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JULY 2021



Feeling adventurous? These nearby theme parks offer thrills for the whole family. **Page 12**



Screen-free entertainment that'll capture their imagination
Page 37

FEATURES

16 STOPPING THE SUMMER SLIDE

School's out for summer, but keeping kids engaged in learning is still in

19 BEST FOR FAMILIES WINNERS

The people, places and activities you voted as the best in the D.C. area

30 SPOTTING A SPEECH DISORDER IN CHILDREN

How to tell whether your child has a language or speech disorder requiring an intervention

DEPARTMENTS

6 CALENDAR

8 FAMILY FUN

Accessible playgrounds across the DMV

10 EDITOR'S PICKS

36 BOOK MARKED

Supportive reads for special needs parents

38 MY TURN

Becoming a mother under unexpectedly challenging circumstances

DIRECTORIES

34 SPECIALIZED LEARNING

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: info@washingtonfamily.com.

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

**WE WANT
YOUR
FEEDBACK**

As area schools resume on site in the fall,
where will that leave your child in the classroom?

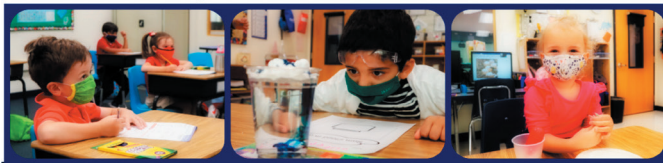
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Special Series



Calendar of
Events



Family Matters
Family Fun



Table
of Contents
Interior
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It Takes a Village

Most parents are familiar with the African proverb “It takes a village to raise a child.” But until the pandemic hit, many of us didn’t realize the extent to which that is true. When schools closed and out-of-state grandparents were unable to visit, we had to quickly adapt to parenting in isolation — and it was hard. It was also unprecedented. As Stephanie Coontz, author of “The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap,” told the New York Times, it’s “unheard of except in total emergencies” for families to be completely responsible for their children.

I also believe that it takes a village to support a parent, and when the world shut down, the mental health of parents suffered dramatically. Last summer, the University of Oregon’s RAPID-EC survey found that 63% of moms and dads felt they had lost emotional support since the start of the pandemic. Social distancing and remote work made it harder for parents to rely on friends and co-workers; however, support from neighbors increased slightly.

In her personal essay, “It Takes a Village,” local mom Katie Schubert explains how her neighbors — the

military community in Okinawa, Japan — came to the rescue when she gave birth prematurely to her first child during the pandemic. The support Katie and her husband received, she said, sustained them through the challenging weeks that followed.

This summer I’m excited to reconnect with my family’s village and have been brainstorming activities we can do together. Putting together this issue, which includes stories about fully accessible playgrounds in the D.C. area and family theme parks within driving distance, has been helpful as I plan the month ahead. I hope you find our recommendations useful as well.

Speaking of recommendations, our July issue also features the results of our annual Best for Families survey. You’ll find the winners and runners up in more than 100 categories, ranging from healthcare to party planning.

Wishing you a happy 4th of July and a safe, memorable summer. ■

PJ Feinstein



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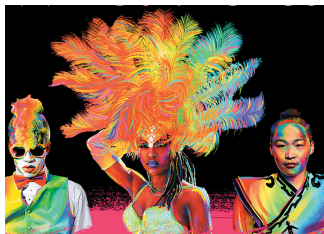
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{TOP 10} Family Activities in July Around the DMV

BY PJ FEINSTEIN

1



ONGOING

UNIVERSOUL CIRCUS

Fans of Cirque du Soleil will enjoy the highly interactive UniverSoul Circus, running throughout July at National Harbor. Combining circus arts, theater and music, this family-friendly event showcases the talents of international performers in an inclusive, festive atmosphere. ticketmaster.com



3

JULY 1, 15 & 29

MOONLIGHT MOVIES AT THE MANSION

The City of Gaithersburg will be screening three fun flicks this month on the front lawn of the historic Kentlands Mansion: "Independence Day," "The Sandlot" and "Rio." Don't forget to pack a picnic blanket and popcorn. gaithersburgmd.gov

4

JULY 7, 14, 21 & 28

STORIES, SONGS & SPRINKLERS

Bring your little one to the Town Green in Vienna every Wednesday for some water play fun. Story time and sing-alongs round out each event. viennava.gov



5

JULY 12 & 26

ROCK THE HILL KIDS CONCERTS

Grab a spot near the fountain at Fair Hill Shops in Olney for some mid-morning music just for kids. The free concerts continue in the evening with bands that'll appeal to the entire family. fairhillshops.com

2

ONGOING

BETHESDA BIG TRAIN BASEBALL

After a canceled season last summer, the defending Cal Ripken Collegiate Baseball League champions are back at Shirley Povich Field in Bethesda to play wooden bat baseball. Catch a home game for \$10 a ticket. bigtrain.org



1 COURTESY UNIVEROUL CIRCUS; 2 LAWRENCESAWYER / E+; 3 BET_NOIRE / ISTOCK / GETTY IMAGES PLUS; 4 BOBBIO / E+; 5 INSIDE CREATIVE HOUSE / ISTOCK / GETTY IMAGES PLUS

JULY 17

MORNING AT THE MUSEUM (VIRTUAL)

Kids, teens and young adults with disabilities will meet on Zoom to create a playground using shapes and lines inspired by designer Isamu Noguchi. For more info or to register, email access@si.edu.



