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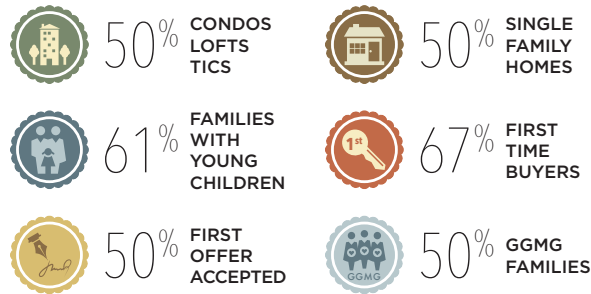
magazine



# Simplify

# 26 Successfully Closed Homes This Year

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A heartfelt thank you to the amazing families who entrusted me with their home purchases and sales this year. I absolutely love working with my fellow GGMG families to help you achieve your homeownership goals! As the mom of a 5 year old son, I truly understand the unique challenges and needs of growing families with school-aged kids.

If you are thinking about making a move, or are interested in learning more about the San Francisco market, call or email me today! Many GGMG family references available.



**Sherri Howe**

**REALTOR® & GGMG Mom**

*a.k.a askhowe — look for me on the GGMG message boards*

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# Letter from the Editor: The Simple Life

By Kirsten Pflieger



Kirsten lives in the Castro with her husband, Karl, and their daughters Serenity (4) and Sierra (2), where she tries to instill a love of art while banning glitter from the house.

When my daughter started preschool, each new family was given a copy of *Simplicity Parenting* by Kim John Payne. Although I found the book a bit repetitive (ironic for a book on keeping it simple), the overarching message was one that resonates with me. Giving children fewer toys, fewer activities, fewer choices can make it easier for them to

fully experience what they have. I see this in practice at our house all of the time. When all of their puzzle and board game boxes are easily accessible, they don't play with any of them. As soon as I put most of them in a closet, the couple left are in high demand.

After reading the book, I went through the girls' toys and books and moved many of them out of circulation. I was feeling pretty

*Giving children fewer toys, fewer activities, fewer choices can make it easier for them to fully experience what they have.*

proud of myself, but ran into an unexpected hurdle—my husband. It seemed like half of the books that I didn't think had been read in months were his favorites, and the toys that drove me crazy were the ones he used when playing with the girls. Coordinating

my simplicity plan has been much harder than I anticipated. On page 16, Sallie takes a more methodical approach to de-cluttering her home, putting the strategies outlined in Marie Kondo's *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up* into practice.

Simplicity is not just about the stuff in your home. Keeping our schedule simple is a difficult task for many of us, especially this time of year. Holiday parties are fun. Shopping for gifts takes time. If you are going to visit family, just planning the travel can take hours. On page 20, Jennifer looks into how some families manage their schedules. Sometimes, the bloating of our schedule occurs in an attempt to maintain relationships. We say yes to an event we don't have time for because we feel guilty about how long it has been since we saw the host. Juli tells us her three R's for maintaining relationships while still keeping time for yourself on page 24. And on page 39, Lynn talks about how she uses technology to create time with her family.

Getting food on the table is probably one of the least simple things in my life. I appreciate Aaron's approach to creating a "good food week" on page 10. As someone who runs to the store in the middle of cooking dinner more often than I like to admit, the idea of having food planned for the week, the shopping completed, and the prep started on Sunday night sounds like utopia.

A good friend of mine is expecting her first child in the spring. I passed my copy of *Simplicity Parenting* on to her this weekend. Not because I have mastered the topic by any means, but in the hope that it will allow her to start this parenting journey with the idea of taking a deep breath, and slowing down.

*K Pflieger*

## Housekeeping

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

**ADVERTISING:** Advertisements are accepted on a first-come, first-served basis. For submission information, email [advertising@ggm.org](mailto:advertising@ggm.org).

**THIS ISSUE MADE POSSIBLE BY:** Hand, foot and mouth disease, too much Halloween candy, short-lived baby naps, the end of daylight savings time, coffee, random acts of preschool defiance, tours of duty (the preschool and kindergarten variety), an awesome volunteer appreciation dinner that included free thongs and caricatures.

**COMING NEXT:** February—Home Sweet Home

**CONTEST:** Congratulations to Heather Nichols, winner of our October contest, custom letterpress stationery from Lilikoi Design + Letterpress.

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

# Letter from the Board: 2016—Here We Come

By Laurel Kellam and Cathy Tran

How is it December already? It feels like 2015 has flown by! The board has made many changes this year and we have a strong team in place to help guide GGMG in 2016.

Thanks to everyone who participated in our annual survey in October. Your feedback has been invaluable to the board as we plan for the upcoming year and figure out how best to meet member needs. We saw some common themes in your feedback and wanted to give a little more detail on how GGMG runs and where we're heading in 2016.

First off, BigTent: it's the platform we currently use to host our forums and manage our member database. We know it's not the most user-friendly site, but we don't run or own it and are therefore often unable to fix some of its more frustrating features. The good news is that we are working on a new GGMG site. It will address many of the issues you've had with BigTent and we are very excited to take our organization into the 21st century!

Among its issues, BigTent has no way for us to limit member access to certain forums. This is a big reason why we do not currently allow men in our group. Many members have stated they would be comfortable with men joining GGMG if there was a separate, female-only forum. We can't offer that with BigTent's infrastructure, but it is on our radar for the future.

We are always amazed at how every single facet of GGMG is organized or managed by mom volunteers. Though we are an organization that is completely volunteer-run, we still have operating costs, including the services of BigTent, lawyers, and a host of other things we never even realized until we joined the board. It turns out being on the board means you get to deal with glamorous things like insurance, trademark renewals, and

copyrights. We are working to cut operating costs where we can and redirect that money into better quality, more thoughtfully curated events and partnerships for all members. Your survey feedback will help us re-prioritize our efforts.

Lastly, we've built up and continue to build such an amazing community of moms who all contributed to our organization in a host of ways. Last year we decided to extend membership to mothers of children up to 12 years old. As we bring more moms with older children in the GGMG community, we are working to provide discounts and events that would

*We are working to cut operating costs where we can and redirect that money into better quality, more thoughtfully curated events and partnerships for all members.*

interest and be of use to older children and their parents. More to come on that in early 2016!

The board is working hard to make GGMG the best it can be, and we thank our members who make GGMG such an amazing, supportive environment for moms. As always, we welcome your input at [feedback@ggm.org](mailto:feedback@ggm.org).

*Laurel Kellam* *Cathy Tran*



Laurel and Cathy are the Chair and Vice Chair of GGMG. They have been volunteering since 2011 and 2012 respectively and previously both served on the GGMG Membership Committee before joining the board.

## Volunteer of the Month



Congratulations to **Kelly Cohen**, our December volunteer of the month! Kelly began volunteering with GGMG in the spring of 2014 and has held a number of positions including Membership volunteer and Just for Moms co-chair. She is an administrative assistant for the Bar Association of San Francisco, wife to Joshua David Cohen, and mother to Elizabeth "Liz" Margaret. Kelly is a fifth-generation San Franciscan.

**Her favorite Pastimes:** genealogy and wine **Books:** *And the Band Played On* and *The Entertainer* **Films:** *I Remember Mama* and *Magnolia* **Restaurants:** Delancey Street Restaurant and Dragon River **Destination:** Las Vegas **Parenting advice:** You will discover that all the things you said you would or would never do go out the window once you have a kid. That's okay.

Kelly will enjoy a 60-minute massage at International Orange Spa (2044 Fillmore St.). Book yourself a massage today at [www.internationalorange.com](http://www.internationalorange.com).

Festive Fun for the Whole Family

Looking for fun things to do with the whole family over the holidays? Look no further for carols, snow, festive lights, and so much more, most of which can be enjoyed by all ages!

By Shaheen Bilgrami

The Christmas Lights at Parkway Estates  
CHESTNUT STREET, SOUTH SAN FRANCISCO

**Starting the second week of December**  
You don't have to drive far to get to this stretch of decorated homes, sure to fill you and your little ones with holiday cheer!  
[tinyurl.com/p8qpexn](http://tinyurl.com/p8qpexn)

Great Dickens Christmas Fair  
COW PALACE EXHIBITION HALLS

**Through December 20**  
Step back into Victorian England and enjoy festive games, dancing, puppets, fairies, Father Christmas, and Victorian arts and crafts.  
[www.dickensfair.com](http://www.dickensfair.com)

Holiday Ice Rink in Union Square  
**Through January 18**

Soak up the holiday spirit as you and your family skate in this seasonal ice rink set amongst the festive decorations of Union Square.  
[www.unionsquareicerink.com](http://www.unionsquareicerink.com)

Holiday Train Express  
**December 5 and 6**

This glittering holiday train, decorated with over 70,000 lights, visits nine stations between San Francisco and Santa Clara.  
[www.holiday-train.org](http://www.holiday-train.org)

Illuminate SF Festival of Light  
MULTIPLE LOCATIONS  
**Through January 31**

Winter is the perfect time for the whole family to enjoy San Francisco's many temporary and permanent light art exhibits and installations.  
[www.illuminatesf.com](http://www.illuminatesf.com)

Lighted Boat Parade at Fisherman's Wharf  
**December 10**

A fun parade with over 60 decorated and illuminated

boats. Catch the best views from Aquatic Park or Pier 39.  
[tinyurl.com/petxr7j](http://tinyurl.com/petxr7j)

Mark Foehringer's Nutcracker Sweets  
COWELL THEATER AT FORT MASON CENTER  
**December 12 through 22**

A short, seasonal performance with music and dance—perfect for little ones with short attention spans!  
[www.nutcrackersweets.org](http://www.nutcrackersweets.org)

SPCA and Macy's Union Square  
Holiday Window  
**Through January 3**

Children (and adults) will love cooing at the adorable adoptable cats and dogs in the Macy's holiday display.  
[tinyurl.com/sfspcamacys](http://tinyurl.com/sfspcamacys)

'Tis the Season for Science at the  
California Academy of Sciences  
**Through January 3**

Enjoy snow, reindeer, holiday performances, and more at this family-friendly seasonal exhibit.  
[www.calacademy.org](http://www.calacademy.org)

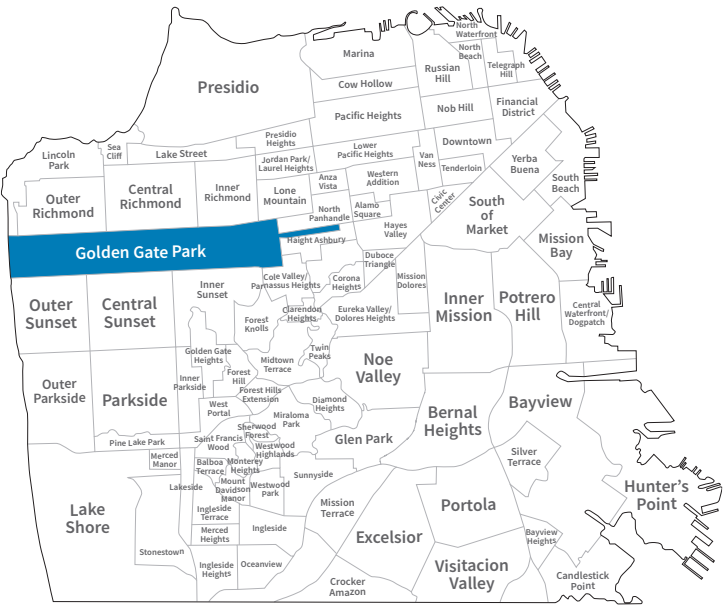
Tom and Jerry Christmas Tree

3650 21ST ST. (BETWEEN CHURCH & SANCHEZ)  
This amazingly decorated Victorian on the top of Castro Hill has become a seasonal institution. The crowd is always manageable, so it's perfect for the whole family.  
[tinyurl.com/owl8att](http://tinyurl.com/owl8att)

Zoo Lights

**Various dates in December**  
While enjoying the magical lights, kids can experience snow flurries, meet Santa and his reindeer, and sip hot chocolate and cider.  
[www.sfzoo.org](http://www.sfzoo.org)

Shaheen Bilgrami is freelance writer and editor and is a contributor to [blog.littlelane.com](http://blog.littlelane.com). She is also the mom of an energetic preschooler. Contact her through her website, [www.shaheenbilgrami.com](http://www.shaheenbilgrami.com), or her blog, [www.girlinfofcity.com](http://www.girlinfofcity.com).



