

JUNE/JULY 2020



GGMG

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magazine

Collected Wisdom





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Letter from the Editor: Harnessing Our Collective Wisdom

By Sonya Abrams



Sonya is a homeschooling, pandemic-prepping photographer and editor and mom to three children who will be triggered by the phrase “stay six feet away!” for the rest of their lives.

During life’s most challenging moments, we often look to the people around us to help guide our behavior. Our mothers dispense hard-earned marriage advice when we’re in the midst of a relationship crisis. During a health scare, our friends share their own experiences navigating the medical system or undergoing chemotherapy. A selection of friends who’ve been there, done that, can share their own tips for getting out of a serious financial hole. Each human struggle is unique, but there’s often someone in our lives who has faced a similar battle and can provide the wisdom borne of experience.

This pandemic has felt different. We’ve been launched onto a journey without a roadmap. I can’t call my mom and ask her tips on homeschooling three children, because she never had to. Instead, she just offers up a heartfelt but unsatisfying “I’m so impressed that you’re tackling this!” I can’t comfort my kids by saying that life will be back to normal quickly, because we haven’t suffered a crisis of this magnitude, and we don’t know the course of this illness. When I sit down at the computer in the morning and peek at the news, confusion and stress coursing through my veins, I am confronted with all kinds of conflicting evidence, advice, reports, and prognostications. It feels like we’re all stumbling blindly through this frightening new era. The sheer uncertainty of it all can feel overwhelming and render us helpless.

But we’re not helpless. Deep into uncharted territory, we may not be able to turn to people in our lives who have endured a similar crisis, but we can harness our collective wisdom on universal topics to better arm ourselves with the knowledge we need to weather this storm. For this issue, we mined dozens of GGMG Magazines past to find topics that are relevant to the moment. We are featuring Jessica Williams’ guide to fostering resilience in children—advice we parents

“Uncertainty is frightening. But as mothers, we are clever, resourceful, and well-versed in crisis management, so we are particularly well-positioned to make it through the pandemic.”

desperately need now. With so many kids so closely attached to screens during the pandemic, we’re sharing Jami Grich’s article on what you need to know about technology and children. As we each cycle through a myriad of exhausting emotions these days, Gail Cornwall’s article on embracing anger will help us cope. And with levity seemingly in short supply, we thought it important to find a reason to laugh, so we are taking another look at Catherine Symon’s discussion of how humor develops in children.

Uncertainty is frightening. But as mothers, we are clever, resourceful, and well-versed in crisis management, so we are particularly well-positioned to make it through the pandemic. Here at GGMG, we hope that revisiting some of our most-loved articles will add tools—and levity—to your arsenal, and we know that if we stay united as a community, we will emerge from this pandemic with strength and wisdom.

Letter from the Board: The Wisdom to Know the Difference

By Virginia Green

If asked to name the one person who loved them unconditionally, was their strongest supporter, and was most influential in their lives, the majority of people would name their mother. But in the midst of this global pandemic, I do not feel as if I’m passing along many nuggets of wisdom to my children or even to my fellow moms; I am simply doing my best to survive.

Like it did for many parents, my support system seemed to disappear when shelter-in-place took affect. Since then, like the peddler in the picture book *Caps for Sale*, I have been precariously balancing too many hats on my head. Parents are now full-time caregivers, teachers, tech support, and crisis counselors. Any other roles, like being a spouse, friend, co-worker, or independent human with personal needs, simmer on the back burner. It’s exhausting. I just want to take a nap like the peddler, who lies carefully against a shady tree to keep his stack of hats balanced, even while sleeping.

I try to remind myself that even though “doing our best” looks differently now, our current “best” is not nothing. Boxed macaroni again? Baking cookies instead of finishing homeschool assignments? Another afternoon showing of *Frozen 2*? These choices once felt like the easy way out. But a home-cooked meal, a

baking project, and a singalong in our Day Pajamas are not nothing. What matters is that I am giving my children plenty of love. I am trying to spread calm over anxiety. I am reflecting on tough times already conquered. There will be good, productive days, and there will be days that feel like a wash. I am doing my best to find the wisdom within me to accept them, and that is not nothing.

Despite being physically isolated, I find strength in knowing we are all in this together. Nowhere is that more apparent than here in GGMG, and oh, how thankful I am for this community!

The forums have always been a space to discuss the good, the bad, and the ugly aspects of parenthood. Now more than ever, they are a lifeline for finding resources and venting about current challenges. GGMG volunteers have created Zoom calls to replace a range of in-person events: new mommy meetups, virtual playgroups, happy hours, and book club meetings. We are reimagining what Preschool Preview Night will look like this fall. And we are supporting members who have experienced great loss, from jobs to loved ones. I am grateful for the volunteers that have donned their creative and compassionate hats for our benefit.

Know that GGMG offers assistance so that every mother can get the support they need from our community. If the \$75 annual membership fee hinders your ability to participate, please reach out to member.support@ggm.org.

As we live through the COVID-19 pandemic together, I look forward to sharing strength, love, and grace as a community. And who knows? Maybe we’ll look back on a moms-only Zoom call, a pillow fort, or a failed bread-making attempt as a moment where we did, in fact, gain a little wisdom: one in which we found that doing our best was not nothing after all.



Virginia, her husband, and their two daughters live north of the Panhandle. This pandemic has reinforced her love for sweatpants, doughnuts, and Scrabble.

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THIS ISSUE MADE POSSIBLE BY: Eating my feelings; Texting with girlfriends about the joy of finding wipes; Worried about my family in Ohio as it opens up; Rediscovering local nature during the lockdown; Plotting and scheming with my fellow neighbors to take over the world; Canceling our April move to NYC; One million neighborhood walks, and 4 new pairs of sweats; Many, many bike rides around our neighborhood and the Polo Fields; PURGING PURGING PURGING.

Cover Outtakes



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

Cover photo by Sonya Abrams Photography
Cover model: Keira, 5

Detecting and Preventing Cyberbullying

With Eve Kupferman, PhD



What is cyberbullying and how common is it?

Cyberbullying is when someone uses technology to willfully and repeatedly inflict harm on another person. Chat apps, anonymous forums, even gaming sites create opportunities to harass, humiliate, and threaten others.

Today, 25 percent of 11- to 18-year-olds report being cyberbullied, with half of those being at the middle school level. Another 17 percent of teens admit to cyberbullying—the problem is very real. What makes cyberbullying particularly devastating is how quickly it can spread thanks to social media, texting, etc. Cyberbullying also has a scary permanence since everything is saved online indefinitely. A victim can feel haunted by hateful comments forever.

What can parents do?

Most kids are too ashamed to tell their parents they are being victimized. Many also worry that parental involvement (especially at school) will make the situation worse.

Becoming aware of key signs can help parents be alert to potential problems. Watch out if your child unexpectedly stops using his device, appears nervous when online, doesn't want to go to school, seems depressed, or sleeps more or less than usual.

On the flip side, the signs a child may be a cyberbully include tendencies to quickly switch screens or hide a device, being online at all hours, and avoiding discussions about online behavior.

How can parents help?

If your child has been cyberbullied, it is important to remain calm, show unconditional support and compassion, and collect the facts to assess the situation. Being a victim of bullying makes one feel helpless, so it's critical that children feel validated and in control as much as possible. Acknowledge how much this must hurt and work on a plan of action together. Start documenting evidence of the bullying (texts, social media messages) in case you need proof down the road.

Help your child also understand that she can disengage, detach, and switch focus. Remind her that computers and phones can be turned off. Cyberbullies feed off responses, and making a choice to step away will empower your child.

Peer support is an especially powerful antidote. Robust research shows that peers sticking up for someone is the most effective way to combat bullying. This is another reason

for parents to hold off on intervening. By waiting and coaching children, you provide a chance for them to reach out to friends and take action themselves.

Sometimes intervention is necessary, especially if your child doesn't want to go back to school. If this happens, it's important to explain to your child that it's your job to protect and help him. Set up meetings with teachers, school counselors, and key administrators. Parents can reach out to the parents of the bully—many schools even help facilitate these discussions. If there are serious physical threats, you may need to contact the police.

How can parents monitor and prevent destructive online behavior?

There is no question that kids will encounter mean behavior in some form online. Just as with anything else, parents should talk to kids about responsible and ethical online behavior and thinking critically about online conduct. Start conversations early, as most kids begin spending time online at a very young age. Having empathy and compassion for others can help prevent negative behavior.

Parents shouldn't be afraid to have rules and monitor kids' online behavior. Explain that just as you keep them safe in other ways, you set limits and monitor behavior to keep them safe online. For example, setting device curfews,

locking devices at dinner, or turning off internet at set times can be ways you set healthy boundaries and limits.

There are also software applications to help parents and children use devices responsibly. Some offer the ability for parents to see all texts (even if they are deleted) or choose the sites kids can access. Finally, parents should be very intentional and clear about their own device use. Remember, kids model their behavior after your actions.

How can schools prevent cyberbullying?

Schools play a critical role in teaching kids how to be good "net citizens." Most teach community standards for how to treat one another online and offline. Schools also play a part in fostering the role of bystanders, and many encourage supporting peers when they see bullying and coming forward.

Finally, schools often provide guidance for parents, such as holding formal and informal conversations or distributing advice and guidelines. Check with your child's school to see what is offered.

This article originally appeared in the November 2016 issue of GGMG Magazine.

Dr. Kupferman is a clinical psychologist with a private practice in San Francisco.

"Today, 25 percent of 11- to 18-year-olds report being cyberbullied, with half of those being at the middle school level."

