

DECEMBER 2022 / JANUARY 2023



GGMG

GOLDEN GATE
MOTHERS GROUP®

magazine



BOUNCE

BACK

Think of my open house kit as a real estate diaper bag.

We moms know the wisdom of carrying everything, just in case. In that spirit, I pack dozens of items for each listing. Goo Gone, a Magic Eraser, a Swiffer - every mess covered! Door wedges and bungee cords - no doors slam shut on my watch. A full toolbox - who needs to hold out for a handyman? I take my responsibility to be prepared seriously.

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LETTER FROM
THE EDITOR:

Comeback Kid

By Sonya Abrams



Sonya is a Cole Valley resident and mom to three children, two cats, and one new dog.

hard to convince him to try new things and take risks. So when we arrived this summer at Camp Mather—San Francisco’s city-owned camp outside Yosemite, which hosts

“I don’t know where he found the courage to fail, but that week he demonstrated strength that inspired me and gives me hope he’ll continue to face hard things head-on.”

families for week-long visits—I cringed when I learned that free access to the camp’s lake required passing an (arguably) daunting swim test, at altitude. My son is a competent swimmer, but he hasn’t had much formal instruction and never learned to tread water, an essential component to most swim tests, so I knew he would fail.

I wasn’t wrong. My child tried mightily, but he couldn’t complete all the required laps, and after he was informed that

he hadn’t passed, he grew anxious and mad, insisting that we pack up and leave camp. I spent most of that afternoon talking him down from his ledge. I was convinced this episode would set the tone for the week.

But then something remarkable happened. On day two, with no prompting, my son attempted the swim test again. Once again, he failed, and I watched his reaction carefully, bracing myself. But this time, he just shrugged and walked away. This scenario repeated itself over the next few days. By the end of the week, he was getting closer to success, but he finished out our visit as a five-time flunkee. I don’t know where he found the courage to fail, but that week he demonstrated strength that inspired me and gives me hope he’ll continue to face hard things head-on.

Our writers in this issue look at the aftermath of adversity and the heartening ways in which resilience asserts itself. We take a fresh look at a couple pieces from the archives, including Rachel Smith’s discussion of how to support your children and yourself during and after divorce, and Jessica

Williams’ deep dive into the psychology of resilience. H.B. Terrell shares professional advice on helping children recover from the pandemic, and Alicia Roberts delves into the magic and mayhem of the postpartum body.

Humans are remarkably resilient. With the right tools and support, we can keep our heads above water and bounce back from much of what life tosses our way.

Sonya Abrams

LETTER FROM
THE BOARD:

Stepping Back and Recharging

By Connie Lin



Connie experienced her first “Fogust” with full days of cloudy skies this August, having never lived on the west side of SF during the summer. She’s excited that her two kids are now both in elementary school.

meal I didn’t have to prepare myself. It was hard to learn that his way of pan frying meat works and the food is yummy.

The next level of this is, of course, recognizing when I need help. There isn’t a trophy waiting for me, emblazoned with SUPER MOM WHO DOES EVERYTHING (but sleep). This is one area where GGMG has got my back. During my high-anxiety and low-sleep baby years, I sought out GGMG’s online forums for help in sorting out breastfeeding issues, baby milestones, interpreting kid behavior, and so much more. GGMG events about positive discipline, healthy eating habits, and career seminars were invaluable guidance and balanced against my fears that I was failing as a mom and that my return to working full time was going to have a negative effect on my kids. While I knew that my body wasn’t going to bounce back

after having two kids, I needed to hear that it’s OK to not want to (or not have the energy to) be more, do more, contribute more. GGMG gently guided me to make choices on what to invest my time in and what to let go of.

After an unexpected break this fall, I’ve appreciated having an opportunity to step back from my old schedule of working days and doing kid/house stuff at night. It’s heavenly to actually sleep during the night. I’ve begun to revert back to my less-stressed self, one who may not get everything done or on time, yet relishes friendships and time spent together and is thankful for the blessings my family and I enjoy.

During this time of celebration and gratitude, consider giving back to your GGMG community—we need you! GGMG

“GGMG gently guided me to make choices on what to invest my time in and what to let go of.”

is completely run by volunteers; volunteering is a wonderful experience and a fun and rewarding opportunity to work in a female-run, nonprofit organization. We are looking for a wide variety of help—board directors, committee chairs, and volunteers, across communications, marketing, recruiting and beyond. Please email recruiting@ggmg.org to learn more.

Hope you and your loved ones enjoy the holiday season, and I look forward to seeing you in 2023!

Connie Lin

HOUSEKEEPING

Opinions expressed in this issue are those of the contributors. Acceptance of advertising does not constitute endorsement by GGMG of any products or services. The editors reserve the right to accept, edit, or reject any content submitted to the magazine.

ADVERTISING: Advertisements are accepted on a first-come, first-served basis. For submission information, email advertising@ggmg.org.

NEXT ISSUE: Health & Wellness

Have an idea for an issue theme or article? Please email editor@ggmg.org.

This issue made possible by: Looking for a new school (again); Skiing in Tahoe over Turkey weekend; Disneyland for Thanksgiving and moving; Dodging viral Lollapalooza; Chasing holiday cheer and only semi-successfully dodging COVID; Hiking and swimming in Lake District National Park (England) with friends and family for Thanksgiving; Definitely mourning Twitter.

COVER OUTTAKES



Only one shot can make it to the cover. Here are some of our other favorites.

Cover photo by Mini Anna Photography
Models: Alison Hughes, Madeline Hughes (14 months)



Imagination Playhouse on Geary Boulevard is a clean play space that offers drop-in play and the option for babysitting for that drop-in if needed. There's a plastic ball pit and climbing structure with two slides ideal for kids ages 2 to 8 (though older kids still like it) and a separate play area for babies with age-appropriate toys.

Peek-a-Boo Factory SF on Geary Boulevard has a three-level play structure with slides, tunnels, bridges, swings, obstacle courses, a zip line, seesaw, and more. It's split into three areas: Ninja Fitness (ages 6 to 12), Junior Play (ages 3 to 12), and Toddler/Baby Play (up to 3 years old).

House of Air in the Presidio is filled with trampolines, airbags, and dodgeball courts that are fun for all ages (including adults). Little jumpers (ages 3 to 6) bounce away in the Air Junior Bounce House to keep them safe while older kids can bounce in other trampoline spaces.

Little Oceanauts on Ocean Avenue has a three-story obstacle course play structure with a trampoline, slides, tunnels, and a ball pit for kids age 3+. There is also a separate infant/toddler play area, where littles can enjoy fun activities and their own ball pit, slides, wall activities and soft foam area.

Rockin' Jump in San Carlos (and other locations) has a main jumping trampoline area, a Dodgeball Arena, and a Slam Dunk Zone for aspiring Warriors.

Rebounderz in Rohnert Park is an indoor trampoline arena that boasts a massive combination jumper with 75 interconnected trampoline beds, four-lane basketball slam, trampoline dodgeball, a four-lane foam pit, a Ninja Warrior obstacle course for adults and kids, and an enormous indoor playground and toddler park for children ages 2 to 12.

While **Pump It Up's** San Francisco location closed, there are locations in Oakland and Santa Clara (among others) if you want to pop in for jumping or book a private party.

Christine's 8 and 6-year-old kids have been happy to go back to jumping at locations in San Francisco for birthday parties.

Volunteer with GGMG

GGMG is a volunteer organization for moms, run by moms. We can always use your help! Want to plan and execute an event? Do you enjoy writing or designing from your home computer in your pajamas? Looking to hone your leadership skills in a friendly environment? Volunteering for GGMG is a wonderful way to build your résumé and create lasting connections with other moms.

Open Magazine roles:

- Copy editor
- Writer
- Designer
- Photographer

Open Board roles:

- Vice President
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- Director of Parent Events
- Director of Kids Events
- Director of Member Engagement
- Secretary

Open Committee roles:

- Member Experiences
- Marketing, Public Relations, and Social Media
- Volunteer Engagement

Volunteer perks include:

- Free GGMG membership (after 1 year of service)
- Annual GGMG Volunteer Appreciation Event
- Dinner and drinks at volunteer meetings every other month (when we return to in-person meetings)
- Extra Partner perks on top of the Member perks you already have access to, like \$100 UrbanSitter credits for babysitting

Whether you have specific skills to contribute or just have a question, please reach out! We know we can find an exciting opportunity that works with your schedule.

For general information, email recruiting@ggmg.org or visit ggmg.org/volunteering/committees to connect with a committee directly.



Lara Bazelon

Photograph by Sonya Abrams Photography

Lara Bazelon is a professor at the University of San Francisco School of Law where she holds the Barnett Chair in Trial Advocacy and directs the Criminal Juvenile Justice and Racial Justice Clinical Programs. She lives in San Francisco with her two children.

Your book, *Ambitious Like A Mother: Why Prioritizing Your Career is Good for Your Kids*, seeks to reframe the debate surrounding career and motherhood aspirations. What led you to write this book?

The book grew out of an op-ed I wrote that was published in *The New York Times* about how at times I had put my career first—I talked about a wrongful conviction case that I was litigating 500 miles away from my children, who were 2 and 4 years old, and how my client's freedom during that time took precedence over my being at home with them. The reaction to the piece was overwhelming and I was inspired by the number of working mothers who shared their stories with me. I wanted to tell those stories and also dig into the research. Most of all I wanted to take the shame and stigma out of the word "ambitious" when applied to women.

Other than changing mindset, what sort of structural, societal changes, in your opinion, must take place to support "ambitious moms?"

The United States is woefully behind our peer countries when it comes to supporting working families. We have no mandated paid parental leave or subsidized childcare—and that's just for starters. The absence of these crucial supports, along with the stubborn patterns that displace most domestic labor on women's shoulders, leave working mothers feeling overburdened and at times completely exhausted.

What inspired you to focus on restorative justice?

I am a public defender by training. I was born and raised in an adversarial system where one side is pitted against the other. I still litigate in that system, now as a law professor with my students. But that is not always the best way to seek justice, particularly when it comes to victims. Many victims want validation of the harm they experienced and proposed solutions geared toward ensuring that what happened to them won't happen to anyone else. Restorative justice empowers victims by requiring that offenders take accountability and commit to repairing the harm that they caused.

There is this perception in general that restorative justice just doesn't work, not in schools or elsewhere. What do people misunderstand about restorative justice?

