffic or a school cafeteria. At 105 decibels, the maximum volume of an iPod, some hearing loss can occur within 15 minutes. At 110 decibels, the level of a rock concert or loud sporting event, damage can occur after one minute.

### Hearing loss is no fun

Take it from someone with hearing loss — you don't want it. Hearing loss is isolating. It makes it harder to enjoy socializing, especially in restaurants and places with lots of background noise, as it becomes harder to pick out the human voices amid all the other noise. You may find yourself missing the joke when everyone is laughing or starting to avoid certain friends whose voices you cannot hear well.

Listening to music also becomes less fun because you may not be able to hear certain instruments or the full range of vocal tones.

Keeping up at school and at work becomes more difficult. You may miss important instructions or key pieces of a lecture, especially if your teacher has his or her back turned. You might also sleep through your alarm if you cannot hear it.

Life also becomes more dangerous, particularly if you cannot hear smoke alarms or other warning bells, which are often high pitched. High pitches are typically the first to be lost in noise-induced hearing loss.

### Hearing aids don't work like glasses

Sure, hearing aids are available, and do help a great deal, but hearing aids will not restore your hearing back to normal, like glasses or contacts do for most vision problems. They are also not very good at picking out the sounds you want to hear. For example, if you are at a party, hearing aids will augment the sounds of your friends' voices, but also the clinking of glasses and the hum of the A/C or a heating unit. Picking out the right sounds can often be harder with the hearing aids than without them.

Hearing aids also change the way music sounds. Most hearing aids are digital, which can make music sound tinny and synthesized. You will miss the richness of the tones and the contrasts of the harmonies.

### Noise induced hearing loss is 100 percent preventable

The good news is that noise-induced hearing loss is entirely preventable. You have the power to protect your ears. Use it. Follow these simple rules and you can enjoy better hearing your whole life through.

1. Turn it down. Enjoy your music, but listen at a safe level. Fifteen minutes at maximum volume on your iPod is all it takes to damage your hearing. Listening time is cumulative so you can listen longer at lower volumes and stay safe. Try noise-canceling headphones which block out background noise, allowing you to enjoy your music at lower volumes.
2. Block the noise. Wear earplugs or earmuffs at concerts or sporting events. They come in many sizes and styles. Some are even made specifically for listening to music.
3. Move away. The farther you are from the noise, the safer it is. Always pick a seat far away from loud speakers and if you see a noisy construction site, cross the street.

Parents, encourage the teens in your life to protect their hearing now. ■

*Want more information? Visit Shari's website livingwithhearingloss.com to find out about her blog and book Hear & Beyond: Live Skillfully with Hearing Loss for very helpful advice on dealing with hearing loss.*

*Parents should send questions and comments to dearteacher@dearteacher.com and visit the dearteacher.com website to learn more about helping their children succeed in school.*
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# 10 Ways to help your kids when the WORLD SEEMS SCARY

*By Rebecca Hastings*



It was a normal evening, full of dinner making and homework and activity. My youngest sat at the table doing a math worksheet, my oldest was practicing her flute and my son was shooting hoops. I stood at the stove, chopping an onion for sauce. Normal.

"Mom, what happened to that man on the news? And I heard about Sandy Hook; what's that?" my youngest asked.

I stopped chopping, grateful my back was to her and also that I had been chopping an onion. That name brings fresh tears to my eyes. Even over ten years later the other name of that small town in my small state brings tears to my eyes.

I inhaled, and exhaled, perhaps taking a moment too long to answer. She was probably wondering if I heard her. How could I explain this to my little girl? How could I tell her what happened on an ordinary May day? How could I tell her that I still remember exactly where I was sitting and where she was playing as I watched the tragedy ten years ago unfold on the news? Kids, just like my own, at school, murdered.

I turned to face her, my girl blissfully unaware of the deep heartache those two words held. Sandy Hook was no longer just a small town an hour away; it was forever engrained as a tragedy. And now my little girl wanted to know about it.

I've always believed in telling my kids the age-appropriate truth. But the truth was I didn't want my girl to know this. I didn't want her to have this understanding that terrible things happen to children and sometimes we can't understand. I wanted to protect her.

But ignorance is not protection. So, I forged ahead.

I gently told her about a very sick person who made some very bad choices and murdered people in a school. Yes, many of them were kids. No, it doesn't make sense. I explained that safety is very important and we talked about all the ways her school keeps her safe, partially because of lessons learned on that tragic day.

I didn't rush. Homework and dinner could wait. I gave her a chance to ask questions and let her keep doodling as we talked. I even grabbed a pencil and doodled a little myself. Sometimes hard things are easier to talk about when we can do something with our hands and don't have to make eye contact.

The whole thing took five minutes. And then she moved on. It took me a little longer as I went back to my onion.

Another day passes and another tragic story is on the news. Today it's Texas. Recently, there was Nashville. And, sadly, the list goes on. Shootings, attacks and brutality is all part of the landscape. We are aware of it, and so are our children.

Knowing how to help them can feel hard. Here are ten practical tips to help your kids when the world seems scary.

**1. Turn off the news.** Watching the news cycle repeat over and over doesn't help anyone. The images, repeated stories, personal accounts and police reports are hard for kids to make sense of. The news is hard for kids. You can get all the news you need in one well-reported or well-written story. Then turn it off. Don't have it running in the background. Also, be aware of switching the radio station as needed. Kids need news from you, not broadcasters.

**2. Ask but don't push.** Ask your child if he's heard about the most recent tragedy. Find out what they already know. Open the door and leave it open, but don't force him to walk through it. Sometimes recognizing that it can be talked about is enough for one day. Let him talk when he's ready.

**3. Talk about your feelings, but don't dwell on them.** Kids should see that their parents feel things because it gives them permission to feel, too. Especially since they don't understand all of the feelings inside themselves. Express your feelings gently without dwelling on them. Admit what you don't understand. Model healthy ways to express your feelings.

**4. State your ideas concisely.** It's good for kids to hear their parents' ideas about hard subjects. For better or worse, they help kids develop their own ideas. Having excessive, lengthy rants about gun control or military action is not helpful for kids. These are scary subjects for kids. You can express your idea simply and ask kids what they think if it seems appropriate.

For example, with a tween or teen, you could say, "I think this is why I have a hard time understanding why people need guns. Maybe I don't know everything about it, but I don't think the average person needs an automatic weapon. What do you think?"

With a younger child something simpler like, "Who do you think should have guns? I'm glad that the police learn how to use their weapons safely to keep us safe," is a better choice.

Make sure what you say is age-appropriate and offers an opportunity for your child to think and express ideas, even if they are different from your own.

**5. Don't worry.** I know that sounds impossible; worry is an automatic response for parents. But worrying all the time in every situation will only breed worry and fear in your child. As parents, we need to think about safety, but also decide what is appropriate to share with our children and when.

An example with young kids is just to get them thinking: "Hey, I noticed that there is an emergency exit over there. Do you see any more? It's always good to know where they are."


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With older kids it may be something different: "I see a police officer over there. If I got pulled over what do you think I should do? I always try to keep my hands on top of the steering wheel where the officer can see them so there is no confusion about what I'm doing."

These are hard conversations, and should not be the only thing we talk about. But weaving thoughts like this into our everyday lives will help our children think proactively about being safe without making them afraid of every possible situation.

**6. Use your hands.** Sometimes it's hard for kids and even adults, to express their feelings when something scary happens in the world. Providing opportunities to work out some of their feelings helps the intensity fade a little. Working in the yard, going for a run, coloring or even using Play-Doh allows us to express feelings without the pressure to say everything.

**7. Be the good.** Give kids a tangible way to help. If you are religious, go beyond the idea of praying for people and actually pray together. Make cards or cookies for first responders. The tragedy may not have happened in your area, but encouraging the police, fire and ems workers that keep us safe helps them and you. Give them something to do that makes them feel like part of the solution.

**8. Answer questions honestly.** Kids crave information, and they often feel like they don't get the whole story. It's okay and healthy to give them information in an age-appropriate manner.