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Where to donate to those in need

As you are well aware, the COVID-19 pandemic has swiftly caused immense suffering – from illness, deaths in the family, unemployment, and poverty to name a few. There are so many organizations to give to in times like these. We would like to offer some guidance on where to give – for those who are able and trying to decide where to help. This list is by no means exhaustive – it contains local organizations that we frequently partner with whose clients are disproportionately impacted by this crisis.

Help A Mother Out (HAMO)

HAMO is focused on distributing diapers, and they report that diaper demand has already surged 500% since the crisis started.

Donate financially here: www.mightycause.com/team/Hamo2020

Homeless Prenatal Program (HPP)

HPP is distributing food, formula, diapers, wipes, hygiene kits, cleaning products, child activity sets, and more to their clients.

Donate financially here: <https://bit.ly/2wRPOE6>

San Francisco-Marin Food Bank

The Food Bank has launched pop-up pantries as well as home delivery for low-income seniors who are sheltering in place. Here's how you can help:

- Donate financially here: www.sfmfoodbank.org
- Volunteer to deliver groceries. Sign up here: www.sfmfoodbank.org/volunteer/home-delivered-groceries-2/

SFSmiles

SFSmiles is collecting and distributing new and/or gently used and clean warm blankets, towels, diapers, formula, strollers, car seats, clothes (infant-adult, any size any sex), bassinets, and laundry soap.

Check their Facebook page for location and days and times when they are accepting donations. www.facebook.com/sfsmiles



CONTEST

Mirror, Mirror on the Wall...



Treat yourself to some serious medical pampering with our Mirror, Mirror on the Wall prize! Win a \$300 gift card toward a non-surgical service of your choice at Pacific Heights Plastic Surgery. Services include Latisse (eyelash growth) and Botox/XEOMIN for facial wrinkles.

Dr. Jonathan Kaplan at Pacific Heights Plastic Surgery was voted "Best Cosmetic Surgeon in San Francisco" by SF Weekly in 2018. Dr. Kaplan showcases his surgeries (with the patient's permission) on Snapchat, Instagram, and YouTube, so you can see what he's like behind the scenes. His website explains a wide variety of services.

Enter the contest by emailing contest@ggmg.org with "Mirror" in the subject line by July 15, 2020. Winners are selected at random.

Thank you to our generous prize donor, Pacific Heights Plastic Surgery.

Find it and a full list of services, costs, and details of the procedures including anticipated time and recovery for each, at www.pacificheightsplasticsurgery.com.

Congratulations to the winner of the last contest! The winner of the Laura Dallagata Portrait is Nina Olding.



Daddy's Kinda Different

By Bobby McMullen

It was my turn to keep “eyes” on my daughter Ella. My wife Heidi and I were at a barbeque, with lots of noise and distractions, and Ella was a handful as she scrambled about. I was having a ball, head down, closely following her. Suddenly a woman shrieked loudly, and all took notice. I pulled Ella close, comforting her, attempting to sort out what was happening. “That’s my baby!! That’s my baby!!” she screamed. A friend grasped my arm and said, “That’s not Ella.” Feeling confused, I tried to explain, guiding the tiny girl to her mommy. It hit me immediately: “I’ve lost my daughter!” I barely heard our friend explain to the woman how I could make such a mistake. I moved through the house, around blurred shapes, yelling for Ella and Heidi. Heidi’s calm voice came over the din, “What’s going on? You OK?” She was close enough for me to realize Ella was with her. This was the first time as an adult that I felt true fear and vulnerability. The moment I thought my disability caused me to lose my daughter. My name is Bobby, and I am blind.

I was 29 and in law school when I lost my sight to Type 1 diabetes. I’m blind in my left eye and 20/1200 out of my right. Close your left eye and look through a toilet paper roll with your right. Now imagine Vaseline smeared over plastic wrap on the end. That’s how I see the world. I’m also a double organ transplant recipient (kidney and pancreas), had a few



Inclusion is a new classroom paradigm to improve education for those with disabilities. It is a cooperative learning process that recognizes the significance of social interaction, allowing students to learn from each other, ask questions, and embrace and explore diversity using positive daily interactions as a tool to grow. Inclusion voids the archaic notion that exclusion and separation were best for persons with disabilities. For those individuals or for parents who have a child with cognitive or physical challenges, this is an educational benchmark. Placing students in special education (“special ed”) programs based on different physical and learning abilities sends a clear message of exclusion, affirming that singling out individuals for being different, for any reason is OK. A caveat to this is that some disabilities are extremely complex. In these cases, an individualized approach to education and socialization are key.

Parents can be vehicles of change.

Differences and diversity in all walks of life are to be celebrated and learned from, but acceptance of others begins with acceptance of oneself. We can help our children develop a positive self-image, so that they have the emotional intelligence and confidence to see the best in others.

I strive to live the life I am lucky to have to the best of my ability, and not let abnormal circumstances dictate my outlook. Every day I work to be the best man, husband, and loving father I can be. I have a remarkable wife and brilliant daughter, so I’ve done all right so far. Growing with them is a privilege with huge responsibilities often complicated by real life, illness, and being blind. I have never used my lack of sight or health as an excuse. Long ago I established high expectations for myself, and when not met, I learn from that experience and forge on. All life philosophies that I share with Ella. Our daily conversation always consist of moments explaining that “Daddy’s eyes don’t work as well as yours,” and sometimes I need help finding things or getting around. With time, she will understand my differences and with time this will become our normal. Recently, while we were out running errands, Ella said, without prompt and matter-of-factly, “Daddy, hold my hand. I help you down the steps.” My 2.5-year-old is leading the dialogue. I hope other parents and children follow suit.

This article originally appeared in the December 2016/January 2017 issue of GGMG Magazine.

Bobby is a professional mountain biker who considers his marriage to wife Heidi and raising daughter Ella his greatest achievements. Read more about him at www.rideblindracing.com.

“Acceptance of others begins with acceptance of oneself.”

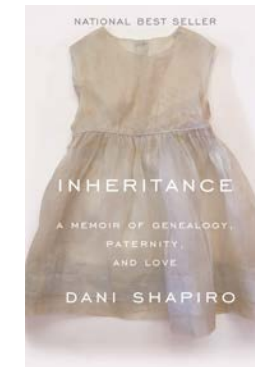
years of dialysis, had heart surgery, went a few rounds with cancer, and rock a pacemaker. I’m held together by more spare parts, pins, rods, and duct tape than I can remember. None of that makes me special or defines me. I don’t speak of them unless asked nor do I wear bracelets or other identifiers of my challenges.

My parents helped me to develop an unwavering sense of self, positive self-image and attitude. That solid foundation established by my parents allowed me to work through instances of bias towards my disability, and I managed the transition from a sighted world to that of the visually impaired better than expected. Exclusion has never been a factor in my life as an adult, and I’m lucky for it. For children, inclusion—being accepted unconditionally in any environment—can be everything.

Books on Looking Back

By Gail Cornwall

For GGMG’s retrospective issue, I decided to review three new memoir (and memoir-ish) books, each of which takes a look at parenting through the rearview mirror.



Inheritance: A Memoir of Genealogy, Paternity, and Love

Dani Shapiro is an accomplished writer who, in midlife, accidentally discovered that she shares no DNA with her idolized, deceased father. By conceiving with a sperm donor, her parents had done something radical during a time when “religious leaders of

every faith decreed donor insemination an abomination.... It was often considered adultery, and the child a bastard.” To say the news throws her for a loop is to say nothing of *Inheritance*, the book that chronicles how Shapiro wrestled to reclaim her identity, perhaps to truly claim it for the first time.

To a member of a blended family used to thinking of familial relationships as more brethren than blood, Shapiro’s dissection of her traumatization felt a touch overdone. That said, there’s no questioning her ability to form art out of words, and *Inheritance* provides plenty of general interest.

The Girlfriend Mom

In her author’s note, Dani Alpert writes, “The story you are about to read was written over many years,” and that explains a lot. Without a clear perspective to ballast the narrative, we don’t know who to like and what to hope for. The result is a bumpy and fairly unflattering ride. In some ways, that’s a gift. A bravely transparent Alpert gives readers an all-access pass to the good, bad, and ugly bits of a woman who “had never aspired to be a mother” becoming “the other mom.”

She touches on hot pokers known to jab many new stepmothers, especially those who aren’t already mothers themselves: How do you come to terms with what you give up when dedicating hours to someone else’s kids? Is your partner’s affection a zero-sum game?

But I’d summarize the overarching voice of *The Girlfriend Mom* as “I had these selfish moments, and I’m admitting it and making fun of myself, which means I can’t actually be a selfish person.” As a forward to her book, Alpert includes rejection slips. One reads: “It felt overly specific and even a bit self-centered. I didn’t fall in love here.” Neither did I.



Adult Conversation

“If there was one thing I wished I had been told before becoming a mother,” narrates Brandy Ferner’s protagonist April, “it was that even with all the immediate, whine-soaked, child-induced atrocities violating my personal space and sanity as a stay-at-home mom for eight straight years, the one person who would consistently dole out the final push over the edge would be my husband.” As this line indicates, *Adult Conversation* is a novel, but it’s also a manifesto. It is a serious take by someone who’s branded herself a humorist. These dualities turn out to be the book’s strength—and its Achilles heel.

The first two-thirds of *Adult Conversation* reads like a blog post on the overwhelming and unsustainable experience of modern middle-class motherhood written by a spitfire with few fucks left to give. In fact, Ferner does such a thorough job illuminating the cumulative impact of the mundane that she gets redundant and neglects to provide a plot. When the action starts, there are issues: for starters, how the law works.

