

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2024



GGMG | GOLDEN GATE
MOTHERS GROUP®

magazine

A photograph of a woman with long brown hair sitting on a toilet in a bathroom. She is wearing a light-colored, long-sleeved shirt and shorts. She is holding the hands of a young child with blonde hair, who is wearing a blue t-shirt with a white cloud design. The child's arms are raised, and the woman is looking down at the child's hands. The bathroom has white subway tiles on the wall and a wooden vanity counter. On the counter, there are several rolls of white paper towels and two bottles of soap. A white towel is hanging on a ring on the wall. The lighting is warm and natural.

Boundaries



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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR:

Life's Wild Ride

By Sonya Luecke-Abrams



Sonya is a Cole Valley mom to three children. She still has her Muni monthly passes from 2001 to 2010 saved in a drawer, and she will probably never use them for the art project she's been meaning to do for a decade now.

My eldest child is a public transit enthusiast. And when I say enthusiast, I mean obsessive. He studies subway maps from around the world. He checks the London tube schedule daily. He's in Discord groups for transit lovers and manages his own YouTube page for uploading transit videos. He has the San Francisco Muni schedule memorized and can tell you the quickest public transit route between any two points in the city without consulting a map. But above all else, he loves to ride.

My son started asking us to ride Muni for fun starting in preschool. We indulged him, spending weekends and late afternoons bumping along the city streets on buses and stuck in subway tunnels. At the beginning of fifth grade, he began asking to ride alone. After buying him an Apple Watch and grilling him on safe behavior, I let him take short bus rides unattended. Slowly, I extended the leash, allowing him to travel within certain areas of San Francisco alone, and making sure he was with his older best friend—also a transit lover—for other neighborhoods. I was nervous, hovering over the Find My app on my cell phone, tracking his journey. Eventually, his requests grew bolder—first, he asked to ride BART, then he begged me to let him ride AC Transit in the adjacent southern suburbs. By seventh grade, he negotiated transbay adventures, including rides on the North Bay SMART train and

Caltrain. Each boundary he knocks up against has been initially met with hesitation and hand-wringing on my part, and I often feel my stomach turn if I don't receive a text response immediately or he's 10 minutes late. But watching his excitement and his street saviness keeps me moving the needle of responsibility, not wanting my unease to hold him too far back.

Our writers in this issue think about how to create and maintain boundaries as well as how to push past the ones we have created for ourselves. H.B. Terrell explains the importance of bodily autonomy in our children and shares ways we can foster and model this ourselves. Yuliya Patsay presents

"I still struggle with wanting to protect [my son] from the world while also wanting to encourage him to spread his wings and take chances."

portraits of Bay Area artists and mothers who have pushed past the boundaries set by society and their inner fears to find their creative paths and thrive. And in an article originally published in 2022, California First Partner Jennifer Siebel Newsom discusses the relationship between children and technology in the post-pandemic world and explains why it's critical to set smart limits.

Watching my son fall in love with transit has brought me both joy and anxiety. I still struggle with wanting to protect him from the world while also wanting to encourage him to spread his wings and take chances. But when I watch him grab his backpack and run off to catch the bus each morning, I must have faith that he will reach his destination safely, even if things sometimes go wrong.

LETTER FROM THE BOARD:

Learning to Draw Lines

By Connie Lin



This summer Connie and her family visited Austria and enjoyed hiking in the Dolomite mountains in Italy.

For me, one of the best and worst parts of becoming a mother is putting my kids before myself. Instead of choosing what's for dinner based on what I want to eat, I think about what I can reasonably get both of my children to consume with minimal complaints which also offers some nutritional value. My weekdays are booked by the surprisingly short amount of time the kids are in school, while my weekends revolve around the kids' sports games and birthday parties. It's fulfilling to see how much better the kids have become at solving problems, explaining more complex topics, and telling stories, not to mention that both of them now fly through the water at swimming lessons. After all, it wasn't that long ago that my younger child was afraid of putting his head underwater!

On the negative side, being a mom means often ordering a side dish or salad when we go out to eat, knowing that I'll probably end up finishing my kids' leftovers. I've noticed that the variety of fruits and vegetables I eat has diminished, while the amount of pasta I consume has increased. Putting my kids first also meant that when I was a new mom, I would sign up for every school request, whether bringing in 40 juice boxes or crafting handmade treats for every child in my kids' classes, telling myself that the sleep I was missing at night was just fine.

But there are only so many hours in a day, and I've learned that keeping my family on track means I can't say "yes" to every school ask or sports need. Showing up as a kind and considerate mom means that I have to make time for my well-being and get enough sleep each night. It's OK to say "no" or "maybe next time."

Luckily, our GGMG community has been a great resource for me to figure out how to mom better. There's a wealth of helpful tips that GGMG moms have shared on our forums, from suggestions on time-saving appliances for weeknight cooking and favorite recipes for kid-friendly dinners to crowdsourced ideas for family vacations. Log in to our website to check out the latest discussions and start your own, too!

"[T]here are only so many hours in a day, and I've learned that keeping my family on track means I can't say 'yes' to every school ask or sports need."

GGMG could use your help as a volunteer, committee lead, or board member. We need volunteers to brainstorm and organize meet-ups and events and keep GGMG running. If this sounds like you, email me at recruiting@ggm.org so we can find the right role for you.

Looking forward to seeing you on our online GGMG forums and at our upcoming events!

P.S. Please join me in congratulating Sonya, our GGMG Magazine editor-in-chief, on her wedding. She is an amazingly creative and inspiring force of nature who's led the magazine for countless years, and we couldn't be more thrilled for her!

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.

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NEXT ISSUE: Spinning Your Wheels

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

This issue made possible by: Shvitzing like a mishagina; Nonstop PTA fundraising/supporting and (behind the) stage-mom-ing a kid applying to an arts high school; Searching for a rescue dog; Two kids at two schools in two different cities.

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: Jenni Riccetti and Santi (1 year)

Candy-Free Halloween Treats

By Christine Chen

Are you tired of the same ol' candy haul every Halloween? Change it up this year by passing out fun and unique candy-free treats that are sure to please.



Individual snack packs: Goldfish crackers, chips, popcorn, veggie sticks, granola bars, pretzels, apple-sauce pouches, and even fruit snacks provide immediate consumption (beyond the candy hoard) while trick-or-treating. These items, while not the most nutritious dinner for you or the kids, are better than the sugarfest (including my tried-and-true chocolate and wine dinner) that is inevitable for the evening.



Fruit: There is a house on our route that hands out apples, which is a good idea in theory, but we sadly always see them discarded on the street as they are heavy and not easy to eat on-the-go. Clementines might be easier and a welcome vitamin C boost and hydration for the evening.



Mini squishy toys: These popular fidget toys come in all sizes and shapes and are inexpensive on Amazon.



Temporary tattoos: They are a fan favorite for most kids of various ages. Halloween themed ones are sure to be a hit.



Mini bubbles: Bubbles always bring joy and smiles and provide a festive atmosphere when outdoors. Just think of all the bubbles at Disneyland!



Stickers: A sticker bowl is always a hit as kids of all ages like to decorate their notebooks and water bottles.



School supplies: A new pencil, eraser, pen, or marker can spark joy and make school that much more fun. Bonus if it is Halloween themed.



Keychains: Serving as accessories on backpacks, keychains are often an insight into a child's interests. The ever-popular fidget toy keychains often provide entertainment for kids in the car and at pick-up.



Mini bottled water or juice: Hydrating during the night is important, but carrying a heavy water bottle the entire evening is an inconvenience.



LED light-up items or anything that glows: Glowsticks, glow or LED light-up bracelets, LED rings, and glow necklaces are loved by all. As it starts to get dark, the appeal and fun increases. Handing out glow-in-the-dark accessories or LED light-up items also makes kids extra visible to drivers and easier for parents to spot as it gets more crowded when it turns dark.



New or unused party favors: We all have leftover party favors from hosting or attending a kid's birthday party. Instead of throwing them out, save them in a bowl or box for trick-or-treaters to choose from, similar to what various doctors and dentists do at their office after a visit. Kids are delighted by these small items, and everyone can pick what interests them.



Pocket change: While it may seem gauche, younger kids are always delighted if the treat is a coin—even a shiny penny is a nice surprise for their piggy banks. Older kids won't turn down currency either!