7

JULY 17

UNICYCLE LADY

Kids will delight at the physical comedy and artistry of the Unicycle Lady, who can juggle and dance atop a 6-ft. unicycle, at this free performance at Reston Town Square Park. restoncommunitycenter.com



JULY 24

ARTS FAMILY DAY

Mount Vernon's on-site activities and take-home craft kits explore the ways art was used to communicate back in George Washington's day. A sensory-friendly experience for individuals who need a quieter visit is available in the morning. mountvernon.org

8



JULY 21

"THE PRESIDENT'S OWN" UNITED STATES MARINE BAND

Their primary purpose is to perform for the president, but you and your family can enjoy the musical stylings of the Marine Big Band — trumpets, trombones, saxophones and more — at this free public concert in Yards Park. capitolriverfront.org



JULY 27

"ALL THE LADIES"

Grammy Award-winner Joanie Leeds entertains with peppy kid-friendly tunes that celebrate influential women in history, such as Harriet Tubman, Malala Yousafzai and RBG. wolftrap.org

accessible
playgrounds
for kids of
all abilities

Inclusive
Fun in the

DMV

BY JAMIE DAVIS SMITH

Every child deserves a place to play, and the D.C. area is home to a number of playgrounds specially designed for children with physical, developmental or sensory disabilities. Accessible playgrounds provide a way for kids with disabilities to play alongside their typically developing peers, although you don't need to have a disability to enjoy them. In fact, many young children prefer accessible playgrounds because they have so many unique features. Here are six of the best playgrounds for inclusive fun across the DMV.

CLEMYJONTRI PARK

6317 Georgetown Pike
McLean, VA 22101

Fairfax's Clemyjontri Park is the biggest — and arguably the best — playground in the D.C. area for kids of all abilities. Every part of this colorful playground was



designed with inclusion in mind, from Virginia's first Liberty Swing that accommodates wheelchairs to play structures that have ramps instead of stairs. The two-acre park even includes an accessible carousel and a trackless train. Enjoy a snack or lunch in the picnic pavilion, or reserve it for a special occasion.

CHESSIE'S BIG BACKYARD

6601 Telegraph Road
Alexandria, VA 22310

Located in the Lee District Family Recreation Area, Chessie's is a nature-themed accessible playground with a padded rubber floor surface and wheelchair-friendly ramps. There's also a 2,160-foot flat trail with sensory features designed for kids of all abilities and an accessible tree house to explore the treetop canopy. Little kids can climb on a pint-size playground nearby, and don't forget to take a spin on the Chesapeake Bay-themed carousel, set flush to the ground for easy access.



ROSEDALE PLAYGROUND

1701 Gales St., NE
Washington, DC 20002

Many of D.C.'s playgrounds have great themes, such as trains and math, and its only fully inclusive playground is no exception. Rosedale's National Mall theme includes mini versions of the White House, the Lincoln Memorial, the Natural History Museum and other landmarks. Among the specialized equipment are double-wide ramps, a high-backed spinner, a wheelchair-accessible glider and lots of sensory elements.



OUR SPECIAL HARBOR

6601 Telegraph Road
Alexandria, VA 22310

Near Chessie's Big Backyard in the Lee District Family Recreation Area is Our Special Harbor, the area's only fully accessible spray park. Kids of all abilities can cool down while playing with giant water-dumping bucks and water cannons, among other Chesapeake Bay-themed activities. Younger children and those who don't like to get soaked by surprise can head to the sand-free "beach" to play with water tables and fountains that gently spray water.



HADLEY'S PARK

12600 Falls Road
Potomac, MD 20854

When it was built more than 20 years ago, Hadley's Park, named after a local girl with cerebral palsy, was the first accessible playground in Maryland and one of the first of its kind in the United States. There are three themed play areas — a pirate ship, frontier village and castle — each with ramps and different games and challenges. Brightly colored signs also include braille for visually-impaired children.



BLANDAIR PARK

5750 Oakland Mills Road
Columbia, MD 21045

Opened in May, this new "play-for-all" playground in Howard County has six unique areas enclosed with fencing. Among the specialized equipment are a wheelchair-accessible rocking boat and merry-go-round, plus non-verbal communication boards to help kids express their feelings. For little ones who may be overwhelmed by all the activity, there are quiet spaces and smaller activities near the trees on the periphery of the playground. The expansive park also includes a section of backyard games, such as bocce courts, horseshoe pits and croquet courts. ■





EDITOR'S **PICKS**

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

WowWee Pop2Play

Your child can zip down a rainbow slide, drive a race car or become a chef without leaving home. Easy to assemble and store, these pop-up play sets are made from durable cardboard that's sturdy enough to hold up to 50 pounds. \$25-\$40, ages 2+, wowwee.com



Brio Battery-Operated Steaming Train

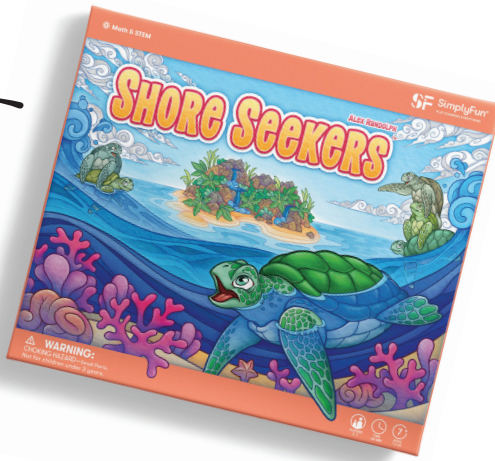
Upgrade your child's train table with an engine that looks like it's steaming as it chugs along the tracks. The safe-to-touch steam effect uses water to create a cool vapor. \$40, ages 3+, amazon.com





