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magazine

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR: **Shifting Gears**

By Sonya Luecke-Abrams



Sonya is a Cole Valley mom to three adolescents and a pair of spunky pets. She prefers four wheels to two.

I was never meant to own a stationary bike. The very idea is absurd. Spinning makes my knees emit a crunching sound. As a hiker and nature lover, I find the indoor, stationary component of exercise bikes frustrating. And I have yet to meet a bicycle seat that doesn't produce enormous wedgies. Despite all this, I found myself, a few months into the Covid pandemic, hovering over the purchase button on Peloton's website.

I was caught up in the early Covid self-improvement era. You remember—all your friends suddenly became sourdough experts or launched mindfulness practices. Back in 2020, we grabbed on to whatever we could to assert our own agency in a world that seemed increasingly out of our control. My deep-rooted cynicism was temporarily suppressed in the face of this pervasive earnestness. Sure, the future might feel bleak and murky, my children were failing at homeschool, my freelance work had evaporated, I was lonely and anxious, but the Peloton would renew my optimism and help carry me through. All with a toned butt. Right?

Wrong. As deeply as I longed to be one of those people who begins the day with an invigorating ride, sharing laughs with a tight tribe of Peloton friends, celebrating 100th rides and following celebrity trainers, I found myself grumbling every time I climbed on. My workouts became shorter and less frequent. I began to regard the machine as an unwelcome visitor in the corner of my bedroom, silently judging me

when I flopped onto the bed instead of strapping on my shoes. I dealt with this judgment by throwing clothes over the bike. There! Now it couldn't see me.

Eventually I conceded that my cycling experiment had failed. I gave the bike to my kids' nanny and returned to hiking, a fitness routine that wasn't as social, trendy, or glamorous as spinning, but was much more true to who I was, not who I wanted to be. It was an expensive lesson to learn, but my experiment as a Peloton owner helped me get to know myself better and figure out the limits of my adaptability.

Our authors in this issue ruminate on the parts of life in which we sometimes find ourselves stuck. In an article from 2017, Neha Mandal Masson identifies ways in which moms face enormous challenges in pursuing career growth opportunities and shares tips on how to achieve a better work-life balance. We also offer Jessica Williams' 2022 article on returning to school as a mother, a step that feels out of reach

“Back in 2020, we grabbed on to whatever we could to assert our own agency in a world that seemed increasingly out of our control.”

to many but can be crucial for self-growth and career advancement. And in the wake of November's tumultuous election, H.B. Terrell taps into a pervasive feeling of frustration in her examination into why parental stress is skyrocketing and how we can begin to reset ourselves and reframe our outlooks.

The New Year offers an opportunity to get unstuck from the forces in our heads, hearts, and lives that can sometimes hold us back. At *GGMG Magazine*, we hope that we play a small part in arming you with the tools and resources to help you get through the hard parts and guide you on the journey of parenthood.

LETTER FROM THE BOARD: **Getting on the Train**

By Connie Lin



Connie explored the Dolomites in Italy with her husband and two kids this summer.

This month marks nearly three months since my kids started learning a new commute to school. After more than 25 years being in three buildings in the center of the city near Hayes Valley, their school moved to the west side of San Francisco into a newly renovated campus. This is the first time that all 500+ students are at the same site, and we've enjoyed celebrating so many more firsts with our school community ever since.

This also means that our morning commute on Muni has now reversed direction, and even though it's not that far away from our home, getting the kids to school takes about the same amount of time on public transit as it used to, since we no longer get to zip under Twin Peaks in the Muni tunnel at 50 mph. My children love getting to meet up with school friends to travel together on Muni as well as watch how older middle and high school students navigate to their schools on their own, sans parents.

But, not all of our friends made the move with us to the new campus. We were sad to see them go, yet it's true that our new school location has enticed other students to join our school anew. It's hard to accept change—whether it's a new job, a new commute, or just how our kids no longer like their once favorite foods. While there is some wisdom in looking before you leap, being open to change and trying out new

things with a positive attitude can bring better things into your life, even beyond what you could have imagined.

As you begin mapping out the new year, I hope you're able to get yourself on the train too. We won't be able to control where we go when we're not the driver, and change is constant. I have a feeling that our ability to be flexible and adapt with the times is going to be tested thoroughly in the next few years.

Don't forget to leverage our own GGMG community and forums to seek out connections and support each other. Perhaps there's a new group of friends who live in your neighborhood who have been waiting to meet someone just like you.

“[B]eing open to change and trying out new things with a positive attitude can bring better things into your life.”

If you'd like to help to organize events or volunteer with GGMG more generally, we would love to have you. GGMG is a volunteer organization for moms, run by moms, and we are always looking for members who would like to help. We have many different roles—including board directors, committee chairs, and volunteers—across communications, marketing, and recruiting and beyond. Please email recruiting@ggmg.org to learn more.

Happy New Year and best wishes to you and your family!

HOUSEKEEPING

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This issue made possible by: Loving the authentic Japanese cuisine and actual walkability in LA's Little Tokyo; Finding our new traditions in a new house; Touring schools again for the first time in 10 years; Rescue pup adoption chaos and love.

COVER OUTTAKES



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

Cover photo by Katya Mizrahi Photography
Cover models: Kevin (5), John (3), Irene

Family-Friendly Biking

By Colleen Morgan

The Bay Area offers abundant biking opportunities for families of all skill levels, whether it's a schoolyard to practice the basics, a casual ride to enjoy the scenery, or a mountain bike trail to boost your adrenaline. But before you and the kids hit the road (or trail), be sure to do the following:

- **Purchase a helmet.** Everyone—adults and children—should wear an appropriately fitted helmet at all times when on a bike. Learn how to fit a bike helmet from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.
- **Complete the ABC Bike Check.** Inspecting the air, brakes, and chain of each bike before each ride ensures safety.
- **Increase visibility.** Lights and reflectors are essential once the sun sets, but during the day, dress yourself and your kids in the brightest layers you have.
- **Know your transportation options.** Muni buses have two bike racks on the front and BART allows bikes on all trains except the first car or any crowded car. Muni buses and metro and light rail vehicles only allow folding bikes inside, while no bikes of any kind are allowed on cable cars.

Introducing a bike to your smallest family member or a biking newbie? Opt for an area that is flat and not crowded, such as spaces affiliated with the **SFUSD Shared Schoolyard Program (SSYP)**. With more than 30 schoolyards open 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on weekends, SSYP offers a convenient, safe space for little ones to bike. The **Great Highway bike path**, the **Marina Green/Crissy Field bike paths**, and the car-free **JFK Promenade** in Golden Gate Park also offer paved, open terrain. These locations have little congestion on weekday afternoons or early weekend mornings.

Ready for a longer ride with your child? Head north to the **Napa Valley Vine Trail** or Sonoma County's **West County Trail**, which both offer beautiful views of farms and vineyards. In the East Bay, ride along the **Bay Trail** from Berkeley to Richmond. The short route from Aquatic Park to the Richmond ferry terminal offers a stop at the free Rosie the Riveter WWII Home Front. The **Contra Costa Canal Trail**, connecting Martinez, Pleasant Hill, Walnut Creek, and Concord, is popular amongst walkers and bikers as it is long, flat, and well-marked. In San Jose, enjoy the **Guadalupe River Trail**, which starts near the Children's Discovery Museum at the south end of downtown and runs northward. And for a front-row seat to crashing waves, ride the majestic **Half Moon Bay Coastside Trail**.

For a family of mountain bikers, introduce your smallest thrill-seeker to the small pump track at **Moscone Park Playground** in the Marina. If your child is ready for bigger bumps and a skills trail, upgrade to half-acre **McLaren Bike Park**. For mountain biking throughout the Bay Area, check out bayarearides.com, which provides a huge list of trails you can filter by distance, total climb, time to complete, and rating levels of fun, scenery, aerobic difficulty, and technical difficulty. A detailed map shows where the trails are, and whether they are primarily paved, dirt, or on roads with traffic.



Colleen lives with three bike enthusiasts including an 8-year-old with a full-face mountain bike helmet. Shred.