Christine's dinner on Halloween consists of dark chocolate with red wine in a sippy cup, both of which she is convinced are good for her health. She is dismayed that as her kids get older, the family-themed costume becomes harder to get buy-in from both kids. Peter Pan, Wendy, Tink, and Captain Hook last year may be the pinnacle and will be hard to top this year.

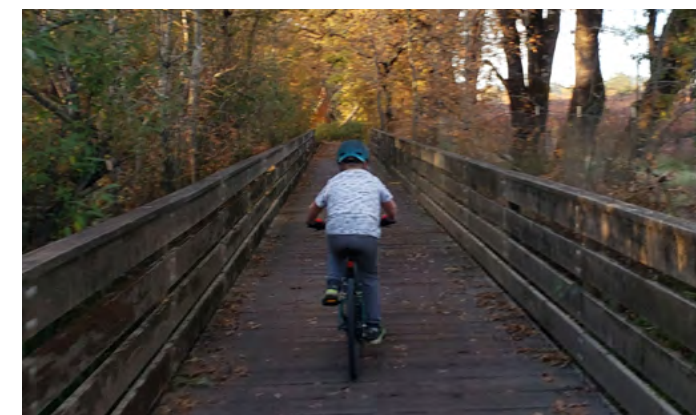


Forestville

By Sandy Woo

Got a day for an easy getaway? The **Russian River** is about an hour north of San Francisco and has much to offer. We'll focus on **Forestville**, a small unincorporated hamlet of Sonoma bordered by the Russian River. (You aren't the only one who has never heard of this underrated wine country gem.) Start your day 15 minutes south at the **Children's Museum of Sonoma County** (think Cal Academy meets Discovery Museum), or if you have older kids, visit the **Charles M. Schulz Museum** complete with original walls of his house plastered with Peanuts comics and an ice skating rink. **Safari West**, where you can see wild African animals roam on extensive grounds, is also nearby. Head over to **Sonoma Pizza Kitchen** in Forestville and enjoy the wood-fired pies in an enchanted backyard. Grab artisanal dessert at **Angela's Organic Ice Cream** across the street. Walk or bike off the carbs on the **West County Trail**, where if you go early enough, bunnies join your stroll or roll. Have towels and swimsuits at the ready to dip in the Russian River at **Mom's Beach**, where you can tube, paddle board, or wade right in the calm water depending on weather. Child-friendly **Russian River Vineyards** has food and music to end your day (reservations strongly recommended).

Sandy was shocked and delighted to discover Forestville and now spends untold amounts of time there.



Boundary-Pushing Dance Classes

By Sonya Luecke-Abrams

Ever get that toe-tapping restlessness, that feeling that perhaps your dancing queen dreams shouldn't have ended at your second cousin's wedding, when you did your best Macarena before fading back into the crowd? Whether you have two left feet or even no left feet, it's never too late to challenge your mind and body to push your limits and discover the confidence of the pop diva that lives within us all. Here are a few dance class offerings that go way beyond tap and ballet.

K-Pop at Rae Studios, San Francisco

Korean popular music is having a *moment*, and here's your chance to be a part of it. Downtown San Francisco's Rae Studios offers you the opportunity to channel your inner BTS and learn choreographed pieces from styles and genres from around the world, including pop, hip hop, jazz, gospel, reggae, and electronic dance music (EDM), as well as traditional Korean influences. The classes are open to dancers of all levels and backgrounds.

PopStar Booty Camp, San Francisco

Ever wanted to learn the dance moves to "Thriller"? How about the Spice Girls' "Wannabe"? PopStar Booty Camp offers a seven-week dance class series in which participants learn the dance choreography of one of several popular music videos, then perform the routine in full costume in a nightclub in front of friends and family. Classes are offered in person and on Zoom and open to all adventurous adults.

San Francisco Pole + Dance, San Francisco/Oakland/Berkeley

Pole dancing as the provenance of seedy strip clubs is an image of the past. It's now a symbol of empowerment and strength, and San Francisco Pole + Dance offers a myriad of classes and workshops to help you build pole tricks and skills, including inversions, laybacks, and grounded movements. The studio also offers pole rentals and private group events.

Sonya is a Cole Valley mom of three who loves to dance like nobody is watching ... but only if nobody is watching.



I Messed Up with My Kid

By Dr. Danika Maddocks



Dr. Danika Maddocks has a PhD in educational psychology and has supported gifted and twice-exceptional kids, teens, and families for over 15 years as an educator, assessment provider, therapist, and now parent coach. She empowers parents to let go of standard parenting pressures and to build a unique family life that actually works for their kid and themselves. Learn more about her free resources and coaching at [giftedlearninglab.com](https://www.giftedlearninglab.com).

Last week, about 30 minutes before it was time to leave for school, my 5 year old became increasingly agitated and started to say over and over that he wanted “something new.” Specifically, he demanded that I buy him a new Minecraft mod. I told him he could choose a new free mod or that he could get an advance on Friday’s allowance to buy a mod that morning.

Usually my kid will take an option like this, but last week he refused and demanded, “You need to buy me a new mod!” then adamantly yelled that he would not go to school.

My typical soothing strategies didn’t seem to help—neither reminding him, “you don’t like to be late to school,” nor encouraging him to work with me as a team. He continued to demand, “I won’t go to school unless you buy it for me!”

“After I lose my cool with my kid, I think about what happened and where things got out of control.”

In a moment of frustration, I tried to forcibly change my kid out of his pajamas and into his school clothes. He screamed and kicked and held onto his shirt sleeves so they wouldn’t budge. When I tried to force him, it just upset him more.

A physical stand-off or battle of wills is never a good idea.

I needed to take a break—to leave the intensity of the situation and to get my bearings.

I returned a few minutes later a little more calm. I suggested that my kid could get early access to one of his Christmas presents (money to the Minecraft store) so he could buy a mod for himself. We already offer his birthday and Christmas presents early—because waiting is extremely upsetting—so this wasn’t a new accommodation for us. My offer calmed him down and he helped get himself dressed for school while I purchased the Minecoins.

After I lose my cool with my kid, I think about what happened and where things got out of control.

First, what triggered my kid’s dysregulation?

Although my kid often protests going to school, his protest

that day was unusually fierce. I know this behavior means he’s distressed or overwhelmed, but why?

- **Dopamine hangover (not a technical term):** My kid had a birthday not long before this incident, and I think he was craving something new more than usual because he just had a rush of exciting new things (that unfortunately quickly lost their novelty). This is a common, if counterintuitive, dynamic I hear about a lot from families with intense kids like mine.

- **It’s hard to wait for something fun:** Over the weekend I told my kid that our Minecraft-loving tween neighbor may be able to babysit and play Minecraft with him. I usually don’t share something like this in advance because it’s so hard for my kid to wait for something exciting.

My takeaways: I’ll try to avoid mentioning fun things long before we can do them. This is especially relevant before birthdays, holidays, school breaks, and Minecraft-loving babysitters. Waiting for something fun is just too tough for my kid right now.

Second, what triggered my dysregulation?

- **I didn’t get my needs met:** A shower in the morning really improves my mood and helps me feel ready for the day. When my kid started to get upset, I realized I wouldn’t have time to shower before school drop-off. My patience and capacity are much diminished when I feel like my own needs haven’t been met.

- **I felt criticized by outside voices:** When I talked with my neighbor about her tween playing Minecraft with my kid, I learned she has more restrictive screen time rules for her 10-year-old than I have for my 5-year-old. Although our rules work well for our family—and my partner and I have crafted them very intentionally—I found myself wondering what this other mom might think about my kid’s screen time. When my kid demanded I buy him a new Minecraft mod before school, I was more irritated than usual. I had a sensation of being watched and my mind filled with others’ criticisms—you’re spoiling him, what a brat, you brought this on yourself—and so on.

My takeaways: That night I talked to my partner and we figured out a new system so I can have reliable shower time every morning. For the sense of being criticized, I find it helpful to journal. I remind myself that our rules work well for our family, that I value nurturing my kid’s interests and strengths—even when they’re on a screen—and that my kid’s whining and begging are a sign of stress, not a sign that he’s spoiled.

The next time you feel like you’ve messed up with your kid, I hope you’ll find some comfort in knowing that we all mess up and we can all repair.