Li'l Kid, Big City:  
Golden Gate Park

By Stef Tousignant

In 1879, Golden Gate Park opened thanks to the efforts of engineer William Hammond Hall. Its multitude of transplanted trees helped to create a windbreak, spurring the development of the Sunset and Richmond neighborhoods.

There is much to discover in the park, from the immense **Koret Children's Playground** to the **California Academy of Sciences**. You can rent a four-person bike and pedal around **Stow Lake**, or grab a bite while the kids run around on the grass at the **Park Chalet**. There's a golf course, soccer fields, baseball diamonds, and a total of 11 lakes!

Even more exciting are all of the hidden discoveries. Did you know that you can take a shuttle from one end of the park and back for FREE? Have your children run through the mysterious fog that springs up in the **Children's Garden**? Or, if you're up for a treasure hunt, try to find the fairy door hidden in the **Music Concourse** between the de Young Museum and the Academy of Sciences.

**Buffalo** have lived in the park since the 1800s. You can find their paddock just off the western part of JFK Drive. There are more animals to be found in the park as well, from horses at the **Equestrian Center** to a few coyotes.

Download the official Golden Gate Park app ([www.golden-gate-park.com/iphone-app.html](http://www.golden-gate-park.com/iphone-app.html)) and start exploring today! ♦

Stef Tousignant is head of marketing for the free mobile app Mommy Nearest. She lives in the Inner Richmond with her high school sweetheart and two boys (3 and 7) who love to play air guitar and explore Golden Gate Park. [mommynearest.com](http://mommynearest.com)

The Final Step

By Tara Hardesty

Simplifying can feel good and the act of cleaning out the old is satisfying. Once a purge is over, you almost feel lighter. It seems like creating more physical space in your life can help create more emotional space as well.

But there is one big step between the purge and that great feeling of accomplishment: where to donate the items you are clearing out. The good news is, in a city like San Francisco, there are dozens of choices. New or gently used items can be donated to a charity or thrift store. If your stuff has seen better days, you can simply have it hauled away. Whatever your circumstances, it is likely there is an option that will help you wrap up your cleaning project.

CHARITIES

- **Goodwill** Accepts new or used items, including clothing, appliances, furniture and working or broken electronics, 10 locations, citywide  
[sfgoodwill.org/donation-locations](http://sfgoodwill.org/donation-locations)
- **St. Vincent de Paul** Accepts donations of clothing, furniture or automobiles. 415.977.1270  
[svdp-sf.org/get-involved/donate](http://svdp-sf.org/get-involved/donate)
- **Salvation Army** Accepts new or used items, including clothing, appliances, furniture, household goods and automobiles. 1.800.SATRUCK  
[salvationarmyusa.org](http://salvationarmyusa.org), [SATruck.org](http://SATruck.org)
- **Community Thrift** Furniture, household items and gently used clothing. 623 Valencia St, 415.861.4910  
[www.communitythriftsf.org/donate](http://www.communitythriftsf.org/donate)

CHARITY FINDER SITES

- **Donation Town** Connects you with local charities that will pick up your clothing, furniture, toys, shoes, and general household items and more  
[donationtown.org/charity](http://donationtown.org/charity)

JUNK HAULERS

- **Junk King** Fast, eco-friendly junk removal service. 415.335.7970  
[www.junk-king.com/locations/sanfrancisco](http://www.junk-king.com/locations/sanfrancisco)
- **Rob's Junk Removal and Haulin** Will haul almost anything at an affordable rate. 650.260.3568  
[sfjunkremovalandhauling.com](http://sfjunkremovalandhauling.com)
- **EcoHaul** Specializing in reuse, recycle and donation, Ecohaul will sort and remove your materials. 1.800.ECOHAUL  
[www.ecohaul.com](http://www.ecohaul.com)

Tara is a freelance writer and marketing professional who specializes in commercial real estate ventures. She blogs at [TheDailyWrites.com](http://TheDailyWrites.com) about the things she is passionate about, the hairy underbelly of life, motherhood, and entrepreneurship.



# Ask the Expert

## Less Is More

By Laura Harrison



### Why do so many of us struggle with clutter and disorganization?

The simple answer is most of us have too much stuff that we are trying to address with products found in aisles of the Container Store. The more complicated but real reasons tend to be much deeper.

Often when we are holding onto emotional stuff, we also hang onto physical stuff. It's one of the reasons that purging feels so good: we are literally and figuratively letting go. Clearing out the clutter is a combination of asking the easy questions—"Have I worn this in the last year?"—and the more difficult ones—"Why can't I let go of this suit I know I will never wear again?" Think hard about how your life might improve with less stuff. When we get honest about our stuff, real progress begins.

### How can those of us with lots of decluttering/organizing projects stay motivated to finish the job?

A common misconception is that once a closet/bedroom/kitchen is organized, the work is done. Overhauling a space is a great way to start, but unless combined with behavioral shifts, the organization may not last and can lead to further frustration.

**Think hard about how your life might improve with less stuff. When we get honest about our stuff, real progress begins.**

To stay motivated, you need to recognize that even the tiniest organizational and behavioral changes make an impact. Yes, putting a recycle bin next to the mail area and using it will make a difference. Donating the mystery cords and chargers, and containing the frequently used ones will help too. If you don't have hours to dedicate to getting organized right now, start with small changes. And while they may be small, these changes should be celebrated.

Keep in mind that habits take time to change, so if it doesn't happen today, tomorrow is another chance to try again. Be kind to yourself, mamas.

### Any tips for keeping horizontal surfaces (e.g., dining and coffee tables, kitchen counters) clear?

When it comes to horizontal surfaces, the area I see my clients struggle with most is the kitchen counter. It becomes the catch-all

for art projects, random socks, gift cards, diaper bags, and everything in between. In order to calm the chaos:

1. Determine what it is that is cluttering the surface. Make a list; a simple list.
2. Ask yourself: Do I really need these things? Are they adding to our life, or to our mess? Donate or recycle what you can.
3. For remaining items, create or find a home. For example, you can:
  - Hang hooks at kid-friendly heights for backpacks and adult height for diaper bags.
  - Label a container for missing socks or loose change.
  - Tape an envelope inside a cabinet for gift cards.
  - Create an inbox system—one tray/bin/box for each person in the house. Empty when full.
  - Create a bin for spare parts/tools leftover from the so-effective-but-painful-to-put-together IKEA Kallax system you just built.
4. Start changing your habits. Resolve to:
  - Put things in their designated spots whenever you enter your home.
  - Keep a rule that before going to bed, the counter must be clean.
  - Celebrate the change.

### What can readers do right now to start getting organized?

1. Get real about your stuff. For immediate satisfaction, place a designated donation bag in each room and start filling it now. Start thinking about a life with less stuff and what that would mean for you. Would you have more time with your family? Would keeping up with the house be less stressful because the clutter had been cleared? Would you feel lighter, physically lighter, with new open spaces?
2. Decide what is most important to you and set goals accordingly. Want a more peaceful bedroom? Start by making your bed each day. This early morning organizing sets the tone for the rest of your day. Desire an encouraging environment for your kid's creativity? Use painter's tape to hang art on bedroom walls. Create an art-supply zone using clear bins.

And, if you can't figure out where to start, then it is time to call in the professionals. Let us help you make the mental shifts while we assess the best use of your home for your family. And ultimately...we can help make it happen, encouraging you every step of the way. ❖

*Laura Harrison is an organizing and design consultant who helps families make the most of their home—sorting, purging, repurposing, and rearranging until form and function coexist. She truly believes less mess allows more time for life and finds joy in helping others on their own organizing journeys. For more information, go to [www.lessmessmorelife.com](http://www.lessmessmorelife.com).*

# GGMG: Helping Others, Treating Yourself

## Community Support

### Give thanks and make it a happier holiday for a family in need!

From November 15 to January 2, GGMG will be supporting **Homeless Prenatal Program (HPP)** families during the holiday season. The holidays are a special time of year but can be difficult for families experiencing challenging circumstances. Did you know \$25 can provide a warm holiday meal for a HPP family of four? What a wonderful way to make a difference!



HPP is a truly remarkable organization that helps more than 3,500 local, low income, and homeless families every year. GGMG and HPP have formed a special relationship of moms helping moms. Please join us in continuing this remarkable tradition and consider making a donation to the HPP holiday drive. Any amount is greatly appreciated and will be put to good use supporting HPP families.

Donations can be made via the following link: <https://hpp.secure.force.com/donate>. Please choose "ggmg gives" in the drop down menu when making a donation, and check the forums for additional ways you can support this drive.

## Contest

### Party at Peek-a-Boo Factory

Peek-a-Boo Factory is offering one lucky winner a Basic Party Package, valued at up to \$300.

#### The Basic Party Package includes:

- 10 children (\$10 for each additional child)
- Maximum 25 children and 30 adults
- A free return day pass for the birthday child
- Time in the public play space before and after the party
- 45 minutes in the private party room
- Free printable invitations
- A party host to help set up and clean up
- Tablecloths, plates, napkins, and utensils (we do not offer cups)

You are welcome to bring your own purchased or catered food, or to order from one of our many preferred restaurants. All parents and guardians must sign a waiver for their children. **A \$150 deposit is required to book your time slot. This will be refunded the day of the party.**

TO ENTER THE CONTEST, SEND AN EMAIL WITH "PEEK-A-BOO" IN THE SUBJECT LINE TO [CONTEST@GGMG.ORG](mailto:CONTEST@GGMG.ORG) BY JANUARY 31.



# DADLANDS

## Planning for a “Good Food Week”

by Aaron Hardisty

If we plan our weekends correctly, my wife and I avoid the question, “What are we doing for dinner tonight?” during the week. Our goal is to have what my wife calls a “good food week.” Roughly speaking, this means that we cooked and ate most of our meals at home and brought lunch during the week. What was once a fun couples activity is now an opportunity to show our children that we value taking the time to buy, cook, and eat good food. Cooking at home is less expensive, healthier, and a great way to bond with children. A number of studies have shown that the ritual of family meals has long-term benefits for child development. Since my wife and I both work, we want to spend time after work with the kids rather than rushing frantically to prepare a meal before a toddler meltdown. Having food prepared ahead of time might not prevent a meltdown but at least it makes it more tolerable, since we’ll have food on the table while it is happening. Having a good food week means prioritizing to make shopping a family event, cook food ahead of time, bring lunch to work, and make meals requiring minimal prep and cleaning time.

San Francisco enables our goal with a weekend farmers market in almost every corner of the city. We try to incorporate our weekend family activities with a little open-air shopping. We’ve ended a hike at Land’s End with a trip to the Clement Street Farmers Market. Before a trip to the pumpkin patch in the Inner Sunset, we visited the Inner Sunset Farmers Market. Most farmers markets are held in open spaces where kids can interact with vendors and partake in occasional kid-friendly activities, whether on foot, in a stroller, or in a carrier. Since many vendors offer samples, it’s a great low-risk, “try before you buy” situation for developing palates. Walking the market with a curious toddler is also great for having discussions about the food, people, and activities in the market itself. Making the market a positive experience for kids goes a long way in getting an important errand done. When our son sees our shopping bags, he happily says, “We are going to the farmers market.” I can’t imagine anyone—toddler or adult—getting that excited over a trip to Safeway.

