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DIRECTORY  
INSIDE!**  
P. 28

# Washington FAMILY

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JULY 2022

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Claudia Skinner  
P. 25

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DAVID STUCK

Your votes have been counted. Here's who you named the Best for Families. **Pg. 12**

**Cover:** Claudia Skinner with daughters Grace Skinner and Brittany Nemzek

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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](mailto:info@washingtonfamily.com).

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

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**WE WANT  
YOUR  
FEEDBACK**



## Washington FAMILY

**JULY 2022**  
**VOL. 30, NO. 7**  
WashingtonFamily.com  
301-230-2222

**Craig Burke, Publisher**

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# Celebrate the Best for Families

**W**elcome to our special July issue of *Washington FAMILY*. Whether you're picking up our magazine for the first time or you've been reading our publication for years, you've likely come to recognize *Washington FAMILY* as your parenting resource for raising your family in the DMV. After reading the stories in this issue, I think you'll understand what I mean.

For many years, *Washington FAMILY* has worked to deliver information and support for parents of neurodiverse children. Beginning on page 20, you'll find articles offering tips for calming kids' anxieties, invisible disabilities and helping children mentally process a physical impairment.

Your votes have been counted, and it's time to reveal this year's Best for Families winners. Turn to page 12 to find out which businesses and organizations you voted as the best in the DMV. We're grateful for all the readers who took time to cast their ballots, and we're grateful to the businesses, schools and organizations

in our region that bring you great products and services for families like yours.

Keep this special issue handy year-round and keep reading *Washington FAMILY* each month. Don't forget to visit [washingtonfamily.com](http://washingtonfamily.com) for more articles, tips, resources, information on local businesses dedicated to your needs and a calendar of family events.

It's been a pleasure working with our talented contributors and staff to produce *Washington FAMILY* for you. This issue is my last as editor of this publication, and I want to thank you, our readers, story subjects and everyone I've interacted with in this role, for your support.

Enjoy these summer days with your family. Happy reading! ■

*Michael Vyskocil*



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# Fourth of July Kids' Craft Fireworks

BY HEATHER M. ROSS

If you're looking for a way to get you and your family into the Independence Day spirit, we've got you covered. This glitter fireworks craft is a budget-friendly, fun way to create an awesome decoration. Happy Fourth of July!

## Materials

**Black construction paper**

**Glow-in-the-dark liquid craft glue**

(if you can't find this glue, you can use regular liquid craft glue)

**Glitter**



## Directions

1. Place a single sheet of black construction paper on a work surface in front of you.
2. Help your child write his or her name in the center of the page using the glue.
3. With guidance, help your child make fireworks designs with glue on the page. It's OK if the glue gets a little messy. The final design will look great once it's covered in glitter.
4. Shake your desired colors of glitter over the parts of the paper containing the glue. **Tip:** Use red, white and blue glitter to add extra patriotic flair to the design.
5. While carefully holding the paper over a trash container, gently jostle the paper until all the glitter on it is stuck to the glue or has slid off of the page. **Tip:** Using a mostly empty trash container is best for this step since you can place the entire paper inside the container before shaking to remove the glitter.
6. Place the paper down on a flat surface and allow the glue to dry completely. The time it takes to dry will depend on the amount of glue used.
7. Hang your personal fireworks design on a refrigerator, wall or in a window. ■

## Crafty Cleanup

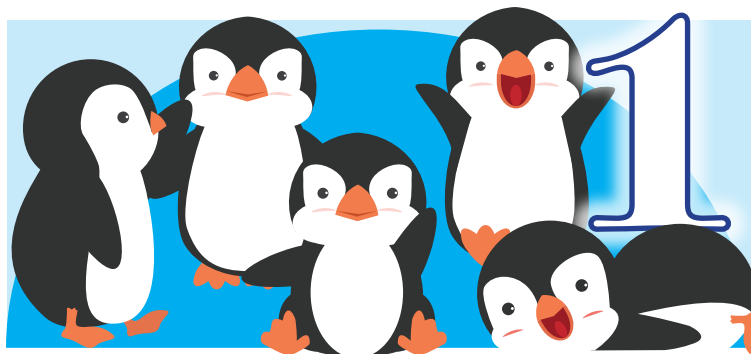
Wondering how to clean up all the glitter that didn't quite make it onto the paper? Try using Play-Doh or Silly Putty. Once you cover one side of the material, simply knead it until you have more open surface. If you don't have this modeling compound on hand, a wet paper towel or a lint roller can also do the trick. ■

# {TOP 10}

BY LINDSAY C. VANASDALAN

## Family Events for July

Find your summer fun at these events happening around the DMV this month.



### THROUGHOUT THE MONTH

#### "MR. POPPER'S PENGUINS"

Mr. Popper dreamed of a grand Antarctic adventure, but what he got were dozens of penguins. Join him as his troupe of penguins take their song-and-dance act on the road in this puppetry-filled production at North Bethesda's Imagination Stage. This program is best for ages 3-10. Special performances include sensory-friendly, July 17, and ASL-interpreted, July 24. The show runs through Aug. 7. Tickets are \$12-\$39.

[imaginationstage.org](http://imaginationstage.org)



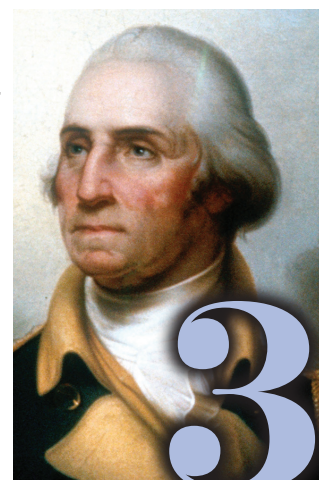
### THROUGHOUT THE MONTH

#### "THE MUSIC MAN"

In a Broadway classic performed with a cast and creative team of Deaf, hearing and hard-of-hearing artists, Harold Hill will attempt to win over the town with his marching band in famous musical numbers such as "76 Trombones" and "'Til There Was You." The show runs through July 24.

Tickets are \$37-\$85.

[olneytheatre.org](http://olneytheatre.org)



### JULY 4

#### AN AMERICAN CELEBRATION

Ever wonder what Independence Day was like for the first U.S. president? Hear from George Washington himself at his home in Mount Vernon, Virginia. Enjoy music, made-for-daytime fireworks and a special naturalization ceremony for new U.S. citizens. Free with admission to Mount Vernon.

[mountvernon.org](http://mountvernon.org)

### JULY 4

#### NATIONAL INDEPENDENCE DAY PARADE

The nation's capital is celebrating the Fourth of July with its annual parade on Constitution Avenue featuring all things to see and hear, including floats, giant balloons, military units and drill teams. The procession before thousands of people begins at 11:45 a.m. and runs from Seventh to 17th streets.

Free

[july4thparade.com](http://july4thparade.com)



### JULY 5 & 26

#### TYSONS CORNER CENTER SUMMERFEST: CORNHOLE SERIES

In this all-ages competition by DC Fray and Tysons Corner Center, all skill levels can compete at the center in Tysons, Virginia, from 6-8 p.m. on July 5 or July 26 in doubles games of cornhole for prizes. Pre-registration is recommended.

Free

[tysonscornercenter.com/events](http://tysonscornercenter.com/events)





## JULY 6 PARKS PLAYHOUSE JUNIOR: "KIDSINGER JIM GOES GREEN"

Kidsinger Jim learns more modern ways of farming when his animals teach him how to go green. Learn about solar energy, rainwater harvesting and composting with Farmer Jim in this musical puppet show from 10-11 a.m. at South Germantown Recreational Park. Free  
[montgomeryparks.org](http://montgomeryparks.org)



## JULY 10 SILVER SPRING ARTS & CRAFTS SUMMER FAIR

Silver Spring's Veterans Plaza will feature a family festival by Chic Events DC with food, arts, crafts, music, performances, activities and more than 80 vendors from 1-7 p.m. Come out for some fun, rain or shine. Free

[facebook.com/events/s/silver-spring-arts-crafts-summ/3218477298429804](https://facebook.com/events/s/silver-spring-arts-crafts-summ/3218477298429804)

## JULY 28 STEPPING IN THE WOODS: CELEBRATING IRISH DANCE

In its latest Children's Theatre in the Woods event, Wolf Trap brings the spectacle of ornate costumes and flying feet from The Culin School of Traditional Irish Dance to young audiences in Vienna, Virginia. This program is best for kids ages 3 and older. Tickets are \$12; kids ages 2 and younger are free.  
[wolftrap.org](http://wolftrap.org)



## JULY 8

### SHAKY SHAKY – EARTHQUAKES!

The Rockville Science Center is ready to teach your child all about earthquakes from 9 a.m. to noon with video demos, a student-built seismometer and LEGO buildings using a shake table. Tickets are \$40.  
[rockvillesciencecenter.org](http://rockvillesciencecenter.org)



## JULY 16

### UNICORN KIDS CLUB: "CELEBRATE WHAT MAKES YOU MAGICAL"

Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum is celebrating differences with stories, crafts and activities. Every third Saturday from 11 a.m. to noon, kids ages 5-12 will be introduced to a new community. Join the group in July for "Introverted Kids Day." Free  
[anacostia.si.edu](http://anacostia.si.edu)







# Essentials for Summer Adventures

## What You'll Need for Sun, Sand and Trailblazing

BY LINDSAY C. VANASDALAN

**S**ummer is a time to relax, let loose and have fun. The last thing you want to worry about on a family outing is whether you packed everything you need to stay safe and entertained. We've gathered a list of must-haves for two popular summer getaways: a hike in the woods and a day on the shore.

Whether you're getting wet and wild in the ocean or working up a sweat in your hiking boots, you need hydration and sun protection.

"My No. 1 recommendation would be sunscreen, sunscreen, sunscreen and staying adequately hydrated," says Adrienne Collier, MD, chief of pediatrics at Kaiser Permanente for the District of Columbia and Suburban Maryland (DCSM).

"Those two rules will take you from the beach to the pool, on

a hike—any place you're going where you're going to be outside for extended periods of time," she says.

The pediatrics care team members at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) recommend using broad-spectrum sunscreen—SPF 15 or higher—that protects against UVA and UVB rays—even on cloudy days.

It's essential to wear sun-protective clothing—especially for babies younger than 6 months old who should have a very limited use of sunscreen.

"As much skin as we can have covered and blocked by the sun is ideal because obviously sunscreen isn't bulletproof," says Dr. Elizabeth Donahoo, a managing pediatrician at The Maryland Pediatric Group.

If babies do not have shade and part of their skin is uncovered,

using a small amount of baby zinc oxide sunscreen is better than them getting burned, she says.

For a hike, you might remember the bug spray, but an additional item to pack is hydrocortisone—which soothes itchy, swollen skin, Donahoo says.