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Setting Boundaries with Your Parents— Without the Guilt

By Elizabeth Neal

“You should really...”
“Well, that’s not how I did it.”
“You turned out just fine.”

No one prepares you for the barrage of unsolicited opinions you receive about how you should raise your child. For me, it was everything from how my daughter should dress to when she should get baptized.

All I *really* wanted someone to ask was, “What do you want for your daughter? How can we support you in carrying that out?”

Naive, wishful thinking? Maybe. But the beauty in creating and/or parenting a human life is that you get the precious gift of cultivating who that little miracle becomes. You get to decide your parenting style, family values, and the issues you’ll die on the hill for. That is your right as a parent. But arguably one of the most agonizing initiations is communicating boundaries with your parents and sitting in the discomfort of how family dynamics may shift.

Boundaries are expressions of self-love and self-worth that keep you physically and psychologically safe, and they come with a deep knowledge of what serves you and what doesn’t. Boundaries allow you to live authentically and connect with others in a way that honors and respects our needs.

That’s not to say boundaries will always be well-received—*especially* if you’re a recovering people pleaser and have never been one to set boundaries. But you are not responsible for how someone responds to a boundary. It is not your responsibility to fix, save, or manage someone’s feelings. They must process their own emotions. You must release the outcome.

That said, there is a mindful way to communicate boundaries around our children to help foster understanding and connection.

Get clear on your non-negotiables

When discussing how my husband and I wanted to raise our daughter, we aligned on how we wanted our daughter to feel—loved, safe, empowered, and resilient. Satisfying her core needs was above all else. Some of my non-negotiables were her physical and emotional safety, sovereignty over her body, and fostering intrinsic self-worth, trust, and confidence.

If you have a partner, have a conversation about values so that you can both bring your perspectives to the table and align on what you will, together, most hold firm to. You can feel differently, but must agree to uphold what your family’s fundamental non-negotiables will be.

Identify where there’s room for flexibility

You will have opinions on everything, of course. But be open

to the idea that your parents and the people you love most will each have some nugget of wisdom to share with your child, a different way of doing or thinking about things that will further your child’s growth.

You may not always agree with them, but where can you surrender and trust that the fundamental values you’ve instilled in your child are there? That even if they’re taught a different way of doing things that they’ll still be OK? Where are areas you can invite input or new ways of thinking?

Advocate for your boundaries—you can do this

When setting a lovingly firm boundary with your parents, speaking to the *why* behind a boundary (i.e., what are you trying to instill and why do you care about it so deeply?) is an opportunity for connection. Candidly, sometimes this may open the door to a productive conversation, and other times, you may have to accept that you and your parents will have a difference of opinion, but that your boundary still holds.

“[Y]ou are not responsible for how someone responds to a boundary. It is not your responsibility to fix, save, or manage someone’s feelings. They must process their own emotions.”

Below is a framework for boundary-setting to get you started as you grow your confidence.

“It’s important to me/us that you [insert desired action]. I/we want to [desired outcome for child and/or value]. We ask that you please [insert boundary]. I/we appreciate your support in being a united front on this issue.”

For example: “It’s important to us that you respect when Olivia says “no” to physical touch. We want to foster body autonomy and consent, so we ask that you do not force hugs or kisses if she’s not open to receiving them. We appreciate your support in showing Olivia her voice matters.”

In an ideal world, your parents say, “Yes, of course” or even “I’ll try.” If they don’t honor your ask, you must decide on what upholding your boundary may look like (e.g., limiting communication or removing yourself from the situation). Remember: You are your child’s fiercest advocate. How you support them now will inform their sense of self-worth, self-trust, and agency in the world.

Elizabeth is a free-spirited creative, storyteller, nature lover, and mother.

VOLUNTEER WITH GGMG!

Want to help some mothers out?

GGMG is a volunteer organization for moms, run by moms, and we are always looking for members who would like to help, whether it’s for a specific event or on an ongoing basis. We have volunteer positions that fit any time commitment. And after one year of volunteer service your next year of membership will be free!

Some committees with roles available:

- Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion
- Membership
- Member Support
- Parent Education
- Social Events



“Part of my me-time is spent volunteering for GGMG. I have been a volunteer for five years, happily giving back to the community that has been such a lifesaver to me as a mother.”

– Virginia



Consider joining the GGMG Board of Directors!

Being a member of the board is a fantastic way to gain experience and enhance your resumé.

Some of the board roles available:

- Treasurer
- Director of Kids Events
- Director of Volunteer Engagement

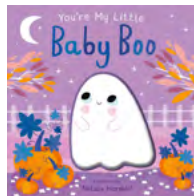
Reach out to us at recruiting@gmg.org to let us know your areas of interest, and we will help find the role that works best for you.



Halloween

By Laure Latham

Supernatural creatures need not be spooky to entertain young readers. As you will find out in these books, ghosts can be surprisingly thoughtful individuals when it comes to work-life balance. Also, Halloween may only happen once a year, but the chills of anticipation can make the fun last longer and get any young one excited about seasonal treats and thrills. Happy Halloween!



You're My Little Baby Boo

Written by Nicola Edwards, illustrated by Natalie Marshall

Celebrate Halloween with your youngest reader with this adorable book featuring cut-out shapes, friendly creatures of the night, and rhyming text. Introducing pumpkins, candy corn, and owls, as well as tiny ghosts, this book is as playful as it is a declaration of parental love to the little one in your heart.

Ages: 1 to 3 years



Get Ready for Halloween

Written by Janet Nolan, illustrated by Amy Zhing

How do you get ready for Halloween? While waiting for the big night, there's so much for families to do. Decorating the house, for starters, then selecting the best costume—which, as we know, is a challenge up to the last minute—and finding delectable treats. All along the pages, the phrase, “Are we ready for Halloween?” comes up, followed by, “Not yet,” with a string of more fun things to be done.

Ages: 2 to 5 years



5 More Sleeps 'til Halloween

Written by Jimmy Fallon, illustrated by Rich Deas

“It's FIVE more sleeps 'til Halloween, / that spooky time of year / where all the ghosts are wide awake / as nighttime's drawing near.” When you're only five sleeps away from Halloween, the anticipation reaches new heights and your imagination is

on hyperdrive. In this book, the daily countdown shows different seasonal activities every day. Watching scary movies, anyone? This book will get anyone excited about Halloween. Ages: 3 to 7 years

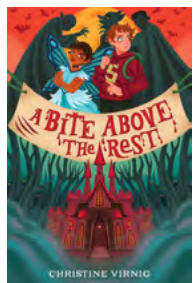


Wolfgang in the Meadow

Written and illustrated by Lenny Wen

Wolfgang is an ambitious little ghost who aspires to succeed his hero, Mighty Hubert, as haunter of the Dark Castle. To succeed, Wolfgang needs to cast aside his love for nature and train exclusively in spooky skills such as casting spells or making things fly. No more cloud

gazing, no more wildflower picking. When Wolfgang succeeds as a spooky ghost, he feels like something is missing. Can he balance both his passions to remain true to himself? Ages: 4 to 8 years



A Bite Above the Rest

Written and illustrated by Christine Virnig

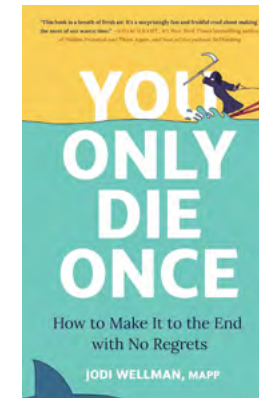
When 12-year-old Caleb and his recently widowed mom move to a small Wisconsin town called Samhain, Caleb is less than thrilled to discover that the city's inhabitants treat every day as Halloween. Caleb already hates Halloween once a year, so every single day? Cue permanent home decorations, dressed-up students, and a city hall only open from dawn to dusk. Refusing to join in the Halloween-mania, Caleb quickly becomes an outcast at school until he finds a friend with whom he starts unraveling disturbing secrets about the city. Could the mayor really be a vampire? Are there real witches in Samhain? Tweens will love this exciting Halloween tale set in a goofier-than-life quaint town. Ages: 8 to 12 years

Laure writes on marathon swimming, healthy living, and adventure travel at Frog Mom (frogmom.com), and is the author of Best Hikes with Kids: San Francisco Bay Area. She is the founder of a tech startup and lives with her teenage girls in London. She swam the English Channel in 2023. You can find her on social media @frogmomblog.

