

APRIL/MAY 2022



**GGMG** | GOLDEN GATE  
MOTHERS GROUP®

magazine



**EXPLORATION**



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# Summer Camp 2022



<b>Week 1</b> Science Rocks! May 30 - Jun 3	<b>Week 2</b> Space Discovery Jun 6 - 10	
<b>Week 3</b> Sport O4ympics Jun 13 - 17	<b>Week 4</b> Mini Campers Jun 20 - 24	<b>Week 5</b> Messy + Water Play Jun 27 - Jul 1
<b>Week 6</b> Music & Dance Jul 4 - 8	<b>Week 7</b> Community Superheroes Jul 11 - 15	<b>Week 8</b> Animal Kingdom Jul 18 - 22
<b>Week 9</b> Renewable Energy Crafts Jul 25 - 29	<b>Week 10</b> Cooking Around the World Aug 1 - 5	<b>Week 11</b> Clowning & Carnival Aug 8 - 12

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## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR:

# Never Stop Exploring

By Sonya Abrams



Sonya is mom to three hiking-ambivalent children and a low-key expert in the wild spaces of southern Marin, always happy to share a trail.

As a child, I loved to hike through the Vermont woods, meandering down streams and discovering old tree-covered foundations, imagining the people who once lived there, building little shelters out of branches, returning to my house in the evening filthy and happy. I felt strong and alive in the woods, in control of my space, an adventurer on the precipice of discovery. I carried this love of wild spaces into adulthood,

hiking and scrambling up rocks when I could, but the stress and the time commitment of parenting three small children increasingly kept me off the hills.

**“Explorations remind us that we are always surrounded by the new and the possible, and they give us an opportunity to test ourselves, push our boundaries, and grow.”**

When the pandemic ground my life and job to a halt, I suddenly had time. An urge to explore, to escape the confines of my COVID-shrunk world, took root. So I dusted off my hiking shoes and set my sights on nearby Mount Tamalpais. I was determined to get to know the secrets of this mountain and its foothills, to become an expert in this one small patch of land, to find some sense of control in a world that felt

increasingly out of my hands. Sometimes I'd hike with a Marin-native friend, but often I explored alone, racking up many miles on the mountain each week, discovering secret swings and old car wrecks, hidden treehouses, and more importantly, finding time to be alone with my thoughts, process my husband's recent death, and build my strength and confidence.

In this issue, our writers venture into new areas of identity and social structure. Julie Houghton tackles the immense topic of gender and language, sharing the vocabulary that's emerging to meet the shifting notions of gender expression and identity. Gone are the days of rigid binary classification. Julie shows how we can rise to meet the occasion and respect the wide range of gender identities. Yuliya Patsy explores nontraditional family structures and shares how a wide range of experiences—from solo parents by choice to communities of non-romantic parent figures—can provide the strength, love, and stability to raise children well in an evolving society.

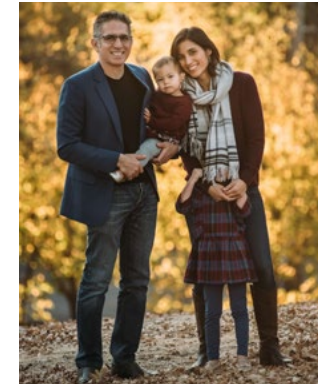
As parents, our lives often settle into predictable routines, which if left unchecked, can become ruts. If offered the chance to explore—a place, a skill, a task—we should take it. Explorations remind us that we are always surrounded by the new and the possible,

and they give us an opportunity to test ourselves, push our boundaries, and grow. I'm proud of the hundreds of miles I've hiked on Tam and the intimate relationship I've developed with the mountain. I even got a foot-long tattoo of its silhouette on my arm, the mountain now woven into and onto me, a reminder that there is always more to know and to see and to be.

## LETTER FROM THE BOARD:

# Redefining Exploration

By Liz Nakamoto Singer



Liz has two kids and lives in Oakland. She recently returned to the workforce in the middle of the pandemic, because that seemed like a great choice at the time.

Exploration. What a concept. In February 2020, exploration meant a lot of things to me: tide pools and shady hikes, sensory bins and shaving cream painting, and cool destinations where we could explore new foods and languages and faces and ways of living.

And then, for the last two years, exploration has meant something else to me, more akin, I suspect, to what the explorers of centuries ago meant when they called it

“exploration”: blindly groping, terrified to find a way though uncharted territory (uncharted to them, at least) to a promised haven on the other side, though they did not know if they would get there, or how far it would be, or even what it would look like if they made it. I've felt like that for two years now. Trying to find my way, and a way for my kids, through this time when I ran out of synonyms for “uncharted territory” and “unprecedented times” and “risk to benefit ratio.” We have groped and stumbled and tripped and slogged through this new territory. We've learned some amazing things about ourselves and our community along the way—new ways to cook old food, new activities to fill endless hours, new ways to be together, even when we are apart.

And now, exactly two years later, I find myself once more on the precipice of a new exploration. What is it going to look like, this “new normal”? When will we get there? I don't think I'm there yet, though it certainly feels like it's right around the corner. I think it might be just as difficult to navigate as this most recent journey has been—though I hope it will be less terrifying and sorrowful.

Wherever you are on your journey, however far or near you are to the next stage of this pandemic life, the GGMG mama community is here to support you and to cheer you on. We got through the last two years together. Cheers to whatever's waiting for us around the next bend in the road.

**“[E]xploration has meant something else to me...blindly groping, terrified to find a way though uncharted territory...I've felt like that for two years now.”**

## HOUSEKEEPING

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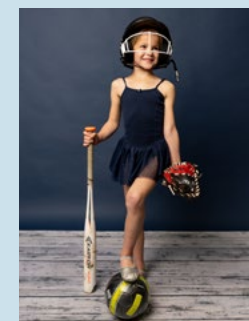
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**NEXT ISSUE:** Rejuvenation

Have an idea for an issue theme or article? Please email [editor@ggmg.org](mailto:editor@ggmg.org).

**THIS ISSUE MADE POSSIBLE BY:** Met new friends who introduced me to a board game called Magic The Gathering; First flight in 2.5 years; Learning how to party again and appreciating the wonder of Spring; Attending both school galas IRL and beyond relieved they weren't super spreaders; Hired a full-time assistant and investing in a lot of things to grow my business; Reluctantly diving back into the expensive Olympic sport of summer camp planning; Severe sleep deprivation; Rental car roulette.

## COVER OUTTAKES



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

Cover photo by Mini Anna Photography  
Model: Josephine, age 6



# Unique Camping Spots

By Sonya Abrams

There are hundreds of spots in Northern California to set up a tent and commune with nature, but where do you go when you want to add a little excitement to your camping experience? Here are a few alternatives to the traditional campsite.

**Inn Town Campground, Nevada City:** This spot, nestled in a pine forest, serves up a turbo-charged camping experience. Along with tent and RV sites, Inn Town has deluxe canvas tents on offer, as well as a fully stocked camp store and a swimming pool, a communal kitchen, and laundry facilities. [inntowncampground.com](http://inntowncampground.com)

**Indian Grinding Rock State Park, Pine Grove:** This is a small, clean campsite two hours east of the Bay, where kids and adults can discover all kinds of features of Native American history. In addition to the eponymous preserved grinding rocks, where Native American women ground down acorns for food, there are recreated teepees and longhouses to crawl in and on, and the Chaw'se Regional Indian Museum, where campers can learn all about the Miwok and Sierra-based communities that shaped the land for hundreds of years. [parks.ca.gov/?page\\_id=553](http://parks.ca.gov/?page_id=553)

**River Bend Resort, Guerneville:** In addition to offering cabins, tent sites, and RV hookups, it has playgrounds, movie nights, an arcade, and most notably, a private beach on a prime stretch of the Russian River. [riverbendresort.net](http://riverbendresort.net)

**Santa Cruz/Monterey KOA, Watsonville:** KOAs are known for their amenities, and this site is no exception. Whether staying in a tent, glamping cabin, or an Airstream rental, guests have access to a heated pool, a KOA fun train, outdoor movies, a playground, a campfire theater, and much more. [koa.com/campgrounds/santa-cruz](http://koa.com/campgrounds/santa-cruz)

**Treebones Resort, Big Sur:** Sorry, toddler moms, this swanky spot high above the Pacific along the Big Sur coast is only open to guests 13 years and older. However, with features like luxury yurts, massage services, and a sushi bar, parents may just want to leave the kids at home entirely. For the more economically minded, there are also tent camping sites. [treebonesresort.com](http://treebonesresort.com)

*Mom to three little tree huggers, Sonya has mastered the art of the group party camping trip and is eagerly filling her 2022 calendar.*



# San Rafael

By Christine Chen



Itching to get out of the city? Try heading north to San Rafael, the county seat of Marin and home to abundant sunshine and warm weather! **Santa Margarita Island Preserve** is a 9-acre preserve near the Santa Venetia neighborhood of San Rafael, where a wide variety of waterfowl and shorebirds flock to the waters. **McInnis Golf Course** has a driving range, 18-hole mini golf course with water hazards and lavish gardens. There is also a batting cage and kid-friendly refreshments. **Lagoon Park** is a 10-acre park that is part of the Civic Center in San Rafael designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. Bring lunch or get a snack from the nearby twice-weekly farmers market, which rivals the San Francisco Ferry Building's market and sometimes features pony rides, balloon animals, a bouncy house, and other kid-friendly amenities. **McNears Beach Park** sits in a sheltered cove along San Pablo Bay and has fishing from the pier, tennis courts, and access for kayaks and canoes. **China Camp State Park** has miles of hiking and mountain biking trails, a beach with concession stand and historical display, and a cozy campground. **Fox & Kit Coffee Haus + Playground** is a zen place with indoor playspace to occupy kids while mom has coffee in a gorgeous setting.