People think that restorative justice is a bunch of kumbaya hooley. They could not be more mistaken. Offenders who go through the restorative justice process describe it as much harder than going to prison and their recidivism rates are far lower.

What are your favorite quotes from your children?

In fourth grade, the students in my son's class were asked to write about what they were grateful for on an orange leaf. Then they stood up and read aloud one by one. My son was one of the last to go. He read from his leaf: "I appreciate my parents for being lawyers because they get people out of jail. This helps me reflect, do the right thing, and have positive role models." His leaf is on the wall in my office.

My ex-husband and I divorced seven years ago. My daughter told me recently, "Some of my friends spend more time with their parents, but I have to give you a lot of credit because those kids are in two-parent families. Our criminal justice system is horrible and messed up, and you are trying to help get it fixed." She added, "I want to have a big career and get somewhere and try to have an impact."

Here is the bottom line: I know I am far from a perfect mother, but my children amaze me every day with their compassion, brilliance, insight, and empathy. They make everything worth it.

Know a mom you want to spotlight in the next issue? Email editor@ggmg.org with her name, email, and a few sentences about what makes her an awesome mom for our next Member Profile.



Couples Counseling

With Teale Taxis, LMFT

Teale Taxis is a longtime licensed marriage and family therapist (LMFT) who created a virtual practice with her partner. She is a plant enthusiast, an audio book lover, and can frequently be found in nature with her dog and family. You can check out her group couples therapy website at empathi.com.

What are some common reasons why couples seek counseling?

Couples seek counseling to gain communication tools, overcome parenting difficulties, process challenges, recover from betrayals, or bring more spark to their partnership.

Have these needs changed due to the stress of the pandemic?

Yes and no. In some ways, the pandemic turned the volume up on home life stressors and couples were struggling—during the first waves in particular (my partnership, too!). The issues were primarily the same as pre-pandemic issues, but became much more intense due to increased reliance on each other during such stressful times.

The layers of having kids home all day put more pressure on parents to be everything to each other. The attachment cycle (the emotion-driven reactive pattern between partners) is where couples expressed much of that stress, and they were fighting a lot more and concerned about managing each other.

Many of us were struggling with grief and shock about all the changes the pandemic brought (and, of course, loss for some of us as well). No doubt the pandemic will be (and is still) an experience we are all working to integrate.

What can couples do to build resilience in their relationship?

This is a great question! The most crucial skill a couple can develop is growing their ability to see discord (aka fights) as a shared problem, not a me or you problem. So many of us can get stuck in describing our partner's inadequacies in our heads and can ignore the deeper, more vulnerable feelings underneath our negative judgments and reactivity.

When we long for closeness or need help to feel collaborative in our lives, it hurts to feel like our partners aren't available, and we get upset or critical (of course we do!). Our partner feels how disappointed we are with them. They don't know how much we love them and want them close—hearing our criticism or disappointment can hit a vulnerable place for them, and they will probably get

defensive or distance themselves from us. Ouch! Now we are both hurting and making things worse. The idea that we are in a negative cycle together is a perspective shift in and of itself that can move mountains.

I am also a huge fan of bringing more explicit, meaningful appreciation into your partnership (e.g. saying "I appreciate when you did x because this is what it means to me"). That process of gratitude can really boost your (and your partner's) endorphins.

How can couples productively discuss their fears?

Many of us can attempt significant conversations with our partners as we run the groceries into the house or put

toothpaste on our toothbrushes. I like to aim to set up a cozy spot in life to have intentional conversations with my partner.

Our nervous systems get pretty overwhelmed, and sometimes difficult conversations do not go well, even with the best of intentions. I so appreciate the saying, "The magic is in the repair." It means that "we both got into a cycle again, and let's try to come back into connection with each other." When we are bonded, we can have difficult conversations more effectively.

How can I support a partner struggling with depression or other mental health challenges?

I believe it's always important to turn to potential medical issues first, so checking this out with their doctor is the first step. Once that is happening, please attend to your own mental health. By being grounded and tapping into your resources (friends, walks, hot showers, cups of tea), you can fill up your bucket so that you can love up your partner who is struggling. If your partner is in individual therapy and you are able, you can get some solo support, too.

Couples therapy is also a massive resource for partners who are struggling individually, because if one of us is hurting, the other is, too. Couples work can help us lean into what's good in our relationship and life (the positive cycle) and lean into the stuck spots and challenges (the negative cycle) in a facilitated, slowed-down, loved-up manner.

"The most crucial skill a couple can develop is growing their ability to see discord (aka fights) as a shared problem, not a me or you problem."

Doctor Dads: When to Worry About Walking

By Brian Feeley, MD and Nirav Pandya, MD

In 2010, when Nirav's son Sajan started walking early at 9 months, his thoughts drifted. *Could Sajan be the next Steph Curry? But what if his daughter, born a few years later, didn't walk as quickly? Should he give up basketball aspirations for his child if she wasn't running and cutting by 13 months?* Luckily, there's solid data out there on why walking happens when it does, whether there are benefits to walking early, and when you should worry.

Why do we walk when we walk?

Typical developmental milestones suggest that walking occurs across a broad period of time, with "early" walkers beginning at 9 to 10 months and "late" walkers closer to 2 years. While we tend to view milestones as discrete, walking represents an important achievement that allows for the progression of a baby's social interaction. Melissa Clearfield, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology and the Laura and Carl Peterson Chair of Social Science at Whitman College, performed an interesting study contrasting behavior patterns in walkers and crawlers. When the study controlled for the age of the baby, independent walking resulted in more time with mom as well as more sophisticated interactions, suggesting a developmental progression with linked motor milestones and social growth. In other words, walking doesn't just allow your baby to move more; it facilitates more complex interactions with the world around them.

What if my child walked early?

If the early bird gets the worm, does the early walker get the... improved language skills? Maybe so, especially in preschool-aged children. Several studies point to early walking being related to early development of language and communication skills. A 2019 study from Germany found that early pointing and walking was associated with better language development at age 2, but these changes washed out by age 3 and 4. So how much work is walking actually doing? Does walking cause increased social interactions and language development, or do kids who have more interaction walk earlier? It would appear to be the former. Dr. Clearfield says, "There is evidence that the increased motor capabilities precede the changes in social interaction. There are a number of studies that provide locomotor capacity to pre-crawling infants (via a baby walker or hand-controlled mini-wheelchair) and that motor experience then leads to advances in social and exploratory skills."



What if my child is a late walker?

Several studies suggest that being a late walker is associated with "late development," but that doesn't necessarily mean there's cause for concern. If you look at two kids at age 3, one of whom started walking at 10 months and the other 5 months later (both in the "normal" range), the earlier walker has a time advantage in the early preschool years. Given the links between walking and other complex social milestones, it's not surprising that later walkers are also a bit later in those too. In the Swiss Preschooler's Health Study, Swiss psychologists followed 555 children at their

childcare center and found that later walkers had slightly weaker fine motor skills, balance, and interestingly, visual perception and attention. But, these effects tend to be small and just because they're measurable, doesn't mean they're important as kids get older. We see this in orthopedic patients recovering from injuries as well. Dr. Jaime Bosl, a physical therapist with Sports Medicine Center for Young Athletes in Walnut Creek, says, "It can take up to 4 to 6 weeks of gait training, manual therapy, and strengthening to see a normalized and safe walking and running pattern" after time in a cast. But they get there. Kids catch up.

When to worry

If it's totally normal for walking to happen at different times for different kids, when should you worry? Typically, when your child has not begun walking by 15 months of age, this warrants a call to your pediatrician. Many things can cause a delay in walking, and having an expert check out all possible sources is important. If your child suddenly stops walking, fatigues easily while walking, or is getting clumsier, this also needs to be evaluated. But you may be able to save yourself anxiety and an appointment by taking a look around your home. When Brian's 13-month-old wasn't walking on schedule, Gay Burton, a physical therapist in Seattle, Washington, took a look around the home. All the toys and board books were on or near the floor. She had no reason to walk! Within weeks of moving the things that interested her up higher, she was up and moving right alongside her peers.

Brian Feeley, MD is chief of the Sports Medicine Service at UCSF. He has five children, four in San Francisco schools and one at UCLA. Nirav Pandya, MD is Chief of the Pediatric Orthopedic Surgery Service at UCSF and is father to two children in Oakland. You can find them on Twitter or listen to their podcast, "6-8 Weeks: Perspectives on Sports Medicine."

CONTEST

Awwwwwwww

This month’s contest centers around our amazing little ones! GGMG Magazine invites you to submit a photo of your child’s most endearing expression. Is it the look on their face right after they break something? Is it that special kiss they give their baby sibling? Is it a blissful smile as they break into fresh mac and cheese?

The GGMG Magazine editorial board will select three photos for publication in next issue’s contest space. To enter the contest, please submit the following to contest@ggmg.org with the subject line “Awwwwwwww”:

- 1. A high-resolution photo of your child in JPG or PDF form.
- 2. One to two sentences, for context of their expression in the photo.
- 3. Your child’s first name and last initial(s) to be used in the photo caption.

Congratulations to **Jitka Citron**, winner of last issue’s contest prize. Jitka won a gift certificate to Burke Williams for a 50-minute massage or spa facial. Enjoy your spa day!



NEW ARRIVALS



Bianca S. **Baby Olivia Celine**
Gina Klein Watts **Baby Vivienne Soleil**

Congratulations to **Gina Klein Watts**! She will be getting joyful moments captured by Anna Munandar from Mini Anna Photography. Anna specializes in capturing joy and every milestone in your family, from birth to college. See her work at minianna.com.



To announce your new arrival in the magazine and for a chance to win a \$150 gift card from **Mini Anna Photography**, fill out the form at tinyurl.com/ggmgNewArrivals.

The San Francisco Bay Area has a multitude of women who have excelled in their careers and are making an impact on their local communities. Every issue, *GGMG Magazine* highlights one of these women and dives into the details of how they started out, what their organization is doing now, and how they’d like to move forward.

Rose Foong

Interviewed by contributing writer Alissa Harrison

Rose Foong’s Miracle of Giving (MOG) partners with charity organizations, Safeway, Costco, and locally-owned shops to support her community and reduce food waste. Growing up, Rose and her siblings helped out at their parent’s multi-level, family-owned housewares shop in Sumatra, Indonesia. She developed skills in managing inventory utilization and warehouse space optimization, and leveraging adaptive selling strategies. She attended UOW Malaysia KDU Penang University College and holds a bachelor’s degree in banking and finance from Northwood University, in Midland, Michigan.