Wake the F**k Up and Live

By Gail Cornwall

Two new books, both based in psychology research, ask you to grapple with the value of habit, routine, ritual, and savoring.



You Only Die Once: How to Make It to the End with No Regrets

If I had picked up *You Only Die Once* (YODO) in a bookstore—and I certainly would not have, given its perch on the self-help shelf and cutesy cover art—I would have slammed it shut after the first few lines of Jodi Wellman's chirpy zealotry. But since the book was recommended by Adam

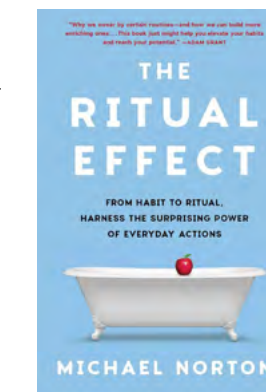
Grant, America's favorite organizational psychologist, I tried to ignore the feeling that I had been seated at a school assembly or had flipped the channel to HSN.

The story behind Wellman's central thesis is straightforward. Her mom died, and in sorting through her belongings, Wellman came to realize how many intentions died with her. Wellman was “stuck in her job and afraid to die like her mother—chock full of regrets.” But the specter of her own doom turned out to hold little gloom. Rather, it was a motivator to “wake the f**k up and live ... to do this life justice.” So Wellman wrote YODO to convince the rest of us to use “mortality as the spark to live with width and depth.” By “depth,” she means purpose and meaning, while “width” refers to a sense of aliveness that stems from experiences of awe, wonder, thrill, pleasure, etc. Both can be increased by figuring out “what you want out of life” and “with tweezer-like specificity—how to carpe those diem,” starting with “one small change.” If that doesn't sound infomercial enough, Wellman assures us that the whole shebang will be informed by the “science of flourishing.”

Here's the truly obnoxious part: She's right—about all of it. With detailed survey questions that felt like *Cosmo* quizzes, Wellman helped me “identify the things that light [my] life up.” As I write this, I'm staring at a list of activities, people, and locations that already make me feel good, and a second list distilling what I want more of. Some of the entries on both took me by surprise; that's how thorough and probing Wellman's questions are. There are people I didn't realize I missed, ways to assuage an anxiety I didn't know I had. This cerebral exercise has had a tangible impact: Two weeks ago it was a wine date with a friend that left me cackling. Last week, I successfully anticipated a regret, jumping in the ocean so I

wouldn't kick myself later for trying to keep my hair presentable instead. I'm putting the phone down, letting go of “lost possible selves,” and making time for Duolingo. I've even been convinced to engage in “conscious death reflection,” by reading obituaries, walking through cemeteries, meditating on death, and imagining loss.

In other words, I think YODO could be well worth your effort, even if Wellman's purposeful repetition grates as much as her hucksterism, despite her condemnation of habit and routine feeling too aggressive, and even though she's got a blind spot when it comes to privilege (“How astonishing your life will be is pretty much proportional to the amount of effort you put into it,” she writes, apparently having never met someone trying to support a gaggle of children on minimum wage). What can I say? I, like Adam Grant before me, am a convert to the idea of us “living Astonishingly Alive Lives in the stark light of our Inescapable Deaths.” (Capitalization courtesy of the schtick Wellman uses to make her points stick.)



The Ritual Effect: From Habit to Ritual, Harness the Surprising Power of Everyday Actions

Michael Norton and his colleagues at Harvard have done a ton of research on individual and collective rituals, and he wants you to know how they can “enhance” and “enchant” your life. In a read that's neither slog nor page turner, Norton answers a

slew of questions: “What exactly are the differences between a ritual, a habit, and a compulsion? How do rituals emerge? And how do we ensure that our rituals work for us rather than against?” He covers “placing your socks in your drawer sideways; ... the real reason open-plan offices don't work; why traditional rain dances and those annoying and seemingly pointless team-building exercises managers make their employees perform really can work; and ... rituals [as] emotional catalysts that energize, inspire, and elevate us.” Norton may inspire you to rework your family's “legacy rituals” as well as your “DIY” ones. Even if that doesn't happen, you'll certainly think more deeply about them—and their power.

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.

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Mythbusters: Childhood Injuries

By Brian Feeley, MD and Nirav Pandya, MD

We get asked several common questions, whether in our offices, at family functions, or just out and about. It's time to break down those myths.

Is heat or ice better for an injury?

The honest answer is: it depends on the injury. The most important thing to consider for both is that they are safe, and often effective in the treatment of certain injuries, regardless of the age of the person. Ice is going to be most effective when trying to limit inflammation right after an injury—for example, in the first 24 to 48 hours after an ankle sprain, when applied directly onto the painful area. The classic recommendation of rest, ice, compression, elevation (RICE) is effective in reducing time to return to play, and time to let kids feel better. Since ice also numbs the skin, it can be effective for things such as bee stings, bug bites, and bruises, but isn't effective for deeper injuries or conditions (i.e. your aching hip). Icing through a thin towel and not for more than 20 minutes minimizes the risk of skin damage and frostbite.

Heat is less commonly used for children, but can be helpful for muscle aches by temporarily causing blood vessels to dilate, allowing improved blood flow and increased circulation to the strained area. While heat often feels good, especially after exercise, there is no evidence that it will prevent or decrease delayed muscle soreness. The use of a heat pack carries a small risk of burns, so in general, heat should be avoided in younger children.

Do I need to put Neosporin or antimicrobial ointments on cuts?

Admit it—there is someone in your family who insists on the placement of Neosporin or a similar salve on every cut, no matter how major or minor, in order to prevent infections from occurring. Even the packaging insists that it kills more than 99.9 percent of all bacteria (along with 24-hour protection), but your immune system does the same, if not better. As far back as 1977, researchers knew that even in the setting of an intensive care unit, a polysporin ointment didn't help prevent infections. That said, there is no harm in using it, but rest assured your child will recover even without the goo applied.

Is wearing a brace or orthotic bad for joints?

We get this question all the time, from all ages. For our older patients, the idea that a knee brace may cause a ligament or



tendon to weaken just isn't true. The amount of load that these structures face on a day-to-day basis is more than enough to keep them strong and healthy, and wearing a brace will not weaken these structures. In kids, we often use orthotics during growing phases—particularly for the skull in infants, for feet in toddlers, and for scoliosis in teens. During phases of rapid growth, braces and orthotics can help direct growth (or at least decrease the amount of deformity), but once out of them, kids and their bones, ligaments, and joints will all recover just fine.

If my child complains of pain in the front of the knee, should I keep them out of sports?

At pretty much all ages, anterior knee pain is common and not typically a sign for concern. Pain that is localized in the front of the knee is caused by an imbalance of forces across the knee and kneecap, and therefore is typical during periods of rapid growth and/or changes in activity. Children will often

"[T]here is no harm in using [Neosporin], but rest assured your child will recover even without the goo applied."

describe an achy pain that is present with activities, worse with walking down hills or down stairs. Sometimes the pain can be enough to cause a limp, but it is rarely a structural problem inside the knee. Instead, the joints don't have an accurate way to report changes in mechanical load (similar to an infant that cries for many different reasons). Returning to regular play and activity will usually lead to an automatic resolution of the pain.

Warning signs can be swelling inside the joint (the whole joint is puffy), inability to put weight on the leg, or in older children, overuse from too many sporting activities (usually a single sport without the necessary rest periods). These are exceedingly rare, and for every 1 to 2 of these kids, we see 30 to 40 with nothing to worry about. However, these should be seen by a specialist (one of us!) within a week or so.

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

EMBRACING CHALLENGE WITH COURAGE AND JOY



MARK DAY SCHOOL

Safe and Sound



Fostering bodily autonomy in our children promotes their safety, self-confidence, and satisfaction in the world.

By H.B. Terrell

The moment we emerge wailing from our mothers' uteruses, we become bodies of our own, living separate from the bodies within which we formed over many months in the womb. Although those first breaths, meals, and movements require a gargantuan amount of support from caregivers, the independent body is a miraculous thing. The body is our source of nourishment, our tool of curiosity, our way of being in the world. As such, the body might be the most sacred thing about us. The body is how we reach into the world, pull it close, make meaning, and imprint ourselves upon the communities we exist within. The body holds the core of our being; it *is* us.