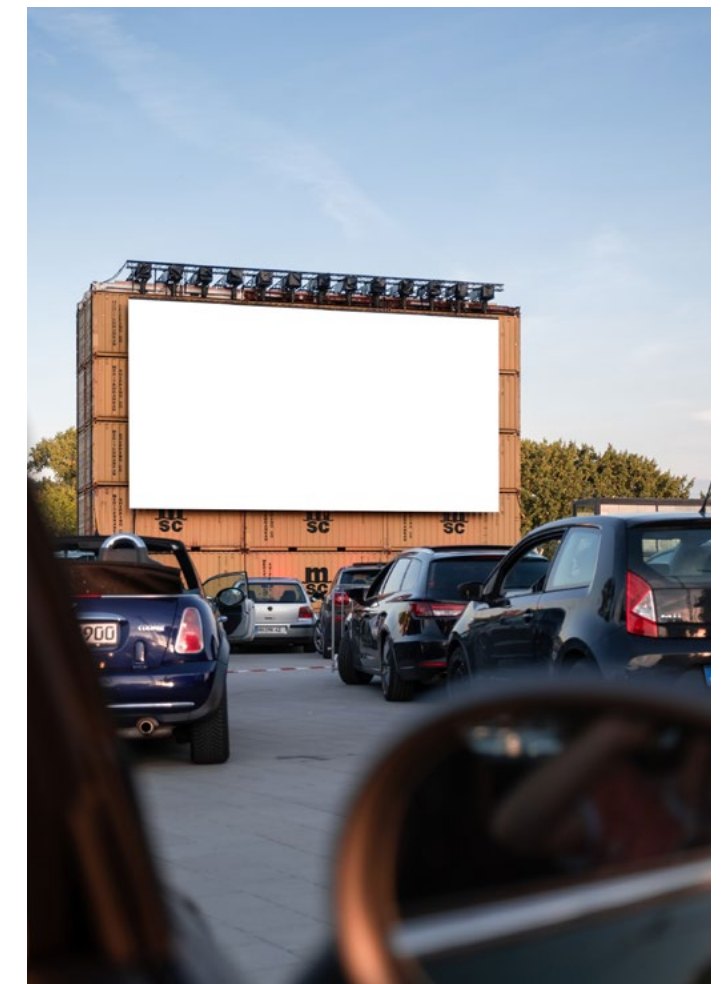
*While she loves living in SF, Christine finds herself often longing for the warmth of Marin during the cold SF summers.*

# Outdoor Movie Theaters

By Christine Chen

**San Jose's Starlight Cinemas** will be hosting free Wednesday night movies with the schedule TBD for summer 2022. **West Wind All Digital Drive-In** in both **Solano** and **San Jose** offer the ability to book tickets online for a variety of movie choices. Tuesday family nights offer discounted tickets of \$5.75 per person and \$2 for kids ages 5 to 11. **The Lark Theater** in Corte Madera has a drive-in at **The Village at Corte Madera**. There is a membership opportunity for special benefits, and viewings have gone beyond movies to include opera last year and theater this year on the big screen. **Alameda County Fairgrounds' Under the Stars Drive-In Movies** charges \$25-\$30 per car, with a discount if you buy online ahead of time.

*Christine hopes you enjoyed her piece on San Rafael where you can find her bio.*





# Motherhood Sexuality Coaching

With Alicia Roberts, MSPT



Alicia Roberts (formerly Alicia Willoughby) is a Women's Health Physical Therapist who specializes in pregnancy and postpartum. She owns Blossom Physical Therapy & Wellness ([blossompt.com](http://blossompt.com)) located in Marin and San Francisco and is a mom to two kids.

### What is a Women's Health Physical Therapist?

A Women's Health Physical Therapist is a physical therapist (PT) who specializes in the treatment of pelvic floor

dysfunctions and is trained to do internal pelvic floor assessments and treatments. She usually has special training in treating pregnancy and postpartum conditions and can evaluate and treat all pelvic floor dysfunctions (pain, urinary leaking, prolapse), abdominal separations, core weakness patterns, and pain in the pelvic joints, low back, or hips. In my practice, I also treat all orthopedic issues that are common to mothers such as neck, shoulder, hip, and back pain.

### How can unresolved postpartum conditions affect a mother's rediscovery of her own sexuality?

Unresolved postpartum conditions such as pain with sex, leaking of urine, core weakness, and pelvic, spine, and hip pain can have a direct relationship to a woman's ability to reconnect with her sexuality. First, it's important to address that these postpartum conditions can be healed with the right guidance and treatments. Pregnancy and birth are often the first time a woman's body is not her own, and this, plus the mentioned conditions, result in the common feeling of disconnect from the physical body. When we are disconnected from the part of our body that brings us pleasure and is involved in sexual interactions, our sexuality (defined as "capacity for sexual feelings") is often negatively affected. These postpartum conditions and disconnect can be present whether a mother gave birth months ago or decades ago. It's never too late to address these issues.

### What inspired you to offer Motherhood Sexuality Coaching to your PT practice?

Due to the nature of my practice, I am discussing very intimate topics with my clients. I am often the first and only person they have confided in about their concerns and discomforts because topics of female anatomy and sex are unfortunately still considered taboo to openly discuss. Over the years I have

heard the same topics come up regarding how sexuality has changed since becoming a mother. These topics include, but are not limited to: decreased or absent libido, decreased sense of self as a sexual being, loss of interest in experiencing pleasure, disconnect with the physical body, and fear/anxiety around sexual intimacy. I found I was having smaller conversations about these topics and wanted to create a safe, specific container to dive deeper into sexuality with clients. I have been through my own motherhood sexuality journey and want to inspire women to reconnect with their sexuality as a part of reclaiming our full selves after the transition into motherhood.

### How does coaching support a woman to explore her sexuality?

It is my honor to provide a safe space to discuss vulnerable topics and emotions. I start with a complimentary 60-minute discovery call where we connect about the interest in coaching and the woman can experience what a mini-session is like to decide if it's the right fit for her. My role as a coach is to help a mother first identify what her personal goals are around her sexuality and then I will support her on the journey

*"I have been through my own motherhood sexuality journey and want to inspire women to reconnect with their sexuality as a part of reclaiming our full selves after the transition into motherhood."*

towards those goals. Many clients have a big goal of increasing their libido. We first start with what smaller things she can explore along the way towards the bigger goal, such as reconnecting to her own body, discovering what brings her pleasure (not always sexual pleasure, it could be something like wearing soft clothing that feels good on the body), getting in touch with her self confidence and feelings of being sexy, finding little things to bring her joy, and how to infuse those things into the daily to-do's of motherhood. The path is as individual as the woman.

# Chinese American International School



**Two-Year-Old Class Coming to CAIS 2022-2023**  
**Learn more at 19th Ave. Open House May 15!**



There's so much to share about the happenings at CAIS: our new two-year-old class, future move to the new 19th Avenue Campus, and so much more. Join us May 15 for an Open House to learn about our Preschool–8th grade Mandarin immersion program committed to inspiring and empowering learners to **Embrace Chinese, Become Our Best Selves, and Contribute to a Better World.**



毅力 Perseverance



好奇 Curiosity



包容 Inclusion



善良 Kindness



勇气 Courage

**SIGN UP FOR THE OPEN HOUSE AT [WWW.CAIS.ORG](http://WWW.CAIS.ORG)**  
**INQUIRE AT [ADMISSION@CAIS.ORG](mailto:ADMISSION@CAIS.ORG)**

## Exploring Bodily Limitations During Pregnancy

By Jessica Perry

The minute I found out I was pregnant I knew my body was in for a crazy ride. I never experienced any of the terror that many of my friends did after hearing their own mothers' birth stories, but I knew it would still be intense. My mom gave birth to me two weeks early, and famously slept through most of her labor, arriving at the hospital so dilated that I arrived swiftly thereafter, leaving little damage in my wake. It was for this reason that I was more worried about the havoc that pregnancy would wreak on my body rather than the birth itself.

Society teaches us that pregnant women are fragile. I took extra precautions when I was pregnant the first time. I didn't lift anything heavy, indulged in my doting husband bringing me ice cream and the cupcakes that I craved late into the evening hours. I didn't drink caffeine for fear of warping my developing baby somehow, eschewed my beloved soft cheeses and sushi.

Around month five, gracious strangers started giving up their seats on Muni for me, which I gratefully accepted after years and years of standing for my ride downtown. Around seven months into my pregnancy, I gave up Muni entirely and started driving in. I relished in the fact that being pregnant was like being a minor celebrity: strangers who had never smiled at me before would glance at my belly and immediately radiate loving affection. Doors were opened for me. Co-workers would pick up lunch for me and bring me (non-caffeinated) Starbucks to keep me from having to exert myself too much.

Towards the end of my pregnancy, plantar fasciitis rendered me unable to walk barefoot for most of the next year and half without pain. Carpal tunnel crept in during month eight and, by the time my first daughter was born, I could barely bend my fingers. This led to difficulty breastfeeding and an early jump to formula. Other than the foot problems, most of my pregnancy ills quickly disseminated and I dove headfirst into rearing my baby girl.

A little more than a year later, having fully recovered, I found myself pregnant again. This time, pregnancy took a



backseat to watching out for my toddler, and after the first trimester nausea, I'd usually forget I was pregnant until I looked down. My second pregnancy was less indulgent. This time, I knew my body was a lot tougher than I gave it credit for during my first go-round and I moved forward with my daily life, lifting my 25-pound toddler all the way up until the day before my second daughter was born. This time, I regularly indulged in caffeine, got kicked in the stomach frequently by my very active, growing toddler, and even planned a bachelorette party, acting as matron of honor at my oldest friend's wedding. The night of the wedding I was seven months pregnant and wore my bridesmaid

dress proudly with my big belly and danced into the wee hours feeling like a pregnant superhero.

The pregnant body is capable of so much more than we give it credit for. While it's lovely to indulge in all of the pampering, it was even more empowering to realize that I could do everything I had during my first pregnancy, while also being a full-time stay-at-home mom to a toddler and powering

**“The pregnant body is capable of so much more than we give it credit for.”**

through. Women's bodies are amazingly resilient and can handle so much more than we give them credit for.