SimplyFun Shore Seekers

This educational board game's turtle migration theme helps to engage kids across many math concepts, from addition to early multiplication. Ideal for kids in grades 1 and 2, each game takes about 30 minutes to play and can be modified for children with special needs. \$36, ages 7+, simplyfun.com



SmartGames IQ Circuit

Multiple levels of brainteasing fun get packed in a portable travel case. Players are challenged to fit all of the double-sided black and gold pieces into a grid to create circuits. \$11, ages 8+, fatbraintoy.com



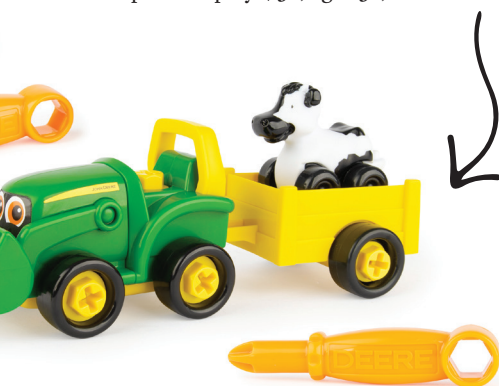
Playmobil Large City Zoo

Take an imaginative adventure to the zoo and visit giraffes, penguins and more. This 213-piece set includes all of the accessories your child needs to replicate a day of family fun in the city park. \$70, ages 4+, playmobil.us



John Deere Build-a-Buddy Value Bundle

Little hands will have a blast using the included screwdriver to take apart and put back together vehicle friends Johnny, Bonnie and Corey. The three-in-one set also comes with barn and farm animals for pretend play. \$36, ages 3+, amazon.com



A2Play Beginner Jigsaw Puzzle

This innovative 48-piece puzzle system includes a "treasure map" to help kids understand the stages and methods of puzzle building. This puzzle features four colorful scenes, including a rainforest and outer space. \$17, ages 3-5 years, getsplashez.com



HERSHEYPARK - HERSHEY, PA



TIME FOR ADVENTURE

FAMILY THEME
PARKS TO BEAT
BACK SUMMER
DOLDRUMS

BY ELEANOR LINAFELT

Summer is the season for amusement parks, and thankfully, the mid-Atlantic region has many. We found 10 that are all within a day's drive of the D.C. area, so whether your kids love Cookie Monster, construction vehicles or chocolate, there's a nearby theme park made for them. These destinations are following CDC guidelines for reopening and are ready to welcome you and your family for a safe and much-needed day (or several days) of fun.



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Road Dunn Loring, Virginia



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Oakton, Virginia



MONTESSORI SCHOOL AT GOOSE CREEK PRESERVE

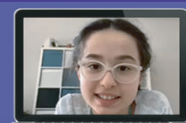
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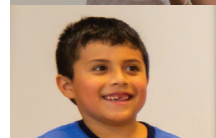
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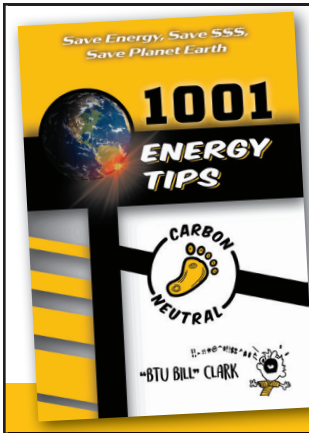


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8617 Chateau Drive
Potomac, MD 20854

SESAME PLACE

The only theme park in the U.S. dedicated entirely to the characters and stories of the award-winning "Sesame Street" television show, Sesame Place boasts rides, shows, dining experiences and, most importantly, ample opportunities to meet and take photos with Elmo and his furry friends. During the summer, check out the park's many themed water rides and special events, including a week-long Christmas in July celebration and a birthday party to mark 41 years of this unique theme park.
100 Sesame Road
Langhorne, PA 19047

DIGGERLAND USA

For kids fascinated by construction equipment and machines, there's no better place than Diggerland USA in New Jersey. At "the only construction theme and water park in America," according to the website, kids can drive, ride and operate real machines and vehicles. There are also plenty of classic amusement park rides and activities, including fruit-flinging air cannons, a zip line and a 4-story tall ropes course. Cool down at the new Main Line water park, with slides, obstacle courses, splash playgrounds and more.
100 Pinedge Drive West
Berlin, NJ 08091

FRONTIER TOWN

Just a 5-mile drive from Ocean City, Maryland, Frontier Town is a blast from the past. America's Wild West comes to life at Western Theme Park, where kids can pan for gold, ride a river boat or try their aim at the new Shooting Gallery. There are also traditional Wild West shows, themed restaurants and old fashioned shops. Looking for more to do? Visit the destination's water park and miniature golf attractions, or spend the night at one of nearly

600 campsites. Frontier Town has a variety of special summer events already on the calendar, including an animal-themed week, a space camp week and a week dedicated specifically to family-friendly activities.