Unfortunately, the produce doesn’t cook itself once we get it home. More than one bunch of vegetables that looked amazing



on Saturday has died a slow death in our refrigerator over the course of a week. To avoid this untimely demise, we do as much cooking as time allows on Sunday. If it’s not too hot to turn on the oven and stove, I’ll prep and cook as many vegetables as possible. Usually, I have no particular recipe in mind and just cook a vegetable so it will taste good on its own, figuring out how to complete the meal later. Since the farmers market determines most of our vegetables these days, we’re eating a lot of cauliflower, squash, and sweet potatoes. Soaking dry beans on Sunday is a good way to prep for a slow cooker of beans on Monday. It’s a pretty simple shopping list: buy what is available and looks good. Sunday will usually be the most labor-intensive meal of the week, but I’ll cook it while preparing components of other meals. I might roast a chicken for that meal and have leftovers, defrost some salmon, or prepare some other protein to cook later in the week. I’m a big fan of using a pressure cooker to speed up cooking time for tougher and less expensive cuts of meat, like lamb shanks. If all goes as planned, I will spend about 1 hour shopping, 3 hours cooking, and 30 minutes cleaning up—and most of the cooking for the week is done.

We don’t have a good food week every week, but we make it a priority to eat as a family no matter where we get our food. If work or personal commitments prevent us from completing the full shop, cook, clean cycle, I feel no shame in getting a little outside

*Making the market a positive experience for kids goes a long way in getting an important errand done.*

help. Maybe on Wednesday, I’ll pick up a burrito or order Sprig on the way home. By Thursday, we might be out of prepared food, or I’ll be bored of eating the same three things for lunch so I’ll go out with colleagues. And by Friday, there is a high probability that the whole family will enjoy a relatively leisurely first seating meal at a restaurant within walking distance. As long as my wife and I have a quick answer to the question, “What are we doing for dinner tonight?” it’s a small victory for the family, and one of the best ways we simplify our week. ♦

*Aaron Hardisty is a member of the board of directors of 18 Reasons, a San Francisco-based nonprofit that helps people learn how to buy, cook, and eat good food every day.*

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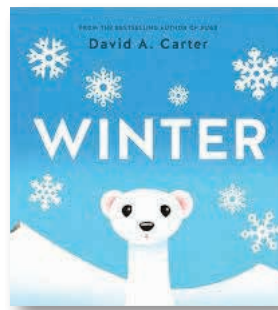
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Winter is coming, and with shorter days come colder temperatures, hot cocoa, and family traditions. It's also a time for giving, being together, and helping others. To celebrate the holidays, kids will enjoy reading these books with a warm drink while waiting for the magic of winter to unfold. Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, and the winter solstice all feature wonderful family traditions that children love to discover and make their own. Roasting chestnuts on an open fire, anyone?



## Winter: A Pop-Up Book

By David Carter

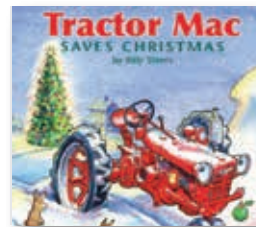
As the sun sets behind a snowy hill and the moon rises, young kids discover the secret life of a snowy countryside landscape through charming pop-ups and fun facts. With just a few words per page, the book shows the various animals and plants that are part of winter in North America. Kids are even invited to look for answers to questions in the

illustrations. As you discover the winter world, check out the night sky constellations that appear on the horizon one by one. Who's looking forward to winter nights now? *Ages: 0 to 3 years*

## Tractor Mac Saves Christmas

By Billy Steers

At Stony Meadows Farm, snow is falling in big flakes and quickly getting very deep. On the day of the storm, the townspeople are set to celebrate the annual tree lighting with carols, hot cocoa, and gingerbread treats. Before long, Tractor Mac realizes that the roads will get snowed in and that the tree lighting may be cancelled. The popular Tractor Mac series describes a lovely rural New England community and includes tractor and truck diagrams as opening and closing pages. Highly recommended for lovers of things on wheels. *Ages: 2 to 5 years*



## Snow

By Sam Usher

When a young boy wakes up to a snowy day, his first thought is to get dressed and hurry to the park. However, before he can go out he has to wait for his granddad, who takes ages. When at last they meet the boy's friend at the park, they have the best snow day ever. This book celebrates the special bond between young children and their grandparents, as well as the benefits of waiting for something special.

*Ages: 3 to 7 years*



## Dear Yeti

By James Kwan

"Dear Yeti, We're searching for you. Sincerely, Hikers." Thus starts the winter quest of two children in a stylized wilderness. Unfazed by the setbacks that they encounter, the pair walks deeper and deeper into unknown territory, communicating with the (shy) Yeti via bird-delivered notes. With undertones of *Where the Wild Things Are*, this book emphasizes the powers of adventure and friendship, even in times of trouble. Young explorers at heart will relate to this pair of fearless children looking for a new friend. *Ages: 3 to 7 years*

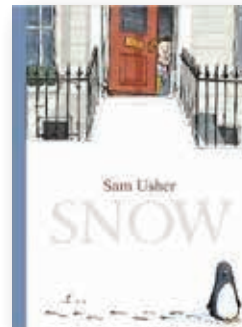


## The Best Parts of Christmas

By Bethanie Deeney Murguia

Fritz knows that the best parts of Christmas happen around the tree—decorating, sharing treats, and opening presents. In this cute story, the young boy helps decorate the tree and snuggles up with a book to spend quiet time beside it. Unlike other Christmas books, the story continues after the holiday, when the tree must leave. Reluctant to say goodbye, Fritz finds a way to let the spirit of the Christmas tree live on.

*Ages: 3 to 6 years*



## Me and My Dragon: Christmas Spirit

By David Biedrzycki

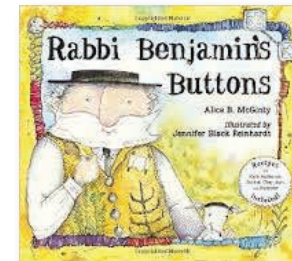
How do you explain to your pet dragon what Christmas is all about? Assuming (wrongly) that his dragon knows nothing about the Christmas spirit, a young boy tells him about giving, helping others, and spreading joy. All the while, the dragon shows that he has more than an inkling what it is all about. Are the presents we give the most important thing of all, and how do you earn money to buy them? This great book shows children the real meaning of Christmas in an off-kilter way through this unique friendship.

*Ages: 4 to 8 years*

## Oskar and the Eight Blessings

By Richard Simon and Tanya Simon, illustrated by Mark Siegel

This heartwarming Hanukkah tale starts in 1938 when Oskar, a young refugee escaping Nazi Europe, arrives by ship in New York. With nothing other than a photo of his aunt Esther, Oskar must walk 100 blocks to find her on the seventh night of Hanukkah. His walk through the city becomes a voyage of discovery as well as small miracles, as people he meets along the way help him overcome obstacles. The holiday season has never seemed so uplifting and welcoming. *Ages: 4 to 8 years*



## Rabbi Benjamin's Buttons

By Alice B. McGinty, illustrated by Jennifer Black Reinhardt

Members of Rabbi Benjamin's congregation appreciate him so much that they give him a special holiday vest with four silver buttons. All through the seasons, Rabbi Benjamin celebrates Rosh Hashanah, Sukkot, Hanukkah, and Passover. Each event takes place with joyous meals and children's activities. Using soft ink and watercolor

illustrations, the book conveys universal messages of love and sharing. Your children will particularly enjoy the four festive recipes in the back pages. *Ages: 4 to 8 years*

## Cold as Ice (Whatever After #6)

By Sarah Mlynowski

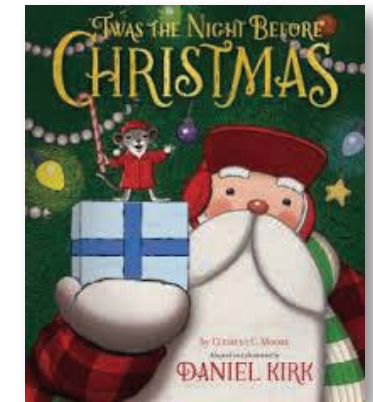
Weaving Hans Christian Andersen's fairytale "The Snow Queen" into a modern-day tween girl drama, *Cold As Ice* is tons of fun. Told in the narrator's snarky tone, these wintry adventures start when two best friends have a falling out, go through a magic mirror by accident, and end up in a dangerous fairytale world. Throwing in references to *Frozen*, Disney's version of Andersen's story, this book teaches about friendship and loyalty. *Ages: 7 to 10 years*



## The Mutts Winter Diaries

By Patrick McDonnell

Perfect for a quick read on the go, this collection of winter-themed *Mutts* comic strips stars the usual Mooch, Earl, and their friends. The 176-page book will appeal to both adults who miss the comic section of their newspaper, and to youngsters who love short formats. Expect witty scenes reminiscent of the classic *Peanuts* thoughtfulness. *Ages: 8 to 12 years*

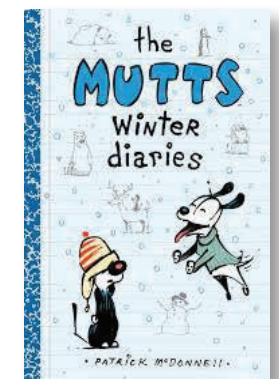


## 'Twas the Night Before Christmas

By Clement C. Moore, adapted and illustrated by Daniel Kirk

What if the classic Christmas poem was told from the point of view of the mouse, the very same mouse that's mentioned in the first four lines of the poem? When an adorable mouse family goes to sleep on a snowy night, they are nestled snugly in bed when a clatter wakes up the mouse dad. The arrival of St. Nick (dressed as a lumberjack) ensues and the poem unfolds, but not quite as you know it. This is a great story for children who believe in magic, and especially those who love *Library Mouse*.

*Ages: 4 to 8 years*





# From Womb to World

## Easy Breezy Baby Registry

By Shannon Brennan

It's inevitable. It's instinctual. It's unavoidable. No matter how laissez-faire the woman in question, at some point in her pregnancy someone is going to ask her for a link to her registry, and she's going to panic about what she does and doesn't need for her baby. Once she panics, nearly every resource she consults is going to turn up a multi-page document of baby must-haves that will leave her feeling utterly unprepared.

The fact is, creating a baby registry is like making a birthday wish list for a total stranger. And not just any stranger—a very opinionated, very needy stranger who will be sure to let you know everything you've gotten wrong.

But that's okay. Deep breath. We're going to simplify.

### Think small

Before you worry too much about what you need and trying to account for everything that you think you should have before baby arrives, know that that is actually a very short list. Babies don't really need much on day one. You can get by with a few changes of clothes, some burp rags, a place to sleep (don't kid yourself that it will be in a crib), diapers, wipes, a few blankets, a car seat...and you. Mostly, they just need you.

A small selection of things to test out works better than an enormous stockpile of stuff that you might end up not liking, so don't be afraid to be underprepared in the beginning. Sure, there are some things that all babies need, but for the vast majority of newborns (and new parents), there are unpredictable quirks and preferences that can't be guessed. For that reason, the ability to be flexible and learn as you go is infinitely more important than being buttoned up and prepared ahead of time, which is where so many baby registries get it wrong. The intent seems to be: Buy everything you could possibly ever need OR ELSE! While the reality is that you're never going to be able to guess it all, and you can probably take some of the pressure off yourself by acknowledging that in advance.

### Register big. Register fun.

When thinking about your registry, think about the things that people like to gift. If you stay too practical, people will turn away from your registry and just buy what they want to anyway. No matter how much you may end up needing them, no one but your mother wants to show up at your shower with nursing pads and lanolin.

When thinking about what to include on your registry, think about the big ticket items that you must have (a car seat and stroller system, a crib, a high chair) and then focus on the fun stuff you want. Toys, cute outfits that are a little pricier than what

you'd usually shell out for, and books that you would like on your baby shelf are all things that your family and friends want to buy for you. So make it easier for them by leveraging your registry.