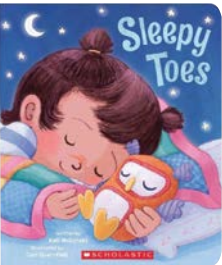
Still, *Adult Conversation* adds value. Ferner puts the condition down on paper in a format few have yet tried. Many readers will see their experience reflected and validated. More importantly, they’ll be left with a more feminist note ringing in their ears than the one struck in popular nonfiction books: “The frenzied framework of modern parenthood wasn’t going to change, so we had to—he had to—if we wanted to survive it, together.”

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/articles or by finding her on Facebook and Twitter.

Positivity in the Making

By Laure Latham

Hope can take many forms in young children, whether it's looking forward to making new friends, being optimistic about a new school, or hoping for the best when the situation is less than ideal. Some of these books function as how-tos while others tell stories of overcoming struggles, but they all inspire us to seek a better world where hope and understanding prevail.

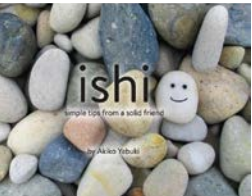


Sleepy Toes

Written and illustrated by Kelli McNeil

Falling asleep can be a scary thing for little ones, but this book will help them become aware of their body as it prepares for sleep. The book asks if each body part is getting sleepy and then refers to simple happenings of the day for each. Step by step, children will give permission to their body parts to feel sleepy. It's a yogi bedtime ritual in the making and a book that your children will hope to read regularly.

Ages: 0 to 3 years

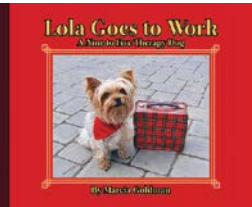


Ishi, Simple Tips from a Solid Friend

Written and illustrated by Akiko Yabuki

If your child needs a smile and a hug, Ishi can help. Ishi means "rock" in Japanese and it's also a rock in this book, but not just any old rock. Ishi is a happy rock that makes good choices in life, overcomes challenges, and turns despair into hope. This clever little book has few words, but can ameliorate almost any bad day with mindfulness and a positive attitude.

Ages: 2 to 5 years

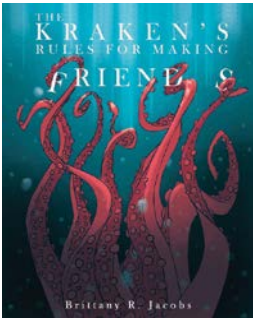


Lola Goes to Work: A Nine-to-Five Therapy Dog

Written by Marcia Goldman

For young and old, hope is embodied by an adorable little terrier with a great attitude. The story of Lola the therapy dog illustrates how therapy dogs are trained and what they do for work. Whether visiting elder care centers, bookstores, or classrooms, Lola brings comfort to people who need it. Using real-life pictures and simple text, this book is a great early reader to prompt questions about how we can help others feel better and find hope when they are sad.

Ages: 3 to 8 years



The Kraken's Rules for Making Friends

Written by Brittany R. Jacobs

Poor Kraken has lost all hope of making friends in the ocean; it's not easy being terrifying to others. When he tries passing as a friendly koi with a home-knitted costume, his trickery backfires and other sea creatures swim away. The only one who is willing to share some friendly advice is the great white shark. With witty puns and thoughtful wisdom, this book is for anybody who has a hard time making friends.

Ages: 3 to 7 years



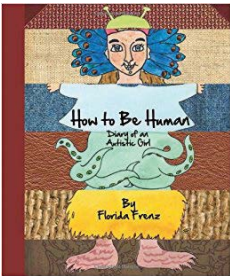
Isaac and His Amazing Asperger Superpowers!

Written and illustrated by Melanie Walsh

When your brain works a little differently than other kids', you can have superpowers to help

you cope with the outside world. For young Isaac, assistance comes from his incredible memory or his extraordinary sensitivity to sounds. Told from Isaac's perspective with superhero-themed illustrations, this book goes a long way to inform readers about Asperger's Syndrome and how kids like Isaac see and feel the world. A great tool to help children with Asperger's cope socially.

Ages: 2 to 7 years

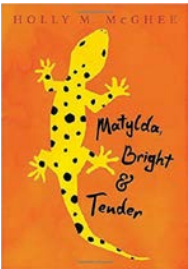


How to Be Human

Written and illustrated by Florida Frenz

This autobiographical account of autism provides a detailed insight into an autistic child's head. From figuring out feelings to matching feelings to facial expressions, Florida has to define emotions in a way that she could understand, such as color illustrations and textures. What's wonderful about this book is how Florida creates strategies to overcome her inner struggles. Now an articulate young adult, she shares excerpts from her therapy journal so others can find hope in her experience.

Ages: 7 to 12 years

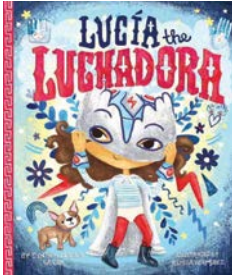


Matylda, Bright and Tender

Written by Holly M. McGhee

Like spaghetti and meatballs, Guy and Sussy are inseparable fourth grade friends who share everything, even a pet gecko named Matylda. When tragedy strikes and Guy dies in a bicycle accident, Sussy feels lost, angry, and confused. In Sussy's grieving journey, Matylda becomes a beacon of hope. This is an emotional story of friendship, loss, and hope that remains sweet and endearing with a positive message.

Ages: 8 to 12 years



Lucía the Luchadora

Written by Cynthia Leonor Garza, illustrated by Alyssa Bermudez

Can girls be superheroes? It's not enough to wear a red cape at the playground and jump off the monkey bars like a boss; Lucía is disheartened when boys at the playground ignore her best efforts, saying that girls are just made of sugar, spice, and everything nice. Thanks to her abuela, she turns up at the playground the next day with a full luchadora costume and a mask. Her secret identity and swift moves get everyone's attention. Pretty soon, she's a star and the playground fills with other luchadores and luchadoras. This is a fantastic girl-power book against bullying.

Ages: 3 to 7 years



Wonder

Written by R.J. Palacio

Auggie is a 10-year-old boy who's been homeschooled all his life because of craniofacial anomalies. When he starts fifth grade at a local school, he just wants to be accepted as a normal kid, but it's difficult for his classmates to get past his appearance. The story follows Auggie's journey from black sheep to school superstar, featuring realistic episodes of middle school life. This amazing book conveys an inspiring story of acceptance and friendship.

Ages: 8 to 12 years

This article originally appeared in the June/July 2017 issue of GGMG Magazine.

Laure is the author of the mommy blog Frog Mom (www.frogmom.com), as well as the book Best Hikes with Kids: San Francisco Bay Area. She writes for several parenting websites and lives in London, where she peppers adventures with her husband and two daughters with compulsory cream tea stops. You can reach her at info@frogmom.com.

Every Single Thing About Pregnancy Is Amazing!

By Anna Gracia

In a recent survey of GGMG members, moms were divided over which aspects of pregnancy they most enjoyed. Though enduring frequent reminders at the doctor’s office to gain no more than 35 pounds was a popular choice, it was outstripped by more glamorous options such as abstaining from alcohol, leaking pee while sneezing, and being asked if their pregnancy was “planned.”

As one mom puts it, “I love how majestic I felt with my larger body. My husband and I went to the beach when I was 8 months pregnant and he told me I reminded him of a manatee. Manatees were once believed to be mermaids! I felt like a goddess when he told me that.” She pauses. “I might have been slightly offended if he had called me a whale, but a svelte sea cow? I couldn’t wait to get back into that swimsuit.” Another mom notes the unintended benefit of lingering varicose veins: “My toddler just adores using the lines snaking down the back of my legs as a racetrack for his toy cars. It’s a great activity for him while I prop up my swollen ankles!”



illustration by Natasha Skogerboe

“I love how majestic I felt with my larger body. My husband and I went to the beach when I was eight months pregnant and he told me I reminded him of a manatee.”

For Maria Gonzales, all the physical side effects have been the key to bringing her and her husband closer together. “Before, we would sometimes run out of things to talk about from our day. But now, I’ve got hemorrhoids, constipation, bloating, acid reflux, morning sickness, cramps—you name it. Even though I’m on bed rest and my days might seem boring, I always have something to talk about over dinner.”

Ling Xiang has a different take. “I really appreciate the sense of community my pregnancy brings. Not only do strangers at the supermarket rub my belly and predict how many babies I’m carrying and when I might ‘pop,’ but I just love how fellow restaurant patrons look out for dangerous foods I might eat.” She explains that thanks to her local barista, she is no longer consuming coffee or even tea because he caringly explained all the possible side effects of caffeine on the developing fetus. “My next door neighbor

also told me to beware of mangos. She doesn’t actually have kids of her own, but I’m sure she’s done research on the matter, so I’m going to trust her judgment.”

Other GGMG moms highlighted the more nuanced side effects of pregnancy. “I am grateful my mother-in-law is so concerned with when I’m having my next baby,” Caroline Welseley coos. “It makes me feel like she’s really invested in being a grandmother.” At only 4 months pregnant, Welseley is carrying the first grandchild on her partner’s side of the family. “I can completely understand she’s anxious to have a baseball team’s worth of kids, as she has repeatedly told us.” Though Welseley has mentioned to her in-laws their intention to have only one child, she welcomes their repeated questioning. “How could we possibly know what I want at this point? Their opinions and desires will obviously help my partner and I clarify our reproductive decisions in the future.”