"A lot of times kids are more prone to insect bites even using bug spray. When that does happen, a lot of times children have more of a histamine response to insect bites," she explains.

Collier says when it comes to a day at the beach, remember that arm or chair flotation devices for babies are not the same as life jackets or preservers. "It's extremely important for parents and guardians to watch their children around water," she adds.

Many children drown or nearly drown in the summer, Collier says. Drowning is one of the leading causes of accidental death for children younger than age 4, and children of color are more at risk.

In any outdoor activity, be sure to be mindful of when the sun is at its highest. The best times to be outside for younger children who are more sensitive to heat is early morning or late afternoon.

Make the most of a trip to the beach or woods by packing the basics—and a few items for exploration and fun.

### Beach Day

1. **Sunscreen** | Apply SPF 30 or greater every 60 to 90 minutes, or after swimming.

2. **Water bottle** | An insulated bottle will keep your water cold even as the sun beats down. Visit [healthychildren.org](http://healthychildren.org) to see fluid requirements according to age, Donahoo says.

3. **Snacks** | When the hunger pangs strike, be ready with a quick snack. Pack a beach cooler with popcorn, frozen grapes, yogurt pouches or carrots, as suggested by The Everyday Mom Life.

4. **Sun-protective clothing** | Keep children 6 months and younger in the shade, or ensure they have clothes that can shield them from the sun. A rash guard is appropriate for the water.

5. **Floaties or life jacket** | Swimmers who are new to the ocean will take some time to adjust. Water wings can build some confidence—but remember, they're no substitute for a life jacket!

6. **Water shoes** | You never know what seashells or rocks might be hiding in the sand. Protect your child's feet with water shoes to avoid scrapes and blisters.

7. **Sandcastle kit** | All this sand, and what to do with it? Let your kids craft a masterpiece while you relax with a book. This kit is a great idea for only children or fun with siblings!

8. **Umbrella** | A day at the beach can last a lot longer if there's a place to escape the sun. Bring or rent an umbrella to give your family a break from the rays.

9. **Jar for seashells** | All types of unique shells wash up on the





beach, and they're free! Walking along the beach with your children to find the best ones can be a great bonding moment.

10. **Frisbee or volleyball** | Lots of beaches have volleyball nets. Bring a ball or a Frisbee to toss along the beach—be sure to watch out for others.

### Hiking at a State Park

1. **Sunscreen** | Hiking under cover of the trees can shield you from some sun, but you'll still need to apply and reapply sunscreen (as noted above). Zinc oxide can be used sparingly for infants.

2. **Sun-protective clothing** | Donahoo recommends UV shirts, hats and sunglasses. Collier says that outside of the water, a wide-brim hat and loosely fitting light-colored clothing is best.

3. **Hydration pack** | Look for age-specific hydration packs for your child's backpack and keep them hydrated on the go. Infants do not need water; use formula instead.

4. **Bug spray** | All kinds of critters can be lurking in the woods, so protect against mosquitoes, ticks and other invaders with bug spray. Spray mostly on clothes to reduce chemicals on skin.



5. **Snacks** | Replenish your energy with trail mix, power bars and other healthy treats that will keep your family going.

6. **Hydrocortisone** | Keep this anti-itch cream handy when bug bites do occur. Children can be more prone to irritation, says Donahoo.

7. **Footwear** | Wear supportive athletic shoes, not sandals. If biking along a wooded path, Donahoo notes your shoes should be secured to your foot so that they won't fall off or get caught in pedals or spokes.

8. **Map or compass** | Don't rely on park signs alone. Build your child's skills in navigation with the same tools the earliest explorers used. Having a paper map instead of a GPS encourages children to actively engage with the hike.

9. **Whistle** | If your children like to wander, have them wear a whistle as an extra safety measure. They can also use it to alert you to cool things along the path!

10. **Wildlife sighting book** | Teach your child how to forage for edible plants or spot local wildlife on the path with a book specific to your area or your state's park systems. ■

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For more than two decades, *Washington FAMILY* has been running our annual Best for FAMILIES survey. Each year, we ask our readers to vote for their favorite people, places and things to do in the DMV. And now, after tallying the votes, this year's survey results are here!

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



# We ASKED, You VOTED!

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RUNNER-UP:

Tiny Dancers | Fairfax

### BEST BALLET OR DANCE STUDIO

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| Bethesda

RUNNER-UP:

Tiny Dancers | Fairfax

### BEST BASEBALL CAMP

Bullis Summer Programs |  
Potomac

RUNNER-UP:

Georgetown Preparatory School |  
North Bethesda

### BEST CHILD CARE AND DAYCARE CENTER

Georgetown Hill Early School  
(multiple locations)  
10001 Apple Ridge Road  
Montgomery Village, MD 20886  
georgetownhill.com

RUNNER-UP:

Merritt Academy | Fairfax

### BEST CHILDREN'S COOKING CLASSES

Tiny Chefs | Falls Church  
RUNNER-UP:

Henry's Sweet Retreat | Bethesda

### BEST CHILDREN'S THEATER OR DRAMA INSTRUCTION

Imagination Stage | Bethesda

RUNNER-UP:

Westminster School | Annandale

### BEST KIDS' YOGA

Flying Buddha Studio |  
Gaithersburg

RUNNER-UP:

The Mindfulness Center, Bethesda

### BEST DAY CAMP

Congressional Camp |  
Falls Church

3229 Sleepy Hollow Road  
Falls Church, VA 22042  
congocamp.org

Tiny Dancers | Fairfax (tie)

RUNNER-UP: Camp Griffin at  
Westminster School | Annandale

### BEST FOREIGN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

Westminster School | Annandale

RUNNER-UP:

Bullis School | Potomac

### BEST GYMNASTICS CENTER

Hill's Gymnastics | Gaithersburg

RUNNER-UP:

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### BEST MARTIAL ARTS INSTRUCTION

Pentagon Mixed Martial Arts |  
Arlington

1041 S. Edgewood St.  
Arlington, VA 22204  
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RUNNER-UP:

Focus Family Academy | Fairfax

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RUNNER-UP:

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Camp Twin Creeks | Marlinton,  
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### BEST PRESCHOOL PROGRAM

Seneca Academy | Darnestown  
RUNNER-UP (TIE):  
The Griffin Academy of  
Westminster School | Annandale;  
Georgetown Hill Early School

### BEST PRIVATE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Seneca Academy | Darnestown  
RUNNER-UP:  
Westminster School | Annandale

### BEST PRIVATE HIGH SCHOOL

Bullis High School | Potomac  
RUNNER-UP:  
Oneness-Family Montessori  
School | Chevy Chase

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RUNNER-UP:  
Bullis School | Potomac

### BEST SAT AND ACT PREP

Educational Connections | Fairfax  
RUNNER-UP:  
Prep Matters | Bethesda, McLean  
and Washington, D.C.

### BEST SPECIAL NEEDS CAMP

Imagination Stage | Bethesda  
RUNNER-UP:  
Celebrate Ability | Rockville

### BEST SPECIAL NEEDS SCHOOL

The Lab School of Washington |  
Washington, D.C.  
RUNNER-UP:  
McClean School | Potomac

### BEST STEM PROGRAM

Bullis School | Potomac  
RUNNER-UP:  
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Rockville and Silver Spring.  
Specially trained instructors.  
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based methods. Come see the  
British Swim School difference!*  
RUNNER-UP (TIE):  
Goldfish Swim School | Reston;  
Big Blue Swim School | Fairfax

### BEST TUTORING PROGRAM

Bullis Student Tutor Program,  
Bullis School | Potomac  
RUNNER-UP:  
Educational Connections | Fairfax

### BEST YOGA AND PILATES STUDIO

Circle Yoga Cooperative |  
Washington, D.C.

### RUNNER-UP:

Down Dog Yoga | Georgetown and  
Herndon

### BEST YOUTH SPORTS LEAGUE

Arlington Soccer Association |  
Arlington  
RUNNER-UP:  
i9 Sports Central Montgomery,  
Maryland

## FOOD & DRINK FAVORITES

### BEST CATERER

Balducci's | Bethesda  
RUNNER-UP:  
Occasions | Washington, D.C.

### BEST FAMILY-FRIENDLY RESTAURANT

Silver Diner | various locations in  
Maryland and Virginia  
RUNNER-UP:  
Calleva Farm | Dickerson

### BEST FARMERS MARKET

Falls Church Farmers Market |  
Falls Church  
RUNNER-UP:  
Bethesda Central Farm Market |  
Bethesda

### BEST FOOD TRUCK

Arepa Zone, various loca-  
tions in Washington, D.C. and  
Northern Virginia; DC Taco Truck,  
Washington, D.C. (tie)  
RUNNER-UP:  
Pepe by Jose Andres |  
Washington, D.C. area

### BEST GROCERY STORE

Wegmans | Fairfax and  
Germantown  
RUNNER-UP:  
Balducci's | Bethesda

### BEST HEALTH FOOD STORE

Mom's Organic Market Merrifield  
| Fairfax  
RUNNER-UP:  
Whole Foods Fair Lakes | Fairfax

### BEST ICE CREAM AND FROZEN YOGURT SHOP

Sarah's Handmade Ice Cream &  
Treats | Bethesda

### RUNNER-UP:

Carmen's Italian Ice and Cafe |  
Rockville

### BEST LOCAL BAKERY

Royal Bagel Bakery | Germantown  
RUNNER-UP:  
Baked & Wired | Washington, D.C.