8428 Stephen Decatur Highway
Berlin, MD 21811

BUSCH GARDENS

Consistently voted the world's most beautiful theme park, Busch Gardens offers both exciting rides and nature experiences. Thrill-seeking families will stay busy riding the park's seven world-class roller coasters, including the only double interlocking loop coaster. For a more low-key experience, try the spinning tea cups, antique carousel or scenic train ride. Whether or not you've already made the trip to Sesame Place, kids can find their favorite furry characters here too, as Busch Gardens also has a themed "Sesame Street" with family-friendly rides and photos opportunities. In July, the park will hold its special Summer Nights events, featuring fireworks, concerts, a laser light show and more.

1 Busch Gardens Blvd.
Williamsburg, VA 23185

WATER COUNTRY USA

If your kids still have energy after a trip to Busch Gardens — and we all know they will — be sure to check out Virginia's largest water park, just 3 miles away. Water Country USA offers plenty of extreme thrills, including the state's first water coaster and fast, twisting water slides. For younger ones, there are calmer splash areas, water playgrounds and kid-friendly slides. If you're looking for endless summer fun, you can purchase a "2-Park 2021 Fun Card" that allows you to visit both Busch Gardens and Water Country USA multiple times all season long.

176 Water Country Parkway
Williamsburg, VA 23185

DUTCH WONDERLAND

Named "Best Family Park" in 2019 by Amusement Today magazine, Dutch Wonderland has been entertaining young children for nearly 60 years. Featuring more than 35 rides and attractions, including Duke's Lagoon — a water play area with pint-sized slides, splash areas — Dutch Wonderland will keep the kids busy without leaving you feeling overwhelmed. Be sure to pay a visit to Exploration Island if you have any dinosaur lovers in your family; the Prehistoric Path is lined with 22 life-like dinosaurs, and the Dino Dig gives kids a chance to dig for fossils and artifacts in a sand pit.
2249 Lincoln Highway East
Lancaster, PA 17602

HERSHEYPARK

What's better than a theme park filled not only with plenty of rides, but also chocolate? (Short answer: nothing.) This summer marks the opening of Hersheypark's new Chocolatetown, where adrenaline junkies can ride the park's tallest, fastest and longer roller coaster, Candymonium. There's so much to do at Hersheypark, including an 11-acre water park, you might need two days to explore all of the amusement park attractions. Just be sure to bring your sweet tooth.
100 W. Hersheypark Drive
Hershey, PA 17033

KNOEBELS

America's largest free-admission amusement park, tied for first place for Favorite Traditional Park by the National Amusement Park Historical Society, is packed with activities geared toward the whole family. Pay per ride or purchase a "Ride All Day Pass" to enjoy Knoebels' two old-fashioned wooden roller coasters, bumper cars, giant flume and more. To beat the summer heat, be sure to check out the park's 900,000-gallon Crystal Pool filled with mountain stream water. And

if you don't want to make the ride there and back in one day, Knoebels offers over 800 campsites for tents and campers.

391 Knoebels Blvd.
Elysburg, PA 17824

SIX FLAGS AMERICA

Conveniently located between D.C. and Baltimore, Six Flags America has over 55 exciting rides, attractions, shows and games for guests of all ages. Among them are nine thrilling roller coasters, including Maryland's only floorless coaster, and three water rides. For younger kids there's Looney Tunes Movie Town, a children's area themed around the classic animated television show that includes a small-scale coaster, tower drop and spinning tea cups. Hurricane Harbor, Six Flags America's water park, is open for the season with a variety of slides, a not-so-lazy river and a two-pool beach.
13710 Central Ave.
Upper Marlboro, MD 20774

KINGS DOMINION

Kings Dominion is the only theme park in Virginia that offers two park experiences for the price of one: the amusement park and Soak City water park. Families can have some fun with Charlie Brown and friends at Planet Snoopy, a Peanuts-themed area featuring kid-sized coasters and other exciting rides. Over at Soak City, visit the newly redesigned Coconut Shores play area, which has a multi-level play structure, eight fun slides, a mini wave pool and other cool kid stuff. If all that splashing makes you hungry, try the new Beach Street dining experience, with multiple food trucks and live entertainment.
16000 Theme Park Way Doswell, VA 23047 ■



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STOPPING THE SUMMER SLIDE

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DISCUSS
THE REALITY
OF SUMMER
LEARNING
LOSS AND
SHARE TIPS
FOR HOW TO
PREVENT IT.**



By Jennifer Marino Walters



AT THE END of every school year, many parents start to worry about the “summer slide”—the loss of knowledge and skills said to occur during summer break. But experts disagree on just how concerned those parents need to be.

In 2017, researchers from the Brookings Institution examined several studies related to summer learning loss. They found that students’ achievement scores declined by an average of one month’s worth of school-year learning over summer break and that those declines were worse for math than for reading. Additionally, the National Summer Learning Association says the extent of summer learning loss is worse for lower-income students.

But other experts say the summer slide is not so dramatic. “When you parcel out the data that support the summer slide theory, you see that reading and math reasoning skills don’t really decline,” says Dr. Amy Moore, a cognitive psychologist at LearningRx, a brain training center with locations in Northern Virginia. “It’s math computation skills like adding and subtracting that decline because kids aren’t practicing them daily. But after two weeks of being back in school in the fall, their efficiency returns.”