Architect Jacqueline Spears appreciates how much her pregnancy has brought out her coworkers’ maternal and paternal instincts. “Hearing the other associates whisper about how they wish they were having babies so they could go on leave just reminds me how lucky I am to be having a child—everyone wants one!” Spears says she feels no apprehension about the effect her time off will have on her career and is certain the partners at the firm will admire her dedication to exclusive breastfeeding for the first year of her baby’s life. “I’m sure my clients will be more than understanding if I have to reschedule a meeting or two so I can pump or pick up my daughter from daycare,” she states with confidence.

Preeta Singh sums it all up by saying, “I am just so happy to be pregnant, which is great since that’s all anyone seems to talk to me about. And every time someone says, ‘Don’t you just love being pregnant?’ I get to exclaim, ‘Yes!’” She continues, “Even if there were one or two things I didn’t love so much, like people criticizing the names we’ve already chosen or not being able to take any sort of medication because my baby’s comfort and health always comes before my own, I’m sure most people would find them trivial in comparison to the miracle of life I’m growing!”

This article originally appeared in the March 2016 issue of GGMG Magazine.

Anna has survived pregnancy three times and is thrilled not to experience it again.

NEW ARRIVALS



Courtney DiCarlo-Grana
Sonya J.



Baby Cora Francesca Grana
Baby Zuri Jain

Congratulations to **Sonya J.**! 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: www.minianna.com.

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How Humor Develops in Children

Humor serves as a window into the state of our children’s cognitive skills and contributes to intellectual, social, and emotional growth.

By Catherine Symon

Photographs by Carolyn Soling Photography



Act 1: The preschool years

[Father and 3-year-old daughter sit together on a couch in their living room. Father is making up a fanciful story and asks daughter to fill in some important details.]

Father: What kind of story do you want?

Daughter: Hmmm, one with a mix-up.

Father: Do you want any surprises?

Daughter: Yes!

Father: There are two snowmen in the story. What should their names be?

Daughter [without hesitation and grinning wryly]: Poop and Pee!

Thus began my family’s journey into potty humor. Although I was a caught off guard in the moment, it’s actually no surprise that our good friends Poop and Pee have become prime time players in my daughter’s stories. No matter how different kids are from each other, children’s humor follows a fairly consistent path. From peek-a-boo to poop and from knock-knock jokes to sarcasm, children tend to gravitate to the same types of jokes as their age peers. Why the similarity among such a diverse set of personalities? Partly because many of these jokes are kept alive by parents, siblings, and friends, but mostly because humor development tracks with

cognitive development. As our brains mature, so does our ability to understand, appreciate, and create increasingly complex forms of humor. Each new milestone reveals itself in our evolving sense of humor. Discovering object permanence? Let’s play peek-a-boo. Learning how to walk? Watch me pretend to slip on a banana peel. Ditching diapers? Poop and pee it is.

From a research standpoint, humor serves as a window into the state of our children’s cognitive skills. And from a developmental standpoint, humor contributes to intellectual, social, and emotional growth. Newer studies point to potential

health benefits, including stimulation of the immune system and stress reduction. So how do the poop and knock-knock jokes benefit our children?

It all begins in infancy

Humor is such a widespread human competency that the inability to appreciate or understand humor is listed as a characteristic of several developmental and psychological disorders. That near universality, however, doesn’t mean humor is innate. Rather, humor is a learned skill that children start developing as early as infancy. During their first year, infants look to their parents (or other attachment figures) to help them interpret situations they don’t understand. By observing the reactions of their parent or caregiver, babies begin to correlate the situation with a particular reaction. This is what developmental scientists call social referencing.

Social referencing is important for identifying dangerous situations. For example, the concept of peek-a-boo could be alarming to an infant because her mother’s face keeps disappearing unexpectedly. However, seeing her mother smile and hearing her coo each time she appears communicates to the infant that the game is safe and fun. By 12 months, babies are already capable of identifying certain humorous situations without having to check the reaction of their parent or caregiver. Social referencing continues



through much of childhood, but declines as a child gains life experience and establishes her own perceptions of what is funny.

“[H]umor is a learned skill that children start developing as early as infancy.”

Funny = smart

In recent years, much attention has been paid to the importance of play in a child’s development. For example, free play is thought to promote problem solving, independence, and resiliency, among other things. Paul McGhee, PhD, longtime humor researcher and author of *Understanding and Promoting the Development of Children’s Humor*, looks at humor as a form of mental play.

McGhee explains that humorous word play, for example, facilitates intellectual development. It can expand a child’s vocabulary by exposing him to new words that he is motivated to learn because he enjoys making people laugh. This motivation also improves his reading skills because he is compelled to read and re-read jokes to memorize them and he even derives pleasure by poring over them when alone. And while your child might drive you crazy by telling the same two or three jokes over and over, that repetition helps to reinforce his memory of both the words and their meanings.

Take these jokes from kidspot.com.au:

“What is a cow without a map?

Udderly lost!”

“Why can’t fishermen be generous?

Because their business makes them sell fish.”

“I wondered why the baseball was getting bigger. **Then it hit me.**”

Even young children will chuckle at the incongruity of a cow using a map in the first example. This joke also requires understanding of the words “udder” and “utterly” in order to be funny. In the second example, the punchline relies on understanding not just the words “generous” and “selfish,” but the use of homophones. The third joke (a nice example of how riddles don’t have to follow the typical question-and-answer format) incorporates the concept of puns.

Jennifer Cunningham, MA, a researcher in educational best practices, agrees with McGhee’s appraisal of humor as a form of play. In *Children’s Play* she writes: “First,

humor is enjoyable—in the ways that most play is enjoyable. Second, humor constructs an unreal world—much as make-believe play does. Third, the enjoyable, unreal world of humor often performs the same cognitive, social, and emotional functions as play in general.” Cunningham also cites research that shows elementary school-aged children seem to find jokes funnier if they have to work to understand it. They enjoy the intellectual challenge of deciphering the joke and appreciate complicated jokes more than overly simplistic or repeated ones. Incidentally, people who are exceptionally talented at creating humor are generally also highly intelligent. Anthropologist Gil Greengross and his University of New Mexico colleague Geoffrey Miller published a research paper in 2011 confirming results of an earlier study showing that “intelligence predicts humor ability.”

Act 2: Early elementary school

[Impromptu Skype session between aunt and niece]

Aunt: Do you know any good jokes?

6-year-old niece [grinning and talking in rapid succession]:

What’s the loudest pet?

A trum-pet!

What did the zero say to the eight?

Nice belt!

What’s the vampire’s favorite dog?

A bloodhound!

What did the toilet say to the other toilet? **You look a bit flushed!**

Why didn’t the teddy bear finish his dinner? **Because he was stuffed!**

What did the tornado say to the other tornado? **See you around!**

Knock knock...

Aunt: Okay, gotta go. Nice talking to you!

Laugh...in good times and in bad

Humor also facilitates social development, particularly when forging relationships. McGhee writes that children who initiate humor are seen as more likable and sociable by their peers. This peer evaluation starts as early as preschool and continues through adulthood. The fact that social bonds are reinforced by humor is especially evident in late elementary school and middle school, when groups of friends use inside jokes to maximize their feeling of belonging.

Making classmates laugh can also help a child to overcome social stigmas (e.g., lack of athleticism, speech or learning

delays, poor social skills) that may otherwise isolate them from their peers. The ability to make other people laugh is an incredibly powerful thing: it provides positive reinforcement, which builds self-esteem, boosts confidence, and promotes social ties.

In terms of emotional development, humor and laughter help us to manage our strongest emotions. Children and adults alike can control anger and minimize stress if they can find humor in even the most irritating situations. In this case, McGhee reminds us that laughter isn't just an expression of joy; humor and laughter can diffuse tense situations. So the next time your child is having a rough day, see if a

bout of laughter can get her out of her funk. You should also try it yourself.

Humor offers a window into development

Graduating from one humor stage to another coincides with certain leaps in development. Using Jean Piaget's classic stages of cognitive development as a model, McGhee created the "Stages of Humor Development." These stages describe typical humor abilities from infancy through early elementary school.

One basic requirement in understanding humor is the ability to differentiate between intentional ("Ha ha, Mommy pretended to fall asleep and snore!") and unintentional

("Oops, Mommy fell asleep while she was reading to me") acts. Research led by Malinda Carpenter of the University of Liverpool shows that this differentiation happens as early as 14 months. Humor can therefore be an effective gauge for what cognitive milestones children have achieved starting at a very young age.

A child's sense of humor also gives us a window into what concepts they are trying to master. So in spite of the fact that my 3-year-old has pooped about 2,000 times in her life, her recent experience of saying goodbye to diapers (hooray!) has elevated poop and pee to the top spot in her joke repertoire. She also enjoys silly word games and rhymes now that her command of language is blossoming. A young toddler, on the other hand, would be more interested in physical humor (peek-a-boo, tickling, making funny faces) because his language skills are less developed and he explores his world by moving and touching. As your child approaches tweendom and adolescence, don't be surprised when you start to (over)hear off-color jokes. It can be shocking, but know that it is normal for children this age to be grappling with novel topics like sex as they navigate puberty.

How to encourage your child's humor

Clearly humor plays an important role in child development. We also now know that kids start by learning from their parents and other key attachment figures. How can you



- Find a few that resonate with your child and tell them often.
- Give your kids some joke and riddle books so they can discover their own favorites.
 - Tickle frequently.
 - When your child tells a joke, laugh at the punch line even if you've heard it a thousand times before.
 - Be silly: wear your Halloween costume to breakfast, watch funny movies together, declare Opposite Day (even if it's only for an hour).