The night before my second daughter was born, I was ready for her to come out, so I did everything I could to “get the bun out of the oven.” I went on a three-mile hill stroller walk with one of my close friends. I ate a spicy burrito. I went into the pool with my daughter for her swim lesson instead of my husband. We embarked on a big shopping trip, preparing for my toddler's birthday party. Not long after the evening burrito, I woke up in the middle of the night, almost exactly two years (to the hour) after my first labor. Ella was born on Tali's second birthday and we like to call them birthday twins—born the same day, but two years apart. Every year on their shared birthday, I can't help but be amazed at everything my body achieved and what delightful humans it created despite the challenges it endured along the way.

*Jessica Perry is a writer and editor living in Marin County. She is a mother to two girls and is grateful to have made it through two pregnancies no worse for wear.*

## CONTEST

### Help Ukraine

This month's contest focuses on how interested GGMG members can direct much-needed aid to people in Ukraine.

Please visit [supportukraine.co](http://supportukraine.co) and take a moment to peruse the 12 organizations listed. Our GGMG Magazine contest editor will fund and remit a \$200 donation in the name of the Golden Gate Mothers Group Magazine to the organization receiving the most votes from our readership.

Please vote for the organization you believe should receive the designated donation by emailing [contest@gmg.org](mailto:contest@gmg.org) with the subject line “Ukraine,” and in the body of the email please write the name of your preferred organization from the 12 included on [supportukraine.co](http://supportukraine.co).

We will announce the winning organization in our next issue. Although one of our dear readers will not win a prize this month, we hope that the drop of aid that we can send to Ukraine serves a much-needed good.

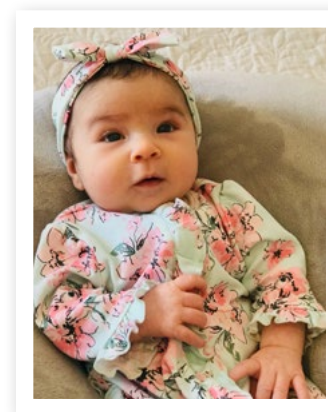


## NEW ARRIVALS



**Sasha Fahimi**  
**Monica A.**  
**Pooja K.**  
**Erin H.**  
**Jennifer Fish**

**Baby Leila Saara**  
**Baby Kian**  
**Baby Diya Latha**  
**Baby Luke Michael**  
**Baby Samuel Sage**



Congratulations to **Pooja K!** She will be getting joyful moments captured by Anna Munandar from Mini Anna Photography. Anna specializes in capturing joy and every milestone in your family, from birth to college. See her work at [minianna.com](http://minianna.com).

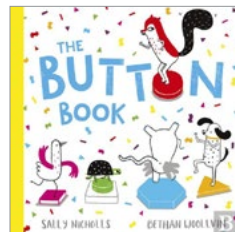
To announce your new arrival in the magazine and for a chance to win a \$150 gift card from **Mini Anna Photography**, fill out the form at [tinyurl.com/gmgNewArrivals](http://tinyurl.com/gmgNewArrivals).



## Exploration

By Laure Latham

From the moment children are born, their journeys on our planet are all about exploration and how they decide to explore. Whether it's starting to like something new, pushing your boundaries, or exploring your past, these books will help kids navigate life as they should—with excitement and an open mind. Enjoy!



### The Button Book

Written by Sally Nicholls, illustrated by Bethan Woollvin

What does this button do? Your toddlers and preschoolers will never get enough of this fun book that encourages young readers to press on different buttons with different

shapes and colors in order to act out things to do or create sounds. The upside is that as the buttons are only drawings on a page, the book is as interactive as you want it to be. Imagine the possibilities!

Ages: 0 to 3 years



### Knight Owl

Written and illustrated by Christopher Denise

Ever since he was a hatchling, Owl has daydreamed about becoming a knight. When a number of knights go missing in his town, Owl decides to explore whether he can live the dream by

applying to Knight School. Surprise! He is accepted and starts training. However, when he becomes part of the Knight Watch, he encounters his enemy, a formidable dragon. Suddenly, Owl is seemingly no match. Or is he? Young ones will root for this adorable warrior with a big heart.

Ages: 3 to 5 years



### I Wish

Written and illustrated by Nancy Guettier

If you found a magic wand and could transform yourself into anything, what would you be? Seeing exploration as the discovery of your true self, this book features two friends who use a

magic wand to become other living creatures. Along their journey, they realize that what matters most is friendship.

Ages: 3 to 5 years



### Here We Are: Notes for Living on Planet Earth

Written and illustrated by Oliver Jeffers

Welcome to Planet Earth, young ones! This book beautifully explains to young children how to live on Planet Earth, celebrating our diversity and our communities. Helping kids to explore

the different themes that relate to our world, the book illustrates the physical planet, caring for the body, diversity of people and animals, time well spent, and caring for the planet. Think of it as a conversation starter for young curious minds.

Ages: 3 to 7 years



### Arthur and the Golden Rope: Brownstone's Mythical Collection #1

Written by Joe Todd-Stanton

Fans of Norse mythology, rejoice! This book is going to make your *Lord of the Rings* heart beat faster. It starts with Mr. Brownstone whose most treasured possession is his

book collection. These books contain long-forgotten stories told by Brownstone's ancestors, including a young, white Icelandic adventure seeker named Arthur, who is tasked with defeating a monstrous wolf named Fenrir. Through research, exploration, and bravery, Arthur receives guidance from Thor and Odin in order to defeat and capture Fenrir and his minions. This is a gorgeous book that reinforces the history of English children's literature.

Ages: 5 to 9 years



### The Aquanaut

Written by Dan Santat

Exploration is not only for humans, as this graphic novel shows. Ever since her father's research vessel sank, young Sophia has been haunting Aqualand, a marine theme park in San

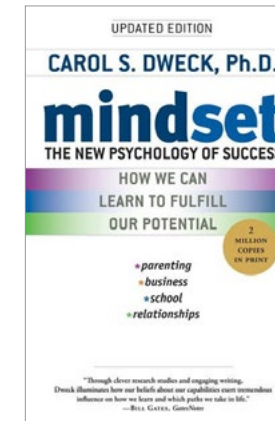
Diego. When her father's deep-sea diving suit walks out of the ocean, Sophia is amazed to find it is inhabited by marine creatures. Together, they set off free the captive marine life of Aqualand before it is too late.

Ages: 8 to 12 years

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

## Something New And Something Old Parenting

By Gail Cornwall



### Mindset: The New Psychology of Success

In *Mindset*, Dweck writes about how to raise children who crave a challenge and don't wilt in the face of a mistake. In readable prose she explains the difference between a growth mindset, which "is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts, your strategies, and help from others," and a "fixed" mindset, which is best summed up as "you have it or you don't." With the former comes resilience; with the latter comes fear, conditional self-worth, and difficulty learning from missteps. Parents can help kids embrace a growth mindset more of the time using Dweck's strategies. That said, the concept has pitfalls, only some of which she addresses in the book. Especially if you're raising a child of color, be sure to Google "J. Luke Wood" or check my website for info on how to avoid the hazards of mindset coaching.



### Hunt, Gather, Parent: What Ancient Cultures Can Teach Us About the Lost Art of Raising Happy, Helpful Little Humans

Doucleff's central conceit, that American parents have completely lost touch with universal tools of high-quality parenting, is reductionist, elitist (e.g., unpaid alloparenting is more common at income levels lower than Doucleff's), and belied by her quotation of Laura Markham and Tina Payne Bryson, who—like other non-hunter-gatherer parenting experts—have been preaching many, if not all, of these same techniques. Doucleff defines positive parenting and free-range parenting in artificially limited ways (as lacking tools and offering kids a "Lord of the Flies" existence, respectively), reshaping these schools of thought into strawmen for her to attack. "We interfere too much," Doucleff writes. While she's not wrong about trends toward controlling, intensive, and isolated parenting in the U.S., using "we" for all of Western culture renders invisible the oodles of teachers and parents who already do the things Doucleff recommends. They have "the look," avoid power struggles, use natural consequences, offer re-enactments and do-overs, and take stir crazy kids outside or give them jobs. Their kind, helpful children are also erased.

It just wasn't necessary to characterize American parents as a mass of nagging, punitive, and over-praising buffoons without access to good advice in order to say the Maya, Hadzabe, and Inuit cultures (and Doucleff) have value to add: that these methods need to be more widespread and advice scattered across parenting books summarized with the lens of what's universal. The schtick gets really, really annoying. But please buy the book anyway.

Why? Doucleff chooses a successful organizing acronym: TEAM, for togetherness, encouragement, autonomy, and minimal interference. Her anecdotes read well. She hammers home the universal formula for transmitting values and reinforcing desirable behavior: "practice, model, acknowledge." She brings together lots of fantastic advice: Invite your kids to work together to clean up, find a way to "acknowledge a child's ideas without actually doing what they ask," and don't micromanage. Don't interrupt your kids. "[T]urn commands, criticisms, and feedback into questions."

I'll discard the advice to ask, "Do whiny babies get to go to Trader Joe's?" And I'll also keep encouraging my kids to negotiate. Because, as Doucleff says, it would be a mistake to "romanticize other cultures, believing they contain some 'ancient magic.'" Not everything she observes is ideal just because it's traditional. And yet, Doucleff gathers so much wisdom on how to create a calm, cooperative household that new parents will benefit from the information, and any caregiver, no matter how skilled, from the refresher.

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](http://gailcornwall.com) or by finding her on Facebook and Twitter.



# Christina Curtis, PhD, MSc

Interviewed by contributing writer Alissa Harrison

Christina Curtis, PhD, MSc is an Associate Professor and Endowed Scholar in the Departments of Medicine and Genetics at Stanford University where she leads the Cancer Computational and Systems Biology group. She serves as the Director of Breast Cancer Translational Research and the Co-Director of the Molecular Tumor Board at the Stanford Cancer Institute. She is also a Chan Zuckerberg Biohub Investigator. Christine articulates how her tenacity and commitment to collaborative scientific research and daily self-care empower her to push forward.