Moore agrees that lower-income students typically don’t learn as much as higher-income ones during the summer. That’s because they don’t usually have the same access to enrichment programs and cultural opportunities, she explains. “So, it’s really the income achievement gap that you see during the school year that’s widening over the summer,” says Moore.

How about this summer, after the pandemic forced most students to attend school virtually for at least part of the school year? Will the summer slide be worse?

“Researchers predict that learning loss during the 2020-2021 school year could be substantial, with students projected to lose five to nine months of learning on average,” says Dr. Matthew Lynch, an

education consultant and former dean of Virginia Union University’s School of Education, Psychology & Interdisciplinary Studies. “If you couple this with summer learning loss, the situation becomes even more dire,” he says.

Moore says this pandemic-related learning deficit will be worse for students that didn’t have good access to technology for online instruction — meaning the achievement gap between lower- and higher-income students may widen even more. But, she continues, even those students that successfully attended virtual school have likely experienced a bit of learning loss.

“This was a scary and stressful time for kids,” Moore says. “If children are anxious, they can’t learn effectively.”

To help students catch up, many schools across the country are offering more robust summer school programs than usual. There are also a multitude of online programs to help children brush up on math and language arts skills, from virtual classes through companies like Khan Academy and Outschool to websites such as Prodigy Math and Imagine Learning & Literacy. And summer camps offering everything from coding to art to robotics are opening up again.

But after such a challenging school year, many kids — and parents — just need a break.

“We’re all mentally drained, so we’re going to take it easy,” says Rakelle Mullenix, a mom from Annandale, Virginia. “We will play board games, tend to our garden and connect with friends and family out in nature.”

But that doesn’t mean her kids, ages 7 and 9, won’t be learning. Many of the fun summer activities families do together teach kids a variety of facts and skills. Looking for ideas? Here are some ways to keep your own children engaged in learning all summer long.

READ, READ, READ

Experts recommend that children read at least 20 minutes per day. To motivate your kids to get those minutes in, sign them up for a rewards-based summer reading program through Barnes & Noble, Pizza Hut or your local library. Help them start a summer book club with friends. Listen to audiobooks on road trips. And spend some time each day reading aloud to them.

COOK OR BAKE TOGETHER

Following a recipe will require your kids to use math and reading skills and to follow directions.

TACKLE PUZZLES AND GAMES

“Jigsaw puzzles and board games promote the development of logic and reasoning skills while also encouraging social connections,” says Moore. Some of the Mullenix family’s favorites are chess, backgammon and Pay Day.

EXPLORE THE OUTDOORS

“There’s so much to learn around us,” says Kelly McCollum, a former middle-school science teacher and co-founder of Yellow Scope, which creates science kits for girls. “The key is to use the power of observation. The more senses you use, the better you learn,” says McCollum.

At the beach, teach your kids about the tides. At campgrounds and national and state parks, seek out naturalists to help identify native animals and plants. Research the chemistry behind fireworks on the 4th of July, and point out interesting rock formations, flowers and animals on walks around your neighborhood.

GO ON A FIELD TRIP

From zoos and farms to museums and historical landmarks, there are plenty of opportunities for educational excursions.

WRITE IT DOWN

Have your kids keep a journal about all of the fun things they do this summer. Ask them to write about what they learned and observed. By the time they return to school, they'll have wonderful memories and improved writing skills.

However, if you feel your child is falling behind in a certain subject, consider hiring a tutor to help them brush up on those skills. If they're struggling across the board, a brain training program like LearningRx may help them strengthen learning skills, such as memory, attention, and reasoning. Just remember not to compare your kids with other students.

"Because of COVID, students across the world are in a similar boat in terms of their educational experience this past year," says Moore. "So the question should not be how your child is doing compared to their peers, but how they are doing now compared to before the pandemic."

Come fall, teachers will be ready to help every child bounce back from a challenging school year. ■

Strengthen Social-Emotional Learning

When we hear the term "summer slide," we tend to think of academic learning. But one of the biggest things students missed out on this past year was social-emotional learning. Working alone behind a screen, children were not able to learn and practice managing their emotions, empathizing with others, resolving conflicts, communicating and building relationships. But there are some things you can do to help your kids develop those skills this summer.

DISCUSS FEELINGS

Share your emotions by saying things like, "I'm so excited about our trip!" or "I'm frustrated that I spilled the milk." Validate your child's feelings by pointing out when they're angry or upset and inviting them to talk about it.

HELP OTHERS

Volunteering in the community is a great way to build empathy and civic engagement. But even informal acts of kindness will do the trick. Encourage them to help a neighbor carry their groceries inside. Leave a treat on a friend's doorstep just to be nice. And talk about how good it feels to be kind and helpful.


SOCIALIZE

This summer is a great time for kids to rebuild relationships with friends, so plan play dates whenever you can. Local playgrounds, community pools and camps are also great places for kids to make new friends.

ROLE PLAY


When playing with your children, act out various scenarios and ask them to think about how they might feel in that situation. This also works great when watching movies or reading books together. Say things like, "That boy must have felt so worried when he lost his dog," or "That girl seemed so proud when she won the spelling bee."

And remember, your children are always watching you. Seeing you maintain healthy relationships with family members and friends will teach them to be good friends and citizens themselves.



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From the best childcare center to the best place for a birthday party, read on to discover all of your FAMILY favorites in the D.C. area.