Giving back is a humbling way of life. Would you agree with that statement and why?

Giving is not easy. Not everyone can be in a position to give. I always focus on the positive, especially in bad situations. I remind myself it could always be worse. I am grateful for my loving family—three cute, happy, and healthy boys—and a place to stay.

Some people worry about food and some cannot afford to change their tires. I am blessed I have what I need to cover my expenses. I am happy with what I have. I am around kind-hearted people who are positive and supportive, so my environment is always positive.

What does your family say about what you do? Are they supportive?

If you want to do anything, the first level of support you need is from your family. My husband gives me full autonomy as long as I can consistently balance caring for the kids and the immediate needs of our family. Family always comes first.

Two years ago, I opened Miracle of Giving (MOG) because it’s meaningful compared to seeing my income disappear into daycare. I would rather be the main caregiver and invest my spare time in getting involved in my community. If there is a will, there is a way.

Describe how MOG has transformed others who were first skeptical of your work.

This transformation happens often with new members who join MOG. Sometimes people are not accustomed to the cyclical

benefits of selfless giving. They share that they’ve been inspired by my kindness and now are ready to begin giving selflessly.

Through the interchange of sharing goods with one another, we build strong friendships within our community. It’s exactly the community I have dreamed of building—an intimate group that

“Always be kind to one another. Whenever you are kind, your kindness will always come back to you. If not today or tomorrow, one day people will see it and the universe itself will be kind to you.”

creates strong friendships filled with trust and accountability. Some members are inspired to give because they know deep inside their gifts will go into good hands. You can truly see the warmth and gratitude within our group through the highly

engaged members sharing gratitude posts, referencing, and thanking the gifter. Whenever I see these types of interactions in my group, it just makes my day!

What insights do you have for the next generation about becoming a compassionate, humble, tenacious, and influential leader like yourself?

Be grateful for what you have. When you compare yourself to others who have less, you will realize you have plenty.

Do your best and give when you can. If you are not in a position to give, then help others. Do community service. Spend quality time with someone. Listen to someone else. Sometimes, someone just needs a good ear. Give a good suggestion. Make someone else’s day. Show them you care. It creates a positive interaction.

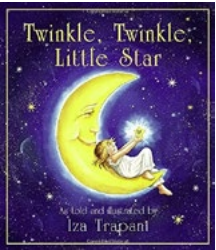
Always be kind to one another. Whenever you are kind, your kindness will always come back to you. If not today or tomorrow, one day people will see it and the universe itself will be kind to you.

Alissa, a mom of two boys, enjoys daily running along the coast, deadlifting, and month-long daily meditation challenges. She is grateful for the invaluable time invested in GGMG, launching and interviewing for “Women in Charge” for the past year. She is excited to move forward with expanding her portfolio and working on personal art projects. If you are interested in connecting with her, you can find her on AlissaHarrison.com.

Winter Holidays

By Laure Latham

Long nights, hot chocolate, and cozy snuggles are some of the staples of this cold season. For kids, once Halloween and Thanksgiving are behind them, it's an opportunity to slow down and enjoy the winter holidays with a book in hand.



Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star

Written and illustrated by Iza Trapani
To celebrate the winter solstice and the longest night of the year, this adorable extended version of the classic nursery rhyme is perfect. Imagine that the little star wants to go on an adventure, a dazzling journey through the swirling, iridescent lights of the night sky. This book will soon become a family favorite. **Ages: 0 to 2 years**



Bright Winter Night

Written by Alli Brydon, illustrated by Ashling Lindsay
On a bright winter night, a group of woodland animals gets together to sing the song of snow and start building something together. Collaborating to see a wondrous sight, the creatures' journey embodies the magic of nature in winter. The artwork, peaceful and calming, as well as the eloquent rhymes, will make this a favorite bedtime read. **Ages: 3 to 6 years**



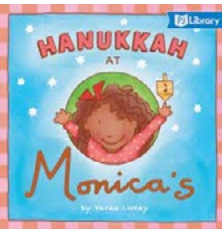
The Night Before Lunar New Year

Written by Natasha Wing with Lingfeng Ho, illustrated by Amy Wummer
If your family celebrates or wants to learn more about the Lunar New Year, this book is a great introduction to all the traditions surrounding this winter holiday (January 22nd in 2023). From kids cleaning their bedroom to making dumplings in the kitchen to buying new clothes to welcome the new year, this book captures the many details that make this week-long holiday so special. **Ages: 4 to 6 years**



Through the North Pole Snow

Written by Polly Faber, illustrated by Richard Jones
What does Santa do all year before Christmas night? A hunting fox is about to find out after it finds itself stuck under a roof on a snowy night and is welcomed inside by a jolly old man with a white beard. Making and wrapping toys, collecting letters, checking lists—the old man is busy all through the seasons, until the magic night arrives. This book will make you feel warm inside even when it's cold outside. **Ages: 3 to 7 years**



Hanukkah at Monica's

Written by Varda Livney
Young Monica is very excited to throw a party for Hanukkah. To celebrate the Festival of Lights with friends, the party will feature lighting candles, singing blessings, eating delicious fried foods, and playing dreidel. This book offers an interactive component as part of the PJ Library Amazon store (amazon.com/pjlibrary) where families can find plenty of ideas and free resources at the Hanukkah Hub, including kid-friendly information about the holiday, interfaith celebration information, recipes, and menorah and dreidel printables. **Ages: 3 to 7 years**



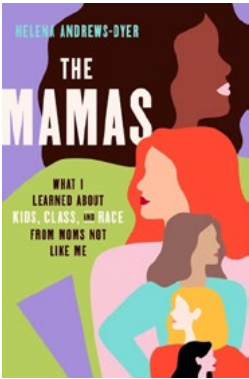
Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening

Written by Robert Frost, illustrated by P. J. Lynch
Published in 1923 and long memorized by school children, this poem by Robert Frost tells the mysterious story of a rider's journey on a wintry night through the woods, far from any villages, farms, or cities. The exquisite watercolor and gouache illustrations slow down the pace of the poem and bring it to life for a new generation, just in time for the centenary of Frost's death in 2023. **Ages: 4 to 12 years**

Laure blogs on healthy living and adventure travel at Frog Mom (frogmom.com), and is the author of Best Hikes with Kids: San Francisco Bay Area. She works in legal marketing and lives in London, where she peppers adventures with her two teenage daughters with wild swims, foraging, and cream teas. You can find her on social media @frogmomblog.

Advice from Moms

By Gail Cornwall

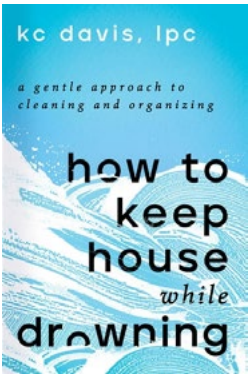


The Mamas: What I Learned About Kids, Class, and Race from Moms Not Like Me

It takes talent to tackle heavy, complex issues in prose that's light and inviting. Helena Andrews-Dyer demonstrates that and more as she asks, "How did a Black mom fit into the nearly all-white definition of motherhood that dominated the streets of her rapidly gentrifying D.C. neighborhood?" She describes going back and forth: "Were these women I'd risk frostbite for my friends? Parenting colonizers?" Ultimately, "both" seems to be where she lands: "Sure, we were alike. They obsess over silly shit; they think their husbands are lazy; they work too much, feel guilty about it, and then feel guilty about the guilt, because feminism. But we're not the same. Not at all." Andrews-Dyer mulls over a white mother saying, "You can't compare them," in reference to the one Black child in the group not rolling over on both sides yet: "Was she being racist? Of course not. If anything, she was offering space on the raft to another drowning mom. But was the moment filled with racial implications for me?

Absolutely." They're all "bougie." She writes, "I'd googled 'Gwyneth Paltrow's pregnancy' and pinned a million images of 'gender neutral' nurseries too." And yet, another mom of color buys designer onesies and plans a luxury cruise as Andrews-Dyer stares down a stack of student loan bills.

With this highly relatable muddle of incisiveness, Andrews-Dyer shares her tale of "a tightrope walk, a mental load, a struggle unseen" with a "slightly amused husband along for the ride." You get the drift. "The Mamas" is a virginity joke one minute and the next, this: "We wanted to support public education but didn't want our kid 'to be the experiment,' because we also knew that white activism can be seasonal, and when the dust settles, white people always have more exits available to them." Ultimately, the book is just as described: "[T]he story of how a Black mom both carries and shrugs off the albatross of the expectation and judgment that exist in her own head and out in the world with the help of the mothers surrounding her." It's a story well worth reading.



How To Keep House While Drowning

"Lots of decisions are moral decisions, but cleaning your car regularly is not one of them," writes KC Davis in this short, uplifting book that seeks to replace shame and recrimination with self-compassion. The self-described "mom and neurodivergent person" writes, "How you relate to care tasks—whether you are clean or dirty, messy or tidy, organized or unorganized—has absolutely no bearing on whether you are a good enough person." Where Davis sees executive dysfunction, overwhelm, perfectionism, trauma, exhaustion, chronic pain, depression, and differing priorities—as well as lack of skills and support—we're taught to see laziness. The result? "When everything is in place, you don't feel like a failure; when it's messy or untidy, you do... [C]are tasks never end ... [s]o if you ever actually let yourself sit down and rest, you're thinking, 'I don't deserve to do this. There is more to do.'" Some of us "never stop moving, feel anxious and overwhelmed, and are constantly exhausted" while others "lack motivation, feel paralyzed and overwhelmed, and are constantly exhausted." But it doesn't have to be this way.

"[R]eplace the voice that says, 'Ugh, I should really go clean my house right now because it's a disaster,' with 'It would be such a kindness to future me if I were to get up right now and do ____.'" Davis draws from the field of cognitive behavioral therapy to offer strategies meant to dismiss "our inner bully" and shift our focus to functionality. At the core of many of these suggestions is the exhortation to "embrace adaptive imperfection." Examples include throwing away recycling ("you are not responsible for saving the world if you are struggling to save yourself"), embracing asynchronous care cycles ("my kitchen island is messy and my living room floors are immaculate"), and hiring help ("it's no more pretentious to pay someone to clean your home than it is to pay someone to change the oil in your car").