Act 3: The gap between tweendom and adulthood

[Weeknight family Skype session. Seattle sister-in-law recounts to San Francisco sister-in-law a joke she was told earlier that day. Nine-year-old Seattle niece sits nearby.]

Seattle SIL: "How long does it take to make Chinese tea?"

San Francisco SIL: "Hmmm, I have no idea."

Seattle SIL [laughing uncontrollably and barely able to get the punchline out]: "Oolong!"

Seattle niece: "I don't get it. Why is that funny???"

This article originally appeared in the March 2016 issue of GGMG Magazine.

Catherine is a medical writer. In spite of what the experts say, she is pretty sure that potty humor never gets old.

Stages of Humor Development

Source: Paul E. McGhee, PhD

Stage	Example	Age range
0: Pre-humor smiling and laughing	Pre-humor smiling and laughing	Early infancy
1: Laughter at the attachment figure	Laughing during peek-a-boo with parent	6 months to 12 or 15 months
2: Treating an object as a different object	Using a banana as a "phone"	12 or 15 months to 3, 4 or 5 years
3a: Misnaming objects or actions	When asked to point to her nose, grins and points to her ear	2 years to 3 or 4 years
3b: Opposites—a special case of misnaming	"This ice cube is so hot!"	
4a: Playing with word sounds	"Funny bunny hunny dunny wunny!"	3 years to 5 years
4b: Nonsense real-word combinations	"Can I have some moon juice?"	
4c: Distortion of features of objects, people or animals	"The giraffes at the zoo can fly."	
4d: Gender reversal	"Raggedy Ann is my pretend brother."	
Pre-riddle stage	Doesn't have firm command of riddles or jokes, but attempts to make them up	5 years to 6 or 7 years
5: Jokes and riddles	Jokes contain words with clever double meanings	6 or 7 years +

"Graduating from one humor stage to another coincides with certain leaps in development."

help build your child's sense of humor? Don't be concerned if you're not a natural comedian. McGhee writes that humor will develop without any special effort from parents. Simple actions like engaging in silly play and laughing at your child's jokes (whether learned or made up) encourages them to explore humor. But if you want to help your child's sense of humor blossom, there are a number of things you can do:

- Tell jokes and teach them to your kids. If you don't remember any or you need more examples, there are countless kid-friendly jokes online.

- Most importantly, join in the fun. Don't just send them off to play. Participate in freeze dancing, Duck Duck Goose, funny face contests and whatever else they're into.
- Lastly, don't be afraid to draw boundaries when humor becomes offensive or mean-spirited. Children often use humor as a testing ground to learn what is appropriate. It may also indicate that they are looking for help in understanding the subject of the joke.



Helping Kids Bounce Back

We can't shield our children from life's difficulties, but we can provide them with the tools to recover from disappointment.

By Jessica Williams

Photographs by Carolyn Soling Photography

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 says.

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 wanted to know the qualities of people who thrive even in the face of adversity, explains 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 (for example, by taking care of little brother or the family pet), school, or community come to assume they are worthy.

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're 3 years old and you don't want to share your cheddar bunnies. Yet resilient children 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

“Resilient children grow up to be adults who can successfully navigate life's bumpy road.”

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. 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 emotion helps the child understand his difficult feelings. “Big emotions can be confusing for kids,” Raymer says. “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,” says Dr. Jocelyn Cremer, PhD, 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 “thorns” and “roses” 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 says, 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 the 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 says. "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 says. "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 Parenting Resources

American Psychological Association, "Resilience Guide for Parents and Teachers." www.apa.org/helpcenter/resilience

This article originally appeared in the July/August 2016 issue of GGMG Magazine.

Jessica remembers vividly the day she got a 37 percent on a high school math test. She lives in Noe Valley and has an almost 2-year-old daughter.

MOMS' CONCERNS

By Jessica Williams

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 daughter or son in today's culture?"**

DAUGHTERS

"I think it's extremely important to make her 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

"This is hard to answer as my daughter is only 10 months old. That said, one 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

SONS

"I don't have any particular concerns regarding raising a boy over a girl. It's important that he learns to treat others who are different than him with respect. I think that goes without saying for both genders though." —Nicolette

"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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Embracing Anger

By Gail Cornwall

Photographs by Lindsay Lovier Photography

Shifting my screaming newborn from my shoulder down to my arms (in an attempt to calm the colicky little bunny as well as buy myself a few additional inches between her mouth and my eardrum), I surveyed the disaster unfolding in the single space that serves as playroom, living room, dining room, and kitchen in our small San Francisco apartment. An unfolded jumble of clean laundry sat on the couch, and dirty clothes littered the ground. Crusty dishes covered the counters. The hardwood floor beneath the kids’ chairs appeared carpeted thanks to food droppings, and the broom I’d gotten out five hours ago but not yet used leaned mockingly against the wall.

Despite my best shush and sway, her howling continued. *Don’t shake the baby*, I reminded myself.

My almost three-year-old son, one hand planted inside the back of his underwear, upended yet another bin of toys.

And still she wailed. *Don’t shake the baby*.

My five-year-old demanded immediate attention in the grating cadence she’d picked up after just two weeks of kindergarten, a sing-song of irreverence that somehow manages to combine the shrill whine of a baby with the sassiness of a teenager. The latest crisis? The two pant legs of her jeggings touched her shins at slightly different points.

The cries intensified. *Don’t shake the baby*.

Perhaps worst of all, a mirror reflected back a face marred by cumulative sleep loss (since my return from the hospital, my son had decided to “check on me” at least once a night, invariably in the middle of the newborn’s “long” stretch) and a huge shiner (sustained when he accidentally tossed his skull into my eye during one such check-in).

Red in the face and shaking, my newborn continued to shout. *Don’t. Shake. The. Baby.*

When my darling son picked up his toy hammer, walked over to his big sister, made eye contact with me, and slammed it down onto her head, I lost it. I finally obtained relief from the newborn’s screaming by drowning it out with screeching of my own. Railing hypocritically about using one’s words and problem-solving to resolve conflict, I sputtered and spat until all four of us shed tears.

It was not my best moment. But was it bad parenting?

Anti-anger parenting: from yelling diets to unfailing calm

These days the mommy blogosphere is awash with posts urging parents to stop raising their voices. Articles like “10 Things I Learned When I Stopped Yelling at My Kids” and “When Yelling Is Worse Than Spanking,” as well as books with even more emphatic titles like *Yell Less, Love More* and *Peaceful Parent, Happy Kids: How to Stop Yelling and Start Connecting*, exhort us to rein in our expressions of anger. These writers treat yelling as a weakness or failing, an injustice even, about which one ought to feel ashamed. Hands Free Mama writes, “I hated myself in those moments. What had become of me that I needed to scream at two precious little people who I loved more than life?” Rachel Zimmerman succinctly adds, “I do it, and then I feel dirty.”

Some parenting books go further than warning against shouting, telling us to maintain an even keel at all times, to be an unwaveringly tranquil ship on the turbulent seas of toddlerhood. *Parenting with Love & Logic*, for example, instructs: “Adults must set firm, loving limits using enforceable statements without showing anger...” After all, these authors reason, adult emotion is what the little hellions seek; if you make it clear that you’ll deny them that satisfaction—affecting a sort of preternatural calm and responding to screaming children with a level tone—you stop tantrums midstream and prevent future ones. Like Princess Elsa in *Frozen*, many of us internalize these admonitions, struggling to “conceal, don’t feel, put on a show.”

It’s all too easy to lose sight of the fact that the anti-yelling, positive-emoting-only parenting push is a relatively new and limited movement. Historically, yelling was the least of children’s (let alone parents’)



worries; after all, the era of government-sponsored child protective services didn’t even begin until 1962. Fifty years later, the scope of the anti-yelling ethos is much more circumscribed than one might think, as socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and geography influence where the line is drawn between discipline and maltreatment. Though the anti-yelling perspective currently reigns in upper-middle class San Francisco circles, plenty of American parents still see nothing wrong with shouting at their kids. To the contrary, the predominant belief in many communities is that verbal haranguing works best for producing independent, successful adults.

What is yelling anyway?

Yelling is defined as “say[ing something] very loudly especially because you are angry, surprised, or are trying to get someone’s attention.” It is not synonymous with verbal abuse, which generally involves name-calling and other substantively destructive language. Of course, communicating perfectly reasonable messaging at a higher than standard volume can rise to the level of verbal abuse if it’s imbued with enough venom.

Frequency alone, however, does not convert yelling into child maltreatment under standards propagated by psychiatrists and government agencies.

Lisa Pion-Berlin, president and chief executive officer of Parents Anonymous, Inc., clarified for *Better Homes and Gardens* readers: “No, yelling all the time is not great... But the context of what you’re saying is most important. If you’re saying to your kid, ‘You’re worthless,’ that’s different than yelling at your kid to get his clothes on.” In *The Happiest Toddler on the Block*, Harvey Karp agrees: “It’s your responsibility to do your utmost never to lash out with... hurtful words.” Parents must adopt a zero tolerance policy for emotionally destructive statements and vitriol.

A mother flipping her lid—saying things that would otherwise pass muster but with elevated vehemence and volume—is another matter. What’s more, done in a certain manner, yelling doesn’t just meet the bare minimum of non-abusive; it can actually be *good* for your kids.