WE ASKED YOU VOTED!





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www.SFGY.org

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Finders Keepers, Arlington

By Laura Farmer

When my son was a toddler, he couldn't pronounce the letter "R." Words like "river" were "wivuh" and "crab" became "cwab." At the time, I thought these speech errors only made his chubby-cheeked baby-talk ramblings all the more endearing.

As he entered kindergarten, he learned to read and write, but not how to pronounce his "R's." My husband and I grew concerned, but his teacher assured us that the speech delay was age appropriate. So we didn't worry — until he turned 7. When he was still saying "wun" and "ice cweam," we decided to meet with a speech-language pathologist at his school.

A speech-language pathologist, or SLP, is a communications expert who is trained to evaluate and create solutions for speech and language disorders, as well as for swallowing and other motor functions related to communication. During my son's assessment, the SLP's trained ear was able to hear him form "R's" in certain words. In other words, he was capable of making the sound and was well on his way to developing normal articulation without further intervention.



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Spotting a **SPEECH** **DISORDER** in Children

YOUR CHILD'S SPEECH-LANGUAGE MILESTONES DURING THE FIRST FOUR YEARS

	HEARING & UNDERSTANDING	TALKING
BIRTH-3 MONTHS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quiets if crying when you speak. Responds to loud sounds. Seems to recognize your voice when you speak. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adjusts cries to different types of needs. Makes soft, gentle "cooing" sounds when content.
4-6 MONTHS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moves eyes in the direction of sounds. Observes that objects make sounds. Responds to changes in your tone of voice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Babbles sounds such as "ba," "pa" and "mi." Engages in vocalizations during play. Giggles and laughs.
7 MONTHS-1 YEAR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognizes simple words such as "mommy" and "truck." Responds to his or her name and directions ("come here"). Enjoys playing peek-a-boo and pat-a-cake. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Babbles in long word strings ("bababababa") with a variety of consonant sounds. Demonstrates intonation for different sound combinations. Says one or two words ("doggie" or "ma-ma") around the first birthday.
12-20 MONTHS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follows simple directions ("roll the ball"). Listens to simple rhymes and stories. Points to objects you name ("where's your shoe?"). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asks simple questions ("what's that?"). Has a speaking vocabulary of approximately 10 to 20 words. Uses "p," "b," "h," "m" and "w" in words.
2-3 YEARS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Processes simple directions ("get the book and give it to me"). Understands new words. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Constructs two- to three-word sentences adults can understand 75% of the time. Has a speaking vocabulary of about 150 to 200 words. Uses "d," "f," "g," "k," "n," "t" and "y" in words.
3-4 YEARS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comprehends oral directions. Recognizes words for colors, shapes and family members. Responds to increasingly complex tasks and questions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Says approximately 1,000 words; uses four- to six-word sentences. Articulates sufficiently for adults to understand what the child is saying. Uses "ch," "l," "s," "sh" and "z" in words.

COMMON SPEECH DISORDERS IN YOUNG CHILDREN

Many children need speech therapy to address communication disorders. Each year, according to the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, approximately 7% of U.S. children will demonstrate a disorder related to speech or communication. These could be functional disorders with no known cause or organic disorders, which are the result of a diagnosed medical reason.

Speech sound disorders

Just as there are age-appropriate milestones for motor skills like walking and running, speech skills also emerge on a predictable timeline. (See sidebar.) Some letter sounds, such as "m" or "b," are easier for little lips to pronounce, while "r" or "th" develop later.

"When children are younger, substituting difficult sounds for easier ones is normal," says Diana Letwinsky, a public school speech-language pathologist in Maryland. "Parents can support their child's typical speech sound development

Sources: American Speech Language-Hearing Association; Children's Hospital Colorado; Small Talk, LLC



ANDREA OBZEROVA/ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES PLUS

by modeling slow, clear speech during play, while reading together or during everyday activities.”

Children whose substitutions persist beyond the age that is developmentally appropriate may have a functional speech sound disorder, such as articulation and phonological disorders. Other less common speech sound disorders include dysarthria, a weakness of the muscles used for speaking, and childhood apraxia of speech, a motor disorder in which a disruption occurs in the pathways between the brain and the muscles used for making speech.

Receptive and expressive language disorders

Children with receptive language disorders struggle to understand the meanings of words. This struggle may impact their comprehension of oral language, making it harder for them to follow directions, participate in learning activities or interact with their peers.

“A 2-year-old should be able to follow simple one- and two-step instructions. If we say, ‘Please get your shoes and put them on,’ they should be able to understand and comply,” says Linda Heller, a speech-language pathologist with Nyman Associates in Pennsylvania. A toddler who is unable to follow such instructions may have a receptive language disorder.

Children with expressive language disorder have trouble using language to communicate. This difficulty may impair their ability to express their needs. These kids often have more tantrums because they don’t have the language skills to express what they want, explains Heller. “As you can imagine, this can be very frustrating,” she says.

Social communication disorder

Social communication disorder is characterized by difficulties in the social aspects of

communication — using language with other people.

“Some children struggle with social or nonverbal aspects of communication,” says Timothy Flynn, a school speech-language pathologist and owner of Forward Steps Therapy in Alexandria, Virginia.

“For example, they may not be able to read facial expressions or body language or respond to social cues,” he says.

