

OCTOBER 2016



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magazine

Tough Talks





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Letter from the Editor:

Do We Really Have to Talk About This?

By Kirsten Pflieger



Mother to a 5- and 3-year-old, Kirsten is trying to figure out why bedtime has become the moment for the serious questions.

Tough conversations are not my forte. I tend to fall into the “let’s just hope that everything works itself out” camp. Not the healthiest of attitudes, and one that I am trying to change, but it is hard to alter lifelong habits. As a parent, I know that avoiding challenging topics with my children is not an option. When your children are small, however, you think

that you have a while before you will be faced with your first “big deal” conversation. Then you realize that your children are observing life and making connections from the start, and it is up to you to steer their conclusions towards your family’s values early on.

Many sitcoms have benefited from the idea that talking to kids about sex is accomplished by having “the talk” with them when

[Y]our children are observing life and making connections from the start, and it is up to you to steer their conclusions towards your family’s values early on.

they are middle-school-aged. Parents of young, verbal children will tell you that questions about their bodies and what is appropriate come much earlier, and that this is an ongoing conversation that changes over time. Suzanne Barnecut gives some practical, age-appropriate tips on page 16.

Changes within your family can lead to conversations earlier than you anticipated, or to ones that you hoped to never have. The decision to dissolve a marriage, especially one with children, isn’t entered into lightly. Rachel Smith (page 24) reflects on some conversations she had with her children early in her divorce process, and discusses how to stay present for your children while also taking care of yourself. When a new baby is on the way, older siblings have questions. Juli Fraga provides you with some strategies for answers on page 14. On page 10, Warren looks back on conversations with his then 5-year-old daughter prior to adopting a child with special needs.

In today’s political climate, talking to your kids about race seems like a no-brainer. For some of us, though, this does not come natural. I grew up white in the colorblind ‘80s; frank discussions about race did not occur in my house. My basic strategy has been to listen more to those around me who are personally affected, to tread lightly, and to seize opportunities when they arise. On page 28, Bobby Shukla offers more insight into how to be proactive with your discussions.

Not all difficult conversations are with your children. Talking with your spouse or partner about money can be difficult. Stephanie AuWerter offers some sage advice for navigating this potential minefield on page 20. On page 8, our expert Sandy Woo walks us through some of the basics of genetic testing, which can spawn intense conversations within couples. And on page 39, Carolyn Soling explores how establishing a relationship with her birth mother has affected conversations in her family.

I know that I have barely scratched the surface of difficult conversations with my children. I expect them to challenge me regularly in the coming years, but I now feel a bit more prepared. Hopefully something in this issue will help you tackle tough talks with your children in the future, too.

K Pflieger

Housekeeping

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THIS ISSUE MADE POSSIBLE BY: First day of preschool, both kids in school for the first time, 4 weeks of kindergarten before preschool started

for little sis, very careful scheduling, Real Housewives reunion spats, annual haircuts, spiked lemonade stand, not your father’s root beer floats, first visit by the tooth fairy.

COMING NEXT: November—Technology; December—Inclusion

CONTEST: Congratulations to Marisa Louie Lee, the winner of dinner from Henry’s Hungry.

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

Letter from the Board:

Fall Fun

By Laurel Kellam

It’s finally fall. The fog is gone, the weather is warmer, and it’s time for some amazing fall events. Not only does GGMG have quite a few events this month, but our city puts on some of my personal favorites as well. It’s a great opportunity to take advantage of the weather and create family memories.

Remember to mark your calendars for Saturday, October 8. It’s our Annual Fall Festival, our largest event of the year, and we hope to see you there! You and your family are invited to enjoy bouncy houses, a pumpkin patch, live activities from local sponsors, and a raffle. You’ll also have a chance to win amazing prizes from places like the Bay Area Discovery Museum, Peekadoodle, and House of Air. Please join us in Sharon Meadow in Golden Gate Park from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. RSVP here: www.bigtent.com/home/calendar/event/98639277

As always, volunteers make all our events happen. For this particular one, there is a lot to manage, and we are looking for additional help throughout the day. If you can contribute 30 minutes of your time to help put on this event, please email

All volunteers receive a Starbucks gift card and are entered into a raffle for another outstanding prize.

rsvp@ggmog.org or sign up here: tinyurl.com/jcs3g3q. All volunteers will receive a Starbucks gift card and are entered into a raffle for another outstanding prize. We appreciate any help you can offer the event organizers.

Many of our local meetup groups are also doing their own Halloween events throughout the month of October. The Bernal

Heights meetup is doing pumpkin painting for the whole family. Snacks, pumpkins, paint, and other decorations will be provided by GGMG. Please check with your neighborhood meetup group to see what sort of Halloween event they’re putting together.

After the fun at our Halloween party, you may need a little time for yourself. Our Just for Moms committee has put together two

amazing events. Please join us on Sunday, October 16 to spend a relaxing morning being pampered with amazing hair and makeup stylists from Beauty Brigade. Then head to Blink for a headshot session with a professional photographer. The event is in Corte Madera and you can RSVP here: www.bigtent.com/home/calendar/event/98721499.

Later that afternoon, we’re having a Nob Hill Spa day. Get a facial, have some wine, and enjoy the day with fellow moms. RSVP here: www.bigtent.com/home/calendar/event/98649467.

I hope you’re able to attend our Fall Festival and enjoy some of these other amazing activities. I’m so thankful for our wonderful volunteers who work hard this month, and every month, to organize events that allow members to connect, learn, relax, and grow.

Laurel Kellam



Laurel is a mom to three kids, wife to an amazing husband, and sales rep for a financial software company. When not managing all that (plus volunteering with GGMG), she enjoys wine, running, reading, and sunshine.

Volunteer of the Month



Marija will enjoy a 60-minute massage at International Orange Spa (2044 Fillmore St.). Book yourself a massage today at www.internationalorange.com.

Congratulations to Marija Djordjevic, our October volunteer of the month! Marija started volunteering with GGMG in 2014 and currently serves on the Entrepreneurship and Careers Committee. She and husband Filip are parents to Emma (3).

WE WANT TO KNOW YOUR FAVORITE...Pastimes: meditation, reading, skiing, swimming, and hiking; **Reading Material:** “When Things Fall Apart” by Pema Chodron; **Film:** *Inside Out*; **Restaurant:** La Brigada; **Destination:** Antarctica; **Parenting Advice:** Give children specific reinforcement for a particular behavior. Encourage them to share only when they are ready. Be a nurturer, consultant, and enforce limits and rules. We are not our feelings. Feelings have a start and an end. Do not get in their way; let them come and go.

Oktoberfest

This centuries-old Bavarian beer festival has tourists flocking to Germany each September to partake in oompah dancing and beer tasting. However, with a number of local options lasting well into the month of October, you can celebrate right here in the Bay! Warm weather, live music, and the guaranteed Chicken Dance make Oktoberfest perfect for families.

By Jennifer Butterfoss

 **Oakland Oaktobefest**
This street festival veers a bit from the traditional and includes live music and street performers. A family-friendly “chill zone” includes root beer floats for kids.

