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INSIDE

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Did you know that the DMV is one of the nation's top apple-growing regions? **Page 8**



Get your kids ready for the return to school this fall. Look inside this issue for back-to-school articles, tips and more.

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With kids back in school and parents back to work, many pets will be alone for the first time. Let us help make the transition easier.

READERS' RESPONSES

We welcome your feedback on specific articles, overall themes and anything else related to editorial content. Enter your comments on the Feedback tab of our website, washingtonfamily.com.

Please note we reserve the right to edit or refrain from publishing comments we deem inappropriate.

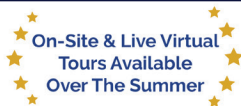
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WE WANT
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FEEDBACK



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School's in Session

One year ago, parents were still trying to imagine what the school year would look like for our kids. Would they be back in the classroom or still logging into Zoom? Some had already decided to homeschool, while others were coordinating learning pods with families who were being similarly cautious during the pandemic. It was a stressful time, to put it mildly.

Thankfully, back-to-school season feels a lot less worrisome this year. Our kids may still have to wear masks in the building per new recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics, but at least schools are planning to be open full time.

Most after-school activities are also planning to offer in-person programming again. That means parents are faced with the pre-pandemic dilemma of determining how many extracurriculars our kids should be participating in. In this issue, staff writer Eleanor Linafelt looks at how kids can get the most out of after-school activities, and how to make scheduling them less stressful for parents.

Are your kids at or approaching the age where they

can participate in instrumental music class at school? If so, check out Laura Farmer's story about what to consider when choosing your child's first instrument. Hint: Your small-for-their-age kid might want to hold off on the trombone for another couple of years.

With kids back in school and many parents finally returning to the office after a year and a half, our homes are going to be a lot quieter soon. What does that mean for our pets, especially the ones we adopted during the pandemic? Contributor Jennifer Marino Walters shares expert advice on minimizing our pets' separation anxiety.

Also in this issue: our favorite local orchards for apple picking, books to ease your child's back-to-school jitters and an interview with Andrea Creel, the mompreneur behind Shining Kids Yoga.

Here's to an A+ school year! Happy reading! ■

PJ Feinstein

Have questions about Car Seat Safety??



What's the law about car seats?

What's the best car seat for my baby?

Where can I get a car seat for my child?

Is there a seat check near me?

Maryland Kids In Safety Seats has answers!



helpline: 800-370-SEAT
e-mail: MDH.kiss@maryland.gov
website: www.mdkiss.org

{TOP 10}

Family Activities in August Around the DMV

BY KATIE BEECHER



JULY 30–AUG. 16

CIRCO VAZQUEZ

After a year hiatus, Circo Vazquez is hitting the road again and bringing its spectacular show to Tysons. Under a vibrant pink and blue big top tent, kids of all ages can enjoy acrobats, trapeze artists, musicians, jugglers and more. \$25–\$80. circovazquez.com



AUG. 11

FLY DANCE COMPANY: THE GENTLEMAN OF HIP HOP

School-age kids will delight in this fast-paced theatrical hip-hop dance performance at Wolfrap's Theatre-in-the-Woods. Combining classical music and street dance, FLY aims to entertain and inform audiences. \$12 for age 2 and up. wolfrap.org



AUG. 12-14

STEP AFRIKA!

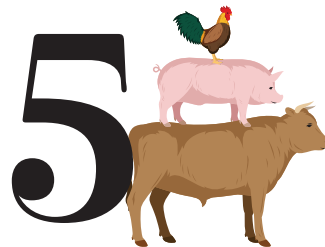
After catching a Step Afrika! Performance at the Kennedy Center, join the fun by participating in a variety of free lessons in stepping, the South African gumboot dance and more. Free. kennedy-center.org



AUG. 6, 13 & 20

STORIES FROM THE PAST

Little learners can enjoy history-themed stories and crafts Friday mornings at Alexandria's Lee-Fendall House Museum and Garden, which dates back to 1785. \$6 per child. leefendallhouse.org



AUG. 13-21

MONTGOMERY COUNTY AGRICULTURAL FAIR

The fair is back for its 72nd year at the Montgomery County Agricultural Center in Gaithersburg, with farm animals, carnival rides, Grandstand entertainment (don't miss the Monster Trucks!) and delicious fried treats. \$15 onsite, \$12 online, free for children 11 and under. mcagfair.org



AUG. 15

MONTGOMERY PARKS FAMILY FISHING FUN

Whether you're an expert angler or a fishing novice, this nature program at Black Hill Regional Park in Boyds offers fishing options for the whole family. Bring your own gear or borrow fishing poles at the lake. \$12. montgomeryparks.org



AUG. 20-22

AWESOME CON JR.

Awesome Con, D.C.'s own Comic Con, includes interactive activities for the next generation of geek culture fans — cosplay parades, drawing lessons, lightsaber training, superhero yoga and more — at Walter E. Washington Convention Center. \$15 per kids ticket. awesome-con.com

AUG. 22

HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS SPREAD GAME TOUR

The world-famous Harlem Globetrotters are bringing their basketball tricks and comedy hijinks to the Capital One Arena in D.C. for a performance that'll keep fans of all ages at the edge of their stadium seats. \$18-\$160. harlemglobetrotters.com



AUG. 25 & 26

DINOSAUR EXPLORE

Future paleontologists will love this two-day outdoor program for preschoolers, featuring creative lessons on dinosaur fossils, feathers, food and more, at Hidden Oaks Nature Center in Annandale. \$36 per child. fairfaxcounty.gov



AUG. 28

LIVING EARTH FAMILY DAY

This virtual event from the National Museum of the American Indian in D.C. is a celebration of summer, with various nature-inspired crafts and a sunflower paint-along. Free. americanindian.si.edu



BY BARBARA NOE KENNEDY

THE DMV's

Best Apple-Picking Orchards

Fall's impending arrival means cooler temps, colorful autumn foliage ... and apple picking! The DMV just happens to be one of the nation's top apple-growing regions, with a plethora of orchards offering pick-your-own apples, along with other family-friendly festivities. There are ladders to climb, corn mazes to get lost in and apple pies to devour. But not all orchards are made the same. Here are some of the best to ensure family memories of a lifetime. (Note: All locations are following current COVID-related mandates.)



Butler's Orchard, Germantown, Maryland

People drive miles and miles to pick fruit, vegetables and flowers (and Christmas trees!) at this popular 350-acre farm in Montgomery County. Apple picking, of course, is the star of the show from mid-September to mid-October, when six varieties of apples are ripe on the branches, including Autumn Gala (which was discovered right here in Maryland). Part of the fun is the farm market, the 5-acre farm park with its cute animals and The Farmer's Porch cafe. Before heading home, be sure to stock up on fresh-made apple cider, cider donuts and apple pie.

butlersorchard.com

Admission is \$3 per person, age 2 and up. Reservations are required. Closed Mondays.



Waters Orchard, Germantown, Maryland

There aren't a lot of bells and whistles at this pretty family farm in Germantown, which focuses solely on apples — 16 varieties of them — between September and November. It's all about the fresh air, country beauty, family fun ... and tractor rides. Be sure to check the website ahead of time to see which apples are ready for picking. An added perk is the nearby Doc Waters Cidery, where you and your family can sip apple juices (and hard ciders) produced from the orchard's apples. Snacks and food trucks are available, or bring your own picnic.

watersorchard.com

No admission fee, but pay for an empty bag upon arriving that you will fill with your choice of apples. Cash only. Closed Monday-Thursday.