If they know they can trust you for the truth, they are more likely to come to you with their questions.

**9. Be grateful.** The bad things that happen have a way of bombarding us. The news and public conversation all focus on the terrifying things that happen. Make sure you purpose time to look for good. It doesn't need to be fake or cliché. Being grateful increases empathy, reduces aggression and helps with stress.

**10. Comfort and reassure.** All of us can use some of this, especially the little ones in our lives. Make time for hugs and snuggles. Be there and be close. Your presence will help them remember that they are safe. It just may help you get through it too.

Remember, you are the safety your child craves in a world that can feel scary. Show them that you are willing to talk about the hard things and it will help you both. ■

*Rebecca Hastings is a former elementary teacher who traded the classroom for writing to stay home with her three children. In real life she can often be found typing words, driving her kids places or wherever there is chocolate.*









# Dealing with a child's fears

*By Sarah Lyons*

As a child, I assumed my parents weren't afraid of anything. I would call on their help when I felt scared or nervous and they were always there to check under the bed for monsters and assure me that all was safe.




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Learn more about Tender Care Learning Centers at tendercarelc.org

Your child. Our care. Their future!

One day I found a wasp flying around in my room and I called my dad to help. When he saw what the problem was, he ran back out of the room in terror. My dad is terrified of wasps. In that moment, I realized that adults have fears too.

It's normal for children to have fears. Kids may have bad dreams, be frightened of the dark or find a movie scene scary. However, kids can develop fears that interrupt their everyday life such as a fear of speaking in front of others, fear of being dropped off at school or fear of trying new things. Here are some tips to help kids face their fears.





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### Give permission

Parents can let kids know that it is perfectly normal and acceptable to be scared. When you give a child permission to feel afraid, they can begin to acknowledge what is frightening them and face it head on. Parents can give tips on how to deal with different situations and work through the situation together. Lauren Heller, mother of twins, says "For my preschoolers, we spend time talking about the event starting a few days before. I try to help them know what to expect and allow them to ask questions."

### Be honest

If there is a scary situation coming up, it is best to be as honest as possible with your child so they know what to expect. "I try my best to prepare my kids in advance for scary situations. If there is a medical procedure coming up, I tell them what is going to happen. I never say it won't hurt if it really will." says Fia Swartwood, mom of two, "My honesty has helped my kids through lots of situations." In the short term, half truths or sugar coating might help your child prior to a scary situation but in reality the trust that is built through honesty helps kids in the long term.

### Problem solve

Try to pinpoint exactly what your child is afraid of and discuss ways that it can be handled. For example, Jane Hammond's nine-year-old daughter was afraid of falling during an ice skating competition, they discussed what would be the result of her fall – just get back up, no big deal. "She did fall once in a competition, then got back up and finished. She was glad for the experience!" says Hammond mom of three. Other problems have easy solutions that kids can't always think of on their own. For instance, if your child is afraid of the dark, using a night light may help solve the problem.

### Books to help kids face their fears

- *Scaredies Away! A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Worry and Anxiety* (Made Simple) by Stacy Fiorile
- *Chicken Lily* by Lori Mortensen
- *Bear Feels Scared* by Karma Wilson
- *There's an Alligator Under My Bed* by Mercer Mayer
- *First Day Jitters* by Julie Danneburg
- *The Monster at the End of this Book* by Jon Stone
- *The Invisible String* by Patrice Karst
- *The Little Old Lady Who Was Not Afraid of Anything* by Linda D. Williams
- *Curious George Goes to the sHospital* by H. A. Rey
- *The Lion Inside* by Rachel Bright



### Teach coping skills

Each time your child is afraid, give a wide variety of options they can use to overcome their fears. A child may be able to calm down by singing a song, hugging a stuffed animal, telling a joke or declaring that monsters aren't real. Giving your child the tools they need to face their fears while also reassuring them you are always there to help them allows them to try handle their fear on their own knowing that you have their back if it doesn't work out. Stephanie Loux, mom of three, says "I also keep the wins in my back pocket to remind them of past successes. It encourages them to try new things because they remember how well it worked out in the past." This technique works great for scary situations such as trying a roller coaster, speaking in front of a crowd or trying a new extracurricular activity.

### Reward for bravery

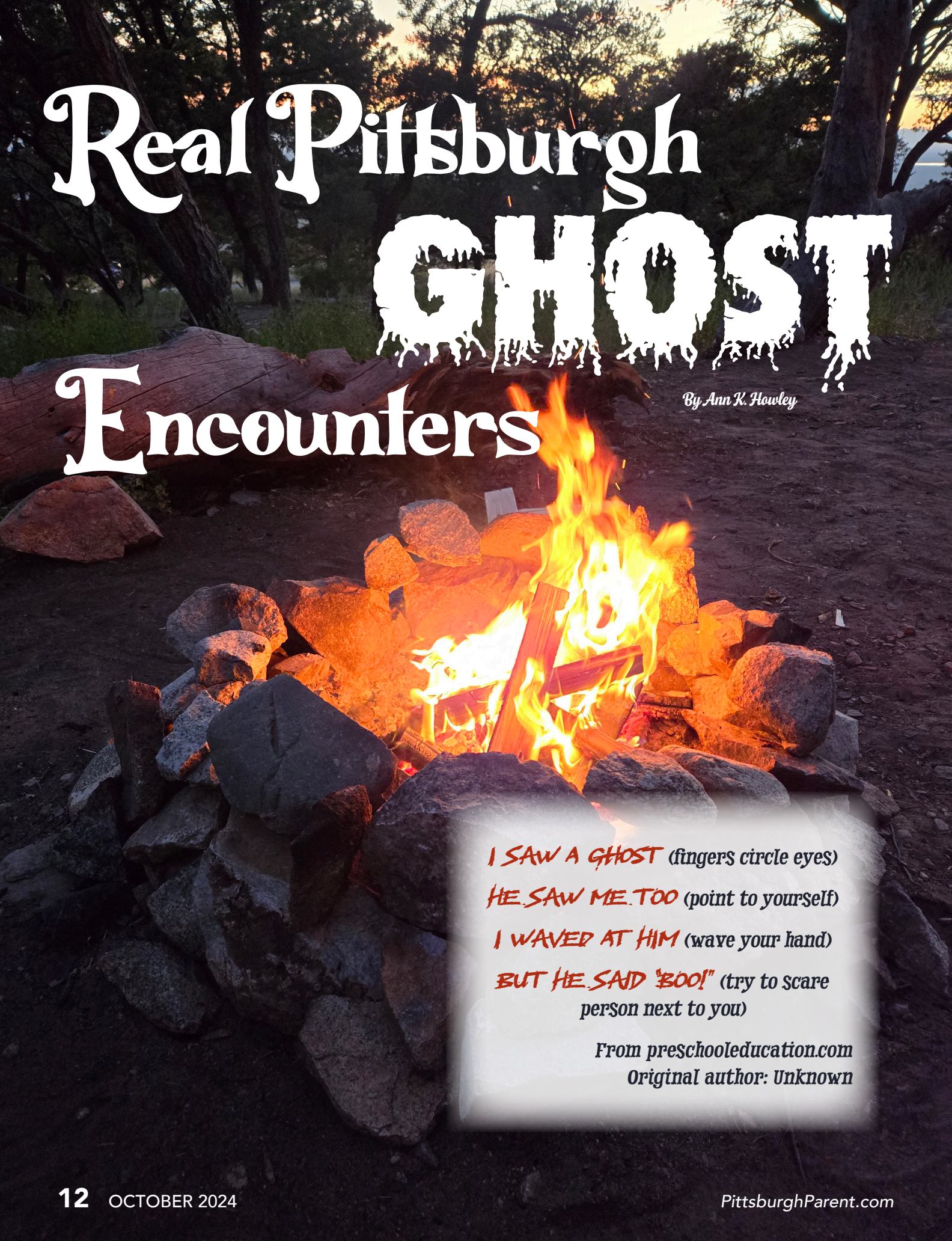
As you see your child overcome fears or at least make efforts to face the things that scare them, reward them for their bravery. Giving positive feedback and acknowledging their efforts will encourage your child to keep trying to confront the things that cause them fear and anxiety. A parent's praise can really build a child's confidence so they are prepared to face a variety of challenges.