DATE: Saturday, October 1, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.
ADDRESS: Macarthur Blvd. at Fruitvale Ave., Oakland
COST: Entry free; food and drink packages starting at \$20
www.oaktobefest.org

Oakland Nature Friends Oktoberfest
For those seeking an authentic experience with a good number of German expats, this traditional celebration takes place in the more forested area of Oakland and features live music, dancing, and the “Shuhplattler.” Think Clark Griswald in *European Vacation*.
DATE: Sunday, October 2, noon to 5 p.m.
PLACE: 3115 Butters Dr., Oakland
COST: \$15 entry; free under 14
www.thenaturefriendscorporation.org/festivals.html


Cotati Oktoberfest
Getting to this event requires that you enjoy a drive through wine country! Ridiculous contests include a “wiener dog” race, yodeling, and potato sack jumping.
DATE: Saturday, October 8, noon to 6 p.m.
PLACE: Old Redwood Hwy. at West Sierra Ave., Cotati
COST: Entry free; \$15 meals with drinks, \$5 beer and wine
www.cotati.org/cotati-oktoberfest-oct-8th-2016



Corte Madera Oktoberfest
Your little one will love the face painting and bounce house, giving mom and dad plenty of time for tastings from local breweries and wineries.
DATE: Saturday, October 8, noon to 5 p.m.
PLACE: Old Corte Madera Square, Corte Madera
COST: \$25 includes mug and unlimited tasting, \$10 ages 12 to 20, children under 12 free
www.oktoberfestcortemadera.org



Oktoberfest at Speissekammer Restaurant
Catch the tail-end of this event the first two Sundays in October. Take part in the stein-holding competition, live music, and dancing.
DATE: Sunday, October 2 and Sunday, October 9, noon to 6 p.m.
PLACE: 2424 Lincoln Ave., Alameda
COST: Entry free; food and beer available for an additional cost
www.speisekammer.com

 **Oktoberfest in Downtown Campbell**
This event was voted best local festival by MetroActive and includes live music, dancing, and arts and crafts vendors. There is even a Kids Zone for the little ones.
DATE: Saturday, October 15 and Sunday, October 16, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
PLACE: East Campbell Ave. and 1st St., Campbell
COST: FREE
www.downtowncampbell.com/tags/campbell-oktoberfest-2016

BEER

Peninsula Oktoberfest at Hiller Aviation Museum
For your little train enthusiasts, consider taking Caltrain from the city to this event and enjoy free shuttle service to the museum. Price includes museum admission for the whole family.
DATE: Saturday, October 15 at 11 a.m.
PLACE: 601 Skyway Rd., San Carlos
COST: \$18 adults, \$11 ages 5 to 17, under 4 free
www.hiller.org/event/oktoberfest-2016

Biketoberfest
Get your city kids pedaling away up in Fairfax! A celebration of beer and bikes, this event includes plenty of entertainment for bike enthusiasts, big and small.
DATE: Saturday, October 15, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.
PLACE: 765 Center Blvd., Fairfax
COST: FREE; \$40 gets you a beer sampling and souvenir glass
www.biketoberfestmarin.com



Jennifer Kuhr Butterfoss is a school administrator through SFUSD and mom of two future public school students. Her husband Ryan typically wins the stein-holding competition at every Oktoberfest they attend. There have been many.

Navigating Fleet Week SF

By Catherine Symon

Ah, October. Time for the (friendly) annual military invasion of San Francisco! This year’s Fleet Week from October 3 to 10 brings lots to see and do on land, on water, and in the air. Check fleetweeksf.org for last-minute changes.

MARINA GREEN:

Parade of Ships
Friday, 10 to 11 a.m.
Watch military ships of all shapes and sizes as they file under the Golden Gate Bridge and enter San Francisco Bay, and earmark ones you like for a ship tour later in the weekend.

Humanitarian Assistance Village
Friday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Watch interactive demonstrations from military and civil disaster response teams. Pick up a passport and get it stamped in each of the four “camps” to be eligible for a prize drawing.

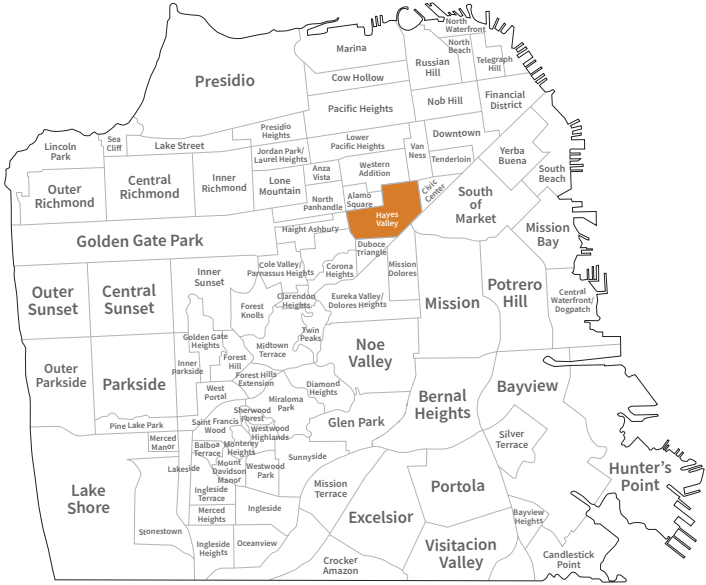
Air Show
Saturday & Sunday plus a Friday rehearsal, noon to 4 p.m.
Grab your earplugs and do your best no-fog dance. New muscle this year: France’s Breitling Jet Team and the US Airforce F-22 Raptor Tactical Demonstration Team. The Blue Angels start at 3 p.m.

High School Band Challenge
Monday, 10 a.m. to noon
Need to occupy the kids on Columbus Day? Take them to hear Bay Area high school bands strut their stuff and compete for prize money. The US Marine Corps Band stars as the opening act.

DUBOCE PARK:
K-9 Heroes
Saturday 10 a.m. to noon
If getting to Marina Green feels too daunting, head to Duboce Park for one of the most family-friendly activities of the weekend: watching K-9 teams and companion dogs show off their skills.

THE EMBARCADERO:
Ship Tours
Saturday through Monday (check fleetweeksf.org for times and pier locations)
Think your living space is small? Engage in a little *schadenfreude* while you tour accommodations on carriers, destroyers, and cruisers. Note: Ship tours are best for older kids. Large items, including strollers, backpacks, and diaper bags, are not allowed on board. Steep ladders and uneven surfaces may be difficult for parents carrying children.

Catherine is a medical writer. She spent her first Fleet Week air show stuck on an overcrowded 24-Divisadero bus nowhere near Marina Green. Go early, people!



Li'l Kid, Big City: Hayes Valley

By Neha Mandal Masson

Talk about transformation! Hayes Valley has officially blossomed from a transitional area bisected by a highway to a neighborhood gem to explore.
Start the day with pain au chocolat from **La Boulangerie de San Francisco** (500 Hayes St.) before shopping. Browse impossibly soft tees at **Marine Layer** (498 Hayes St.) and trendy eyeglasses at **Warby Parker**’s only SF location (357 Hayes St.). For the kiddos, **Fiddlesticks** (540 Hayes St.) offers a delightful assortment of books, clothing, and toys.
Getting hungry? **Biergarten** (424 Hayes St.) is the spot for giant pretzels, sliders, and beers on a sunny day. If you prefer take-out, **DragonEats** (520 Gough St.) offers Vietnamese banh mi sandwiches. Eat while people-watching at **Patricia’s Green**, a bustling town square at Octavia and Fell Streets.
No day is complete without something sweet, and Hayes Valley delivers. Frozen Greek yogurt studded with baklava bits at **Souvla** (535 Octavia St.) is a delicious indulgence. Or spoil the kids with churned-to-order ice cream from **Smitten** (432 Octavia St.) and macarons from **Chantal Guillon** (437 Hayes St.). End your dessert spree with a visit to **Miette** (449 Octavia St.), where you can be a kid in a decidedly French candy store. ❖

Neha is a Bay Area native turned New Yorker turned San Franciscan. She enjoys chasing after her 1-year-old, cooking, reading, and dancing.