### BEST LOCAL CHEAP-EATS RESTAURANT

Chick-fil-A (multiple locations in  
the DMV)  
RUNNER-UP:  
Ixtapalapa Taqueria | Gaithersburg

### BEST LOCAL CUPCAKE SHOP

Georgetown Cupcake | Bethesda  
and Washington, D.C.  
RUNNER-UP:  
Nothing Bundt Cakes | multiple  
locations in Maryland and Virginia

### BEST LOCAL CUP OF COFFEE

Rare Bird Coffee Roasters |  
Falls Church  
RUNNER-UP:  
Coffee Republic | Rockville

### BEST LOCAL OUTDOOR AND PATIO DINING

Uncle Julio's | Gaithersburg  
RUNNER-UP:  
Northside Social | Arlington and  
Falls Church

### BEST LOCAL RESTAURANT WITH A KIDS' NIGHT AND SPECIAL

Silver Diner | various locations in  
Maryland and Virginia  
RUNNER-UP:  
Texas Roadhouse | multiple loca-  
tions in the DMV

### BEST LOCAL ROMANTIC RESTAURANT

Locavino | Silver Spring  
RUNNER-UP:  
The Old Angler's Inn | Potomac

### BEST LOCAL SPORTS BAR

Open Road Grill, Arlington and  
Falls Church  
RUNNER-UP:  
Quincy's Potomac Bar & Grille |  
Potomac



## HEALTH CARE FAVORITES

### BEST ALLERGY OR ASTHMA DOCTOR AND PRACTICE

Dr. Rachel L. Schreiber | Schreiber Allergy, Rockville  
 RUNNER-UP:  
 Dr. Alan N. Moshell | MedStar Health, Chevy Chase

### BEST CHILDREN'S DENTISTRY

VK Pediatric Dentistry | Arlington  
 RUNNER-UP:  
 DC Pediatric Smiles | Bethesda

### BEST CHILDREN'S THERAPIST, PSYCHIATRIST AND PRACTICE

Andrea Zawatsky, LCSW-C, Potomac Therapy Group | North Bethesda  
 RUNNER-UP:  
 Dr. Carey Heller, Psy.D., Heller Psychology Group | Bethesda

### BEST DENTIST OR ORTHODONTIST AND PRACTICE

Dr. Crissy Markova, DMD, Virginia Center for Orthodontics | Arlington  
 RUNNER-UP:  
 Dr. David Lavine, Maryland Advanced Orthodontics | Gaithersburg

### BEST DERMATOLOGIST AND PRACTICE

Dr. Amy B. Cole, MD, FAAD, DermAssociates | Rockville and Silver Spring  
 RUNNER-UP:  
 Dr. Alan N. Moshell, MedStar Health | Chevy Chase

### BEST EYE DOCTOR (OPTOMETRIST) AND PRACTICE

Dr. Marshall P. Keys, Marshall P. Keys, M.D., P.A. | Rockville;  
 Dr. G. Vike Vicente, Eye Doctors of Washington | Chevy Chase, Vienna and Washington, D.C. (tie)  
 RUNNER-UP:  
 Dr. Gregory Katchuk, Bethesda Vision Care | Bethesda

### BEST FAMILY DOCTOR AND PRACTICE

Pediatric Care of Rockville (Johns Hopkins Medicine) | Rockville  
 RUNNER-UP:  
 Dr. Lisa Kelly, MD, FAAP, Northern Virginia Pediatric Associates | Falls Church

### BEST FAMILY THERAPIST, PSYCHIATRIST AND PRACTICE

Laura Goldstein, LCMFT, Montgomery County Counseling Center | Olney and Rockville  
 RUNNER-UP:  
 Jaclyn Halpern, Psy.D., The SOAR Program for Psychotherapy and Testing | Washington Behavioral Medicine Associates, LLC

### BEST FERTILITY CLINIC

Shady Grove Fertility | Rockville  
 RUNNER-UP (TIE):  
 Genetics & IVF Institute | Fairfax; Dominion Fertility | Arlington, Bethesda, Fairfax and Washington, D.C.

### BEST GYM OR HEALTH CLUB

Fit4Mom | Montgomery and Frederick Counties  
 RUNNER-UP:  
 Life Time | Gaithersburg

### BEST HOSPITAL

Inova Fairfax Hospital | Falls Church  
 RUNNER-UP:  
 Sibley Memorial Hospital (Johns Hopkins Medicine) | Washington

### BEST MIDWIFE

Midwifery Care Associates | Frederick, Gaithersburg, Rockville  
 RUNNER-UP (TIE):  
 Physicians & Midwives | Alexandria, Arlington and Woodbridge; Melissa Rogina, C.N.M., Capital Women's Care | Fairfax

### BEST NUTRITIONIST AND DIETITIAN

Envision Health Chiropractic and Wellness Center | North Bethesda  
 RUNNER-UP:  
 Dr. Casi McFarland, Envision Health Chiropractic and Wellness Center | North Bethesda



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### BEST OB-GYN/PRACTICE

Dr. Thu Tran, Capital Women's Care | Germantown and Rockville  
RUNNER-UP:

Inova Medical Group – Orthopaedics and Sports Medicine, Drs. Robert A. Hymes, MD, and Jeff E. Schulman, MD | Fairfax

### BEST ORTHOPEDIST & PRACTICE

Dr. Robert R. Buber, MD, OrthoBethesda | Bethesda  
RUNNER-UP:

Dr. David P. Moss, MD, Washington Orthopedics & Sports Medicine | Washington, D.C.

### BEST PEDIATRIC OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST & PRACTICE

Christine Sproat, MA, OTR/L, Canyon Kids Occupational Therapy Services | Bethesda  
RUNNER-UP:

Michelle Herman, OTR/L, Dynamic Development Pediatric Services | Bethesda

### BEST PEDIATRICIAN & PRACTICE

Dr. Leila Hall, MD, Next Generation Pediatrics | Bethesda  
RUNNER-UP:

Dr. Cynthia Fishman, MD, Children First Pediatrics, PC Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine | Rockville and Silver Spring

### BEST PHYSICAL THERAPIST & PRACTICE

Natalie Merki, MA, CCC-SLP, The Children's Therapy Center | Falls Church  
RUNNER-UP:

SMARTtherapy, Washington Orthopaedics & Sports Medicine | Washington, D.C.

### BEST URGENT CARE

Patient First | multiple locations in the DMV  
RUNNER-UP:

MedStar Health | multiple locations in the DMV

### BEST WEIGHT LOSS PROGRAM OR DOCTOR

WeightWatchers

### RUNNER-UP:

Carly Silver, coach for Optavia | Chevy Chase

## HOME SERVICES FAVORITES

### BEST DECK AND PORCH SERVICES PROVIDER

C.A. Niglio and Son | Silver Spring  
RUNNER-UP (TIE):

F.H. Furr Plumbing, HVAC and Electrical | Rockville; James Dowd, Northern Alliance | Bethesda

### BEST ELECTRICIAN

Dane Electric | Alexandria  
RUNNER-UP:

GAC Services | Gaithersburg

### BEST FLOORING COMPANY

Carpet & Vacuum Expo | Gaithersburg, Olney, Potomac  
RUNNER-UP:

Master Flooring Design Center | Ashburn

### BEST FURNITURE STORE

IKEA | Woodbridge  
RUNNER-UP:

Wayfair

### BEST GENERAL REPAIRS AND HANDYMAN

Manny Ventura  
RUNNER-UP:

Rafael Dugarte, Dugarte Home Improvement | Montgomery Village

### BEST HEATING AND AIR CONDITIONING COMPANY

Eli's Heating & Air Conditioning | Rockville  
RUNNER-UP:

John Nugent & Sons | Sterling

### BEST HOME BUILDER

Sandy Spring Builders | Bethesda  
RUNNER-UP:

Toll Brothers | Washington, D.C.

### BEST INTERIOR DECORATOR

Kerith Eckart Modern Interior Design | Washington, D.C.  
RUNNER-UP:

Dubinsky - Wendy Lloyd

### BEST KITCHEN DESIGNER

Jack Rosen, Jack Rosen Custom Kitchens, Inc. | Rockville  
RUNNER-UP:

The Home Depot | multiple locations in the DMV

### BEST MARBLE AND GRANITE COMPANY

Fernando's Marble Shop Inc. | Rockville  
RUNNER-UP:

The Marble Doctor | Chantilly and Fairfax

### BEST PAINTING COMPANY

Five Star Painting | multiple locations in the DMV  
RUNNER-UP:

Dave Divecha, Divecha Associates Painting Company | Falls Church

### BEST PLUMBER

Marines Plumbing | Fairfax  
RUNNER-UP (TIE):

F.H. Furr | Gainesville, Manassas and Rockville;  
Ari Javid, Ari Plumbing, LLC | Montgomery County

### BEST REMODELING COMPANY

Jendell Construction | Kensington  
RUNNER-UP:

NOVO Kitchen & Bath | Vienna

## LOCAL PERSONALITIES

### BEST FAMILY BLOGGER

The DC Moms Group  
RUNNER-UP:

Adventure Moms D.C.

### BEST LOCAL AUTHOR

Zoie Seay  
RUNNER-UP:

Ann Dolin, M.Ed.

### BEST LOCAL NEWS PERSONALITY

Eun Yang, News4 | Washington  
RUNNER-UP:

Sue Palka, on-air contributor for FOX 5 and former weather reporter | Washington, D.C.

### BEST LOCAL PROFESSIONAL ATHLETE

Alex Ovechkin, Washington Capitals

### RUNNER-UP:

Katie Ledecky, Olympic swimmer

## PARTY AND EVENT PLANNING FAVORITES

### BEST CHILDREN'S BIRTHDAY PARTY VENUE

Tiny Dancers | Alexandria and Fairfax  
RUNNER-UP:

Sky Zone Trampoline Park | Gaithersburg, Manassas, Springfield and Sterling

### BEST CHILDREN'S PARTY ENTERTAINER

The Great Zucchini  
RUNNER-UP:

Eric Energy | Ellicott City

### BEST EVENT PLANNER

Jamie Kramer Events |

North Bethesda  
RUNNER-UP:

Rachel Weisman, Events by RAW Design | Potomac

### BEST PARTY SUPPLIES

Party City | Fairfax and

Falls Church  
RUNNER-UP:

Party Depot

### BEST PLACE FOR A TEAM PARTY

Topgolf | Oxon Hill  
RUNNER-UP:

Ledo Pizza | Falls Church and other locations

## PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICES FAVORITES

### BEST ACCESSORIES

Francesca's | Washington, D.C.

### BEST CHILDREN'S CONSIGNMENT OR RESALE STORE

Kid to Kid | Rockville  
RUNNER-UP:

Lemon Lane Consignment | Falls Church



**BEST COSMETIC  
SURGEON**

Dr. Barry J. Cohen, M.D., P.C. |  
Fulton, McLean and Rockville  
RUNNER-UP:  
Dr. Stephen B. Baker, MD, DDS,  
FACS | Georgetown and McLean

**BEST DAY SPA**

Salamander Resort & Spa |  
Middleburg, Virginia;  
The Woodhouse Day Spa | North  
Bethesda and additional locations  
in the DMV (tie)  
RUNNER-UP:  
Bluemercury Spa | Alexandria,  
Arlington, Bethesda and  
Washington, D.C.