Great Country Farms, Bluemont, Virginia

This super picturesque farm in Loudoun County offers a variety of fruit picking spring through fall, but come September into early October, it's all about the apples — more than 40 different kinds of them. And here's an interesting fact: all of their trees are dwarf trees, making picking easy even for the little ones. The Corn Maze and Apple Harvest festival happens throughout September, with additional activities on weekends, including marshmallow roasting, cider press demonstrations and live family-friendly music. The farm's newest addition is Henway Hard Cider Company, producing hard ciders from orchard apples and offering al fresco dining and cider-sipping by a placid pond.

greatcountryfarms.com

Tickets are \$10/child and \$12/adult on weekdays, and \$14/child and \$16/adult on weekends. Open daily. Advance tickets are recommended on weekends.

Crooked Run Orchard, Purcellville, Virginia

The Brown family has tended this vegetable and fruit farm in Loudoun County for 250-plus years, with apples one of its mainstays (some of the trees date back to 1760!). A minimal amount of chemicals is used in the growing process, making this a healthy choice. You and your kids will love hanging out with farm animals, walking the nature trail and lingering over lunch at one of the picnic tables (BYO picnic basket). Check the Facebook page for current offerings, or call 540-338-6642.

facebook.com/CrookedRunOrchard/

No ticket price or reservations needed, but it is cash only for the crops. Closed Monday-Thursday.



West Oaks Farm & Market, Winchester, Virginia

Virginia is the nation's sixth largest producer of apples, with the Shenandoah Valley being the epicenter, and this 200-acre Frederick County farm has been in the Snapp family for 10 generations— since the early 1700s! They began selling produce 15 years ago, with the farm market opening in 2018. Last year apple picking was added to the mix, meaning this pick-your-own experience is likely to be less crowded than others, since word is just getting out. Ten varieties of apples are grown, with the most popular being Honeycrisp. There's also a corn maze with 3 miles of paths and live music events on the weekends.

westoaksfarm-market.com

No ticket price or reservations needed. Open daily.

HERE'S WHAT WE'RE LOVING FOR KIDS THIS MONTH

BY ELENA EPSTEIN,
DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL
PARENTING PRODUCT AWARDS

For more product reviews, visit nappaawards.com

TETIANA GARKUSHA / ISTOCK / GETTY IMAGES PLUS

Cry Babies Goodnight Starry Sky

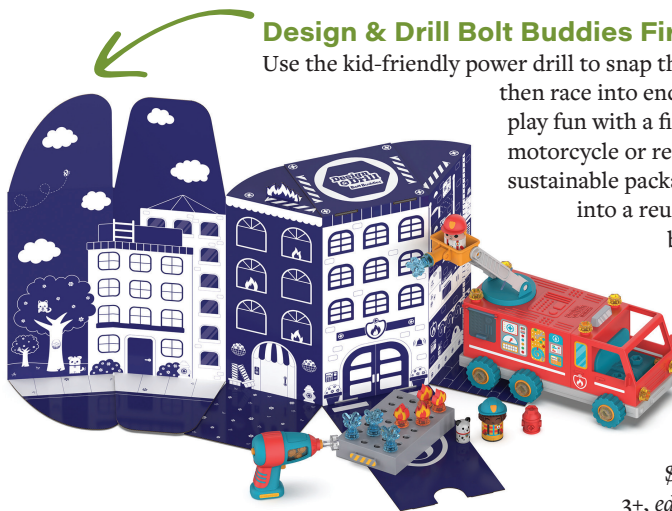
This Cry Babies toy makes realistic baby sounds and cries LED tears when you remove its pacifier. Press her belly; she'll turn any room into a magical starry night sky by projecting a moon and stars design. Kids can also fall asleep to the sounds of five different lullabies that play more than 10 minutes of soothing music. \$19.99, ages 18 months+, imctoys.com



Design & Drill Bolt Buddies First Responders

Use the kid-friendly power drill to snap the pieces together, then race into endless pretend-play fun with a fire truck, police motorcycle or rescue helicopter. The sustainable packaging transforms into a reusable play set, which becomes part of the playtime experience and features color-in graphics that spark kids' creativity.

\$21.99-\$39.99, ages 3+, educationalinsights.com



Super Mario Aquabeads Creation Cube Set

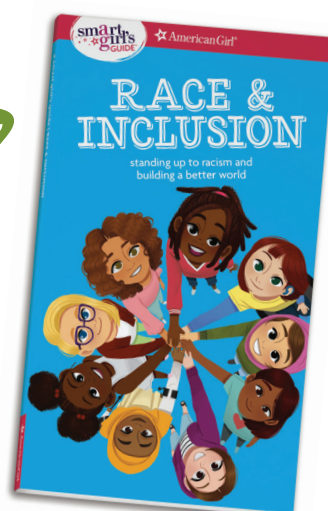
Place the beads on the provided templates, spray with water and watch as the beads magically fuse together to create Super Mario art. Using the included design pegs, your child can attach the bead design to the base to act out scenes. The creation kit includes more than 2,500 solid, jewel and star beads in 30 vibrant colors. \$39.99, ages 4+, epocheverlastingplay.com





"Spanish for Kids: La Música"

Pack your bags for a musical adventure around the world. Join María and a playful group of peers as they embark on a fun-filled journey from Spain to Latin America. Dance to lively Spanish melodies, explore vibrant places and meet a colorful cast of characters. \$12.99, ages 1-10, whistlefritz.com

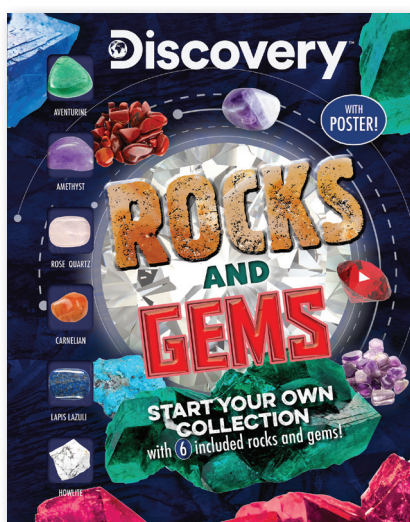


"A Smart Girl's Guide: Race & Inclusion"

Give kids the tools and techniques to gain racial fluency, normalize the conversation around race, question biases and take positive action individually and collectively. Tips, quizzes, questions and challenges provide practical ways for readers to learn and implement the concepts right away. \$12.99, ages 10+, americangirl.com

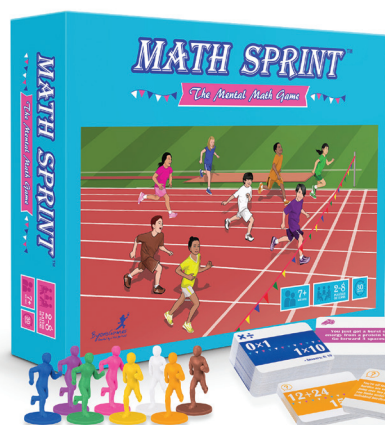
Discovery: Rocks and Gems

Learn how various rocks and gems are formed as well as their uses. Use the six rock and gem samples to get your collection started. This fun learning kit features a slide-out tray printed with rock names and a poster for young collectors to categorize their finds. From sparkling gemstones to molten lava, this introduction to the world of rocks and gems is a must-have item for any future geologist. \$17.99, ages 6-8, silverdolphinbooks.com