Ask the Expert

To Test Or Not To Test?

With Sandy Woo



GGMG: For whom is genetic testing recommended?

SW: Genetic testing is always optional. We recommend that women planning families consider their views on risks for birth defects or disability, uncertainty, and what they would do with information learned prenatally.

Some couples will be offered ethnic-based screening. Some wish to learn preconceptionally

about their risk status for recessive conditions or debilitating adult-onset conditions (typically due to a family history). These couples may consider IVF and preimplantation genetic screening to select healthy embryos to implant.

For pregnant women, screening and/or diagnostic tests for chromosome abnormalities are offered to anyone who is interested. The risk for chromosome abnormalities slowly increases as women age, so everyone's risk is age-dependent.

GGMG: How accurate is genetic testing? Should patients seek a second opinion or consider retesting when serious anomalies are detected?

SW: If a patient has only had a screening test, we recommend follow-up testing to confirm results. If she has had a diagnostic prenatal test, such as a CVS or amniocentesis, and a chromosome abnormality is detected, we do not recommend a second opinion or retesting. It is common for patients to question diagnostic test results, especially in the face of devastating news, but accuracy and laboratory protocol are held to the highest standards. If there are extenuating circumstances that cast doubt on the results, the patient would be informed, but these instances are rare. With structural fetal abnormalities seen on an ultrasound, sometimes a second opinion may be helpful in better defining the anomaly and future prognosis.

GGMG: A patient has just received difficult news about her health or the health of her fetus or child. What types of resources are available for a patient dealing with challenging news about her or her child's health?

SW: Depending on the type of news, a plethora of resources exist.

Genetic counselors are often the messengers in these situations and can offer acute crisis counseling. Patients are then referred to appropriate specialists, psychotherapists, religious leaders in the community (per patient

preference), social workers, support groups, other patients/families who have offered to be peer referrals, etc. Informational pamphlets on every genetic disease imaginable are available to newly-diagnosed patients. Many reputable online resources help identify other families open to contact and help keep patients up-to-date on the latest research and events, such as summer camps for affected individuals.

For prenatal patients facing difficult decisions, genetic counselors help facilitate decision-making and appointments, set up peer referrals, and support the family in whatever decision they make.

GGMG: What is the most challenging aspect of being a genetic counselor?

SW: It depends on the day you ask...Most days, the challenging aspects are why I love my job. Giving bad news never gets easier. Trying to reconcile a patient's perception of risk, and the accompanying anxiety with the reality of an often low risk, is definitely challenging. Staying current in a rapidly evolving field is hard—sometimes I wish I had that crystal ball patients often think genetic testing is! ♦

Sandy Woo is a genetic counselor who sees prenatal, pediatric, adult, and hereditary cancer patients, and has been on the "other side."

We recommend that women planning families consider their views on risks for birth defects or disability...and what they would do with information learned prenatally.

GGMG: What kind of tests and evaluations are used to assess a patient's risk for genetic conditions?

SW: Whenever a patient is referred to a genetic counselor, a detailed family history is taken. This low-tech diagram is a powerful tool to assess risk for known genetic conditions, delineate inheritance pattern of a reported condition, identify a possible hereditary cancer syndrome, or ease a patient's anxiety about general health risks. When a possible genetic condition is reported in family history, a genetics physical exam or additional evaluation, such as an ultrasound or appropriate genetic testing, may be offered. During pregnancy, prenatal testing may be available to evaluate a fetus for the specific condition identified in the family.

Two types of routine prenatal testing are available. Screening tests, such as serum-based screening and non-invasive prenatal testing (NIPT), can provide information about the risk level of having a baby with certain chromosome conditions, but cannot completely rule out such risk. If an elevated risk is seen, diagnostic testing such as a CVS or amniocentesis is offered to confirm or rule out the result. Diagnostic testing is available to any woman at any age; a closer examination of the chromosomes, other than a standard karyotype, may also be available. Ultrasounds can also identify some genetic conditions and birth defects.

GGMG: Helping Others, Treating Yourself

Community Support

Halloween Costume Drive for HPP



GGMG is partnering with the Homeless Prenatal Program (HPP) to host a halloween costume drive in October. Please consider joining us in supporting this organization in one of two ways:

1. Donate funds directly to HPP via the website: www.homelessprenatal.org/donate. Choose "GGMG Gives" in the gift designation scroll down to help us track donations.
2. Drop off new or gently used costumes (size newborn to age 10) at the following locations:
 - Imagination Playhouse, 5628 Geary St.
 - Peekadoodle, 900 North Point St., Suite F100
 - Peek-a-Boo Factory, 2 West Portal Ave.
 - Play Haven, 254 Laguna Honda
 - Recess, 470 Carolina St.
 - Homeless Prenatal Program, 2500 18th St. (Fridays only). Please ask the office to drop the donations off in Sharon's office.

Thank you so much for your support of this drive! For more information, please email drives@ggmg.org.

HPP works to break the cycle of childhood poverty by finding housing for homeless families, providing prenatal and parenting support, training community health workers, and stabilizing families by addressing issues related to mental health, domestic violence, and substance abuse in their clients' lives. HPP also responds to basic emergency needs and child care issues, provides access to a community technology center for clients, and gives families tools to build financial stability.

Contest



Munchkin et Moi is a new, Berkeley-based web boutique stocking fashionable European shoes for the littlest of feet (up to size 13.5 US/31 EU). With an eye for detail and quality workmanship, and a firm belief that a little of something special is infinitely nicer than masses of ordinary, Munchkin et Moi stocks gorgeous shoes of exceptional quality that your child can outgrow well before wearing out.

Owner Nicola brings a boutique feel along with personal touches almost entirely missing from the current world of e-commerce. You can be assured of finding the same care and attention you would find in a brick and mortar store—if not more.

One lucky person will win a gift certificate, valued at \$300, to be redeemed at Munchkin et Moi.

Fall/Winter 2016 stock has just arrived. You'll find French eco-friendly brand Easy Peasy, Italian handmade luxury from PèPè, a modern take on British retro-cool made by Young Soles, traditional value for money from Spanish brand Clarys, and eco-friendly and ethical leather sneakers by French brand VEJA. However, sizes are limited, so set time for a 'visit' soon!

<http://munchkinetmoi.com>

TO ENTER THE CONTEST, SEND AN EMAIL WITH "MUNCHKIN" IN THE SUBJECT LINE TO CONTEST@GGMG.ORG BY OCTOBER 31, 2016.

Choosing Down Syndrome

By Warren

We had been talking to our 5-year-old daughter, Annaliese, about Down Syndrome for many months: what it means, what it is, and what it isn't. In the process, we learned a great deal as well. It is frequently called Trisomy 21 because there are three chromosome 21s instead of two. Children with Down Syndrome have varying degrees of physical and mental disabilities, generally considered mild to moderate in severity, and they all have distinctive facial features. Due partially to pressure from doctors and general fear from lack of understanding, there is around a 67 percent abortion rate when people find out that they're carrying a child with Down Syndrome¹. Of the people who are not tested and find out their child has Down Syndrome after the birth, a large number put their child up for adoption.

