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APRIL 2021

Children's
Books About
Autism

Are You a Good

Sports Parent?

Naturally Dyed
Easter Eggs

Talking to
Kids About
Climate Change

The Jewish Federation's Sara & Samuel J. Lessans

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LINDA FREUND



IMGORTHAND / E+ / GETTY IMAGES

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Supporting Young Athletes

On Saturdays when the weather is cooperative, a group of kids from my son's first grade class meets in our neighborhood park for a pickup soccer game. They divide themselves into teams and spend an hour or so running up and down the grassy field until a few get bored and decide it's time to play football instead.

One of the dads usually takes on the role of referee while the rest of us parents socially distance on sidelines, chatting or checking our phones. Except lately I've been paying more attention to the game than the conversations around me, shouting instructions at my 7-year-old who, while not terrible, is probably not the next Messi or Ronaldo. My intention is to help him learn, not to pressure him to win, but my sideline coaching obviously annoys him because he yells back at me, "I know what to do!" (Readers, he doesn't.)

As youth sports leagues across the DMV start their spring season, many parents may be wondering how they can best support their young athletes from the stands. In this issue, writer Jennifer Marino Walters shares tips from

local sports psychologists on how to be a winning sports parent in her story, "Sideline Sportsmanship." Turns out shouting instructions from the sidelines isn't one of them.

April is Autism Awareness Month, and our friends at D.C. Public Library are back with an assortment of books to help kids better understand autism and related disorders. We also have a personal essay from local mom Hannah Grieco about the unexpected effect word searches have on her three children, including one who is on the autism spectrum.

Earth Day is April 22, and many kids are understandably worried about the future of our planet. In this issue, Aliza Friedlander writes about eco-anxiety and age-appropriate ways to talk about climate change. We also have a recipe for rainbow rock candy and tips for weaning kids off their electronic devices.

Happy reading, and stay safe!

PJ Feinstein



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BY ELENA EPSTEIN,
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"THE MIGHTY RIVER"

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"LOVE THE EARTH: UNDERSTANDING CLIMATE CHANGE, SPEAKING UP FOR SOLUTIONS, AND LIVING AN EARTH-FRIENDLY LIFE"

This book is packed with ideas and information for readers who care about the earth and want to understand climate change, speak up for solutions and live an earth-friendly life. Discover profiles of real-life girls making real changes for a healthier planet, plus quizzes, crafts, party ideas and a science experiment. The work helps readers ages 8 and older to learn how they can use their passions and talents to make a difference. \$9.99, ages 8+, americangirl.com



JUNIOR FOLDABLE FANTASY SCOOTER

The three-wheel scooter made for toddlers features all the essentials, such as a patented steering lock button and folding system with a push button. This scooter's wider deck comes in a range of fun colors and patterns. An adjustable T-bar best suits growing toddlers. \$79.99, ages 2-5, globber.com



YO RING

Your kids can play with this interactive, challenging toy anytime, anywhere. A high schooler who wanted to get his friends away from their screens came up with the concept. Play solo, with a friend or as a group. Manufactured in the United States, these yellow, red and blue discs offer the perfect balance of flight, flexibility and fun. \$7.25, ages 6+, yoring.com



Hop Into Some Easter Fun

COMPILED BY WF STAFF

Whether in-person
or virtual,
these events offer
celebrations the
whole family
can enjoy.

For kids, Easter is a time for fun with the family. Although seasonal celebrations may be modified due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there's still lots to do around the DMV, from socially distanced egg hunts to arts-and-crafts activities.

Editor's Note: Our staff verified information to the best of our ability at press time. Please check with event organizers prior to attending to confirm dates, times, locations and details.

VARIOUS DATES

Hop to It, Kids!: The Online Easter Egg Hunt

This Zoom-based egg hunt was designed for kids ages 10 and older. Join a public game or reserve a private session to play with family and friends. Tickets cost \$19; book online at watsonadventures.com.

Bunnyland Festival

Race down giant slides, bounce on jump pads, take a hayride, visit friendly farm animals and more during your two-hour visit. Face painting, pony rides and food cost extra. Open April 1, 2, 3, 5, 10 and 11. Reservations required.

Butler's Orchard, Germantown, Md. \$10 per person. 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. butlersorchard.com

Egg Hunts Galore

Between April 2 and 11, socially distanced egg hunts are included in your admission to the petting farm, and kids can trade in their eggs for a goodie bag.

Clark's Ellioak Farm, Ellicott City, Md. \$8 per person. 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. clarklandfarm.com

Easter Egg Hunt

Eight wooden eggs are hidden throughout the park. Fill out your egg hunt sheet as you find them, then return it to the nature center for a prize. Through April 4.

Potomac Overlook Regional Park, Arlington, Va. \$8 per child. 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. novaparks.com

SATURDAY, APRIL 3

3rd Annual Eco Easter Egg Hunt

There will be three chances for kids to find candy-filled biodegradable eggs. Other activities include wagon rides, Easter games and feeding the animals.

Whitehall Farm, Fairfax, Va. \$7.50-\$15 per person. 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Bunny Hop Parade

Put on a pair of bunny ears and hop to Stead Park for socially distanced games and treats, hosted by Friends of Stead Park. Register for a 15-minute time slot online.

Stead Park, Washington, D.C. FREE. 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. eventbrite.com

Easter Egg Hunts

Bring your own basket for hourly egg hunts in the garden at Lee-Fendall House. Reservations are required for this socially distanced family event.

Lee-Fendall House Museum and Garden, Alexandria, Va. 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. \$15 per child ages 2-12, \$5 per accompanying adult. leafendallhouse.org

SATURDAY, APRIL 3- SUNDAY, APRIL 4

Kids Easter Crafting Workshop

Young artists will enjoy this afternoon of making crafts, from Easter Bunny masks to spring-themed paintings. There will be workshops for kids ages 4-9, kids ages 5-11 and one for all ages. Supplies are included.

FSC Workshop, District Heights, Md. \$38. Times vary. fscworkshop.com

Easter Egg Hunts

Reserve a morning or afternoon session for some good old-fashioned egg hunting. Bags will be provided, and each age group will have its own start time.

Leesburg Animal Park, Leesburg, Va.

\$13.95-\$18.95 per person. 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. leesburganimalpark.com

Easter Spring Fling

Grab a pre-packaged coloring kit for some arts-and-crafts fun, get a glitter tattoo or race with an egg and a spoon. Just don't miss the zoo's warthog, pony, tortoises, goat and macaw on parade.

Roer's Zoofari, Vienna, Va. \$20 per child, \$25 per adult. 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. roerszoofari.com ■



They symbolize creation and life itself. Each spring, eggs are dyed a multitude of colors, their dazzling shades enchanting those who display them, hunt for them or offer them as gifts during the Easter holiday.

This year, skip the store-bought dye kits and turn eggs into gems with natural dyes. Your kitchen is already stocked with the ingredients you need: ground turmeric, onion skins, blueberries and heads of cabbage. Together with your kids, you can create dye in subtle shades or vibrant hues — the fun is in the experimentation. Double dip for two-toned eggs. Wrap them with kitchen twine and rubber bands to make stripes. When the dye has dried, young artists will delight in their colorful creations.