The Imagine Neighborhood Podcast

Each episode tells an original, fantastical and hilarious story, but it also tackles the big feelings that come with growing up. Through the use of metaphor, the series explores topics such as fear, frustration and responsibility, as well as real-life serious issues including race and diversity, dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic and cyberbullying. Free, ages 5-8, imagineneighborhood.org



Math Sprint: The Mental Math Game

This educational board game for kids boosts addition, subtraction, multiplication and division skills. \$29.97, ages 7+, byrongsames.com

Magna-Tiles: Animal Series

These distinctive animals are ready for your child's next adventure in creativity and learning. Match animals to their footprints and build new and exciting environments. The figures are compatible with all Magna-Tiles sets and feature fun new characters, colors and patterns. \$39.99, ages 3+, magnatiles.com



A Conversation with Andrea Creel, Founder of Shining Kids Yoga

BY PJ FEINSTEIN



If you're looking for Shining Kids Yoga, you won't find it on Google Maps. The Washington FAMILY Best for Families 2020 "Best Children's Yoga Classes" winner doesn't have a studio or a storefront. Instead, Shining Kids Yoga provides yoga enrichment programming at elementary schools, preschools and daycare centers across Montgomery County, Maryland. It also offers online classes, a necessary addition during the pandemic.

"Yoga doesn't just happen in a yoga studio,

and it isn't just for flexible or athletic people," says Andrea Creel, founder of Shining Kids Yoga. "It can be adapted to meet the needs of all people in all places."

Creel, who lives in Rockville with her son Quinn, 13, teaches 20 kids yoga classes a week. But as a business owner, her responsibilities don't end when she rolls up her yoga mat.

"I wear many hats as part of my job," she says. "I also create class schedules, hire and train instructors, manage registrations, coordinate with school administrators and PTAs and handle our social media accounts."

Washington FAMILY spoke to Creel about the benefits of yoga and the highs and lows of being a mom entrepreneur.

When did you decide to start Shining Kids Yoga, and how has your business grown over the years?

Shining Kids Yoga began in 2014 when I started teaching after-school yoga classes at my son's elementary school in Rockville. The class was so popular that I started to hear from other schools and PTAs that wanted yoga classes to be a part of their after-school enrichment programs. Eventually, there were so many schools interested in after-school yoga programming that I hired additional teachers and Shining Kids Yoga really started to expand!

In 2019, I created the Shining Kids Yoga Teacher Training Program to guide a new generation of kids yoga teachers. And this year, I released my first yoga book for kids, "Mystery Pose: A Yoga Guessing Game," and created several yoga card games so that kids could have fun practicing yoga at home and with friends. I love finding new ways to help children experience the joys and benefits of yoga.

What are some of those benefits?

Oh, there are so many! Benefits of yoga include increased focus and concentration, self-awareness, self-acceptance, strength, flexibility and emotional self-regulation. As with most things, the more frequently a child practices

yoga, the greater the benefits. However, even a few minutes per day or one class per week makes a difference.

Does your son enjoy yoga, too?

He does like yoga! When he was younger, he practiced yoga with me and attended a lot of my yoga classes and events. Now that he's a teenager, he's more focused on his own interests and activities, like art, theater and video games. I love watching him perform onstage and exploring his talents and passions.

We also like exploring new towns and places nearby. Somehow many of our explorations end with us finding new ice cream shops like Rocky Point Creamery in Point of Rocks and Woodbourne Creamery in Mount Airy.

What are some of the challenges of being a mother and a business owner?

Being a business owner often means working odd hours, always being "on the clock" and always having something else that needs to be done. As is a common experience for many parents, I sometimes stay up late to finish everything, but I try to remember to set aside time to do fun things together with my son and take a break from work because there's always something more that could be done.

Of course, there are many benefits, too. One benefit that has been really meaningful to me is that I have been able to carve out time in my schedule to volunteer at my son's school, and I have been very active with the PTA. If I was working a traditional 9-5 job, I don't know that I would have had the flexibility to do this. Childhood goes by so quickly, and it has been important to me to have this ability to play an active role at my son's school and be there when he needs me.

Do you have a mantra?

"You are whole, perfect, and complete exactly as you are." I tell this to my adult and child yoga students, and I remind myself of this, too. ■

Make Mealtime Less Stressful

Local experts offer tips for parents of picky eaters

BY KATE OCZYPOK



Parents deal with all sorts of child-related frustrations throughout the day, but frustration at mealtimes can be a whole other level of exasperation.

"It's easy to feel defeated and focus on what the kids aren't eating," says Jennifer Anderson, a registered dietician and founder of Kids Eat in Color, a local resource with 1.4 million Instagram followers. "Feeding kids is a long game, though."

First, it's important to remember that most children are a bit picky, especially around age two, according to Mandy Hart, a pediatric speech-language pathologist and drama therapist in Bethesda, Maryland. One of Hart's specializations is feeding disorders.

"If a kid doesn't like foods like broccoli, cauliflower or lettuce, that's okay," she says. "Kids are allowed to have personal preferences."

That said, kids' preferences are often fickle; sometimes there's no rhyme or reason to them.

Christine Ju, a registered dietician nutritionist in Washington, D.C., and part of the Good Food Nutrition Group, advises parents not to give up.

"As parents, we all get frustrated when our kids don't eat something we want them to eat after multiple attempts," she says. "Sometimes, if a child rejects a food once, the parents assume that the food is forever banned, but that's not the case at all."

Start small

Anderson recommends serving micro portions of new foods — about the size of a pinky nail — to reduce a child's anxiety about it and to reduce waste. Even with such tiny portions, "it can take many exposures to a new food, sometimes hundreds, before a child tries it," she says.

Have safe foods

While it is important for parents to expose children to different foods Hart recommends serving at least two foods at each meal that you know your child will eat.

Anderson echoes this sentiment, saying it's important to always include a safe food at meals to prevent table tension. "A meal consisting of all new foods or foods that are hit-or-miss for your child can cause stress,"

she says. "Make it a habit to make meals that usually include familiar non-familiar foods."

Make it flavorful

"Parents tend to go for more bland foods, but kids like spicy, tasty foods," Hart says. She recommends offering young children food in all different flavors, including spicy, bitter and sour.

Put them to work

"The more your child invests in the preparation of your meal, the more likely he or she will be excited to try it," says Ju. She suggests taking children grocery shopping, letting them pick out a new fruit or vegetable and then finding an interesting recipe to try together.

Look for signs

Although many kids dismiss certain foods because they don't like the taste, some refuse to eat them because of how they feel afterward. If you notice a pattern of physical ailments after they eat a certain food or food group, try eliminating the food in question and then reintroducing it to determine the source of the problem, says Ju.

"If you have serious food-related concerns, a discussion with your pediatrician or a registered dietician is always in order," she adds.

Classic examples of something more serious include physical ailments such as diarrhea, loose stool, excessive gas, stomach upset or pain and skin issues like hives.

"If the child acts out after eating something he or she didn't like, but then acts fine when presented with other foods, chances are it's more of a preference," says Nancy Piho, a registered dietician nutritionist at Good Food Nutrition Group. "The body doesn't lie when it's an allergy, intolerance or sensitivity, so be sure to look for signs and patterns." ■

Finding Their

Rhythm

How to help your
instrument and foster a lifelong love of music
child choose a musical

BY LAURA FARMER

For the Withers family of Abingdon, Maryland, the house rule is if you want to live here, you have to learn to play a musical instrument. “We said, ‘We don’t care which instrument. Just pick one you like!’” says Cheri Withers, a mother of two school-aged children.