My wife worked with special needs children as a teen, and it sparked a desire to adopt such a child. This desire spawned the first in a series of conscientious deliberations. Together, my wife and I laid out the plans for what we wanted to do: adopt a child with Down Syndrome. We chose Down Syndrome over other conditions because of our limited financial resources. We did have three sets of local grandparents, but we also needed to make sure that medical needs wouldn't crush us financially, and that we wouldn't be consumed by the time investment of a more severe condition.

Next, we spoke in depth with Annaliese. It's a big decision to put into the hands of a 5-year-old, but we had to let her know that:

1. We would only adopt a child if all three of us agreed completely;
2. If we did this, it was for the long haul. Once we chose to adopt, we couldn't turn back;
3. This adoption could get painful and messy. But it's a life-long commitment, and love is our priority.

Prior to having this conversation with Annaliese, we had no idea how long it would take to come to an agreement within the family, but she was all-in from the first minute. She had already been asking for a sibling, and loved the idea of one with special needs. I'm proud to say that she's 14 now, and has been her brother's fiercest advocate and best friend for the last nine years. Oddly, it was our parents' resistance that surprised me:

"Annaliese is smart and deserves a sibling who's her equal."
"He'll take time away from Annaliese."
"People will make fun of him."

"Medical bills will be too expensive." (A fair call with American health insurance being what it is.)
"It'll be too challenging for you."
"He'll die young and break our hearts."
Their argument against adoption was essentially twofold. One, "Nobody chooses suffering—don't start now." Two, "Let the people who had tragedy thrust on them by happenstance deal with it."

But we rejected their resistance. People deal with Down Syndrome when it is unexpected; we could certainly make it work knowing what we were getting into. So, has it been all teddy bears and roses after adopting baby Harrison? No, it hasn't, and we don't sugarcoat when discussing it.

When my wife's cousin found out that their baby had Down Syndrome, the doctors pressured them to abort. They had found pointed stories online extolling the joys of Down Syndrome or opposing tales of misfortune. There seemed to be no middle ground. When they turned to us, we

told them about the wonders of our boy and the hardships of heart surgery. We described the fear of not knowing how much he will learn and the pleasure of seeing it when he does, and his ability to communicate through action and his unwillingness to do so through speech. We emphasized how unfiltered his love is, and how painfully obstinate he becomes when he doesn't get his

So, has it been all teddy bears and roses after adopting baby Harrison? No, it hasn't, and we don't sugarcoat when discussing it.

way. It's a mish-mosh. They were glad to finally hear from people not trying to sell only one side or the other. But what finally helped them make the choice was when their own daughter said they couldn't give her sister away because if the baby is sick, it means that they need to take care of her even more.

And that's the final part of any tough talk: pushing aside your adult know-it-all attitude and listening to what your 5-year-old has to say. ♦

Warren has lived 52 (of his 54) years in Southern California and found it to be the perfect spot for enjoying life, traveling with his family of four, and writing, when time permits. Warren's last name has been withheld for privacy.

¹ Natoli et al. Prenatal diagnosis of Down Syndrome: a systematic review of termination rates (1995-2011). Prenatal Diagnosis. 2012



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Books for Kids Halloween and Fall

By Laure Latham

Everybody's favorite red, orange, and yellow season brings with it tales of pumpkin patches, nighttime revelry, and the apple harvest. To get in the mood, check out this selection of recent books that feature Halloween or the fall season.



Halloween Colors

Written and illustrated by Barbara McGrath

What colors will the littlest trick-or-treaters see on Halloween? From orange pumpkins to white ghosts, this cute book shaped like a pumpkin is a fun introduction to baby's first night out in the dark. *Ages: 0 to 2 years*

Eek! Halloween!

Written and illustrated by Sandra Boynton

Sandra Boynton's cast of nutty animals celebrates Halloween with humor in this not-so-scary story. It starts with the chickens. (It always does.) They are nervous, but do you know why? One chicken spotted a pumpkin with flickering eyes. Toddlers will love throwing in the occasional "Eek!" to accompany the chorus of silly chickens who are scared of Halloween. *Ages: 2 to 5 years*



Owl Sees Owl

Written by Laura Godwin, illustrated by Rob Dunlavey

When a baby barn owl ventures from the nest at night, his adventure begins. With very few words and adorable illustrations, this book is a poem that follows the baby owl over farms and forests and culminates when he sees his reflection in a stream. This is the perfect first peek at nocturnal animals. *Ages: 3 to 7 years*

Hocus Pocus, It's Fall!

Written by Anne Sibley O'Brien, illustrated by Susan Gal

Celebrating the arrival of fall, this book shows nature at work as days get shorter and colder. Apples are picked, leaves turn, and animals prepare for winter. Lift-the-flaps reveal surprises on every page and the addition of magic words like "Abracadabra" or "Shazam" turn this warm story into a whimsical goodbye to summer and hello to fall. *Ages: 3 to 5 years*



Yellow Time

Written and illustrated by Lauren Stringer

When autumn's cool weather has almost stripped the leaves of their fiery colors, it becomes yellow

time. Children love the last days of autumn, with its wild weather and flying dead leaves which announce the coming of white time. Subtly reminiscent of Virginia Lee Burton's folkish style, the illustrations of *Yellow Time* are artistic and dynamic, bringing to life the many families who are waiting to celebrate yellow time outside with a sweater on. Reading this will make you want to run through a forest of yellow leaves! *Ages: 4 to 7 years*

It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown

Written and illustrated by Charles M. Schulz

To commemorate the 50th anniversary of the beloved television special, this book was written to introduce the younger generation to the Peanuts gang. On Halloween night, Linus insists on waiting at the pumpkin patch for the Great Pumpkin while all his friends go trick-or-treating. Well, not all his friends. Sally decides to join him on this very special night, and classical hilarity ensues. A must for all Peanuts fans. *Ages: 4 to 7 years*



Bring Me Some Apples and I'll Make You a Pie: A Story About Edna Lewis

Written by Robbin Gourley

Edna Lewis was an African-American chef who believed that vegetables and fruit should be enjoyed the way nature intended. This biography mixes prose with rhymes and sayings from Edna's childhood on a farm, ending with five recipes that kids can make with adult

supervision. Even if kids have never heard of Edna Lewis, they will like reading about foraging, canning, and the seasonality of produce. You can even take the story further by heading to the farmers' market to make a pie with seasonal produce. *Ages: 4 to 7 years*

Hubble Bubble: The Super-Spooky Fright Night!