Amusement Parks

By Christine Chen

For little kids, bigger is not always better when it comes to amusement parks, as the walking can be tiresome and energy levels may only allow for a limited number of rides. **Children's Fairyland** in Oakland is compact and a toddler's dream; it can entertain kids up to about 8 years old. Tickets are inexpensive—\$17 for kids and \$19 for adults—and frequent visitors might want to consider a membership. This charming park brings 60 children's fairy tales, stories, and nursery rhymes to life—from Jack and Jill's Hill, Alice in Wonderland's Tunnel, and Peter Rabbit's Garden to many more. Rides are geared toward toddlers and are a perfect introduction to future amusement park adventures. **TrainTown** in Sonoma is a must-visit for train lovers and a nice detour for kids during trips to Wine Country. The eponymous 20-minute train ride travels through tunnels and over bridges, with a stop at a miniature town and petting zoo as the park's highlight. The other six rides include a mini train roller coaster, carousel, ferris wheel, airplane ride, scrambler, and train tugboat. Tickets are per-ride, offering flexibility in case kids aren't ready for all the rides or if parents just want some quick entertainment for

the kids between winery visits. **Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk** has a variety of carnival rides that appeal to all ages. **Legoland** in the San Diego area is a good introduction to a themed amusement park before graduating kids to the "Happiest Place on Earth" at Disneyland. Legoland is a more manageable size and geared toward younger kids and toddlers. There are gentle rollercoasters and Lego mini-lands of San Francisco, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, and New York City that are my personal favorite. Kids eventually age out, but the appeal of Lego never grows old. Look for online coupons to ensure the best price. **Disneyland** and **Disney California Adventure Park** in Anaheim need no explanation, but for those who have not been since their childhood, newer attractions such as Cars Land in California Adventure are a must see for Lightning McQueen fans, while Galaxy's Edge draws an older crowd—especially at night—and are a must visit for any Star Wars fan. The vast size of **Six Flags** in Vallejo makes it more appropriate for older kids; note that height requirements for many of the roller coasters could result in disappointment for intrepid younger children.



Christine loves anything Disney and her kids have been there more times than necessary.



Unstructured Outdoor Play

With Corry Wagner, MOT, OTR/L



Corry is an occupational therapist and the founder/director of Friendship Explorations, an outdoor occupational and speech therapy program run through Ready Set GO Therapy in Sausalito. She has been an occupational therapist for over 15 years, blending her love of the outdoors, kids, and mental health to support kids and parents looking to learn ways to live more joyful lives. Learn more at friendshipexplorations.com.

What is our sensory system and why is it important in development?

Our sensory system provides the basis for all our movement and interactions in the world. It includes the five senses that we all learned as children—sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell—as well as proprioceptive (where our bodies are in space), vestibular (where our heads are in space), and interoceptive (the signals our body sends us, such as hunger, thirst, temperature, and the need to go to the bathroom) sense. A system that recognizes input effectively—not over- or under-responding to input—allows us to respond to the demands of our environment to learn, play, and make friends.

What are the benefits of play, especially unstructured play, for our kids?

Unrestricted and unstructured play is one of the best gifts we can give our children. Through active free play, children naturally develop strength and coordination and receive sensory input to develop their sensory systems while learning about themselves, their likes and dislikes, what makes them feel good or bad, and what actions will help them connect with others. They learn what it's like to feel a wide range of emotions—wonder, excitement, fear, frustration—and work through them. Nature provides endless opportunities for unstructured play through the benefit of “loose play” for imagination and creativity to run wild. A stick is not just a stick—it can be the roof of a fort, an art tool (either as an instrument to draw or as a piece in an art creation), something to jump over or crawl under, a fishing pole; the list goes on and on. And here the magic of the outdoors and imagination opens up.

Why is nature therapeutic?

Nature provides a perfect balance of challenge and risk, calming and exciting input and an ever-forgiving environment to find just what our body needs. Sensory input is everywhere in nature. In order to maintain balance while walking on uneven terrain, our bodies' proprioceptive and vestibular senses are challenged. These two systems are the basis for coordination of movement, balance, and maintaining a calm

and alert state of regulation. Some kids love to hang upside down, or spin, getting lots of vestibular input. Some of us don't like that so much—it might make us feel nauseous. In nature each of us can find just the right amount of input that feeds our bodies.

What are some pros and cons of modern playground equipment?

Playgrounds can be great places for kids to engage in unstructured play as well as providing input to the sensory system. Swinging and hanging upside down puts our head in different planes, which provides input to the vestibular system. Climbing a play structure, running, and jumping feed our proprioceptive system, which tells us where our body is in space. Playgrounds can be really fun, providing play opportunities in a very predictable environment. After you come down the slide a few times, you know exactly the experience that you will have the next time you go down that slide. Naturally, a child will want to explore their environment, so they might try going down on their stomachs, or walking up the slide. But after a while, there is a limit to the creativity that a non-moveable playground structure, without any loose parts, can provide. And in many instances, creativity in interacting with these structures can be seen as “not safe.”

So, tell us about safety.

When a child is learning how to walk, the best way for them to learn the limits of their balance is to fall. They don't fall far because they are so close to the ground already, and generally have lots of padding, so we don't worry too much. But as they get older, we tell them to “be careful” in a broad range of situations. What we really want to tell them is, “Look both ways to make sure no cars are coming,” or “Make sure your foot is stable when you are climbing that tree.” We are teaching them to assess their environment to make safe decisions. But oftentimes, the message kids receive is that they need to limit their play or that we don't trust them to assess their own risk. And this, unfortunately, gets in the way of kids experiencing their environment in rich and wonderful ways. So next time you want to say, “Be careful,” try instead to ask yourself if your child has the skills to climb to the top of that play structure or that tree. Then ask your child the same question. Ask them what will happen if they fall. And if the result is a bruise or a scrape, let them go for it. You will be giving them the opportunity to build self-esteem, challenge themselves at their own pace, and learn to be adaptable.

What's an easy takeaway from all this information?

Get your kids out in nature as much as you can, allow them to play freely with little instruction from you, teach them about safety, and then trust them to make their own decisions.

Keeping Us Connected: The Humble Chocolate Chip Cookie

Luke's Local is not just a grocery store—it's an anchoring place to slow down and reconnect.

Luke Oppenheim

One of the best-selling products at Luke's Local is our house-made chocolate chip cookie, sold out of a self-serve case near the register. Sure, it's a cookie and it's made fresh daily by our chef team, so it's naturally going to do well, but I believe there's more to the appeal than mere deliciousness. In today's fast-paced and technology-driven world, we all too often forget to slow down and appreciate the community-centric values practiced by prior generations. The choice of our house-made cookie, over the many other options our customers face, is a small example of the inherent draw toward the way things used to be. Somehow, although unspoken, our customers are opting for the choice that mirrors the past: the overflowing jar of cookies sitting enticingly on the counter of the local market.

At Luke's, we are all about nostalgia and learning from generations prior. We are always working to give customers an experience that goes beyond the task of grocery shopping. We see the pleasure this brings our customers as we observe them meeting up at the coffee window with their dogs and kids in tow, stopping in for First Fridays to sample new products, swinging by the meat case to get cooking tips from our butcher, or grabbing that last minute cookie on their way out.

As a parent, I am increasingly reminded just how powerful these simple pleasures are. My wife and I are both full-time working parents, making for long days that often feel—if we aren't careful—too fast to keep up with. Between diaper changing, potty training, cooking and cleaning on repeat, endless loads of laundry, dressing and undressing, and



bathing and bedtime routines, we are seldom able to simply slow down. One of our favorite routines, though, is getting out of the house early to walk to Scratch, our favorite local bakery, for cups of coffee and bagels loaded with cream cheese. We leave our phones at home, pack the kids in the double stroller, and make the trek on foot. When we arrive, the kids jump out of the stroller, run to say hi to the staff, and point at their favorite bagel. These small rituals—whether cookies or bagels—are touchstones of connection and meaning in our hectic lives.

As I dig deeper into what it means to be a neighborhood hub and to be a good parent, I come back to the small things. Our job as a grocer is not to get you in and out of our store as quickly as

possible with the best technology available. It's not to package up every piece of meat in the meat case, so we don't have to employ a butcher. Our purpose is to serve the community. In a world that seems to be prioritizing stripping away that connection, I feel even more compelled to lean into it. I want my kids to learn about the seasonality of

produce and the care that goes into producing it. While I get the ease of efficiency and convenience, I believe we'll always need those anchoring places to slow down and reconnect. Next time you're at Luke's, watch the faces light up at our cookie counter—they're the same warm smiles I remember from my own favorite neighborhood spots, and are daily reminders that the simplest rituals often hold the most meaning.

Luke's Local Grocery is celebrating its 15th year of serving the San Francisco community. Luke, along with running Luke's Local, is the father of two boys, Billy and Charlie.

“In today's fast-paced and technology-driven world, we all too often forget to slow down and appreciate the community-centric values practiced by prior generations.”

A Tale of One City and Seven Strollers

By Lynn Perkins

Originally published in the September 2016 Get Moving! issue. This piece has been edited for length.