Gail works as a mom and writer in San Francisco. Read about parenting and education from the perspective of a former teacher and lawyer at gailcornwall.com or by finding her on Facebook and Twitter.

Is Bouncing Back Really Possible After Baby?

The path to healing postpartum is unique to each body and its dynamic set of needs.

By Alicia Roberts, MSPT



Pregnancy and birth commonly bring on the biggest physical changes that a body experiences. In pregnancy, the abdominal muscles, fascia, and skin are stretched and the organs are pushed up and away for the growing uterus. During the last trimester, the joints of the pelvis open as the ribcage rotates up and out to make even more room. In a vaginal birth, the pelvic floor and vaginal tissues are stretched up to 200 percent of their normal length plus any tearing or cutting that occurs. In a Cesarean, the abdominal tissues are stretched out even more and there is an

incision through seven layers of tissue to get to the baby. After birth, a person is left in a body they don't recognize as their own. Things don't look the same, feel the same, fit the same, and often don't function the same. **Reframing how to bounce back postpartum** When it comes to postpartum recovery, the most important thing to understand is that people can't fully bounce back. They can't bounce back to a body that never had a baby. As Robin Arzon from Peloton says, we "bounce forward, baby," not backwards.

This reframe is wonderful because it is the reality of a postpartum body. While people can't expect their body to look the same, they can expect their body to function the same. Too often, many postpartum conditions are left untreated as they have been normalized by society, peers, the medical system, and prior generations. **Mind the gap: diastasis rectus abdominis** One of the biggest postpartum concerns is a Diastasis Rectus Abdominis (DRA), a gap between the abdominal muscles in the

connective tissue that runs down the midline (the linea alba). Research defines a DRA as the separation between these muscles of ≥ 2 cm wide. Everyone has a DRA at the end of pregnancy as this tissue stretches open. The prevalence of a DRA is 60.0 percent at 6 weeks postpartum, 45.4 percent at 6 months postpartum, and 32.6 percent at 12 months postpartum. So the question is not who has a DRA, but how does the tissue recoil after the uterus and belly has shrunk postpartum? While most people focus on the width of a DRA, a thorough assessment looks at the depth of the midline tissue and if muscle

create muscle tension in the gap while doing static and dynamic movements. **Please don't make me laugh: Incontinence** The second most common postpartum complaint is leaking urine. There are two types of incontinence: stress urinary incontinence (SUI), which is a leak when a person laughs, coughs, sneezes, jumps, or runs, and urge incontinence, which is when the leak happens with the onset of the urge to urinate but without one of the aforementioned "stressors." This is commonly found when pulling into the driveway, putting keys

person passes this assessment, they are usually cleared to return to exercise, but there is actually no scientific evidence to suggest they are ready to return to pre-baby exercise at that time. An assessment of muscular support and strength and body mechanics are essential before embarking on this phase of "bouncing back." Think about an athlete returning after a major injury: they will need to go through testing to determine if they are ready to return to their sport. Postpartum people are athletes of life and deserve the same kind of pre-exercise assessment after the demands pregnancy and birth have put on their bodies. A 2018 study by De Mattos Lorenzo et al. found that "high impact exercise was found to have a 4.59 fold increased risk of pelvic floor dysfunction compared to low impact exercise." Thus, it is absolutely not recommended for someone to return to running 6 weeks postpartum as it will increase the risk of injury and pelvic dysfunction. When is a person really ready to return to pre-baby exercises that load the pelvic and abdominal tissue? 1. Recovery of the deepest pelvic floor layer that holds one's organs inside and supports the pelvic bones and joints is generally maximized by **4 to 6 months** postnatal (Shek et al. 2010, Stær-Jensen et al. 2015). 2. Post Cesarean, the abdominal fascia has only regained 51 percent to 59 percent of its original tensile strength at 6 weeks and 73 percent to 93 percent of its original tensile strength at **6 to 7 months** (Ceydeli et al. 2005). Tensile strength can be defined as "the maximum stress that a material can bear before breaking when it is stretched or pulled." Physical therapists, who perform comprehensive musculoskeletal assessments, recommend waiting at least 4 months before returning to running based on the data points above. Many postpartum people return to impact activities too soon and consequently cause pain and injury. Another area to consider is how strong the pelvic floor and abdominal muscles are postpartum. A person can be 9 months postpartum, but the pelvic floor is still weak. As a result, there is still a high risk of pelvic organ or musculoskeletal injury if

"People don't need to be in the dark about postpartum healing. There are experts to help each person bounce forward into their phenomenal new body."

tension can be generated there. If one body has a 3-finger width DRA, but the tissue is really firm and shallow, and that body can generate muscle tension while performing dynamic movements, they are at a lower injury risk. This body still has the structural integrity of the corset muscles and tissues supporting the spine and pelvis. If another body has the same 3-finger width DRA, but the midline is very deep without any tissue tension felt, they are at a higher injury risk due to the impaired structural support. The width of the DRA actually isn't the concern here. There is a myth that the DRA can close fully or must close to be healed. But could it be possible that the abdominal connective tissue space existed before pregnancy? A study by Beer et al. measured 150 bodies who have never been pregnant and found the width of the midline tissue to vary between 0 to 3 cm! Thus, if a 2-cm width gap existed preconception and a 2.5-cm width gap existed postpartum, should this be labeled a dysfunction? If a DRA closes fully, it will do so spontaneously by 8 to 10 weeks postpartum when the tissues are done recoiling. This is rare, as most people will end up with some space between the muscles postpartum. The bigger question is whether the DRA is functional at supporting the body, and this is assessed by looking at the ability to

in the door, or even when the urge to pee comes on while sitting still. Some people will then have both. Incontinence is a pelvic floor dysfunction. The pelvic floor muscles are responsible for keeping the urethra closed until voluntarily relaxing to urinate. Leaking happens when the pelvic floor muscles are not working efficiently—either the muscles are weak or are stuck in a state of too much tension leading to fatigue and loss of force to adequately close the urethra. According to a 2021 review and analysis by researchers at Maastricht University in the Netherlands, at 1 year postpartum, 32 percent of postpartum bodies were still experiencing urinary incontinence. The good news is that the pelvic floor muscles can be treated and strengthened just like other muscles in the body with the guidance of a women's health and pelvic floor physical therapist. If a person can go to a knee specialist and learn exercises to help the muscles that support the knee, the same can be done with the pelvic floor muscle system. **Just had baby, will run marathon: Returning to exercise** At 6 weeks postpartum, an OBGYN is ensuring that bleeding is complete, scars are healed, and no infection is present. If a



high loads are placed on the system, such as running, jumping, and weight lifting.

Based on this information, physical therapists recommend sticking to low impact exercise such as walking, swimming, and biking plus deep core activation and strengthening exercises between weeks 6 to 12 postpartum. After the 3 month mark, a gradual increase of cardio intensity is acceptable, while watching for any symptoms such as leaking, pelvic heaviness, or pelvic pain. Return to exercise is a marathon, not a sprint. It cannot be rushed, but it can be supported.

Just breathe: How breathing patterns affect healing

Due to the incredible physical changes the body experiences throughout pregnancy, postpartum people frequently return to exercise with an impaired core strategy. This means they won't get stronger, and may actually contribute to injury regardless of what exercises are performed.

The biggest contributor to an impaired core strategy is a reverse breathing pattern. With natural breathing, an inhale should relax the belly and pelvic floor, like letting an egg fall out of the vagina, while an exhale should contract the pelvic floor like drawing in a tampon and pulling the

belly in towards the spine. This is the correct way that the pelvic floor and abdominals dynamically function during core activation.

A reverse breathing pattern, where an inhale results in pelvic floor and abdominal contraction instead of relaxation, contributes to postpartum dysfunctions, such as incontinence, and lack of progress with core exercises. Until this changes, nothing else will—it is the first step that needs to be established in a postpartum exercise rehabilitation program to build appropriate abdominal muscle tension and activate the pelvic floor. Once this breathing pattern is practiced and learned, it can be added to core exercises, where arms and legs move in varying positions of laying on the back, standing, and hands and knees. Planks are not considered a safe early postpartum core exercise as the abdominal wall must stay engaged against gravity the entire time in this position.

It's incredibly important to follow a postpartum-specific exercise program that takes into account the natural limitations to various tissues. A women's health and pelvic floor physical therapist can guide a person through this challenging process safely.

Getting busy: Returning to sex

Returning to sex is a part of returning to pre-baby life and it is normal for it to elicit some anxiety. The average experience when returning to penetrative sex is some minor discomfort, but not enough to prevent the act. Then, after a handful of times, it should noticeably improve.

Starting with non-penetrative ways of connecting with a partner will reduce anxiety around penetrative sex. It will allow the body and nervous system to get used to touch and intimacy without any discomfort. Then, it is a more natural progression into penetration if that is desired. Using a good brand of lubrication that is gentle on vaginal tissue, such as Good Clean Love, Sliquid Organics, or Isabel Fay, is essential. If pain persists and isn't improving, or if there is no pain but decreased sensation, one should not assume this is the new normal. These are concerns a women's health and pelvic floor physical therapist can address.

Bounce forward, baby

Bouncing forward into a new postpartum body is a journey, and each person deserves support and guidance beyond what the traditional medical model provides. Women's health and pelvic floor physical therapists are trained to do exactly that. Each individual came into pregnancy in a different body, had a different birth, and has different postpartum goals, so there isn't a cookie cutter protocol for healing postpartum. Individualized assessments of each body will provide a status check on progress and provide a personalized plan for what each body needs to reach their goals.

People don't need to be in the dark about postpartum healing. There are experts to help each person bounce forward into their phenomenal new body.

Alicia Roberts, MSPT, is a women's health and pelvic floor physical therapist who specializes in prenatal and postpartum bodies. She has an office in San Rafael and San Francisco. Alicia is a mom of two and knows firsthand that a postpartum body is forever changed but can be strong as ever. Learn more at blossompt.com.

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Resilience in the Emerging Post-pandemic World

With the right kind of support, children recovering from pandemic-related anxiety or trauma can learn to regulate intense and overwhelming emotions.