Written by Tracey Corderoy, illustrated by Joe Berger

With two mischievous witches as grandmothers, it's no wonder Pandora is so popular with her friends. Granny Crow can make the living room look like a haunted woods while cleaning, and when Pandora's Halloween party begins, she makes broomsticks and flapping paper bats appear with a flick of her wand. Of course, things can get out of hand with excited witch grandmothers, and this is never truer than when Pandora attends a birthday party for a friend. Featuring three illustrated short stories, this book will be the toast of the town with young readers. *Ages: 6 to 8 years*



Applesauce Weather

Written by Helen Frost, illustrated by Amy June Bates

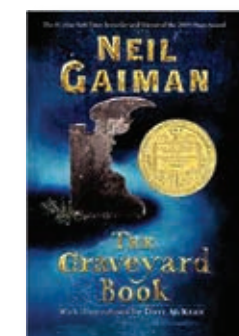
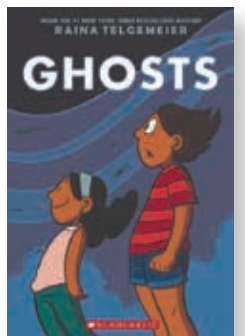
When the first apples fall from the tree, it's usually a sign that siblings Faith and Peter will soon receive a visit from their aunt Lucy and their storytelling uncle Arthur. Sadly, this year Lucy has passed away and when uncle Arthur shows up, he's not quite the same. Told poetically in the voice of each character, the story alternates seamlessly

between Lucy's memories and current events. This story is about coping with loss as much as it is about family rituals and the importance of a good story to soothe the soul. *Ages: 8 to 12 years*

Ghosts

Written and illustrated by Raina Telgemeier

This graphic novel follows Catrina as her family moves to a town on the coast of Northern California because the sea air makes it easier for her sister Maya, who has cystic fibrosis, to breathe. In their new town of Bahia de la Luna everyone is obsessed with ghosts, and at first, Cat is afraid of them. However, as the Day of the Dead celebrations approach, she learns to connect and interact with ghosts as she starts to face the possibility that Maya might die. *Ages: 8 to 12 years*



The Graveyard Book

Written by Neil Gaiman, illustrated by Dave McKean

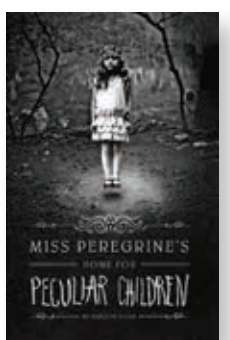
Imagine a boy has been raised by ghosts in a graveyard. Then imagine that this boy cannot leave the boundaries of the graveyard because of murderers at large, and that he can disappear from human view. This thrilling story features an eclectic selection of historical ghosts, dark magic, and a boy's quest to find out who he really

is. Never really scary, though sometimes violent, Neil Gaiman creates a modern coming-of-age tale that's hard to put down. *Ages: 10+ years*

Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children

Written by Ransom Riggs

In the first book of an amazing trilogy, teenager Jacob travels to a mysterious Welsh island where his grandfather grew up and discovers a parallel universe where monsters are not what they seem. Haunting (authentic) photos from a bygone era punctuate the story and anchor the characters in a weird fantasy world. Soon to be a Tim Burton movie, this book will enrapture both tweens and adults with its masterful storytelling and compelling—and peculiar—characters. *Ages: 11+ years*



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

From Womb to World

What to Expect When You're Expecting a Sibling

By Juli Fraga

“Is the baby still in your tummy?” Kelly’s curious 3-year-old daughter asked her just days after the new baby arrived. “No, the baby is here—this is your brother!” Kelly replied. In a fit of disappointment, her daughter Chloe threw her doll across the room as she shouted, “I no like baby!”



This scenario is not unusual. While the addition of a new sibling is a joyful family event, it is often stressful for other children in the family. Oftentimes, children feel jealous of a new baby’s arrival and yet younger children are unable to articulate their feelings. Because of this, they may showcase feelings by throwing things, yelling, or testing household rules and limits.

Parents should not despair; just as you prepare for a new baby’s arrival, you can also prepare your older children for a new sibling. Here are some tips and tricks that will help you to welcome baby brother or sister with greater ease.

Help your child embrace a new family role

In the months leading up to the baby’s arrival, help your child understand and embrace her new role in the family.

There are various resources that deal with the subject of a new sibling. The Daniel Tiger animated series offers *The Baby is Here* and *Big Brother Daniel*, books for kids expecting a sibling. If you prefer a more hands-on approach, California Pacific Medical Center has a sibling celebration class where kids can partake in a series of activities including games, storytelling, and role-playing. This class is for 3- to 6-year-old-children and is offered at various times throughout the year.

Something as simple as a baby doll can be useful as well, allowing the child to practice caring for a baby. Use the doll to show your child how you all should be gentle and care for the baby. Once the baby arrives, your older child can care for his baby doll when you are changing or feeding the new baby.

If your doctor or midwife allows it, bring your child to an ultrasound to “see” the baby growing inside mommy’s tummy. By engaging your younger child in the process, you are starting a conversation that will help to prepare him for this family transition in the months to come.

It’s also important to help your older child feel proud of her new family role. Something as simple as buying a t-shirt that says “I am a Big Brother/Sister” can help create a feeling of excitement, rather than jealousy or trepidation.

A sibling gift exchange

Sometimes choosing a small gift that the baby can “give” to the older child can help smooth new sibling waters. If your older child visits the baby at the hospital, many parents have a gift waiting for big brother or big sister upon arrival. Additionally, the older sibling can pick out a gift for the baby and bring this present to the hospital.

The first hello

“When children meet their younger sibling, I always encourage Mom to have her hands free so that she can hug the older child,” says Pediatrician Dr. Steve Martel. This technique can help abate feelings of jealousy that are bound to emerge once mom and baby return from the hospital.

Explain new feelings

A few days after her newborn daughter came home from the hospital, San Francisco mother Natalie Ryan taught her 3-year-old daughter Hannah about a new feeling called “jealousy.” She told Hannah that feeling jealous is a bit like feeling mad or frustrated, but it’s when you are upset because you want something that someone else has. Natalie explained that having a sibling means that you have to share Mommy with baby sister, even if you don’t prefer to. By talking openly and naming these feelings, you can foster an emotional vocabulary that will help children express how they feel about the newest addition to the family.

As with any family change, adjustment will take some time. Try to carve out one-on-one time with your older children, and if they are in preschool or daycare, try to keep schedules the same to provide predictable structure in their daily routines. Remember that preschoolers (ages 3 to 5) and older children are more likely to comprehend the addition of a new sibling. For younger toddlers, you can introduce the concept with some picture books, such as *What to Expect When Mommy’s Having a Baby*, by Heidi Murkoff and *The Berenstain Bears’ New Baby* by Stan and Jan Berenstain. ♦

Juli Fraga is a psychologist and a freelance writer. She’s written for National Public Radio (NPR), The Washington Post and The New York Times.

Parents should not despair; just as you prepare for a new baby’s arrival, you can also prepare your older children for a new sibling.

New Arrivals



Caitlin Dudley
Megan Sweeney
Jamie J.
Shirin K.
Ailish M.
Baby George Timothy
Baby James Alexander
Baby Emily Ashley
Baby Julian and Baby Shane
Baby Fiachra Patrick

Sara S.
Dana C.
Aliza C.
Mayorik Carranza
Baby Daniel James
Baby Declan Timothy
Baby Elliot Nathan
Baby Noemí

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Let's Talk About Sex, Baby

When it comes to discussing this touchy topic, parents should be open and approachable, truthful yet age appropriate.

By Suzanne Barnecut Photographs by Carolyn Soling Photography

Sex probably isn't high on the list of topics you're in a hurry to explain to kids. Yet in all likelihood, it's a topic that will come up much sooner than you might imagine, and in a moment when you're not expecting it.

As one mother shared, her 3-year-old son sometimes took a shower with her until one day, he looked up and made an astute observation: "Mama, your penis is broken."

It makes for a funny story, but it's also a perfect example of how conversations about sex may begin. Although we may picture sitting down and initiating an awkward talk about the "birds and the bees," the reality is that conversations about sex are usually ongoing, initiated by children asking questions, and they happen in a string of

smaller moments over time.