A couple of years ago, our apartment building was going through an inspection and the inspector needed to see the furnace. As the garage door rolled open, he turned to me and said, “Let me guess, you run a daycare center!” I can see where he got that impression. My garage looked like the carousel stroller parking area. We’ve owned seven strollers over the past decade. I know—it’s crazy. But with twins first, followed by a singleton, and friends eager to pass on their gear, we became the used car lot of strollers.



Then it happened. One day at the park I spotted my stroller unicorn—a pseudo-jogger all-terrain number with a front/back seating arrangement configurable in multiple ways⁵. It had ample room, but was still compact. It was the crossover SUV of strollers. The mom

confided that she, too, was poly-strollerous and this one surpassed all. **(Tip #7: Scout for potential strollers at parks, Starbucks, and the entrance to the library around storytime. If you see one you like, ask the parent what they think about it. Parents love to share information!)**

Our strollers were starting to get dusty when I found out I was pregnant again (just one baby this time). I had visions of retiring the entire stroller collection and splurging on one of those fancy strollers that wasn’t an option with twins: the kind that look aerodynamic, has a name I can’t pronounce, and comes with special cup holders for artisanal coffee drinks. My plans were thwarted when friends told us they were expecting twins, and asked if we wanted to swap our double strollers for their single strollers.

My littlest is now 3 and the crossover is still my go-to favorite. I cruise around city streets, Crissy Field, and the zoo with it. When my friend’s daughter joins us, we pop the second seat back in. **(Tip #8: If you are looking for a stroller that can grow with you, get one with multiple seating options.)** And that stroller still looks pretty good. I see newer versions of it with pastel-colored seats and fancy patterns. Mine has black seats, but they’ve worn well. **(Tip #9: Black seats are great for hiding smashed raisins and other foods of indeterminate origin.)**

Soon the day will come when I list my gaggle of strollers on GGMG and Nextdoor. Then the next time the inspector looks at our garage, he will probably ask me if I rent kids’ scooters and bikes for a living.

¹ Baby Trend Universal Snap-N-Go Double
² BOB Revolution Pro Duallie
³ Maclaren Double
⁴ Maclaren Quest
⁵ Baby Jogger City Select Double

Editor’s note: Some strollers listed may be discontinued since the original publication date. Check each company’s website for their newest models.

Lynn Perkins is CEO of UrbanSitter. She enjoys exploring the Bay Area with her husband and three sons.

Our first stroller was the stretch limo of strollers, the double snap-and-go¹. When my twins were little, this was the most convenient stroller to use when going somewhere in the car. They stayed in their car seats, and the frame was light and fit into my trunk. **(Tip #1: Make sure you can easily collapse and lift the stroller. Also, make sure it fits in your trunk.)** Plus, the storage area underneath it fit an entire shopping trip of groceries. **(Tip #2: Get a stroller with adequate storage space.)** However, when I tried to stroll down the sidewalks of San Francisco, trouble ensued. Uneven sidewalks would cause us to come to a sudden halt, because I couldn’t see over the top. Forget about taking sharp turns, and watching out for cars pulling out of driveways was impossible. **(Tip #3: Test for maneuverability.)**

Once my twins could sit up, I rotated between a top-of-the-line double jogger², a double side-by-side umbrella stroller³, and two (single) umbrella strollers⁴. To be honest, I wasn’t doing a lot of jogging, but man, that fancy jogging stroller was light and had a hand brake, perfect for conquering San Francisco hills. Throw on some workout gear and no one would raise an eyebrow. For me, pushing two 35-pound children with gear uphill in any other stroller would have caused a heart attack. **(Tip #4: Keep local terrain in mind, and remember the stroller will get heavier as your children grow.)**

The double side-by-side umbrella stroller was a third generation hand-me-down—the wood-paneled station wagon of the bunch. This was the light, portable stroller I used traveling solo with the kids. And let’s not forget the single umbrella strollers we used to go to different places or maneuver through busy areas. **(Tip #5 & 6: Do not attempt to bring a double-wide stroller to a crowded amusement park. An inexpensive umbrella stroller is convenient and compact for travel or for when your child only needs one occasionally.)**

VOLUNTEER WITH GGMG!

Want to help some mothers out?

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

Some committees with roles available:

- Volunteer Engagement
- Careers & Entrepreneurship
- PR/Marketing
- Parent Education
- Social Events
- Magazine



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



Consider joining the GGMG Board of Directors!

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

Some of the board roles available:

- Secretary
- Director of Parent Education
- Director of Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

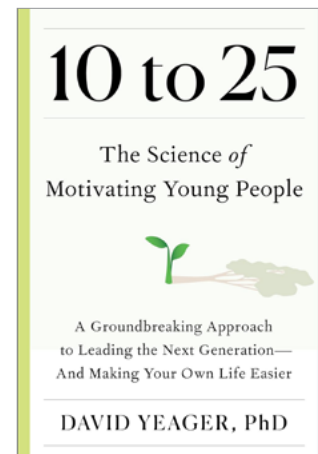
Reach out to us at recruiting@gmg.org to let us know your areas of interest, and we will help find the role that works best for you.



A New Motivation Mindset

By Gail Cornwall

One of the most frustrating ways we spin our wheels is by trying to get a kid (or direct report) to do something—something we know they can and should do—and failing to get through to them. A new book hopes to help us avoid that dance by suggesting several new ones, and by reassuring us parents that teens can be valued unconditionally and be well-supported while also being expected to tolerate feeling uncomfortable and meet high standards.



10 to 25: The Science of Motivating Young People: A Groundbreaking Approach to Leading the Next Generation—And Making Your Own Life Easier

David Yeager, a psychology professor at University of Texas at Austin, has done a lot of studies on adolescent motivation, testing out interventions in schools, and he's read a lot of papers from other fields. His big cross-disciplinary insight? Mentors in every context share a dilemma of how to criticize without crushing confidence, and there is one approach that resolves it well. Education research calls it the "warm demander." Child development research calls it the "authoritative parent." In business, it's "radical candor" and "Theory Y." All of these terms boil down to pairing high standards with a high level of support. Yeager rebrands that combo "the mentor mindset" and calls it the key "to stop clashing with the next generation and start inspiring them."

He begins with the why. Adolescents crave "belonging, connection, status, and respect"; they crave meaningful experiences, being taken seriously, and earned prestige, not in the distant future, but right now. In part due to a well-meaning but misguided attempt at empathy, we adults have come to see this tendency as a "neurobiological incompetence." As Yeager puts it, "According to this model, a young person is a flawed and deficient thinker who can't comprehend the future consequences of their actions." But research shows that adolescents are good at things like planning ahead if we "present choices to them in a way that aligns with the social rewards they already value," rather than trying to nag them into valuing what we value. (In one example, teens were taught about exploitative food marketing and encouraged to see healthy eating as a way to "stick it to the man" and assume the identity of an "independent-minded pe[r]son who fight[s] to make the world a fairer place.")

Yeager fleshes out this framework—including why it's important to reject both the "enforcer" and the "protector" mindset—in an iterative fashion over several chapters, but eventually, patient readers will find themselves with practical tools applicable to parenting. Validate, he tells us. Presume agency. Give "wise feedback," which means pairing criticism "with a clear and transparent statement" that you have faith in an adolescent's ability to meet a high standard with the right support. Yeager explains how to engage teens in "collaborative troubleshooting." Use "let's" and "we," be transparent about your benevolent intent at the get-go, and loop kids in on the constraints and pressures you're dealing with. Ask authentic, open-ended questions like, "Can you help me figure this out?" and "Do you have any ideas?" and "Can you help me understand?" Mirror back what they've said, and find other ways to communicate. "Your skills, your energy, your talents, your contributions are all essential. They matter."

Then there are the reframes. Parents, coaches, teachers, and managers can teach adolescents that "stress can be enhancing" so they're primed to rise to a challenge rather than perceive every stressor as a threat. Pair that intervention with growth mindset work, and you've got Yeager's "synergistic-mindsets intervention." Storytelling comes in handy for these. In another intervention, hearing about a professor struggling with belonging at the outset of their academic journey normalized that experience and changed students'

beliefs about the possibility of improvement, which ended up leaving them more willing to take the "microrisks" necessary to increase their own sense of belonging. In another reframe, being reminded about how they overcame a fear of heights to ride a zipline at summer camp—in order to inspire younger campers—created a narrative in each teen's mind of tenacity and purpose that did two things: It connected struggle with success and status, and it motivated them to persist despite adversity years later. Bullying can be addressed with a "growth mindset of personality." And in a saying-is-believing exercise, we can ask a teen to write an argument to convince someone else in the hopes that they convince themselves.