## **Disrupting traditional scientific research and applications is challenging. Highlight how you fought to resolve pushback and push forward.**

Imagine you're off to something big. We need to look at this phenomenon. How the tumor has completely changed in a new way, challenging the textbooks you've read as a student. It's a good reminder we have to follow our instincts. If you believe the data supports this new conclusion, you have to keep pursuing it. *There's a tenacity: I believe in it. I will pursue this. I will understand it deeper and be open to why it might be this way.* When we stumble upon findings that challenge a vantage point, we make more effort to convey our findings because it changes a paradigm. So in hindsight, you're wondering: *Why hasn't anyone else seen this? or Are we wrong?* You have to question yourself and keep going. It could be something really rewarding. When you are on to something, it requires the rigor and pursuit to make sure that you really have the right answer.

## **How do you prioritize daily self-care to calm your mind and regain clarity?**

I am a big believer in prioritizing and committing to a daily self-care routine. [My] job is all-consuming [in] the best of ways as well because I can't stop thinking about it. Sometimes I find it very hard to call it quits because I'm on to something. However, I have a family as well. I put my best foot forward for my family to make time. I have two young children (8 and 10) that require a lot. [They're] a little bit older and less

demanding these days, although [there's] a lot more going on with school and everything else. It is really critical for me to have both clarity of thought and creativity in how I'm approaching questions and also as a mom, wife, and mentor. It's really important to have these windows where you say to yourself, *I think I'm going to take some time apart for myself.*

I'm an avid hiker, runner, and walker. Anywhere where I can get outdoors just to clear my mind. I try to go in the mornings before I start the day. I find on those days when I've committed to running, which I do pretty religiously, I have so much greater clarity of thought and actually more energy as well. I enjoy hiking, there's just something about the endorphins when I'm running. There's this head state you can get into when you're running I think is nice. It's actually therapeutic, restful, and restorative.

## **What are your frustrations in your roles? Your industry?**

A huge part of what motivates me is to actually see these discoveries we make in the laboratory, whether at the bench or the computer, translate into improved patient outcomes. It's a big part of what we hope to achieve. That's why I started this. Sometimes the path is long because it's such a laborious process. It is frustrating it takes a very long time to translate a discovery you make in a laboratory to actually impact patient care. There are hurdles to the process. However, some are just absolutely necessary, but also just the logistics of executing can be onerous. I sometimes feel frustrated that we

could potentially be helping patients sooner than that. The information content that we have isn't directly improving patient outcomes. It takes longer.

But it eventually gets there. In many cases we have many wonderful examples, so I am very optimistic as well that these kinds of insights are now feasible because of the types of technologies of genome sequencing and so forth that I am mentioning. They are really going to transform both how we approach personalization of therapy and how we identify cancers earlier. It's incredibly exciting we are seeing some of that happen.

But I'd love to see it happen faster, to lessen the time frame between those discoveries and the benefit because

sometimes you feel like you're just inching towards it. I think we all have family members and others that have been impacted. You just want to get there faster. It's just not fast enough. So that is a point of frustration and one that we are actively working to circumvent. It's exciting that

some of our discoveries are now going forward in clinical trials for breast cancer patients. That's really rewarding.

Figuring out ways to lessen that time span and to really effectively collaborate. That's part of it. But there can be a valley of death where discoveries in academic settings don't quite make it, where it is not quite time yet to push it over to, let's say, industry or biotech where they can carry the baton where a lot of drug discovery happens. There's this balance. I think we are fortunate to be in Silicon Valley where a lot of these connections can happen and I think we can be more nimble. But still, it sometimes seems slower than normal.

## **Synthesize how your leadership roles and responsibilities create a framework to support your research communities.**

One of the greatest joys of my jobs is getting to train the next generation. We have a pretty diverse lab and I get to learn

from these people every day who are brilliant, who are so committed to what they are doing, bringing different expertise to the table, and who are going to go out and have profoundly impactful careers in cancer research. It's neat to see a microcosm of collaboration in my lab, but it also happens in some of my roles in trying to bridge the gaps within the university and cancer institute. Then [repeat] on a national and international scale, through other associations and organizations looking to do similar things. At that level it becomes really important to figure out, *How do we combine our collective knowledge? What we learn here at Stanford is great, but how do we translate that somewhere else and vice versa?* We need to be learning from the collective and that is

actually hugely important because some cancer types are rare, and even within breast cancer there are subgroups that are less represented and we need to amalgamate just to have enough patient numbers.

That's also true when you work on pediatric tumors, and

fortunately those are rare. That also means we need to bring together cohorts that come from different locations. There's a lot of making connections so we can really advance the research and translation as rapidly as possible, and that takes collaboration. That is part of what I am doing in these different roles and leadership opportunities—trying to connect the dots. I feel really privileged to sit in a place where I have a perspective on each of these components of the types of data that are needed in genomic assays and how we interpret them and how we move them into the clinic.

There is a different inspiration that comes from the data versus sitting down with a patient and understanding some of the challenges. Especially in the drudgery we just keep going. We don't know what the answers are, but to know ultimately what we are doing will have a significant impact. It's a fun and demanding place to be, but it's rewarding.

**“When we stumble upon findings that challenge a vantage point, we make more effort to convey our findings because it changes a paradigm.”**

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

*Alissa is mom of 3 and 4 year old boys, aspiring adept acrobats frequenting playgrounds, bouncy houses, and House of Air. Daily sunrise morning runs are her rest to calm and recalibrate her mind. Alissa enjoys learning to live outside of her comfort zone through uncovering deep, passionate insights fueling the challenging career pursuits of strong women.*





# How to Support Kids in Exploring Gender

Tackling the nuances of the gender spectrum with children of various ages.

By Julie Houghton

Gender permeates every aspect of our lives. From the “What are you having?” question every pregnant person has encountered to gender-reveal parties to pink and blue baby clothes, gender-based assumptions are imposed upon our kids even before birth. These assumptions are not only confining but also harmful. According to a 2017 National Science study, by age 6, girls are already significantly less likely than boys to say that members of their own gender are “really, really smart,” and are more likely to avoid games described as being for kids who are “really, really smart.” The stereotypes girls experience in childhood impact their likelihood to pursue certain career paths

and affect their earnings throughout adulthood. On the flip side, the gender norms forced upon boys threaten them as well, teaching them to believe that being a boy means being “tough,” and confining them to a narrow set of interests, which limits ways of showing emotion and relating to others.

Talking to kids about gender goes beyond just exposing harmful stereotypes. Research indicates that it’s critical to kids’ mental health to feel affirmed and safe to explore their gender identity. According to Diane Ehrensaft, Ph.D., Director of Mental Health at the Child and Adolescent Gender Center at the University of California, San Francisco, when transgender children

receive support that affirms their gender identities, their mental health improves and when they don’t, their mental health suffers. Past research focused on what was wrong with transgender kids but now we know better. “That’s where the radical shift is,” says Ehrensaft. “It looks like the pathology lies in the culture, not inside the child.”

All of this makes it critical that parents create safe spaces for their kids to explore and talk about gender.

According to Lilly Rivera, Director of Family Programming at Gender Spectrum, a San Leandro-based nonprofit that works to create gender sensitive and inclusive environments for children and teens, “Gender is a pervasive construct in our lives. Gender is not something that we encounter one day at a particular time in our development. It is part of our entire existence and shapes how we feel about ourselves and how we move in the world.”

“Gender is not something that we encounter one day at a particular time in our development. It is part of our entire existence and shapes how we feel about ourselves and how we move in the world.”

It’s really important to have conversations about gender with children on an ongoing basis all the time.”

But the idea of discussing gender with their kids leaves many parents feeling ill-equipped or overwhelmed, especially since our society’s acknowledgement of the rich diversity of gender and the language to describe it have both expanded exponentially in recent years.

There are many simple, yet powerful ways to start this conversation with your kids, however, and to continue having it as they grow up.

## Talking to kids in preschool and early elementary school

According to Rivera, by the time they are age 3 or 4, kids are aware of their gender, which presents opportunities to talk about it and to reiterate the fact that we all get to choose our gender. Gender options exist beyond just male and female, and you can’t tell gender simply by looking at a

person. The only way to know someone’s gender is to ask.

Books are a great avenue into the topic for young kids. According to Mame Campbell, Director of San Francisco-based preschool Glenridge Cooperative Nursery School, “There are a few children’s books that challenge gender assumptions directly, but most books default to male pronouns for everything, including animals and inanimate objects. Several years ago, when a child found a roly-poly, I commented that we would need to put her somewhere safe after we studied her. The child immediately asked how I knew it was a girl. I was struck by that because when I used male pronouns when talking about bugs, no one ever questioned it. That interaction made me think about the message received by children when the central characters (and heroes) in books are male, so I started changing things up by switching the predominantly male pronouns that are

the discussion. Along with the questions, I say ‘Hmm...’ a lot. ‘Why can’t a boy be a princess? Wait—can’t boys be anything they want to be? Do clothes make someone a boy or a girl? What about hair—can boys have long hair? Are some colors only for girls and other colors only for boys? Hmm...’ I find that if I have helped to create a community where everyone is valued and celebrated, children can participate in these conversations with amazing levels of openness and understanding.”

Preschool and early elementary school are also a time when many parents talk to kids about body parts, which presents another great opportunity to talk about gender identity. Saying things like “some people have a penis but feel like a girl inside” or “many girls have a vulva and uterus and many boys have a penis but not all do” sends the message that genitals are not indicative of gender identity and is also inclusive of intersex kids, which make up an estimated 1.7 percent of the population.