But sometimes, the power of our bodies becomes blunted as they encounter disruptions to our autonomy—we learn not to trust our own feelings, intentions, and self-determination. Uncomfortable, dangerous, or traumatic experiences coupled with oppressive systems of power combine to strip us of the ability to choose our own path, to say “no” to others' encroaching on our bodies, and to pursue our own priorities. Parents want better than this for our kids.

Rooted in respect

“I think sometimes people have a difficult time with the subject because of the connection between consent and sex. But my goal is to teach about appropriate behavior,” says Liz Kleinrock, a third-grade teacher whose explainer, “All About Consent,” frames consent to her class as a mode of respect for others.

Pediatric Psychologist Katherine Corvi echoes this sentiment. “Talking about consent and bodily autonomy is a place where you're helping your child develop empathy and empowerment,” she says.

“Kids are the experts of their own bodies, so we should be teaching them that they know what feels right for them and what doesn't feel right for them.”

Children are often treated as the property of their parents; combating this unspoken assumption wherever we recognize it can foster self-confidence, safety, and mental wellness. Respecting our children as intelligent, feeling beings learning about their own bodies and experimenting with self-determination requires parents to equip them with the necessary tools to support bodily autonomy.

Safe haven

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 90 percent of sexual abuse is perpetrated by someone known to a child. “When we force children to submit to unwanted affection in order not to offend a relative or hurt a friend's feelings, we teach them that their bodies do not really belong to them because they have to push aside their own feelings about what feels right to them,” says Irene van der Zande, co-founder and executive director of Kidpower International.

Instead of teaching children to ignore their personal boundaries by hugging or cuddling with an adult or another child when they don't want to, caregivers can offer kids choices for treating others with respect—high fives, handshakes, waves from across the room, a verbalized hello. “Manners—treating people with respect and care—is different than demanding physical displays of affection,” says van der Zande.

Experts agree that it is important to teach children the anatomical names of their body parts—whether it's nose, foot, penis, ear, vulva, or knee. When we include genitals in a neutral list of body parts, this eliminates children's feelings of shame in talking about private body parts. If kids are comfortable using the names of their body parts, they have the language to use in reporting it if those private parts are interfered with.

Beyond creating a culture of consent within your family, it is also important to explain to your child what to do if someone doesn't respect their boundaries and coach them with some basic phrases or

actions they can take, such as saying, “You do not have permission to ...”; yelling loudly, “DON'T TOUCH ME!”; doing whatever is necessary to get away; and immediately telling a caregiver they trust.

and tell a trusted adult. Their understanding of “no” contributes to their certainty about the parameters of their bodies and others' intentions.

“Intuition is not exclusive to adulthood,

“The best way to teach [children] these boundaries and how to enforce them is to model it ourselves.”

Author Akilah S. Richards says, “Consent culture should start with children—and when children grow up believing that all people have the right to control and protect their own bodies, then they're likely to respect other people's boundaries, and to speak up when boundaries—whether their own or those of others—are being violated.”

Cultivated confidence

When we show children that we trust them to be aware of their bodies' needs, they learn to trust themselves. Kristen Pavlik McCallie, executive director of Children's Advocacy Center, says, “Kids can set their own boundaries around their bodies, regardless of age. And regardless of age, they need to have ‘safe adults’ [they] can trust to help them if something happens.”

Children who know beyond a doubt that it is not their responsibility to sacrifice their own bodies for someone else's emotional state are children who have the confidence to say “no,” flee an uncomfortable situation,

and it can play a very helpful role in helping a child develop a healthy sense of bodily autonomy,” Richards says. She nurtures her children's confidence in their “gut feelings” by helping them understand what intuition does.

Van der Zande describes it as a signal in the body that can warn of possible danger. She suggests describing this to children as an internal safety alarm: “Suppose that you want to do something, or to please someone who wants you to do something, but you get an uncomfortable feeling or even a voice in your head that warns, ‘This feels wrong!’ Many people say they notice this kind of intuition as a sinking feeling in their guts, their hair standing on end, or a thought in their minds that just will not go away. Instead of ignoring your intuition, pay attention. Ask yourself if you are sure that the situation is safe. Ask yourself what other choices you might have. As soon as you can, discuss these feelings with adults you trust.”

At all ages, we feel things in our bodies.



Carolyn Solling Photography



Children feel hungry, or cold, or scared. They experience the joy of movement and the pain that comes with bumps and bruises. All of this sits within the body. When our children tell us what is going on in their bodies, whether it's that they need a snack, don't want to wear the itchy sweater, or are reluctant to interact with someone, it's important to listen rather than to explain away their feelings.

Rather than direct our children on how to interact with a new adult, watch and see how they respond to them to avoid intuitive interference. Richards says, "In order for a child to develop a sense of trust in their own intuition, we as parents have to respect their choices, and decide on a safe place and time to discuss the interaction and see if our child has questions. This is where we parents can be advocates and allies for our children." She brings books, games, and art supplies when hanging out with friends so her daughter has choices for activities and does not feel compelled to engage with anyone—child or adult—unless she wants to.

Borderlands and boundaries

Consent is important at all ages, but people understand it in different contexts as we hit

developmental milestones, gaining age and experience. Experts suggest that parents tailor conversations about consent to what is appropriate to our child's experience and developmental stage.

In pre-K through elementary school, the focus should be narrating respect for boundaries as teachable moments arise. If, for example, your child tells you to stop when you're tickling them, stop tickling them and explain why you're stopping. "I will always stop when you say 'no.' You get to decide what happens to your body." You might also offer them terms they can use to express how they're feeling and the choices they'd like to make, such as, "Was that too much laughing? Did it make your tummy hurt? Did you want to stop and play a different game?"

Corvi explains, "You're helping them and respecting them by setting that boundary and listening to what their body is telling them. You're also helping them to develop that inner voice and recognize that [it] didn't feel right."

At this age, it's important to advocate for your kids when others attempt non-consensual touch, e.g., "He said 'stop,'" to a third party, or "You don't have to hug if you don't want to," to your child. Ask before

initiating physical contact, e.g., "Do you want to snuggle?"—and stop when they signal discomfort; you might check in periodically during a ticklefest, "Are you still okay with tickles?"

For middle schoolers, begin to focus more deeply on empathy. On the drive home from a movie theater, you might discuss the film. "I was anxious when [heroine] had to stand up to [big bad]. What do you think [heroine] was feeling when they had to defy [big bad]? What would you have done?" In discussing fictional and hypothetical situations like this, you're helping children step into another's shoes and then relate it back to their own experience, giving them space to consider how we recognize feelings of unease, conflict, and distress in our bodies and how trusting those intuitions can protect us. Asking for your middle schooler's opinions is not just a way to connect with them emotionally; it also shows them that their thoughts, discernment, and intelligence matter.

In middle grades, or even earlier, discuss respecting others' boundaries. Countless stories of children who experience peer-to-peer harassment highlight the importance of giving clear guidance to our

children about the bodily autonomy of friends and classmates. They should be prepared to stop whatever they're doing to someone else's body when that person says "no"; or "I don't like that"; or "stop." Richards says, "We help children to start exploring the reality that they may not agree with or understand why someone is saying 'no' to them, and that the person does not need to explain whatever they're declining."

During high school, many kids become developmentally prepared to have conversations about social and sexual relationships. "In this stage, you want to continue with empathy and express that no means stop," says Corvi. Say it in as many ways as needed to ensure teens understand that in relationships, making someone unhappy by saying "no" does not mean it's something we should acquiesce to if it doesn't feel right in our own bodies.

Continue the conversation about respecting consent by revisiting the idea that when someone says "no," you accept that they've made their decision and drop it. It's important to convey to teens that it is not OK to try to convince someone to change their mind once they've refused. Respecting consent means saying "OK" and leaving it at that.

"The more often and comfortably adults have these conversations with children," says Molly Horn of Alliance for Children, "the more likely those children are to speak up if something happens to them that they don't like or that shouldn't happen." Horn urges parents not to avoid or delay these kinds of conversations with kids. "They need you to protect [them] and teach them how to protect themselves."