Like any good airport book author, Yeager wraps each of

these tips in a readable vignette, anecdote, or profile, touching on everything from community policing outreach to anti-smoking PSAs to a woman who grew up poor now killing it at NASA.

In the closing pages, Yeager turns on us, demonstrating the age universality of his methods: "[Y]ou don't have to be born with a mentor mindset to use it. ... [M]oments of struggle here or there in implementing the advice in this book will be normal; you can take steps to overcome those struggles (e.g., rereading sections and asking for do-overs), and eventually you will start to see changes in how young people interact with you, including less defensiveness and more collaboration."

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

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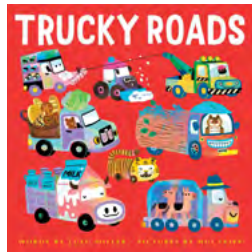
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A Different Way of Thinking

By Laure Latham

What does it mean to look at something with fresh eyes or change one’s mind about a situation? It’s not always easy to buck a trend or forge a different path, but these books will show children that some situations need a different way of thinking—or looking—at things!



Trucky Roads

Written by Lulu Miller, illustrated by Hui Skipp

Some people look at the road and only see trucks, but there are dozens of different kinds of trucks. Trucky Roads is a vehicle enthusiast who shares lots of really fun facts about trucks.

You’ve heard about tow trucks, but what about toe trucks? Wind trucks? Silly trucks? With plenty of details to spot on every page, this book will have your little one look at trucks with a new eye. **Ages: 1 to 3 years**

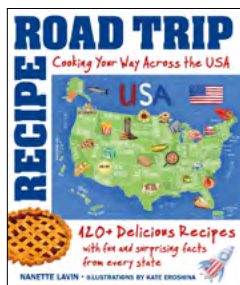


The Swallow Who Stayed

Written and illustrated by Philip Giordano, translated by Arielle Aaronson

Iris, a dark blue swallow, is a migratory bird who arrives at a forest in the

spring. When the season turns and the flock prepares to fly away, Iris asks, “What happens to the forest when we leave?” None of the birds know. No bird had ever stayed, but Iris does, striking an unlikely friendship with a squirrel. Over the winter, the pair forges strong bonds. When Iris’ flock returns and again prepares for the winter migration, Iris leaves with them. Is it the end of their friendship? Young ones will love the story of a bird who goes against the grain and charts a new path. **Ages: 3 to 7 years**



Recipe Road Trip

Written by Nanette Lavin, illustrated by Kate Eroshina

Chicago-style pizza from Illinois, chippers from North Dakota, pecan pie mini muffins from Alabama. Have you ever wanted to take a road trip around the country without leaving home? This child-friendly cookbook features recipes that reflect crops grown locally or that have historical significance, showing the vast cultural diversity of the U.S. Prefaced with regional maps and brief historical and geographical descriptions, the book invites young chefs to discover local foods with different identities in 120 recipes.

Ages: 8 to 12 years

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



The Yellow Bus

Written and illustrated by Loren Long

Loren Long shares the story of a yellow bus who spends her days driving children to school. Over time, the yellow bus gets a new driver, a new route, a new crowd. Things keep changing and the

yellow bus no longer drives around, but her passengers—humans or animals—continue to fill her with joy. In the manner of Virginia Lee Burton’s book *The Little House*, this poetic story brings a bus at the center of a human life story of change and decay.

Ages: 3 to 6 years



The Duel: A Story About Peace

Written by Inês Viegas Oliveira, translated by Rosa Churcher Clarke

In a distant and cold country, two men meet to settle a disagreement. They each take 100 steps, weapon in hand, but one of them keeps walking. As he walks, his surroundings change, becoming more vibrant, more bucolic, and the man wonders what the other

one thinks. What happens when you turn away from violence and look for a peaceful resolution? This book will have young minds think deeply about conflict resolution, illustrated with beautiful images to boot. **Ages: 4 to 8 years**

E-bike and E-scooter Safety

By Brian Feeley, MD and Nirav Pandya, MD

Many of us live in a hilly environment and gaze with considerable jealousy when an e-bike effortlessly cruises by as we try to struggle up the final hill on our 1996 Stumpjumper. It’s true, the overall number of e-bikes has dramatically increased in the last few years, as has the number of e-scooters. According to Charles DiMaggio, a researcher at NYU, “Sales of micro-mobility devices in the US increased over 300 percent between 2019 and 2022. And that doesn’t include the outsized influence of rideshare programs.” As the cost has come down, and even kids’ e-bikes and e-scooters have become available, it begs the question—are these “micro-mobility” machines actually safe?

One issue that comes up frequently is whether kids are even allowed on e-bikes. While some companies limit rentals, California law states that kids under 16 are allowed to ride an e-bike that stays under 28 miles per hour (mph). For comparison, the average commuter rides their bike at 8 to 10 mph, and a Tour de France rider averages 25 mph on flat ground. So while e-bikes are legal, the speeds that kids (or adults) reach can be harrowing and considerably faster than the average commuter.

Recent studies have brought to light that with the rise of e-powered transportation options, there has also been a considerable rise in injury rates, particularly in urban settings. In a recent series of studies published by University of California San Francisco resident Adrian Fernandez, M.D. and colleagues, they found that injury rates from e-bikes doubled in the period between 2017 and 2022, and the number of serious injuries (those requiring hospitalization) also doubled. Similarly, e-scooter injury rates have increased at high rates as well—with an increase of 45 percent over the same 5 year period. While the study didn’t examine pediatric injuries too closely, Fernandez says, “One thing we can say for sure is that e-bike injuries in kids are much more common in recent years. E-bikes are heavy and go quickly, so they can be hard to control, especially for kids.” Other studies have shown that whereas bike injuries are often scrapes and scratches, e-bike and e-scooter injuries are often more serious and include burns, more serious fractures, and collisions with both moving and stationary objects.

One thing is for sure—helmets are a priority! Says Fernandez: “I’m alarmed to see how many e-bike/e-scooter riders there are who are zooming along without helmets on. In our recent research, we looked at e-bike injuries from 2017



to 2022 and found that head injuries from e-bike injuries increased 49 fold, outpacing overall increases in e-bike injuries. During that period, the percentage of people wearing a helmet at the time of injury decreased!” As he points out, part of the issue is that e-bike rideshares don’t offer helmet rentals, so it is easy to convince yourself that riding without a helmet is

“safe enough.” DiMaggio backs this up and adds, “My best guess is that head injuries have been undercounted in studies.” Things like concussions are counted accurately, but severe traumatic brain injuries are included under the general category of “internal injury” and are likely undercounted. Therefore, the risks of riding an e-bike or e-scooter are somewhat underreported.

While many cities have made inroads on improved infrastructure, with slow streets and well-marked bike lanes, the

“[W]hile they are legal, the speeds that kids (or adults) can reach on an e-bike can be harrowing and considerably faster than the average commuter.”

overall risk of these micro-mobility devices is high and use in children in particular needs to be monitored closely. Even the use of a “slower” e-scooter or e-bike puts kids at faster speeds than they would be accustomed to with muscle-powered devices, so if you decide that it is OK for your kids to ride these, make sure they are appropriately trained and wear a helmet. For pedestrians, there is now something else to be on the lookout for, especially parents walking with kids who may not be used to the speeds that e-bikes and e-scooters can approach. DiMaggio’s recommendation? “Pay attention. Kids are natural multitaskers, but an e-bike or e-scooter is no place to be texting or checking in on TikTok. Wear a helmet. Use reflective gear, especially if you’re on the road at dusk or night. Know and follow traffic rules.”

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



What, Me Worry?

Examining the origins of parental stress may help us reframe the non-essentials.

By H.B. Terrell

If you often feel that you are running at full speed—moving kids from school to activities to play dates—at the expense of your own well-being, you’re not alone. On August 28, 2024, Dr. Vivek Murthy released the *Surgeon General’s Advisory on the Mental Health and Well-Being of Parents*, emphasizing the critical need for improved support systems for parents, caregivers, and families. His advice was based on a 2023 survey conducted by the American Psychological Association showing that roughly half of parents surveyed said that on most days they are “so stressed they cannot function.” Of the parents surveyed, 50 percent said that “when they are stressed, they can’t bring themselves to do anything.” The survey also found that parents report consistently higher levels of stress than adults without children in their households.