MATERIALS

- Dye ingredients
- Dry and liquid measuring cups
- Knife and cutting board
- Large saucepan
- Strainer
- Glass jar for each dye color
- White vinegar
- Hard-cooked eggs
- Metal spoons
- Paper towels
- Lace, tape, twine, rubber bands, white crayon and vegetable oil (optional)

DYEING EGGS

Naturally

PROJECT METHOD AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY
LINDSAY PONTA
TEXT BY MICHAEL VYSKOCIL

DYE INGREDIENTS

Beets: 1 large beet (about 2 cups), cut into small dices

Blueberries: 2 cups fresh or frozen berries, blended or mashed

Red cabbage: 1/2 medium head (about 3 cups), shredded

Red onion: Dry, papery skins from 6 to 8 medium and large onions

Turmeric: 3 tablespoons ground turmeric

Yellow onion: Dry, papery skins from 6 to 8 medium and large onions

DIRECTIONS

1. Combine the desired dye ingredients and 2 cups water in a large saucepan. Bring water to a boil; reduce heat to a simmer. Simmer for at least 30 minutes. The longer the mixture simmers, the more vibrant the dye.
2. Strain mixture into a glass jar or container. Use or compost left-over dye material.
4. Add 1 tablespoon of white vinegar per cup of dye.
5. Soak hard-cooked eggs in dye following the instructions at right.
6. Remove the eggs with a spoon and blot with paper towels. Rub eggs with vegetable oil to apply a shine to the shells, if desired.
7. Optional: Create designs on the shells by wrapping undyed eggs in rubber bands, lace or twine. You can also draw designs on the shells using a white crayon or blocking sections with tape. Use a small glass to dye sections of the shells in different colors, overlapping to mix colors.

Note: Do not serve these eggs for breakfast; they're purely decorative. ■

Dye Instructions

Ingredients from your kitchen can sometimes produce unexpected results. Find out what you need to create your desired egg colors.

Turmeric

- 30 minutes in hot dye yields a light yellow.
- 3 hours in hot dye as it cools to room temperature makes a medium yellow.
- 12 hours soaking in the refrigerator creates a brighter yellow.

Yellow onion

- 30 minutes in hot dye yields a medium orange.
- 3 hours in hot dye as it cools to room temperature makes a deep orange.
- 12 hours soaking in the refrigerator creates a deeper orange.

Red onion

- 30 minutes in hot dye yields a light brown, similar to the color you'll find with a naturally brown egg.
- 3 hours in hot dye as it cools to room temperature makes a medium brown.
- 12 hours soaking in the refrigerator creates a dark reddish brown.



Red cabbage

- 30 minutes in hot dye yields a very light blue.
- 3 hours in hot dye as it cools to room temperature makes teal.
- 12 hours soaking in the refrigerator creates a deep cobalt blue.



Blueberries

- 30 minutes in hot dye yields a light blue-gray.
- 3 hours in hot dye as it cools to room temperature makes a medium blue-gray.
- 12 hours soaking in the refrigerator creates a deep purple-gray.

Beet

- 30 minutes in hot dye yields a bright pink.
- 3 hours in hot dye as it cools to room temperature makes a brighter pink.
- 12 hours soaking in the refrigerator creates a deep magenta.







April Showers Bring

puddle playtime

BY MICHAEL VYSKOCIL

the rain stops, and the clouds break. After a day of being cooped up inside, you decide it's time to play outdoors. You step outside with your toddler and take in the scene. Puddles, puddles and more puddles dot the landscape. Before you realize it, your child is pulling at your raincoat and begging you to let him stomp in one. You don't understand why puddles are so fascinating, but you curb your impulse to pick him up and stop him from getting soaked.

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“Jumping and hopping allow them to practice large motor coordination skills.”

Dr. Joan Carney, assistant vice president of clinical programs,
Kennedy Krieger Institute

LEARNING ABOUT AND EXPLORING THE NATURAL WORLD AROUND US

Splashing in puddles is child's play, and play is how children learn about the world around them.

Playtime is a crucial part of a child's development. Some of toddlers' favorite activities — which may seem messy at times to parents — offer more than meets the eye. While playing in puddles may not be particularly appealing to adults, the nature of the activity makes it excellent for nurturing a child's developing mind.

“Kids can learn so many things from this,” says Dr. Joan Carney, assistant vice president of clinical programs at Kennedy Krieger Institute. “They're going to get the sensory context of cold or wet. If they're jumping in a puddle, they get to use a lot of large body coordination. Jumping and hopping allow them to practice large motor coordination skills.”

As a child's motor skills develop between ages 1 and 2, playing in puddles turns into more of a lesson in consequences: jump in a puddle, and you'll make a splash. When you splash in a puddle, you'll get wet. This type of cause-and-effect experiment can translate to more situations a child encounters in life.

At age 4, children may experiment with principles of engineering—digging ditches in the mud and watching them pool with water. By age 7, they may start incorporating the elements of scientific discovery by exploring puddle ecosystems and the living organisms they support.

UNDERSTANDING THE VALUE OF HAVING UNSTRUCTURED CHILD'S PLAY

Playing in puddles also fills an important need for children — the need for unstructured, individualized activities.

While it's great for parents to get involved with their children's play — and little ones definitely require quality time with mom and dad — kids also need the freedom to play on their own. Puddles naturally lend themselves to this type of play.

There are no rules to the game of splashing in puddles, Carney says. “There is no turn-taking; there is no structure. They are making their own decisions about doing things that are unstructured. Do they like it and want to keep doing it? Do they not like it, abandon it and try something else? The reason it's important is that it gives children confidence and a sense of self.”

“Unstructured play also allows children to learn how to share, resolve conflicts, develop communication skills and explore their interests in a meaningful and natural way,” says Dr. Mutiat Tolu Onigbanjo, who serves as medical director for UM Pediatrics at University of Maryland Medical Center, Midtown Campus. “It gets them to use their imagination skills, which help promote healthy brain development.”

Parents' Resources for Rainy-Day Activities

20 Ideas to Encourage Outdoor Rainy Day Play

The Empowered Educator
theempowerededucatoronline.com

50 Ways to Play in the Rain

Mother Natured
mothernatured.com

Play in a Puddle on a Rainy Day

National Association for the Education of Young Children
naeyc.org

Rainy Day Activities: 20 Fun Things to Do When It Rains

Climacell
climacell.co



As with any activity your child engages in, always think safety first. Toddlers shouldn't be left to play unsupervised in standing pools of water.

Children who are only a few years old or younger can drown in only several inches of standing water. As long as you are present to monitor your child, you can let your son or daughter get messy and have a good time with puddle jumping.

Of course, puddles are certain to appear at the most inopportune moments. What parent hasn't tried to find a way to avoid a child's inevitable plunge into a puddle during a trip to the supermarket or an appointment?

The simplest thing to do is to take your child by the hand and direct him or her away from it. Make a distraction, talk about something silly or ask a question. Timing is everything in the world of puddle play.

When you allow playtime with puddles, make sure your child is wearing play clothes you don't mind getting dirty and sturdy footwear. While most moms and dads may not hesitate to climb into a sandbox with their child, few may care to splash in a puddle. Onigbanjo suggests ways parents can join in the fun without getting wet themselves.

"Bring along floating toys and explore the concept of what sinks or floats," she says. "Sing a song together about being out in the rain or playing in a puddle."

Puddles last only a short time, but memories of rainy-day play can last a lifetime. ■



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MAKE YOUR OWN

Whether your kids are in it for the science or the sugar, they won't be disappointed with this edible experiment.

With extra time on their hands this winter thanks to the colder weather and COVID-19 restrictions, Linda Freund and her 7-year-old son Arias started experimenting in the kitchen. Arias, who loves science and art, researched how to make rock candy and, in his mother's words, "grew these glorious things from scratch."

There's a science to candymaking, and crystallizing sugar produces varied results. Freund and Arias suggest making a lot of rock candy in case some turn out to be underwhelming. Keep in mind, however, that smaller, thinner rock candy is actually easier to eat and enjoy, according to Freund.

Here, mother and son share their recipe for rainbow rock candy. Freund, a freelance video journalist, also filmed Arias making the candy. You can watch it at washingtonfamily.com.