Bodily autonomy for moms

My four-year-old understands autonomy. She frequently reminds me, "It's my body and I get to decide," whether we're talking about watching another episode of *Bluey*, using yet another bandage to cover a barely-there scrape, eating another packet of fruit snacks, brushing her teeth, or choosing her outfit for the day. No matter how inconvenient this can be for me, I love it.

However, the thing she's still fuzzy on is when I remind her that the body she tries to leap on from across the room to demand

a piggyback ride? That's *MY* body and I get to decide. Our children, especially the youngest ones, feel such a strong connection with our bodies that there's often a sense that we are an extension of their interests. Yet four years old is not too young to teach children that they aren't entitled to use our maternal bodies as jungle gyms! It's often enough to communicate your boundaries clearly and consistently. "I need some privacy right now" has become a regular refrain in my household.

Fostering bodily autonomy in kids and teens has been in the research landscape since at least as early as 1994, but the parental body seems to be of less interest. Nevertheless, modeling one's bodily autonomy is as important as advocating for our children's autonomy.

"The best way to teach [children] these boundaries and how to enforce them is to model it ourselves," says Allana Robinson of Uncommon Sense Parenting. "The more practice they have with being on the receiving end of body boundaries being enforced, the better they'll be at enforcing them themselves."

If you lock the bathroom door so your kid won't bust in on you to chat while you're incapacitated on the toilet, you're enforcing a boundary. If you tell your child that it's time for them to play quietly in their room while you read a chapter of a book, you're letting them know that the people who love and care for them also need their own space and solitude. "As a mom, you still get to decide how much of your body you want to share with others, including your child," says Robinson. You can take a half hour to have a cup of tea without a

child crawling on your lap—for no other reason than it's what you prefer—and then engage with your child, refreshed and fulfilled.

Sound in body and mind

Teaching respect and compassion starts with having empathy for our children. "We have to remember we're not in their body, so helping them come to this place where they're listening to their bodies and what their bodies are telling them and helping them to express those feelings is a way to empower them," encourages Corvi. "This will not only help them in the moment, but it will also help them down the road when they're in more social situations as teenagers and young adults."

By teaching our young people that their bodies belong to them and that they have agency over them, we equip them with the confidence to respond intuitively to their bodies' needs. This is protective when they are young, but also reverberates throughout their adult lives as they make medical decisions, eat and move intuitively, and help themselves and others feel safe. Modeling consistent bodily autonomy in our own lives reinforces explicitly described tools with the implicit examples of our own lives based on consent, communication, and respect.

As United Nations Population Fund Executive Director Natalia Kanem has said, "Bodily autonomy means my body is for me; my body is my own. It's about power, and it's about agency ... and it's about dignity."

H.B. needs some privacy.





Janine Kovac, photo by Terry Lorant



Sasha Vasilyuk, photo by Christopher Michel



Amber Allen-Pearson, photo by Kristen Loken



Rachel Hébert, photo by Kristen Loken

Unleashing Creativity: Women, Motherhood, and the Arts

Local women push boundaries while exploring the intersection of motherhood and art.

By Yuliya Patsay

The Bay Area has long attracted boundary-pushing creatives. The women featured in this piece are mothers, dancers, artists, poets, and authors. Drawing on their childhood experiences, trauma, and the demands of motherhood, their stories and bodies of work may just encourage you to step outside your comfort zone.

Janine Kovac (East Bay): mother of three, dancer, and author. Her memoir, *The Nutcracker Chronicles*, blends her personal life with the events in ballet's most famous show.

I've been an artist for as long as I can remember. As a child, I started taking ballet lessons and never stopped. I also wrote my own books, stapled them together, sold them to my parents, and even awarded myself Newbery Medals!

My ballet teacher was a theater child in Berlin so she trained us to tell stories. We would examine the 12 people on stage as they conveyed a story without words with their bodies. Then we would talk about what worked and what didn't.

What are some of the themes in your work?

I've written about my premature twins, I've just finished a ballet memoir, and I'm working on a novel in which sex trafficking is a big element. These sound different, but they all have to do with

power dynamics and women's bodies. I'm particularly interested in power as an external force that is imposed on us versus empowerment which is internal and going through us.

How did your identity as an artist change with motherhood?

When my daughter was born I told myself that I wasn't an artist anymore, and I went to college to get a "real job." Then my twins were born at 25 weeks and the only way I could process what was going on on a day-to-day basis was to go back to what I did as a dancer—I stretched, put on makeup, got dressed in bright colors, and got enough sleep and food so that I could "perform" the next day. I had to stay at home and take care of my fragile babies, fitting in writing around caregiving. Motherhood became the container for my writing—sometimes a very small container—but before, there wasn't a container and so there wasn't much writing.

Sasha Vasilyuk (San Francisco): mother of two and author. Her debut novel, *Your Presence Is Mandatory*, features a Ukrainian Jewish WWII veteran with a lifelong secret.

I've wanted to become a writer since elementary school, but when I moved from Russia to the States as a teen, I had to first learn a new language. Eventually, I became a journalist, writing for the *San Francisco Examiner* and other local papers, then my career turned more entrepreneurial. I launched the first coworking space in San Francisco, then started a wedding PR agency. But ultimately, while pregnant with my son in 2017, I began working on my first novel. It came out earlier this year and is forthcoming in several countries.

How have you balanced motherhood and art?

I was seven months pregnant when I began my novel and I believe there was something about the deadline of pregnancy that created a sense of urgency—I was convinced my personal life would end when the baby came. Once I had the baby, I realized I could not give up on writing. I just had to make room for both. I was lucky that my husband worked from home part-time, helping out with the baby, so I had time to write. In the following years, he supported me through a transcontinental move, the pandemic, and having a second child, always reminding me to keep working on my book.

What are some ways you created boundaries to protect your work?

I didn't have an office in our apartment, so while my son was at daycare and my daughter napped, I would drag a kitchen chair and the tiniest of desks into my son's room and write. For a few months, I also had a nanny come for 5 hours twice a week, which

gave me a longer stretch of time to work on the book.

What advice would you give to a writer who is thinking about becoming a parent?

My dad once told me that the most efficient time in his career was the year after I was born. As a man, his responsibilities were obviously different from mine as a mother, but he was onto something. It's very common for writers to wait until they've landed a book contract before having kids because they feel like they can't do both. I always tell younger writers that writing a book and having kids shouldn't be mutually exclusive.

Amber Allen-Pearson (Mill Valley): mother of one, poet, and activist. Author of *The Unrooted Bloom*, a collection of poetry.

I was raised traversing between Oakland and Marin. I was an artist before I knew I was an artist—in middle school, my mom submitted a poem of mine to the Library of Congress and I was in an anthology of poems!

How did you become a poet?

In 2005, I was living in a homeless shelter with my then five-year-old son after escaping domestic violence. A friend of mine took me to an open mic Mouth Off in Oakland. The first time I heard these incredible poets share themselves vulnerably on stage, I was deeply inspired. I'd never paid attention to poetry as a way of releasing and processing fear, grief, and rage in that way. I wrote my first poem, "Dear Daddy," a letter to my dad about our tumultuous relationship. I felt if he had learned to be a better father, I would have been better at discerning what made a good partner. I went back to Mouth Off and shared my poem. Sharing it felt awful. I was shaky and raw. *I thought, I am never going to do*

that shit again! But a lot of people came up to me who felt touched by my poem—and all of a sudden I was connected to the Oakland/San Francisco open mic and slam circuit.

How did your career evolve as a poet and mother of a young son?

The boundary I came up against was that I lived in Marin with my son, and all of these poetry/slam events were at night in Oakland and San Francisco. I was a single parent, so every time I went out to perform, someone else was tucking my child in at night. But I took a lot of pride in my bedtime routine—I would read him five books and sing a song—and so I felt that I needed to break up with poetry. Poetry was the love of my life, but love didn't pay the bills.

How did you hold on to your identity as an artist?

I kept writing everywhere I could: on the backs of napkins, menus, whatever. This year, I finally published *The Unrooted Bloom*, a curated collection of almost 20 years of work that marks the way poetry has been my partner throughout my life, helping me process everything from power to love to grief. The boundary I created slowed me down from being able to participate in my art but it didn't deter me from creating, because the art itself is boundaryless.

How do you decide how much to share?