**BEST FINANCIAL  
PLANNER**

David Duncan, The Duncan  
Wealth Management Group (RBC  
Wealth Management) | Rockville  
RUNNER-UP:  
First Command Financial Services

**BEST HAIR SALON AND  
COLORIST**

Smitten Boutique Salon and  
Smitten on Washington | Arlington  
RUNNER-UP:  
Chaos Salon | Bethesda

**BEST HAIR SALON FOR  
CHILDREN**

Eclips Salon & Day Spa | McLean  
RUNNER-UP:  
Cartoon Cuts | Rockville

**BEST HOME CLEANING  
SERVICE**

Merry Maids | multiple  
locations in the DMV  
RUNNER-UP:  
Season Maids | Rockville and  
other locations

**BEST JEWELRY STORE**

Tiny Jewel Box | Washington;  
Rubini Jewelers | Alexandria (tie)

**BEST LOCAL CAR DEALER**

Ourisman Honda | Bethesda and  
Laurel  
RUNNER-UP:  
Fitzgerald Toyota Gaithersburg |  
Gaithersburg

**BEST LOCAL CHILDREN'S  
FURNITURE STORE**

Kids 2 Teen Bedrooms | Rockville  
RUNNER-UP:  
Zadia Furniture Inc. | Rockville

**BEST LOCAL CHILDREN'S  
CLOTHING STORE**

Kid to Kid | Rockville  
RUNNER-UP:  
On Cloud 9 | Rockville

**BEST LOCAL FAMILY  
PHOTOGRAPHER**

Pages of Gray - Jennifer Duncan  
Photography | New Market  
RUNNER-UP:  
Chris Knowles Photography |  
Poolesville

**BEST LOCAL SELECTION  
OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS**

Child's Play Toys & Books |  
Washington, D.C. and additional  
locations in the DMV  
RUNNER-UP:  
Friends of the Library |  
Montgomery County

**BEST LOCAL TOY STORE**

Child's Play Toys & Books |  
Washington, D.C.  
RUNNER-UP:  
Doodlehopper 4 Kids |  
Falls Church

**BEST LOCAL WOMEN'S  
CLOTHING STORE**

South Moon Under,  
The Crossing Clarendon |  
Arlington  
RUNNER-UP:  
Kashmir Boutiques | Washington,  
D.C.

**BEST MAKEUP STORE**

Bluemercury Spa | Alexandria,  
Arlington, Bethesda and  
Washington, D.C.  
RUNNER-UP:  
Ulta Beauty | Congressional Plaza,  
Rockville

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Lifetime Fitness | Centreville,  
Virginia  
RUNNER-UP:  
Gloss Bar | Washington, D.C.

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### BEST MECHANIC

Andy Carpenter, Golden Gears Automotive | Rockville

RUNNER-UP:

Drive European | Falls Church

### BEST MEN'S CLOTHING STORE

Nordstrom | Arlington, Bethesda, McLean, Washington, D.C.

RUNNER-UP:

Men's Wearhouse | Washington

### BEST MORTGAGE LOAN OFFICER

Christopher Jordan, Main Street Home Loans | Montgomery County

RUNNER-UP:

Mike Fegan, Caliber Home Loans | Bethesda

### BEST NANNY SERVICE AND BABYSITTER

Ms. Encieh Nazari of M&M Childcare | Vienna

### BEST PERSONAL ORGANIZER

Efficient Edition

RUNNER-UP:

Emily Strompf, Organizing Solutions by Emily, LLC | Reston

### BEST PET GROOMER

Belly Rubs Biscuit Bar & Spa | Ashburn

RUNNER-UP:

Bone Jour Inc. | Bethesda

### BEST PET SITTING AND BOARDING

Brendan Voss

RUNNER-UP:

Dogtopia of Bethesda

### BEST PET STORE

PetSmart | multiple locations in the DMV

RUNNER-UP:

Loyal Companion | Washington, D.C.

### BEST PET TRAINER

PetSmart

RUNNER-UP:

Sarah Stoycos, Laughing Dog Academy | Rockville

### BEST PLACE TO BUY MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

Foxes Music Company | Falls Church

RUNNER-UP: Guitar Center

### BEST PLACE TO BUY OUTDOOR PLAY EQUIPMENT

Costco Wholesale

RUNNER-UP:

Creative Playthings | Gainesville (direct sales only)

### BEST REALTOR

Jen Vo, Keller Williams Capital Properties | Bethesda

RUNNER-UP:

Sheena Saydam, Saydam Properties Group at Keller Williams Capital Properties | Washington, D.C.

### BEST SHOE STORE

Nordstrom | Arlington, Bethesda, McLean, D.C.

RUNNER-UP:

Shoe Train | Potomac

### BEST SWIM INSTRUCTOR

Sarah Reed, British Swim School

RUNNER-UP:

Jade, British Swim School

### BEST UPSCALE CONSIGNMENT

New to You Inc. | Falls Church

RUNNER-UP (TIE):

Current Boutique | Alexandria; Lemon Lane Consignment | Falls Church

### BEST VETERINARIAN

Dr. Christina Stotz, Kentlands Veterinary Hospital | Gaithersburg

RUNNER-UP:

Clarendon Animal Care, Columbia Pike | Arlington

### BEST WOMEN'S CLOTHING STORE

Nordstrom | Arlington, Bethesda, McLean, Washington, D.C.

## VENUE AND ATTRACTION FAVORITES

### BEST AMUSEMENT PARK

Hersheypark | Hershey, Pennsylvania

### RUNNER-UP:

Busch Gardens | Williamsburg, Virginia

### BEST ART GALLERY

National Gallery of Art | Washington, D.C.

RUNNER-UP:

Smithsonian American Art Museum | Washington, D.C.

### BEST CHURCH AND PLACE OF WORSHIP

Congregation Sha'are Shalom | Leesburg

RUNNER-UP (TIE):

Darnestown Presbyterian Church | Darnestown; McLean Bible Church | Arlington, Lansdowne, Manassas, Rockville and Vienna

### BEST CONCERT VENUE

Wolf Trap | Vienna

RUNNER-UP:

Merriweather Post Pavilion | Columbia

### BEST FAMILY DAY TRIP

National Aquarium | Baltimore

RUNNER-UP:

Harpers Ferry | West Virginia

### BEST ICE SKATING RINK

MedStar Capitals Iceplex | Arlington

RUNNER-UP:

Cabin John Ice Rink | Rockville

### BEST INDOOR ACTIVITY

Bethesda Conservatory of Dance | Bethesda

RUNNER-UP: The International School of Music | Potomac

### BEST INDOOR PLAY FACILITY

Jolly Yolly Kids | Fairfax

RUNNER-UP:

ZavaZone | Potomac Mills, Rockville and Sterling

### BEST INDOOR SWIMMING POOL/REC CENTER

British Swim School at Cloppers Mill Village | Germantown

RUNNER-UP:

Cub Run Rec Center | Fairfax

### BEST LOCAL BREWERY

Lone Oak Farm Brewing Co. | Olney

### RUNNER-UP (TIE):

2 Silos Brewing Co. | Manassas; Caboose Commons | Fairfax

### BEST LOCAL GETAWAY AND RESORT

Salamander Resort & Spa | Middleburg

RUNNER-UP:

Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center | National Harbor

### BEST LOCAL SHOPPING CENTER OR MALL

Tysons Corner Center | Tysons

RUNNER-UP:

Westfield Montgomery | Bethesda

### BEST LOCAL WINERY

Sugarloaf Mountain Vineyard | Dickerson

RUNNER-UP:

Windridge Vineyards | Darnestown

### BEST MOVIE THEATER

Angelika at Mosaic | Fairfax

RUNNER-UP:

University Mall Theatres | Fairfax

### BEST MUSEUM

Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center | Chantilly

RUNNER-UP (TIE):

National Gallery of Art | Washington, D.C.; Smithsonian National Museum of American History | Washington, D.C.

### BEST PETTING ZOO

Roer's Zoofari | Vienna

RUNNER-UP:

Green Meadows Petting Farm | Ijamsville

### BEST ROLLER RINK

Skate N' Fun Zone | Manassas

RUNNER-UP:

Historic Bush Tabernacle Roller Rink & Event Venue | Purcellville, Virginia

### BEST WATER PARK

The Water Mine Family Swimmin' Hole | Fairfax

RUNNER-UP:

Great Wolf Lodge | Baltimore, Perryville, Williamsburg





# Washington FAMILY

SPECIAL  
SECTION

## Inclusive FAMILY

INFORMATION AND  
INSPIRATION FOR FAMILIES  
OF CHILDREN WITH  
SPECIAL NEEDS





# The Very Real Burden of Invisible Disabilities

BY JACQUELINE RENFROW

**B**eing a parent of a child with any disability, physical or emotional, comes with its challenges. When out in public, most parents would hope that a stranger will stop to open the door for a child in a wheelchair or have patience when talking with a teenager who has a speech impediment. But what if the challenge isn't so obvious by looking at or starting a friendly conversation with a child?

I am a mother to a son diagnosed on the autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). They are neurological differences. When my child is next to you in the swimming pool, you may have no idea. Why do I feel the need to cower or grab my children and run out of the pool when my 9-year-old is throwing a toddler-like tantrum in the water?

## Defining 'invisible disability'

While invisible disability is not a clinical term, it often refers to a child's needs, diagnoses or disabilities that aren't immediately obvious by looking at a person. This invisibility can create extra challenges for a child and families, since the symptoms may be judged or misunderstood by friends and family due to a lack of understanding.

Laurie Chaikind McNulty specializes in helping children and families find tools that work for their needs.

"This may require greater focus on social-emotional development depending on the child

and family," says Chaikind McNulty, LCSW-C, a clinical social worker at Jonah Green and Associates, LLC in Kensington, Maryland.

Chaikind McNulty says that numerous struggles exist for the parents of patients diagnosed with invisible disabilities such as ASD and ADHD. For example, parents often express feelings of isolation from other families; disappointment, which comes from changing expectations and hopes and dreams they had for their child; exhaustion from constant management of care; confusion with managing expensive and complex health care systems; variability in therapeutic progress and hard feelings due to challenging behaviors.

"Additionally, there is often tremendous worry for their child, both now and in the future, as well as the impact on the family overall," Chaikind McNulty says.

She often counsels these parents on the personal decision of when and how they might share with friends and family about the struggles they face with their child. Before making any moves to share your struggles, Chaikind McNulty recommends making sure you feel safe and supported and have an established trust with these individuals, or at least feel fairly certain that these confidants will respond in a helpful way.

"Sharing vulnerable details with others, when in a compassionate safe relationship, can be a powerful way to reduce shame, gain support and build community and understanding," she says.

As a parent of a child with an invisible disability, I can confirm the feeling of hesitation that comes with public outings as your child's behavior is so unknown. Maybe it will be a good day and your child will embrace being at the park and participate in tag with his siblings and other children. On the other hand, what if another child pushes him by accident or doesn't play by the rules? Will your child scream? The best way to prepare for what could happen is to make a plan before leaving the house.

This process may involve thinking ahead about only going to a place that gets crowded at certain times of the day to avoid your child getting overstimulated or trying to avoid places that historically have behavioral triggers for your child. For example, if loud noises set off your child, avoid a movie theater or an arcade.

Also, think about packing tools for distraction and soothing in case your child gets upset, says Chaikind McNulty. Another suggestion is to plan the outing with another supportive adult who can jump in if you need an extra pair of hands.

## An exercise in self-compassion

If your child engages in a behavior that is embarrassing, take a deep breath and engage in self-compassion. You will get through this tough moment.