That's a good thing—not just because doctors and psychologists recommend approaching sex this way—but because in San Francisco, where any number of neighborhood street festivals may involve nudity or chaps, sex is undoubtedly part of the landscape. Parents should have some idea of how to respond to kids' probing questions.

Let your child take the lead

The first thing is: don't panic. It's only natural that kids should be curious about their bodies and ours. This curiosity can begin early, when we notice our toddlers touching themselves in the bathtub or perhaps demonstrating a renewed interest in mommy's breasts long after being weaned.

Around ages 3 and 4, kids are both able to articulate their thoughts and notice differences between the people around them. They might bluntly point out variations in skin color, body size, or body parts. This might be embarrassing if it happens unprompted at the grocery store, but it's a very normal time for kids to begin understanding that some people are tall and some are short, or that boys have penises and girls have vaginas.

"One of the great things about kids is that they ask questions when they're developmentally ready for the answer," explained Dr. Shannon Udovic-Constant, a pediatrician at Kaiser San

Francisco and mother of two. "I like to think about body development and sex as a continuum; you're going to be having conversations about body changes much earlier than you're going to be talking about sex."

There are all kinds of scenarios in which questions about sex or body parts might come up; having a second or third child is often a life event that will prompt a child's curiosity. The

One of the reasons to start the sex conversation early is that having "the talk" gives you a chance to share and reinforce your values, whatever those may be.

important thing is to answer each question simply, and then wait to see whether there's a follow-up question to expand your answer. If not, your work is done until your child expresses interest in hearing more.

"It's important to be factual, but age appropriate," said Dr. Udovic-Constant. "Trust that there's going to be another opportunity to fill in the details or to put together the pieces that they don't quite understand yet."

Making babies—it's complicated

Few parents today are falling back on the great stork, deliverer of babies, when it comes to answering the sex questions. Yet sometimes when we hear our children's theories on the subject, it's easy to understand why the stork seemed plausible.

One mother on the GGMG forum shared with me her 4-year-old's explanation for how babies are made. "The stuff you eat makes a baby appear and the more you eat, the more it makes it appear," her child explained. "Well, not really. The food comes trickling down to a big ball where the baby is an egg and the magic makes the baby."

My own 4-year-old daughter believes that mothers grow babies much in the same way that gardens grow watermelons. There's a seed or some type of fertilization involved but in her mind, having a baby is mostly a choice a mother makes after a series of life events have occurred. In her words, "After people get married, they grow a baby. And then they make a cake."

One of the reasons to start the sex conversation early is that having "the talk" gives you a chance to share and reinforce your values, whatever those may be. The myriad constellations of family life and all the ways a baby might come to be mean that there isn't a single party line we all can use. But the more we can give simple, truthful answers, the more we prepare our kids to be accepting of families in all circumstances. Especially as kids reach elementary-school age, the answer might be that having a baby is a way that people show love, or that there are different ways and times that people decide to grow their families.

So, what's age appropriate?

Every child is different. Some kids will be less curious than others, while others will initiate the conversation ahead of the curve. One former San Francisco resident said her 5-year-old moved quickly from having a loose idea that babies were made "when mommies and daddies touched belly buttons" to (with the help of a book) grasping the basics of a father giving sperm to a mother to fertilize an egg.

But her daughter still wasn't satisfied. "She went on to ask *how* that happens," the mother told me. "I was totally caught off-guard, because she's 5, and I didn't know how to tell her an age-appropriate version of the truth. I told her I wasn't sure how to explain, but that I'd think about it. Sure enough, she asked me again a few days later and I just blurted out that the dad puts his penis inside of the vagina and then the sperm finds the egg."

To this, her daughter merely crinkled her nose and said, "Oh."

This mother handled her daughter's questions well, by instinct. And in truth, a lot of the stories I heard were handled similarly well. Even so, here are a few examples of the level of detail that can be appropriate to share as children mature.



Ages 2 to 3

Private parts are just one of many body parts that kids begin to learn and name, so around ages 2 to 3, introduce the "penis" or "vagina" in the same way as you would a knee or an ankle. As you begin these conversations, consider that kids pick up on our comfort levels. Calling anatomy by its proper name shows more comfort than a made-up name, which might send a message to your child that it's embarrassing or something silly.

Ages 3 to 5

Keep your answers simple and literal. Babies live in the uterus and grow until they're ready to be born. If your child is wondering how the baby gets out, it's okay to say that the uterus pushes a baby out of the mother's vagina. It might also be enough to simply state that babies are born with the help of a doctor. This is also the time, in conjunction with potty training, to provide simple but clear boundaries around private parts.

Ages 5 to 7

At this point, kids might be curious about how a baby is actually made. Your answer might range from something as simple as "mommies and daddies can make a baby together" to a more detailed explanation that dad has sperm that joins together with an egg that lives inside mom. Some kids may be ready for a basic understanding of intercourse, specifically that the penis and vagina fit together to allow the sperm to swim to the egg.

Ages 8 to 12
This is when it's really key to impart values surrounding sex. By now, your child has possibly seen examples of sex on TV or in the media and will pick things up from peers. The conversation can become more nuanced as kids can understand the difference between rape and sex as something consensual. This is also a time when kids may be close to or entering puberty, and they'll want to understand how and why their own bodies are changing.

Let's talk about puberty
The best time to talk about the ways your child's body is changing is around the time the changes are happening. "We're seeing earlier puberty," Dr. Udovic-Constant shared, "but sometimes some of the hormonal changes that come aren't the true start of puberty."
In younger children, body changes may be easier to spot. The appearance of pubic hair and breast budding in girls are the indicators of the start of puberty; these changes can occur a few years in advance of a period. Puberty in boys, similarly, can be a bit of a moving target, but may begin as early as age 9 and starts as an increase in the size of the testicles.
The challenge at puberty is that kids may not be as vocal about what's happening with

their bodies. One way to approach the conversation, Dr. Udovic-Constant advised, is to simply say, "I'm noticing there are some changes and wondered if you had any questions." Be prepared that your child may want to talk to someone else instead, or read a book on his own, which is okay.
Make time for conversation
Knowing how and when to talk about sex is only half the battle. It's just as important to make space in our busy lives for these conversations to happen. Whether we're talking about sex or something in the news, we want our kids to know they can come to us for honest, direct, and true information. Often this requires some quiet, unstructured time, whether it's a regular family mealtime or reading quietly together at bedtime.
"Some of the most difficult discussions I've had [with my kids] have been in the car driving somewhere," Dr. Udovic-Constant shared. "When they are by themselves, they feel more comfortable asking. We need to create opportunities for time with us, so that kids can ask these natural questions as they come up." ♦

Suzanne Barnecut is a GGMG Magazine contributing writer and mother to a twirling, singing, 4-year-old girl. She currently works as a senior writer at Zendesk. Find her and her writing on Twitter @elisesus.



THERE'S A BOOK FOR THAT

If you're looking for help, there are some great resources and books available to guide the sex conversation at every stage:
The Care and Keeping of You from the American Girl brand comes a two-part series for girls. Part One (for ages up to 10) discusses body changes, while Part Two (for 10-plus) delves into emotions and more detail.

What's the Big Secret? by Laurie Krasny Brown and Marc Brown is another great option to help explain the differences between girls and boys, and to answer questions about babies and pregnancy.

It's Not the Stork! by Robie H. Harris and Michael Emberley helps explain where babies come from. Harris and Emberley are also the authors behind *It's So Amazing* and *It's Perfectly Normal*, the latter of which targets middle-school-aged kids.