### Store-agnostic registries

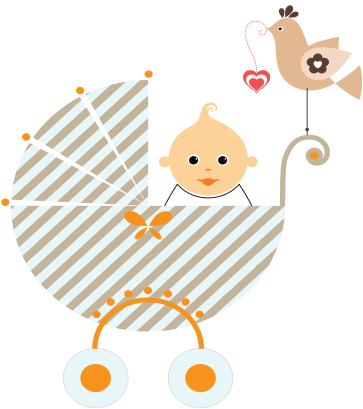
When it is time to register, consider using some of the store-agnostic registries (like BabyList or MyRegistry.com) that allow you to select items from any online store to include. This allows you to get a bit more eclectic in your selections than if you stayed with a single-store registry and gives you an opportunity to support smaller and niche online businesses.

Another option, if you want to go really simple, is to ask folks to use a service like Deposit a Gift or Smart Pig that enable gifters to give money that you can use to make purchases along the way. A cash gift could be a particularly compelling option if you are in a very small space and can't store items you won't need for another six months or a year. It also allows you to get to know your baby before you invest in too much in stuff. The reality is that different

*A small selection of things to test out works better than an enormous stockpile of stuff that you might end up not liking, so don't be afraid to be underprepared in the beginning.*

babies do better with one brand of diapers over another. Same with bottle preferences. And some babies are long and narrow and others have rolls on top of rolls on top of rolls, which will impact how all of their clothes do and don't fit. There are so many variations on "newborn" and "infant" that it's hard to predict what your baby prefers until he shows up and you get to know him. Buying as you go can ensure that you're selecting the stuff that YOUR baby wants and needs. ❖

*Shannon Brennan lives in Noe Valley with her husband, 1-year-old son, and French bulldog, Fergus. She sometimes wishes she would have registered for wine instead of onesies.*



## New Arrivals



Michelle S. **Baby Solomon**  
Gabriella C. **Baby Salvatore Forrest**  
Shelley W. **Baby Liam Wu**  
Kelly H. **Baby Elan Akira**  
Patty G. **Baby Liam**  
Jennifer H. **Baby Antonia Marie**

Emilie L. **Baby Caroline Mae**  
Amy E. **Baby Aurora Mae**  
Sarah R. **Baby William Wagner**  
Christine S. **Baby Caleb Andrew**  
Lisa L. **Baby Wesley Thomas**  
Vivian G. **Baby Tara**

Aparna K. **Baby Kinara**  
Jaime H. **Baby Lila Marie**  
Katrina C. **Baby Arielle Colette**  
Grace W. **Baby Zalia Wu**  
Elle B. **Baby Katherine Anne**  
Lisa G. **Baby Emily Alexandra**



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# Marie Kondo *and the Modern Mom*

By Sallie Hess

Photographs by Carmen Dunham Photography

When I was 36 weeks pregnant with our second child, we decided to move out of our condo and buy a house. Given the timing and the market in San Francisco, we went through a complicated set of moves involving staging, storage, and a temporary rental. We should have purged before we started, but while packing, I cried hot, fat, hormonal tears over a pair of wool clogs I had gotten for Christmas my freshman year of college. Sometimes, you just have to pay for storage.

A year later and in our new house, we had three basement leaks, all from different sources and in different areas. We had to gut the basement and replace the floor, which meant that we had to move things into storage again. When the construction was over, I thought, “That’s it. No more paying to move junk around. Let’s start off easy, with the baby gear.” It was not so easy.

## Enter Marie Kondo

I decided to try the method detailed in Marie Kondo’s bestseller *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*. The genius of her system is that you go category by category. This way, you can see, for example, that you have seven flashlights, five of which don’t work. A lot has been made of the “sparks joy” element of her method, but for a lover of things such as myself, that’s a pretty low bar. Rather, the directive to unearth and touch every little thing in your house forces you to evaluate

rather than simply accept its presence. No tablecloth, no screwdriver, no magazine gets a pass. You start with your clothes, then your books, then papers, then miscellany or komono, and finally mementos.

Starting with your clothes is a smart move because, as Kondo says, clothes seem less precious. You may have made mistakes buying them, and can easily say, “The collar on that blouse never lays right,” or, “I haven’t worn pantyhose since 2002.” At the end of my

quick face mask on a weekend morning. Now, magazines and catalogs are quickly digested and easily discarded into a recycling bag upstairs. Reading material, conquered.

Mountains of black turtlenecks and gray sweaters went to the chopping block, while white pants, fluttery fruity-colored tops, and gold sandals were sparking a lot of joy. I realized that I have missed outdoor living in the summer, and started reassessing my travel (and life) plans.

*The directive to unearth and touch every little thing in your house forces you to evaluate rather than simply accept its presence.*

clothing purge, I had eight bags of clothes to donate, two bags of actual trash, two bags of hangers for the dry cleaner, and two bags for consignment.

I still failed parts of the assignment. I am optimistic enough to keep a few favorites that are a little too tight. Having deleted so much, though, I have space for that little group of hopeful pants, separated from the wearables. The high-end clothes not taken by consignment are in a shopping bag in my closet. After seeing one embarrassingly expensive couture dress sell on ThredUp for only \$80, I thought I might resurrect the clothing swap a friend used to host.

And thus the task list of dealing with the cast-offs started to mount.

## Early positive results

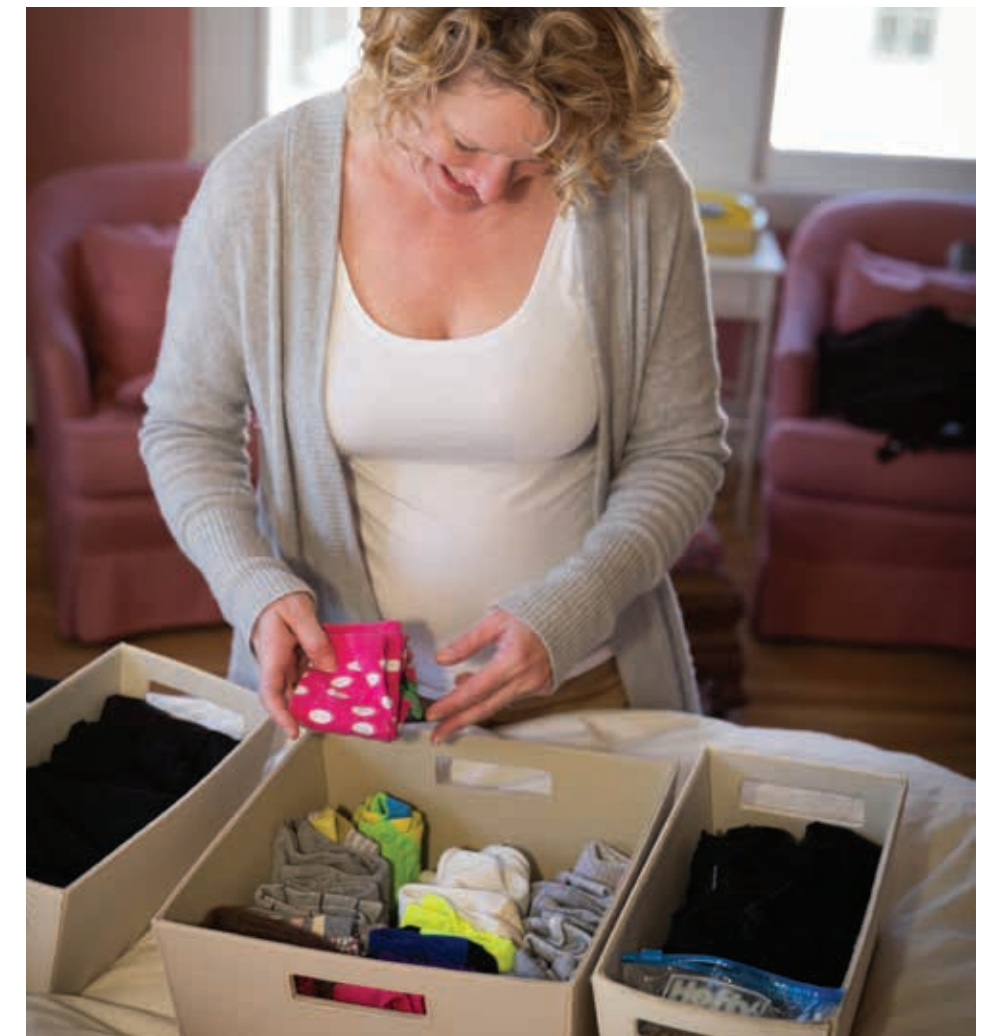
I recommend reading Kondo’s book all the way through before you start your purge. At the end, she explains why she believes tidying is life-changing: what you decide to keep says a lot about the life you want to live. Just on the other side of the clothes and books, I could see that benefit. Examining my reading material made me face what I was actually doing these days. Thoughtful, chunky books gathered dust on my nightstand; years of *Architectural Digest* gathered dust in my office; several copies of the same catalogs gathered dust in our sun room’s magazine basket. I moved the books to the magazine basket since I’m more likely to read in long stretches during naptime, and the most recent magazines and catalogs went upstairs to be flipped through before bed or during a

There have been other little victories, like finding mismatched paper products, extra corkscrews and cheese knives, and a soft-sided cooler, which led me to put together a little picnic kit for the car.

## Challenges and adjustments

I encountered reversals and pauses along the way, too, though. During the magazine portion of the challenge, I hit a very time-consuming snag. Recipes to be pulled out? Of course! Let’s make color-coded file folders! And I’m an interior designer. How could I dump those shelter magazines without pulling images? More folders! It took me almost a week to get through the years of magazines. I should have tossed them all wholesale.

And the papers? Fixing a jammed shredder does not spark joy. Take my advice and drop off your shredding at a big-box office store. They will shred it for a nominal per-pound fee while you watch. Also note that in Japan, the tax structure is much different. Here, you need to keep a lot more papers than Kondo advises. I learned that the hard way during tax season. Maybe you don’t need to keep everything, but there





are reasons to keep many of the documents that Kondo pooh-poohs.

I am enthusiastically going through the komono portion of this project, but here, too, are challenges. How do you get rid of your grandmother's wedding china? Or yours, which you like just as much? And certainly you need to keep the everyday stuff, which can actually go in the dishwasher, so my three sets of dishes remain.

As I look through our tools, I know that we will not need much more than a hammer, needle-nosed pliers, a drill, and a few screwdrivers. My wildest imagination interferes, though. There is the possibility that some day, The Big One will level the neighborhood and my three saws will prove very useful. And actually, I use a saw once a year to cut our Christmas tree in half to comply with Recology's directive.

Yes, you should follow the instructions and take a good hard look at everything, but if you hesitate and are not in terrible straits for space, give yourself a little time. It's okay to keep all of your scented candles if you can abide by your vow to start using them. I have often ended up donating something I initially planned to keep; for me, it helps to let go of things slowly to avoid regretting a hasty decision.

The initial burning desire to keep going has ebbed as I fall prey to decision fatigue and my practical side. I know that I am supposed to look at something and get rid of it simply if it doesn't spark joy, but I can't afford to purge everything in this emotional way. We have several mismatched martini glasses—two



## Here are some great ways to get rid of odds and ends that don't seem to have an obvious home:

- Who among us doesn't have a bunch of various-sized **bras**? **The Bra Recyclers** will distribute them to women in shelters all over the country. [www.brarecycling.com](http://www.brarecycling.com)
- Have some old **eyeglasses** you don't need? **The Lions Club International** distributes them to people in need. See their website for a mailing address, or drop them in the box at the Bon Air Shopping Center in Kentfield if you happen to be up that way.
- **Bayview Mission** and **La Casa de las Madres** will take **toiletries**, travel sized or regular.
- **Old towels** are useful to dog shelters. **The SPCA** and **Pets Unlimited** often have bins in their lobbies to collect them.
- **Sports Basement** has bins set up near their exit door for old **tennis balls**, **tennis shoes**, and **corks**. **Nike** also has a **shoe** recycling program.
- While there are many good uses for old **pantyhose**, you might consider sending them to **NoNonsense**, which operates a recycling program.
- And those old **broken crayons** your kids keep taking the paper off of? Send them to one of two organizations, **The Crayon Initiative** or **Crazy Crayons**.

here, three there—so do I get rid of the non-matching ones and buy a whole set of new ones?