Like many musically inclined families, Cheri and her husband Jared believe that learning to play an instrument and eventually performing in an ensemble foster valuable life skills, such as perseverance, the ability to work with others and self-esteem. But what’s the Withers’ most important reason? It’s fun!

“I played in my school band and later, as an adult, learned to play the mandolin. I wish I had a little more training to be able to play at a higher level,” says Jared, who has performed in a bluegrass band as an adult and continues to jam with his neighbors. “I’d like my children to get enough training so that they can feel confident on their instruments and enjoy making music with others.”

Their eldest daughter, Elliott, dabbled in learning the piano for a few months before she finally landed on the instrument that seems like a fit: classical guitar. But like most young musicians, it’s a long road from the first tentative plucks of the guitar strings to effortless playing with an ensemble.

“With guitar, kids may have to practice for several days to build the dexterity to correctly fret a string with their finger,” explains Jared. “There was a learning curve just to be able to play an easy song.”

BABY BEATS

Before your kid embarks down the path of learning to play music, you can do many things to prepare them for the journey.

Just ask Michelle Urzynecok, a professional musician who plays the E-flat clarinet as a master sergeant for the U.S. Marine Band. “I’m a huge proponent for the early childhood music programs,” says Urzynecok. “For example, I did Music Together with my kids, and it was amazing! They were exposed to world music. They got to move around. The kids didn’t have to behave; they just got to have a lot of fun. It was important to me that their first exposure to and participation in music be fun!”

She also advocates looking for opportunities to expose children to live music. “Take advantage of anything in your community,” she advises. “The major orchestra in your city has children’s concerts that are often free or very inexpensive. It’s very different to experience live music instead of watching a screen. There’s so much more energy!”

SCHOOL SOUNDS

In elementary school, your child will likely receive general music classes once or twice per week. By second or third grade, most school music

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programs teach students how to play the recorder, a simple musical instrument in the woodwind family. Through learning to play notes and read music on this basic instrument, budding young musicians are laying the groundwork to learn to play other more complex orchestral and band instruments.

Around fourth grade, students usually have the opportunity to choose an instrument and participate in the school band. This choice can often be difficult. Which one to choose? What is the best fit?

The good news is that choosing an instrument doesn't need to be complicated.

"If your child gravitates toward a certain instrument, let them play that instrument!" says Urzynecok. "Too often, I see parents negotiate: 'If you play this certain instrument for a few years, then we'll let you play the instrument you actually want to play.'"

According to Dr. Miles Brown, assistant professor of string bass and jazz at the University of Delaware, there's no wrong answer, especially by the time the kids are in their later elementary school years.

"When kids are much younger, some of the easier instruments to learn are violin, piano, classical guitar or the drums," says Brown. "Some of the brass instruments are heavy, and younger kids may not have the strength to hold them. But by third or fourth grade, they should have the stamina to play any instrument, especially when instruments are sized appropriately."

Brown should know. He plays the giant of the orchestra, the bass, with the nationally recognized contemporary chamber orchestra Alarm Will Sound. Most elementary-aged kids could barely reach the top of Brown's standard size bass, let alone play it. But that's where finding the proper fit becomes important, since many fourth graders can manage a quarter-sized bass. For this reason, parents of young musicians may consider renting their child's first instruments so that they can size up as their child grows.

HOW DO YOU CHOOSE THE RIGHT PRIVATE MUSIC TEACHER?

For younger musicians, finding a teacher with an impressive resume is less important than finding one who works well with your child.

According to Jenine Brown of the Peabody Institute, "When my friends ask me who they should hire as a private teacher, I ask, 'Well, what kind of teacher do they gravitate toward at school? Do they like a more structured teacher, or do they run to greet the one who is more warm and friendly?' Find one whose personality is a good fit for your child."

Don't get discouraged if your child needs to switch teachers a few times until you find the right fit. ■

MAKING MUSIC

After your child has chosen an instrument, you can help them succeed at learning to make music. First, their school music teacher is a great resource. She or he will usually work with your child a few times per week in individual and small group lessons. Typically, teachers and students work toward a final concert.

If you find that your child is energized by their music studies, you might consider hiring a private instructor. More frequent one-on-one instruction will help them progress more quickly. The local preparatory programs, colleges or orchestras in your area are a good place to begin your search for a private teacher.

Both private teachers and school music programs usually encourage young musicians to practice outside of school. Making time for this extra practice can be challenging, given all of the other extracurricular activities that most families are already managing. But according to Jenine Brown, assistant professor of music at the Peabody Institute of The Johns Hopkins University, it doesn't have to be. She is also a mother of two school-aged musicians and understands that the struggle to encourage practicing is real.

"I am not ashamed to say little

candies go a long way! Bribery doesn't hurt anybody. Honestly that is the number one go-to that works," she says with a laugh. "I don't think a 7-year-old can necessarily see the endgame 20

years from now. My daughter loves playing and is proud of her progress, but day-to-day practice is hard. You should also keep in mind the attention span of a younger child: Just 10 minutes per day may be enough for a beginning musician."

The Withers family also unashamedly embraces bribery to encourage young Elliott's progress. Together, they agree on a daily practice set list. When she completes the set, they mark her practice chart. When she completely fills in her practice chart, she gets a prize.

"It's amazing!" Cheri Withers says. "A \$5 stuffed animal bought us a whole month's worth of practicing!"

And, apparently, it's paying off.

"Most of her lessons this last year were virtual (due to COVID-19), but her progress has been remarkable," says Cheri. "She's having fun, and we're so proud of how much she's already learned." ■



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Back-to-School Blues?

How to Navigate Family Feelings About Returning to School



"It's important to remember that even in the best of times, it's normal for children to express feelings of sadness, isolation or stress."

Whether it's your child's first day of kindergarten or the start of middle school, back-to-school season can bring a range of feelings – from worry to excitement – for the entire family. This year may be more emotional as many families spent the better part of the past two school years at home due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It's important to remember that even in the best of times, it's normal for children to express feelings of sadness, isolation or stress," says Tyreca Elliott, from KinderCare Learning Centers' inclusion services team. "Learning how to address those feelings helps us build self-confidence, resilience and independence. What's important is the way adults respond to children's stress. Offering comfort, reassurance and assisting with problem solving will help children learn and grow from stress in a positive way."

As an added bonus, Elliott says many of the most effective ways to help children learn to

navigate their feelings work just as well with adults. Consider these three tips to help your children (and yourself) manage emotions during the transition back to school.

Plan ahead

The fear of the unknown can be stressful. Children who aren't able to clearly articulate their feelings likely won't be able to make the connection between new, uncertain situations – like going to school and being around other people – and their feelings. Instead they may become overwhelmed by emotions, which might look like more meltdowns, clinginess or a variety of other behaviors. Talk with your children about how they feel about going back to school ahead of the first day of class. Ask questions to help them determine why they feel particular feelings when they think about school then work together to solve potential issues. That could mean finding a way to meet your children's teachers ahead of time, whether virtually or in-person, or practicing introducing themselves to classmates.