Steps:

- 1 Soak wooden skewers in water for 5 minutes.
- 2 Cover wet skewers in sugar. The sugar will serve as the seed for the rock candy when it grows, so you want to make sure it's really caked on there. Then, set skewers aside to dry.
- 3 Heat water to a slow boil. Add sugar and stir until fully dissolved. The water may turn yellowish and the texture will be syrup-like. The more sugar, the thicker the consistency and the better and faster the rock candy forms. We've found it's best to make one batch at a time, using a 3 cups sugar to 1 cup water ratio.
- 4 Let sugar solution cool for 40 minutes. This step will make or break your rock candy results. If the water is too hot, it will dissolve all the sugar ("seeds") crusted onto your wooden skewer and the rock candy will not grow. Our son Arias (featured here) learned this the hard way and had to start all over after a week of no results!
- 5 Fill jars or glasses carefully. The bigger the jar, the more sugar solution, and the faster and larger the rock candy will grow. So if your kid is impatient and wants to see results in only a day or two, we'd suggest the big mason jars — but the rock candy may be too big for little mouths! Arias used mostly small glasses and made medium sized candies.
- 6 Hang sugar-coated skewers in the sugar solution from a clothespin resting across the top of each glass or jar. Only hang one skewer per jar, and make sure they are an inch or so above the bottom and placed in the middle. They need room to grow.

Also, make sure that the solution is cool enough so the seeds don't fall off the skewer, but warm enough so slight bubbles forms around them. If the sugar coating on your skewer dissolves, don't worry. Your kiddo can just coat the skewer in more sugar, let it dry a bit and then re-insert into the syrupy sugar water.

Again, Arias wants to stress that these two things will guarantee success:

- Cooling the sugar solution.
- Making sure most of those seeds stays on your wooden skewer when you put it in your jar.

- 7 Put rock candy in a cool dark place to grow. Wait one week. Arias knows it's a long time, but it's worth it. Plus, you can go back each day to check on its progress. You'll want to crack any sugar that forms around the top with a spoon.
- 8 Remove rock candy and hang upside down with clothespins in empty jars or glasses to dry. This could take a few hours.
- 9 Painting time! Put a little bit of liquid food coloring onto a small plate. Arias used the colors of a rainbow: red, orange, yellow, green, blue and purple. With a paintbrush, apply in a circle around the rock candy, one color at a time.

In addition to a bowl of water, kids can dip their paintbrush in a bowl of vodka or Everclear before adding the next color. It's a little trick to make the color more vibrant and dry faster. The alcohol will evaporate, but if you have very young kids who put things in their mouths, you may want to skip it. Optional: Add edible glitter for extra unicorn magic!

- 10 Let rock candy dry upright in empty jar or glass. — Linda Freund

ROCK CANDY



Arias Freund

Supplies:

- 3 cups of sugar
- 1 cup of water
- Wooden skewers
- Clothespins
- Jars/glasses (assorted sizes)
- Food coloring
- Paint brushes
- Edible glitter (optional)

An illustration of a child sitting up in bed, looking out a window at a dark, stormy night. The child's arms are raised in a gesture of surprise or fear. Outside the window, there are dark, swirling clouds, a large, gnarled tree, and several stars hanging from the sky. The title 'Eco-Anxiety & Kids' is overlaid on the illustration. 'Eco-Anxiety' is in a large, black, gothic-style font. '&' is in a white, gothic-style font. 'Kids' is in a red, gothic-style font.

Eco-Anxiety & Kids

Extreme weather events, a result of human-induced changes to our global climate, are happening more frequently — and causing many kids to worry about the future of our planet. Here's how to help ease your child's fears about climate change.

KIDS

BY ALIZA FRIEDLANDER



As a parenting coach, Rachel Duffy spends her days helping entrepreneurs and high-achieving professionals develop trust, acceptance, accountability and connection within the family unit. So, when her 9-year-old son started expressing worries around climate change, Duffy began using those methods she shares with clients within her own family.

“My son is a big supporter of environmental activism,” says Duffy. “He feels anxious about the permanent consequences to our planet and all living beings if we don’t eliminate the use of plastics.”

Instead of pushing his fears away, Duffy and her son embrace those anxieties and work together to manage them.

“We ask what our anxiety is trying to tell us, which requires patience because more often than not, we don’t know,” Duffy explains. “Possible messages that anxiety sends us are a warning or an alarm to protect us from a perceived threat. In the case of climate change, that would be an appropriate message.”

With extreme weather events like the California wildfires and Winter Storm

Uri in Texas, it’s understandable that children like Duffy’s son will have concerns about the current state of the environment.

“Kids want to know what they can do,” says Laura Flusche, executive director at Museum of Design Atlanta.

“They want to know if it’s too late or if we can reverse

climate change. And they want to know why adults aren’t doing more and how we got into this situation. They’re also really interested in learning about out-of-the-box solutions and using their own skills to explore ways to make a positive impact.”

Through online classes, camps and clubs housed on the Sawyer platform, an online marketplace of learning activities, MODA offers a variety of educational opportunities for kids around the country interested in knowing more about climate change and the environment.

“MODA believes that the most important thing we can do is empower children to turn their passions into actions,” Flusche says. “We have a special initiative underway called The Climate & Change Project, by which we are teaching, celebrating and advocating for the power of design to make a difference in the fight against climate change, and our Earth Guardians Club invites kids to join bi-monthly meetings with other young climate activists to discuss issues and develop and implement action plans.”

Flusche also believes it’s imperative that parents allow their children to lead the climate change conversation.

“Kids are talking about climate change at school and other places, and they have a lot to say if you’re willing to listen and have the conversation with them,” she says. “We’ve learned so much by listening to kids tell us about climate change. Ask your children what they know and what about climate change matters to them.”

In addition to education and discussion,

enjoying the outdoors together as a family can help kids feel more comfortable with the environment.

“Spend more time in nature. It’s not only proven to soothe, it can teach kids that they’re a part of nature,” says Katy Bowman, author of “Grow Wild: The Whole-Child, Whole-Family, Nature-Rich Guide to Moving More.”

“Walking the same nature path with

kids over the course of time helps them understand how seasons and time changes things. Talk about those changes like where a tree’s fallen but life continues to spring around it. Show them how simple it

can be to take action

— and that their actions matter,” she says.

Bowman, a biomechanist who studies human movement and how it relates to health and human development, believes parents should focus on helping kids recognize what they can do about climate change as opposed to what they can’t.

“Many families teach their kids recycling and forgo single-use water bottles for reusable ones. Just don’t stop there,” says Bowman. “Our kids host an annual clothing swap with all of their friends and we adults have our own too. Learn to sew or at least repair and patch otherwise perfectly fine clothes. Start or join a community garden or grow something, just to remind yourself how. Take a weekly walk to gather trash from your neighborhood or favorite green space. Don’t place more emphasis on the problem than the many opportunities that can be taken by all of us each day to improve the situation.”

Duffy and her son are embracing those opportunities to take action in achievable ways.

“We made a plan to reduce the carbon footprint of our family which included composting, changing all our lights to LED bulbs and installing solar panels on our roof,” Duffy says. “We also made a commitment, as a family, to immediately reduce and eventually eliminate the use of plastic in our everyday lives. The way we got to this plan was to list out all the ways in which we contribute to the emission of carbon.”

And when Duffy’s son feels like he’s “too small and just a kid,” they discuss “how one



Talking to Kids about Climate Change

Climate change is a complicated subject and can cause anxiety and fear among adults as well as children. So, what should parents do to help alleviate that worry? Not being afraid to discuss the issue with our kids is the first step.