It is true that I was keeping some of my books because I couldn't face tossing the ones my late father had in college, or because they were serious books with serious prizes to recommend them. Kondo writes from a Japanese perspective here, though: she describes having 50 books as being excessive. Even after donating 10 boxes of books, I have hundreds. Kondo would say I am delusional. So what? I have the space to be a little delusional, and I will read them someday.

And speaking of delusional, let's get back to the baby stuff for a minute. The outgrown clothes of my children have the contours of ghost babies in their folds. Picking up soft pima cotton jammies in size 0-3 months conjures the warm, squirmly infant bodies of my now-preschoolers. It's almost enough to overcome my vow to stay at two kids. I have placed the rest of the baby things firmly at the end of the purge—in the mementos section.

### Getting it out of your house

Once you have decided to get rid of things, it can be hard to find places for them. Kondo talks about how many trash bags her clients throw out. That is not really practical in San Francisco. Even if you wanted to throw everything away, good luck getting Recology to take it.

It takes a lot of work figuring out the best ways to offload unwanted stuff. I have had bags and boxes on deck for various end users constantly for about six months. Who loaded



those 10 boxes of books into my car to be donated? I did. The effort required has contributed to the slow pace of my purging.

Do you sell? Where? eBay is still one of the best places if you can be organized enough to make sure the shipping labels end up on the right packages. Shipping can be complicated for a novice, so try to reserve eBay for things that will fit in a USPS flat-rate box and pack them carefully. If you want to burn a single day rather than engage in a lot of email

back-and-forth to Craigslist buyers who never show up, you can have a yard sale.

You can donate, of course, but what where becomes complicated. Smaller organizations are great, but they can be picky about what they take. It seems that nobody takes used socks or baby bottles. Some organizations,

like the Salvation Army and Goodwill, will sell your unusable clothes by the pound to be shredded and turned into insulation, which is at least not the landfill.

Someday, I hope to move down to the level of a woman I saw at Goodwill the other day, dropping off two books, no receipt.

### Manage your expectations

After purging my closet, I had "nothing to wear," so I had to go shopping. As I purged my

bookshelves of books that would never be read, I felt the urge to go find more books that I would read and started haunting the Friends of the Public Library used bookstore.

Understand, then, that your ultimate success may be dictated by your personality. Marie Kondo is not a recovering hoarder or even a collector; she has been trying to "tidy" everything around her since she was a child. I have not. I was the kid whose parents would intermittently come in my room with a trash bag threatening to throw everything away. Every month, I come home from the flea market with a charming lamp that needs rewiring or a gem of a painting that needs reframing.

The most important takeaway from Kondo's book is that every item in your home should be valuable to you. The ultimate lesson for me, though, is that stuff is hard to get rid of, so you had better think twice before bringing it into your home in the first place. ❖

*Sallie Hess lives with her husband and two children in Balboa Terrace, where she is using her background in agriculture to convert her landscaping to edibles.*



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# An Over-Scheduled Life

By Jennifer Hofmann  
Photographs by Carolyn Soling Photography

**H**elicopter. Free Range. Over-scheduled. Enriched. Ask any parent and she will tell you she wants what is best for her kids. The best preschool, the best language program, the best nanny, the best before- and after-care.

Ask any parent what she wishes she had more of and her answer is almost always time. Time alone with her partner, time with her kids, time to finish errands, costumes, and lunches. Time to sleep. Time to fit it all in.

This is the struggle—how, as a parent, do you give your child what you feel is the best with the time that you have, and fit in all your other obligations?

We don't want to helicopter parent; we want to advocate. We don't want to overschedule our child but we want to offer them every opportunity to find enrichment. We know schedules are important, as Lori W., mother of two daughters in elementary school puts it, "Having a schedule is important; otherwise I would have to spend time every day prioritizing things instead of accomplishing things." But how do we, as parents, find that balance between too much and not enough? And how do we know when we're doing it right?



As a parent of a 4-year-old daughter and 9-month-old twin boys, I am far from knowing the answer. So I did what many parents do when facing these questions—I reached out to my village and asked the GGMG community how they find their balance: working mothers, single parents, stay-at-home moms. While the specifics varied, the core approach was the same for every family—start slow, work deliberately, and be diligent.

## Find your center

All families have one obligation that takes up a majority of their time. For most families, it's school. Drop-off, pick-up, homework—school is at the center of most families' weekdays and weekends. So start at the center and build your schedule around that one main element. Enrichment activities should not interfere with school hours or the ability to complete schoolwork, and homework time should be built into the evening hours. And remember that for most children, the school day is a busy, exciting, and extremely varied experience.

Kristine W., a working mother of two boys explains, "I'm very happy with the public school my older child attends because the

regular curriculum includes music, dance, theater, and art every week. He gets a lot of enrichment during the day. I also like the aftercare clubs because they provide a different experience (he is currently in chess and a nature program) without lengthening his day. I don't think they need additional enrichment as much as they need down time."

Lori W. approaches it this way: "I try to be mindful of what each child needs and can handle in terms of enrichment activities. I grew up taking after school Chinese classes in elementary school. Now my girls are doing the same, but I try to make sure they get some

then, there are schedules and routines. Overwhelmingly, the advice from the GGMG community was to schedule free time. The same way we schedule playdates and birthday parties, we should schedule downtime.

"Put it in the schedule," says Karen L., a single mother to three teenage children. "Right there between swimming and dinner, it says 'Nothing.' Really, nothing. An entire hour to do whatever you want. It used to be reading books and crafts, now it's mostly watching videos on the iPad together and talking to each other. We plan who's here for dinner and who

*Having a schedule is important; otherwise I would have to spend time every day prioritizing things instead of accomplishing things*

other physical activity, and free time to play and explore their individual interests and build their sibling relationship."

## Schedule unscheduled time

Fitting in unscheduled time can be difficult. Often, parents and children are scheduled and moving right up until bedtime, and even

is going where after dinner. After that, everyone is in motion, but for that hour we are together. It's my time with my kids."

Kristine W. takes a similar approach. She explains, "I try to keep Saturday mornings unscheduled so they can play at home as long as they want without having to get dressed and go somewhere."



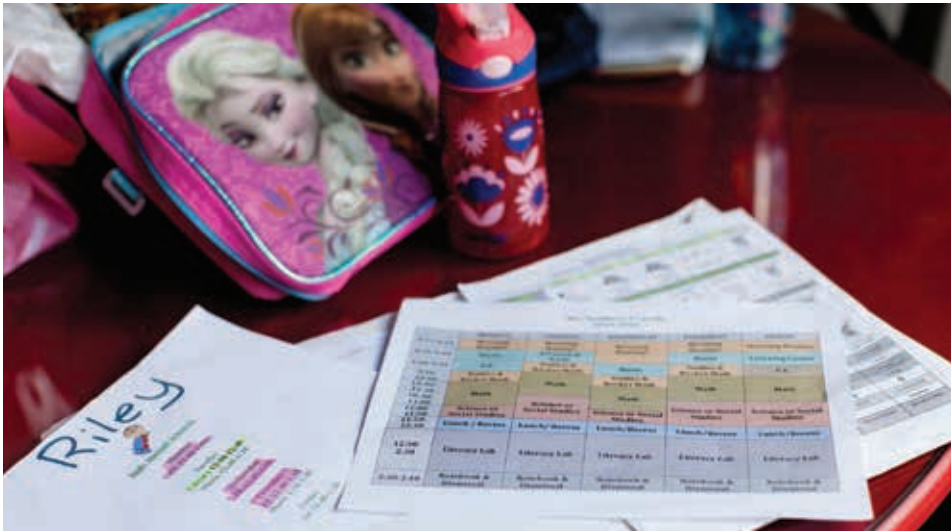
Readjust and adapt

Consistency is key when raising young children, and schedules and routines are a part of that consistency. Yet, often parents get so locked into a schedule that any deviation or unexpected event creates chaos. Ting F., a stay-at-home mom to 2-year-old twin daughters says, “Give yourself permission to change when things aren’t working. You might feel obligated to stick to your schedule to be consistent but if it’s not working you’ll do more harm than good.” Sometimes this means pulling out of a class or activity that costs money, or letting go of a family obligation.

For many parents, including Amy M., a working mother of two boys attending preschool, it is a process of learning as you go: “So far, we’re winging it. Whatever feels right. Can’t be too far away, too late, too demanding on parents. As kids get older, (we) will have to be more deliberate about limits. We did a tee-ball season at a field that was across town 1 day per week after a full pre-K school day. It became clear very quickly that we would not sign up for that location again, but we did finish out the season.”

Be able to say no

Setting limits, particularly in the Bay Area, where there is such a remarkable array of family-friendly events in which to take part, can be difficult. Add to that birthday parties, school events, family obligations, and your unscheduled family time, and very quickly calendars fill up weeks or months in advance. But, it’s hard to say no. Knowing when and how to say no can be tricky. Lizbeth A. shares, “It took me a long time to say no to things. I felt like everyone was keeping a tally of which parties we went to, which ones we didn’t, and how much time we spent there. I put way too



much time stressing over RSVP’ing no to something for my kids. Then I realized—I didn’t keep tabs on who went where so why would someone do that to me? And why do I care? It became a lot easier to say no, with regrets, and just go to the zoo with my kids for the afternoon instead of rushing to another birthday party.”

Kristine W. agrees: “I say no to many, many things. I say no to birthday parties on busy weekends. I say no to mid-week dinners with friends that will interfere with bedtime. You know yourself and your children, and what will work best for your family. It’s great to say yes to activities that make you happy and feel like a part of a community. And it’s also great to say no to create more down time at home with your kids. I never feel like my kids are missing out on anything.”

Lianne J. shared a similar sentiment: “You can’t please everyone. You need to be able to do what is best for your family and it may feel challenging at that moment but it usually passes. Eventually everything works itself out. Don’t stress too much about the things that you push aside.”

Know yourself and know your community—a heartfelt and honest “no, thank you” is always more respected than a half-hearted or insincere yes. A perfect example, when asked to comment for this article, Holly C. responded, “I’m totally too busy. I’m sorry. I don’t have any free time longer than a few minutes between now and then. Good luck though.” Fair and to the point.

Remember what is really important

At the center of all these decisions and schedules and activities is your child, so keep him involved when scheduling his time. This may mean giving your preschooler a choice between two perfectly acceptable activities, or allowing an older child to opt out of an after school program or sport when the season is over. Be clear in your motivation: Is this an activity or event that will help your child grow? What is it that you hope your child will learn from this activity and how can you share this with him?

As Patricia A., mom to two elementary schoolchildren explains, “I want my kids to be happy and make friends and learn how to be strong citizens. I want them to treat others how they want to be treated. My job as a parent is to provide my child with opportunities to learn all these things. There are so many ways to learn these things. It’s my job to give them the opportunity to see and experience and the time to think and learn from what they do.”

Providing the opportunity to experience life and the time to truly internalize the experience—maybe that is the true balance we each need to find in our busy, scheduled lives. ♦

*Jennifer Hofmann is a high school English teacher who lives in the Sunset with her husband, 4.5-year-old daughter and twin 9-month-old boys. While no expert at scheduling, she has managed to get the twins to eat and nap at the same time each day and get her daughter to school on time most days. She did neglect to schedule time to write this article, however, and turned her copy in late, the irony of which is not lost on her.*

FURTHER READING

*How to Raise an Adult: Break Free of the Overparenting Trap and Prepare Your Kid for Success* by Julie Lythcott-Haims

*The Over-Scheduled Child: Avoiding the Hyper-Parenting Trap* by Alvin Rosenfeld and Nicole Wise

*Pressured Parents, Stressed-out Kids: Dealing With Competition While Raising a Successful Child* by Wendy S. Grolnick and Kathy Seal

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# Simply Connected

*As we enter the hectic holiday season, take a moment to explore how your relationships nurture you, and where you may benefit from some change.*

By Juli Fraga  
Photographs by Whitney Cooley Photography

We're all familiar with the concept of tidying up our lives and simplifying our spaces, but what about our relationships? Is there a recipe to simplify human interaction with others?