Constructive anger

Some of parenting’s most educated and trusted voices agree that parental displays of rage can be quite constructive. In *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child*, preeminent psychologist John Gottman explains that by permitting your kids to perceive your anger, “you are demonstrat-

“Railing hypocritically about using one’s words and problem-solving to resolve conflict, I sputtered and spat until all four of us shed tears. It was not my best moment. But was it bad parenting?”

ing two things: (1) Strong feelings can be expressed and managed, and (2) Your child’s behavior really matters to you.” By moderating your tone, you can actually do children a disservice both by allowing them to assume that your emotional detachment comes from a lack of investment and by making your child’s strong emotions appear abnormal in contrast with your own easily mastered ones. Letting your kids see you struggle to control yourself, on the other hand, clearly demarcates unacceptable behavior, shows that you care, and teaches them to honor their own feelings (which is the first step in empathizing).

Karp acknowledges the benefit of this type of modeling and advocates more explicitly employing parental anger as a

teaching moment: “Apologize as soon as you cool down. Then, later in the day, take a moment to calmly talk about how you wish you and she had behaved, and remind her that... your love is way stronger than anger.” Simply put, losing your cool doesn’t just present a chance to model emotion-management, it also allows you to demonstrate contrition, healthy communication, genuine apology, and self-improvement.

As Harvard professor Steven Schlozman summarized for Zimmerman, “We can’t and shouldn’t be Stepford parents.... Among the risks of feeling compelled as parents to be under such questionably possible emotional control is

the fact that your children will never get to see how you respond to... [this] part of being human...”

Tricks to limit yelling

In order for shouting to serve as an effective teaching moment, however, it must be fairly infrequent. Here are a few tips I rely on to help prevent yelling from becoming the status quo in my household:

Focus on *self-care*: paying down your sleep debt is proven to enhance impulse control, and snacking can keep you from getting “hangry” (a portmanteau of “hungry” and “angry”).

- Try to maintain **age-appropriate expectations**.
- **Relax the schedule**: I often lash out at

the kids because I'm racing the clock.

- **Separate:** I leave the room or send my kids to theirs, explaining, "I need a little space right now because if we stay together I will probably end up yelling."
- Take a **deep breath.**
- Adopt **code words:** when I say "Run, Monkey Sauce, Run," my little ones know I'm on the brink of blowing a gasket.
- **Vent:** find a judgment-free friend to whom you can text such truths as "if motherhood were a job I'd hand in my resignation today."
- **Whisper:** sometimes you've got to fake it 'til you make it, and being barely audible forces everyone to pipe down and focus for a few moments.
- Repeat **"no one can be perfect":** this mantra both helps me see my child's offense as forgivable and keeps me from exploding simply due to the pressure not to explode.
- Find a way to **blow off steam:** techniques that help kids channel their frustration—like screaming into a pillow, biting a stuffed animal, and ripping paper—work for moms, too.
- **Don't hold a grudge:** to keep their misbehavior from having a cumulative effect, I ask my kids to lay their upturned hands on top of mine; we then take turns putting offenses into our layered palms (e.g., "when Stuart banged holes into the new windowsill with the ice cream scoop" and "when Mommy grabbed the ice cream scoop away from Stuart") and together shout "put it behind us!" as we fling the imaginary contents over our shoulders.
- **Give everyone an out:** I often avoid a power struggle by asking the offending child if they'd like a "do over" and then letting the initial transgression slide.
- **Be silly:** do something bonkers to shock and awe the kiddos and take the edge off your own ire (I like to announce, "it's donkey time" and bray my best "hee-haw" while kicking a leg out behind me).
- **Get out** of the house: physical exertion, containment of the kids (in a stroller, car seat, or shopping cart), change of venue, fresh air, and the presence of other adults all work wonders.



Refusing guilt

At the end of the day, high-quality parenting allows freedom of choice within the confines of firm boundaries, makes sure children feel valued, and models healthy physical, emotional, and social behavior. If you limit the occurrence of yelling and engage your kids in a postmortem when it happens, you can serve each of these purposes and let go of the guilt we're told to feel when our negative emotions inevitably find expression. You are only human, and your humanity can be used to bring you and your child closer rather than threaten your bond. Do your best to accept this truth: *you can act in anger and still be mom of the year.*

Case in point: after I lost it that day shortly after my third child's birth, I asked the two big kids to sit down on the floor with me. I told them I got angry because my son broke one of our family's rules by hurting his big sister on purpose. I explained that instead of saying, "I feel mad," I yelled because I also felt tired, overwhelmed, and frustrated about all the things I wanted to do but couldn't get done, like helping the kids with their problems right away and keeping the house tidy. I concluded, "Mommy's a little fussy, and it's harder to remember to use my inside voice and take deep breaths when I'm fussy." Both kids nodded knowingly. My five-year-old excitedly piped up, "Mommy, that *totally* happens to me! But it's okay, Mommy. No one can be perfect. We just have to try our best and then make amends when we mess up. You said sorry. Why don't we put it behind us?" At the end of that day I didn't hate myself, and I didn't feel dirty. I stood tall, proud of my parenting—anger and all.

This article originally appeared in the March 2016 issue of GGMG Magazine.

Gail is a former public school teacher and recovering lawyer who now works as a stay-at-home mom of three and writes about motherhood. Born in St. Louis and raised on the Peninsula, she's a serial monogamist of urban living who resided in Berkeley, New York, Washington D.C., Boston, and Seattle before settling down in San Francisco. You can read more at www.joiedeviv.wordpress.com (maternal musings) and www.readymommy.wordpress.com (book reviews for moms).

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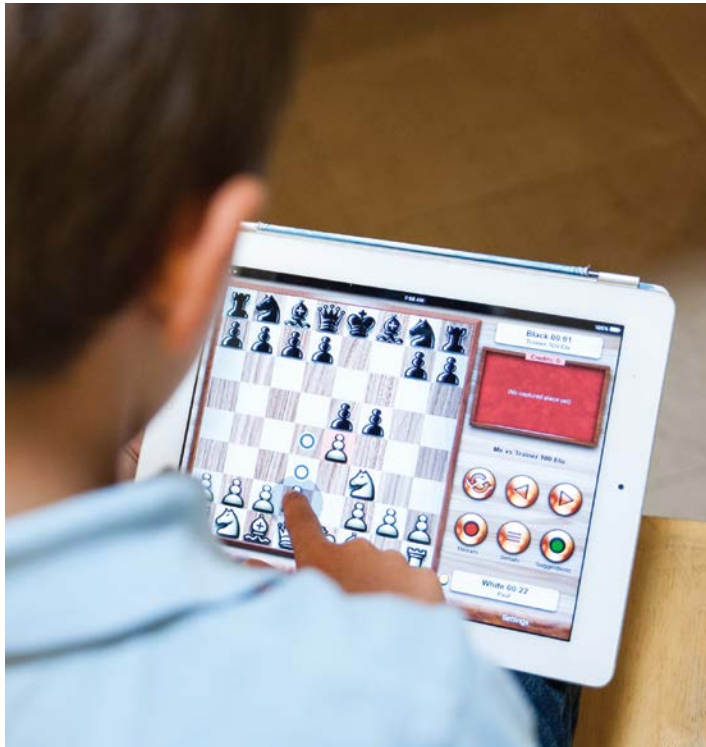
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Technology and Kids: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

Sifting through the data, we determine how best to use technology to help children develop lifelong skills.

By Jami Grich Photographs by Mini Anna Photography

Parenting so often calls us to check in with our biases and assumptions, and do our homework to discover what's actually best for our children. There's hardly a topic more pressing than technology, which has bombarded our lives in recent years.

In my household there's a divide: my husband is an avid techie who couldn't wait to download educational apps for our daughter. I, on the other hand, would prefer she get her education from the natural world, and am skeptical about the effects of technology on her young brain. So researching this article was compelling.

What became clear immediately is that the information is incredibly loaded, with headlines ranging from "The Terrifying Truth About What Technology is Doing to Children" to "Technology Essential to Children's Success." It's also incredibly complex. There's no simple way to comprehensively research these topics. There are compelling arguments both for and against the use of technology for kids.

Monitoring screen time

Experts recommend recognizing that quality is more important than quantity when it comes to kids' screen time. Screen time can be thought of in four separate categories: passive consumption (e.g., TV, listening to music), interactive consumption (e.g., internet browsing or educational apps), communication (e.g., video chatting, social media), and content creation (e.g., coding, creating music, drawing/painting apps). The benefits of passive consumption are few compared to content creation, for example, but balance is most important—between categories of media use as well as between online and offline time.

Critics of media use assert that children aren't spending enough time in nature, moving their bodies, exploring their environment, and connecting with others. There is evidence that the increasing incidence of childhood diabetes and obesity (and a host of other problems) are causally related to technology overuse. It seems clear that this is a balance issue. As speaker Doreen Dodgen-Magee

likes to remind teens, it's "The M word" that matters: moderation. Kids reportedly spend a staggering seven hours per day engaged with technology. Just like your mom likely told you to turn off the TV and go outside, we need to be doing the same.

However, unlike television, technology clearly offers opportunities for growth as well. For older kids, tablets, phones, gaming systems, etc...offer incredibly exciting ways to develop skills and talents compatible with their unique interests. One family I know was concerned about their son's frequent video game playing, until he grew up to be a surgeon who uses robotic systems to treat patients. His gaming directly developed the skills he relies on for a successful career.

"If they're acting like zombies...or they're mad that you're taking away their device, they've probably had either too much or poor quality screen time."