When stress is severe or prolonged, it can have a harmful effect on the mental health of caregivers, which in turn affects the well-being of the children they raise. Murthy says, “Caregivers today face tremendous pressures, from familiar stressors such as worrying about their kids’ health and safety and financial concerns, to new challenges like navigating technology and social media, a youth mental health crisis, and an epidemic of loneliness that has hit young people the hardest.”

Why are parents facing this crisis of stress? The long-running overparenting debate may hold some clues. The even longer-running disparity in meaningful support for children and their families may hold some more.

What happens after the womb: the realities of child care

Self-proclaimed intensive parent and data scientist Nate Hilger says, “Everything that intensive parents worry about does indeed seem to matter.” His analysis of the data says that key indicators of adult happiness correlate with childhood factors such as neighborhood safety; access to early-childhood and K to 12 schools with smaller classes and well-supported teachers; good management of kids’ health and behavioral issues; exposure to extracurricular science, sports, and arts opportunities; and availability of the academic trifecta of tutoring, test prep, and college guidance counseling.

“The simple fact is that we need greater

public investment in child development,” says Hilger. In the same way that Medicare makes health care services more accessible to seniors, he advocates for universal federally funded paid leave for parent-child bonding, early education, after-school and summer programs, tutoring, counseling, college preparation, and early-career development for children and emerging adults. Hilger says that we Americans are doing ourselves a national disservice by not investing in our children’s well-being, encouraging voters to compel policymakers to shift more of the child-development burden from overloaded parents to publicly funded programs.

He touches on the fact that there are real barriers in this country that prevent working-class and middle-class families from flourishing. These are the kinds of parental stressors that are difficult to solve because they are systemic. The question of choice arises in the gap between the wealthiest families and those in lower tax brackets. Which stressors are unyielding realities, and which are a byproduct of conspicuous consumption that we can choose to let go?

Jessica Winter unpacks these questions in “The Real and Perceived Pressures of American Parenthood,” her recent article for *The New Yorker*, drawing the contrasts between a working-class parent who “cannot choose to create more day-care slots if she lives in a child-care desert, or to bend the time-space continuum to ensure that unreliable and underfunded public transport can get her from her job to day care in time for pickup,” with a more financially secure parent whose stress arises from “intensive-parenting dogma.” The latter parent can choose to face the reality that her kids will survive if they don’t get into Stanford, can choose to enroll her kids in fewer activities, can choose to stop chauffeuring her kids to soccer. “Her social context and conditioning may make these choices seem like difficult ones,” says Winter, “but choices they remain.”

Winter asserts that by conflating the very different challenges faced by those who find themselves in opposite income brackets, “we belittle them both.” She advocates for “a coherent, constructive debate about how to help working parents—about how our politics and

institutions can foster a care economy that exists ... in virtually every other developed nation on Earth.” This conversation is only possible, she says, if we delineate a clear distinction between the calamitous inequities faced by a vast cohort of families and the “status-safeguarding decisions of a smaller but far more visible cohort.”

“[W]e Americans are doing ourselves a national disservice by not investing in our children’s well-being, encouraging voters to compel policymakers to shift more of the child-development burden from overloaded parents to publicly funded programs.”

The choices wrought by a culture of consumption: overparenting

In modern parlance, overparenting encompasses a hyper-competitive, highly supervised, closely curated regimen of childhood experiences that makes extreme demands on a parent’s time, disposable income, and mental load. Think: signing your kid up for activities that require multiple weekly practices and the purchase of equipment or supplies on top of the participation fee, arranging endless playdates watchfully attended by each child’s parents, or even sitting in on your teenager’s first job interview.

The term “helicopter parenting” was coined in 1969 by parent educator Dr. Haim Ginott. Examples he cited included telling a child how to play “correctly,” brushing a 12-year-old’s teeth, doing your teenager’s science project, or talking to a college professor about an adult child’s grade. Building upon this, David Elkind’s 1981 book *The Hurried Child: Growing Up Too Fast Too Soon* warned against overscheduling children’s free time. Fifteen years later, Sharon Hays wrote, in *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*, that intensive parenting is a symptom of what we are today commonly referring to as “late-stage capitalism”: “...the norms and practices of the capitalist marketplace find their way into areas of life where they had not been before.” She wrote that social life in the 1990s was both perceived and discussed as a means “to calculate the most efficient means of maximizing power and material advantage.”

As author of *How to Raise an Adult*, Julie

Lythcott-Haims asks in her 2016 TED Talk, “When did the central aim of parenting become preparing children for success?” She describes every act of nurturing as being weighed in the balance based on whether it will result in a life of accomplishment or failure, and shows how this paradigm “embodies the fundamental

insecurity of global capitalist culture, with its unbending fixation on prosperity and the future.”

This begs the question: When every caregiving act is conducted with the future in mind, what becomes of the present moment? Lythcott-Haims posits that “...a child who soaks in the ambient anxiety that surrounds each trivial choice or activity is an anxious child, formed in the handwringing, future-focused image of her anxious parents.”

Author Jonathan Haidt advises that the way kids learn is by repeatedly trying new things in a low-risk environment. “They’re going to fail. ... They’re going to have conflicts. ... They’re going to come up with games that are stupid or even a little bit dangerous. Let them, unless it’s a risk of death. ... Children need risks.”





This is echoed by Jessica Lahey, author of *The Gift of Failure*. “Kids are anxious, afraid, and risk-averse because parents are more focused on keeping their children safe ... than on parenting for competence,” she writes. When kids are given the opportunity to face small dangers using their own ingenuity, cooperation with peers, and grit, they can overcome fears and gain confidence.

“It is literally the case that by protecting our children from risks,” Haidt says, “we are making them more anxious and less able to handle risk as adults.” Ultimately, he says, we’re worrying about the wrong things when we try to insulate our children against future unhappiness by teaching them that publicly-acknowledged achievement—rather than curiosity and commitment—is the key to success and satisfaction.

Resetting priorities

When our babies are born, we nourish them—skin to skin, squishy kisses, gazing in their newly focusing eyes while they learn to eat with their mouths, with our hearts keeping the comforting beat in the background to make them feel secure in this jarring world outside the womb.

As they grow, we do our best to give them shelter, make sure they are warm and

fed and clean. We applaud their momentous victories—the smiles, the wobbles. Eventually their curiosity gives way to expertise—home runs, stage performances, science experiments, good grades, good deeds.

We love our children beyond comprehension, and do not want them to suffer. We want to help them make their way in the long life that lies in front of them, partly because we know how long that life will be, how much our choices can matter, and how easy it is to tip over the edge into oblivion. For those of us with a modicum of financial stability, what we tend to forget is how our own failures built resilience, fostered our skills, and helped us discover what mattered to us, in our own time.

We know that our children are their own small personalities. We also want them to be able to benefit from all that we have learned and all we can provide to help them thrive. We give them the gifts of experiences, ideas, people, and places that we think will bolster their growth. We want to give them their best chance in what we know can be a difficult world.

It’s so difficult to let them stumble, but we do just that when they learn to walk. We sit on the floor beckoning them to us—laughing, clapping when they fall, get up, and try again. We may offer a hand when

they get close enough to reach us, but we don’t prevent them from taking a little tumble on the way there.

We mean well. We want for our children what we have been told is the best. But in a country where “the best” is a mansion in Mar-a-Lago and total domination of those who disagree with us, we may need to adjust our idea of what we want for our children. What if the best thing for our children is being good enough, happy enough? In a word—content.

My grandfather had my life planned out for me. He wanted me to become a teacher and marry a good Christian boy and have many children, being settled and sorted by the time I turned 30. He wanted to see that I was “taken care of.” I can appreciate now what a good place this came from, a place of love—misguided though it was.

By the time I turned 30, I’d terminated an unwanted pregnancy, quit a job to travel around Europe for a month, was broke, living in a cheap studio apartment, and had not long before met the person I’m still married to. I was in the process of finding my way. I was okay—not perfect, but on the whole, happy. My world was unfurling. I felt mostly at peace, even with my challenges.

At 48, I look back and like my twisty life, populated by switchbacks and triumphs, discoveries and decisions, with a delightful family formed much later than Grandpa ever imagined possible. I did not go to any particularly grand schools. I have not achieved my high school dream of becoming a famous writer, or even one who makes a living by my pen. I have an interesting job that affords me the right amount of balance between the professional and personal. I love my daughter more than I knew you could love another human being. I have a happy home. There’s laughter. There’s curiosity. We make ends meet. It’s not always perfect, but it’s *enough*.

H.B. did not play sports or an instrument in high school. Her only extracurricular was the student newspaper. She was also bullied for her differences. What weighted the scale in her favor was having a close-knit family that supported her in the ways they were able to, and going far enough away to college to learn how to live without her family as her only scaffolding.