Build a consistent routine

Routines can give children (and adults) a sense of security and structure, which in turn make it easier to cope with big emotions like stress and anxiety. Try to stay consistent, and if you need to make adjustments, talk them through with your children. Be sure to mention key milestones instead of times, particularly if they can't tell time yet. Make sure your children have opportunities to ask questions about any changes to routines. They may need reassurance before they're ready to face something new.

Create special family moments

As important as routine is, it's just as important to prioritize quality time together. That could mean a vacation or something as simple as Saturday bike rides or Sunday morning pancakes. Plan a family outing or special time together to celebrate completing the first week of school. Family rituals and celebrations can give children and adults something to look forward to. Quality time together also helps families build resiliency. —

FAMILY FEATURES ■

After the Bell

BY ELEANOR LINA FELT





THE IMPORTANCE OF AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS AND KEEPING THEM STRESS-FREE

Even though your kids would probably dispute the numbers, 80% of a young person's life is spent outside of school. The summer accounts for some of that time, but much of it occurs in the hours after school is done for the day.

How kids spend that time matters. Some parents choose to enroll their children in structured programs, which can include anything from sports to art classes to music. But exactly how important are after-school programs? What should you look for when choosing the right ones for your kids, and what are some ways to manage the inevitable stresses of scheduling?





Ellie Mitchell, the executive director of the Maryland Out of School Time Network, says that after-school programs allow kids to interact with each other more casually than they are able to in school. “There is more space and time in after-school for kids to be kids together,” Mitchell says. “Free play, imagination and creativity goes on in those spaces that structured time in the school day doesn’t often allow for.”

Due to the relative freedom of after-school programs, they are often environments where kids discover their passions.

“People frequently say in their reflections on their own after-school experience that that is where they found the thing they fell in love with,” Mitchell says. “Often they are introduced to the passion in an informal learning setting rather than the formal, because you have that freedom to explore it in a way that has less pressure attached to it.”

To find out what they like, kids should be introduced to a variety of activities. In the early years, Mitchell recommends parents choose a variety of programs for their children, but eventually young people can

pursue what they’re interested in.

Dr. Kaushal Amatya, pediatric psychologist for the divisions of nephrology and cardiology at Children’s National Hospital and professor of pediatrics and psychiatry at the George Washington University School of Medicine, says it is important to encourage kids to focus on what they’re good at. But that shouldn’t be the only factor.

“Parents should try to understand what they see as some skills that the children are developing,” Amatya says, “and try to harness those by getting the children more involved



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"There is more space and time in after-school for kids to be kids together."

ELLIE MITCHELL



in the things that they seem to be naturally gravitating toward." However, he adds, "after-school activities don't always have to be something that they're good at, or something that they need to excel in — in fact, it shouldn't always be like that."

Jessica Boro, a parent of three who lives in Potomac, Maryland, believes it's important for her kids try out a variety of activities, even those that they don't show a natural flair for right off the bat. But she also recognizes the challenges this can bring. Her 7-year-old daughter, for example, is sometimes discouraged when her soccer team loses, and gets turned off by the competitive aspects of sports.

"There is some stress that comes with it," Boro says.

In order to relieve some of this stress, Amatya recommends paying close attention to how you schedule these activities. While he recognizes that it can be difficult to coordinate schedules for kids enrolled in after-school programs most afternoons because their parents work or have other commitments, ideally competitive activities should be limited to once or twice a week.

"If it's something that the children are expected to excel in or compete in," he says, "daily or even a few times a week might be a little too much, especially for elementary school kids."

To preserve their "family sanity," Boro and her husband decided to have each of their

children participate in one activity per season. With three kids, this helps them balance everyone's schedules and still have quality time to spend together as a family.

But how you schedule the kids' after-school activities isn't just important for them: Parents also need to minimize their own commitments and stress for the sake of the whole family, according to Dr. Consuelo Cagande, division chief of the Community Care and Wellness Program at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

"I strongly feel that the best way children can manage many demands is learning from their parents or adults," she says. "Parents need to be self-aware of their own over-commitment and model good self-care. It's OK to not do everything just because another child is doing it."

While there can be stresses associated with her kids' after-school activities, ultimately Boro is grateful for the unique social opportunities they grant. For one, being on the soccer team has allowed her daughter to make friends with kids who aren't in her class at school and who she wouldn't have met otherwise.

"I like the community aspect of it for them," Boro says. "That's the good part of any of the after-school programs: They are a way for kids to do an activity that's structured, but also be able to be kids." ■

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MONTESSORI SCHOOL OF CEDAR LANE

preschoolmontessori.com
info@cedarlanemontessori.com
703-560-4379

3035 Cedar Lane, Fairfax, Va.

Open House: Call to schedule a tour.

Montessori School of Cedar Lane has been providing over 40 years of Montessori tradition to Northern Virginia. We offer a complete educational and social environment and utilize the discoveries and methods of Dr. Montessori to help the child develop more fully the potential within him.

MONTESSORI SCHOOL OF MCLEAN

mcleanmontessori.org
703-790-1049
1711 Kirby Road, McLean, Va.

Ages: 2-12

Open House: Call to schedule a tour.

Preschool and elementary classes. Spanish, French, science, drama, music, P.E., computer, art, summer school, transportation available.

NYSMITH SCHOOL FOR THE GIFTED

nysmith.com
ebalberde@nysmith.com
703-713-3332

13625 EDS Drive, Herndon, Va.

Ages Served: 3 yrs.-8th Grade

Hours: 7 a.m.-6:30 p.m.

Open House: Call to schedule a tour.

The award winning Nysmith School for the Gifted is committed to making school fun. We nurture your student's love of learning and help your child learn to their potential. Our 1:9 ratio allows us to differentiate the academic program up to 4 grade levels above grade.

ONENESS-FAMILY HIGH SCHOOL

Andrew Kutt
9411 Connecticut Avenue, Kensington, Md
240-426-2614
onenessfamily.org/

admissions@onenessfamily.org

9:00 AM - 5:30 PM Serving students from 2 years through grade 12
Virtual Tours for Lower School on Tuesdays and Fridays at 9:30 AM, and for High School on Wednesdays at 11:00 AM

For 30 years, Oneness-Family School's award winning Montessori program has served families of students 2 years thru grade 12. OFS features highly trained, supportive teachers and a diverse, engaged parent community. We create a collaborative learning environment where everyone feels successful. We foster students who are prepared to lead and succeed in a changing, challenging world by balancing college prep academics with a focus on well-being and shared values such as empathy, inclusion and equity. This September 2021, Oneness-Family School will launch its new high school Results Leadership and Global Studies program.

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pincrestschool.org
admissions@pincrestschool.org
703-354-3446
Ages: 3-12

7209 Quiet Cove, Alexandria, Va.

Hours: 7:30 a.m.-6 p.m.

Please email for more information!

Pinecrest School is a fully accredited progressive school offering small class sizes, hands on curriculum, individualized approach, and a focus on a balance of academics and social and emotional well being. Offers preschool-6th, summer camp and before/after care.

SPRING BILINGUAL MONTESSORI ACADEMY

spring-bilingual.org
301-962-7262
3514 Pliers Mill Road, Kensington, Md.
Ages: 2-6; Hours: 7:30 a.m.-6:30 p.m.
Open House: Call to schedule a tour.
Montessori preschool with Foreign Language programs.