"It is critical to create a team that can help guide you, support you and rally around you,"



says Chaikind McNulty. “Even if you don’t immediately find those you trust, keep searching because you and your family deserve a community through this journey. Also, engage in self-compassion. This journey will be full of wonderful loving moments and very, very challenging ones. All that will be enhanced and helped with self-compassion.”

Marie Wei of Rockville is a mother to 7-year-old Parker, a child with ASD.

“The hardest part is the fact that it truly is an invisible disability until it’s not,” says Wei. “People often think that a child’s behavior is acting out or misbehaving. In reality, autism is a disability that causes the child the inability to control certain behaviors.”

And Wei stresses that beyond a parent’s difficulty to cope with embarrassment, a mom or dad also has to worry about a child’s feelings.

“Just because my son doesn’t talk or play with your children the same way, it doesn’t mean that he doesn’t want to have friends,” Wei says. Like many other parents, Wei hopes that once adults gain an understanding of children with invisible special needs, they can pass on this understanding, compassion and empathy to their children as well.

“Will you please teach your children to have extra compassion to include children with special needs? Will you please teach your children to learn what my child likes so they can gain his trust, respect and desire to play with them?” Wei asks.

But Wei does try to take time to appreciate the positive attributes and accomplishments of her son.

“Be patient. Look at the growth your child has made. Try not to compare him or her to others, but be proud of where your child is now,” Wei says. “You have an amazing kid who is so special.” ■

## Parenting a Child with an Invisible Disability

We asked several mothers to express the emotions and thoughts that come to mind as parents of a child with an invisible disability. Below is some feedback they shared:

- Judged.
- Isolated and left out.
- Feeling of a lack of empathy from others.
- Not in control.
- Always tired.
- Constantly advocating.
- Fear of failure.
- Always on edge.
- Fear of my child being labeled.
- Always working harder behind the scenes than other parents.
- Wondering if my child will ever truly fit in.
- Struggling to see my child’s positive attributes.
- Fearing failure without school and professional supports.
- Saddened that no one may get to know my child beyond his or her diagnosis.
- Wondering if my child will hold a job or become capable of functioning independently.
- Missing out on the typical childhood experiences.
- Struggling with when to disclose the disability for support versus staying silent.



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# Ten Tips to Keep Kids Calm and Cool



Kids with special needs may struggle with anxiety more than their peers. These strategies can help them ease their fears and thrive.

BY LAURA FARMER

Most of us have felt the symptoms of anxiety: persistent fear or uneasiness, a racing heartbeat, shortness of breath, nausea or disruption to sleep. It is normal for children, too, to occasionally experience anxiety. But when they do not outgrow the normal fears of childhood, such as separation anxiety, or when these fears disrupt their daily lives, they may have an anxiety disorder.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as many as 4.4 million or about 7% of children ages 3-17 have diagnosed anxiety. Experts suggest that children with special needs are even more likely than their peers to experience anxiety. For example, according to one study, nearly 40% of young people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) also had an anxiety disorder. Further, anxiety may manifest differently in children with special needs.

"Anxiety often presents in children as a change to their usual behavior, behavioral outbursts or meltdowns, changes in daily habits such as sleep or eating or difficulty with self-regulation," says Dr. Elizabeth M. Chawla, co-director of the Integrated Mental Health Clinic at MedStar Georgetown University Hospital Pediatrics. "Neurodiverse children can present with any of these symptoms but might have more nuanced or varied expressions of anxiety. For example, neurodiverse children experiencing anxiety might have frequent behavioral outbursts, be less tolerant of changes in routine,

be less tolerant of stimuli or might become overwhelmed and upset more easily. For children with differences in communication, it may be more difficult to express an increase in worries or fears with caregivers, so it is important for caregivers to be mindful of these signs."

According to Rebekah Hagan, LCSW-C, a psychotherapist for Sheppard Pratt's nationally recognized Outpatient Mental Health Center in Maryland, children with special needs may be more prone to experiencing the symptoms of anxiety or an anxiety disorder.

"Children with special needs may feel like they are different and have lower self-esteem," explains Hagan. "They can experience bullying. They may worry about being able to make friends or be more likely to be left out of the group. Also, having a disability can be unpredictable. They may have symptoms that flare up without warning, which can understandably be stressful. Finally, children with special needs often have more difficulty understanding their social environment, which makes it difficult to process what's going on around them."

For families of children with disabilities, watching their child struggle with these heightened worries can be heartbreaking. To help them cope, Hagan offers the following 10 tips for children—and their parents—to remain calm and cool.



## 1. Offer choices.

Offering options, like choosing between two different outfits or a few different food choices, provides kids with some positive opportunities for control in their day.

## 2. Teach self-awareness.

Providing age and developmentally appropriate information about their condition will help them understand what they're capable of and ensure they are not left frustrated with unanswered questions about themselves.

## 3. Focus on uniqueness.

Have a positive outlook that focuses on their uniqueness rather than their disability.

## 4. Get social.

Seek out peer support networks in your community for you and your child. In addition to seeking broader social opportunities, try to help your child foster a few more intimate friendships by planning one-on-one playdates.

## 5. Learn what soothes them.

Most children have a safe person, activity or space that tends to calm them down. Learn all of the things that comfort your child and have them on hand when you notice something may be triggering the anxiety.

## 6. Be a bookworm.

Reading books and social stories that teach children how to navigate stressful situations can help them better handle real-world events that may trigger anxiety. Also, reading about other children with disabilities can help normalize their experience while boosting their self-esteem.

## 7. Validate their feelings.

Help your children understand their feelings by narrating what's going on. Giving them the words or signs to articulate what they're feeling will help them feel less frustrated. Even for children

who are not able to verbalize their feelings, hearing you try to describe what they seem to be expressing can be very helpful.

## 8. Be consistent.

One of the best ways to help children experience less anxiety is to incorporate routines into every element of their day. Predictability helps them feel more in control and less anxious. When schedule changes inevitably arise, try to take time to communicate and help them process these changes in advance.

## 9. Seek help.

Please don't try to manage your child's anxiety on your own. Seek help from professionals who can provide appropriate medication and therapy. Further, seek help from your village. As much as you love and appreciate your child, raising a child with special needs takes tremendous effort. When you have bad days or seasons, be vulnerable with your friends and community and ask for the help you need. It could be as simple as having a friend sit with your child while you take a long shower. You could ask your church or neighbors for help with meals. You could seek out carpools for school or medical appointments. Your child benefits as much as you do when you seek help; you are better able to care for and appreciate them.

## 10. Be a calm and cool role model.

While it is certainly easier said than done, as much as possible, try to model calm. Manage your own anxiety in healthy ways by practicing self-care and seeking out support when you can. Your example can help your child understand that anxiety is a normal and natural part of life, and healthy and unhealthy ways of coping with it exist. Problem solving, seeking help, caring for yourself, knowing your limits and engaging in activities that foster your mental wellness are all healthy ways to help you manage your anxiety. ■



# Sensory-Friendly Experiences for Kids in the DMV

BY JAMIE DAVIS SMITH

**K**ids with sensory sensitivities enjoy going to museums, plays and events like their neurotypical peers. However, they may need some modifications to make the experiences accessible for them.

## Movies

### Select AMC Theatres

Movies can transport children to another world, but they can be overwhelming to the senses. Select AMC Theatres in Washington, Maryland and Virginia host sensory-friendly movie showings where lights are turned up and the sound is turned down. During these screenings, it's OK to get up and walk or sing along. Catch AMC's Sensory-Friendly Film program on the second and fourth Saturday of each month. On these days, one showing of the biggest hits supports family-friendly, sensory-friendly screenings. Check your local theater for showtimes.

[amctheatres.com](http://amctheatres.com)

## Museums

### B&O Railroad Museum

Select Sundays at the B&O Railroad Museum in Baltimore are designated as Sensory Sundays. During these visits, the museum features a special sensory activity, such as making Snow

Dough, and sensory-friendly tours and train rides. During Sensory Sundays, the museum turns off all music, provides low lighting and designates quiet areas. Museum staff also provide sensory kits and a community table with resources from local organizations. The museum presents several stories about the museum and train rides to prepare young engineers for their visit.

901 W. Pratt St., Baltimore | 410-752-2490  
[borail.org](http://borail.org)

### National Children's Museum

Young visitors who need extra support can borrow a sensory backpack. The backpack includes noise-reduction headphones and fidgets to help ease sensory stimulation. This museum also has two specially designed quiet spaces. Parents can find the Quiet Room and the Hideaway Tree nook space featuring acoustic-absorbing materials and lower light levels. The museum plans on introducing sensory-focused sessions in the future.

1300 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, D.C.  
202-844-2486 | [nationalchildrensmuseum.org](http://nationalchildrensmuseum.org)

## Theaters

### Imagination Stage

Imagination Stage excels at making sure

all families feel welcome and can enjoy the theater. Select performances are modified to make them welcoming to kids who need sensory support. Accommodations start before the show begins with a pre-visit social story so that kids know what to expect once they arrive. During the show, the sound level and brightness of the stage lights are reduced, staff raise glow sticks before something surprising happens on stage and quiet areas are available for anyone who needs a break.

4908 Auburn Ave., Bethesda | 301-961-6060  
[imaginationstage.org](http://imaginationstage.org)

### The Kennedy Center

The Kennedy Center offers sensory-friendly performances for many of its shows. The organization's website offers several resources for areas to prepare children for their visit. These resources include social stories, a virtual tour of the building and maps with designated quiet spaces. During the show, guests may talk and move around, strobe lighting is reduced, lights are kept on and sounds are quieter than a typical performance. Kennedy Center staff are trained to assist families who need extra support.

2700 F St. NW, Washington, D.C. | 800-444-1324  
[kennedy-center.org](http://kennedy-center.org) ■

## ARTECHOUSE

ARTECHOUSE DC is where art and technology combine. Its highly immersive and interactive exhibits are other-worldly. Many children love the sensory experience of visiting ARTECHOUSE DC, but a visit can seem overwhelming for some visitors. To ensure exhibits are accessible to everyone, ARTECHOUSE DC hosts sensory-friendly sessions. Before visiting, guests can review a Social Narrative, view a First Person Exhibition Video featuring live sound and check out an Exhibition Experience Map. During its Sensory-Friendly Programs, ARTECHOUSE DC lowers the sound in the Immersion Gallery and provides a "take-a-break" space for those who need to rest from the experience.

1238 Maryland Ave. SW, Washington, D.C.  
<https://artechouse.com/plan-your-visit-dc/?locations=dc>



COURTESY OF THE ARTECHOUSE/TEAM RYKOV

# Claudia Skinner

## Promoting the power of potential at PosAbilities Academy

BY LINDSAY C. VANASDALAN



**W**hen Claudia Skinner didn't see a program that would help her daughter Grace reach her career goals, she decided to start one herself. PosAbilities Academy opened in 2019, using Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) therapy as its guide.