So how's a parent to decide? If your kid lights up when talking about the hours he just spent writing a song, he may be developing a passion that could turn into a rewarding career. In contrast, passive consumption generally doesn't lead to cognitive gains. It is our job to help our kids differentiate: am I really benefitting from this screen time? Or am I just being mindlessly entertained? Enjoying a little mindless entertainment never hurt anyone, but losing several hours a day to it is not a good choice.

It is important to pay attention to how your kids are acting during and after screen time. If they're acting like zombies (a condition referred to as "digital fog" which affects adults as well) or they're mad that you're taking away their device, they've probably had either too much or poor quality screen time. If they're acting out a new game they've invented

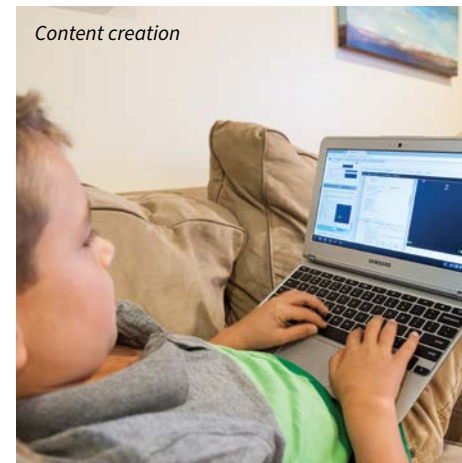
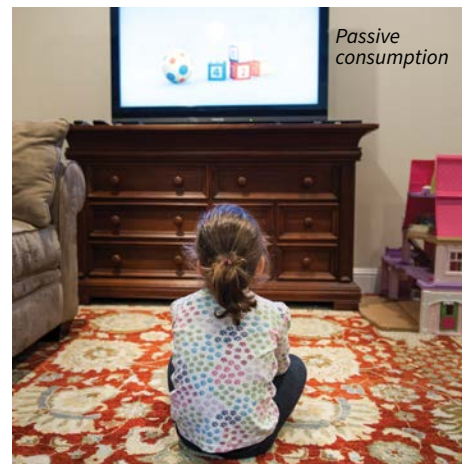
based on what they just saw or being creative in a new way, you're onto something. My 3-year-old has become a master play-doh builder partly due to YouTube videos she found—ones that I had originally shrugged off as passive-consumption screen time.

In all my research, I didn't find any evidence that screen time in and of itself is harmful for young children other than the potential sleep difficulties related to the blue light emitted by screens. Even the data concluding that Baby Einstein videos had a negative impact on infant language development has now been re-analyzed. The researchers concluded that exposure to educational programming tended to be positively related to language development, and infants exposed to no media had lower levels of language development compared to infants with some exposure. One study reported negative developmental impact of television watching for infants, but only for those who watched older child/adult-oriented tv shows.

This is your brain on technology

Brain scans of kids today look substantially different from scans of same-aged kids just 18 years ago. They are so different that Mark Prensky, who originally coined the terms "digital natives" (those who have never known life without technology) and "digital immigrants" (those who have transitioned to the use of technology) said in 2001 that kids "think and process information fundamentally differently from their predecessors." In one study, brain scans of non-internet users looked different after just five hours of internet use.

One widely cited difference in the way modern brains work is that linear thinking and learning has been replaced by minds that jump around and multi-task. Some claim that heavy use of technology has resulted in kids with shortened attention spans. This may be true in some ways (even some digital immigrants are noticing a proclivity nowadays to read less and scan more), but when learning is tailored to digital natives' learning style, their attention doesn't show impairment. Mental skills that are enhanced by digital media and computer games include "inductive





discovery” (i.e., the making of observations leading to the discovery of rules governing the behavior of a dynamic representation), “mental paper folding” (i.e., picturing the results of various origami-like folds in your mind without actually doing them), and “representational competence” (i.e., reading visual images as representations of three dimensional space).

On the other end of the continuum, “techno-brain burnout” is of concern. Gigi Vorgan and Gary Small, authors of “Your Brain Is Evolving Right Now” in *Digital Divide*, believe the mental stress of hour upon hour of digital connectivity leads to cortisol and adrenaline secretion that can result in depression and cognitive impairment over time.

Media violence and aggression

Somehow, people are still asking if media violence leads to aggression. The research on this is clear and bountiful and has been accumulating for decades. According to the The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), “research shows that without guidance or controls [virtual violence] has the power to make children more aggressive, violent, and fearful.” Way back in 1982, the National Institute of Mental Health reported that the effects of viewing violence on TV were abundant enough for concern. The advent of first-person shooter video games such as *Call of Duty* have created a whole new cause for concern.

A 2014 meta-analysis of 98 independent studies (with a total of almost 37,000 participants) concluded that violent video games increase aggression and aggression-related variables and decrease

prosocial outcomes. Interestingly, the study also concluded that prosocial video games have the opposite effects, strengthening the conclusion that the effects of technology go both ways. Even violent video games have positive effects on skills sets such as increasing reaction time and flexible mindset, visual-spatial skills and others, and contrary to popular belief, violent video games do not appear to result in poor impulse control.

Frighteningly, though, one study found that kids who had played violent video games were four times more likely to report that they’d carried a weapon to school and were more likely to be arrested and prosecuted for criminal acts as adults. Another convincing piece of research was a longitudinal, cross-cultural, meta-analysis that reported a link between exposure to violent video games and increased aggressive behavior.

Christopher Ferguson, a prolific researcher who believes that the previously mentioned studies overstate the situation, claims that factors such as depression, antisocial personality traits, family violence, and peer influence are larger factors than media violence contributing to violent behavior. Although that may be true, it doesn’t negate the link. Groups including the AAP, American Medical Association (AMA), and American Psychological Association (APA) support the conclusion that the research translates to significant societal level effects. The good news? Research shows that kids

whose parents actively manage their media use consume less and make higher quality choices on their own.

And about that Facebook post...

Many of us have a love-hate relationship with social media. And it’s no wonder, given that the immediate rewards of social media have a dopaminergic effect on the brain: every time a text or a “like” is received, happy hormones are released in the brain, at a level similar to when a groom sees his bride at the altar.

In addition, social media is ripe with opportunities for social comparison, which can potentially lead to either enhanced or harmed self-image. In fact, satisfaction with body image and/or life is negatively associated with time spent on Facebook. And unfortunately, kids are seeing and learning things on the internet we’d rather they weren’t. One study found increased risk-taking behavior in adolescents to be related to exposure to risky social media content.

This is yet another area where parents are called to monitor their children’s use of media, teach self-regulation, and encourage healthy media choices. The same way you wouldn’t let them eat cookies all day long, it’s best not to let them indulge their Instagram obsession. Although “Facebook Depression” exists, it’s also been shown that supportive communication with parents can alleviate it. And don’t forget that there are powerful

pro-social opportunities presented by social media. Kids can and do use Facebook to pay it forward and change the world.

The big takeaway

Don’t get lackadaisical. The evidence so far supports that smart use of technology includes

- avoiding over-consumption/sedentary lifestyles,
- allowing kids to be their digital native selves and remembering that their brains are radically different from ours,
- balancing technological and non-technological growth and learning opportunities,
- choosing technology that has an educational component or pro-social benefit more often than passive consumption or addictive social media,
- proactively encouraging kids to flourish with the amazing opportunities provided in the digital environment, and
- recognizing the negative impact of violent media and educating children about the reality of violence when they are exposed to it.

We’re all familiar with IQ and EQ. Perhaps we ought to start thinking in terms of a TQ—technological quotient. This would include both hard skills, such as skillful gaming and discerning internet surfing, as well as soft skills like knowing when to turn it off and how to use technology to maximize our own creative potential, sense of belonging and self-worth, and interpersonal relationships.

In the decades to come, the gap between those with high and low TQ is likely to be frighteningly evident. For particularly moving examples, see the movie *Idiocracy* and compare it to a series of inspiring TED talks by young adults called “TEDx Nextgeneration Asheville.” Being mindful and investing significant time and energy in teaching our kids lifelong skills to maximize their TQ is perhaps one of the best things we can do for them.

This article originally appeared in the November 2016 issue of GGMG Magazine.

Jami is a psychologist specializing in teaching couples how to have healthy conflict in just four hours. She is definitely a digital immigrant and is grateful to have married a man who functions as her personal tech support hotline.

How Much Screen Time Is OK?

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) previously recommended no screen time for kids under 2 and two hours maximum daily for children, but their new guidelines highlight the importance of teaching kids “healthy concepts of digital use and citizenship.” The AAP’s 2016 recommendations for children’s use of screen time, listed below, can be summarized as “monitor, co-view, and model.”

- pay attention to their online environment just as you would any other environment
- set limits and make unplugged time a daily priority
- be aware of what kids are doing online and what friends they’re doing it with
- join them in their online activities
- be a good role model in your own media use
- remember that media use is not a good substitution for face-to-face communication
- create tech-free zones (especially kids’ bedrooms) and times (such as dinner)
- don’t use technology as an emotional pacifier; teach kids emotional regulation
- do your homework regarding “educational” apps and read reviews of video games (www.common sense media.org is a great resource)
- help teens create appropriate online relationships and behave appropriately; help them understand the importance of privacy and the fact that their digital footprint is indefinite
- use kids’ online mistakes as teachable moments and seek help if you see any red flags such as sexting, bullying, or posting self-harm images



DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Discrimination during a Pandemic



As the news about the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) spread globally from this past winter into spring, another set of articles appeared alongside those about the virus: discrimination, xenophobia, and racism against people of Asian descent. Throughout the world, these stories have become a creeping presence in the COVID-19 pandemic. Research shows that there is a link between discriminatory language and actions, and the stories about discriminatory language progressed to people and businesses being harassed and attacked across the country. In response, the Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council created a website where people and organizations could report discrimination in any form. They received over 1,100 reports in the first two weeks. As the form states, “As the virus COVID-19 spreads, numerous Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) have reported experiencing microaggressions, racial profiling, hate incidents and in some cases, hate violence. In Los Angeles, a child

in San Fernando Valley was physically assaulted at his middle school and accused of having the coronavirus simply because he is AAPI. On a San Francisco street, a young AAPI woman was spat upon and blamed for bringing the coronavirus to the U.S. Young people as well as adults and seniors in California fear being perceived as the source or carrier of the disease.”¹

Be an ally

You can push back against discrimination and xenophobia when you encounter it. The website *Tolerance.org* offers some “speak up” strategies, including a four-step process for addressing racism that encourages its users to Interrupt, Question, Educate, Echo.