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Hitting the Books (Again)

If your inner student calls, consider a few key questions first.

by Jessica Williams

Originally published in the February/March 2022 Occupation issue.



Returning to school as an adult and full-time parent to earn a master's degree, professional degree, or certificate may seem impossible and unmanageable. *When, exactly, am I going to study?* However, to pursue a career change, hitting the books may be necessary. We talked to several women who decided to go back to school for various reasons. Ultimately, we gleaned some very important questions to ask yourself if you are considering continuing your education while raising little ones.

Is going back to school necessary?

If you are contemplating a career change, determining whether going back to school is necessary is the first question you must ask, followed by, what kind of education is needed? A master's degree? A certificate? Something else? Finally, you'll want to consider whether a remote, an in-person, or a low-residency program will best fit your lifestyle.

Many colleges and universities offer online, asynchronous

graduate programs, meaning you can work through the structured program, for the most part, at times most convenient for you, like after the kids are in bed. In fact, according to the National Center for Education Statistics, in fall 2018, about 31 percent of post-baccalaureate students (those in master's and doctoral programs, including professional doctorates such as law, medicine, and dentistry) were enrolled exclusively in distance education courses. The pandemic further accelerated this growth and mainstreamed distance education.

Other graduate programs may be low-residency, requiring you to be on campus for certain weeks or weekends each semester. Erin applied to a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in creative writing in spring 2019, when her children were 4 and 7 years old. She was admitted to several low-residency programs and ultimately chose a particular institution's program precisely because it allowed her to bring her kids, if necessary, to the residency component. "This program was super-welcoming," says Erin. "They would help me



make it work." Erin stresses the importance of speaking with program directors and asking questions as a parent. "There *are* programs out there that will work with you and support you."

If you are considering an in-person program or attending full-time, many institutions offer college-affiliated family housing. The Campus Family Housing Database, through the Wellesley Centers for Women, provides a searchable database of institutions offering college-affiliated family housing.

Certificate programs are typically shorter than master's programs and provide very specialized education and training in job-related skills. Online providers such as edX and Coursera offer a wide array of massive open online courses (MOOC) and professional certificates in a multitude of areas, such as data science and risk management. Community colleges like City College of San Francisco and College of Marin, in addition to offering associate's degree programs, offer certificate programs in specialized areas such as floristry and real estate. City College of San Francisco and College of Marin also offer childcare at certain campuses for eligible families.

Short informational interviews with professionals in your anticipated field can be invaluable, not only to determine whether additional education is necessary but also to find out which programs are highly regarded and which ones should probably be avoided. Additionally, they can

help you find programs that may or may not require standardized exams such as the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) for admission (not all graduate programs do). This is where those LinkedIn and Facebook contacts are incredibly helpful. So don't be shy. Reach out. You will likely be pleasantly surprised at how willing others are to help you find your way.

What is my motivation?

Karen, mother of three, realized that she wanted to transition to a new career when the pandemic started. After being a stay-at-home mom for five years, she enrolled in a certificate program in nutrition coaching through Precision Nutrition. "I knew I wanted to help other moms with their health, and I explored several different options until I decided on my certificate program." Karen completed the Precision Nutrition Level 1 Certificate to strengthen her knowledge of the behavioral and scientific aspects of nutrition, weight loss, and health. "This certificate was a perfect fit for me as I had studied psychology and biology in college, although that was many years ago!"

While Karen chose to go back to school to start her own nutrition coaching business, a career change may not be your only motivator. In March 2020, Sylvia, a mother of a 1-year-old at the time, decided

to pursue an online master's degree at Johns Hopkins University as a prerequisite to earning her doctorate. For her, going back to school and earning a Ph.D. was helpful to obtain more credibility in her field.

"I had heard a lot of classes were going remote because of the pandemic and got curious to see if there were remote PhDs available," says Sylvia, noting that in her field of scientific equipment, a doctorate in hard science is highly valued. "I found out by Googling that there was a remote doctorate program at Johns Hopkins in physics, so I applied for their master's program because the doctorate program requires a master's degree."

For Erin, going back to school to earn her MFA had always been a dream. "In my life, I wanted to write at least one novel." Erin realized she could not write it on her own without the help of mentors and other writers. After her mother passed away, she decided to apply to her low-residency program. "My mom died, and it made me

"So don't be shy. Reach out. You will likely be pleasantly surprised at how willing others are to help you find your way."

think about things. It made me very reflective," says Erin. "What do I want my life to be?"

Do I have time?

In her 2018 column for *The Hechinger Report*, Claire Wladis, Ph.D., wrote about her study that examined time constraints of undergraduate student-parents, which was published in *The Journal of Higher Education*. To no mother's surprise, the study found that, after paid work, housework, and childcare, "students with preschool-aged children had only about 10 hours per day left over ... to fit in sleeping, eating, leisure activities and schoolwork."

Certainly, furthering your education is a time commitment. One of the most difficult parts about pursuing an additional degree for many mothers is the conflict between being available for their kids and doing their classwork. "I sometimes feel like if I didn't choose to do this program, I'd have more time for my kids," says Erin.

Karen agrees that finding time to study

was definitely the most difficult part about going back to school. “At the time, I was the primary caregiver for my three kids, who were mostly at home due to COVID. Luckily, the program was 100 percent virtual and self-paced, which meant that I could fit in learning and studying during the cracks of my day and at night.” Karen adds that she “got very good at getting creative with my time and asking for help,” and acknowledged her partner, who was very supportive of her going back to school and would watch the kids a lot on the weekends so she could study.

Can I do this?

Self-doubt can inhibit many pursuits. Training your mind to barrel through self-doubt and finding a support network are keys to starting any program (and to finishing one).

“I graduated in 2007,” says Sylvia, “so it had been over a decade since I had taken classes, and I was particularly worried about whether my math skills were up to par and anxious about taking tests again.” Additionally, for those pursuing degrees part-time, the amount of time until completion can be demoralizing—at first. At the beginning, earning a master’s degree “seemed like it would take forever,” Sylvia says, since she was taking one class per trimester and ten classes were required. “That’s 3.3 years! Now that I’m halfway through it, it doesn’t feel so bad.” The trick—like with anything—is *not stopping*.

Support systems can help hold you accountable. Your academic advisor can help you navigate your courses, including helping you manage your time by suggesting which courses to pair with others if you plan on taking more than one course at a time. Advisors can also be your go-to for general questions about the program or school (What is a capstone exactly? How do I set up an internship?). Making an effort to get to know your academic advisor, who is usually assigned to you at the beginning of the program, can help you feel connected to your program—especially if the program is remote—and help you succeed.

Other students in your program can also offer support. Erin, whose low-residency MFA turned all-remote because of the pandemic, proactively sought a group of other students to form a writing group. The



group of four now meets once a month over Zoom. Erin says a support network of people pursuing the same thing helps her persevere when she’s frustrated or needs advice. Connecting with other students in her program was also one of the most important aspects of pursuing her degree.

How can I afford this?

With the average cost of a master’s degree hovering around \$66,000, according to the Education Data Initiative, it pays to compare and weigh options. This cost will differ according to the type of degree awarded as well as whether the degree-granting institution is private or public. If you are considering a low-residency program, take into account expenses like childcare and travel and lodging. The cost of obtaining a certificate will likely be significantly less than a graduate degree.

Federal student aid is available for graduate programs (check out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, FAFSA), and certain certificate programs are eligible for federal student aid under the Eligibility and Certification Approval Report (ECAR) published each year by the U.S. Department of Education. Additionally, you may be able to obtain graduate school funding through various organizations,

such as the American Association of University Women (AAUW). Working towards your degree on a part-time basis may be another, more palatable way to handle the cost.

Is it worth it?

Only you can decide whether returning to school is worthwhile. That said, every woman we spoke with unequivocally believed that the time, effort, money, and sacrifice to further her education was worth it.

“There will always be reasons to postpone or excuses to not go through with it, but you can and will make it work,” says Karen, acknowledging it’s very easy as moms to put our own needs on the back burner but that she was so glad that she pushed herself. “I felt that I set a really good example for my kids.”

The women also acknowledged they could not have advanced their education without supportive partners and family members, who helped with childcare. For Erin, her husband was instrumental in helping her pursue her master’s. “He’s taken the kids, even away for a weekend when I had to work. He’s gone above and beyond. He also has a lot of artistic pursuits, so he understands how important it is to me.” While publishing a novel has always been her dream, Erin also believes that taking the time to pursue her interests also makes her a better parent. “We are actually better parents when we are doing what we love.”