As the year comes to an end, I take stock of my life, which means closely examining how I'm nurturing my relationships. There are always friends who I barely saw during the year, and I feel guilty about being an "absentee" friend.

While friendships shouldn't feel stressful, sometimes they do. I often feel like I am in a game of tug-of-war, as I try to balance my family life and self-care along with my friendships. Last year, when my daughter began kindergarten, we were fortunate to connect with a new group of classmates and friends. But when the social calendar began bursting at the seams, our emotional wherewithal for socializing decreased. As an introverted family, we need down time to rejuvenate.

One of the hardest parts of managing friendships/relationships is setting boundaries. Our desire to socialize with friends does not always align with how much free time we actually have. Sometimes we need to give ourselves permission to say "no" and prioritize self-care over taking care of others. Once we do, we may feel calmer and more relaxed. Present.

I've come up with the three "R's" as a way to check-in with myself when navigating my relationships.

## Recognize

Our energy focuses outward as we pack lunches, keep track of our children's schedules, and manage our households. Social invitations may come by way of text message or Facebook.

Friends text and ask if I'm free for dinner, coffee, or a quick chat. I used to respond immediately and my answer was almost always "yes," but this was without pausing to ask myself if I actually had time for these plans. Now, I remind myself to recognize my feelings, as well as my family's needs, before I make social plans. Sure, a late afternoon picnic in the Presidio might sound lovely, but

if it's sandwiched between a soccer game and a birthday party, it's apt to feel draining rather than fulfilling.

As I get older, I try to cultivate relationships that foster authenticity, which means I'm less likely to spend time with people where small talk is required to move the conversation along. I enjoy spending time with more intimate friends, but I know people who desire the opposite. They feel parenting and daily life is so intense that they hope for some light-hearted conversation and fun with their friends.

Friendships are a two-way street. When we cultivate relationships it's important to ask ourselves what we hope to give as well as receive from our interactions with others. By establishing clear boundaries around our

these friendships are the ones that slip away because we become distracted with school obligations and activities.

Since becoming a mother, I've also realized friendships may be temporary. Relationships forged during new motherhood often center around our children's lives. As their worlds expand and change, the commonalities of these friendships may disband. I used to take such exits personally, but have come to appreciate them for what they are.

## Regroup

We all need time to regroup, which means cultivating space to nurture our emotional selves and put some TLC back into our own buckets. This might mean heading out for a daily walk or starting a meditation/

*Our desire to socialize with friends does not always align with how much free time we actually have.*

hopes, requirements, and expectations of others, we pave the way for working out relationship hiccups. When misunderstandings and conflict do arise, we may spin our wheels ruminating over the "perfect" way to express our hurt and angry feelings. Being direct by using "I" statements and discussing concerns before they fester is one of the best ways to prevent resentment from taking the joy out of relationships.

## Reorganize

Flexibility is key when it comes to simplifying friendships. With smaller slices of free time, I try to organize social gatherings with groups of friends who know each other. If I am trying to see several moms from my daughter's school, I'll organize a group lunch so we can all connect. If I know that a friend enjoys the same exercise class that I do, I'll try to meet her there regularly so I can work out and socialize at the same time.

Once a child starts school, much of a parent's social life may revolve around the child's friendships and school activities. For friends who are outside of this community, try setting a regular lunch or brunch date. I find

mindfulness practice to help manage some of the daily stressors of parenting.

Too often we neglect our own self-care because we feel there isn't time for the things we used to enjoy. Yet, regrouping also means redefining and rediscovering how we can care for ourselves so that we can care for our families and children, too. The following are a couple of ideas to get started:

- Offer to trade/swap babysitting duties with a neighbor or a mom friend so each can have an hour for exercise, reading, or taking care of an errand.
- Attend one of the GGMG-hosted "Just for Mom" events, a wonderful opportunity for mothers in the Bay Area to connect and relax and meet other women, too.

## Navigating in-law/family relationships

Relationships with extended family and in-laws may cause stress and worry. It's hard to iron out the wrinkles with family members, especially when they are well intentioned, but their intentions are different from our own.

The holiday season is one in which family differences may come into play. Everyone has



their own version of an “Aunt Gertrude,” that one family member who rubs us the wrong way because of their challenging personality.

Licensed marriage and family therapist Elizabeth Sullivan offers parents these tips and tricks for managing in-law and extended-family conflicts and differences.

“When ironing out family differences, one of the most important aspects is looking at the reality of the situation,” says Elizabeth. Words and actions may feel hurtful and require us to step in and kindly use our words to express our feelings. Elizabeth says, “Depending upon the cultural make-up of your family, it’s often a good idea to speak up before feelings build up and are expressed in a way you might regret.”

Elizabeth offers these tips for working through in-law and family conflicts:

Acceptance

Acknowledging that some family members are difficult and harder to connect with may help things go better. Elizabeth says when we stop fighting against our expectations that

people will change, we adjust our expectations, which creates space to accept the person and the situation for what it truly is.

Our own expectations are often a symptom of our own sadness that things have not gone the way we hoped. It’s easy to direct this energy outward by trying to improve and even control another’s pesky behavior.

For example, perhaps there’s a family member who’s particularly critical, “Wow, you’re using those napkins again for Thanksgiving—aren’t they the ones you used last year?” It’s easy to believe that if only we “perfect” that person, we will prevent these criticisms from puncturing our sense of well-being. Yet, from a more realistic place, your goals can be things like “survive the visit with some dignity and grace,” rather than “I’m going to get this person to change their behavior once and for all!”

And finally, think about aspects of the person that you enjoy and activities that go well. A little foresight and planning can engender feelings of action instead of passivity.

The gift of laughter

While we don’t want to dismiss our disappointments with laughter, it might help to imagine that one day, someone may experience *us* as the difficult in-law or family member. Doing so offers perspective, and we might find some humor in imagining that our future daughter- or son-in-law may not appreciate our political views or childrearing practices.

Elizabeth says that “personal dilemmas are as old as humans,” and reminds family members that they are not alone.

Relationships are worth working on. While differences may abound, they are more manageable when we accept what we cannot change, and when we can laugh off the small stuff. ♦

*Juli Fraga is a psychologist and writer. She lives in San Francisco with her husband, daughter and two cats. Her essays have appeared in The New York Times, The Washington Post and Brain Child.*



GGMG ♥ PKC

BENEFITS FOR JULY 1, 2015 - JUNE 30, 2016

GOLDEN GATE MOTHERS GROUP + PEEKADOODLE ARE PROUD TO ANNOUNCE THE RENEWAL OF A PARTNERSHIP THAT BENEFITS GGMG MOMS AND THEIR CHILDREN!



COMPLIMENTARY 2 MONTH MEMBERSHIP

GGMG members can simply contact Peekadoodle or walk in to activate their free 2-month introductory membership to the Kidsclub. Membership affords your family unlimited access to the playspace, wifi, café, and lounge spaces Monday-Friday from 9am-6pm, and Saturdays from 9am-4pm. This is available for first-time members only, and you must complete a membership application and agreement at Peekadoodle.



GGMG WEEKLY MEETUP

GGMG members receive complimentary access to Peekadoodle Kidsclub every Thursday from 2-4pm. Simply show proof of your GGMG membership at the front desk when you check in. Advance reservations are not required.



8 WEEKS OF ANY 45-60 MINUTE ENRICHMENT CLASS

To be used in conjunction with the complimentary membership, GGMG members are entitled to 8 weeks of any 45-60 minute enrichment class. Our quarters are generally 11 weeks in length, and you will have the option to extend your participation in the class if you decide to maintain your membership.



GGMG WORKING PARENT MEETUP

GGMG members receive complimentary access to Peekadoodle Kidsclub the first Saturday of each month from 9-11am. Simply show proof of your GGMG membership at the front desk when you check in. Advance reservations are not required.



WAIVED INITIATION

If you do not terminate your membership at the end of the first 2 introductory months, we will waive the initiation fee—a \$200 value!



DISCOUNTED PARTY PACKAGE

GGMG members will receive \$100 off any exclusive party package with proof of GGMG membership. Contact us to reserve your date!



DISCOUNTED INITIATION

If you decide not to join after the first two months, but would like to join at a later date, GGMG members will receive \$100 off your initiation fee when you decide to re-join.



Peekadoodle kidsclub

Simply come into Peekadoodle to complete a brief membership application. Show your GGMG card or the most recent copy of your GGMG newsletter (addressed to you, of course!) to waive your first 2 months of membership and class fees. If you remain a member after your first 2 months, GGMG will also take care of your initiation fee—a \$200 value! If you would like to end your membership after the 2 free months, you can submit a termination form at the front desk. Space in classes is limited and schedules can be found at [www.peekadoodle.com](http://www.peekadoodle.com). Early registration encouraged. Some restrictions may apply.

2 free months and 8 consecutive weeks of one class for first time members only. Initiation fee waived only if third month is consecutive to second month. Space is limited. Early registration is encouraged.



# Services in a Snap

In all the hustle and bustle of our day-to-day lives, many of us ask ourselves, “How can I make life easier and get things done more efficiently?” The reality of getting all of it done can be daunting! Luckily, there are many services out there that make achieving these goals much more obtainable.

By Whitney Cooley

## Greenhearts Family Farm CSA

[www.greenheartsfamilyfarm.com](http://www.greenheartsfamilyfarm.com)

The Greenhearts Family Farm is “San Francisco’s only farmer-owned local farm providing a ‘veggie box’ home delivery service.” Greenhearts Family Farm offers a weekly box filled with a collection of produce from its Half Moon Bay farms and fields. “It’s like getting the best of the farmer’s market delivered right to your door.” The service is flexible and consumers can adjust the frequency of deliveries.

**Cost:** Subscriptions range from \$36 to \$44 (weekly) and \$73 to \$89 (monthly). One-time seasonal packages may be purchased starting at \$595.



## Reserve In-Store

Many brick and mortar stores that have online shopping are now offering online customers the option to reserve items in one of their nearby stores. Customers can hold their items via the retailer’s website and pick them up later that day. Retailers such as Gap, Inc. and Target offer this feature to their time-crunched customers.

**Cost:** Free

## Postmates

[www.postmates.com](http://www.postmates.com)



Postmates is a service that specializes in delivering goods of all kinds to you within an hour from places in close range to your zip code. Have a hankering for your favorite local haunt, but can’t get out of the house? No problem—just have a local carrier from Postmates pick it up for you! Order through the Postmates site and it will be on its way.

**Cost:** Delivery fees start at \$5, plus a 9% service fee.

## Shuddle

[www.shuddle.us](http://www.shuddle.us)



Shuddle is a Bay Area car service that specializes in safely transporting kids, ages 8+. Shuddle also provides a carpool service, which is a private trip with families you already know (i.e., school carpool, sporting carpools, etc.).

**Cost:** \$12-\$15; memberships are available.

## Kitchit

[www.kitchit.com](http://www.kitchit.com)



Kitchit is a San Francisco-based company that offers two dinner options for anyone who is looking for a way to simplify their evenings.

### Book a Chef

The first option is an in-home personal chef who comes to your home and cooks up a delicious meal, with the freshest of ingredients, for you and your guests. In addition to their high-end culinary skills, the chefs do all of the prep and clean-up. Sign me up! All you need to do is book your dinner for 2-12 people via the Kitchit website and select one of their menus offered that month.

**Cost:** \$39 per person (2 to 12 persons)



### Book a Kit

The second service that Kitchit provides is for the person who loves to cook, but doesn’t have time to do all of the shopping and prep work. A kit filled with the prepped food and instructions will be delivered to your home. Kits stay fresh for up to 2 days.