Fluency disorder

Children with a fluency disorder have trouble speaking in a flowing, uninterrupted speech rhythm. This may include taking long pauses between words or saying sounds rapidly, several times in a row — a condition known as stuttering. Cluttering, another fluency disorder, involves breaks in the typical flow of speech that seem to stem from disorganized speech planning, speaking too quickly or being uncertain about what to say. In contrast, a person who stutters usually knows precisely what he or she wants to say, but is temporarily unable to say it.

As both a speech pathologist and someone who stutters, Flynn is an expert on fluency disorders.

“I can tell you that stuttering is still greatly misunderstood by most people,” he says. “Parents of children who stutter are often told to wait and see. While many children do outgrow stuttering, there are several factors that speech pathologists consider to determine if intervention is warranted.”

Voice disorder

Problems with the sound and production of a child’s voice may indicate a voice disorder and should be evaluated by an otolaryngologist. Speech therapy with an SLP may be recommended as part of the child’s treatment plan.

NORMAL DEVELOPMENT OR DISORDER?

How can you tell whether

your child is developing on track or has a language or speech disorder requiring intervention?

“Your child’s pediatrician should be screening your child at each well visit to ensure that they are meeting their language milestones,” says Heller. “For example, a 2-year-old child should be able to say around 50 words. Remember, even animal sounds count as words.”

A pediatrician should also regularly test your child’s hearing.

“Hearing is incredibly important for proper speech development,” says Flynn. “Frequent middle ear infections can build fluid in the ear that mimics how difficult it would be to hear underwater. Imagine if you were at a swimming pool and asked someone to try to tell you something while you were underwater. Naturally, you would not hear the speech sounds correctly, so you would reproduce them incorrectly.”

HOW AN SLP CAN HELP

If you’re still uncertain about your child’s speech progress, it never hurts to seek out an assessment from a certified SLP. All children are eligible to seek services from their county’s infants and toddlers program or local public school. If it’s decided that speech therapy would be helpful, your child will begin meeting with an SLP on a regular basis.

According to Lindsay Lyons, senior speech-language pathologist with Sheppard Pratt School in Maryland, speech therapy can be fun.

“I love to play and use age-appropriate toys to keep the students’ hands busy and increase their focus,” says Lyons. “My favorite go-to activities are the simplest activities, such as coloring, listening to music and overall play. Gross motor activities are also a favorite go-to for me. Going on the playground can increase a lot of language production.” ■

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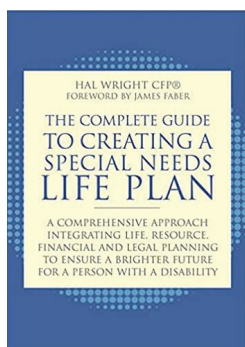
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6 Books for Special Needs Parents

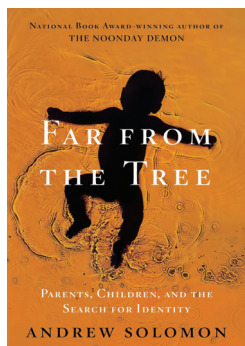
Raising a child with a disability can feel confusing and isolating. These books, recommended by Julia Wolhandler, manager of the Center for Accessibility at Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library in D.C., aim to relieve some of those difficult feelings by providing advice and understanding from medical professionals and other parents of children with special needs.



THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO CREATING A SPECIAL NEEDS LIFE PLAN

By Hal Wright

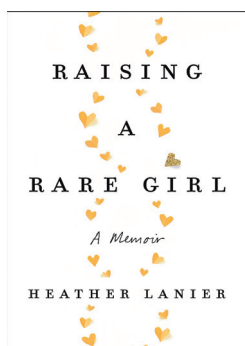
Written for parents and professionals, this book outlines how developing a life plan can help children with disabilities gain independence as they grow up. Wright explores employment and residential options, government programs, and financial and legal considerations, including special needs trusts.



FAR FROM THE TREE

By Andrew Solomon

Solomon, who writes about families coping with deafness, dwarfism, Down syndrome, autism, schizophrenia and other disabilities, believes that differences are what unite us. Sharing stories of parents with children who are prodigies, who were conceived in rape, who become criminals and who are transgender, he explores how people who love each other can still struggle to accept each other.



RAISING A RARE GIRL

By Heather Lanier

In this memoir, Lanier shares the story of her daughter's ultra-rare illness, the genetic disorder Wolf-Hirschhorn syndrome, and how the diagnosis challenged all of her preconceptions about motherhood. The book explores the sometimes radical act of loving one's child just as they are.

MADE TO HEAR

By Laura Mauldin

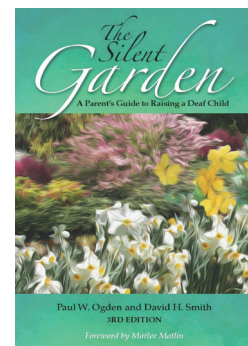
Based on research from her Ph.D. dissertation, Mauldin examines the expectations and consequences of cochlear implant surgery. Her focus is on the lack of information available to help parents make an appropriate decision and the long struggle children and their families face once the device is implanted.