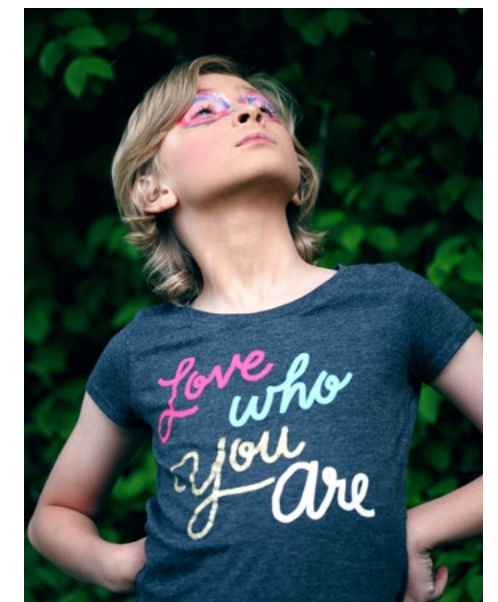
## Talking to older kids about gender

When kids are in late elementary school, there is opportunity to have more nuanced conversations with them about gender. According to Lilly Rivera of Gender Spectrum, “When kids see adolescence in the distance, that’s another opportunity for them to understand themselves in different ways. Just reinforcing the expansiveness of gender and investigating how they treat people based on gender is important. How

used in children’s literature.”

This tactic can have a profound impact on children. As Mame recounts, “Once, when [I was] reading *Swimmy* by Leo Lionni [and switched the main character’s pronouns from he to she], a very reserved little girl sitting next to me said, ‘Wow! She’s smart and brave! I’m smart and brave too.’ I don’t know if that child would have made the same association if I had used the male pronouns as written in the book.”

In addition to books, providing young kids with access to a wide range of toys and dress up clothes is a great way to open conversations about gender. At Glenridge, if another child at school questions something like a boy’s right to dress up in a princess dress, Mame embraces that as a teachable moment. “Preschoolers can be rigid in their world views, and I welcome these opportunities to have thoughtful discussions with children. I sit down and ask gentle questions to stimulate a conversation and hope to draw several children into



do they welcome friends who might be gender expansive? How do they explore what gender means to them? How do they 'language' what their gender identity may be? Female or male, boy or girl may not feel right to them. What are the other possibilities? These are questions I would throw out to inspire thought in children."

At this age kids can also have more sophisticated conversations about sexism and stereotypes, like the fact that our society is more accepting of "boyish" girls than it is of feminine boys. Discussing the ways in which sexism and gender stereotypes show up in the media is another way to start conversations. Jen\*, mom of a 7-year-old trans daughter, recommends, "Have discussions around outdated comedic tropes. Sometimes my kids will watch a show in which a boy puts on a dress for laughs, and we talk about how anyone can wear whatever they want."

This is also a time when conversations about puberty present an opportunity to read books that present that information in a gender-inclusive way (see sidebar for recommendations). As kids think about their changing bodies, it's a natural time to think about their gender identity as well.

## Supporting Gender Expansive Kids

What do you do if your child identifies outside the gender binary or as a gender

other than the one they were assigned at birth? It's normal for this to bring up a mix of emotions for parents.

Laura's trans son Max\* was in preschool when he started to express the fact that the female gender he was assigned at birth did not feel right, first by asking to be called Max instead of his birth name Emilia, and then by responding affirmatively when a teacher asked if he wanted to be called "he" instead of "she."

Laura recounts, "When [the school] told me that, I asked him how he felt and he said, 'I feel like a boy on the inside, Mom.'"

According to Laura, "The night he told me, I felt stunned, like I didn't know my kid, and that felt bad. But quickly I realized he was the same child."

Jen experienced a similar mix of emotions when her child Riley\*, who was assigned male at birth, gradually began to present as female, becoming consistently clear about the fact she felt like a girl by age 5. Jen remembers, "Over time it became apparent that she is a girl and now it seems so obvious, it is almost hard to remember those early times."

Jen advises parents, "You have to give yourself space to grieve the child you thought you had who you do not. I thought I had a son and I don't. I had to look at baby photos and cry a lot. I made sure to do it after my kids' bedtime. It's odd grieving a child who is still there, but I think

it is natural. Talk to whoever you can—your pediatrician, a gender therapist, a therapist for you, a pediatric endocrinologist, whoever will understand where you are in the process and hold you there."

Rivera agrees that it's critical that parents get outside support so they can work through their own emotions without burdening their child. As she says, "We are the parents; we are the caretakers; we are the adults, and we may have significant responses to their gender journey. All of that is valid. What could be challenging and hurtful is if we rely on our children to help us process this. That's not their job. Their job is to take this journey and figure out who they are in this world. Our job is to take care of ourselves within adult spaces and then return to them to give them what they need as they go on this journey."

Equally important to working through your feelings is taking your child's lead, believing them, and supporting their decisions around their gender expression.

Jen remembers, "I think I was initially hesitant to accept her identity as the truth, like I had a wait-and-see attitude. I tried to keep my doubts to myself and outwardly support her 100 percent. My brother was getting married when she was 4, and I remember agonizing over getting a flower girl dress or a ring bearer suit. At one point I thought I'll get both and she can decide the day of. There was pressure with the wedding photos being a family memento and I wanted to make sure her gender was accurately represented. The closer it got to the wedding, the dress was the clear correct choice, and I am so glad we have those pictures now."

Laura recounts a similar approach of letting her child lead, emphasizing the importance of "giving the kid space to explore and asking if they need help or for the parent to run interference with school/teachers/family/friends/sports teams." She continues, "Our experience has been entirely child-led. He changed his name and started to dress and identify as a boy. I just stay out of the way. We are at the stage now where he goes into new situations as a boy, and I don't say anything."

Taking your child's lead can also mean living with ambiguity if their gender identity changes or is fluid. According to Rivera, "Your child is the expert in their gender

experience and it's important that we make space and allow children to articulate what that means for them. They may try lots of things until they arrive at what feels like their authentic self, or they may feel that being fluid is their authentic self and all of that is valid. As adults who always want the right answer or want things defined, we may not get that. We need to stand in our discomfort in order to be present with our children."

Letting your child lead also means creating space for them to do so by stepping up as their ally, and making sure they are surrounded by supportive adults. Rivera emphasizes the importance of this, saying "Make sure that you are really clear about your values around gender with other people in your child's life and that those will be respected. If someone says something inappropriate to your child, you are very clear that you are going to stand by your child at all times, and that that is communicated very specifically to the child. That no matter what the world throws at you, your family will be here by your side taking care of you."

## The Language of Gender

**Agender** – A person who sees themselves as not having a gender. Some agender-identified people see themselves as being gender neutral, rather than not having any gender, but in any case do not identify with a gender.

**Cisgender** – Refers to people whose gender identity aligns with their assigned sex at birth (cis- from Latin, meaning, "on this side [of].") In contrast to trans, from the Latin root meaning "across," "beyond," or "on the opposite side [of].")

**Congruence** – Gender congruence is the feeling of harmony in our gender.

**Gender expression** – This is our "public" gender. How we present our gender in the world and how society, culture, community, and family perceive, interact with, and try to shape our gender. Gender expression is also related to gender roles and how society uses those roles to try to enforce conformity to current gender norms.

**Genderfluid** – People who have a gender or genders that change. Genderfluid people move between genders, experiencing their gender as something dynamic and changing, rather than static.

Raising a trans child is another opportunity to grow as a parent. According to Laura, "I'll always be his biggest supporter and champion. We have had surprisingly few problems, but there have been comments by family members that he perceives as mean, and I have to decide whether to confront those folks, let it go, or cut them out of our lives. Frankly, I think that's an excellent skill to develop."

Ultimately supporting your trans kids means you are allowing them to be their whole selves, which is what we all want for our kids. As Jen says, "When we were going through her social transition it was all I could think about, but now I think of her as my daughter who loves soccer, Star Wars movies, pizza, and stuffies. I have to consider things for her that I don't for my cis daughter, like name and gender change paperwork, upcoming hormone therapy, and her safety at school and in the world, but mostly I just want her to brush her teeth and tie her shoes."

*\*Pseudonyms and only first names used to protect the families' privacy.*



Julie (she/her) is a queer mom to two amazing kids and one very cute dachshund poodle mix. She's also a career and business coach with almost 10 years of experience helping people find careers and launch businesses that are in alignment with who they are. You can connect with her at [juliehoughton.com](http://juliehoughton.com) or [julie@juliehoughton.com](mailto:julie@juliehoughton.com).

**Transboy** – A child who was assigned a female sex at birth and has a boy gender identity.

**Transgender** – Sometimes this term is used broadly as an umbrella term to describe anyone whose gender identity differs from their assigned sex. It can also be used more narrowly as a gender identity that reflects a binary gender identity that is "opposite" or "across from" the sex they were assigned at birth.

**Transgirl** – A child who was assigned a male sex at birth and has a girl gender identity.

**Transsexual** – This term is used in different ways in English-speaking countries. In the U.S., it is considered an older term that originated in the medical and psychological communities and is considered offensive by many people. Still used by some people who have permanently changed, or seek to change, their bodies through medical interventions, including, but not limited to, hormones and/or surgeries. Unlike the term transgender, transsexual is not an umbrella term. Many transgender people do not identify as transsexual and prefer the word transgender.

Source: *Gender Spectrum*

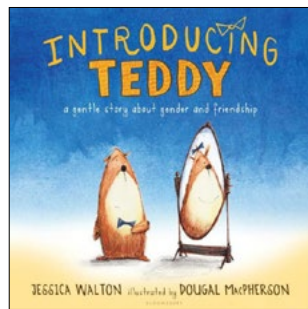


## Books for Kids That Explore Gender Identity

### Introducing Teddy: A Gentle Story About Gender and Friendship

by Jessica Walton

A story of friendship that introduces young readers to the idea of gender identity via the story of a bear named Thomas who has always felt like a girl inside. **Ages: 3 to 6**



### Pink is for Boys

by Robb Pearlman

A beautiful picture book that reframes the stereotypical pink/blue gender binary and empowers kids to express themselves.