By H.B. Terrell

Viewing the world as unsafe is a symptom of trauma, but what if the world is unsafe? COVID-19 has exacerbated deep-rooted systemic inequalities in education, law enforcement, resource allocation, and access to health care. It has resulted in devastating losses for the loved ones of millions who died in the space of two years, and has surfaced mental health issues for many. Uncertainty, lack of resources, ever-present fear, and isolation have taken a toll on people of all ages. How can caregivers help children regain a sense of stability that fluctuates when vigilance in response to a clear and present danger has been the norm for more than two years?

Cause

In 2020, scientists were already predicting that the impact of COVID-19 would remain long after the pandemic was under

control, projecting effect timelines of a decade or more. “Any time a child feels extremely unsafe, out of control, or at risk of serious injury, illness, or death, the experience may be traumatic for them,” says Katie Lear, a licensed therapist specializing in childhood trauma and anxiety. Traumatic experiences can undermine kids’ sense of safety, magnify their perceptions of danger, and make it difficult for children to distinguish between safe and unsafe situations.

Silver Stress and Coping Lab at the University of California, Irvine, studies the psychological impact of traumatic events on individuals and communities. Collective trauma researcher Roxane Cohen Silver and her team have conducted extensive COVID-19 studies to understand how the pandemic has differed from a typical collective trauma. Normally when tragedy strikes, survivors have the time and space to process the event and

develop coping mechanisms to move forward with their lives afterward. The primary difference is that the pandemic is not a single event; Cohen Silver characterizes it as a “slow-moving disaster [that] escalated in intensity over time.” Essentially, an ongoing tragedy without an “afterward.”

And Effect

The necessary circumspection of 2020 and beyond has affected children in profound ways, and the effects are still emerging as conditions move slowly back toward the status quo. The idea that life simply reverts to pre-pandemic norms when death tolls and case counts decline is an optimistic but unlikely scenario. To be clear: in the context of systemic racism, political turmoil, climate crisis, gun violence, to name a few—what economic historian Adam Tooze terms “polycrisis”—the pandemic is only one of several entwined stressors that we and our children face. For many, it feels like no place is a safe space.

Caregivers help children learn to cope with stress, emotional overwhelm, social upheavals, and other difficult experiences. Many are concerned about the lingering effects of shelter-in-place orders as well as the threatening and chaotic environments produced when children attend onsite school while COVID-19 circulates. Now that case counts seem to be receding and life is back to normal for some, those caring for children experiencing adverse mental health responses live with a transformed normal. They help their children cope with the effects of the pandemic concurrently with processing their own experience.

A few areas of focus in scientific and popular literature surface repeatedly. Relationships, reflective awareness, and support for caregivers are key to sustainable recovery for those suffering from the mental health effects of the pandemic.

Caregiver relationships

In a 2021 study of the mental health effects of COVID-19 on children, Anat Shoshani and Ariel Kor identified strong relationships and systemic support as key factors in pandemic resilience. They and other experts point to support from caregivers as a primary factor in children’s success in navigating post-pandemic stress.

Psychologist Adam D. Brown of NYU Langone Child Study Center suggests asking your child open-ended questions and discussing their anxieties without invalidating their feelings. For younger children, provide concrete explanations, avoid euphemisms, and be prepared to revisit the same concerns many times. Brown notes that teenagers may want in-depth information; be straightforward, factual, and honest about what you don’t know. Help them find reliable sources such as librarians or therapists who can help with what you’re not equipped to do. This can provide teens with a sense of agency in the face of what feels like powerlessness. Alternatively, teens may not want to

your child is not yet comfortable with organized or team activities, work with them to identify activities that make them feel safe in the world, even if that’s something solitary, like walking the dog, shooting pictures on a photo walk of the neighborhood, or reading in a park. Incremental habituation can be a helpful strategy to ease children back into the world. When your child is ready to be more social, start small. A one-on-one sleepover or playdate may feel safer than reverting immediately to all of their pre-pandemic social activities. Make it easier for kids to get together with friends or join an activity without putting the onus on them.

More than a million Americans died in

“More than a million Americans died in two years; these are war zone numbers, not something that anyone—much less children still learning to navigate the world—might easily bounce back from.”

talk at all, feeling too vulnerable to express their anxieties and triggers. In such a case, Brown suggests giving them space while keeping a close eye on how they are coping. Watch for opportunities to engage in discussion on your teen’s terms and create casual opportunities to check in with your child.

Peer relationships

Interacting with peers helps children develop both socially and intellectually. The abrupt limitation of peer relationships during school closures and remote learning has had myriad effects on children and teens. The RAPID project (based at Stanford Center on Early Childhood), launched in April 2020, continues to survey more than 38,000 families across the United States to learn about early childhood and family well-being. Their findings indicate that externalizing behaviors like defiance or tantrums and internalizing behaviors such as anxiety have remained well above baseline as of the most recent results published in August 2022.

Some children may recover quickly while others need more time to rebuild their social capacity. Validate their thoughts, hesitations, or feelings they experience. Researchers and therapists suggest that if

two years; these are war zone numbers, not something that anyone—much less children still learning to navigate the world—might easily bounce back from. Those exhibiting trauma responses are having reasonable reactions to an existential threat: patience and support are essential to recovery.

Mindfulness

Some of the negative health consequences of adverse childhood experiences can be mitigated if a child is supported in developing healthy coping mechanisms. In a 2018 study, Jaclyn Iacona and Stephanie Johnson found that evidence-based mindfulness practices can help to develop self-regulation and resilience in children who have experienced trauma.

They tested the neurological effects of different activities, showing various helpful conclusions. Relaxation strategies such as deep breathing or progressive muscle relaxation can help children to self-soothe and disengage from fight-or-flight mode. Exercise and meditation can help children regulate overwhelming emotions. Positive affirmations, e.g. repeated phrases or mantras, can help create a sense of safety for children or provide confidence to do something difficult.

If a child's traumatic stress reaction interferes with their ability to function at school or home, or if symptoms persist or become worse over time, they may need help from a mental health professional trained in evidence-based trauma treatment. Caregivers who have concerns about a child's reactions or their ability to help their child can ask a pediatrician, family physician, school counselor, or clergy member for a referral.

Therapy

Americans are at a disadvantage when it comes to systemic cornerstones of mental health and well-being. Mental health care is often prohibitively expensive, and the reimbursement process is overly complex to navigate.

To find in-network providers, begin by requesting a list of providers your insurance covers. Some health insurance companies include searchable databases that help locate participating practitioners in your area. Does your employer offer an Employee Assistance Plan (EAP)? Check with your HR representative to learn whether the plan includes several free therapy sessions for your family. Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) is a federal agency dedicated to improving access to health care; its website provides information on finding affordable mental health care, including providers that offer care on a sliding fee scale.



If the family is an ecosystem, all organisms must be attended to. When seeking therapy, consider which family members need critical care, and remember that it may take visits to different practitioners before finding one with the expertise, interaction style, and skills to help individuals thrive.

Support for supporters

Recent survey results from the RAPID project showed that families are reporting more emotional distress now than at any other point in the pandemic. Even as some aspects of daily life improve, challenges to well-being persist. The work of caregivers has been thrown into sharp relief during the pandemic, with high levels of burnout and attrition among healthcare workers and educators, including a significant exodus of women from the workforce to care for families. These challenges reinforce the importance of identifying, addressing, and preventing secondary traumatic stress (aka compassion fatigue) among professional and familial caregivers.

Support comes in different forms. A growing body of research shows that gratitude journaling can help people sleep better, lower stress, and improve relationships. If this isn't your style, the most recent study on kindness, led by Robin Banerjee from the University of Sussex, found that those who carry out more kind acts or witness the kindness of others have higher levels of well-being on average. Children perceive caregivers' stress; coping in a

productive way helps both. Brown underscores the importance of modeling how to manage difficult feelings. "Let your children know when you are sad or worried while reassuring them that you are there for them no matter what." Use the same self-soothing strategies your children are learning to practice.

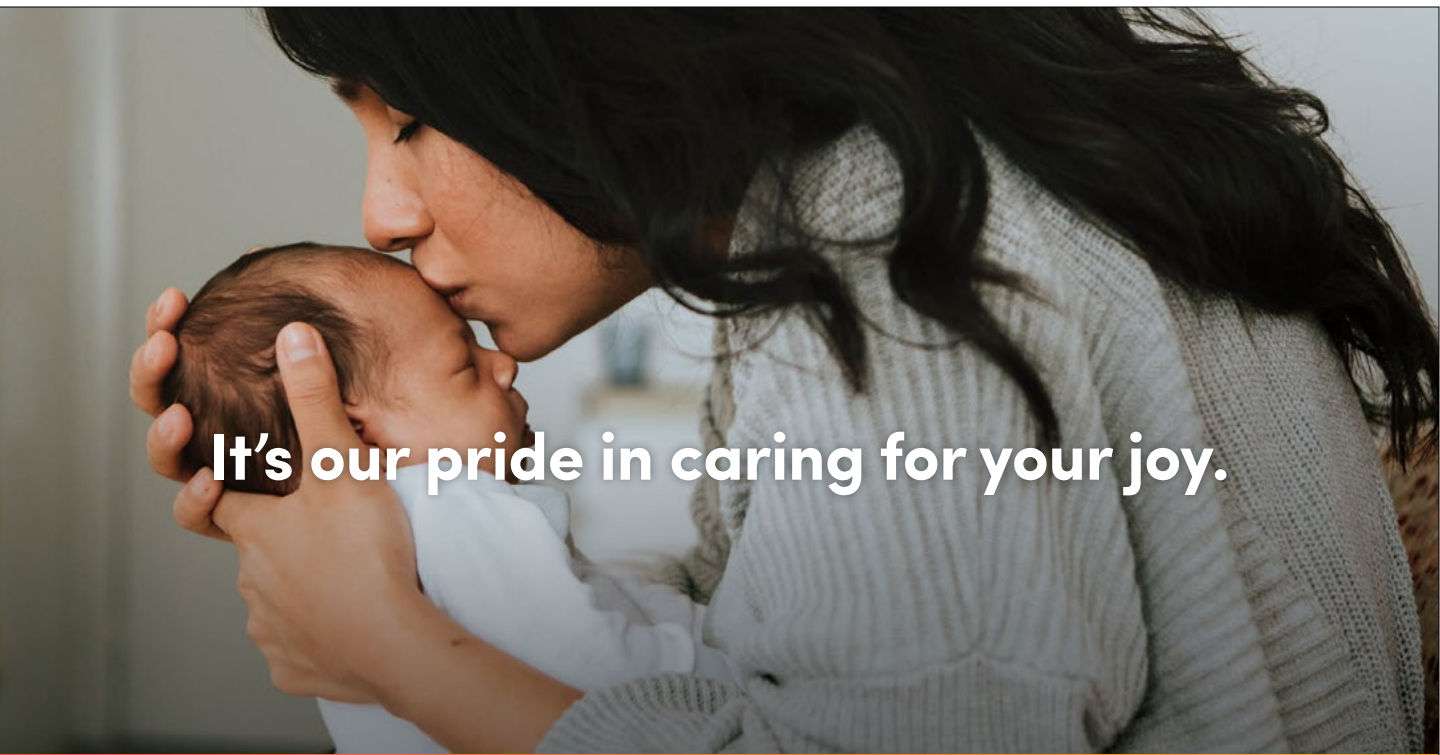
Caregivers' mental health is important, since their needs are consequential and their well-being affects how effectively they can help the children in their lives. Whether through therapy, asserting time and space for exercise and self-care, or taking sanity breaks when a child's challenging behaviors surface, remember that the ability to take even small moments of self-care is a privilege in a country where systemic inequities persist. Notice the needs of other caregivers and service providers, and give what you are able of your own time and resources when you have some to spare—helping peers can be therapeutic for the giver and the recipient.