WESTMINSTER SCHOOL

westminsterschool.com
admissions@westminsterschool.com
703-256-3620
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3819 Gallows Road, Annandale, Va.
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2021

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thecenterforballetarts.com

ctrballetarts@aol.com

703-273-5344

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Fairfax, Va.

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www.citydance.net

inquiry@citydance.net

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ismw.org; info@ismw.org

301-365-5888

11325 Seven Locks Road

Potomac, MD 20854, #255

4701 Sangamore Road, #LL-03

Bethesda, Md.

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Bethesda, Maryland 20814

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harmoniaschool.org

harmonia@harmoniaschool.org

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ismw.org; info@ismw.org
301-365-5888

11325 Seven Locks Road #255
Potomac, MD 20854
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Bethesda, Md.
Hours: Monday-Friday 10 a.m.-8 p.m.
Saturday 10 a.m.-9 p.m.

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Nicole Goodman
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Washington, DC 20008

(202) 387-2700
aidanschool.org
admissions@aidanschool.org
8:00 AM-4:00 PM
After School & Enrichment Activities
Aidan Montessori School is a co-ed, independent private school for children ages 18 months through grade 6 located in Woodley Park, DC. Founded in 1961, Aidan prepares children to learn confidently, think independently, and succeed wherever they go.

BASIS INDEPENDENT MCLEAN
mclean.basisindependent.com
McLean_admissions@
basisindependent.com
703-854-1253
8000 Jones Branch Dr.
McLean, VA
Grades: Preschool (age 2) - Grade 12 •
Year Founded: 2016 • Coed • Enrollment:
470 • Student-Teacher Ratio 8:1 •
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Mandarin, Latin, Spanish, and French
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brooksfIELDSCHOOL.org
sarah@brooksfIELDSCHOOL.org
703-356-5437
1830 Kirby Road, McLean, Va.
Ages Served: 3-10
Open House: Call to schedule a tour.
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gherbst@congressionschool.org
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established in 1990
703-938-7755 • 2709 Hunter Mill Road
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glenbrookschool.org
membership@glenbrookschool.org

301-365-3190; 10010 Fernwood Road
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preschoolmontessori.com
info@hollybrookmontessori.com

703 573-7800

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Children learn in an intimate and unpretentious atmosphere, where they respect themselves and others and care for the environment around them. We offer a complete educational and social environment and utilize the discoveries and methods of Dr. Montessori to help the child develop more fully the potential within him. The school provides a program specially suited to the needs of the child and offers individual attention to his whole development.

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preschoolmontessori.com
info@huntermillmontessori.com

703-938-7755

2709 Hunter Mill Road, Oakton, VA 22124

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703-560-4379

3035 Cedar Lane
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mcleanmontessori.org

703-790-1049

1711 Kirby Road, McLean, Va.

Ages: 2-12

Open House: Call to schedule a tour.

Preschool and elementary classes. Spanish, French, science, drama, music, P.E., computer, art, summer school, transportation available.

NYSMITH SCHOOL FOR THE GIFTED

nysmith.com; ebalberde@nysmith.com
703-713-3332

13625 EDS Drive, Herndon, Va.

Ages Served: 3 yrs.-8th Grade

Hours: 7 a.m.-6:30 p.m.

Open House: Call to schedule a tour.

The award winning Nysmith School for the Gifted is committed to making school fun. We nurture your student's love of learning and help your child learn to their potential. Our 1:9 ratio allows us to differentiate the academic program up to 4 grade levels above grade.

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Andrew Kutt
9411 Connecticut Avenue
Kensington, MD 20895

240-426-2614

onenessfamily.org/

admissions@onenessfamily.org

9:00 AM - 5:30 PM Serving students from 2 years through grade 12

Virtual Tours for Lower School on Tuesdays and Fridays at 9:30 AM, and for High School on Wednesdays at 11:00 AM

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pinecrestschool.org
admissions@pinecrestschool.org
 703-354-3446
 Ages: 3-12
 7209 Quiet Cove
 Alexandria, Va.
 Hours: 7:30 a.m.-6 p.m.
 Please email for more information!

Pinecrest School is a fully accredited progressive school offering small class sizes, hands on curriculum, individualized approach, and a focus on a balance of academics and social and emotional well being. Offers preschool-6th, summer camp and before/after care.

RESTON MONTESSORI SCHOOL

restonmontessori.com
office@restonmontessori.com
 703-481-2922
 1928 Isaac Newton Sq. West, Reston, Va.
 Hours: 7 a.m.-6:30 p.m.

Open House: Call to schedule a tour.

Established in 1986, Reston Montessori School is a private, coeducational school for children from 3 months through 6th grade. RMS provides academic school day, enrichment programs and before/ after school activities.

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spring-bilingual.org
 301-962-7262
 3514 Pylers Mill Road
 Kensington, Md.
 Ages: 2-6; Hours: 7:30 a.m.-6:30 p.m.
 Montessori preschool with Foreign Language programs.

SPRINGWELL SCHOOL

springwell.school
info@springwell.school
 (301) 578-6885
 9525 Colesville Road, Silver Spring, MD 20901
 Grades: K-4

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A close-up profile of a brown and white dog, likely a Shetland Sheepdog, looking out a window. The dog's head is in the foreground, and its gaze is directed towards the right. The background shows a window with vertical blinds, through which some greenery is visible. The lighting is soft and natural, coming from the window.

Sit, Stay ... See You Soon!

As your family returns to work and school, here's how to help your pets handle the transition.

BY JENNIFER MARINO WALTERS

Whenver Adam Lopuch would leave his house — to pick up food, to drive the baby to daycare or even just to mow the lawn — his Labrador retriever, Bella, would go nuts. She'd bark like crazy. She'd jump on the windowsill, sometimes scratching off the paint. She'd pant.

After Lopuch and his wife, Abbie, got some tips from a trainer, Bella's separation anxiety eased a bit. Her twice-weekly trips to doggie day care have helped as well. But when Lopuch returns to the office in September following the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions, he's worried about how Bella will react to his being gone on the days she's not at day care.

"I've had a lot of anxiety about it," Lopuch admits.

And he's not alone. According to the American Pet Products Association, more than 11 million U.S. households got a new pet during the pandemic. A large number of those pets were dogs. And those pandemic pups have spent a lot of time

with their humans, making them happier and more closely bonded with their owners.

But all of that attention has come with a downside. “Many of these dogs have never learned independence,” says Dr. Amy Learn, an animal behaviorist with AB Wellness Center in Richmond, Virginia. “They were never left home, so they may have become hyper attached to the humans in the household.”

Now, as pandemic restrictions ease and Americans return to work and school, those dogs will suddenly be home alone for the first time. And experts fear that sudden change could cause — or worsen — separation anxiety.

Separation anxiety in pets isn’t just sadness when their owner is away. It’s extreme distress and panic that could lead to all sorts of health issues and problematic behaviors. Here are some of its signs:

- Excessive howling or barking
- Peeing or pooping in the house
- Chewing up furniture, shoes and other items
- Scratching windows and doors
- Pacing
- Salivating
- Attempting to escape, sometimes to the point where they harm themselves

These behaviors often begin when a dog sees its owner getting ready to leave, such as when they’re putting on their shoes or picking up their wallet. The behaviors often continue for some time after the owner leaves, until the dog tires itself out or the owner returns.

How to Prevent and Ease Separation Anxiety in Dogs

Luckily, there are things you can do to help prepare your pup for daily separations and to ease their anxiety while you’re away.