So while going back to school may seem impossible, it can be done. “If your gut is telling you to go back to school,” says Karen, “then just do it.”

Jessica began her master’s program, part-time, in 2020 when her daughter was in kindergarten. She finished in 2024, earning her M.Ed. in Higher Education, when her daughter was in fourth grade. Her capstone paper explored the necessity of teaching creativity due to the expansion of artificial intelligence. She earned her J.D. at the University of California College of the Law, San Francisco.

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Career Day

Self-confidence, planning, and being willing to tell your story are essential to growing your career. Just don't forget that for parents, it's all a balancing act.

By Neha Mandal Masson Photography by Petra Cross Photography

Originally published in the October/November 2017 Growth issue. This piece has been edited for length.

In early 2017, I had the opportunity to take on a bigger job at a large company in the tech space. It was a chance to step into a big leadership position with more responsibilities and professional growth. Everything sounded perfect ... so why did I feel such mixed emotions when deciding whether or not to take the job?

My first instinct was to ask myself: *Am I ready for a larger leadership role? What if I fail? Am I qualified enough or have I oversold myself?* Then came the mom guilt. *Would my toddler be OK if I wasn't around as much? How will we make it work with*

two parents in very demanding jobs?

In the end, I decided to say yes. At first I was hesitant, self-doubt coursing through my veins, hoping my new employers wouldn't realize I wasn't as special as they thought. Slowly, with the help of friends, family, introspection, and time, I was able to say yes emphatically and confidently; I knew I was qualified and had skills that were desperately needed.

Great! That was step one. That didn't make the reality of the situation go away. *Would I come home from a long business trip and find my son subsisting on donuts and pizza? Who would make sure his*

18-month checkup happened? Would people judge me if I took conference calls during school drop-offs?

The truth is that in many traditional households, these responsibilities often fall on mom, so we tend to tie all of that beautiful chaos to our decision making in a way that fathers may not. Whether it's a question of taking on that difficult project, asking for a promotion, or starting a company, career-growth opportunities come with costs of which mothers often feel the pain more acutely than others.

Additionally, there tends to be a struggle with the internal challenges of being a

woman in the workplace. Women more often than men tend to question their abilities and second-guess their qualifications, which further confounds the path to career growth. Regina L.*, a software engineer and mom of two, shares that she has passed up great career opportunities because of this self-doubt. "I didn't apply for a huge role on my team because I feared failing in a new, more technical role," she shared. "I have the skills, the expertise, and I *know* I'm more qualified than the guy who got the job. But when push came to shove, I feared being measured against others and failing if I did get the job."

Why are women, particularly working mothers who are qualified, educated, and experienced, so often plagued with these issues in professional life? Is the deck stacked against us, or do we need to change our own thinking? Perhaps it's a bit of both.

Changing the story

Iris Charabi-Berggren is a certified career and life coach in San Francisco, and mom to twins. She has worked with hundreds of men and women seeking professional growth, across demographics and career stages. "I definitely see that women are more prone than men to allowing self-doubt and the worries of family life to affect career decisions," she says. However, she goes on, "I want to emphasize I also see this with men, and much of it relates to cultural norms, not just gender roles."

During coaching sessions, she often asks clients to evaluate their professional competencies on a scale of 1 to 10. "In these evaluations, women will usually give themselves high evaluations, nines and even tens. If I ask them to write out a list of accomplishments, they can fill pages and pages with impressive feats," she explains. "They seem to know their true added value in their professions. But there is a disconnect between their true self-evaluations and the verbal story they construct to tell others." When women explain in words what they do and how good they are at their jobs, the story often changes, with a lot of hedging and apologizing for not being technical enough, smart enough, or needing more skills than they have. She

particularly sees this disconnect with women in high-stakes leadership positions.

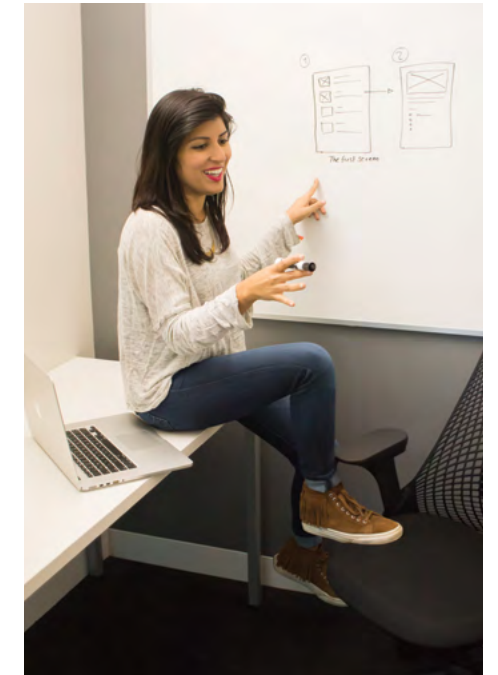
"I call this synthetic storytelling," says Charabi-Berggren. "For some reason, women (and some men as well) tend to shy away from painting themselves as highly competent, successful individuals. The thing is, we have the ultimate power to craft our stories, so we might as well be accurate, authentic, and unapologetic. But often, that isn't happening and that directly impacts chances at career growth."

A lot of this self-doubt may be cultural, she points out. In American culture, women have traditionally been nurturers, with high emotional quotients and an expectation of being agreeable, likable, and altruistic. "It all goes back to your history," Charabi-Berggren says. "Who were your role models? What behaviors were reinforced positively? What did your culture expect of you?"

When it comes to the question of why women like Regina don't raise their hands for bigger jobs, much of it relates to taking risks. "Women tend to be much more cautious and calculated risk-takers," Charabi-Berggren estimates, "which serves us in many instances—for example, women tend to be better at saving and investing, according to research." Charabi-Berggren

“Women more often than men tend to question their abilities and second-guess their qualifications, which further confounds the path to career growth.”

also notes that women starting their own businesses tend to demonstrate significant risk taking, motivated by the rewards of a flexible work environment. "But perhaps [calculated risk taking] doesn't serve us in high-performing professional cultures like Silicon Valley or Wall Street," she says. When people start families or take on other big responsibilities such as buying a home, their risk tolerance tends to decrease, simply because there is so much more to lose if they fail. You can imagine the effect of having children to care for on that risk tolerance.



Playing the game

There is no doubt that it's challenging being a woman in almost any professional environment. Many men and even other women may look at us and assume we aren't as "valuable" in our jobs, perhaps because of gender stereotypes or our traditional responsibilities inside of the home. If you want proof of that mentality, then consider the persistent wage gap across industries in the U.S.

This narrative itself can impact self-confidence and feelings of self-worth in the workplace, and ultimately potential for career growth. Additionally, work environments have traditionally been set up and run by men, therefore the rules have also been set by them in most cases, with traditionally "male" traits garnering praise and rewards. Being emotional or compromising is often seen as a weakness. Confidence can be prized over competence.

In the journey of career growth, much of it comes down to game play. Even if confidence doesn't exude from your pores, at high leadership levels, there's an expectation of being assertive and confident. "For women," Charabi-Berggren says, "I often work on being authentic yet assertive to a degree where they're confident in a way that disarms people. It's a beautiful fine line, confident yet warm, so that people can hear you regardless of



gender.” The truth is that confidence can be perceived differently when women project it versus men.

Clarity of thought, controlling body language and speech, and putting people at ease all play a part in projecting confidence. These things are learned, but we don’t explicitly teach it. This is to say that, whatever you bring to a room, your fears, apprehensions, enthusiasms—everything is communicated to the people around you. Small gestures such as going into a meeting early can make a huge difference. Studies show that even a simple introductory handshake can increase the degree to which people want you to succeed. Now that’s playing the game and setting yourself up to succeed.

Having it all

Once we start advancing in our careers and taking on those bigger jobs, there’s the question of making it work. Many people, and women in particular, struggle with jobs that threaten work-life balance. This applies to women without children as well, who tend to look for that balance to set themselves up to have families in the future.

“The way I suggest thinking about it, is in increments of time,” Charabi-Berggren shares. “If you’re committing to a demanding job, ask yourself how long you want to commit to that. It might mean no vacations, or giving just 30 percent of your time to yourself and 70 percent to your job. Then decide how long you’re willing to say yes to that.” She emphasizes that deciding to

say yes for a specific period of time is very important. The realities and compromises may feel very doable if it’s a six-month period, versus three years. Set expectations that will allow you to honor yourself, your health, the needs of family, and other commitments.