Light at the end of the tunnel

Mental health conditions are complex. People differ widely in their conditions and responses, and treatments are best evaluated by a physical examination and consultation with a qualified clinician. "There's enormous variability in how people process and respond to events, very much influenced by people's prior life experiences, by their chronic stress or their experiences during the event, and by the amount of support and resources that they have in the aftermath," says Cohen Silver.

Not all children will experience traumatic stress after exposure to the pandemic's upheaval, but for those who do, many will be able to recover. Research in the field of developmental traumatology indicates that children can be deeply impacted by both individual and collective trauma, but treatment methods that focus on emotional regulation and a supportive environment can help children learn how to cope with stress and process their experience in a way that prevents long-term damage to their well-being.

H.B. manages grants supporting scientific research and informal STEM learning programs and enjoys meandering McLaren Park. She lives in the Excelsior neighborhood with her spouse and child.



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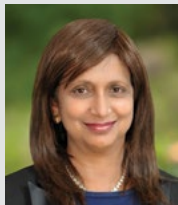
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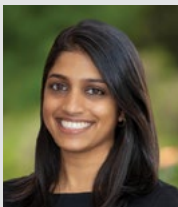
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Walk Humbly, Love Mercifully, and Rise Strong

While parenting intentionally and thoughtfully is important when going through a divorce or separation, it's equally important to be gracious with yourself and your children.

By Rachel Smith, Ed.D

Originally published in the October 2016 Tough Talks issue.

My oldest child came into my bedroom early one morning and curled up in my bed while I was getting dressed. I could tell something was bothering her as she stared at a family picture of all of us hanging on the wall.

"Mom?" she asked.

"Yes, my love."

"Are we a whole family still?"

Breathe, I thought to myself. *Just*

breathe. It had been four months since my marriage of 15 years had imploded and begun its rapid, dark descent toward divorce. Our children were 5 and 1, and sitting down to tell them what was happening did not make much sense to me. Their father and I had briefly discussed doing it together, which every co-parenting counselor and book on divorce will tell you is the best thing to do. However, it required

an agreement as to what was happening between us, and we had not yet arrived at one that satisfied either of us. It was messy. As I walked toward the bed where my daughter was lying, I had no idea what I was going to tell her.

"Yes, my love. We will always be family," I replied as I cuddled up on the bed next to her.

"But not a *whole* family, right?"

"Well...more like a *different* kind of family, I suppose."

"But not a *whole* one?" she pressed.

I paused, struggling to find a way to answer her question. Looking into my daughter's eyes, I could see her struggling too.

"I think I know what you are asking," I said, with my voice shaking. I was trying not to cry. "We are probably not going to be a family that lives all together anymore, but Daddy will always be your dad. I will always be your mom and your brother will always be your brother. Living together or apart does not change that. Living together or apart does not change how much each of us loves you."

We cuddled together in silence for a moment and tears began to leak out of my eyes. She looked at me with tears in her own eyes. We wiped them away from each other's cheeks.

"Do you miss being whole?" she whispered as more tears fell.

"Yes, I do."

"Me too," my daughter's voice flooded with emotion. "Do you miss Daddy like I miss Daddy?"

"Yes, baby, I do. I miss him very much."

We melted into each other and cried until we did not feel like crying anymore, then we collected her brother from his crib and made breakfast.

Of all the conversations I imagined having with my children, the one about divorce was never on the list. It was not a completely wrong way to tell my daughter, but it wasn't completely right either. It was just how it happened. There were several more discussions about the separation between me and her father that took place after that morning, and I anticipate more will take place in the future as I start to date other people and perhaps eventually remarry. When my son reaches an age when he wonders what happened, I know I will have to begin having these hard conversations again. I emphasize the *beginning* part of these conversations so much because it is important to realize these conversations evolve over time. I will not have them only once with my children and move on.

People trained in crisis management and counseling know that there is a pattern to the way disasters unfold. They study it



regularly and practice managing it. As a result, they offer a great deal of sage advice for those navigating their way through it. However, it is hard to discern which path best suits your situation when you are actually in crisis. Everyone

admit that I was getting divorced when I joined, much less recognize that I was a single mom, but that group helped me keep my head above water so I could parent while I figured it out. Support, whether in the form of therapy, groups,

“It is important that [your children] understand that while the situation is out of their control, they can still voice their thoughts, feelings, concerns, and desires.”

acknowledges that separation, divorce, dating, and remarriage all happen with regularity, but no one is really prepared for the moment it happens to them. They are even less prepared for how to begin a conversation with their children about it. Like most people in similar situations, I was taken by surprise, and interpreting advice was like trying to follow a CPR manual with somebody actually dying in front of me. It did not feel the like the right time to be learning, but I had to pull it together for the sake of my children.

In the spirit of preparation and prevention, I have summarized some advice regarding conversations with your children about separation, divorce, dating, or remarriage.

Find support

I was fortunate to have a friend who saw what was happening in my marriage before I did. When it started to crumble, she invited me into a single moms group sponsored by GGMG. I was not ready to

friends, or family, is essential. These topics are emotional and they impact the lives of your children. It is hard to feel the weight of that and handle it with any kind of strength without someone upon whom you can lean. Your children cannot and should not be those people, and when you talk to them about any of these topics, they need to know you are OK.

Take the high road

No matter the topic of hard conversation with your children, there is always a high road and a low road. It is important that you constantly pay attention to the road you are choosing and be aware of how it is affecting your children. Taking the high road does not mean you lie to your children. Rather, you carefully select the truth you tell them. You keep your negative opinions and fights private, especially when the situation involves separation or divorce. If you need to talk about it with someone, take your conversation to a place where your children cannot hear it.



Be thoughtful about what you say around your children. Text or email rather than talk on the phone when they are around. Respect their relationships with the other people involved. Keep them out of the middle of the conflict and let them know that they are not the problem. Children are like sponges; they soak up more than we realize. This was hard for me during my divorce; I often excused my bad behavior by telling myself that my children were too little to notice or understand, but they did and it caused them stress.

Preventing problems is also part of taking the high road. Specifically in matters pertaining to separation and divorce, many co-parenting counselors recommend using OurFamilyWizard (ourfamilywizard.com) or 2houses (2houses.com) to facilitate communication between parents.

Start as you mean to continue

Start the hard conversation with your children as soon as you can and in a way that lets them know they can continue it at any time. Unless your children initiate the discussion, avoid having it when the kids are hungry, distracted by another activity, or tired. The gravity and seriousness with which we approach topics like divorce, dating, and remarriage can increase anxiety and make children feel like they did something wrong. Notice how your children respond whenever you talk about the situation. They may sit silently, cry, laugh, ask questions, express concerns, change the subject, show anger, and/or misbehave.

Acknowledge their reactions. Validate their feelings. Clarify their misunderstandings. Answer their questions. It is important that they understand that though the situation is out of their control, they can still voice their thoughts, feelings, concerns, and desires. Their feelings and experiences will evolve over time, and when they do address the topic again, pay attention to your reaction and welcome the conversation.

Speak with simplicity, honesty, and love

Talking about changes that are about to occur does not need to be overly dramatic or long-winded. Simple sentences are best, alongside a brief explanation as to what may change for your children. Keep the conversation positive. Give them an opportunity to express their questions and thoughts. If you don't have all the answers, it is OK to tell them that you don't know or you aren't sure. Provide them with as much age-appropriate information as they feel they need, but again, it is important to be honest with them. Carefully choose the facts of the matter, and avoid making promises.

It is also a time to reinforce your love for them. Express that love often and in a manner that is consistent with your previous behavior. Pay attention to them without obsessing over them. Avoid buying extra gifts, taking special vacations, or doing anything outside the norm just to make your children feel better. That does not mean avoiding these things altogether; it simply means that you buy gifts or take

vacations with intention. They will know they are loved and feel secure during the change.

Be consistent

Consistency helps children cope. If everyone involved in the situation is having separate conversations with the children, keep the messaging consistent. Keep routines and schedules the same and stay consistent with rules, expected behaviors, and discipline, but recognize and acknowledge that there will be inconsistencies. Children will sometimes make an effort to exploit the circumstances or the differences they notice to get something they want. Respond with grace and understanding when it creates a problem. The consistency in your behavior and reaction will help your children understand that it is not OK to manipulate you, but it is OK to discuss what is happening without feeling anxiety, stress, discomfort, or caught in the middle.

My daughter came out of her room one night and told me she missed her dad and could not sleep. My heart broke, so I invited her to sit and we talked about it for a while, then I let her stay up and watch a movie until she fell asleep. The next three nights, she still couldn't sleep because she missed her dad. Those nights I hugged her and put her back to bed. While I knew she genuinely missed her dad, I also knew she was being a 5-year-old who did not want to go to bed.

In speaking with many single moms and co-parenting counselors, I found that the best advice was to be gracious with yourself and your children. You are going to make mistakes. Forgive yourself. Learn from it. Make better choices. Pay attention to the example you are setting for your children. One mother said it best when she shared her experience having these hard conversations: "In the end," she explained, "you want your children to be proud of you. Make them proud. Walk humbly through the experience, love mercifully, and rise strong."