"That's really how we can teach individuals the skills they need to learn and then work with them to reduce the maladaptive behaviors which sometimes are the barriers for them to getting a job," she says.

Drawing on her experience in project management for businesses and startups, Skinner went back to school for a master's degree in education and a certificate in ABA therapy to create this private academy for differently-abled learners. The Loudon County, Virginia, mom started two additional initiatives—each born out of needs that she saw for her daughter.

One is the academy's summer camp, which provides fun, age-appropriate opportunities for students to avoid falling into a summer slump and an ABA clinic for adults and teens who typically would have aged out of support services.

Skinner lives in Loudon County with her partner, Mark Gand; his son, Eric, 19; and her two daughters, Grace, 18, and Brittany, 31. (Gand's other daughter Nicole lives in Florida).

Skinner spoke to *Washington FAMILY* about motherhood and her new career in education.

**Navigating life and a career as a mom can be tough, and caring for**

### **a child with special needs adds another element. How do you balance it all?**

I have a strong support system around me that helps me balance it. I definitely couldn't do this alone. Between life with children and my partner—and before that—I had extended family—my mom. They used to help me a lot; the support system is very important, especially when you have an individual with special needs that you have to care for. (Grace) has a care attendant who works with her and has been working with us or part of the family for 12 years. If I decide that there's a goal in front of me, I will work very hard to get it done.

### **What is the greatest lesson you've learned from parenthood?**

Patience. Whether a child has special needs or doesn't, having that patience to learn to let them be, let them make mistakes and just be there—I think that has been one of the greatest lessons for me.

### **You left a career that you knew to start something completely new. What were the triumphs and challenges of that experience?**

I think the biggest triumph has been how rewarding it is—and it has nothing to do with money. With our first year (at) the academy, there are students that finished that year, wrote us a letter and quoted many little things that, because of what we did, they were now able to do. What has been the most challenging is having to learn things that, at my age in my other career, I already was an expert at. One of the ways I have worked to overcome that challenge is surround myself with people who have the experience and knowledge I can learn from and work with me so that we provide support to everyone we come into contact with.

### **Why did you feel having a summer camp at PosAbilities Academy was important?**

The population we work with needs the support throughout the summer. There's not

any path for them to not continue to work on skills or not continue to have structure. For individuals with disabilities, individuals with autism and individuals who need to work hard to achieve goals that they have, having a whole summer without support and without the structure could regress them. Providing something for those individuals to continue to have learning opportunities is very important so that they can continue to progress. ■

### **FAMILY FAVORITES**

**Family Meal:** We have lots of homemade favorites, especially typical cuisine from my motherland, Colombia.

**Local Spot to Spend the Day Together:** We live in Loudoun County, and there are lots of wineries, breweries and farms that are family-friendly. A favorite day trip is to visit Great Country Farms then go across the street to Bluemont Vineyard and Dirt Farm Brewing.

**Summer Vacation:** We love to visit beaches across the East Coast.

**Summer Camp Activity at PosAbilities:** Each week is packed with activities, from cooking to going to play ball at a local park. We enjoy exploring our community with our (camp) participants. From state parks to small coffee shops, we look for special needs-friendly destinations we can visit. We also have an entrepreneurship week that offers participants the opportunity to develop a business plan to launch their business.

**Words of Wisdom:** There is a quote I live my life by: "If you don't like something, change it. If you can't change it, change your attitude."





# Adjusting to a New Physical Impairment as a Family

BY HEATHER M. ROSS

**C**hildren who are adjusting to a new physical limitation may have trouble understanding how this new circumstance will affect their day-to-day lives. As a parent, you may also wonder how things are going to work differently for them and what their daily living will be like.

Your child may be adjusting to a new mobility device such as a cane or walker, or a prosthetic that will take time to learn how to use.

## What to keep in mind

How your child copes with a physical impairment will depend heavily on the child's age and maturity. The older your child is, the stronger the senses of loss and grief will be.

According to Lindsay Cirincione, a licensed clinical psychologist who works with children with disabilities at the nationally recognized Kennedy Krieger Institute, it's common for children to be frustrated at the beginning as they're learning to use their bodies in a new way. These adjustments take time and practice, and that's OK.

"The most important piece when a kid is adjusting to a new impairment is that parents need to let their child take the lead," Cirincione says.

## Let your child lead

There is no wrong or abnormal way to react to this type of change in ability. The best step parents can take is talk to their child. Ask how they're doing, how things are going with their friends at school, and how things are going with family members.

"Kids are remarkably resilient, and sometimes adults have a harder time adjusting. Kids often bounce back quickly. We see a lot

of parents who also need support in coping with this change," Cirincione says.

## Talk to your child about physical differences

At the beginning of your child's journey, your child may want to hear very little about why his or her body is different from yours or that of one's peers. As kids get older, it's OK to give more information as they develop more questions.

It's OK if you don't know all the answers to your child's questions. In this case, Via Strong, a clinical and rehabilitation psychologist who works with the National Center for Children's Rehabilitation through Children's National Hospital, recommends saying to your child, "I want to make sure I'm giving you the right information. Let's make an appointment with your pediatrician and ask that question there."

When you're explaining additional help your child might need, reassure them that you feel lucky to be their parent and that while there may be some hard things, you'll get through them together.

## Nurture confidence building in your child

One source of anxiety for children dealing with a new physical impairment is wondering how they'll answer questions from friends, classmates and teachers at school. The best way to deal with this situation is to practice answering some of the more common questions at home.

Cirincione recommends daily family check-ins where parents can express their feelings to model healthy expression.

Another important way parents can

"The most important piece when a kid is adjusting to a new impairment is that parents need to let their child take the lead."  
—Lindsay Cirincione, Kennedy Krieger

reduce anxiety is by giving children permission to say they don't want to talk about it.

For example, "That's something I'm not comfortable talking about right now. Can you call (name of parent or relative) to get more information?" says Cirincione.

Another way parents can help their child adjust is getting them involved in social activities with other children who have similar differences. Many activities, camps and types of wheelchair sports exist for children.

"Find what's in your area and connect with these things," advises Strong.

## Prepare for school

If your child's first time back to school after a physical impairment has occurred is approaching, you as a parent can help your child prepare for this transition.

First, set up a meeting with school administration and your child's teachers to explain your child's ability difference. Discuss the type of support your child will need and the signs that your child may be experiencing difficulty. Make a plan for when teachers should contact a parent or guardian for help.

Make sure you learn about the school's approach with disabilities. If the school overly focuses on liability, administrators may keep kids out of activities that would benefit them.

## Misconceptions about raising a child with a physical impairment

One common myth about children and physical impairments is that kids will be limited in what they can do. That may not be true. Children are remarkably resilient and often surprise caregivers and doctors with how well they cope and adapt to their new circumstances.

"Each parent goes through a grieving process. Guilt, sadness and anger are all OK to experience. Those emotions don't make you less of a parent. Normalize all the emotions," says Cirincione.

"Despite the immense challenges that can come with having a physical impairment, kids who deal with these circumstances are constantly surprising us," Cirincione says. "While it may be a very difficult circumstance to adjust to, we need to give kids room to be successful because they can surprise us with all the things they can do that we never would have dreamed of." ■

## FAQs for Parents

### How do I find a support group?

"Online support groups can be very helpful, but it's important to be cautious. Every child is unique, and just because one person had a really good or really bad outcome doesn't mean that will happen for your child. (Remember to) double-check information with medical providers," says Cirincione.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many support groups now have a Zoom meeting option. Parents of children with more rare differences can access a global network of parents. Strong also recommends that parents look into conferences for their child's disability. Conferences not only give parents access to other parents, but also to new research and the best emerging practices for coping and thriving with the condition.

### How do I know if my child is coping well with an injury or impairment?

"Let your child take the lead. As adults, we anticipate challenges ahead of us. Children are better at living in the moment," says Cirincione. "If you see your child doing well, it's OK to assume they're coping well."

If your child stops doing what he or she enjoys, withdraws to spend more time alone and isolates from family and friends, these signs may signal that a child is having trouble coping.

### What's different between children born with a physical difference and kids who acquire one later?

When children are born with an impairment, they won't know that any differences exist between them and their peers at first. Eventually, they will start to notice differences and ask questions about why and how they are different from their peers. During this time, parents may notice some social withdrawal and reluctance to engage with their peers.



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# Resources for Families with Neurodiverse Children

## AUTISM SOCIETY OF NORTHERN VIRGINIA

asn.v.org  
571-328-5792  
10467 White Granite Drive, #324  
Oakton, VA 22124

For more than 50 years, the Autism Society of Northern Virginia has lead the way, advocating at the local, state and national levels to improve the quality of life for those in the disability community.

## AUTISM SPEAKS

autismspeaks.org  
help@autismspeaks.org  
888-AUTISM2

The Autism Speaks Response Team (ART) is an information line for the autism community. Team members are specially trained to provide personalized information and resources to people with autism and their families.

## CARE CONNECTION FOR CHILDREN

inova.org/about-inova/inova-your-community/community-access-care/care-connection-children  
703-698-2450  
2700 Prosperity Ave., #295  
Fairfax, VA 22031

Care Connection for Children is part of the Virginia Department of Health statewide network of excellence serving children and

youth with disabilities. The organization's caring team works closely with families to coordinate care and find the best community and health care resources in Northern Virginia. Care Connection for Children helps children reach their optimal health and quality of life in a caring, innovative and culturally sensitive manner.

## CENTER FOR ACCESSIBILITY AT DC PUBLIC LIBRARY

dclibrary.org/services/accessibility

The Center for Accessibility is committed to providing individuals with disabilities equal access to library resources and services at all DC Public Library branches. The Center for Accessibility staff offer disability-related cultural programming, book clubs and accessible game nights throughout the year and classes in American Sign Language and Assistive Technology. All services are free.

## DREAMS FOR KIDS DC

dreamsforkidsdc.org  
Dreams for Kids DC, a nonprofit children's charity, provides life-changing activities that empower children with physical and developmental disabilities to unite with their peers and realize their potential. Dreams for Kids DC provides life-changing experiences to more than 800 children with these disabilities for free while serving residents of Washington, Maryland and Virginia.

## ELEVATED LEARNING SOLUTIONS

www.elevatedlearningsolutionsllc.com  
elevatedlearningsolutionsllc@gmail.com  
301-466-5123

We are a group of professional educators who implement a team approach in order to support the WHOLE child. Our goal is to not only fill academic gaps, but to create confident, independent individuals who understand themselves as learners.