**Cost:** \$15 per person (2 to 12 persons)

## StitchFix

[www.stitchfix.com](http://www.stitchfix.com)



StitchFix is an online personal clothing and accessory shopping experience for the busy woman. The service is tailored to each shopper based on personal taste, budget, and lifestyle. Shopping through StitchFix is as easy as 1, 2, 3.

**Cost:** \$20 styling fee, which will be applied as a credit toward anything kept from the shipment. If you purchase all 5 items, you will receive 25% off your entire purchase. No membership fee or monthly subscriptions are required, but you can choose to receive shipments regularly.




Whitney Miller is a new mom and photographer, who is always looking for new shortcuts to help simplify her busy life.



**About GGMG Events:** Events listed on these pages are either exclusive to GGMG members or are offered to GGMG members at a discount. Generally, registration is required and can be completed by following the REGISTRATION instructions listed under the event details or at [www.ggmg.org/events.html](http://www.ggmg.org/events.html) (BigTent). Rules and policies vary. GGMG members and their families only.

GGMG volunteers may occasionally take photos during our events for use in this publication or on the GGMG/BigTent website. Please understand these photographs may include images of all attendees (including children).

Vendors who would like to partner with GGMG, please contact the appropriate committee. Email addresses are listed on page 3.

 Indicates events appropriate for infants (0 to 12 months). Many also welcome toddlers and preschoolers (see registration rules for more details).

KIDS ACTIVITIES

Interested in volunteering with the Kids’ Activities Committee? We are currently recruiting for a Committee position and a Co-Chair position. Contact us at [activities@ggmg.org](mailto:activities@ggmg.org).

JAMaROO Storytime Music at Pacific Heights Health Club

This class combines the joys of reading and music.

**DATE:** Tuesday, December 1  
**TIME:** 10 to 10:30 a.m.  
**PLACE:** 2356 Pine St.  
**COST:** \$10

**REGISTRATION:** *Ages 2 to 3 years. Introductory rate. Register at [www.jamarookids.com](http://www.jamarookids.com) or call 415.614.2001.*



PlayLab at seesaw

Led by play therapists and child specialists, this class offers parent support and play time for young children.

**DATES:** Wednesdays, December 2 OR January 6 OR January 20  
**TIME:** 10 to 11 a.m.  
**PLACE:** 600 Octavia St., Suite A  
**COST:** FREE

**REGISTRATION:** *Ages 18 to 36 months. Introductory rate. Register at [www.seesawsf.com](http://www.seesawsf.com) or email [info@seesawsf.com](mailto:info@seesawsf.com). Each date is a stand-alone session.*



Yoga, Baby + Massage at It’s Yoga Kids

Enrich your baby’s development with songs, yoga, and infant massage.

**DATE:** Friday, December 4  
**TIME:** 11 to 11:50 a.m.  
**PLACE:** 569 Ruger St.  
**COST:** \$15 cash; \$18 credit card

**REGISTRATION:** *Ages newborn to pre-crawlers. Introductory rate. Register by emailing [info@itsyogakids.com](mailto:info@itsyogakids.com).*

Le You You Mandarin Music at seesaw

Children will sing songs in Mandarin and enjoy music and movement.

**DATE:** Tuesday, December 8  
**TIME:** 11 a.m. to noon  
**PLACE:** 600 Octavia St., Suite A  
**COST:** FREE

**REGISTRATION:** *Ages 6 months to 3 years. Introductory rate. Register at [www.seesawsf.com](http://www.seesawsf.com) or email [info@seesawsf.com](mailto:info@seesawsf.com).*



Parent Tot Music & Movement at JAMaROO Kids

Parents and children will dance and sing to music from around the world and play with a variety of simple instruments.

**DATE & TIME:** Thursday, December 10 at 4 to 4:30 p.m. or January 7 11:30 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.

**TIME:** PLACE: 388 4th Ave.  
**COST:** \$10

**REGISTRATION:** *Ages infant to 2 years. Introductory rate. Register at [www.jamarookids.com](http://www.jamarookids.com) or call 415.614.2001. Each date is a stand-alone session.*



It’s Yoga, Movers at It’s Yoga Kids

Developmentally appropriate yoga movement with song and play for young movers with adult participation.

**DATE:** Friday, December 11  
**TIME:** 9:30 to 10 a.m. or noon to 12:30 p.m.  
**PLACE:** 569 Ruger St.  
**COST:** \$15 cash; \$18 credit card

**REGISTRATION:** *Ages crawlers to two years. Introductory rate. Register by emailing [info@itsyogakids.com](mailto:info@itsyogakids.com).*



Music Class for Infants with SF Music Together

Quality, fun, research-based, award winning Music Together classes. Jamming, dancing, singing, and community! All adult caregivers are welcome.

**DATE:** Friday, December 11  
**TIME:** 12:30 p.m.  
**PLACE:** 1350 Waller St.  
**COST:** FREE

**REGISTRATION:** *Ages newborn to 9 months. No drop-ins. Register either by going to [www.sfmusictogether.com](http://www.sfmusictogether.com) and clicking on the free trial link, or via email to [info@sfmusictogether.com](mailto:info@sfmusictogether.com) with your full name, phone number, and child’s name and date of birth.*

Tutu School

In October, Tutu School, one of our long-time partners opened a new location—**Tutu School West**, in West Portal.

They hosted special opening events for GGMG members, free of charge. Dancers ages 18 months to 4 years were transported to a magical land of movement. They then twirled away with their own tutu to take home to continue the magic.

Tutu Schools offer free trial classes to GGMG members throughout the year. Visit [www.tutuschool.com](http://www.tutuschool.com) for more information, as well as the the events calendar in BigTent for the dates of upcoming offerings.



The Nutcracker at Mercy High School Theatre

A magical, family-friendly performance of the Nutcracker performed by the San Francisco Youth Ballet.

**DATE:** Saturday, December 12  
**TIME:** 1 to 3 p.m. or 5 to 7 p.m.  
**PLACE:** 3250 19th Ave.  
**COST:** \$15

**REGISTRATION:** *Register on BigTent.*

Totshop: The Art of Gifting at Peekadoodle Kidsclub

Your child will create three unique gifts and gift wrap that will be the perfect gift. ‘Tis the season to be artsy!

**DATE:** Tuesday, December 15  
**TIME:** 11:15 a.m. to noon  
**PLACE:** 900 North Point St., Suite F100  
**COST:** FREE

**REGISTRATION:** *Ages 2 to 3 years old. Parent participation is required. Register at 415.440.7335. Space is limited.*

Christmas Art Class at JAMaROO Kids

Holiday arts and crafts for all ages.

**DATE:** Wednesday, December 16  
**TIME:** 10 to 10:45 a.m.  
**PLACE:** 388 4th Ave.  
**COST:** \$10

**REGISTRATION:** *All ages welcome. Register at [www.jamarookids.com](http://www.jamarookids.com) or call 415-614-2001.*



Music & Movement at JAMaROO Kids

Parents and children will dance and sing to music from around the world and play with a variety of simple instruments.

**DATE:** Wednesday, January 13  
**TIME:** 9:15 to 10 a.m.  
**PLACE:** 388 4th Ave.  
**COST:** \$10

**REGISTRATION:** *Ages 18 months to 2 years. Introductory rate. Register at [www.jamarookids.com](http://www.jamarookids.com) or call 415.614.2001.*

Ichi Ni San Music at seesaw

Children will sing, dance, and play a variety of musical instruments. Taught in Japanese and English.

**DATE:** Thursday, January 14  
**TIME:** 11 a.m. to noon  
**PLACE:** 600 Octavia St., Suite A  
**COST:** Free

**REGISTRATION:** *Ages 6 months to 3 years. Introductory rate. Register at [www.seesawsf.com](http://www.seesawsf.com) or email [info@seesawsf.com](mailto:info@seesawsf.com).*

Storytime Art at JAMaROO Kids

This class combines the joys of reading and art.

**DATE:** Wednesday, January 20  
**TIME:** 10:15 to 10:45 a.m.  
**PLACE:** 388 4th Ave.  
**COST:** \$10

**REGISTRATION:** *Ages 3 to 5 years. Introductory rate. Register at [www.jamarookids.com](http://www.jamarookids.com) or call 415.614.2001.*

Kidshop: Peekadoodle Bakeshop at Peekadoodle Kidsclub

Join us for some sweet fun at the Peekadoodle Bakeshop! Your little one will get his or her hands dirty whipping up a sweet treat to enjoy after class

**DATE:** Tuesday, January 26  
**TIME:** 3 to 3:45 p.m.  
**PLACE:** 900 North Point St., Suite F100  
**COST:** FREE

**REGISTRATION:** *Ages 3 to 5 years. Parent participation is not required. Register at 415.440.7335.*

JAMaROO Yoga

Children will work on strengthening their growing bodies and stretching their little muscles, while improving their balance, coordination, and concentration.

**DATE:** Wednesday, January 27  
**TIME:** 10:45 to 11:30 a.m.  
**PLACE:** 2356 Pine St.  
**COST:** \$10

**REGISTRATION:** *Ages 2 to 3 years. Introductory rate. Register at [www.jamarookids.com](http://www.jamarookids.com) or call 415.614.2001.*

JUST FOR MOMS

Mani and Pedi Pamper at Simply Unique Nails

Get spoiled, pampered, and ready for the holiday rush coming your way!

**DATE:** Thursday, December 10  
**TIME:** 7 p.m.  
**PLACE:** 734 14th St. #1  
**COST:** \$15

**REGISTRATION:** *Registration is required on BigTent*

Blow Outs, Up Dos, Makeup, and More at Tease Salon

With the holidays fast approaching, it’s time to get spoiled and pampered to get the new year started off right. There will be lots of goodies at this event, so don’t miss it. Hair, makeup, nails, oh my!

**DATE:** Monday, December 14  
**TIME:** 5 to 8 p.m.  
**PLACE:** 411 Spruce St.  
**COST:** FREE

**REGISTRATION:** *Registration is required on BigTent*



NEIGHBORHOOD MEETUPS

'Tis the season, mamas!

While we know your calendar is likely filling up fast with all manner of parties with family, friends, and general decking of the halls, don't forget to find out what is going on in your neighborhood or in a neighborhood near you. Neighborhood Meetups volunteers are busily planning fun events for the kiddos, as well as events just for moms, so you can break out those sparkles and celebrate!

Holiday fun

This year, join **Nob Hill** mamas and little ones for an early evening play date at Huntington Park, followed by the Nob Hill Association's annual tree lighting celebration. Enjoy hot chocolate, cookies, live music, and of course, the tree lighting!

If you're in the mood for a kid-free evening, join **Bernal/Glen Park** mamas, who are planning an End of the Year Dinner Party, with food prepared by Kitchit. Eat, drink, and be merry without having to clean up or referee a toddler squabble. Come celebrate the end of 2015 with your favorite moms in the neighborhood! Please note: this is a popular event with very limited availability and will fill up fast.

The ladies of the **Heights, Sunset/West Portal, Noe Valley**, and the **Marina** are also working on a fun and festive event or two, so make sure to join their subgroups so you won't miss out on the fun!

Get connected

To find out more about this year's holiday events, as well as other events and playdates hosted in your neighborhood, and to RSVP, join the neighborhood subgroup on BigTent for the neighborhood(s) you are interested in at [www.bigtent.com/group/subgroup](http://www.bigtent.com/group/subgroup).

You are not restricted to only joining one subgroup and you are not required to live in the neighborhood in order to join. If you have any questions or ideas for future meetups, or if you'd like to get involved as a neighborhood meetup volunteer, please contact the co-chairs at [sashafahimi@icloud.com](mailto:sashafahimi@icloud.com) and [andreassen.tracy@gmail.com](mailto:andreassen.tracy@gmail.com).