I don't have natural boundaries around my storytelling. I don't ever want to write from an edited place. In my journey with my son, we recognize that we have been through hell together. He takes a lot of pride in his survival and respects my process, knowing poetry was the only thing I had when we were going through what we were going through. What I selected to share wasn't just important to our story, but hopefully will be a balm for those who are suffering, or inspiring to create more empathy.

What would you say to a mom who feels like she's putting her art or her personhood on the back burner for motherhood?

That's OK: There's no one way to be a mother. You have to know what you are called to and choose it and live with that. In general, motherhood has been commodified: We have been sold a lie that our worth is in our sacrifice to our children. But our best gift to our children is to live our best lives in front of them—fully striving to take care of ourselves. That is what we owe our children. My best self was reading those books to my child at night.

Rachel Hébert (Mill Valley): mother of two, artist and author of *The Book of Thanks: A Catalogue of Gratitudes*, which will be available November 2024.

I grew up in the Evangelical Pentecostal Church. We had little offering envelopes and little pencils without erasers, so some of my earliest memories were drawing in church, first whatever was on my mind, and then eventually portraits of the people around me. My childhood was fairly sheltered so art was one of the main pastimes and escapes from the reality I was in.

My upbringing was oriented around missionary work: Our underlying motivation in life was to save souls. Having that foundational orientation to the world—of purpose and deeper meaning—is something that never left me.

Tell us about the intersection of motherhood and art.

It has been a growth edge for me. When my daughters were young I had a studio outside of the house and I tried to make that the place where my identity beyond "mom" was held. It was a spiritual practice for me to walk in the studio, breathe, and remember who I was. I wasn't very productive at this time though—most of my energy was directed toward parenting.

In retrospect, it's OK to set aside some of those ideas of self-expression and identity. I look back and know my biggest creative energy was pouring myself into my daughters, which I don't regret. The downside of working

outside the home is that my children rarely got to see me working, so it was very mysterious—this idea that "mommy is an artist." They didn't see me sketching out ideas and making messes.

Now I have a little studio in the garage of the cottage where we live. Over the last one and a half years, I've been working intensely on *The Book of Thanks* and my kids have seen that effort—the exhaustion and unwashed dishes. I like that we have all been on that journey together.

What's been the biggest challenge for you?

The biggest hurdle I've experienced is my own idealism and self-doubt. While making this book, there was a lot of imposter syndrome: *Who am I to do this? What if no one wants to hear what I have to say?*

What inspired this book?

A lot of the subject matter of *The Book of Thanks* is around everyday objects that we interact with and maybe don't appreciate. The imagery was born of my own gratitude practice in which I've devoted myself to paying attention and really looking at all of the things in our lives that create ease, that we touch. The book is a meditation on gratitude in words and images, with 52 short poems and 108 pieces of art featuring things like the light that turns on in the refrigerator, nail clippers, your favorite coffee cup, and when someone waves to you in traffic. I started keeping a list of these things and it was a very long list.

A gratitude practice often focuses on these really big ideals like my health, nature, my family, but I found specificity brings us closer. My ex-husband and the father of my children was diagnosed with cancer and recently died, and the relationship between grief and gratitude was one of the things that inspired the project as a whole. My internal process of watching his life slip away threw everything into a stark and beautiful contrast, the light changed in my life, a filter was put on, and everything became more beautiful, precious, and delicate.

Yuliya (it rhymes with Goo-lia) is Soviet-born and San Francisco-raised. She is a storyteller and voice actor. Her debut memoir, Until the Last Pickle, is available now!

"I don't have natural boundaries around my storytelling. I don't ever want to write from an edited place."

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HAPPY HEARTS & CURIOUS MINDS



Parents as Chief Technology Officers

How building strong relationships and setting limits can mitigate the fallout from pandemic-fueled increases in technology use.

By Jennifer Siebel Newsom

Originally published in the February/March 2022 Occupation issue.

As a working mom with four young kids, I know firsthand how difficult the pandemic was on our families. After years of increased technology use in our families' lives, we are all looking for solutions to help parents manage our kids' media and technology consumption and to feel less burnt out as a result of the added responsibilities and changes the pandemic has ushered into our daily lives—all while keeping our kids "tech safe."

Soon after I stepped into the role of First Partner of California, I co-founded the [California Partners Project \(CPP\)](#) to amplify the

work I was doing as First Partner supporting children's mental and physical health, as well as providing families with tools to help kids build a solid learning foundation. As a mom, I wanted to reach out and connect with other moms to better understand their family's experiences with technology, and what they needed to help their kids overcome the downsides of technology saturation. So, for a year, I led a virtual listening tour with moms across California to personally hear about the influence media and technology was having on their kids' health and wellbeing.

Not surprisingly, I listened to countless moms discuss the overwhelm of technology in their kids' lives. Collectively, parents shared the challenges in safeguarding their children from anxiety-fueled news coverage and exposure to hyper-sexual and violent social media and content online. Many talked about being unable to enforce video game boundaries with their boys. All is understandable given kids have experienced so many new norms and had so few options to socialize during the pandemic.

During session after session, moms bravely discussed their anxiety and fears about their kids' tech addiction. They were

“As a mom, I wanted to reach out and connect with other moms to better understand their family’s experiences with technology, and what they needed to help their kids overcome the downsides of technology saturation.”

worried about kids who had not only stayed in their homes, but hadn't even left their bedrooms since the onset of the pandemic!

Faced with challenges like these, it's easy to feel like we're navigating uncharted territory on our own—whether we work outside of the home or not. But throughout the tour, I found comfort in this community as other mothers came together to provide support to one another and share best practices for how to navigate these stressful situations.

Seeing the resilience and connection these listening sessions fostered, CPP committed itself to empowering parents with resources to tackle concerns about technology and mental health issues head-on. CPP developed [responsive toolkits](#) containing best practices, tips, and recommendations to help parents address the challenges of parenting during this tech-heavy time. Our team consulted with experts including psychologists, pediatricians, educators, and mental health professionals to tailor each toolkit with practical best practices.

Here's what we found: Conversation and connection are critical ingredients to building healthy relationships. In order to raise healthy, whole, and resilient kids,

partners need to be aligned on the rules and expectations in their home. By showing a united front and incorporating their children's input as they age, negotiations around tech and media consumption will be easier to address. And as a result, kids will feel seen and heard, which will in turn lead to better outcomes overall.

There are three strategies in particular worth highlighting to help parents get there:

First, create a family contract around technology use. In one listening session, I heard from a mom who spoke about a disagreement she had with her husband

about whether their son was allowed to play video games. Prior to the pandemic, her son was not allowed to play at all, but to cope with the limitations of the pandemic, her husband purchased some video games. Before the pandemic took hold, two-thirds of parents said parenting is harder than it was

20 years ago, and many cite technology or social media use as the driving forces behind this belief. It's no surprise that these disagreements about technology and social media use would be compounded



by the pandemic. That's why it is more important than ever to get on the same page about your family's tech use.

Second, we heard from caregivers all across the state who are struggling with how to best manage their children's

Tips to reach an agreement on games and devices:

Family rules need to be clear, consistent, and predictable.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, family rules help children understand what behaviors are expected. For these to work well, "everyone needs to know, understand, and follow the rules" within a family. If parents do not follow the rules or have different rules, it will be confusing to the children. Kids learn best when the rules and expectations are clear and consistent across parents.

Collaborate on a plan to show a united front.

According to an interview with Child Psychologist Susan Wilkens, kids do best when parents reach an understanding about rules ahead of time. If a parent knows that some areas may cause friction, try to discuss and resolve these issues privately, outside of the presence of the child. As a child grows, incorporating their input into a media/tech plan is helpful and more likely to be successful. Check out Common Sense Media's [Family Tech Planners](#), which provide a framework for screen time rules and expectations by age.

Have compassion for each other.

When approaching disagreements, start by validating your partner's love and concern. Acknowledging their feelings and care for your child first will make negotiations around areas of conflict easier to address.



devices. In addition to open and age-appropriate conversations with your children, four issues to consider include: content restrictions, privacy features, time limits, and in-app purchases. Understanding these terms is key. Content settings, including parental filters, can restrict access to websites you deem inappropriate. Privacy settings determine the type of information shared with internet companies and their clients. Time limits allow users to restrict the duration of use or the time of day a device is used. And, in-app purchasing preferences, including authentication requirements, can limit purchases in online games.