Rachel is a sensational single mom of two adorable children. She has her doctorate in education from UCLA, master's in school administration, and undergraduate degrees in child development and English. When life hands you lemons, make limoncello.



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Helping Kids Bounce Back

Raising resilient children.

By Jessica Williams

Photographs by Carolyn Soling Photography

Originally published in the July/August 2016 Feminism issue.

Childhood has its fair share of heartaches. Not being invited to a birthday party, getting cut from the basketball team, failing a test...the list goes on. No child is immune from these types of challenges, but some children are able to handle them, and the emotional pain that follows, better than others.

Those who bounce back quickly exhibit that magical trait called resilience. But all children can become more resilient, and parents can help develop resilience starting when their children are very young, even infants.

What is resilience?

According to Aki Raymer, MA, a transformative parenting coach and founder of Oakland-based Parenting Paths, resilience is the ability to tolerate difficult feelings and events—whether an everyday challenge or severe trauma—and continue to grow and thrive.

It can be considered a mindset, according to Dr. Kenneth Ginsburg. In *Building Resilience in Children and Teens*, Ginsburg emphasizes that resilience is not invulnerability or isolation from all risk. “Resilient people see challenges as opportunities. They do not seek problems, but they understand that they will ultimately be strengthened from them. Rather than engaging in self-doubt, catastrophic thinking, or victimization (*Why me?*), they seek solutions.”

Along with compassion, confidence, self-awareness, and humility, resilience is one trait GGMG mom Danielle hopes to instill in her children. She often uses the term “pop back up” when her kids physically fall down so as not to dwell on their fall if there are no major issues. “Aside from physically making sure our kids...don’t give up when they hurt themselves, [my partner and I] feel it is important [for them] to be resilient emotionally and socially as well,” Danielle states.

The study of resilience

Children who are resilient have certain attributes, such as flexibility, empathy, a sense of humor, and the ability to elicit positive responses from others. Some experts also include the ability to think abstractly and reflectively, a strong sense of independence and identity, and a sense of purpose and hopeful belief in a bright future.

Researchers have started focusing on resilience following earlier studies on the human response to trauma. They want to know the qualities of people who thrive even in the face of adversity, explained Dr. Laura Choate, author of the book *Swimming Upstream: Parenting Girls for Resilience in a Toxic Culture*. “So instead of only studying what happens when children develop problems, researchers started to recognize the importance of studying why some children are resilient,” Choate says. “What helps them do well? What makes them different? And how can we promote those qualities in all children?”

Building resilience

Certain conditions in a child’s family, school, or community can promote resilience, maintains Bonnie Benard, author of *Fostering Resiliency in Kids: Protective Factors in the Family, School, and Community*. Children who receive warm, affectionate care and support from at least one person form a sense of basic trust and safety. Children who are held to high expectations begin to believe that they are bright and capable. Children who are encouraged to participate meaningfully within the family (e.g., taking care of a

younger sibling or the family pet), school, or community assume they have self-worth.

Ultimately, developing children’s resilience begins with providing a safe, nurturing environment and modeling behavior for them to observe. As they grow older, children can start problem-solving in order to generate their own solutions to adversity while using parents as sounding boards. Ways parents can build children’s resilience include helping children regulate emotions and tolerate frustration, sharing failings, and paying attention to cultural messages.

Regulating emotions and tolerating frustration

Let’s face it, keeping emotions in check is not an easy task, especially when you are 3 years old and you don’t want to share your cheddar bunnies. Yet resilient children

“[R]esilient children become adults who can successfully navigate life’s bumpy road.”

become adults who can successfully navigate life’s bumpy road. Raymer notes that parents can help young children learn these not-so-easy skills.

First and foremost, parents should allow children to experience difficult feelings and situations without immediately rescuing them. “If a crawling baby gets stuck under a table and cries out,” says Raymer, “avoid running in and swooping him up, and instead coach him through getting out. Move a chair out of the way or offer ideas about how to get out,” she said. “This teaches the baby that you are there to help, but gives him the satisfaction of figuring out how to get out of a tough situation on his own.”

Similarly, telling kids what they can do helps them learn to focus on solutions, which is important for resilience. If your child “pushes another child out of the way, say ‘Oh, it looks like you wanted him to move! You can say excuse me.’ By giving kids tools for how to behave rather than simply telling them what not to do, we prime them to become people who focus on solutions rather than getting stuck.”

Additionally, modeling empathy by validating a child’s emotions helps the child understand difficult feelings. “Big emotions can be confusing for kids,” Raymer said. “When children act up, parents should start with acknowledging the emotion before correcting the behavior.” For instance, if a toddler throws a tantrum when leaving the playground, parents can start by showing understanding. Saying something like, “You were having so much fun and you wish we could stay at the park all day!” teaches the child to better understand their feelings, according to Raymer. “Most of the time feeling understood is the first step to being able to recover.” Parents who respond to their children’s cues sensitively and to their children’s behavior appropriately and consistently are priming their children’s brains for resilience.

Children as young as toddlers can also learn how to overcome adversity by listening to their parents work through their own hurdles. “You can verbalize your own self-talk about how you get through things,” said Dr. Jocelyn Cremer, Ph.D., a psychologist and co-founder of Potrero Hill Psychotherapy. That provides a way of thinking to model for the child and also shows a means to self-soothe.

Sharing failings

So maybe you didn’t get the lead in your middle school play decades ago. Your older child will love to hear about it. When parents share their failings and how they handled them, children learn that everyone (even Mom!) struggles with adversity at some point, that it is temporary, and that there are ways to work through it. Even sharing daily ups and downs, or the “roses and thorns” of the day, as Cremer put it, helps children learn that failings are transitory.

Moreover, sharing failings teaches kids they don’t have to be perfect. “Perfectionism can be very inflexible,” Cremer said, noting that part of resilience is the ability to handle failure. When parents share their failings while reiterating their optimism for the future, they help children build confidence and hope, important building blocks for resilience.

Paying attention to cultural messages

Speaking of perfectionism, today’s children are facing incredible pressures to perform at very high levels, especially in academics and athletics as they enter their teen years. Girls in particular may face additional pressures.

Choate, whose book examines the pressures today’s girls face, notes that “girls not only have pressure to look ‘hot and sexy,’ but also stay thin, maintain their relationships, and become accomplished at high levels. They have to do everything boys are expected to do and more, and accomplish it all perfectly.” Moreover, according to Choate, social media pressures affect girls far more than boys, primarily because girls spend more time on social media and value their social media “numbers” such as likes, followers, friends, and re-tweets more than boys.

How can parents help develop a child’s resilience to cultural pressures? “As a new parent, decide what you want for your child,” Choate said. “What is most important to you? Then decide to make parenting decisions from those values and not from what you are hearing in popular culture about current parenting trends...For

example, if you don’t feel comfortable buying your child a certain toy or certain outfit, then don’t do it, even if every other parent around you seems to be making those purchases.”

Paying attention to cultural messages targeted at children is also important. “Walk down the toy aisle at a major retailer and notice the difference between the girls’ and boys’ toy rows,” Choate said. “Notice that girls are being socialized...to look and act older than they are. It is too much, too soon. When you start paying attention, you can be better informed and equipped to make decisions about whether you want to participate in these cultural trends.”

Although we parents cannot bear our children’s heartaches or eliminate all cultural pressures, we can help develop their resilience. Every child can learn how to bounce back a little more quickly than before and be stronger for it.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE:

American Psychological Association, “Resilience Guide for Parents and Teachers.” [apa.org/topics/resilience/guide-parents-teachers](https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience/guide-parents-teachers)

Jessica Williams lives in San Rafael and has an 8-year-old daughter.



MOMS’ CONCERNS

As much as we’d like to shield our children from pain, social challenges and cultural pressures are inescapable. Here are some GGMG moms’ responses when asked, “What’s your biggest concern for your child in today’s culture?”

“I think it’s extremely important to make [my daughter] confident and proud of being a woman, for her to understand the differences between genders, but not to accept the discrimination caused by these differences... Another thing I am very concerned [about] is sexual harassment...and not only the extreme cases. I am afraid of her experiencing anything that makes her uncomfortable.” —Mariana

“[O]ne of my future concerns will certainly be gender equality. Not only when it comes to compensation and career growth, but also when it comes to men and women in managerial roles and how these managers are perceived. For example, a driven, direct, and successful female manager may be viewed as ‘bossy’... A man exuding the same qualities is simply a successful manager who has worked his way up and knows what he’s doing.” —Shannon

“As the parent of a trans child, I see daily reminders in the news about the challenges my child faces now and in the future just by being who he is. I am especially concerned about the increasing level of hate and discrimination in today’s world that targets not only gender-diverse individuals but any child that doesn’t conform to societal ‘norms.’ I feel it is critical to celebrate and honor my child for who he is and reinforce his value in this world.” —Kim

“I hope for my boy to be confident enough to stand for himself and at the same time to be confident enough to show his emotions. I think there is a big pressure on men to be stable and hide their insecurities and fears as if they don’t even exist. I think it is very hard to live in such [a] way...” —Ludmila



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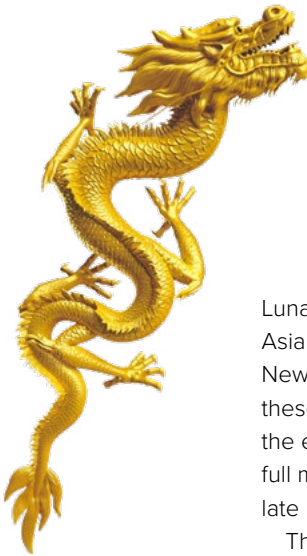
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Celebrating Lunar New Year, 2023



Lunar New Year is one of the most important celebrations in East Asian and Southeast Asian cultures including Chinese, Vietnamese, and Korean among many others. Lunar New Year begins this year on Sunday, January 22, 2023. Lunar New Year across all of these cultures is tied to the Lunar Calendar and commences with the first new moon in the end of January and spans 15 days of the first month of the Lunar Calendar until the full moon arrives. The dates vary by year, but generally fall between late January and late February.

The traditional Chinese New Year (CNY) festival, also known as the Spring Festival, is a subset of Lunar New Year and is celebrated in a number of Asian countries and the Chinese diaspora all over the world. Common ways to celebrate include: a thorough house cleaning to remove bad luck, wearing new clothes (red is considered lucky, black is unlucky), and handing out red envelopes with money inside. CNY Eve and CNY Day are generally reserved for family time, with different households celebrating with foods from their regions. For example, dumplings are a must-have for Northern Chinese, while Southern Chinese might opt for rice cakes instead.