As you work these steps with your child, continue to be patient and supportive. "When our kids are scared we let them know Mommy and Daddy are bigger and tougher than anything scary. And we will always protect them," says Amy Cameron, mother of three. "We have defeated monsters in the dark by reassuring them that as parents, we make the rules and there are no monsters allowed in our house." It is normal to have fears and it is appropriate to explain this to your child. As scary situations arise, encourage your children to share their feelings with you so that you can deal with them together. ■

*Sarah Lyons is a freelance writer and a mom from Olathe, Kansas.*

# Real Pittsburgh GHOST Encounters

By Ann K. Howley



I SAW A GHOST (fingers circle eyes)

HE SAW ME TOO (point to yourself)

I WAVED AT HIM (wave your hand)

BUT HE SAID "BOO!" (try to scare person next to you)

From preschooleducation.com
Original author: Unknown

Tis the season to be spooked.

So gather your family around a campfire and watch the embers glow against a darkening sky as you ponder these tales from local people who have had real ghostly encounters.

## The employee that never left and the woman in white

There is a longstanding rumor that the 21st floor of downtown Pittsburgh's Omni William Penn Hotel is haunted, based on an urban legend that someone had once been murdered on that floor. The hotel's catering sales manager, Corey Makrush, who has worked at the hotel for 40 years, is not aware of any murders happening at the hotel. However, he does remember that a few years ago, a group wanted to have a Halloween Party on the 21st floor. Since the space was only being used for storage, the group was not allowed to have a party up there for safety reasons, but Corey got permission to take the psychic they hired for the occasion to check out the space. As he escorted her around the presumably "haunted" space, the psychic told Corey there was "absolutely nothing" up there.


Omni William Penn Hotel

Afterward, Corey took the psychic to the second floor, which also served as unused office space at that time. Although the psychic offered no opinion as they walked through the second floor, afterward, she said she felt a 'presence" there. What Corey hadn't told her was that there was a woman who had worked as the director of human resources on the second floor for decades until she passed away. After her passing, the person who replaced her claimed that he sometimes saw and heard things in the office when he was there by himself. According to Corey, when the psychic described this "person," she perfectly described the former HR director's hair, dress and mannerisms.

"She was spot on," Corey says.

Perhaps the most famous "spirit" at the Omni William Penn Hotel is a woman wearing a white dress that people have seen glimpses of on different floors, usually near the elevators.

"Nobody really knows who she is or why she is there," Corey says.

He recounts hearing about a former co-worker who once saw this ghostly woman, who was wearing a long, white, lacy, old-fashioned dress, as she was waiting for an elevator. The co-worker described how she followed her into the elevator and intended to say something to her, but when she turned around, the woman had disappeared.

Corey had his own encounter with this mysterious entity. One Saturday night, he was the only one in the office and as he packed up, getting ready to leave, he looked down the hallway, past an elevator bank and saw a woman wearing white going around the corner. For a split second, he was tempted to follow her, but said he thought better of it.

He also recalls a man who had once applied for a job at the hotel. He appeared to be upset when he came in for an interview and told the HR director that as he was coming down the hallway, he saw a woman wearing a long white dress, but she was being followed by a dark figure that gave him a bad feeling.

I don't know if he was offered or if he took the job.

## The unfriendly boy at RR Station

Recent college graduate, Savannah Nealon, recounts that when she was about ten-years-old, her family had a weekend getaway at the historic R&R Station, a family restaurant and inn, which used to be located on Route 31 in Mount Pleasant.


Savannah Nealon

"There was a downstairs area that had a piano," Savannah recalls. "And when I walked down there, I saw a boy about my age just sitting at the piano."

The boy wasn't playing the piano. Savannah remembers that his hands were simply resting on his lap. Savannah said hello to him, but was surprised that he didn't respond.

"I thought that was odd. I didn't understand why he wasn't being friendly," she says, also remembering that she also thought it was weird that he was wearing old-fashioned clothes.

Since there were no other doors or entrances to the downstairs room, the boy would have had to come up the stairs to exit, but when Savannah went back upstairs and told her mom there was a boy down there, her mom went to look and he was gone. No one saw him come up the stairs.

"He just disappeared," Savannah insists.

*Continued on page 14…*

*Continued from page 13…*



Penn Francis Hotel circa 1940s

The establishment, built in the 1883 by a tobacco and fur trader, was originally called the Kesslar Hotel and was thought to have served as a boarding house and waystation for the passengers on the nearby B&O and Pennsylvania Railroad lines. For over 100 years, the building had different names and purposes. In the 1940's, it was known as the Penn Francis Hotel. Over time, various owners and patrons claimed that the property was haunted by as many as 15 spirits, including entities called Mob Boss, The Snitch and Insane Daughter, as well as the less intimidating "Little Boy" that was usually seen on the first floor, where Savannah recalls having her strange encounter.



Haunted R&R Station

In 2008, the building's paranormal activity was the subject of a docudrama called Haunted R&R Station, which is still available for rent or purchase on Amazon Prime. Today, all that remains of R&R Station is an empty lot, as it was torn down in 2018 after sitting empty and abandoned for many years.

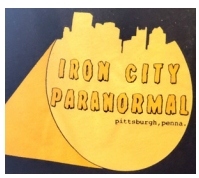
## Meet the ghosthunting bros

Dan Metelsky and Derrick Smith were grade school buddies, who played baseball together and enjoyed watching horror movies. Over the years, the two bros stayed in touch and when Derrick got married a few years ago, buddy Dan arranged to have his bachelor party at Hillview Manor, the notoriously haunted former poor house and nursing home located near New Castle that has become a destination for ghost hunters and paranormal investigators.

According to Dan, "there were ten guys who were invited to Derrick's bachelor party, eight who didn't want to be there."


Dan Metelsky and Derrick Smith

Despite the unusual site and activities, the 'haunted" bachelor party served to solidify Dan and Derrick's interest in the paranormal, which, in 2017, led them to found Iron City Paranormal, which is dedicated to conducting paranormal investigations of haunted locations both locally and around the country.



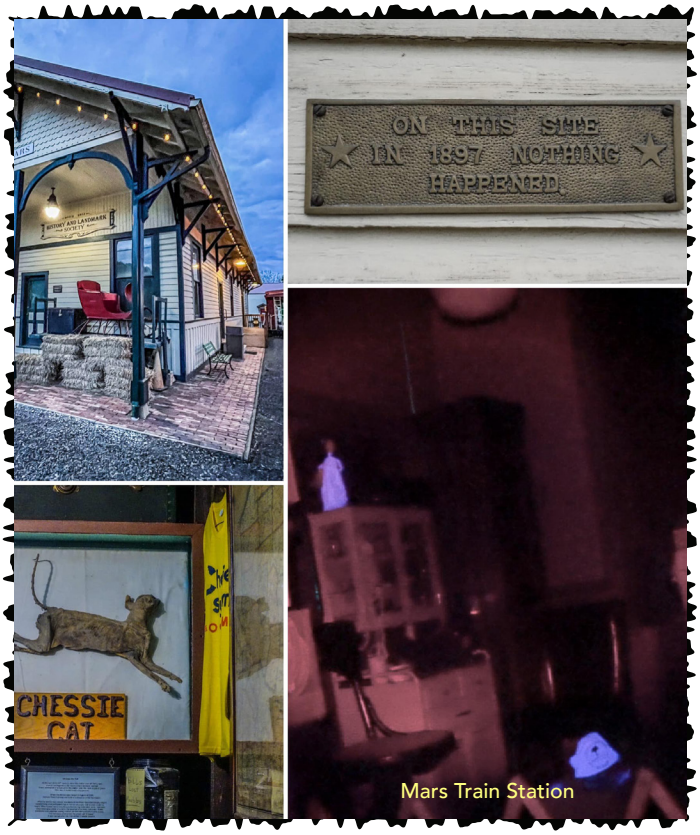

"We are skeptical believers," they agree. "We always challenge our results to see if there is any scientific or logical explanation. Sometimes we won't even call something 'paranormal,' but would rather refer to it as 'unexplained."