1. Lean into the abstract concept but let kids determine the pace. Follow your child’s lead and truthfully answer any questions without giving away information that hasn’t been asked.
2. Explain the process around our carbon footprint or how single-use plastic can harm the environment before talking about the bigger problem of climate change. As parents, we need to resist the urge to spill all the beans right away. Not because we need to hide information from our kids, but because we need to respect their processing speed and ability.
3. Look for stories and books that inform children about ways they can help and show respect for our planet. Explore climate change together and look at trusted sources like NASA and National Geographic.
4. Let the kids explore their interests and try out their suggestions. There is a good chance they’ll do research on their ideas and feel empowered to take on an issue that can feel scary.

person can have an enormous effect.”

“We remember that while climate change is very real, and has potentially devastating repercussions, in this very moment we are in fact safe,” she says. “We are also not at a point of no return yet. This means we have the opportunity to act, and we can try to feel grateful that we can make an impact.” ■



2021 SUMMER CAMP

With each new milestone that our children reach comes the need for information to guide them (and us) through this stage. This is particularly true when our children are old enough to attend summer camp. How do we know which camp is right for them? In an education-centered community like ours, there can be a lot of options—where do we even get started? Right here, actually, with these listings. Read about these camps, what they offer and the ages they serve. Then visit their websites to learn more. On our website, WashingtonFAMILY.com, you can find even more listings to help you in your search. Be sure to check back on our website and in our magazine in upcoming months for more stories and helpful tips.

Note: The camps on the following pages were still planning to be open as we went to press; however, that may change as we get closer to summer. Please be sure to contact the camps directly for up-to-date information about their operating status.

Good luck! Here's to a great summer.

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Sideline Sportsmanship

Local psychologists share the do's and don'ts of being a winning sports parent.

Roy Edwards will never forget one of the young players he coached on his son's basketball team in Burke, Virginia. The child would resist going onto the court because of the pressure his parents put on him to play well. He was in first grade.

Rob Porter, another Burke dad, coached and refereed youth and college lacrosse for 12 years. He says he has seen and heard "everything under the sun" from parents on the sidelines — yelling and swearing (at coaches, refs, their kids and even other players), shouting instructions, following the play up and down the field and more.

"All of it affects the mood of the game, and almost always in a negative way," Porter says.

Unfortunately, Edwards' and Porter's experiences are not unusual. Bad behavior from parents on the sidelines is as common as missed goals on the soccer field. But while young athletes can eventually brush off a dropped ball or a missed shot, pressure and unruliness from parents can leave lasting negative effects on kids — both on and off the field.

"Bad behavior by parents during a game can cause kids distress, embarrassment and the inability to make their own decisions," says sports psychologist Christie Marshall, founder of Personal Best Sports in Ashburn, Virginia. "That can get into their heads and make them start to overthink, leading to more mistakes and less fun."

It can also make kids lose interest in the sport. "Researchers asked young athletes why they play sports, and the overwhelming response was, 'Because it's fun,'" Marshall says. "But a sobering statistic reveals that by age 13, 70% of athletes quit playing organized sports. The most cited response for why they quit? 'It isn't fun anymore.'"

So how can you be your child's biggest fan without piling on the pressure? Here are some do's and don'ts:

DO cheer for all the players, not just your own. Use positive encouragement such as, "Great job!" "Way to go!" and "Nice shot!"

DON'T berate your child — or anyone else's. You may think you're being helpful by shouting things like "Run faster!" "You need to make that catch!" and "Get your head in the game!" But all your child will hear is negativity and disapproval.

DO watch your body language. Your child is watching you as much as you're watching her. So if you're pacing the sidelines, shaking your head, waving your arms or laughing when she fumbles a play, she will notice. And remember, you are there to offer unconditional support and encouragement, not to make her feel bad.

DON'T scream at the officials. "Referees and umpires are authority figures, and our children should be encouraged to respect them and their opinions, even if they disagree. It is about having

good sportsmanship,” says Marshall. “If you loudly express your disagreement, you undermine the integrity of the game and risk embarrassing your child.”

Remember, referees and umpires are humans who make mistakes. If they make a bad call, don’t take it personally. “They usually don’t have anything against a player or a team,” says Porter.

DO keep your cheering in check. It’s perfectly fine to get excited when your child makes a good play, but cheering excessively can embarrass him and annoy the other parents and players. Plus, he’ll catch on quickly if you clap like a maniac for every easy play, and it won’t mean as much to him.

DON’T yell out instructions. Ask any youth sports coach what parental behavior they find most annoying and they’ll likely say sideline coaching. Even if you’re an expert in the sport or your child is obviously doing something wrong, shouting instructions undermines the coach’s authority. It also puts your child in an awkward position if what you tell him to do differs from the coach’s instructions.

“During games, athletes are already processing information from their coaches, teammates and their own instincts,” says Dr. Caroline Silby, a sports psychologist in Potomac, Maryland. “I have never had an athlete tell me they needed more information to process.”

And micromanaging youth athletes robs them of the opportunity to learn some very important sports lessons, like making their own decisions, figuring out what does and does not work and bouncing back from mistakes.

“Parents need to let their children fail on their own and discuss it with them after the game as a learning tool,” says Edwards. “Trying to coach from the stands does more harm than good.”

If you really can’t resist giving instruction during games, talk to your child’s coach about helping out as an assistant — or consider become a coach yourself.

DO praise your child’s performance, regardless of outcome. We all want our children to succeed, but what’s most important is seeing them do their best.

“Children who believe their worth to Mom or Dad increases with every ribbon and trophy will most likely buckle under the weight of unrealistic expectations,” says Silby. “Communicate to your children that your love is based on who they are rather than what they accomplish. The pursuit of excellence is then transformed from a daunting task to a realistic goal.” ■



How to Handle Common Youth Sports Scenarios

WHAT TO SAY TO YOUR CHILD...

Before a game “Have fun!” “Work hard!” “I love watching you play!”

After a win “Kids know the point of playing a game is to win, and that’s OK,” says Marshall. “What’s less OK is when it becomes all about winning versus effort.”

So join in your child’s excitement about the victory, but be sure to include specifics about the great effort she and the other players put in. “She needs to know that when she and her teammates work hard, great things can happen,” says Marshall.

After a loss Remember that losing helps children learn and develop. Let your child feel his feels, then give him a hug or a pat on the back. “Win or lose, show your child that you respect him, believe in him and care for him,” says Silby.

After she has a bad game or makes an error Do not lie about or minimize what happened. That could send the message that failure is so bad that we can’t even acknowledge or talk about it. Instead, remind your child that mistakes are inevitable and that even pros make them and come back stronger. “Accept what happened and let your child know you believe in her hunger to do better,” says Silby. “The magic in sport happens in the overlap between acceptance and challenge/hunger for more.”

After every game First, applaud your child’s effort. “Tell him you expect him to do his best, not necessarily be the best,” says Marshall. Then, focus on his learning and improvement. Talk about what he did well, what he thinks went wrong and what he can do differently next time.

WHAT TO SAY TO THE COACH...