**Ages: 4 to 8**

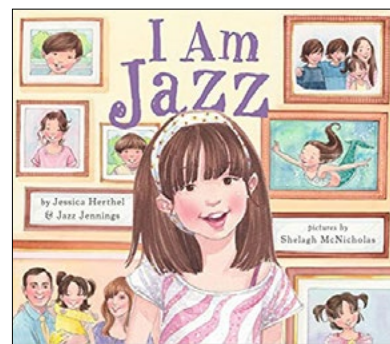


### I Am Jazz

by Jessica Herthel and Jazz Jennings

A simple, honest story based on the real-life experiences of Jazz Jennings—a spokesperson for transkids everywhere.

**Ages: 4 to 8**

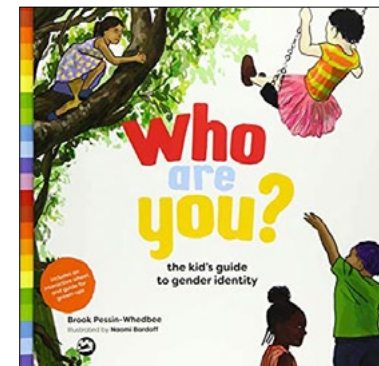


## Books for Kids That Explore Gender Identity

### Who Are You? The Kid's Guide to Gender Identity

by Brook Pessin-Whedbee

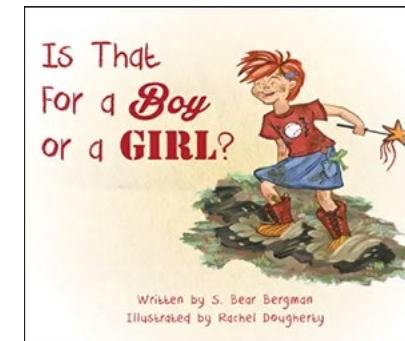
A straightforward introduction to gender, including an interactive three-layered wheel for talking to kids about the differences between our bodies, the ways in which we express ourselves through clothes and hobbies, and our gender identity. Includes talking points for adults in the back. **Ages: 5 to 8**



### Is That For a Girl or a Boy?

by S. Bear Bergman

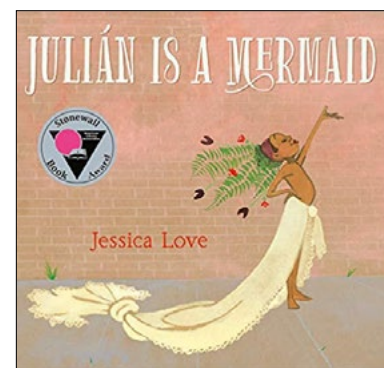
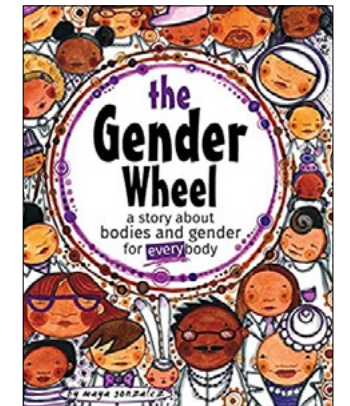
Twelve inspiring, gender-independent kids who have gotten tired of being told some things are for girls and some are for boys share their likes and interests. **Ages: 6 to 8**



### The Gender Wheel

by Maya Gonzalez  
An age-appropriate book that explains the origins of the current binary gender system and points to the ways in which nature offers a new story that includes room for all bodies and genders. Includes teacher tips for creating an inclusive classroom.

**Ages: 7 to 10**



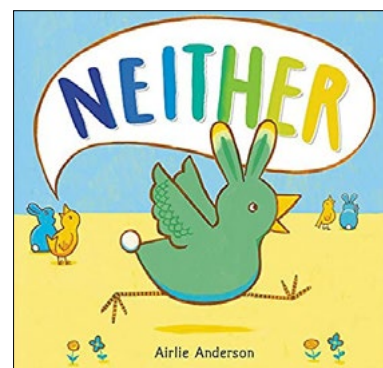
### Julian is a Mermaid

by Jessica Love  
Julian is so excited to dress up like a mermaid. Will his abuela approve?

**Ages: 4 to 8**

### Neither

by Airlie Anderson  
In a world of birds and bunnies, a little creature who is not quite either searches for a way to fit in. **Ages: 4 to 8**



### Gender-Inclusive Puberty Books:

#### Sex Is A Funny Word: A Book About Bodies, Feelings, and YOU

by Cory Silverberg

An award-winning comic book that includes children and families of all makeups, orientations, and gender identities. **Ages: 7 to 10**

#### The Every Body Book: The LGBTQ+ Inclusive Guide for Kids about Sex, Gender, Bodies, and Families

by Rachel E. Simon

A gender-inclusive book about puberty, hormones, consent, sex, pregnancy and safety. **Ages: 7 to 12**

#### Vaginas and Periods 101: A Pop Up Book

by Christian Hoeger and Kristen Lilla

Although it's targeted at girls, this book talks about vaginas and periods in a gender inclusive way and is written for anyone who will or does menstruate. **Ages: 7 to 12**

#### Wait, What?

by Heather Corinna and Isabella Rotman

An award-winning, gender-inclusive graphic novel guide that covers bodies, sexual and gender identity, gender roles and stereotypes, relationships, consent and more. **Ages: 9 to 14**

#### You Know, Sex: Bodies, Gender, Puberty, and Other Things

by Cory Silverberg

The highly-anticipated, newly released third book from the award-winning author of *What Makes a Baby* and *Sex Is a Funny Word*. This sex education book for middle schoolers includes trans, non-binary and intersex bodies and experiences. It is racially and ethnically diverse and inclusive of cross-disability experiences.

**Ages: 10 to 14**

### Books for Parents:

#### The Transgender Child

by Stephanie Brill and Rachel Pepper

#### Raising the Transgender Child

by Dr. Michele Angello and Ali Bowman

#### He's Always Been My Son

by Janna Barkin

#### At the Broken Places

by Mary Collins and Donald Collins

#### Becoming an Ally to the Gender-Expansive Child

by Anna Bianchi

#### The Gender Creative Child

by Diane Ehrensaft

### Other Resources for Parents:

**UCSF Gender Center** offers comprehensive medical and psychological care, as well as advocacy and legal support, to transgender, nonbinary and gender-expansive kids.

**Gender Spectrum** is a national organization offering educational, training and advocacy services to promote gender acceptance for youth of all diverse genders.

### Jacob's New Dress

by Sarah and Ian Hoffman  
An inspiring picture book that tells the story of Jacob's desire to wear a dress to school even though some kids tell him he can't wear "girl" clothes. **Ages: 4 to 8**



### Jacob's Room to Choose

by Sarah and Ian Hoffman  
After Jacob is chased out of the boys' bathroom when his classmates think he is dressed like a girl, he and his friend Sophie (who has the same experience when using the girls' bathroom) lead change at their school. **Ages: 4 to 8**

### Jacob's School Play: Starring He, She, and They

by Sarah and Ian Hoffman

As Jacob's class prepare for the school play, they also work on understanding one child's identity as they. **Ages: 4 to 8**

# Beyond “The Modern Family”

## A look behind the scenes at real life “alternative parenting structures” and how to navigate them

By Yuliya Patsay



Though TV might trick us into believing that the most common family structure is nuclear, with a married man and woman at the helm, off the screen, “alternative parenting” arrangements are much more diverse. “Alternative” implies an alternative to the norm, but there is no such thing as “the norm.” According to the Pew Research Center, “two parent households are on the decline in the United States as divorce, remarriage and cohabitation are on the rise.”

In speaking to several different families—including those who are co-parenting or parallel parenting with former romantic partners, living in separate dwellings as a blended family, or living

communally with new partners, as well as a poly family, a single mom by choice, and a bonus parent stepping in to co-parent her sister’s children—common challenges and themes emerged that can help us navigate our own diverse parenting arrangements.

### Let go of the parenting fantasy. Put the needs of the child first.

We all embark on the journey of parenthood with some ideas of how that experience will be, and for almost all of us, circumstances will arise to challenge those ideas and require us to respond flexibly to change. A women’s life coach and mom to two girls

whom she parents with her ex-husband across state lines, Rebecca Auster posits, “Places of transition are a crucible for change.” As your situation changes, she recommends figuring out “what you need to move forward and what you need to leave behind.”

Letting go of a specific parenting vision or fantasy is a sentiment echoed across multiple parenting situations. Lauren, who stepped in to help her sister after her sister’s divorce, refers to herself as a “bonus parent” or someone who is “more

“[I]nstead of focusing on reaching the perfect compromise, make reducing toxicity, and increasing awareness and acceptance the goal.”

than an aunt and less than a step-parent.” For all intents and purposes, co-parenting with her sister meant that their lives became as intertwined as any married couple. Lauren explained that, though she never wanted to be a parent, she partnered with someone who has kids and had to let go of her previous ideas of what life would look like.

Similarly, executive coach and single parent by choice, Diana Tauder shared that she “had to mourn the life I thought I’d have” (of a husband and kids) in order to lovingly embrace this new life experience. Melissa Taylor, Executive Director of the Reno Little Theater, describes her family as blended, admits this path wasn’t the plan (“I didn’t get married to get divorced”), and credits herself and her ex for working together amicably and adjusting the plan so they can both parent in as active a role as they want.

Conscious Parent Coach Christina Perez, who shares a home with her romantic partner and her child’s biological father, also had to grieve the fantasy of marriage. “I idealized the white picket fence and marriage, and I didn’t want to have a broken family,” Christina said. So when her marriage ended she had to adjust her vision. The good news? Christina shares that “through staying open and co-creating the parenting experience we wanted, it actually turned out even better than I thought,” and she gratefully shares “I have the whole package: my child’s

biological father and my ideal romantic partner.”

The reality, though, is that the path towards a new vision can be rocky: when two people who are in a romantic partnership decide to dissolve that partnership, it can feel like betrayal. One or both parties may feel as if there is a breach of contract that has taken place, which makes it challenging to then co-parent from a place of goodwill and trust. To overcome that, Liana Wenger, MA, LMFT, suggests that “instead of focusing on reaching the

perfect compromise, make reducing toxicity, and increasing awareness and acceptance the goal.”