- Give your dog lots of exercise and mental stimulation. Physically and mentally challenging your pup while you’re at home will increase her endorphins, making her more relaxed and less stressed when you leave.
- Begin your back-to-work routine ahead of time. Dogs thrive on routines, which give them a sense of stability and thereby reduce their anxiety. The key is to start your workday routine before you head back to the office. Wake up at the proper time, get dressed, have breakfast, etc. You could even leave the house to exercise or run an errand at the time you’d usually leave for work. Do your best to feed, walk and play with your pup around the same times you will when you’re back in the office.

- Start with shorter absences and work your way up. Begin building your dog’s independence by spending increasing lengths of time in a different room from your pet while you’re at home. Then you can start to leave the house for longer and longer time periods, starting with five minutes and gradually increasing the time.
- Keep departures and returns drama-free. If you make a big deal about leaving, it will only make your pet nervous. So keep your departures short and simple — just smile and say, “I’ll be back!” The same goes for your returns.
- Be careful with “departure cues.” Your dog may begin to feel anxious when he sees certain signs that you’re preparing to leave. So, try to do these things at times when you’re not leaving the house. If your dog starts to whine when you pick up your keys, for example, pick them up and put them down throughout the day. If he begins to pace when you put on your coat, wear it around the house for short time periods.
- Associate separations with positive things. Before you leave the house, hide little treats for your dog to find. You could also leave out a bone or some fun toys. Lopuch began to leave Bella in her crate with a peanut butter-filled Kong whenever he’d leave the house. Now she knows that when Dad leaves, it’s time for her favorite treat.
- Make your absences as comfortable as possible. Be sure your dog has easy access to her bed, her blanket, her favorite stuffed animal and her food and water. Leave the house at a comfortable temperature, and consider keeping a TV or radio on. You could also set up a camera system that will allow you to check on and talk to your pup remotely.
- Consider hiring a dog walker. Hiring someone to walk and/or play with your dog once or twice a day will mean he’s alone for shorter time periods, which could ease his anxiety a great deal.

If your dog’s separation anxiety persists or gets worse even after you’ve tried all of those steps, it’s time to visit your veterinarian to make sure there’s nothing else going on. They may recommend anti-anxiety medication or natural supplements, such as St. John’s Wort and chamomile. You could also consult a veterinary behaviorist or professional trainer.

With a lot of love, patience and consistency, you can help your dog become calmer, happier and more independent. ■

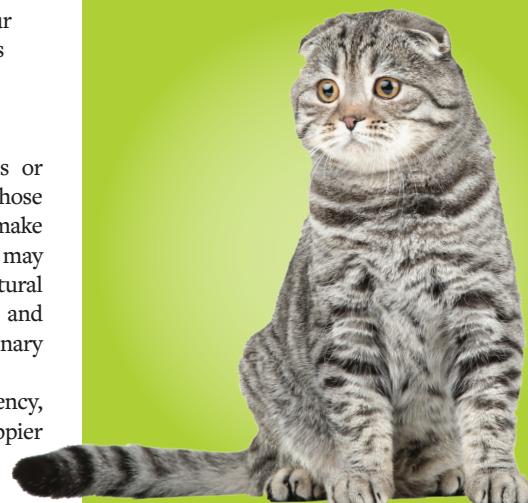
DON'T FORGET ABOUT CATS!

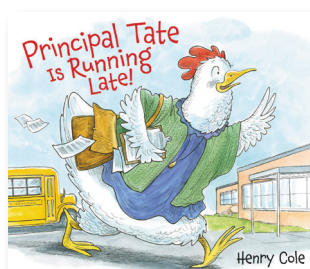
Cats may have a reputation for being independent and aloof, but the truth is that they can experience separation anxiety as well. In fact, a 2019 Oregon State University study found that cats have similar attachment styles to their humans as dogs and children do. So, make sure to check for signs of separation anxiety in your felines when you head back to the office. Here’s what to watch out for:

- Going to the bathroom outside of the litter box, especially on your bed
- Excessive meowing, crying, yowling or other vocalizations
- Destroying things
- Excessive grooming
- Wanting constant contact with you when you’re at home

To prevent and ease separation anxiety in your cat, you can follow the same steps as you would for dogs. You could also provide a perch or patio that will allow your cat to look out the window, and a small shelter or nook for your kitty to hang out in. And you might consider adopting another cat so the pair can keep each other company.

As with dogs, see your veterinarian if your cat’s separation anxiety seems excessive. They may recommend a supplement, medication or pheromones to help with the anxiety, or connect you with an animal behaviorist if needed. ■

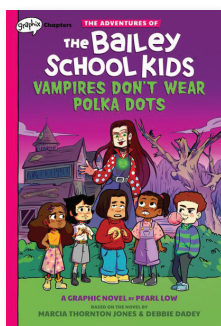
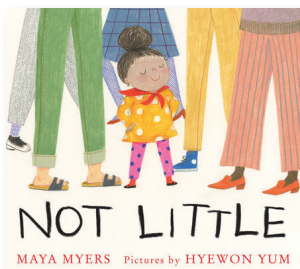




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BY JENNIFER ROTHSCHILD,
COLLECTION ENGAGEMENT LIBRARIAN, ARLINGTON PUBLIC LIBRARY



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PRINCIPAL TATE IS RUNNING LATE

Written by Henry Cole

Principal Tate keeps Hardy Elementary School running smoothly with friendly cheer until the day car trouble means she's not there when the day starts. Without their beloved principal, no one knows what to do about all the little things that happen—everything from a sick student to school board members stopping by. Luckily, everyone starts working together so that by the time Principal Tate arrives, the pandemonium has been averted and the school is running smoothly.

HENRY AT HOME

Written by Megan Maynor, illustrated by Alea Marley

Henry and his sister Liza do everything together, from fun activities like visiting their favorite Twisty Tree to scary things like getting a shot. Liza is going to start kindergarten, but Henry isn't old enough to go. Lonely and angry at being left behind, Henry learns to have fun without Liza until the end of the day when the two can share everything that happened on their separate adventures.

NOT LITTLE

Written by Maya Myers, illustrated by Hyewon Yum

Dot is very small, but she'll tell you that she is not little. She is constantly proving her capabilities, especially when a new boy comes to school who's even shorter than she is! When a bully turns his taunts to the new student, Dot proves that she's not little by standing up for her new classmate despite her fear.

EARLY READERS

VAMPIRES DON'T WEAR POLKA DOTS

Written by Marcia Thornton Jones and Debbie Dadey, illustrated by Pearl Low

The classic Bailey School Kids Adventures are getting a fresh new life as a graphic novel series. The third graders at Bailey Elementary School are notoriously hard to teach, and they're notorious for driving all of their other teachers to quit. But their latest teacher may be more than she seems. Mrs. Jeepers just moved from Transylvania and lives in the spookiest house in town. She couldn't actually be a vampire, could she?