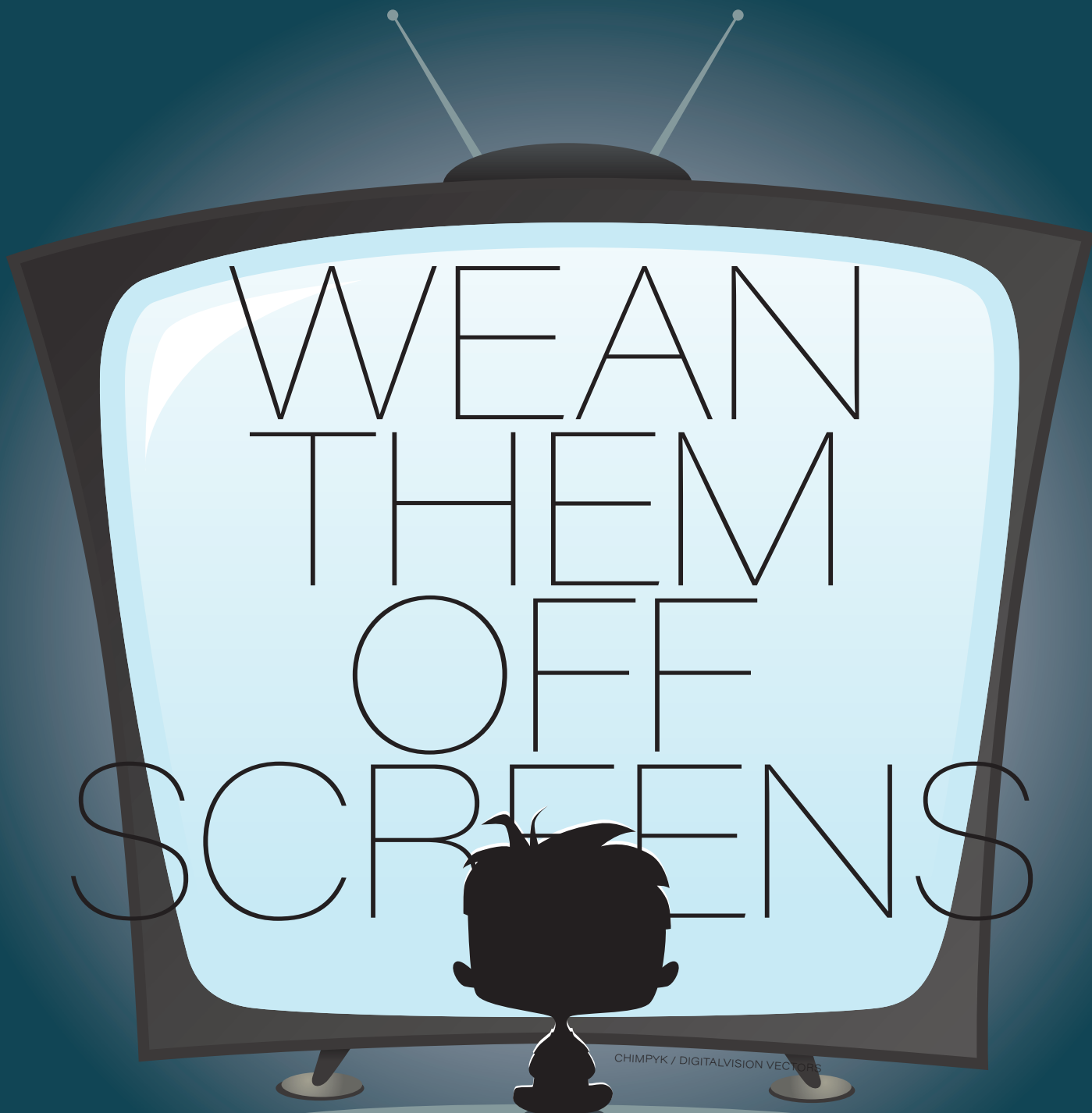
If your child isn’t getting a lot of playing time Speak with the coach privately to get the reasoning behind the decision. Ask what your child can do to get more playing time. That changes the discussion from a complaint session to a chance to get useful information.

If your child is older, have her advocate for herself “It goes a long way in her development to be able to speak up, ask questions about her performance and look for ways to improve based on knowing her coach’s expectations,” says Marshall.

If you have any other issue Never criticize the coach in front of your child. Reach out to the coach privately, but know that things likely won’t change. You may just need to ride out the season.

WHAT TO SAY TO ANOTHER PARENT...

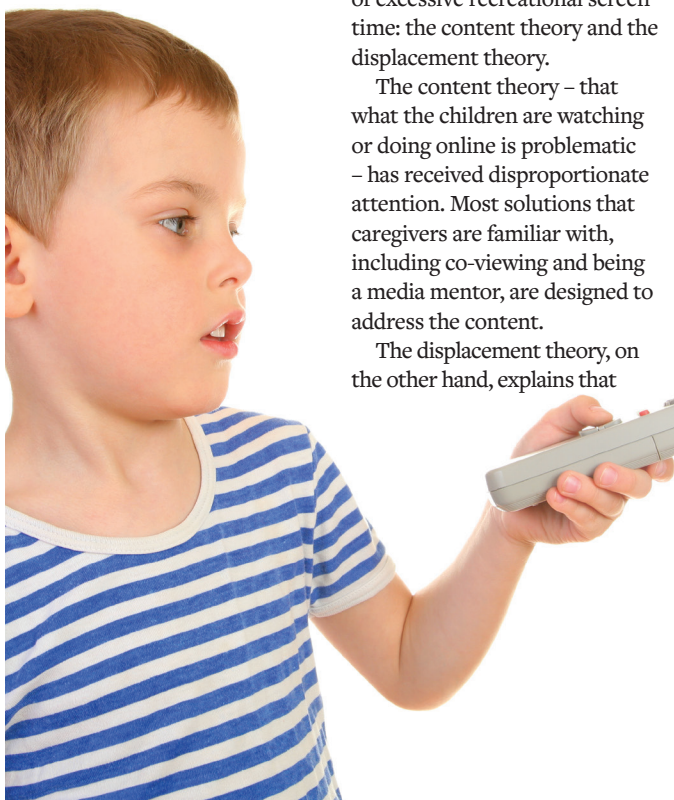
If he or she is being disrespectful during a game It’s best to let the officials and coaches handle it. The last thing you want to do is create a confrontation that will disrupt the game or embarrass your child. ■



Kids spending too much time staring at screens? Focus on positive goals to get them moving and reading and talking.

BY MEGHAN OWENZ, ASSISTANT TEACHING PROFESSOR OF REHABILITATION AND HUMAN SERVICES, PENN STATE

As vaccines become more available and life begins returning to so-called normal, caregivers and educators may have to contend with dramatically increased screen habits that kids developed during the pandemic. My research offers a positive – dare I say joyful – way to wean a child off of a screen habit. Instead of focusing on the excessive screen time, my approach focuses on the healthy activities that kids could be doing instead.



Displaced activities

Two theories explain the risks of excessive recreational screen time: the content theory and the displacement theory.

The content theory – that what the children are watching or doing online is problematic – has received disproportionate attention. Most solutions that caregivers are familiar with, including co-viewing and being a media mentor, are designed to address the content.

The displacement theory, on the other hand, explains that

time spent online means not doing other things, and that it's the loss of those other activities, such as outdoor play or reading, that may result in problems paying attention or gaining too much weight.

This also gives caregivers, and those who work with caregivers, the opportunity to focus on a positive goal: increasing time spent in those activities, which may lead to less time online and better childhood health.

Avoidance versus approach goals

Focusing on a positive goal may work better than avoidance goals, such as staying away from sugary foods or cutting down on screen time. That's because avoidance goals are typically associated with poor mood and reduced goal persistence. They

rely on self-control, which can weaken over time.

As a result, parents and caregivers typically struggle with screen avoidance goals and report a great deal of arguments about screen limits.

In contrast, approach goals encourage a desired activity or outcome and they are associated with good mood, greater effectiveness and more goal persistence.

Research on dieting and obesity demonstrates the effectiveness of approach over avoidance goals. For instance, in one study, families with one obese parent were assigned to either an avoidance diet plan that encouraged them to cut high-fat and high-sugar foods or an approach diet plan that encouraged them to eat more fruits and vegetables. After a year, families on the approach plan had lost more weight. In the process, they also reduced their intake of high-fat, high-sugar foods, which were edged

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out naturally by the fruits and vegetables.

Similarly, parents and caregivers can edge out screen time by encouraging meaningful activities that have long been shown to promote child development.