So how do you effectively parent with someone you have ended a romantic relationship with? One way is to think outside the co-parenting paradigm: “Effective co-parenting, when adults who have split up manage to set aside their wounds, put their kids first, and behave like a high-functioning married couple, results in children who thrive,” explains Gail Cornwall, a writer on education and parenting, “but this approach only works well for kids when their caregivers can co-parent without conflict. If they cannot,

the best option becomes parallel parenting, like parallel play for toddlers, where adults parent in parallel with minimal interaction between them.” Liana also recommends letting go of expectations of how parenting with a former romantic partner is supposed to be: “It’s a fallacy that harmony can only happen if you’re under one roof or if things are perfectly cohesive. Harmony can look different for everyone.”

For the kids, effectively parenting them through a separation might mean creating a transitional plan. For local mom Lisa and her partner, that looked like starting off with a trial period during which dad took the kids one night a week to a friend’s cabin. So when the time came to live in separate dwellings, the kids were more used to the idea—staying with dad sometimes and mom sometimes was already a normal part of their experience. Lisa also advises taking each parent’s relationship with the children into consideration when creating a plan for shared custody. In their situation, her partner was a hands-on caregiver from the very start and made it a priority to spend one-on-one time with each child so when they transitioned to co-parenting, Lisa was confident that he could meet the children’s emotional needs and handle a truly equal parenting role. If one parent works 80-hour-weeks and the other tends to the children full time, it might be unfair to expect a 50/50 arrangement to be in everyone’s best interests.



## Strength. Support. Self-care. Play to your strengths, build your support system, and model self-care.

Regardless of parenting structure, everyone can agree that parenting is hard, so any arrangements that can make it easier and can lighten the load are welcome. A helpful way to do that is to rely on each other's strengths and another is to build your village, or your support system.

The saying "it takes a village," while clichéd, is also true. Living in a village, or in a multigenerational community, is a way of life that human beings are biologically wired for. Even the Obamas understood the benefit of multigenerational support—they moved Michelle's mom into the White House to help them rear their children!

If moving grandma in isn't an option, then look at other supportive structures that exist, such as intentional communities, and finding a network of parents within your children's school circle that help carry the load. Nish Nadaraja, Angel Investor, who parallel parents his teenager with his ex, explains that since both sets of biological grandparents are on the East Coast and there's few other extended family members around, he relies heavily on the support of their teenager's school community, some even dating back to preschool.

A more permanent support setup is an intentional parenting community, which usually involves getting a group of people



with shared values together and creating a communal living arrangement in which resources are shared.

Local couple Kim Inglinsky and Michael Costuros, who both work as coaches, describe themselves as a non-romantic parenting partnership. They live in an intentional co-parenting community with occasional support from grandparents that live locally. They emphasize that they live, by design, in an ecosystem that is extraordinarily supportive of parenting and that even before they became parents, they both knew they didn't want to live as a nuclear family. Kim shared that she "saw that as a recipe of things not working because it's too binary." Michael put it even

more plainly, "We both thought that the nuclear paradigm is #!@\*&%! insane."

Tara Jazdzewski, writer and book publisher, would probably agree with that sentiment. She explains that multigenerational living is a part of her ethos, having been raised by a mom who grew up with village living. Tara is in a consensual non-monogamous relationship (or "poly" relationship) and refers to the network of adults in her children's lives as a "polycule" and the kids as "podlings." For her, one of the biggest benefits of communal parenting is there are "so many safe adults for my kids that provide a different perspective and can share their different strengths and skills." Another benefit Tara points to is that "by and large, those in an alternative parenting structure are people who are typically more open to other people's style of parenting and in this way we are able to honor each other's parenting journeys."

Christina, who practices communal living by sharing a home with both her daughter's biological father and her romantic partner, says that the key to a successful communal living arrangement, in her case, is having a romantic partner that is "open minded and supportive of the fact that I have a lifelong commitment to this other person."

Melissa who defines her family as "truly blended"—so much so that she hosts a podcast of the same name with her ex-husband's wife—shared that the best part of having four adults ready to step in and parent their shared children is that they aren't doing it all alone, they are in

this together and "divide responsibilities based on strengths." Tara, who parents in a polycule, echoes that tapping into the strengths of the other adults is key. She jokes, "I am not a math person!" So when her oldest daughter needed help with math, she outsourced it to her former partner's current spouse who is a math wiz!

Of course, major stressors like COVID have complicated things for everyone, especially those outside of the two-parent household paradigm. Diana, single mom by choice, described COVID as "a nightmare at times" and "a spotlight on the fact that you're doing this alone." And Lauren, who stepped in to help her sister parent her children, admits to the very real struggle of going from an occasional "relief parent" to a "full-time parent" due to COVID.

In times of major stressors like COVID, Liana Wenger encourages people to lean into self-compassion and double down on taking care of themselves. She explains that tough times can also be an opportunity to "be kind to yourself, relax your expectations, and be honest with your children about what you need to do to take care of yourself." She quips that it's "really ok to have cereal for dinner" or to let the kids know, "I'm really tired and I'm going to take a nap while you watch a movie."

## Logistics are hard. Technology can help.

Beyond recruiting the screen as a parenting aid, you can also lean on technology more to help with some of the heavy logistical lifting between parenting parties, especially when communication is particularly complicated or strained.

From utilizing services like [Wevorce](#) to help modern families navigate divorce, to using shared calendars and utilizing apps such as [amicable](#) or [Fayr](#), technology can make co-parenting much easier. Fayr, for example, boasts that they've been "recognized by family law experts who say the app can significantly lower the emotional and financial burdens of separation and divorce on families." And that "Fayr's transparent, real-time audit logs and geo-location functions help parents communicate constructively—preemptively mitigating misunderstandings that would formerly escalate to the courtroom."

Melissa, who manages much of the logistics for her dual household blended family of four adults and seven children, praises the use of multiple communication modes to help communicate: "We get together weekly for a blended family card night" and "talk IRL and send group texts. I've even been known to write a lengthy

Doing the hard work means you will reap the rewards of alternative parenting arrangements which families describe as:

- All of the love that exists around the child.
- Modeling that dissolution of a romantic relationship is not a failure.
- By extracting the role of parent from the role of romantic partner, you can have the best of both worlds.
- Increasing your circle of available caregivers and sharing parenting responsibilities mean that you get more time to yourself to be an adult, and enrich your child's experience.
- Raising children is no small feat. We need our village and our people, and those people do not have to be biologically related to you. A chosen family with shared values is just as beneficial.



email or two." She also notes that using indirect communication via technology can be a great way to diffuse tension and to make sure you get your point across without worry of interruptions or strong emotional reactions.

## Final thoughts.

Whether parenting with an ex, living in an intentional parenting community, practicing consensual non-monogamy, or helping to raise your sister's children, navigating parenting requires radical acceptance, "putting your big girl pants on" and putting kids' needs first, a lot of communication, and honoring your individuality while valuing your differences.

*Yuliya (it rhymes with Goo-ly) Patsay is Soviet born and San Francisco raised. She is a storyteller, voice actor, and speaker and is working on completing her first book, which will be out in October 2022.*

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, & INCLUSION

## Black Maternal Health Week, April 11 to 17

This year marks the fifth year and second nationally recognized Black Maternal Health Week (BMHW), from April 11 to 17. BMHW highlights the uphill struggle that Black mothers and their infants have to go through in order to gain quality health care. According to the CDC, “Black women are three times more likely to die from a pregnancy-related cause than white women.” These disparities persist after controlling for socioeconomic status. Whether it’s due to lack of access and knowledge or systematic inequalities within the healthcare system and providers, all women deserve to have safe and healthy pregnancies and births.

For a more intimate account, check out the podcast series NATAL. This narrative podcast explores having a baby while Black in the United States. Beyond the soundbites and statistics about Black maternal health are real people with intimate stories about their pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum care. NATAL passes the microphone to Black parents to share their stories in their own words. The docuseries also highlights the birth workers, medical professionals, and advocates fighting daily for better care and outcomes for Black families around the country. [natalstories.com/listen](https://natalstories.com/listen)

### Want to get involved?

**SisterWeb** is a San Francisco community doula network, committed to “building a community where Black, Latinx, and Pacific Islander pregnant women, their partners, and their families benefit from the expertise, support, and advocacy of a birth companion (doula) to have a satisfying and dignified birth experience.” This organization’s work is multifaceted: providing prenatal, birth, and postpartum care to low-income women of color and providing continuing education to labor and delivery centers specifically, and to the medical and birth community in San Francisco. In 2020, GGMG members and the Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Committee raised a combined \$5,122 to help aid this organization with their mission and goals.

**Roots of Labor Birth Collective (RLBC)** is committed to providing support and care for Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities. RLBC consists of birth workers of color. They strive to reflect the communities they serve, while uplifting and caring for themselves.



**Mothers to Mothers’s** mission is “to share cross cultural postpartum recipes, traditions, and wisdom, to expose current postpartum realities, and promote Postpartum Justice in Black and Indigenous communities.”

**Black Mamas Matter Alliance (BMMA)** is a national Black women-led cross-sectoral alliance that centers on Black mamas to advocate, drive research, build power, and shift culture for Black maternal health, rights, and justice. BMMA envisions a world where Black mamas have the rights, respect, and resources to thrive before, during, and after pregnancy.