On their website, the co-founders insist their "intentions are pure. We DO NOT provoke spirits or attempt to communicate through the Occult. It is our mission to become the voice for those who have lost their ability to speak for themselves."

## The bros and the ghost cat

One of those voices is apparently a cat at an old train station in Mars, Pennsylvania that now serves as the museum for the local historical society. The original building was located less than a mile down the road, but when a developer wanted to tear it down, the Mars Area History and Landmarks Society moved the whole building to its current location, In doing this, they found a mummified cat that had probably died long ago in the train station, and somehow, the environment of the train station perfectly preserved the body of "Chessie Cat," which is now displayed on the wall of the museum.

Chessie Cat is also a bit of a local celebrity. Business owners frequently report seeing a cat wandering around town, but if anyone tries to get close to it or try to follow it, it weirdly disappears, sometimes into walls. So it's not surprising that some Mars residents believe that Chessie is a ghost cat.



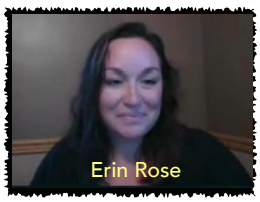
Mars Train Station

## The bros and the skeleton

Other strange things happened when Dan and Derrick conducted another investigation at the train station museum. As they were setting up their equipment in the back building in what they call "Chessie's area," they kept hearing random words like "doctor" and "Schmidt" through their Phasma Box, also known as a Spirit Box, a device that creates white noise by scanning various radio frequencies that allows any willing "spirits" to use the electronics to communicate words or phrases through the static.

"I also heard knocking on the wall and when I looked down through the long building, I thought I saw something moving at the end," Dan says.

When they noticed that lights decorating a caboose outside the museum were blinking on and off, Chris, their contact at the museum, said those lights were on a timer that should have automatically turned off hours earlier.


Erin Rose

Dan, Derrick and their colleague, Erin Rose, moved into a small room that was used for storage for what looked like "medical stuff". When Dan sat in a chair, he felt unsettled like something wasn't right.

"I felt something on the back of my neck and felt drained," he describes.

Erin also didn't like that room.

"She thought there was a man standing in the back next to a tall cabinet," Derrick recalls.

Later when they examined a photo of the glass cabinet, they noticed it had a hook inside the top, which they learned had been used to display a human skeleton in the cabinet.


Investigating the storage room at the train station

Dan, Derrick and Erin decided to investigate a little more, using what is known as the Estes Method. Derrick wore headphones and a blindfold as Dan and Erin played a voice recorder. When Dan and Erin asked questions out loud, Derrick repeated any clear words he heard over over the static, so that later they would be able to put it together with the Phasma Box responses.

First they introduced themselves and told any "entity" in the room that they weren't there to bother them or ask them to leave, they just wanted to hear their story.

"Can you tell us your name?" Erin asked.

Derrick repeated the word "Dave."

When they asked general questions, Derrick heard responses that indicated this (former?) person had a family and one child. But when Dan asked, "can you tell us how you got here?" Derrick heard these words:

"I came here in many pieces."

When Dan asked what that meant, the "spirit" replied:

"I couldn't breathe then I realized I was dust."

At the end of this 28-minute conversation, "Dave" told them that he was excited to talk to them and that they were welcome to come back. The guys told "Dave" that they wanted to try to find his skeleton so they could give it a proper burial.

The guys stunned Chris when they told her about their extraordinary conversation with "Dave."

"She was like a deer in the headlights," Derrick says.

Chris informed them that the skeleton that had been in the case was from a doctor's office and the still-living doctor's name was Schmidt. When Chris contacted the doctor, he told her that he had sold the skeleton and didn't know where it had gone, so the guys are still looking for the skeleton to give it a proper burial.

'We like preserving history, documenting and sharing stories and helping people," Dan and Derrick say.

Even ghosts.

I'm not afraid - I will not be!
I'm brave as any kid you see;
When ghosts and witches pass me by,
I never, never run and cry.
And when a jack-o'-lantern blinks,
I only wonder what he thinks.
I'm not afraid, I will not be,
I'm brave as any kid, you see.

*From Not Afraid by Ada Clark*

*For the record, local writer Ann K. Howley IS afraid of ghosts.*


HALLOWEEN
Happenings

# Sweet Farewells: understanding when kids should say goodbye to trick-or-treating

By Jill Morgenstern



Trick-or-treating is a time honored way to spend Halloween, giving kids the treasured opportunities to be creative, have fun and, of course, fill up on candy! But deciding when it's time to leave childhood behind can be a bit tricky and parents are often left wondering when to leave this cherished tradition behind. Here are a number of ways to determine whether your child is on the brink of outgrowing trick-or-treating:

## Your neighborhood culture

Look around at the other children trick-or-treating in your neighborhood. Is your child among the oldest? The youngest? Right in between? This can help you decide if your child fits into their neighborhood culture. Says Angela Marvel, mom of two, "My now 15-year-old plans to go out this year and dress up with his girlfriend in a couple costume. My 17-year-old isn't sure. If he has a group he will go out, if not he will stay home. Around our area the teens tend to choose to stop when their friend groups decide not to anymore."

## Lack of enthusiasm

Your child may be letting you know that they are feeling too old to trick-or-treat if they don't seem as excited by trick-or-treating as they used to. In this case follow their lead and it may phase out by itself.

## Birth order

An older sibling may trick-or-treat a little longer than they normally would in order to accompany their younger sibling. Shaun Thompson, mom of four, said her older children would take her younger ones out trick-or-treating and sneak in some candy for themselves. Because of that, "I think it's difficult to pinpoint an age when they would stop." she says.

## They're never too old!

Many parents would prefer their children do something as innocent as trick-or-treating for as long as possible rather than pursue more grown up interests. If this is you, let them trick-or-treat for as long as they are willing! Barb Danielsen, mom of three, said, "I encouraged my kids to trick-or-treat for as long as they were willing to dress up and have fun with it. One stopped around 13 I think, the other daughter around 15 or maybe more, my '97 baby didn't stop until 15.

I'm always happy to give out treats to teenagers who are dressed up in the spirit of the night."

High school teacher Jeb Barry agrees saying, "I never had much of a problem with my high school students coming to my house trick-or-treating since they could have been doing a lot worse things instead… but if they didn't wear a costume I would tell them they are simply begging for candy."

## What to do instead of trick-or-treating

Just because your child may have outgrown trick-or-treating doesn't mean there aren't plenty of fun activities to do on Halloween. Try making memories with one or more of these:

**Costume parties:** Even adults enjoy costume parties and kids may willingly trade a night of trick-or-treating for a fun party!

**Haunted houses:** Another Halloween activity that appeals to the older crowd is a spooky haunted house.

**Movie night:** Cuddling up with a spooky movie and answering the door to trick-or-treaters is another tradition sure to entertain.