THE SILENT GARDEN

By Paul W. Ogden and David H. Smith

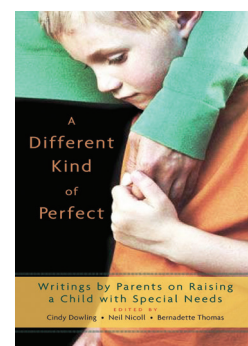
First published in 1996, "The Silent Garden" has continued to be a valuable resource for parents of deaf children seeking to navigate the confusing and conflicting maze of information provided by medical professionals and educators. Written from the perspectives of two deaf parents, Ogden and Smith provide an unbiased take on the challenges of raising a deaf child and what parents can expect.



A DIFFERENT KIND OF PERFECT

Edited by Cindy Dowling, Neil Nicoll and Bernadette Thomas

Special needs parents will find comfort and wisdom in this collection of more than 50 deeply personal essays written by parents of children across the spectrum of disability. The essays explore the emotional journey of raising a child with special needs and offer practical advice and encouragement for other parents going through it. ■





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Screen-Free Summer Entertainment

From a diverse array of music to captivating stories, these radio shows and podcasts will capture the imagination of your little ones.

BY ELEANOR LINA FELT

ELEANOR AMPLIFIED

A production of WHYY in Philadelphia, "Eleanor Amplified" is a fictional podcast series that follows a radio reporter as she chases exciting stories. Offering an introduction to journalism, it is designed to appeal to the whole family, but is specifically recommended for ages 8-12. Available on Apple Podcasts and Spotify.

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CIRCLE ROUND

From WBUR, Boston's NPR station, "Circle Round" is a podcast that adapts international folktales with universal themes to encourage conversations between children and adults. Listen carefully for some of your

favorite TV and film stars as characters. Created and produced by parents of young children, "Circle Round" is geared toward ages 4-10. Available on Apple Podcasts.

JUMP 105.3

Launched in February, this Pittsburgh-based station offers well-known and independent music for kids of all ages through a variety of weekly specialty shows. Streaming online at jump1053.com.

BUT WHY: A PODCAST FOR CURIOUS KIDS

Vermont Public Radio's podcast "But Why" attempts to answer all sorts of questions, big and small, submitted by kids. Recent episodes include explorations into why cactuses are spiky and what robots are doing on Mars. Available on Apple Podcasts.

GOOD NIGHT STORIES FOR REBEL GIRLS

Based on the bestselling book series by the same name, "Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls" is a podcast that dives into the stories of remarkable women throughout history. Well-known leaders, creators and members of the Rebel Girls community narrate each episode. Available on Apple Podcasts and Spotify.

WOW IN THE WORLD

The hosts of NPR's podcast "Wow in the World" weave news about science, technology and innovation into fantastical storylines that kids ages 5-12 will find hilarious. Each episode discusses an exciting new scientific discovery. Available on Apple Podcasts. ■

It Takes a Village



BY KATIE SCHUBERT

Do you have a story to share with our readers? Send your personal essay and photos to editor@washingtonfamily.com for consideration in a future issue.

Over the past seven years, my husband Allan and I have moved six times. We've gotten used to moving so frequently because Allan is in the Navy, but nothing could have prepared us for our move to Japan in the middle of a worldwide pandemic — only two days after learning we were pregnant with our daughter.

We arrived on Okinawa, a small island some 400 miles south of the Japanese mainland, in early September 2020. After a strict two-week quarantine, Allan and I began our new life here in Okinawa, and the next few months progressed uneventfully.

Then, in March, our daughter Alice arrived. She was six weeks early. At 4 pounds, 5 ounces, Alice was the definition of a “little girl.” Delivered by cesarean section, she was whisked away to the NICU shortly after Dad cut the cord, where she spent the next three weeks growing and learning to eat properly.

The hospital staff was incredible, and even if I had space for 10,000 words, I still couldn't sing their praises enough.

Becoming a mother under any circumstances is a rollercoaster of emotions, and I was counting on having the full 40 weeks to prepare for my new role. Not only did Allan and I not have many of the things we needed to welcome Alice, but I lost six weeks to prepare myself emotionally for her arrival. Being away from home, from my friends and family, made the transition to motherhood more difficult. Okinawa is 13 hours ahead of Washington, D.C., so when it is 3 p.m. here, it's 2 a.m. at my parents' house. Not being able to call whenever I needed to talk to them made this time even more difficult.

Luckily, the military community in Okinawa came to our aid almost without my asking. A friend set up a meal train for the three weeks after Alice got out of the NICU, so we wouldn't have to worry about dinner while figuring out how to have her home with us — especially since we were running on only a little bit of sleep. People I had never met gave us premie clothes, so Alice would have little onesies and sleepers that fit her properly. A neighbor offered to go grocery shopping for us.

Throughout the entire NICU ordeal, Allan was just phenomenal. While recovering from my c-section, he happily bounced back and forth between my hospital room and Alice's little bassinet in the NICU, never once complaining about being tired or overextended. He brought me sandwiches from Subway to give me a break from hospital food and enthusiastically fed our tiny daughter. He laughed when changing her diapers — and still does. I couldn't ask for a better partner to have by my side during such a stressful (though joyous) time.

Throughout Allan's Navy career, I have made lifelong friends within the military community, and it was members of that community who provided us with the resources and the time to make it through Alice's NICU stay. I could never have imagined giving birth prematurely to a tiny baby halfway around the world during a global pandemic, but when it happened, I'm glad I had my village to support us. ■



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A close-up, high-resolution photograph of a dog's face, likely a Weimaraner, with brown and white fur and striking light-colored eyes. The dog is looking slightly to the left of the frame.

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