SPOIL system

SPOIL is an acronym I developed to easily explain this information to parents and caregivers. It stands for Social activities, Play, Outdoor time, Independent work and Literacy.

The SPOIL activities can reverse the effects of recreational screen time. For example, active time outdoors can promote sleep, while excessive recreational screen time can decrease sleep quality.

Some elements of the SPOIL framework, such as social and literacy-based activities, encourage caregivers to spend time with children. Others like play and independent work, which includes chores, encourage children to entertain or occupy themselves and regulate their emotions without the aid of a screen or a parent, as pediatricians recommend.

Here is a more in-depth look at what SPOIL involves.

SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

Social activities include time spent with parents, friends or siblings. In addition to obvious relationship-building benefits, social activities allow children to practice cooperation, competition and empathy. Since social interactions are inversely related to recreational screen time, emphasizing them can decrease screen time naturally.

PLAY

Free play, especially pretend play, has been linked to planning, problem-solving and impulse-control skills as well as math achievement and physical, social and language development in children. Free play takes time to evolve and may occur when

caregivers step back or are otherwise unavailable, allowing a child to direct their own attention. It also has an inverse relationship with screen time.

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

Outdoor time is associated with improved sleep, attention, creative problem-solving and decreased stress. Multiple studies have found an inverse relationship between time spent outdoors and recreational screen time in children.

INDEPENDENT WORK

Independent work includes goal-directed activities, such as homework and chores, that require a child to put aside an immediate interest. Participation in household chores has declined dramatically in recent decades, despite chores having positive links with self-esteem, responsibility, academic achievement and self-sufficiency.

LITERACY

Literacy involves all forms of reading and writing, including a child being read to, reading independently and listening to audiobooks. Reading is associated with understanding the perspectives of others, larger vocabulary and academic achievement. As with many of the SPOIL categories, the frequency of reading in the home is inversely related to recreational screen time.

Replacing excessive screen time with SPOIL activities may support children's development during and after the pandemic. Because positive approach goals rely less on self-control, they may be more sustainable and successful than avoidance goals. Additionally, these activities likely counteract some negative effects of excessive recreational screen time, which makes the emphasis on screen limits less necessary in the first place. ■

*This article originally appeared on
The Conversation.*

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BY ALEXANDRA FROST

A woman with brown hair tied back, wearing a blue athletic tank top and leggings, is in a starting crouch for a race. She is looking down, her hands are on the ground, and her feet are in white sneakers with pink laces. The background is plain white.

ADHD & SPORTS

Can athletics
help kids
with ADHD?
Experts say yes.

FOR a child with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), the school day can be long and daunting, where having to sit quietly is expected. The pandemic has exacerbated other stressors, with kids allowed less interaction with their peers. Sports, and physical activity in general, might hold the key to easing some symptoms, and to even treating ADHD altogether in milder cases.

According to the A.D.D. Resource Center, there's a discrepancy in just how many children suffer from ADHD: The Centers for

Disease Control and Prevention say it's about 11% of kids, while the American Psychiatric Association says it's about 5%.

Regardless, a significant number of children are struggling with three components related to ADHD: cognitive regulation, behavioral regulation and emotional regulation. Dr. Michael Morse, psychiatrist at the Chesapeake Center for ADHD, Learning, and Behavioral Health in Bethesda, Maryland, sees a number of potential benefits from kids getting some exercise outdoors.

Check out these key reasons why movement may work wonders for children with ADHD.

EXERCISE AS MEDICINE

Harvard Health reports that exercise can improve memory and thinking, reduce insulin resistance and inflammation, and stimulate chemical release — including the feel-good chemicals that reduce stress and anxiety. Morse has also seen a reduction in impulsivity and hyperactivity in children with ADHD when they play sports.

“A kid who has worked out may have

an easier time staying in their chair [at school],” says Morse. He has worked with patients who are on their optimal dose of ADHD medication and regularly exercising and their focus is good. Then they get an injury and think their medicine isn't working well. “The exercise was also treating their ADHD,” he says.

SPORTS ARE A “TRAINING GROUND” FOR SOCIAL SKILLS

Friendships, socializing and working as a team can be major struggles for children with ADHD. Luckily, sports presents all of those opportunities and provides what Morse calls a “training ground” for social skills.

“Kids with ADHD have more challenges with social skills, as their internal engine is running at a higher rate. They sometimes have to have it their way and have trouble with delayed gratification,” he says. “Staying in your part of the soccer field, for example, is a way to learn boundaries and ‘my role.’”

These clearly defined rules and roles, present in many sports, may be the perfect non-academic atmosphere for children to practice social skills.

POSITIVE EXPERIENCES CAN DECREASE ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION

While many parents, teachers and caregivers are familiar with ADHD, they may not know just how prevalent anxiety and depression can be in children with ADHD — roughly triple the risk, Morse says. It's a balance of counteracting negative childhood experiences with positive ones, which he calls a massive opportunity in reducing that risk.

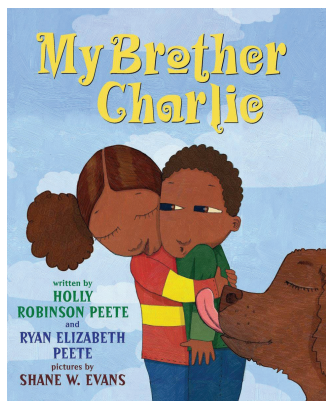
“[Kids with ADHD] may get a negative impact from peers or teachers or parents, especially if they are not meeting expectations in every domain. But then they get on the soccer field and are motivated, and that can be really significant in terms of their self-concept,” says Morse. ▢

TIMING IS EVERYTHING

Typical medicines for ADHD can cause difficulty falling asleep, meaning most families may try to time the medication so that it wears off within a few hours of bedtime. For students playing after-school sports, this might be the time when they're finally able to sit down to do homework.

Dr. Michael Morse, psychiatrist at the Chesapeake Center for ADHD, Learning, and Behavioral Health in Bethesda, Maryland, advises parents to work with the school to find a solution. Perhaps the student can work in a study hall to finish homework, then proceed on with sports, dinner and bedtime. This prevents a tired, unmedicated child from trying to do homework late in the evening, which can end up taking double or triple the time, says Morse, and disrupt their sleep schedule. — *Alexandra Frost*

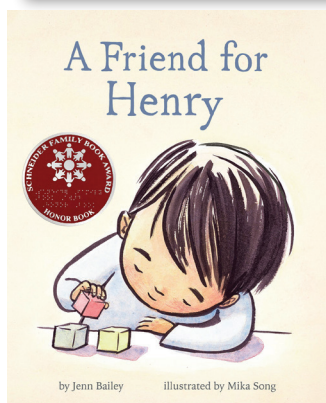




15 Children's Books About Autism

April is Autism Awareness Month, an ideal time to share books about and written by members of the autistic community.

BY JENNIFER CAVALLERO, CHILDREN'S LIBRARIAN,
CENTER FOR ACCESSIBILITY, D.C. PUBLIC LIBRARY



PICTURE BOOKS

"My Brother Charlie"

By Holly Robinson Peete and Ryan Elizabeth Peete, illustrated by Shane W. Evans

This story, co-written by a mother and daughter about their real-life experiences, is told from the point of view of Charlie's sister, Callie. The book celebrates all the things she loves about her twin brother with autism and some of the differences in the ways they experience the world.

Wonderful rhyming text makes this a fun and informative read about Dr. Temple Grandin's journey, from a child who couldn't speak to a world-renowned animal researcher.