## ENCORE STAGE & STUDIO

encorestage.org  
info@encorestage.org  
703-548-1154  
4000 Lorcom Lane  
Arlington, VA 22207

Ages: 4-18

Encore Stage & Studio provides accessibility services year-round. Encore is delighted to provide an accessibility matinee performance for selected productions. These matinee performances provide accommodations for children and families with special needs. Accommodations include ASL interpretation and assisted listening devices as well as Braille and large print programs to allow the performance to be accessible to all audiences. An exclusive backstage tour will be provided for children to make meaningful connections with the story and to experience theater in a new way. Interested patrons needing these accommodations must e-mail info@encorestage.org in advance. Dates for our accessibility matinee performances will be available online on our website.

## FORMED FAMILIES FORWARD

formedfamiliesforward.org  
703-539-2904  
4031 University Drive, Suite 100  
Fairfax, VA 22030

Formed Families Forward is a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting foster, kinship and adoptive families of children and youth with disabilities and other special needs. The organization serves families, educators and child welfare professionals in the Northern Virginia region. The organization improves the developmental, educational, social, emotional and post-secondary outcomes for children and youth with disabilities and other special needs.

## KEEN GREATER DC-BALTIMORE

keengreaterdc.org  
301-770-3200  
P.O. Box 341590  
Bethesda, MD 20827-1590  
KEEN (Kids Enjoy Exercise Now) empowers youth with disabilities and impacts volunteer

coaches through participation in free, noncompetitive one-on-one programs of physical activity and fun, supporting the overall health and well-being of all individuals. In-person and virtual programs take place on Sundays throughout the DMV and on Saturdays in Washington, D.C. More information about activities taking place in Baltimore, Montgomery County, Washington, Arlington and Fairfax are available online.

## KENNEDY SCHOOL

catholiccharitiesdc.org/kennedyschool  
202-281-2700  
801 Buchanan St. NE  
Washington, DC 20017

The Kennedy School is a nonpublic day school for children ages 6 to 22 with disabilities. The Kennedy School specializes in serving students with autism, intellectual disabilities, emotional disabilities, learning disabilities and traumatic brain injuries. Using a small-classroom, team-based approach, staff support students holistically through behavioral and social counseling, academic intervention focusing on mathematics, internships that emphasize core employment skills and physical education.

## LITTLE BUDS PROGRAM

littleleaves.org  
info@littleleaves.org  
202-420-8359  
9727 Georgia Ave.  
Silver Spring, MD  
11480 Sunset Hills Road  
Reston, VA 20190

Ages: 1-6

A center-based ABA program for young children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder run in a preschool-like setting. It is designed for children up to age 6 who have been recommended for intensive ABA services.

## LITTLE LEAVES BEHAVIORAL SERVICES

littleleaves.org  
202-420-8359  
9727 Georgia Ave.  
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Little Leaves is dedicated to helping people with social, communication and behavioral challenges grow and succeed so that they can participate as fully as possible in their families and communities. Using evidence-based practices based on the principles of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), professionals partner with each family to develop and implement an individualized therapy plan. We also help families coordinate the logistics of therapy. Little Leaves has 11 locations across the Baltimore, Washington, Virginia and South Florida regions.



### MARYLAND FAMILY NETWORK

[marylandfamilynetwork.org](http://marylandfamilynetwork.org)  
410-659-7701

1001 Eastern Ave., Second Floor  
Baltimore, MD 21202

Formed in 2009 from the merger of two leading nonprofit organizations—the Maryland Committee for Children and Friends of the Family, the Maryland Family Network operates a statewide network of Family Support Centers that help hundreds of families with infants and toddlers to become stronger and self-sufficient. The organization's Child Care Resource Centers offer state-of-the-art training, mentoring, coaching and other supports to Maryland's dedicated child care workforce. Maryland Family Network's LOCATE Child Care Special Needs Service is a free service available to any family who has a child with an IEP or an IFSP from birth through age 21.

### NEWFOUND FAMILIES VIRGINIA

[newfoundva.org](http://newfoundva.org)  
P.O. Box 85

Ashland, VA 23005

NewFound Families is the Virginia adoptive, foster and kinship family association. This organization provides educational, advocacy and support services to families caring for children who are unable to live with their birth parents. As a membership association, Newfound Families Virginia supports the recruitment and retention of quality foster, adoptive and kinship families; advocates for consistent and standardized training and support for foster, adoptive and kinship families; and provides resources and information to families, empowering them to be educated, equipped and effective as valued partners in protecting the health and safety of children.

### PATHWAYS EDUCATIONAL CONSULTING

[pathwayseducationalconsulting.com/educational-consultant-montgomery-county-md-educational-advocate-montgomery-county-md](http://pathwayseducationalconsulting.com/educational-consultant-montgomery-county-md-educational-advocate-montgomery-county-md)  
301-926-1081

Pathways Educational Consulting is an academic advisory service that helps parents navigate the public school system of Montgomery County, Maryland. The organization works with parents of students with learning disabilities and mental health challenges to connect them to the services their children need to put them on the path to educational success. Founder Janet Lee works with parents to prepare them for Montgomery County Public Schools meetings and assists at these meetings to secure accommodations and, when necessary, appropriate school placements.

### PEDIATRIC THERAPY STUDIO

[info@pediatrictherapiststudio.com](mailto:info@pediatrictherapiststudio.com)  
703-663-4808

8221 Old Courthouse Road, Suite 105  
Vienna, VA 22182

Pediatric Therapy Studio is accredited by the Behavioral Health Center of Excellence. We provide ABA behavioral therapy, speech and language therapy, and occupational therapy to children with exceptional needs. We provide center-based and in-home services and accept VA Medicaid and commercial insurances.

### SHEFTER LAW, P.A.

[shefterlaw.com](http://shefterlaw.com)  
301-605-7303

110 N. Washington St., Suite 350  
Rockville, MD 20850

Frances Shefter is an education attorney and advocate committed to helping clients have a Stress-Free IEP experience. Shefter Law, P.A. serves families of children with special needs. Employing her education background to IEP matters, Shefter offers strategy sessions, mediation services and due process responses.

### SPIRIT CLUB

[spiritclub.com](http://spiritclub.com)  
301-933-3722

10417-B Metropolitan Ave.  
Kensington, MD 20985

SPIRIT Club provides supportive fitness

programs for people with and without disabilities. In-person and virtual options, group classes and personal training are available, plus HSCSN/DDS/DDA options. Visit [spiritclub.com](http://spiritclub.com) or email [join@spiritclub.com](mailto:join@spiritclub.com). Mention #WASHFAM to get your first session and class free.

### THE ARC MONTGOMERY COUNTY

[thearcmontgomerycounty.org](http://thearcmontgomerycounty.org)  
301-984-5777

7362 Calhoun Place  
Rockville, MD 20855

The Arc Montgomery County offers inclusive programs for children and youth ages 6 weeks to 21 years with and without disabilities and special health care needs, including full-time child care, preschool, before- and after-care programs, and summer activities.

### THE AUBURN SCHOOL

[theauburnschool.org](http://theauburnschool.org)  
[info@theauburnschool.org](mailto:info@theauburnschool.org)  
9115 Georgia Ave.  
Silver Spring, MD 20910  
301-588-8048

3800 Concorde Parkway, #500

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Unlike traditional cigarettes, vape devices lack tobacco's telltale odor, making them easier to hide.

# What Parents Need to Know About Kids and Vaping

BY RUDY MALCOM

Faint scents of mint and mango emanate from middle and high school bathrooms, hallways and classrooms, from students' parties and from bedrooms. These fruity flavors, subtle and designed to hook kids, belie the harmful effects of their sources: e-cigarettes, or vape devices.

Between 2011 and 2019, vaping increased 1,800% among youth, in large part due to Juul Labs' sweet-tasting, flash-drive-looking e-cigarettes, often advertised as harmless and cool.

Another reason: "E-cigarette companies are taking the playbook of conventional cigarettes and using young, sexy models and other techniques that they know worked before because there is little to no regulation on marketing for e-cigarettes," says Dr. Susan Walley, chief of Children's National Hospital's division of hospital medicine.

Walley, who chairs the American Academy of Pediatrics' section on nicotine and tobacco prevention and treatment, says that while ads for cancer-causing cigarettes were banned in the 1970s, "it's a Wild Wild West" for vaping devices.

According to the American Lung Association (ALA), 8,000 kids are starting to vape every day, leaving them four times likelier to try regular cigarettes. Here's what parents should know about kids and vaping.

## Dangers of vaping

Juuls and other vape devices—which can resemble objects like pens, highlighters and chargers—are often marketed as a healthier alternative to traditional cigarettes, which contain lung-damaging tar, along with thousands of toxic chemicals.

E-cigarettes haven't been around long enough for long-term research, and it is unknown exactly what chemicals are in

them. However, vaping likely exposes users to fewer toxins than regular smoking.

Yet vaping remains unsafe. One vape pod can contain as much nicotine, a highly addictive substance, as a pack of cigarettes.

Worse, vaping is associated with lung injuries and deaths. In February 2020, before COVID-19 dominated headlines, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) confirmed nearly 3,000 cases of e-cigarette or vaping use-associated lung injury (EVALI), with 68 deaths attributed to the condition.

In response, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) began cracking down on sales of vaping devices, particularly fruit-flavored ones widely blamed for igniting the youth vaping epidemic. Juul discontinued all of its flavors except for menthol and tobacco.

Yet the government's ban on refillable devices ignited competing brands to produce prefilled disposable ones, some with even higher levels of nicotine than Juuls. Between 2019 and 2020, use of disposables increased 1,000% among high students and 400% among middle-school students, according to the CDC.

"Inhaling these things is very dangerous, but teenagers don't understand that," says Dr. Okan Elidemir, the chief of pulmonary medicine at Nemours Children's Specialty Care in Pensacola, Florida. (Elidemir is available by telehealth for patients at the hospital's Wilmington, Delaware, campus.)

Vaping can increase users' heart rate and blood pressure and can cause coughing, wheezing and shortness of breath—or bacterial infection and pneumonia.

## Stats about vaping

According to the 2021 National Youth Tobacco Survey, 11% of high schoolers and 3% of middle schoolers in the

United States reported they were current users of e-cigarettes, with 80% using flavored products. That's more than 2 million middle and high school students, compared to 3.6 million in 2020 and 5.4 million in 2019.

These declines could in part reflect young people avoiding stores and spending more time under their parents' supervision due to COVID-19. At the same time, however, more current users are using daily than before.

Walley sees this statistic as a "proxy for addiction," a public health crisis related to rising anxiety and depression among youth due to factors like climate change, mass shootings and the COVID-19 pandemic.

"A lot of kids are self-medicating by vaping," says Dr. Mary Garza of the Maryland Pediatric Group, adding that they also "want to seem like they're growing up and like they're cool."

### Signs of vaping in kids

Unlike traditional cigarettes, vape devices lack tobacco's telltale odor, making them easier to hide. However, signs of use include

irritability or restlessness, faint sweet scents and unfamiliar technology or spare parts like atomizers and cartridges.