“I read *Lean In*,” says Priya R.*, a marketing professional and mother. “It seems very convenient and easy to criticize women for not raising their hands at work when you’ve got infinite resources to take care of everything else the rest of us struggle to balance.” The truth is everyone, but particularly parents, has to look at the context of their lives when making career decisions. Everyone needs to ask themselves, *How much do I want to push here in the context of my entire life?*

“What happens is that people look at their careers as an independent item in their lives, but it’s not. This is what’s missing in the *Lean In* stuff,” Charabi-Berggren says.

That brings us to the other piece of the puzzle, which is figuring out who will support you and your family when you do decide to amp things up at work, and get them on board. Within a family, taking on a consuming job will have implications on spouses or partners, kids, family members, friends, and even hobbies. That’s okay; the fact that we lead full lives that mix passion, nurturing, and ambition, is simply real. This means asking partners or parents to play larger or new roles to make time to unlock

your potential for career growth, or relying on paid help to fill in any gaps.

“Understand the circle of impact and set up a structure that makes it work so that you can truly focus on your professional commitments,” Charabi-Berggren advises.

She also shares that highly successful people look for support in the workplace as well, by putting in place powerful mentors that keep them focused and inspired. “You need an unbiased, objective person or people who can provide feedback and be a sounding board,” she says. For example, career coaches, mentors, or anyone outside of your organization, where you are their agenda without any complexity or politics. Keep in mind the importance of including male mentors as well, since men understand the behaviors and driving forces that inform male-dominated cultures, which means they have valuable insights and perspectives. “And invest in your networks!” Charabi-Berggren emphasizes. “Women particularly don’t invest in building and

Thursday 9/7	
4pm	4:30p – 5:30p Performance review
5pm	4:30p - pick up kids
6pm	5p - cook dinner
	5:30p – 6:30p Happy Hour
	5:30p – 6:30p help kids with homework

maintaining their networks enough; they have to foster connections to stay visible.” Despite being natural relationship builders, there’s a need for women to feel more at ease tapping into and taking advantage of networks when seeking career growth or building their own professional brands.

When I think of my son, I think of who I want him to see looking back at him. I hope he sees a woman who pursued growth in all aspects of life, and someone who played the game without losing any of the traits he loves about her.

Neha is a mother and a vice president of marketing at a large technology company. Her superpower is multitasking like a boss.

*Last names withheld by request.

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

Committee duties in Friends:

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

Committee duties in Partners:

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

Open Roles:

- Committee Co-chair in Friends (1 hour per week)
- Committee Co-chair in Partnerships (1 to 2 hours per week)

To volunteer, email partnerships@gmg.org.

NEIGHBORHOOD MEETUPS

Monthly Queer Family Hike

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

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

Moms Supper Club

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

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

Monthly Bernal/Glen Park Moms Night Out

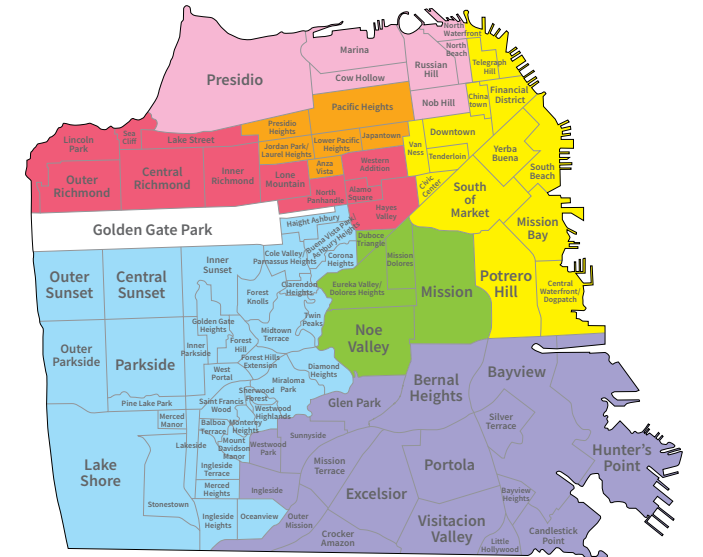
Each month we will visit a different venue in our neighborhood, moms only! After kiddo bedtime, enjoy a drink and some appetizers with other mothers.

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

Monthly Moms Happy Hour

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

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



Marina/Pac Heights/North Beach Monthly Moms Happy Hour

Drop in anytime for drinks and appetizers with other moms!

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

Marina Stroller Walk

Calling all Marina (and surrounding neighborhoods) mamas & babies! Would you like to meet neighborhood moms, grab a coffee, and enjoy a stroller walk together? We're organizing this stroller walk for you! We meet at the Philz Coffee Truck before heading out for a walk and some fresh air. Drop by and say hello!

- Date:** Every week on Wednesdays
- Time:** 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
- Place:** Philz Coffee Truck, 500 Marina Blvd.
- Cost:** Free for members
- Contact:** Contact Carly at 650.722.1124 or Carly.n.hoffman@gmail.com to RSVP or with any questions

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I Never Wanted Children

By Sandy Woo

Oh, the horror. Cue Macaulay Culkin's face from the *Home Alone* poster. Clutch your pearls that I am writing such sentiments in a mother's magazine after ruminating about what it would have been like to be a childless cat lady (technically impossible because cats and me—nope!).

As a 7-year-old "bossy" girl, I declared I didn't want children. Sure, I loved playing house like the rest of my cohort, creating voices and elaborate storylines with my menagerie of stuffies and blinking dolls as make-believe babies, but my own progeny? *No, thank you.* My parents laughed it off at the time, because, surely, what did a snot-nosed child know about anything?

"I'll adopt," I retorted to anyone who challenged that I'd regret not having kids once I was of age to conceive biologically. "It's selfish to have kids," I stated to my dismayed boyfriends and aghast girlfriends. "I don't need a mini-me." My grandfather jumped into the fray, telling me it was selfish to not "create for the future." I spat back that too many people don't deserve children, that any fool could have them (of note, he had children with 3 three different women and then got the woman I called grandma—who was infertile—to raise my father and his siblings). My father counseled that childless women were weird, that children were necessary to fulfill a woman, to make her whole. He was before his time or perhaps always of the time.

"As a 7-year-old 'bossy' girl, I declared I didn't want children."

It wasn't that I had ambitious plans of space travel, extreme sports, or anything that might preclude having children. I just never felt the need to. I was the odd woman out in grad school in a class where we were given two options to ponder: to either have a biological child or to be pregnant with a child. This was an exercise to help us understand infertility: how it deprives one of the ability to have biological children and the experience of pregnancy. I asked if neither could be an answer. An awkward silence ensued. Then I witnessed a baby delivered sunny side up assisted by giant metal soup ladles, which I later learned were forceps. Nooo. I have no explanation for my anti-birth stance. Perhaps I



bought wholesale into the notion that we were on a population precipice of disaster, or that "breeders" contributed to the planet's demise. I believed that not having biological children was the moral choice and that I'd rather buck the prosaic trend of procreation. I loved kids though; I frequently cared for my younger cousins with great relish. I was nicknamed "Mama Woo" by friends for the regular dining and dishing at my house.

Somewhere, stumbling along life, the wheels in my head shifted in direction: they jammed, screeched, and protested vociferously while grinding toward motherhood. My husband always wanted children and I couldn't slam the door on that desire. I rolled my eyes at his suggestion that I create my own environmentalist. While pregnancy planning, I was furious at my predicament. Furious that women had to bear the burden of all of it: carrying, caring, and possibly suffering a damaged body, and yet be expected to be forever grateful for creating life. On top of the anger, I was physically terrified of giving birth, having heard countless horror stories about it—fourth-degree tears, leaking urine, uterine prolapse.

I danced my entire pregnancy, and when the kid decided to pop his amniotic sac five weeks early on Christmas Day, I climbed back in bed after laying down a towel. Motherhood is a rollercoaster of breathtaking highs and abysmal lows. Sometimes it's a meandering river of moments, inconsequential initially yet profound later, like how my son enjoys sleeping on my head, even now. Like how I wanted to give him a sibling after hating being pregnant. I still feel like I "don't have the programming" à la *The Wild Robot* to be a mother. Recently, we adopted a second child, a 6-month-old rescue pup. Her cries for my constant presence sent me into a tailspin of unresolved emotions from the first year of motherhood. I sunk into a deep depression coupled with ruminations of crazy childless cat ladies.

I am a mother, with one of my own, and also a furbaby. Humanity needs children and a community that will cherish and nurture them. We need this hope. At 9 years old, my son proclaimed that he'd like maybe three kids but would check with his future wife first. *Yes, please.*

Sandy is still wading through the emotional baggage of motherhood.



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