EVENTS

### Monthly Queer Family Hike

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

The safety requirements are:

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

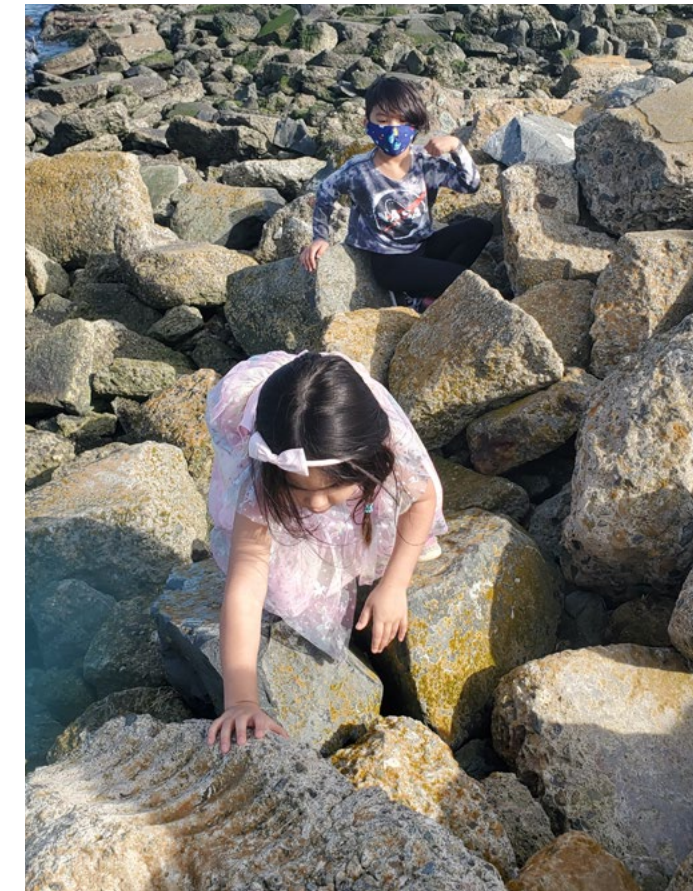
**DATE:** Sunday, April 3

**TIME:** 10 a.m. to noon

**PLACE:** San Bruno Mountain Park

**COST:** FREE for members

**REGISTRATION:** Email Dy Nguyen for details ([dy.nguyen@gmail.com](mailto:dy.nguyen@gmail.com))



PARTNERSHIPS

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

The Partners branch of the Partnerships Committee manages our relationships with our large Partners including the Jewish Community Center San Francisco (JCCSF), Luke’s Local grocery, and UrbanSitter.

Committee duties in Friends:

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

Committee duties in Partners:

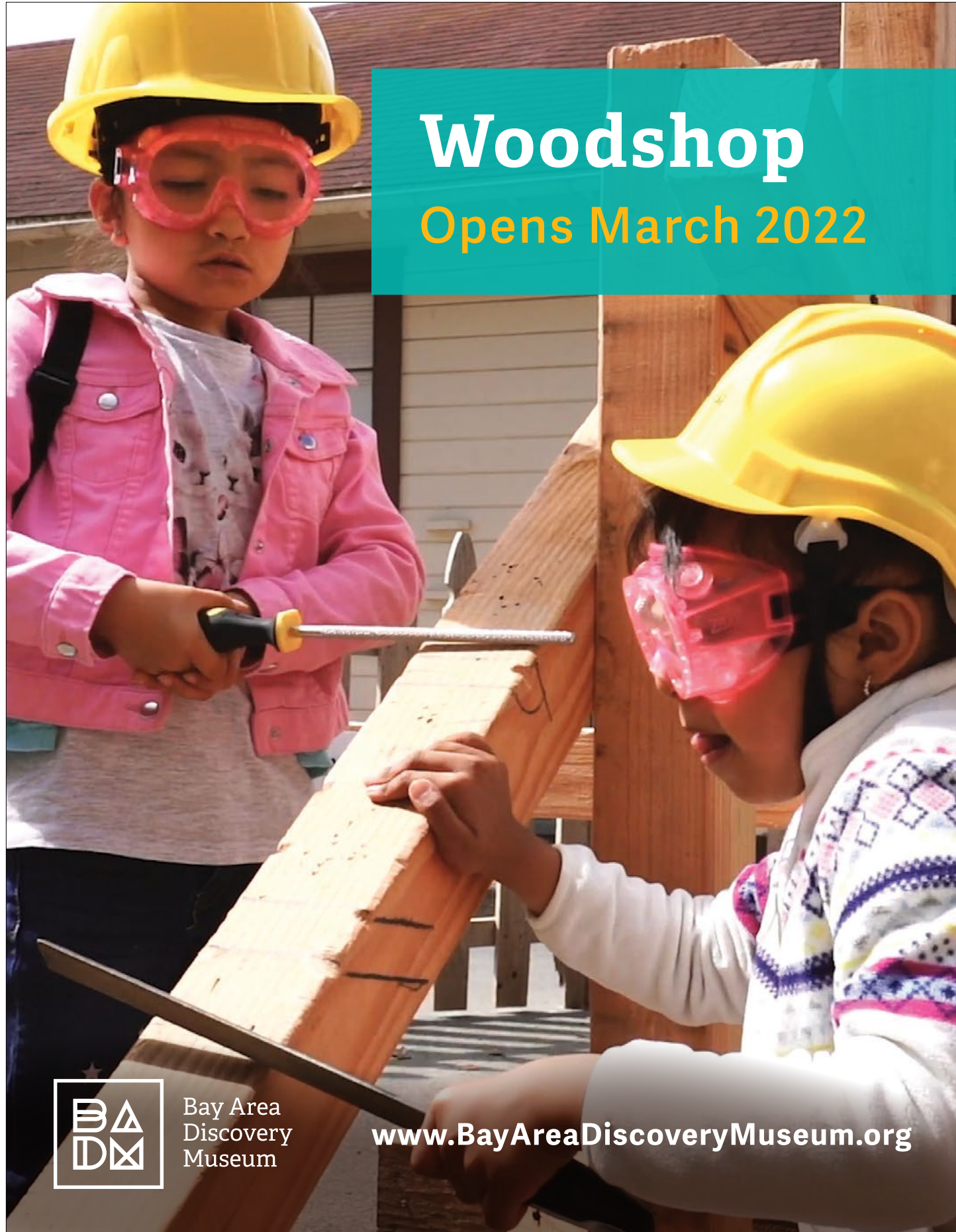
- Maintain relationships with current Partners and seek out new Partners
- Negotiate new business discounts to expand the discount offerings for GGMG members
- Outreach for new Partners of interest with preference to small local businesses run by women and/or people of color

Open Roles:

- Committee Co-chair in Friends (one hour per week)
- Committee Co-chair in Partnerships (one to two hours per week)

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## Nature, Nurture, and Finding My Own Way

By Yvonne Tsang

I am a city person. I like the density of urban life, of being able to walk to cafes and corner stores. I like concrete sidewalks and the anonymity of crowds. At the end of the day, I want to be warm, surrounded by electricity and glowing gadgets at my fingertips.

Some of this stems from my parents, who were not outdoorsy. We didn't go hiking or spend a lot of time at parks or beaches. Despite growing up in the Bay Area, we never went to Lake Tahoe, skipping over to Reno and Las Vegas instead. So my exploration into the great outdoors really started after college when I was on my own, though I needed help.

I went on my first camping trip in my mid-20s, arranged by my boyfriend at the time. We spent a summer night at Big Basin and I'd never been colder in my life. My second camping trip was arranged by the next boyfriend. We stayed in tent cabins in Yosemite's Curry Village and I was heartened to discover that there were different flavors of camping—not owning a tent or other gear wasn't a prerequisite to sleeping outdoors. While standing in the shadow of El Capitan was even more breathtaking than I anticipated, I wasn't bitten by the camping bug (other than by mosquitoes). Having checked off "camping" from my bucket list, I didn't feel the urge to go again until I became a mom.

I wound up marrying a former Boy Scout who came equipped with a titanium spork, a pocket water filter, and a sleeping pad that packed down to the size of a super burrito. I had nothing except a desire that my children be comfortable in the great outdoors at an early age. When we started taking our kids camping, we splurged on a 6-person tent for the four of us and cushy sleeping pads that rolled up into the size of tree trunks. We haven't braved backpacking into true wilderness, sticking to warm-weather car camping for now, but it's enough. My kids love being bathed in dirt, finding trees to climb and bugs to investigate, and not having to transition from indoors to outdoors.

I have learned how to be a pretty good camper, while still gritting my teeth at aspects of it: sticky marshmallowed hands that are brown from chocolate, dirt, and who knows what; shared bathrooms that require a coat and a trudge in the dark;



the slightly soapy and slightly greasy dishes that result from quickly washing at a spigot. And I still have not had a good night's sleep in a tent. Partly it's the weight of the silence, unnatural to ears attuned to the hum of a city; partly it's paranoia from not being able to lock a door at night and irrational thoughts of bears and other predators.

Despite these discomforts, I discovered that I wasn't done yet—camping with kids is another flavor of camping, one that I truly enjoy. "Family time" at home can be fraught with too many options and bickering over whose turn it is to choose; family time when camping is just... time. We eat, hike, and sleep,

bound by sunrise and sunset. During these long pandemic years, time in the outdoors became even more precious to us. For a while, it was one of the few safe spaces apart from our home where we could shed our masks and pretend, for a little while, that all was right with the world.

Now that my kids have taken several trips to Tahoe and Yosemite and spent many nights in a tent, my wish is that this comfort in the outdoors doesn't just result in a Scout's knowledge of how to prepare for a camping trip, but that it grounds them in a deeper relationship with nature that also carries over into our urban life. It's starting to take shape: they call out red-tailed hawks circling our skyline, and they recognize native plants that we have grown in our backyard— monkey

flowers, poppies, bee plants, miner's lettuce—at local and state parks. They rescue worms from dry sidewalks and take spiders from inside the house out to the garden, a task I'm more than happy to hand over.

Still, I admit that at the end of every camping trip I'm always happy to pack up, and I'm first in the shower as soon as we're home. And then the next day, I'm online researching new campsites to explore. I've found my own peace in the outdoors, and I bring that home with me, too.

*Yvonne is a designer for GGMG Magazine. This summer she's looking forward to a road trip through national parks, two camping trips, and her third time at Camp Mather with her husband and two kids.*

*"I've found my own peace in the outdoors, and I bring that home with me, too."*



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