PARENT EDUCATION

Hiring a Nanny: Challenges and Solutions with Alyce Desrosiers at Sports Basement

Hiring a nanny is not a simple task. Alyce Desrosiers, LCSW Childcare Consultant for Families and Nannies, LLC, will teach the meaningful steps to ensure that you manage the process successfully and hire the right nanny for your children. Checklists, forms, and worksheets will be provided so you have all the tools needed to make this important decision.

**DATE:** Thursday, January 14  
**TIME:** 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.  
**PLACE:** 610 Mason St.  
**COST:** FREE

**REGISTRATION:** [admin@chirpchirp.com](mailto:admin@chirpchirp.com)

Real Estate and Schools in the East Bay and Marin County at Sports Basement

Hosted by Karyn Kambur of Coldwell Banker, Claudia Mills of McGuire Realty, and Julie Shumate of Stearns Lending, three moms and real estate professionals who will share their knowledge about choosing schools, housing prices and trends, and how buying real estate will tie into the school process. Dads are welcome to attend.

**DATE:** Wednesday, January 20  
**TIME:** 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.  
**PLACE:** 1590 Bryant St.  
**COST:** FREE

**REGISTRATION:** [shumate.julie@gmail.com](mailto:shumate.julie@gmail.com)

Real Estate and Schools in San Francisco and the Peninsula at Sports Basement

Hosted by Paul Huber of Pacific Union, Heidi Maierhofer of Keller Williams, and Julie Shumate of Stearns Lending, three parents and real estate professionals who will share their knowledge about choosing schools, housing prices and trends, and how buying real estate will tie into the school process. Dads are welcome to attend.

**DATE:** Wednesday, January 27  
**TIME:** 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.  
**PLACE:** 1590 Bryant St.  
**COST:** FREE

**REGISTRATION:** [shumate.julie@gmail.com](mailto:shumate.julie@gmail.com)

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**Happy New Year, Baby!**

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## Committee Spotlight: *Operations*

**Describe the personality of your committee.**  
Compulsively organized! We each have our own way of doing things, but we are all serious planners and like to have things done \*just so\* while staying in budget.

**Why do you do what you do?**  
We know how much work it takes to run an organization like GGMG and to offer moms the resources that GGMG offers. Helping with operations is a great way to give something back to this amazing community that serves so many moms like us!

**What has been an unexpected benefit of being involved with the Operations Committee?**  
We spend a lot of time researching venues, caterers, and other services for GGMG events, which introduces us to some pretty cool businesses that we wouldn’t have found otherwise.

**What types of activities or projects do you undertake?**  
Setting up all volunteer functions, mostly the monthly volunteer

meetings, as well as two volunteer appreciation dinners each year. We manage invitations, venue, food, beverages, and any other tactical details.

**How do you know when you are making a difference?**  
It’s rare that you notice when a function goes smoothly, so we know we’re making a difference when volunteer functions run so seamlessly that no one even notices how they were managed.

**Who are your volunteers?**  
We have two co-chairs, Andrea Semancik and Liz Nakamoto Singer. This summer, we were lucky to gain two fabulous volunteers: Sanny Kataoka and Sbeen Ajmal. Viorica Ciobanu stepped in for a few months prior to their joining for additional support.

**What’s next for the Operations team?**  
Our first monthly meeting in January 2016 and kicking off the planning for the Committee Chair dinner in May. Anyone interested in helping out can contact [operations@gmg.org](mailto:operations@gmg.org).

## Partnerships

GGMG Partnerships manages GGMG’s relationships with the organizations that provide us with our membership perks.

For **business owners** who would like to work with GGMG, information about our partnership programs—including how to enroll—is now available at [www.gmg.org/partnerprograms.html](http://www.gmg.org/partnerprograms.html)

**Partners of GGMG** offer year-round, exclusive perks to every GGMG member. Remember to claim free fitness passes at the JCCSF, free access to play spaces at Peekadoodle and Recess, and more. For details, visit: [www.gmg.org/partnerships.html](http://www.gmg.org/partnerships.html)

**Friends of GGMG** is our new, revamped discount program. It currently features a variety of traditional and new innovative businesses, from spas and kids’ clothing stores to subscription services for toys and books. For a public listing of businesses currently in the program, see [www.gmg.org/friends.html](http://www.gmg.org/friends.html). GGMG members can see details of the discounts, and directions on how to claim the discounts, in the members-only area within BigTent. Look for the “Friends of GGMG Benefits” tag in the files section.

Lastly, remember to look for promotions from **Neighbors of GGMG** in the monthly Board Bulletin email, delivered to your inbox around the 15th of every month.

We are very excited about bringing these member perks to you! Send us feedback at [partnerships@gmg.org](mailto:partnerships@gmg.org).

## GGMG Forum Etiquette

**Question:** What is the forum etiquette on GGMG forums?

**Answer:** To encourage a supportive sharing of resources in the forums, members are expected to be considerate of all members when communicating in the forums. Please make sure you can objectively answer NO to these three questions in regards to your post:

- **Is it destructive rather than constructive?**  
Any communication in the forums, even those expressing disagreement or negative experiences/opinions, must be delivered in a manner that is respectful and serves a purpose (to ask for support, answer a question, further the discussion, etc).
- **Is it malicious?**  
Regardless of intent, posts/comments that contain any mean-spirited or harmful content may be removed.
- **Is it inflammatory?**  
Regardless of intent, posts/comments that contain any hint of agitation or provocation may be removed.

If you answered **yes** to one or more, the post is **not** appropriate for the GGMG forums and should not be posted.

As always, feel free to contact [webteam@gmg.org](mailto:webteam@gmg.org) directly for help with questions about online forums or the GGMG website. GGMG Forum Guidelines can be found at [www.gmg.org/Forum\\_Etiquette.html](http://www.gmg.org/Forum_Etiquette.html).

## Member Support

### *GGMG PPD/Anxiety/Depression/Mood Disorder Support Group*

While our group started for moms with postpartum depression (PPD), we quickly realized that GGMG moms often sacrifice their own mental health while supporting their families. We now welcome moms with any mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, and PPD. The Mood Disorder Group is peer led, where we say those things we can’t say to anyone else, no judgement. It is a wonderfully freeing experience. Support and understanding abound. We meet monthly, with free childcare.

If you need help from a mental health professional, Talkline for Parents has a staffed hotline 24/7 and offers sliding scale therapy with childcare. Signs that you might need help include:

- Feeling depressed, overwhelmed, on edge, or irritable most of the time
- A sense of panic or excessive worry on most days
- Recurrent and persistent thoughts, impulses, or images that are not related to real life problems
- Compulsive behavior that functions to reduce distress (excessive hand-washing, checking, counting, repeating words silently)
- A sudden increase in energy, a persistent need to talk (fast or pressured speech), racing thoughts, or engaging excessively in

- pleasurable activities that could lead to self harm (unrestrained shopping sprees, rash business investments, sexual indiscretions, etc.)
- Losing interest in your child or wishing for your child’s demise
  - Seeing or hearing things that are not real, having delusions (an unshakable belief in something that is not true), or uncontrollable feelings of paranoia
  - Thoughts of suicide
  - Any thought, feeling, or behavior that impacts your ability to function

**Resources**

- Talkline for Parents: [www.talklineforparents.org](http://www.talklineforparents.org), 415.441.5437
- UCSF Pregnancy and Postpartum Mood Assessment Clinic: [www.tinyurl.com/njuubfp](http://www.tinyurl.com/njuubfp), 415.353.2566
- You can find GGMG member-recommended resources at: [www.gmg.org/member\\_support\\_resources/postpartum\\_depression.html](http://www.gmg.org/member_support_resources/postpartum_depression.html)
- You can join our group at: [www.bigtent.com/group/subgroup/gmg\\_ppdsupportgroup/join](http://www.bigtent.com/group/subgroup/gmg_ppdsupportgroup/join)

## Recruiting

This holiday season is all about giving—giving back to the community—and one way to do that is by volunteering with GGMG! GGMG is completely volunteer-run, so we truly rely on our wonderful volunteers to keep things operating smoothly. But being a volunteer is great for you too—it is a fun way to meet other moms and a great resume builder. Interested? Send an email to [volunteer@gmg.org](mailto:volunteer@gmg.org) for more information.

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## I ♥ Mom

### Simplifying Through Technology Discretion

By Lynn Perkins

When I was about 7 years old, my mother brought home a telephone answering machine, our family's first. My friend Nikki and I watched her fumble to create the outgoing message. We figured we could do much better, so we worked up a song for the recording. It went like this: "You've reached the McPhees and we're not home, but we'll call you back on this nifty new phone. Just leave your name, and your number too, and we'll get right back to you!"

The technology had an immediate impact on our lives. We would come home and find a message about a rescheduled soccer game, or a heads up from my dad that he was going to be late for dinner. It was incredibly helpful at the time, managing the ever-evolving logistics of our family's busy life. And looking back, it didn't disrupt what we were doing or take our attention away from each other the way technology can interrupt us today.

I remember that song that I made up thirty years ago, but I can't tell you what I ate for breakfast today. Why? I'm too busy juggling family, work, friends, and if I'm lucky, a spare moment to call my own. So I'm doing what my own mom did: I'm embracing the available technology to simplify my life and carve out more quality time for my family and myself. Here are a few of my favorite tips and hacks to keep technology working for me, but not distracting me.

#### The virtual wishlist

The holidays are here and if your kids are like mine, their wishlist is reaching an all-time nagging high. "Mom, I want this...oh no, this one! I mean this one!" Take advantage of your phone's camera and offer to take a photo, so your kids can decide which toy they really want later, not while you are trying to escape Target with just the one thing you came to buy. With a snap, you'll be back on track to your next destination.

#### Talk it out

To make sure my kids don't feel ignored while I'm being productive on my phone, I like to narrate what I'm doing. Instead of asking them to "wait a minute," I'll tell them that I'm checking to see if their game location has changed, or that I'm ordering dinner and will ask what they want. Narrating my actions on the phone helps my kids understand that I'm diverting my attention from them to coordinate family logistics, not to play Monkey LunchBox or to check Facebook.

#### Go old school

I'm not the only mom who occasionally drops everything to find a buzzing phone. While it often can't be avoided, sometimes it can. For instance, I restrict myself from checking my phone from the time I get home from work until my kids are tucked into bed. Believe it or not, we still have an old school land line at home.

Few know the number, but it allows family members to reach me

while my cell phone is hiding. I refuse to succumb to my cell phone when my attention really should be elsewhere—like when my son is up to bat or his brother is telling me about his day—and, of course, during time designated as "family time."

#### Take a shortcut

Like many parents, I adopt technology to save time and buy a few minutes to spend elsewhere—doing what I'd rather be doing, like reading to my kids or squeezing in some exercise. For instance, I use Instacart ([www.instacart.com](http://www.instacart.com)) to avoid grocery stops on my way

home from work. I can come home to a healthy dinner on the table thanks to Sprig ([www.sprig.com](http://www.sprig.com)). I use Diapers.com for obvious reasons; and my own app, UrbanSitter ([www.urbansitter.com](http://www.urbansitter.com)), to find a babysitter to take care of my kids when our nanny calls in sick or when my husband scores us a table at a no-kids kind of restaurant.

With three kids and a growing business, I need all the help technology can offer. I admit that it's not always easy to follow my own rules for managing it. With the holidays bombarding us with obligations and extra to-dos, I plan to aim high—reaching for a hand when technology can give it, like buying presents online versus waiting in long lines, while also making sure I'm living in

*I'm embracing the available technology to simplify my life and carve out more quality time for my family and myself.*

the moment. It's inevitable that our kids will grow up with similar demands and even more helpful, yet potentially distracting technology. All we can do is show them how to use it to make the most of their time and hope that they also see how rewarding it can be to put technology down. ♦

Lynn Perkins is CEO and co-founder of UrbanSitter, a service that helps parents find the sitters most trusted by their community. Lynn enjoys exploring San Francisco with her husband and three young sons.







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