Finally, we heard time and again how when it comes to gaming, the intensity and difficulty of limiting use was a particular challenge for parents. A mom of a 12-year-old boy in Oakland told us, “It became so much gaming and that is all he wants to do. We fight constantly when we ask him to stop playing.” Another mom from Southern California shared, “For my teenager, he spends so much time gaming. ... [A]ll of his social activity [is] gaming.” Given gaming is a social outlet, finding a balance that allows for this socialization is key—as long as it’s limited (no more than an hour a day), the kid is engaged in sufficient outdoor exercise, and when possible, they have time in person with friends.

Some key tips to managing your children’s devices:

Engage in an age-appropriate conversation with your child.

According to an interview with Julia Storm, founder of [ReConnect](#), “if your tween or teen wants to access something online, no amount of parental controls will stop them. Ultimately our job as parents is to protect, mentor, and guide. Talking to our kids about the reasons behind our rules shows that we are being thoughtful in our decision making.”

Start with settings.

In most cases, according to research, if you want to begin to activate restrictions on devices or applications, whether for content or time limits, the best place to begin is in your device settings. Platforms like Google (Digital Wellbeing) and Apple (Screen Time) have settings that allow you to put restrictions on your or your child’s devices.

Reference: [cdc.gov](#)

In many cases, time spent on technology is not Problematic Interactive Media Use (PIMU). However, if your child’s gaming activities or social media use are causing an inability to function and presenting as a compulsion of a repeated non-productive behavior that your child can’t or isn’t willing to stop—or if you are noticing your child is withdrawing from their normal personality or are experiencing more sadness or depression—bring this concern to your trusted pediatrician. In most cases you might compare gaming or social media consumption to binge eating. We need food, but a balanced diet of a variety of nutritious options is best. Abstinence doesn’t need to be the goal; instead, make time for other interests and celebrate their engagement in other activities.

Of course, these tips alone won’t solve all our concerns, and we can’t put this whole responsibility on individual parents. Technology companies must take responsibility for their actions and listen to parents, educators, coaches, and young adults to improve their technology and, in so doing, improve young people’s health and wellbeing. That is why as First Partner I’m committed to elevating the voices of parents, and making sure that the companies who call California home understand that we want and expect more from them for our children.

Jennifer Siebel Newsom is the First Partner of California, a filmmaker, and a champion of various issues related to gender equity and raising healthy, whole children.



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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 goal is to work preferentially 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) and UrbanSitter.

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 (1 hour per week)
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NEIGHBORHOOD MEETUPS

Monthly Queer Family Hike

Join queer families for a walk/hike, which includes casually 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!

- Date:** First Saturday or Sunday of each month
- Time:** Typically 10 a.m. to noon
- Place:** TBD
- Cost:** Free for members
- Contact:** Email Dy Nguyen for details (dy.nguyen@gmail.com)

Moms Supper Club

Explore new restaurants in the city, enjoy dinner and drinks, and meet new moms in your community! Details for each venue will be announced through gmg.org.

- Date:** Quarterly on Thursdays
- Time:** 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.
- Place:** TBD
- Cost:** \$10 for members, \$20 for non-members
- Contact:** Email Lydia Weiss for details (Weiss.lydiab@gmail.com)

Monthly Bernal/Glen Park Moms Night Out

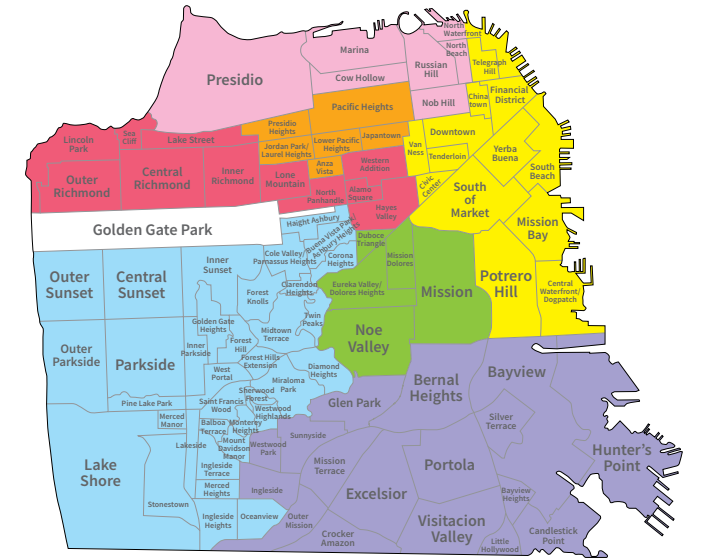
Each month we will visit a different venue in our neighborhood, moms only! After kiddo bedtime, enjoy a drink and some appetizers with other mothers.

- Date:** The second Thursday of every month
- Time:** 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.
- Place:** TBD (different place each month)
- Cost:** Free for members

Monthly Moms Happy Hour

Join us for drinks and appetizers at a local restaurant to meet and connect with other moms in San Francisco. There will be a different venue in neighborhoods all around the city each month. Info will be announced two weeks before the event.

- Date:** The third Thursday of every month
- Time:** 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m.
- Place:** TBD
- Cost:** \$5 for members, \$10 for non-members
- Contact:** Text or email Jessie Lee for details (Leejessiesf@gmail.com) or 415.518.6402



Marina/Pac Heights/North Beach Monthly Moms Happy Hour

Drop in anytime for drinks and appetizers with other moms!

- Date:** First Thursday of every month
- Time:** 5 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.
- Place:** Wildseed, 2000 Union St.
- Cost:** \$5 for members, \$10 for non-members

Register for events at gmg.org/calendar unless otherwise noted.



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A Little Exercise Goes a Long Way

By Catherine Symon

Originally published in the May 2015 Taking Care of Mom issue. This piece has been edited for accuracy.

Physical exercise helps to reduce stress, boost energy, control body weight, build strength, and improve health. It's just what every overextended parent needs. But how do you find 45 minutes or more to work out when all your "free" time is consumed with pureeing prunes and bouncing your ululating sweetheart to sleep? You don't. You find 10 minutes. Or 5. Or 1.

Researchers have found that micro workouts—vigorous bouts of exercise lasting 10 minutes or less—can improve fitness and even help manage chronic conditions such as diabetes and heart disease. In fact, short sessions of interval training, alternating between bursts of high and moderate intensity, increase aerobic fitness more effectively than long sessions of mild exercise. And while micro



“Researchers have found that micro workouts—vigorous bouts of exercise lasting 10 minutes or less—can improve fitness and even help manage chronic conditions such as diabetes and heart disease.”

workouts alone won't prepare you for a marathon, they will make you more fit than if you spent those few minutes every day wishing you had more time to exercise.

Small doses of exercise seem to have parent-specific

benefits, too. On the days when I have crammed in 7 or 8 minutes of exercise, I am less likely to need a cupcake to get through the afternoon and more able to handle my toddler's mounting emotional crises: "This shirt doesn't have sparkles on it!" "I *need* to pump the gas!" "Stop the wind!"

Because micro workouts are so short, it's easy to incorporate a lot of variety and stave off boredom. Micro workout apps abound; one of the most well-known is the "Scientific 7-Minute Workout" developed by *The New York Times* columnist Gretchen Reynolds in 2013. Do part of a streaming or DVD workout. Take advantage of the Bay Area's topography and climb some stairs or jog uphill. Invest in a jump rope. Make up your own workout: alternate between basic calisthenics like jumping jacks, running in place, mountain climbers, and lunges (look online for ideas and demonstrational videos). Or, just queue up a few songs and dance like a fool.

Bottom line: Move a lot for a few minutes; try to break a sweat; do it

again tomorrow. Every minute counts.

Catherine is a medical writer and former Olympic rower. She works out in her Miraloma Park garage while her husband and daughter are asleep.

Working out safely

Pregnant mamas, check with your doctor to determine what exercises are safe for you. Ask about the warning signs to stop exercising.

Postpartum mamas, the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists' guidelines state that exercise can begin as soon as it is medically and physically safe. Make sure you are recovered and ready.

All mamas, find the level of intensity that's right for you. If your pelvic floor just isn't what it used to be, remember to pee *before* you start jumping or running. Consider working with a women's health and pelvic-floor physical therapist to personalize a plan to reach your fitness goals.



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