“We can echo other people’s statements when they stand up to racism, by agreeing or offering our support.”

We teach our kids not to interrupt, yet interrupting can signal that something is so important to address that it can’t wait. Combining this tactic with asking questions can open the door to education. As *tolerance.org* offers, “...you might explain that it’s actually not common anymore to name a disease after its place of origin, that there’s a long, bad history of associating diseases with specific groups of people and that the name COVID-19 was chosen very carefully to avoid repeating those mistakes.”² We can echo other people’s statements when they stand up to racism, by agreeing or offering our support. All of these steps can be taken in person, over the phone, or online, as is safe to do so. Standing together is an important part of combating racism, and these strategies offer concrete ways to do this.

Talking to kids about any hard topic is, well... hard. When you talk to your kids about the COVID-19 pandemic, use age-appropriate language and break the information up into separate conversations. Be conscious of how you frame places and groups of people. If your kids are older and reading the news, point out the articles on discrimination and racism and ask what they think. Hard topics don’t have to be a single conversation, but instead let the discussion be open-ended and ongoing. And if the way you handled a particular conversation doesn’t sit well with you, don’t hesitate to revisit the topic with your children, which makes it a learning experience for all involved.

1. Access the form and read more at www.asianpacificpolicyandplanningcouncil.org/stop-aapi-hate/.
2. www.tolerance.org/magazine/how-to-respond-to-coronavirus-racism

CAREERS & ENTREPRENEURS



Has the COVID-19 experience left you feeling like life is too short to stay in a soul-sucking job, even if you don’t know what to do instead? Do you know you’re in the wrong career but feel stuck by fear or self-doubt when you think about trying to make a change, especially given the current economic situation?

Join GGMG mom and career coach **Julie Houghton** for this popular career change workshop so you can start to get clarity and take steps toward finding work (or maybe even starting a business!) you love. Whether you’re going back to work after maternity leave, thinking about returning to the workforce after time as a SAHM, or are currently in a job and just know you’re meant to do something more, this workshop is for you.

Check the GGMG calendar online for registration details. Date, time, and location will depend on the COVID-19 situation.

PARTNERSHIPS

Our team of amazing women works with local businesses to bring exclusive deals to our members. We work closely with strategic partners such as JCCSF, UrbanSitter, Recess Collective, and Peekadoodle, to obtain benefits for all GGMG members on an annual contractual basis, as well as additional benefits for GGMG volunteers. Through our Friends Program, we also work with various local companies to obtain substantial promotions and discounts for GGMG members. With roughly 3,000 members, we use the power of our community to gain exclusive deals on everything from childcare to adult fitness classes to food delivery services. We look forward to continuing to support our GGMG community with new and relevant discounts through these unprecedented times.

Current discounts and benefits for GGMG members are listed in the “Member Perks” section of our website: www.ggm.org/member-perks/friends (Friends Program) and www.ggm.org/member-perks/partners (Partners Program). And look for our monthly GGMG Member Perks email highlighting many of these great deals! We are always searching for new members to join our committee. If you are interested in joining, please contact Director of Partnerships **Kimberly Newman** at partnerships@ggm.org.

MEMBER SUPPORT



The global pandemic has impacted parents hard, each of us feeling deeply the loss of our support systems. Without childcare, extended family support, self-care time, and in many cases, employment and income, we find ourselves in exhausting daily marathons. Networks like GGMG are more critical than ever before. The Member Support committee has been urgently responding to members’ needs for a helping hand during this crisis. Now, as always, we are available to support you by providing:

- Resources for domestic violence, marriage therapy, and child behavior specialists
- Membership scholarships for financially strained members
- Single moms meet-ups
- Grocery assistance to lighten your load

Please don’t hesitate to reach out to member.support@ggm.org if you need a hand. We’re always looking for more volunteers as well!

Due to the ongoing shelter-in-place and related COVID-19 shutdowns we are not planning events more than 3-4 weeks ahead. As things slowly start to open back up, and we add more events, we will update the events calendar on the GGMG website as well as the GGMG Facebook page. Hope you are all safe and healthy.

Virtual Music & Movement Class with Cucu's PlayHouse
A fun class for kids of various ages (newborn to 6 years old), this virtual music and movement class includes a selection of children's songs in English and Spanish that guide the class from start to finish. Activities are related to the lyrics in order to familiarize the children with the words and their meanings. Participants (children, parents, caregivers) are able to join the Zoom video from home and interact in real time. After registering, participants will receive an email with a personal link to join the classes, as well as an email reminder 1 hour prior to each class.

Date: Tuesdays at 4:30 p.m. and Thursdays at 10:30 a.m.
Cost: \$25 for one month of weekly classes
Register: www.cucusplayhouse.com/ggmg

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KidzToPros LIVE is a series of online, weekly enrichment programs for students in grades K through 12. Their most popular STEM, Arts, and Sports programs are taught in real time by expert instructors to groups of 10 students. Your child can join our online programs from anywhere with a wifi or cell connection and a computer. The variety of activities offered will improve your child's critical thinking and decision-making skills, spark their creativity, and get them moving! GGMG members receive a 20% discount on all online programs. Use code LIVE20P at checkout.

Date: Multiple dates during May through December
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Dining Together When You're 3,000 Miles Apart

By Jennifer Hofmann

My children have dinner with my parents twice a week. My 5-year-old daughter, Lotte, and twin toddler sons, Jamie and Ryan, wash their hands, climb into their seats—one kitchen chair and two high chairs—and patiently wait for the electronic beep that indicates a call coming in. Then my parents, at 8:30 p.m. New York time, show up on the laptop, sitting at their dining room table, to great cheering and squealing from my tiny army of three. Meals are described, analyzed, and shared through the screen, glasses and sippy cups are cheered repeatedly and a great mess of smiling kids and an even broader set of smiling grandparents fill my kitchen.

We first started our twice-a-week dinners when Lotte was small, around 2 years old. I would sit at the table with her and we would talk to my parents. I'd ask her questions and she would answer me, sometimes looking at them, but really just responding to me. My parents called it "Baby TV." It was mostly them observing, and my daughter didn't really seem to pay much attention to their presence. It was fun, but not interactive.

Then one day, while I was pregnant with the boys, we were having dinner, and I left the table to grab something in the kitchen. While I was gone, I heard Lotte start describing to my

drawings from preschool, or a new book to share. My mother started sending books to Lotte, something she has always done, but now she would buy a second copy for her house and they would read books together and turn the pages in unison. My dad would make faces and sing Beatles songs as Lotte ate, and I would very quietly observe from the kitchen, cleaning up, or packing leftovers, while they spent time together.

When the boys were born, dinners with grandma and grandpa became even louder and messier, and three times as joyful. The first time Jamie motioned along to Itsy Bitsy Spider was with my mother on Skype. The first time Ryan said "grandpa," "kitty cat," and "choo choo!" was on Skype. After arriving on our first trip to Buffalo, we pushed the stroller through security, saw my parents waiting for us, and the boys absolutely freaked out with joy. The recognition was instant—no shyness or

quiet side glances, just immediate smiles and laughter followed by reaching requests of "up! up! up!"

We've even branched out a little and roped in some other family members, a "Super Skype," as Lotte calls it. Sometimes we conference chat with my great aunt in Florida along with my parents. The quality of the conversation seems to decrease as the number of people chatting increases, but everyone still seems pretty happy when we log off. This summer while in Buffalo, my aunt came up for a surprise visit and as we all sat down to dinner Lotte declared, "We're Skyping—in real life!" We all agreed and cheered the declaration.

Communicating this way makes me really happy. Would I prefer my parents to live close enough so we could see them once a week? Sure. But a very simple piece of free technology makes the distance and time apart a little easier to bear, and allows my most favorite people a chance to come together, over dinner, twice a week.

This article originally appeared in the November 2016 issue of GGMG Magazine.

Jennifer is a mother to a small army of children, a writer, and a member of various book clubs despite rarely reading the books. She is an expert on playgrounds that are completely enclosed and finds herself daily explaining that 'yes, they're twins, yes, they do look alike—they're identical.' She hopes her daughter will be able to tell her brothers apart before they start to seriously mess with her.



I had been trying for weeks to get her to engage; apparently all I had to do was leave her alone with the laptop.

parents what was happening. She was chattering away—it was so great! Then when I returned to the table, she stopped and resumed her dinner, and my parents continued talking to me. It wasn't hard to see what was going on, so a few minutes later I walked back into the kitchen—with the table in view but out of Lotte's line of sight, and she started talking to my parents again. She even offered to sing them a song. I had been trying for weeks to get her to engage; apparently all I had to do was leave her alone with the laptop.

Dinner with my parents became really wonderful from that night forward. Lotte would plan the visit: stack up some



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