Ultimately the decision to stop trick-or-treating will involve communication between parents and children because there is no one size fits all solution. Discussing children's feelings openly can ensure a smooth transition. Every child is different and some children may want to quit younger than others. Embracing new ways to celebrate can help create traditions that will grow with your child, ensuring that Halloween remains a joyful time no matter their age. ■

*Jill Morgenstern is a mother to four. She has over 20 years teaching experience in various settings and a Masters Degree in Teaching Reading.*

# Mindful Halloween:
## Dressing up without crossing the line

*By Carrie Woodard*



### Quick tips for Halloween safety:

1. **Visibility is essential:**
   - Ensure your child's costume includes reflective elements or bright colors. Equip them with glow sticks or flashlights to increase visibility, especially after dark. LED-lit accessories can also be a fun addition.
2. **Stay connected with technology:**
   - Equip older children with a fully charged phone and consider using a location-sharing app to keep track of them.
   - For younger children, make sure they always stay with a trusted adult.
3. **Check costumes for safety:**
   - Make sure costumes are flame-resistant and fit properly to avoid tripping. Avoid masks that can obstruct vision; opt for non-toxic face paint instead.
   - Remove makeup before your kids go to bed to prevent skin and eye irritation.
   - Comfortable shoes are a must for all the walking.
4. **Inspect treats before eating:**
   - Remind children not to eat any candy until they get home and you've had a chance to inspect it.
   - Discard any unwrapped or homemade treats. Stick to factory-wrapped candies and snacks.

For more tips, visit the National Safety Council at https://www.nsc.org






Halloween is extra special for our family since both of my kids have fall birthdays, making it a season-long celebration for us. Over time, Halloween has become a big deal in our household. It's a time filled with fun, silliness and a bit of spookiness, but most of all, it's magical for my kids. I love watching them get excited about all the October activities, and our family enjoys dressing up together for trick-or-treating. But when it comes to costumes, we need to be careful. In recent years, especially with the rise of social media, some people have been criticized for wearing costumes that are offensive, such as those that involve cultural appropriation or are even racist. It's important for parents and caregivers to understand what cultural appropriation is, why it's wrong and how to explain it to their kids.

Dr. Rhonda Threet, the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Coordinator for Gateway School District, explains that cultural appropriation happens "when someone misrepresents another person's culture, typically from a historically marginalized community, such as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color)." She emphasizes, "A person's culture should never be used as a costume, particularly if you are not from that cultural background. We do not have the privilege to use another person's personal, traditional and often sacred garments as any type of costume."

Cultural appreciation is different. "Cultural appreciation involves a humble and respectful attitude towards someone else's culture," Dr. Threet explains. "When one has cultural humility, they also possess cultural sensitivity and understand how wearing another person's culture and lived experience as a costume is inappropriate."

It's crucial to know the difference between appropriation and appreciation. For example, when my daughter was five and my son was one, they both loved the Disney movie Moana. I thought it would be cute for them to dress up as Moana and Maui — the film's dynamic heroes, but I felt uncomfortable with my son wearing Maui's tattoos. Tattoos hold deep meaning in many cultures, like those of Pacific Islanders and wearing them when you're not part of that culture can be disrespectful. Instead, my kids dressed up as Cruella De Vil and a Dalmatian — super cute and no one was offended.

With 2024 being an election year, we also need to think about the current social and political climate when choosing costumes. Dr. Threet advises, "During this election season, we must be mindful that there may be election-based trauma, especially within BIPOC communities and among women." As parents and caregivers, it's our job to teach our children to respect everyone, including people of color, women and our political candidates.

There are also many common stereotypes we need to stop using. "First and foremost, we must stop using feathers and moccasins to represent Indigenous people," Dr. Threet says. "Instead, we should acknowledge the land we stand on and honor the contributions of our Indigenous communities." Other examples include dressing in traditional garments from other cultures like dashikis, hijabs or saris. And never, ever darken your or your child's skin to represent another culture. (A quick Google search on why blackface is wrong can help with this decision.) Dr. Threet suggests that if you're unsure whether a costume is appropriate, "seek multiple perspectives from individuals of that culture before proceeding with your idea." Let's make sure Halloween is a magical time for everyone, without causing hurt. ■

*Carrie Woodard is a National Certified Counselor, National Certified School Counselor, and a Pittsburgh mama of two.*

# HALLOWEEN HAPPENINGS

### THE BEACON'S HAUNTED HOUSE AND CORN MAZE

**Fridays and Saturdays through October 26**
***Renfrew***

Be prepared to be scared in our haunted corn maze and haunted house! Ticket sales are cash only. **gotothebeacon.com**

### CHEESEMAN FRIGHT FARM

**Fridays and Saturdays through October 26**
***Portersville***

Join us for the haunted hayride, corn maze and multiple walk-through attractions. Over 100 actors are hiding around every corner, and the farm is isolated by over 300 acres … so no one will hear you scream! Attractions are geared toward teens and adults. **cheesemanfarm.com**

### EERIE ACRES FARM

**Fridays and Saturdays through October 26**
***Butler***

Our indoor haunt and midway (with food trucks and music) will be in full swing as well as a blazing bonfire for everyone to enjoy. **eerieacresfarm.com**

### VALLEY OF TERROR

**Fridays, Saturdays and select Sundays through October 27**
***Greensburg***

Bring the family and check out our get lost corn maze for some great fall fun! For the brave, check out our two intense haunted attractions – the Haunted Hayride with Walking Trail and the Slotter Farmhouse and Barn. **lonesomevalleyfarms.com**

### ZOMBIES OF THE CORN

**Fridays, Saturdays and select Sundays through October 27**
***Freedom***

Walk through the zombie campground and z-maze, kill zombies on the shoot ride, see the 3D funhouse, hear ghost stories and more spooky fun.
**zombiesofthecorn.com**

### HALLOWBOO

**Saturdays & Sundays through October 27; 11am – 6pm**
***Idlewild Park***

This year, HALLOWBOO! offers all-new, family-friendly ways to celebrate with Daniel Tiger, Duke the Dragon, and all your Story Book Forest friends. Enjoy trick-or-treating, fun mazes and walk-throughs, Halloween shows, a dance party, and more! Plus, enjoy festive Halloween foods and your favorite Idlewild rides.
**www.idlewild.com/hallowboo**

### HUNDRED ACRES MANOR

**Thursdays to Sundays through October 31**
***Bethel Park***

Your ticket grants you admission into six different haunted experiences. Hundred Acres has ranked one of the nation's top haunted attractions.
**hundredacresmanor.com**

**OCTOBER 4**

### PETERS TOWNSHIP HAUNTED TRAIL

**October 4-5 – Haunted Trail**
**October 5 – Haunted Trail for Kids**
***Peterswood Park***

Haunted Trail for Kids is appropriate for those 8 years old and under.
**peterstownship.com**

## OCTOBER 12

### CAMPFIRE GHOST STORIES

**October 12 – *Hartwood Acres***

**October 19 – *Boyce Park***

**October 20 – *Deer Lakes Park***

**October 26 – *White Oak Park***

**October 27 – *Harrison Hills Park***

**7:00 pm – 8:00 pm**

Bring chairs and blankets and get ready to cozy up for fall nights and the spooky season with family-friendly ghost stories and songs by the glow of the roaring campfire. Attendees are encouraged to wear a Halloween costume for a chance to win a prize! ASL interpretation will be available for this event. These events are free and weather permitting.
**alleghenycounty.us**

## OCTOBER 18

### ALAMEDA PARK'S HAUNTED TRAILS

**October 18; 7:00 pm – 10:00 pm**

***Butler***

We're back for a night full of ghouls, ghosts and goblins running around the trails of Alameda Park. While this is a family-friendly event, we strongly advise against using a stroller or wagon on the trails (we don't want anyone to get stuck).
**bcpr.recdesk.com**

### HALLOWEEN MOVIES IN THE PARKS

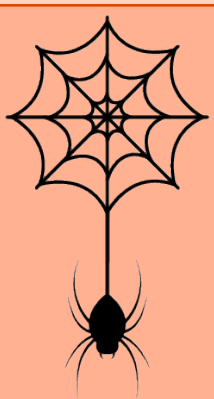
**October 18 – *Settlers Cabin Park***

**October 19 – *North Park***

**October 25 – *Hartwood Acres***

**October 26 – *Round Hill Park***

Bring chairs or blankets and enjoys Halloweentown in the Parks! Guests are welcome to bring their own food, drinks, and snacks. This event is free for all and weather permitting. The movie begins at dusk (between 6:35pm and 6:40 pm).
**alleghenycounty.us**