My Body Belongs to Me by Jill Starishevsky offers a simple rhyming story to help teach body boundaries to young children and to help them be and feel safe. Similarly, *I Said No! A Kid-to-Kid Guide to Keeping Private Parts Private* by Kimberly and Zack King is written from a kid's point of view and empowers young children to know how and when to say no.

Another great resource is kidpower.org, which offers resources as well as safety- and confidence-training programs for kids at different age levels.

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Honey? We Need To Talk (About Money)



Most couples struggle with financial discussions. Here's how to get the conversations flowing.

By Stephanie AuWerter Photographs by Lindsay Lovier Photography

As a reporter who's spent most of her career writing and speaking about personal finance, you might think that when I married the man of my dreams, at age 39, discussing our financial future would have been easy-breezy. I'd written articles about how to have money talks and had been interviewed on TV and radio as an expert on the subject—I had this, right?

Not exactly. After many years on my own, embracing the concept of *our* money rather than *my* money was difficult. Our incomes were lopsided (my husband earned more than me), which made me feel dependent on him in an anxiety-producing, rather than happily-ever-after, kind of way. Our initial conversations about finances were actually more awkward than our first date.

Why we need to have “the talk”

Even with our challenges, my husband and I were still ahead of the game. At least we were *trying* to communicate. According to a 2010 survey from American Express, 91 percent of Americans find reasons to avoid talking money with their partners, with 30 percent stating that

money is the biggest source of stress in their relationship, easily outpacing intimacy issues (11 percent), kids (9 percent), or in-laws (4 percent).

Why is talking about money so hard? Part of it is that money conversations are rarely just about money. “They can really be about love, power, freedom, security, control—whatever money represents to that person,” says money coach Olivia Mellan, co-author of *Money Harmony: A Road Map for Individuals and Couples*. “It’s an emotionally loaded subject.”

Still, learning how to talk comfortably

Before you can talk honestly with your partner about money, you first need to recognize your own values about money and understand how you developed them.

about money with your partner is essential. Money fights, particularly when they begin early on in a marriage, are a red flag for divorce, according to the 2012 study “Examining the Relationship Between Financial Issues and Divorce,” published in the journal *Family Relations*. That’s because arguments about money tend to be longer, more intense, and harder to recover from.

This doesn’t mean that you and your sweetheart need to be in a constant state of financial bliss, floating on a cloud of billowy 401(k) statements and balance-free credit card bills. “I don’t think I’ve ever met a couple that doesn’t have at least some troubles,” says Liz Weston, columnist for San Francisco-based personal finance website NerdWallet and author of *The 10 Commandments of Money*. But if money talks don’t come easily in your relationship, it’s worth trying to improve that. “It takes some extra effort to have these conversations,” concedes Weston. Here’s how to apply the elbow grease:

Reflect

Before you can talk honestly with your partner about money, you first need to recognize your own values and understand how you developed them. So take some time to consider how money was discussed and allocated during your childhood, and what it represented to you and other family members. Try to recall your earliest memory of money. For many, it’s a negative one—say, when money became tight for a parent after a divorce. Delving into your financial past might feel a little squishy. However, identifying the messages you received about money at a young age will help you recognize the impact they have on your attitude as an adult, says Mellan.

Share this history with your partner, and vice versa. Knowing where your partner is coming from is important, says Weston, since it can help you empathize when different points of view arise. San Francisco fee-only financial planner Michelle Fait agrees, “Couples may have the same financial goals, but because they have different money histories, they have different scripts running

through their heads,” which can lead to conflict. So come clean about your past. (It’s likely to be less awkward than discussing your romantic history!)

Communication 101

Because money talks often devolve into money fights, it helps to agree to a basic code of conduct before delving into the family balance sheet.

Start with the assumption that there isn’t just one way to manage money. “Most of us have the mistaken idea that money is a rational thing that we can be right or wrong about,” says New York City-based financial therapist Amanda Clayman. “We spend a lot of time trying to convince our partner that we are right—and if that doesn’t work, it leads to intense conflict.” When not causing friction, incorporating two points of view can actually lead to better outcomes, says Weston, who jokes that if she made all the financial decisions in her relationship, her home would have no furniture, while if her husband made all the decisions, they would have no retirement savings.

Genuinely listening is essential, too. This can be hard when emotions run high. So if you often find yourselves in heated arguments with the same well-worn scripts being hammered out, try an “active listening” exercise, suggests Clayman. Start by using “I statements,” rather than “you statements,” to describe your financial concerns. Your partner

then repeats back what you’ve said, making sure that he fully understands what you’re saying by asking, “Do I have that right?” and, “Is there anything else?” Your partner then gets to respond, using the same techniques.

Sound a little stilted? It absolutely is, concedes Clayman. But slowing down the conversation and using a formal structure can be an effective way to ensure that you are being heard, without making your partner defensive.

Set a money date

Ah, after a bruising week of work and kid duties, there’s nothing like breaking open a nice bottle of red wine...and examining the family budget.

While it might not top your list of pleasurable date-night activities, you should nonetheless find a relaxed, intimate (no kids tugging at your sleeve) time where you and your partner can discuss finances, says financial planner Jeff Motske, author of *The Couple's Guide to Financial Compatibility*. And it should happen regularly—once a month or once a quarter, whichever feels right.

By having regular money meetings, you’ll hopefully avoid launching into a fight whenever, say, an unexpected bill arises. It also ensures that an ongoing conversation is maintained. Because financial talks are so often avoided, many couples are in the dark about where they stand financially, even when it comes to the basics. Consider this:



according to Fidelity Investments’ 2015 Couples Retirement Study, 43 percent couldn’t identify how much their partner earned (and 10 percent were off by \$25,000 or more).

Use these meetings to discuss dreams and goals, whether it’s retirement at age 65 or finding a way to support aging parents. It’s also a good time to create a financial to-do list, with tasks that can be completed by the time you meet again, such as finding a credit card with a better interest rate.

Don’t try to split the work directly down the middle. Instead, embrace your different styles and interests. “With almost all couples I work with, there is a yin and a yang,” says Clayman. So the spender may want take charge of planning a family vacation (within an agreed-upon budget), while the saver could research 529 college savings plans.

His, hers, ours

Whatever financial system a couple may have had prior to kids should be reviewed once a

baby comes along. “You cannot overstate how seismic this shift is in terms of your identity and financial life,” says Clayman.

It’s an issue that San Francisco newlywed Michelle O’Connor has been grappling with recently. O’Connor admits that she “dreads” talking about money. But with a baby due in November, the 35-year-old public relations agency owner recently realized that keeping her finances separate from her husband was no longer going to work. So she created a spreadsheet itemizing household and baby costs, and established a joint account for those expenses—while each still maintained personal accounts of their own. “This gave [me] a tangible way to discuss budget and costs with my husband without me feeling the need to ask for money,” says O’Connor.

Maintaining some financial autonomy can indeed be a good strategy, particularly when one partner is staying home with the kids for some period of time. Having your own money to spend as you see fit “tends to quell the

common arguments over small purchases,” says Motske.

And remember, you can always revise your arrangements as you evolve as a couple and experience the inevitable financial highs and lows. The key is to work together with whatever is the new reality. “You’re a team,” says Weston. “The most important goal is preserving that.”