OLIVE OH GETS CREATIVE

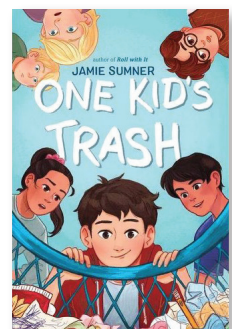
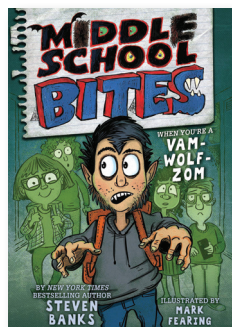
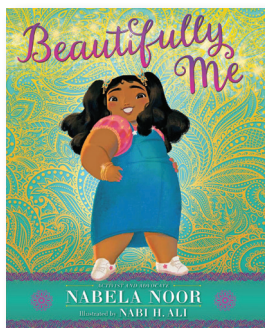
Written by Tina Kim, illustrated by Tiff Bartel

Olive is excited about her school's art contest. She may only be in the third grade, but she already knows she'll be a famous artist when she grows up, and creativity is what she does best. But when all of her classmates start working on their projects, Olive can't think about what to do. As she sees everyone else's work, she starts to question her creativity and artistic talent until she finally finds the perfect idea.

BEAUTIFULLY ME

Written by Nabela Noor, illustrated by Nabi H. Ali

Zuri is excited for her first day at school and has picked out a special outfit for the big day and everything. She starts the day feeling fantastic, but at breakfast, her parents and sister vocalize their body insecurities. At school, she overhears mean comments about other students' bodies and starts to feel bad about her own appearance. At dinner that night, she declares she's going on a diet, causing her family to engage in frank self-reflection and a conversation about what true beauty really is.



MIDDLE-GRADE READERS

MIDDLE SCHOOL BITES

Written by Steven Banks, illustrated by Mark Fearing

Looking at the start of middle school, Tom has big plans to fly under the radar and have a quiet year. His plans are dashed on the last day of summer vacation when he's bitten by a rat, a mangy dog and a creepy Halloween decoration. He finds himself turned into a vampire, werewolf and zombie. In addition to navigating classes, bullies and locker mates, he also has to deal with turning into a wolf once a month and frequent cravings for blood and brains!

JUST BE COOL, JENNA SAKAI

Written by Debbi Michiko Florence

Dealing with the fallout of her parents' nasty divorce and her own breakup, Jenna decides to refocus on school and her goals, especially her love of investigative journalism. But her first assignment for newspaper club is a personal essay, which will mean poking some emotional bruises she'd rather pretend don't exist. Things get even more complicated when her recent ex is her main competition for a journalism scholarship.

ONE KID'S TRASH

Written by Jamie Sumner

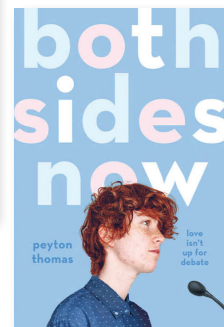
Hugo has always been teased for being small, but his outcast status means he's gotten very good at observing everything around him. He's particularly adept at Garbology—the art of learning all about someone by analyzing their trash. When his father moves them across the country for a new job, Hugo's garbage-analyzing skills gain him popularity for the first time, but popularity can be fickle, especially when Hugo lets his fame go to his head.

TEENS

THE TAKING OF JAKE LIVINGSTON

Written by Ryan Douglass

The teachers at Jake's high school frequently ignore the small and large ways he's bullied for being one of the only Black students at his school. In addition to the horror that is school, Jake's also a medium. He sees dead people reliving and helps them move on. One recent spirit is particularly vengeful and wants to use Jake to finish enacting the murder spree he started before he died. Jake is now fighting a battle for survival on multiple planes in this horror thriller.



HANI AND ISHU'S GUIDE TO FAKE DATING

Written by Adiba Jaigirdar

When Hani's friends tell her she can't really be bisexual because she's only dated guys, she blurts out that she's dating the most unlikely girl in school—Ishu. They're total opposites: Hani is popular, but Ishu is devoted to her studies. Hani is Muslim and Ishu is an atheist Hindu. Hani is out, and Ishu is still in the closet. Hani is Bangladeshi-Irish, and Ishu is Indian-Irish. But Ishu could use Hani's popularity in her bid to become head girl, so Ishu agrees to the ruse. But fake dating wasn't nearly as hard as staying together when feelings develop between the two of them.

BOTH SIDES NOW

Written by Peyton Thomas

Finch loves debate and is hoping to get a debate scholarship to attend college, but he struggles with the topic for Nationals. Everyone at the competition will be debating transgender bathroom access, but for Finch, it isn't an academic exercise. He is trans and isn't sure he can handle hearing what feels like a debate on his right to exist in public. Adding to his complications, he has a crush on his debate partner who already has a boyfriend. ■



'Zeke's New Glasses'

BY DANA COHEN



When I found out my spirited 4-year-old son Zeke needed glasses at a routine doctor's appointment, I immediately started my campaign to hype him up about how cool glasses are and how much fun it will be to pick out frames. He was not convinced. We borrowed every children's book from the library we could about glasses. The problem was they all centered around the theme of not being able to see and how glasses magically solved the problem. "I can see," he'd repeatedly tell my husband and me. The books didn't resonate with him at all.

I realized that at 4, the way he sees is all he's ever known. Of course he thought he could see! Honestly, so did I. This was a kid who pointed out all the different types of vehicles as we drove along the highway, easily recognized objects and never appeared to squint or strain. In his preschool program, learning is play. He wasn't expected to read a chalkboard from a distance, accomplish highly precise tasks or struggle to complete schoolwork. Why would he be eager to wear glasses to fix a "problem" he didn't think he

had? I had to change my strategy and try to build a little acceptance so that he wouldn't immediately snub the glasses when they arrived, which I fully expected him to do.

One night before bed, he told me he felt sad about needing glasses because he was worried "people won't know it's Zeke when I wear them." I reminded him of all the people we know who wear glasses. We recognize them easily, and it's no big deal—just an extra accessory. Even his dad wears glasses!

I decided to write a book for him, "Zeke's New Glasses," featuring photos of our family, friends and neighbors wearing their glasses. I thought seeing so many familiar faces and having some silly rhymes would get him laughing and make the topic of glasses less daunting for him. I created the book online and had it printed and mailed to us. It included 35 family members, friends and characters wearing their glasses.

*"Zeke has new glasses.
Daddy wears them too.
Amanda and Mark have glasses,
and they're just a few."*

I found photos online of some things he likes and included them, too.

"Glasses help your eyes so you can see the world clearly."

Firefighters, construction workers and truck drivers wear them and get a checkup yearly."

I ended the book with some words I was hoping would quell the biggest worry he expressed—that no one would know it was him behind his new frames.

"Wearing glasses is no big deal. We promise. It's true."

Your glasses just make you the best version of YOU.

You're still the same Zeke, and everyone can agree.

Zeke is kind, silly and smart, and now he can see."

When Zeke's glasses arrived, he was more interested in them than I expected. He tried them on and kept them on for a bit. Every day afterward he wore them for longer chunks of time. Progress! About a week in, I heard him get up in the morning. I peeked on my phone at the camera we have in his room. I saw him get out of bed, pick up his glasses, put them on himself and grab the book before settling into his big chair. He looked at the cover and "read" aloud "Zeke's New Glasses" and began to flip through the pages. We're now a few months in, over that initial trepidation, and he recognizes the glasses help him. He happily wears them every day.

As parents, we always want to protect our kids from hard things, but children learn resilience by facing adversity and working past it. To a 4-year-old, glasses feel big! I've actually enjoyed navigating this parenting test. It taught both me and my son the value of acknowledging an unavoidable life challenge—and there will be many, as we all know—and finding a way to creatively tackle it together. ■

Dana Cohen is a communications professional who lives in Towson with her husband, Michael, and their two kids, Zeke and Thea.

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