## OCTOBER 19

### ZOO BOO

**October 19-20 and 26-27**

***Pittsburgh Zoo & PPG Aquarium***

Trick-or-treat throughout the Zoo, collecting treats and supporting local businesses at this daytime family favorite event. Enjoy fun crafts and meet some of your favorite characters. Show off your spooktacular costumes in our Halloween parade, dance, and costume contest. Be sure to check out our animals enjoying Halloween treats throughout the park. ZooBoo activities and candy are included with general daytime admission.
**pittsburghzoo.org**



### TRACK AND TREAT

**October 19; 12:00 pm – 4:00 pm**

***Bud Harris Cycling Track***

Join Citiparks for this free, healthy lifestyle event that's fun for the entire family! Bring your bike or borrow one from Citiparks. Cycle around the track and stop to enjoy refreshments, food trucks and bike safety instructions. Have fun decorating your bike, playing games and entering the costume contest! **pittsburghpa.gov**

### HAUNTED GUYASUTA

**October 19; 3:00 – 6:00 pm – No Scare**

**6:00 pm – 9:00 pm – Scare**

***Sharpsburg***

Whether you're looking for good family fun or the fright of your life, Camp Guyasuta is the place to be this Halloween season. This event features a hayride, climbing, and a bonfire. Discounted rates available for advanced ticket purchases. **campguyasuta.org**

### MOON HALLOWEEN SPOOKTACULAR & RMU BASKETBALL MADNESS

**October 19; 4:30 pm – 7:00 pm (Spooktacular)**
**6:30 pm – 7:30 pm (RMU Basketball Madness)**

***UPMC Events Center***

Ghouls and goblins can trick-or-treat throughout the facility and then brace yourself for heart-pounding "Madness" Basketball where you'll meet the RMU Men's and Women's Basketball squads. Reusable trick-or-treat bags will be provided to the first 500 kids.
**moonparks.org**

## OCTOBER 26

### TRUNK OR TREAT

**October 26 – *South Park***

**October 27 – *Hartwood Acres***

**2:00 pm – 4:00 pm**

Come out and join us for Halloween fun! Car cruisers will pass out candy and treats to kids and families that attend. We encourage participants to decorate their vehicles and dress up in their best Halloween costumes. This family-friendly is weather permitting. **alleghenycounty.us**

### PUMPKIN PALOOZA

**October 26; 12:00 pm – 3:00 pm**

***Kelly Strahorn Theater***

Dress up in your favorite costume or come as you are for an afternoon of tricks, treats and groovy beats. Join us for candy, crafts and other fun activities, then come into the theater to enjoy a family-friendly program. The performance culminates with a costume parade so everyone can show off their spooky and creative Halloween looks! **kelly-strayhorn.org**

### GHOST TALES

**October 26; 6:30 pm – 8:30 pm**

***Freedom***

Join us for tales, local legends and hauntings of Beaver County, told by guest speakers. The mansion will be spooktacularly decorated for all ages. Bring a chair and stories to share while sitting by the fire. **bchrlf.org**





# FALL FAMILY Fun

## 10 Encourage curiosity: Fall stem projects for kids

*By Pam Molnar*

Hey Mom and Dad! You know the fun doesn't end just because summer is over. If your kids are curious, like to get dirty and enjoy the magic of science, we have ten great seasonal science experiments for you to try with your kids.

**Where does the water go? –** Before the leaves change colors and start to fall, grab a few green leaves directly off the tree. Place the stems of the leaves in a mixture of water and red food coloring. You can see how the leaf absorbs the water as the color moves through the leaf. Photograph and document the progress over the next 24 hours.

**Candy corn lava lamp –** Pour one cup of water into a large mason jar. Add orange food coloring and mix. Slowly pour in three cups of vegetable oil and let the mixture settle for 20 minutes. Then add an effervescent tablet into mixture and watch the colored bubbles move around like a lava lamp.

**Apple volcanos –** If you are looking for ways to use up the bad apples this fall, why not make a volcano? Cut out the center of a whole apple and fill with 1½ tablespoons of baking soda and a few drops of red food coloring. Place the apple in a bowl to catch the "lava".



Slowly pour vinegar into the center of the apple and watch it erupt.

**Seed bombs –** Gather newsprint, tear into small pieces and cover it with water. After it has soaked for 30 minutes, add the mixture to a blender to create a pulp. Mix with seeds you harvested from your summer flower garden and squeeze out excess water. Form into small balls and let dry completely. In the spring, drop seed bombs in areas that need a little color and they will plant themselves. They also make great gifts!

**Pumpkin science –** Compare two or more similar-sized pumpkins by weighing, measuring the circumference, comparing the color, the thickness of the shell and the number and size of the seeds. Before cutting them open, you can also see if they will sink or float by placing them in a bucket of water. Let the kids make predictions before each comparison.

**Candy corn buildings –** Use leftover candy corn (they usually go on sale right after Halloween) and toothpicks to create buildings, towers, bridges or whatever your engineer desires. You can even "bling up" your creations by adding beads to the toothpicks before adding the candy corn to contain them.

**No one likes brown apples –** There are so many methods for preventing sliced apples from turning brown, but which one works the best? Place a cut apple in each of these solutions: ginger ale, salted water (½ teaspoon salt to a cup of water), vitamin C crystals or chewable C vitamin, apple juice, lemon juice, honey water (1 tablespoon honey to a cup of water) and plain water. Compare the results.

**Make pumpkin gut slime –** Create a simple sensory toy with the pumpkin guts and seeds, two bottles of clear Elmer's Glue, 1½ teaspoons of baking soda and two tablespoons of contact solution. Knead it together until it is no longer sticky. Refrigerate when not us-

THE SPRINGHOUSE MARKET
Fall Fun
ON THE FARM
Season runs
SEPT 20
THROUGHOUT
OCT 27
OPEN EVERY
SAT & SUN
from
11AM–5PM
OPEN EVERY FRIDAY FROM 2PM–7PM
ALL new FUN ON THE FARM PLUS
ALL OF YOUR FAVORITES FROM YEARS PAST
Since 1975
WASHINGTON·PA






ing and don't keep for more than for a few days.

**Oozing Jack-o'-Lantern –** Carve a face into a pumpkin, removing the pieces from its eyes, nose and mouth. Next, cut a hole in the bottom of the pumpkin, large enough to fit the pumpkin over a disposable cup. Fill the cup with one cup of water, a squirt of dish soap and three tablespoons of baking soda. Place the pumpkin over the cup. When you are ready, quickly pour ¼ cup of vinegar into the cup, replace the top of the pumpkin and stand back. The solution will ooze from the pumpkin face. This is definitely an outdoor project!

**Fire pit color –** Soak two pinecones in a mixture of water and one pound of salt. At the same time, soak two pinecones in water and one pound of Borax. Take them out after 30 minutes and let them dry completely. When they are dry, place the pinecones into a fire pit and watch the color differences. (Salt burns yellow and Borax burns green.) ■

*Pam Molnar is a writer and mother of three curious kids. Follow her creativity on Etsy at Pam's Party Printables.*

PITTSBURGH PLAYHOUSE
POINT PARK UNIVERSITY
Join us for the first annual
fall fest
October 17 - 27, 2024
Entertainment for the whole family!
Food | Games | Music | Crafts
PLUS! Enjoy performances of the family-friendly Halloween Show Boo's Halloween House Party, conceived and directed by Ahmad Simmons, and written by Ahmad Simmons and Lazlo Graves. It's a ghoulishly good time that will leave you BOOing for more!
Packages and Tickets at PittsburghPlayhouse.com

# FALL FAMILY Fun

## GREAT SEASONAL ACTIVITIES FOR FAMILIES

### Fall Festival at Iron Mills Farmstead

**Weekends and select weekdays in October**
***New Wilmington***

Spend the day exploring our 40+ attractions all over the farm. Visit Corn Cob Beach, climb Tire Mountain, check out the Bounce Corral, catch candy raining from the sky, bury yourself in corn and many more activities that are sure to bring smiles to everyone in your family! ironsmillfarmstead.com