"My Friend Has Autism"

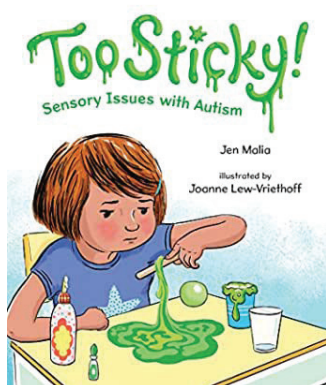
By Kaitlyn Duling

Simple text shows young readers what autism might look like and how they can be sensitive to different needs.

"I See Things Differently: A First Look at Autism"

By Pat Thomas, illustrated by Claire Keay

Written by a psychotherapist and counselor, this work introduces younger readers to autism.



"A Friend for Henry"

By Jenn Bailey, illustrated by Mika Song
Henry wants what every child wants: a friend that fits him just right. The story explains Henry's sensory issues in simple text, and the search for a friend is relatable for everyone.

"Too Sticky! Sensory Issues with Autism"

By Jen Malia, illustrated by Joanne Lew-Vriethoff

Our only selection that also includes a slime recipe, this book explores how a young student handles her sensory issues at school.

MIDDLE GRADE

"Rules"

By Cynthia Lord

Twelve-year-old Catherine has a complicated relationship with her younger brother and a healthy dose of pre-teen angst in this realistic portrayal of family, friendship and understanding autism.

"Most Valuable Players"

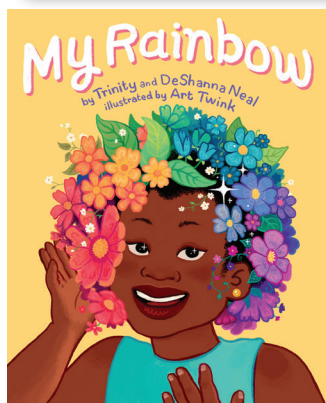
By Phil Bildner, illustrations by Tim Probert

Rip and his best friend Red, who has autism, are nearing fifth-grade graduation and a high-stakes basketball game in the fourth book in Bildner's Rip & Red series.

"It's Not Destiny: An Abby Story"

By Kelsey Abrams, illustrated by Jomike Tejido

Part of the Second Chance Ranch series, Abby Ramirez, a 10-year-old with autism, helps a German shepherd overcome its anxieties and her own fear of the ocean.



"My Rainbow"

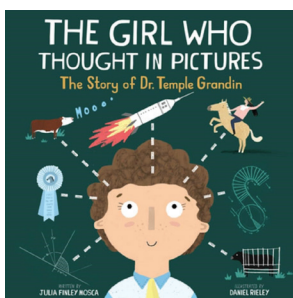
By Trinity and DeShanna Neal, illustrated by Art Twink

This true story describes a transgender child with autism, her loving family and her rainbow of curls. Readers will also learn about other aspects of the child's life.

NONFICTION

"The Girl Who Thought in Pictures: The Story of Dr. Temple Grandin"

By Julia Finley Mosca, illustrated by Daniel Rieley



"A Boy Called Bat"

By Elana K. Arnold

Third-grader Bat often finds the world overwhelming, but he's determined to care for a new friend, an orphaned baby skunk, when his mom brings it home. This heartwarming story is the first in a series.

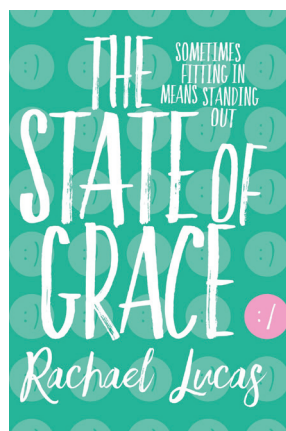
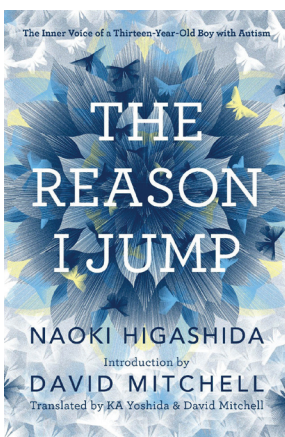
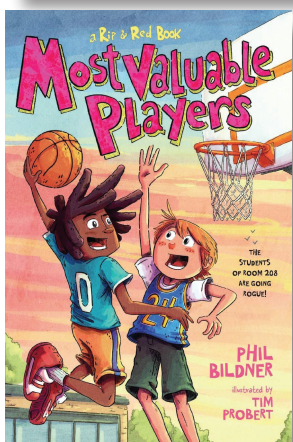
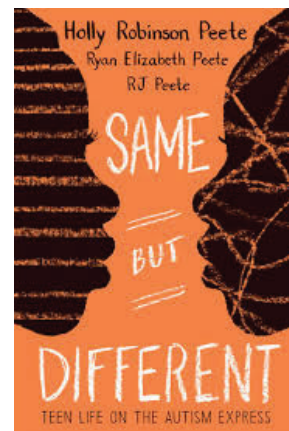
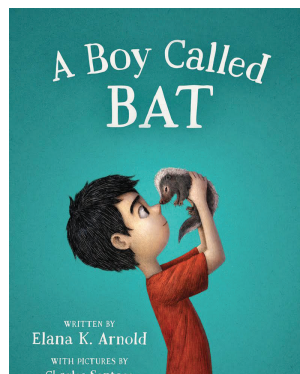
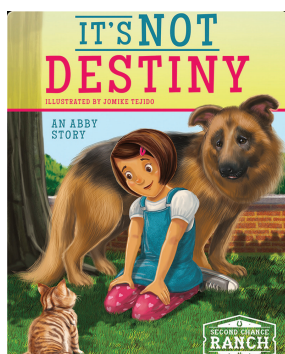
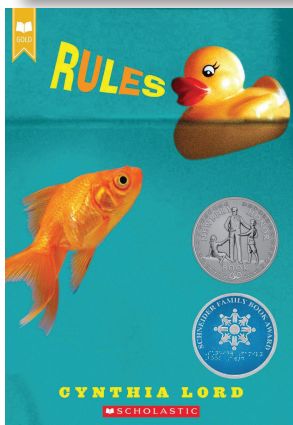
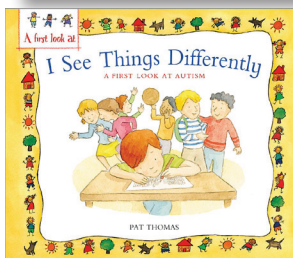


YOUNG ADULT

"Same But Different: Teen Life on the Autism Express"

By Holly Robinson Peete, Ryan Elizabeth Peete and RJ Peete

Teen versions of their characters from "My Brother Charlie," based on siblings and co-authors Ryan Elizabeth and RJ Peete, tell what it's like navigating high school as the sibling with and without autism in alternating chapters.



"The State of Grace"

By Rachael Lucas

A teen girl with Asperger's syndrome navigates crushes, family problems and school accommodations in this sweet coming-of-age story.

"Marcelo in the Real World"

By Francisco X. Stork

Marcelo, a 17-year-old with Asperger's syndrome, faces social and professional challenges when he takes on his first big summer job working in a mailroom at his father's urging. The first-person narration helps us understand Marcelo's experience of the world and makes his dilemmas that much more compelling.

"The Reason I Jump: The Inner Voice of a Thirteen-Year-Old Boy With Autism"

By Naoki Higashida

Translated from Japanese, this first-person account details what a teen with autism thinks and feels, and how he navigates a complex world. ■

FINDING ORDER IN Puzzles

How word
searches have
helped my
children learn to
self-soothe.

By Hannah Grieco

"I hate school! I hate everybody!" screams my seven-year-old, running behind the sofa to hide. Her pink fleece blanket, in dire need of a wash, covers her little body. She shakes and huddles down, desperate to sink into invisibility.

It's 9:05 a.m. on a Tuesday. I head to my laptop and quickly create an LOL Doll word search.