In San Francisco's Chinatown—the largest outside of Asia and the oldest in North America—CNY is an extremely festive time of year. The 15-day festival combines elements of the traditional Chinese Lantern Festival (celebrated on the 15th day of the first lunar month) with the traditional American parade.

History of the San Francisco Chinatown Parade: An American Invention

The Chinese don't traditionally hold parades, but the San Francisco Chinese community began a small procession in the 1860s during the Gold Rush in an attempt to combat xenophobic hostility. After the Great Earthquake in 1906, the community rallied around the rebuilding of Chinatown and the parade became an integral part of Chinatown's attraction to tourists and locals alike.

The modern parade came to be in 1953 when the first Miss Chinatown was crowned and a procession went through the neighborhood. The Chinese Chamber of Commerce officially took charge of the parade in 1958 and used the parade as a platform for portraying Chinese Americans in a positive light. The CNY parade route then grew beyond Chinatown. Beginning in the '80s, the Chamber garnered major sponsors and was broadcasted via television, with more diverse cultural organizations, including LGBTQ organizations, joining the parade.

The roughly two-hour parade always ends with a massive 300-foot long golden dragon with the alumni and kids from Leung's White Crane Dragon and Lion Dance Association returning from all over the U.S. to carry the dragon each year.

- **Highlights:** Floats, elementary school groups in costume, stilt walkers, Chinese acrobats, and at least 600,000 firecrackers.
- **Route:** Begins on Market Street and ends in Chinatown.



2023 Lunar New Year Events in San Francisco

- The 2023 Year of the Rabbit CNY Parade is Saturday, February 4. The Flower Market Fair is held a few weeks prior, on the weekend of January 14 to 15, and the Miss Chinatown Pageant is held on February 3.
chineseparade.com/events-calendar/
- In past years, the Asian Art Museum has held a series of events celebrating Lunar New Year, including art, storytelling, and books. Not yet announced for 2023.
- The San Francisco Symphony's Lunar New Year Performance will be held Sunday, February 5, 2023 at 5 p.m. A reception and banquet are also scheduled.
sfsymphony.org/Buy-Tickets/2022-23/LNY-Year-of-the-Rabbit
- In the past, the Bay Area Discovery Museum has hosted an annual CNY celebration.
- Check with the San Francisco Public Library's Chinatown and/or Main Branch for events in January.
- The Chinese Cultural Center has exhibitions that are free and open to the public.



Ways to Support the Community

For the past several years, the entire Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) community has not only had to face the pandemic, but also a sharp rise in xenophobia and anti-AAPI hate crimes. Businesses have also suffered greatly, and given the large number of lower-income households residing in Chinatown (the median household income is barely over \$21K), the community—especially seniors and the vulnerable—need our help.

- Chinatown Community Development Center, which offers housing, workshops, and events for the SF Chinatown community, is relaunching their Feed + Fuel Chinatown campaign. In partnership with SF New Deal, donated funds will help provide 300,000 meals from local restaurants to Chinatown residents living in Single Room Occupancy housing.
- The Salvation Army SF Chinatown Corps ensures those in SF Chinatown receive the help they need. On the official website, click on "Donate to This Community" on the top red banner.
- Chinese for Affirmative Action is a progressive civil and political rights advocacy organization that focuses on systemic change that protects immigrant rights, promotes language diversity, and remedies racial and social justice. In March 2020, it helped launch the Stop AAPI Hate Coalition. The Coalition not only tracks, but also responds to incidents of hate, violence, harassment, shunning, and child bullying against those in the AAPI community in the United States.

SOCIAL EVENTS

Preschool Preview Night

Preschool Preview Night 2022 was an all-in-one evening for parents of upcoming preschoolers and kindergarteners, hosted by Golden Gate Mothers Group.

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NEIGHBORHOOD MEETUPS

Monthly Queer Family Hike
Join queer families for a COVID-safe walk/hike, which includes casual mingling/chatting, discussions on agreed-upon topics, and just sharing unique experiences and issues we have encountered as queer families. All queer families are welcome!

The safety requirements are:

- Socially distanced families
- Adults and kids (age 2+) can wear masks the whole time

Time: TBD
Place: TBD
Cost: FREE for members
Registration: Email Dy Nguyen for details (dy.nguyen@gmail.com)

Noe Valley Stroller Walk
Come join other Noe moms with babies for a weekly stroller walk down Sanchez Street and then possibly a hang in Town Square! All ages of babies are welcome.

Date: Thursdays
Time: 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
Place: La Boulangerie on 24th Street
Cost: FREE for members

Happy Hour for Moms in the Richmond and Sunset
Meet other GGMG moms at this outdoor location. GGMG will cover a happy hour drink and appetizers. Open to all moms with kids of any age.

Date: December 13, 2022
Time: 5:15 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.
Place: Violet's at 2301 Clement Street
Cost: \$5
Registration: see gmg.org/calendar

GGMG New Mommies + Babies Meetup – December 2022
Are you looking for your own mom village? Sign up to meet other moms! If you have children under 12 months old or are expecting, we would like to invite you to a small, casual gathering where you will meet GGMG moms similar to you.

Snacks and drinks will be provided while you and other new moms meet, connect and take the first steps to plan a stroller walk, find a workout buddy, or plan a playdate for your little ones.

Please contact playgroups@gmg.org with any questions.

Date: TBD
Time: 5:15 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.
Place: TBD, five locations in different parts of the city, will be emailed to participants close to the event date
Cost: \$5
Registration: See gmg.org/calendar

PARTNERSHIPS

The Friends branch of the Partnerships Committee collaborates with local organizations and businesses to provide substantial discounts and resources for our members. We aim to develop mutually beneficial relationships with businesses in the Bay Area that provide useful services to mothers. Our preferred goal is to work with small, local businesses run by women and/or people of color in an effort to promote their professional advancements in our society.

The Partners branch of the Partnerships Committee manages our relationships with our large Partners including the Jewish Community Center of San Francisco (JCCSF), Luke's Local grocery, and UrbanSitter. Reach out to partnerships@gmg.org for more information.

- Committee duties in Friends:
- Input new offers by local businesses (Friends) looking to provide substantial (20 percent or more) discounts to GGMG members
 - Maintain our relationships with our current Friends
 - Seek out potential new Friends who provide services useful to our members
 - Negotiate new business discounts
 - Update members on new discounts

- Committee duties in Partners:
- Maintain relationships with current Partners and seek out new Partners
 - Negotiate new business discounts to expand the discount offerings for GGMG members
 - Outreach for new Partners of interest with preference to small local businesses run by women and/or people of color
- Open Roles:
- Committee Co-chair in Friends (one hour per week)
 - Committee Co-chair in Partnerships (one to two hours per week)



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Healing the Heartbreak of Miscarriage— With Some Help

By Elizabeth Neal

In just a moment, a single life-defining moment, my miracle was gone (again). The dreaded words no mother wants to hear pierced my heart and soul...“I’m sorry. There’s no heartbeat.”

I couldn’t breathe. I shook. I wept. I felt hollow. My body cramped and ached. My heart ached more. I was left to grieve, to empty. This was my second spirit baby whose hand I would never hold, whose hair I would never smell, whose smile I would never see.

Grieving from miscarriage or pregnancy loss can be one of the loneliest, traumatic experiences of our lives. And the fact is, there is no right or wrong way to grieve. My hope is that sharing my experience with processing loss and finding healing can help grieving mamas feel held and empowered to lean on their community for support.

After my first miscarriage, my brain switched to autopilot and signaled my adolescent coping strategy for processing trauma: isolate. I alienated myself from my loved ones, and my inner critic kept me captive in the darkness, literally and figuratively, as a form of self-punishment and self-preservation. I hated my body—it failed me. And I failed my baby. Ruminating about these intense feelings sent me into a deep, dark depression.

With my second miscarriage, the loss was even harder. You think that you can’t hurt anymore. You think that you’ve already experienced the greatest hurt in the world and that you won’t survive it—but, somehow, some way, you do.

This time, I knew I needed a different script for how to heal in a healthier way, a way where I wouldn’t lose myself again. So here’s what I did differently: I allowed myself to feel every single feeling that came up without any shame or judgment—and I openly shared everything. Sorrow. Shock. Rage. Numbness. I didn’t hide. I didn’t put on a façade. When family or friends asked, “How are you doing?” (a question I d-r-e-a-d-e-d)...I removed the mask. Raw. Real. Me. I was out of hiding.

I let each and every feeling take center stage for as long as it needed to, unapologetically. I opened my breaking heart, sought grief counseling support with grieving mamas, shared



video journals with a safe community of hundreds of women, and leaned into the women in my family so we could grieve together (because I had forgotten that they, too, were suffering loss).

While this helped me feel less alone—I heard countless stories of other women who also were impacted by miscarriage and pregnancy loss but never talked about it—there was one transformative and cathartic act that guided me on the path to healing. My intuition told me: “You need to release your rage.”

I didn’t understand it, but I trusted it. I invited my sister to bear witness. Together, we mustered the courage to bare our most vulnerable selves and channel our

rage in a rage room, a safe space for people to release their anger by smashing objects (i.e., televisions, glass, teapots, mirrors). We devised our own ritual—aloud we named and claimed our anger, the source of our anger, and our feelings. Then we released it all, screaming, swinging, smashing, throwing,

and breaking anything in our path.

I share this with you because, as women, we’re conditioned to be polite, pleasant, and nice. To bottle our feelings or put them last. To judge ourselves. To people please. To quiet our rage. But we are stronger in a community. We can hurt together. We can release together. We can heal together.

When you heal within a community and when you crack open your heart and you let it spill, there are people on this planet that will receive, support, and love you. It wasn’t until I shared my story, connected with women I trusted, listened to my intuition, and let go that I was then able to forgive and love myself. I thought pushing forward, being strong, and sucking it up was the right way forward. But that’s not the way to heal. Your story matters—you matter.

Elizabeth Neal is a free-spirited creative, writer, nature lover, and mother of two spirit babies with a daughter on the way. She is welcoming Olivia Grace Neal in February 2023. She dedicates this piece to her two very special spirit babies and to every broken-hearted mama who has suffered miscarriage or pregnancy loss.



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