### Triple B Farms

**10:00 am to 5pm daily**
***Monongahela***

Triple B Farms is your home for the region's best fresh, local, sustainably grown, delicious produce...AND...the most wholesome family fun destination in the area!Children & adults love to play together in Pop's Farmyard, open weekends all summer long. In the fall, we host Pittsburgh's Finest Family Apple & Pumpkin Festival, more fun for the WHOLE family! tripleBfarms.com

### No Scare Sundays at The Beacon

**Saturdays and Sundays through October 6 and 13**
***Renfrew***

Walk the maze to get tickets for candy and prizes, have fun with the animals at the petting zoo, and kids can enjoy a pony/horse ride. gotothebeacon.com

### Pumpkin Festival at Reeger's Farm

**Saturdays and Sundays through October 20**
***Shelocta***

Bring your family out to enjoy our hayrides, barnyard, pumpkin patch, corn maze, corn cannon and more! reegersfarm.com

### Autumnfest

**Saturdays & Sundays through October 20**
***Seven Springs Mountain Resort***

Explore a vibrant world of family fun all over the mountain! Enjoy live musical entertainment of all kinds, hop on the chairlift for an aerial view of the fiery colors of autumn, and ride down the Alpine Slide. Don't miss the great activities for kids including a pumpkin patch, face painting, hay maze and Kids Zone with balloon artists, crafts and more! 7springs.com

### Fair Haven Farms Fall Festival Weekends

**Saturdays and Sundays through October 27 (Open Columbus Day)**
***Grove City***

Special events each weekend! There is something fun for everyone at this fall event … hayrides, corn maze, Kids Zone, farm animals, food shack and lots more to see and do! fairhavenfarms.net

### The Springhouse Market

**September 20 through October 27**
**Open every Saturday & Sunday**
**11 am to 5pm And Fridays 2 – 7 pm**
***Washington***

Visit the Springhouse Market or Fall Fun on the Fam – all new fun on the farm plus all of your favorites from years past. Located in Washington, PA since1975, the market has been serving the western PA area since 1975 with its country store, family activities, restaurant and catering. Springhousemarket.com

### Freedom Farms Fall Festival

**Saturdays and Sundays through October 27 (Open Columbus Day)**
***Valencia***

Don't miss our biggest event of the year – hayrides, corn maze, corn pit, hay mountain, petting zoo, pumpkin patch and pick-your-own sunflowers. freedomfarmspa.com

### Annual Corn Maze at Gearhard Farms

**Saturdays and Sundays through October 27**
***Murrysville***

We offer hayrides around the farm, pumpkin patch extravaganza, and our famous corn maze! gearhardfarms.com

### Pumpkin Festival at Cheeseman Farm

**Saturdays and Sundays through October 27**
***Portersville***

Spend the day with family and enjoy the fall weather, hayrides, corn stalks and more! Don't forget to pick up your local favorites: honey, apple butter and, of course, pumpkins. pumpkinfestival.us

### Non-Haunted Corn Maze and Valley of Terror

**Fridays, Saturdays and select Sundays through October 27**
***Greensburg***

Bring the family and check out our get lost corn maze for some great fall fun! For the brave, check out our two intense haunted attractions – the Haunted Hayride with Walking Trail and the Slotter Farmhouse and Barn. lonesomevalleyfarms.com

### Soergel's Orchard Fall Festival Weekends

**Saturdays and Sundays through October 27**
***Wexford***

Come celebrate the fall with us! Enjoy pumpkin picking, apple picking (check website for availability), games and activities, great food, tractor rides and more fall fun! soergels.com

## Pick Your Own Apples at Norman's Orchard

**Open approximately through October 31**
***Tarentum***

Pick your own apple varieties, including Golden Delicious, Jonagold, Crispin and many more! Please check for availability before you arrive! Fresh apple cider is available throughout the month.
normansorchard.com

## Fun at Simmons Farm

**Open through the fall season**
***McMurray***

So much to see and do! Don't miss our Harvest Trail, hayrides, 2 and 4-acre corn mazes, play area, fire truck slide, petting zoo and many more family fall favorites!
simmonsfarm.com

OCTOBER 5

## Hickory Apple Festival

**October 5-6**
***Hickory***

Live entertainment, unique crafters, trackless train, clown shows, petting zoo, face painting, homemade brick oven bread, delicious apple crisp and more!
visitwashingtoncountypa.com

## Vanport Fall Festival

**October 5; 12:00 pm – 6:00 pm**
***Vanport***

A true fall festival with something for everyone – food, fun, live music and games for kids. visitbeavercounty.com

## Delmont Apple 'n Arts Festival

**October 5-6**
***Delmont***

With more than 100 arts and crafts and food vendors, you can find handmade items from local crafters, delicious food, antique farm equipment and fresh-pressed apple cider! The kids will love painting pumpkins, petting zoo, straw bale maze, train rides, and more!
delmontapplenarts.com

## Bedford's Fall Foliage Festival

**October 5-6 and 12-13**
***Bedford***

Bedford's Fall Foliage has continually brought people together over crafts, arts and music in the crisp mountains of Pennsylvania. From horseback riding, scarecrow making and other children's entertainment, we're sure that you'll find something for everyone in your family!
bedfordfallfoliagefestival.com

## Smicksburg Fall Festival

**October 5-6**
***Smicksburg***

The fall foliage adds a special beauty to all the festivities and entertainment this fabulous weekend! Come visit and enjoy hayrides, live entertainment, activities for kids and more! visitsmicksburg.com

## Mars Applefest

**October 5; 10:00 am – 4:00 pm**
***Mars***

Bring your family and friends to this delightful hometown event in the heart of downtown Mars. There will be a variety of arts and crafts, food vendors, live entertainment, games and more!
marsapplefest.com

OCTOBER 6

## Meet the Salem Sisters from Hocus Pocus

**October 6; 12:00 pm – 2:00 pm**
***Schenley Park***

This family-friendly special event includes an assortment of devilishly delightful treats including cookies, cupcakes, punch, and more. Wicked attire is encouraged. Ticket registration is required and seating is limited for this event. For kids ages 6 and older. pittsburghparks.org

OCTOBER 11

## Houston Pumpkin Festival

**October 11-13**
***Houston***

This three-day community festival features family fun for all ages including music, food and craft vendors, children's games and activities, a parade and many pumpkin-related contests.
houstonpumpkinfestival.net

OCTOBER 12

## Zelienople Fall Festival

**October 12-13**
***Zelienople***

Enjoy beautiful fall foliage and festivities in downtown Zelienople where there will be live music, food vendors, wagon rides, a bounce zone for kids and more!
zeliefallfestival.com

## Harvest Happenings at Geary Farm

**October 12 and 13**
***McDonald***

Come out to our 4th annual fall event as we celebrate the autumn season with exciting activities and good old-fashioned farm fun. We will have live music, bounce houses, a crafting station, and pumpkin picking, too. Bring family and friends for a memorable day. gearyfarm.com

OCTOBER 17

## Pittsburgh Playhouse first annual fallfest

**October 17 – 27**
**Thursday through Sunday**
***Point Park University***

Entertainment for the whole family! Food! Games! Music! Crafts! Pus performances of family-friendly Halloween Show Boo's Halloween House Party. It's a ghostly good time that will leave you BOOing for more!
Pittsburghplayhouse.com

OCTOBER 19

## Pittsburgh Monster Pumpkin Festival

**October 19-20**
***Strip District***

Mother Nature's most outrageous, humongous fruits … in one stupendous sea of orange! We promise one memorable and magical moment in time, made possible by the world-famous Atlantic Giant pumpkins with record weights well over 2,500 pounds!
monsterpumpkins.com

## Applebutter Fest

**October 19; 10:00 am – 5:00 pm**
***Freedom***

Don't let another year go by without stopping in for some apple butter and freshly baked bread. Try your hand at stirring the apples the traditional way in a copper kettle on an open flame. While you're here, visit the Vicary Mansion and stroll the grounds. No admission is charged, but donations are appreciated!
bchrlf.org

OCTOBER 26

## Meadowcroft's Taffy Pull & Fall Celebration

**October 26; 10:00 pm – 4:00 pm**
***Meadowcroft Rockshelter and Historic Village***

Join us for our fall finale celebration. Bring your sweet tooth to learn about historic confections and make an old-fashioned sweet treat. Visitors will enjoy cooking demonstrations, cornhusk crafting and atlatl throwing.
heinzhistorycenter.org

# How to SUPPORT your questioning child

By Carrie Woodard

As parents and caregivers, our primary role is to provide a safe, loving and supportive environment for our children. When it comes to exploring their gender or sexual identity, it's crucial to have an open heart and mind so your child knows that they can safely confide in you. Children and adolescents are navigating a complex world that is not always accepting, so children knowing that they have their parents' unconditional support can be priceless.