"Hey, grab a pencil!" I call to her. "Something's printing up for you!"

She runs to the printer. A crisis averted.

Selective mutism, like many anxiety-related disabilities, makes distance learning especially difficult. My daughter will talk to — and yell at — me, but not her teacher or classroom assistants. Not her peers. She stays silent online with them, refusing even to turn on her video camera. She only occasionally emails a short message to a friend she used to play with before COVID-19 hit.

All of my kids are struggling with virtual learning, despite their kind and patient teachers and despite me feigning enthusiasm as I physically toggle between three kids who desperately miss human connection and who express that grief through meltdowns and school refusal.

There's only so much one mom can do, even with virtual therapy sessions for each child and a background in parenting uncomfortable behaviors. My oldest child is on the autism spectrum and my middle child struggles with mood dysregulation. All three

of my kids fight when distressed, become irritable when sad and sink into fearfulness when their schedules become too loose or change too quickly.

COVID-19 brought that to a whole new level. Isolated at home, the school experience fluctuating and confusing, friends all but lost to them, my kids' behavior exploded in hard ways.

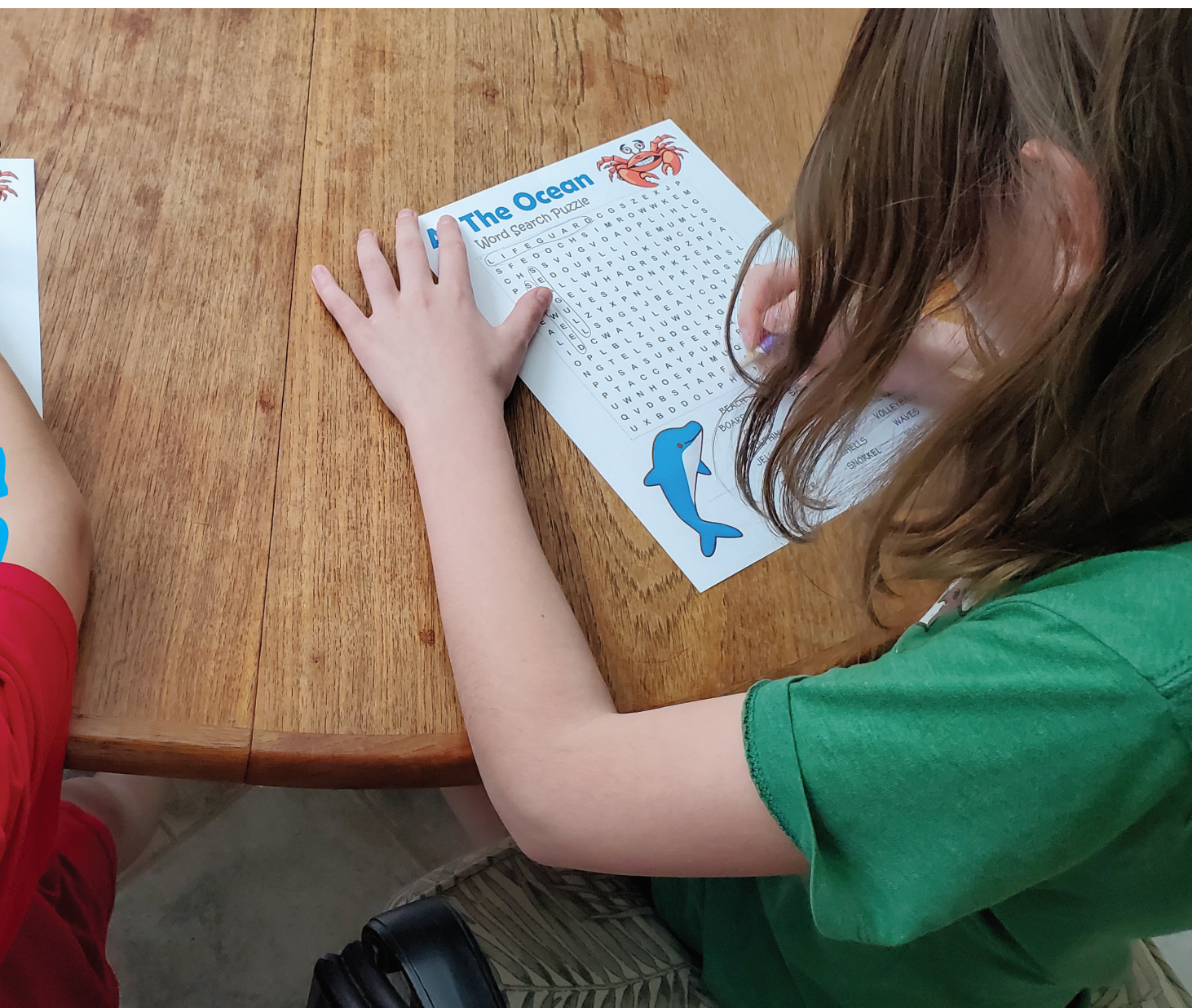
But what can we do when all the coping strategies in all the child development books don't work to soothe our kids?

We improvise and frantically Google "hamster word search" one day, in hopes of keeping a kid from loudly crying during a Zoom meeting.

"Can I have one, too?" my oldest asks when he sees the paper.

"Me too!" his sister demands.





All three sit down and work on the puzzle together, helping each other, laughing at the words: sunflower (backward and diagonal!), water bottle, Roborovski.

“Can we do another one?” they beg.

And so begins a new cognitive behavioral therapy practice, inspired by far too much time stuck at home and on iPads. I print word searches for everything. My 13-year-old’s cell biology unit? Everyone find the word mitosis! My 11-year-old’s research project on Albert Einstein? Equation, relativity, science, invention.

I begin to make my own, quickly typing up searches that might make a child smile when they can’t stop crying or distract them in the middle of a meltdown. I include holidays and YouTube celebrities and silly facts about our dogs. Anything that might interest them.

Panic eases into focus. When one of my kids starts to circle the hidden words, to announce “Ah ha!” and pump their fist, the others run over to see what they’re doing, pull up their own chairs and search, too. This isn’t homework, even when it’s about something they’re learning in school. The paper gets recycled afterward, sometimes just 30 seconds later. And yet the act itself centers and soothes. The puzzles give my kids what coloring books and yoga never could — peace, even pleasure, in the midst of distress.

Now we’re heading back into the classroom but only two days a week and with the constant threat of closing again. It’s a lack of consistency that feels like torture for children who need routine and physical proximity to their teachers and peers to stay regulated.

So we find fun where we can. More

importantly, we find order in a time that otherwise feels chaotic to all people — big and little — right now.

If I had known these puzzles provided this sense of purpose to my children, I would have started making them when my son first began school. I would have met him in the pickup lane with a Black Hole word search in hand. I would have given my daughter an Artists Who Draw Horses word search when she woke up far too early on a Saturday morning. I would have researched every Minecraft phrase and created a Mega Gamer word search for all three kids, keeping them busy for hours on those days we were stuck at home, long before COVID-19, simply because we struggled that day.

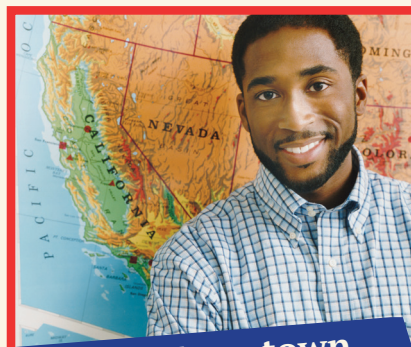
If nothing else, the pandemic has given our family this gift. And I am grateful. ■

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**Vote for your favorite people, places
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Winners will be contacted in June, and the results will be in the July issue of Washington FAMILY magazine.

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