Other signs include increased thirst, dark circles under the eyes and desire for spicy food, all of which come from vaping-induced dehydration. Since nicotine slows down the healing of wounds, kids who vape are likelier to have long-lasting acne and blemishes.

### Tips for conversation

The ALA advises parents to ask open-ended questions and avoid judgment and scare tactics when talking to their kids about vaping.

Even before that, Dr. Panagis Galiatatos, who directs Johns Hopkins Medicine's tobacco treatment clinic, says: "The first thing I would tell parents is: Talk to your kids about how they're handling their stress."

Opening the door to these conversations can keep the lines of communication flowing between parents and children. Talking to kids about vaping before they begin can help educate them about the dangers of vaping for their health. ■



### Additional Resources

Teens and young adults who want to quit vaping can join the program "This is Quitting" for free by texting DITCHVAPE to 88709.

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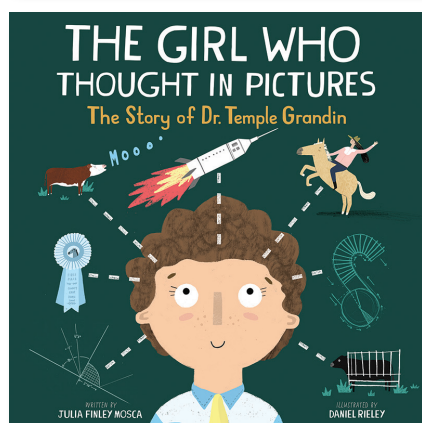
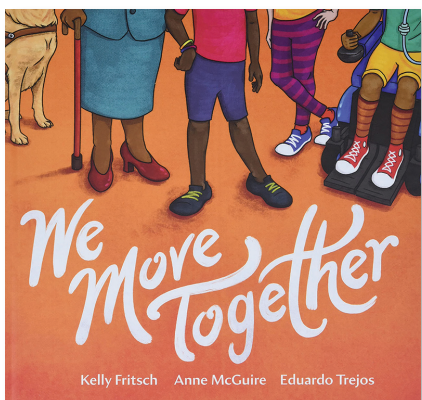
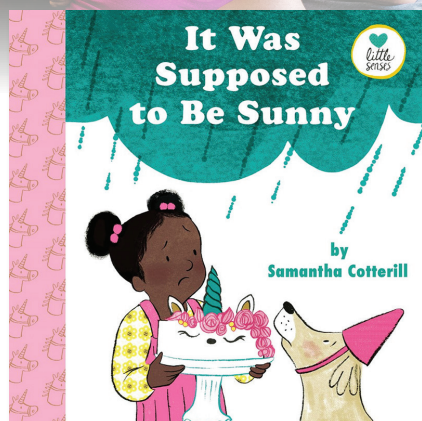


# Appreciate Others for Who They Are

Discover books that invite readers to learn about neurodiversity

BY DC PUBLIC LIBRARY STAFF

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## BOOKS FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN

### "It Was Supposed to Be Sunny" by Samantha Cotterill

Part of the "Little Senses" series, focusing on children with autism and sensory processing disorders, birthday girl Laila learns to regroup and save her party from disaster with the help of her service dog Charlie and coping tools from her mom. The illustrations are bright and colorful, and the story is great for any child who feels overwhelmed by social situations and the unexpected.

Readers will also enjoy "Benji, The Bad Day, and Me," by Sally J. Pla and illustrated by Ken Min, and "My Brother Charlie" by Denene Millner, Holly Robinson Peete and Ryan Elizabeth Peete.

### "We Move Together"

by Kelly Fritsch and Anne McGuire, illustrated by Eduardo Trejos

A fun book to read aloud or one on one, "We Move Together" depicts children with a range of abilities exploring their world and addressing issues like accessibility and problem solving. This work is a wonderful, simple introduction to accessibility issues

for younger children and the importance of community in helping to solve them. The authors also include talking points at the end for further discussion about disability issues.

Readers will also enjoy "My Three Best Friends and Me, Zulay" by Cari Best, pictures by Vanessa Brantley-Newton, and "Just Ask!: Be Different, Be Brave, Be You" by Sonia Sotomayor, illustrated by Rafael López.

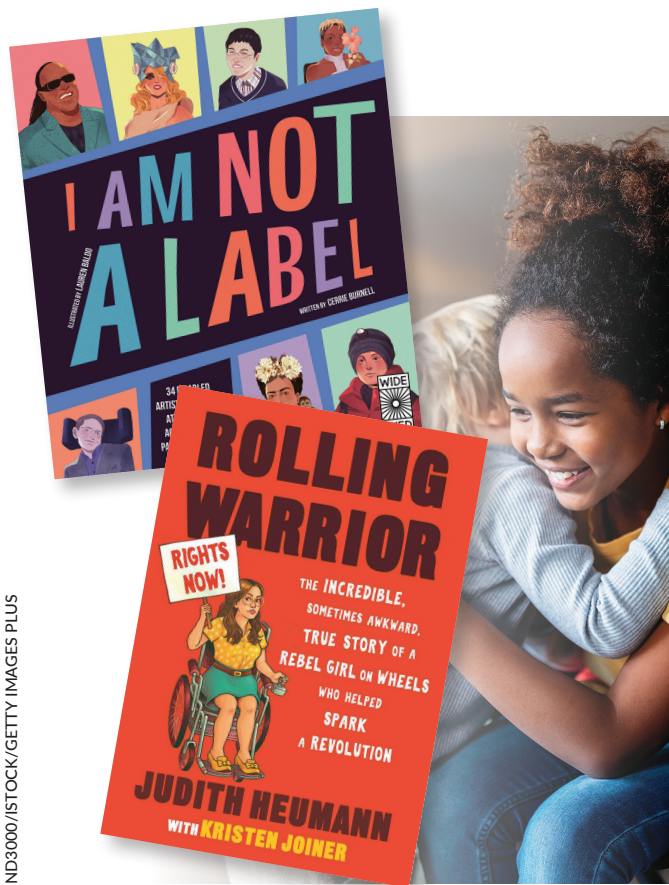
### "The Girl Who Thought in Pictures: The Story of Dr. Temple Grandin" by Julia Finley Mosca, illustrated by Daniel Rieley

It's rare that a biography can be so enjoyable to read aloud, but this one about renowned animal scientist and autism spokesperson Dr. Temple Grandin makes it seamless with easy rhyming verse.

You'll appreciate this wonderful story to share with any child who has a passion for animals. The story touches on the barriers she faced in finding her voice as a child, how her visual memory is such an asset to her work as a scientist and fun illustrations of her inventions.

Readers will also enjoy "All the Way to the Top: How One Girl's Fight for Americans with Disabilities Changed Everything" by Annette Bay Pimental, illustrated by Nabi Ali.





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## BOOKS FOR OLDER CHILDREN

### **"I Am Not a Label: 34 Disabled Artists, Thinkers, Athletes and Activists from Past and Present"**

by Cerrie Burnell, illustrated by Lauren Mark Baldo

Prominent people with disabilities are celebrated in this brightly illustrated collection, from mountain climbers and YouTubers to painters and more. The spectrum of disability is shown well throughout, including sections on invisible disabilities as important parts of disability representation.

### **"Rolling Warrior: The Incredible, Sometimes Awkward, True Story of a Rebel Girl on Wheels Who Helped Spark a Revolution"**

by Judith Heumann and Kristen Joiner

Judith (Judy) Heumann's journey to become a modern disability rights activist began when she was denied access to attend kindergarten due to her disability. Her fight for equal education led to becoming a teacher and leader in the push for disability rights protections under U.S. law. She quite literally helped change the world for people with disabilities, and her part in disability history was also celebrated in the 2020 Oscar-nominated documentary "Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution." "Rolling Warrior" is a great story for young activists on how one person's fight for access to education can transform into the fight for millions. ■

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# From Bad Speller to Attorney

The importance of focusing on one's strengths

BY FRANCES SHEFTER, ESQ.



**A**s a little girl growing up, I did not think I was very smart. I did not spell well, and I was not great with grammar. Back then, special education services were minimal at best. For the few services that were available, they came with a negative stigma. I grew up thinking that I'm not very smart, but that's OK. I am kind and giving. I did OK in high school. I remember meeting with my high school counselor and having her guide me toward teaching. I thought, "OK. I love children. This could be good."

Luckily, I got into my safety school for college, a school known for education. I majored in early childhood education and did OK. Two weeks after I graduated, I moved to Florida and got my first full-time teaching position teaching kindergarten. After a few years, I went back to school and earned my master's degree in special education. I spent seven years in various elementary school classrooms and two years as a special education coordinator in an alternative middle and high school.

My career was great, and I was happy—kind of. I was being considered for a position at central office, but it did not feel right. I did not love what I was doing, and I did not have a passion for it anymore. I was not helping the students in a way that I felt mattered.

Now what? I had always been interested in law, but I never thought I was smart enough to go to law school. I thought I'd take the LSAT, the law school entrance exam, and see how I do. I got an acceptance letter to Stetson University College of Law, and as I read the letter, I said, "I am going to law school." I paused a second and then said, "I am going to law school!"

During the first year of law school, I often thought I wasn't smart enough to be there. Then I had a mind shift. Obviously, the admissions committee thought I was smart enough and showed potential. I set goals for myself—higher goals than I had ever set—and I achieved every one of them. I wrote onto the Law Review, was published more

than once and got my certificate in advocacy. For those of you who don't know, only the top 1% to 5% of law students make it onto Law Review. I was one of the 1% to 5%, even though I could not spell and my grammar was marginal.

Why am I telling you this story, and why is this story important to me? I do not want this situation to happen to your children. Your neurodiverse children are smart. They might not be able to read well. They might not be able to do math. Spelling and decoding might be challenging. But that should not be the focus.

What can your children do? Use their strengths to bring up the weaknesses. School systems are different now. They have supports in place for your children.

Your children deserve to grow up in a positive and encouraging school environment. They deserve to know that weaknesses should not hold them back from reaching their dreams. As their parent, you can educate yourself and advocate for appropriate accommodations and supports in school. Check out the resource box below for a place to start. ■

*Frances Shefter, Esq., is an attorney at Shefter Law, P.A., based in Maryland. Her firm's focus is special education law, and she strives to assist families in Washington and Maryland have a Stress-Free IEP experience. Contact her at 301-605-7303 or frances@shefterlaw.com.*

## RESOURCES

Shefter Law, PA blog and YouTube channel (links at [shefterlaw.com](http://shefterlaw.com))

U.S. Department of Education: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (<https://sites.ed.gov/idea>) [wrightslaw.com](http://wrightslaw.com)

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Email [editor@washingtonfamily.com](mailto:editor@washingtonfamily.com) to submit a story for consideration. "My Turn" pieces do not reflect the views of Washington FAMILY.



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. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

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