Devin Browne is a teacher of Russian and French at Pittsburgh Brashear High School and has also served as an advisor for the Gender Sexuality Alliance (GSA) for nearly 15 years. Browne shares that about a decade ago, it was common for students to "come out" to him as their trusted teacher. Now, one of the biggest shifts he has seen in recent years is students showing up to high school already having a pretty good idea of "who they are" in terms of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Browne shares that many students have already come out at home, often in middle school or late elementary school. "Thankfully for a good number of students, they have had supportive reactions from their family, or reactions that might be described as 'a shrug' for lack of a better way of describing it," he says. "That's been encouraging to me as a gay teacher and as a parent of a Gen Z kid."

Indeed, it feels incredibly encouraging to see young people who are comfortable in the skin they're in and are accepted by their peers. However, too many students still struggle coming out to their families. Many youths face the potential for physical or emotional abuse if they come out at home. Sadly, due to lack of family support, LGBTQIA+ youth are at the greatest risk of experiencing homelessness. Further, LGBTQIA+ children are at an increased risk of completing suicide. If they have parents who are supportive, that risk decreases dramatically.

In Browne's experience, over the years he has had parents and teachers ask him about ways to help their kids. "Many still wonder if this could be 'a phase,' often because younger kids are exploring labels earlier and earlier these days, and to the adults in their lives, it seems to be at a quick pace." As a millennial who was a high school student in the early 2000s, I can recall seeing peers who one week were emo, one week were goth, one week were skater and so on until they felt they found their style. Parents might not have understood the need for their kid's constant wardrobe changes, but would the misunderstanding make them love their child any less? That sounds pretty silly.

What do you do if your child begins exploring their identity? "One of the best ways to show support is to become more familiar with the LGBTQIA+ community and the identities that young people are donning these days," Browne suggests. "The days of just *gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender* are very much rooted in the 90s, 00s and 10s. Gen Z embraces less static choices, like *nonbinary, pan, fluid* and *queer*." ***

A topic that Browne and I discussed together is if there is a difference between kids who are *questioning* versus kids who are *exploring*. Browne has been working with high school students 180 days out of the year for the last 28 years, so it's safe to say that he has had some time to make some authentic observations. "*Questioning* seems rooted in misunderstanding and confusion," he argues. "This is something that some queer people experience, but that's not what I'm seeing among my students and my kid's friends today."

*Exploring* acknowledges agency and self-efficacy. Young people have the internet at their literal fingers and can Google any term they're not familiar with in milliseconds. Likewise, they are often immersed in influencer culture, which can lead to more research. If they see a label that speaks to them at that moment, they might switch their pronouns on social media or ask to be called by a different name while at school. Some kids may make these changes multiple times, which can be confusing for the adult who's just trying to keep up! "Lots of parents and teachers have told me it drives them crazy," shares Browne. "And I'm not immune to this, despite being immersed in it. I've tripped up on preferred pronouns and chosen names of students I don't see often. Most just remind me or correct me, and we move on with our day."

Supporting your child as they explore their identity is one of the most impactful ways you can demonstrate your love for them. Standing by your child with patience and compassion is needed. A caregivers' acceptance and encouragement can empower children to embrace their true selves and lead fulfilling lives. Browne adds, "It might feel like the kid we thought we knew is all over the place — one person one day, another person the next. But that's really what adolescence is about, right?" Together, as a family, you can navigate this path together. It's okay to take time, to do your research and even make mistakes. As long as you can assure your child that they are loved for exactly who they are — that's what matters. ■

*Carrie Woodard is a National Certified Counselor, National Certified School Counselor, and a Pittsburgh mama of two.*

*** *To learn more about these definitions, please visit www.pflagpgh.org. PFLAG Pittsburgh is a local chapter of PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), a national organization dedicated to supporting the LGBTQIA+ community and their families and friends. PFLAG Pittsburgh provides support, education, resources and more.*

# OCTOBER

**OCTOBER 2**

### Rosh Hashana

**October 2-4**

**OCTOBER 5**

### Tennis Lessons

**October 5 – South Park Sessions Begin**

**October 6 – North Park Sessions Begin**

**Class Times Vary**

Please refer to the website for the extensive schedule of classes to see what class best suits your child's age and ability level. There are classes for young beginners (age 5 and older) through high school players. alleghenycounty.us

### Dek Hockey Clinic – Ages 4-12

**October 5 and 19 – North Park, Settler's Cabin Park, and South Park**

**9:00 am – 10:00 am**

Get an introduction to dek hockey and learn the basics! This free clinic will focus on skill building and sportsmanship. A basic introduction of stick handling, passing, and shooting will be covered. alleghenycounty.us

### Touch A Plane
### Beaver Falls

**October 5; 9:00 am – 2:00 pm**

Explore airplanes and aviation careers at this fun, free, family-friendly event. ccbc.edu

### Fall Apple Fest
### Portersville

**October 5-6**

Join us for a fall apple festival! Visit our steam-powered cider press, watch apple butter production, see the antique car rally and so much more! Don't forget to take home a gallon of fresh cider right off the press! portersvillesteamshow.com

### Hydref Market Faire
### Allison Park

**October 5; 11:00 am – 4:00 pm**

Join us for a day filled with 18th-century charm and autumnal festivities. Experience history come alive with skilled craftspeople, reenactors, and purveyors of goods. Enjoy the interactive displays and activities for kids! dlmuseum.org

**OCTOBER 11**

### Powdermill Avian Research Center Free Tour
### Powdermill Nature Reserve

**October 11; 8:00 am – 9:30 am**

Enjoy a free guided tour of the bird banding lab and research facility. See up-close how researchers safely capture and band birds and learn about the data they gather. This event takes place in an area typically closed to the public, so make sure that you don't miss it! Pre-registration is required for this event. carnegiemnh.org

### Fort Ligonier Days
### Ligonier

**October 11-13**

This three-day event features historic battle reenactments, top-rated juried crafts, delicious foods, popular musical entertainment, a grand parade and a 5K walk/run. fortligonierdays.com




**OCTOBER 12**

### Yom Kippur

### Hobgoblin Hikes

**October 12 – Northmoreland Park**

**October 19 – Mammoth Park**

**7:00 pm – 9:00 pm**

Recommended for ages 8 and older, these hikes are half-mile outdoor guided walks. Visitors will be led through mazes and cemeteries, past more than 100 ghouls, goblins and monsters. No candy or treats will be handed out, but visitors are welcome to dress in costume. co.westmoreland.pa.us

**OCTOBER 19**

### Community Campfire
### Frick Park

**October 19; 4:00 pm – 7:00 pm**

Celebrate the beauty of fall! BYOR (bring your own roast-ables) and we'll provide the fire. (We'll have some for sharing as well.). The evening will feature live music, lawn games, and pumpkin painting for kids. Feel free to bring blankets and chairs as seating is limited. pittsburghparks.org

**OCTOBER 31**




Highlighted events have an advertisement within the publication.

All events & costs are subject to change. Please confirm before you go.

Deadline to submit events for our November Calendar is October 3, 2024.

# Pittsburgh Parent

## CONNECTING WITH FAMILIES




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