My husband and I employed a few of the techniques above, and it wasn’t always pretty. We had to slog through some real issues before our disagreements became the “let’s-tackle-this-together” financial discussions we now enjoy. Start slow, with the confidence that your family will be much better off in the long run when you make finances a family affair. ❖

Stephanie has written personal finance articles for numerous publications, including Money Magazine, SmartMoney Magazine, Real Simple Magazine and Parents Magazine.

TALKING TO KIDS ABOUT MONEY

Discussing money with your partner may not be easy, but neither is talking about it with your kids.

Don’t make it taboo. Don’t be afraid to talk about your finances in front of or with your child—even when times are stressful, says Motske. If, say, a parent has lost a job, explain in an age-appropriate way what is happening and what changes may occur. Be sure to let the child know that you will work together as a family to get through the tough times—and follow through.

Answer questions. Make sure your child knows you are there to answer questions, and expect her to ask some tough ones. Questions about who’s rich and who’s poor, for example, are common, and can often make parents squeamish. But never shame your child for asking a question (i.e., by saying that a question is rude or inappropriate) or avoid giving an answer.

Instead, find out why the question is being asked, says Clayman, and then answer it according to your own truth. If

you’re feeling uncomfortable, your child will pick up on that, so don’t be afraid to explain why you have a tough time talking about the subject.

Model money. Money has become so abstract these days (i.e., paying bills online during a lunch break) that in addition to



talking money, you should make a conscious effort to show it, too. “I like to joke that you need to ‘perform money’ for kids,” says Clayman. So allow your kids to handle cash at the store, and let them see you write a check. Haven’t stepped foot in a bank in years? Take a field trip.

Emphasize choice. Ultimately, managing money is about choice. So when kids inevitably ask for something you don’t want to buy, don’t tell them “we can’t afford it,” says Weston. Instead say “we don’t choose to spend our money in that way.”

Likewise, providing a child with an allowance lets you have ongoing discussions about money and can offer valuable lessons. Learning, for example, that he’ll have to wait until he’s saved enough money to purchase something he wants is a lesson you want well-established before he gets his hand on that first credit card.

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Walk Humbly, Love Mercifully, and Rise Strong

While parenting intentionally and thoughtfully is important when going through a divorce or separation, it's equally important to be gracious with yourself and your children.

By Rachel Smith, Ed.D

My oldest child came into my bedroom early one morning and curled up in my bed while I was getting dressed. I could tell something was bothering her as she stared at a family picture of all of us hanging on the wall.

"Mom?" she asked.

"Yes, my love."

"Are we a whole family still?"

Breathe, I thought to myself. *Just breathe*. It had been four months since my marriage of 15 years had imploded and begun its rapid, dark descent toward divorce. Our children were 5 and 1, and sitting down to tell them what was happening did not make much sense to me. Their father and I had briefly discussed doing it together, which every co-parenting counselor and book on divorce

will tell you is the best thing to do. However, it required an agreement as to what was happening between us, and we had not yet arrived at one that satisfied either of us. It was messy. As I walked toward the bed where my daughter was lying, I had no idea what I was going to tell her.

"Yes, my love. We will always be family," I replied as I cuddled up on the bed next to her.

"But not a *whole* family, right?"

"Well...more like a *different* kind of family, I suppose."

"But not a *whole* one?" she pressed.

I paused, struggling to find a way to answer her question. Looking into my daughter's eyes, I could see her struggling too.

"I think I know what you are asking," I said, with my voice shaking. I was trying not to cry. "We are probably not going to be a family that lives all together anymore, but Daddy will always be your dad. I will always be your mom and your brother will always be your brother. Living together or apart does not change that. Living together or apart does not change how much each of us loves you."

We cuddled together in silence for a moment and tears began to leak out of my eyes. She looked at me with tears in her own eyes. We wiped them away from each other's cheeks.

"Do you miss being whole?" she whispered as more tears fell.

"Yes, I do."

"Me too," my daughter's voice flooded with emotion. "Do you miss Daddy like I miss Daddy?"

"Yes, baby, I do. I miss him very much."

We melted into each other and cried until we did not feel like crying anymore, then we collected her brother from his crib and made breakfast.

Of all the conversations I imagined having with my children, the one about divorce was never on the list. It was not a completely wrong way to tell my daughter, but it wasn't completely right either. It was just how it happened. There were several more discussions about the separation between her father and me that took place after that morning, and I anticipate more will take place in the future as I start to date other people and perhaps eventually remarry. When my son reaches an age when he wonders what happened, I know I will have to begin having these hard conversations again. I emphasize the *beginning* part of these conversations so much because it is important to realize these conversations evolve over time. I will not have them only once with my children and move on.

People trained in crisis management and counseling know that there is a pattern to the



way disasters unfold. They study it regularly and practice managing it. As a result, they offer a great deal of sage advice for those navigating their way through it. However, it is hard to discern which path best suits your

GGMG. I was not ready to admit that I was getting divorced when I joined, much less recognize that I was a single mom, but that group helped me keep my head above water so I could parent while I figured it out.

It is important that [your children] understand that while the situation is out of their control, they can still voice their thoughts, feelings, concerns, and desires.

situation when you are actually in crisis. Everyone acknowledges that separation, divorce, dating, and remarriage all happen with regularity, but no one is really prepared for the moment it happens to them. They are even less prepared for how to begin a conversation with their children about it. Like most people in similar situations, I was taken by surprise, and interpreting advice was like trying to follow a CPR manual with somebody actually dying in front of me. It did not feel like the right time to be learning, but I had to pull it together for the sake of my children.

In the spirit of preparation and prevention, I have summarized some advice regarding conversations with your children about separation, divorce, dating, or remarriage.

Find support

I was fortunate to have a friend who saw what was happening in my marriage before I did. When it started to crumble, she invited me into a single moms group sponsored by

Support, whether in the form of therapy, groups, friends, or family, is essential. These topics are emotional and they impact the lives of your children. It is hard to feel the weight of that and handle it with any kind of strength without someone upon whom you can lean. Your children cannot and should not be those people, and when you talk to them about any of these topics, they need to know you are okay.

Take the high road

No matter the topic of hard conversation with your children, there is always a high road and a low road. It is important that you constantly pay attention to the road you are choosing and be aware of how it is affecting your children. Taking the high road does not mean you lie to your children. Rather, you carefully select the truth you tell them. You keep your negative opinions and fights private, especially when the situation involves separation or divorce. If you need to talk



about it with someone, take your conversation to a place where your children cannot hear it. Be thoughtful about what you say around your children. Text or email rather than talk on the phone when they are around. Respect their relationships with the other people involved. Keep them out of the middle of the conflict and let them know that they are not the problem. Children are like sponges; they soak up more than we realize. This was hard for me during my divorce; I often excused my bad behavior by telling myself that my children were too little to notice or understand, but they did and it caused them stress.

Preventing problems is also part of taking the high road. Specifically in matters pertaining to separation and divorce, many co-parenting counselors recommend using Our Family Wizard (www.ourfamilywizard.com) or 2Houses (www.2houses.com) to facilitate communication between parents.

Start as you mean to continue

Start the hard conversation with your children as soon as you can and in a way that lets them know they can continue it at any time. Unless your children initiate the discussion, avoid having it when the kids are hungry, distracted by another activity, or tired. The gravity and seriousness with which we approach topics like divorce, dating, and remarriage can increase anxiety and make children feel like they did something wrong. Notice how your children respond whenever you talk about

the situation. They may sit silently, cry, laugh, ask questions, express concerns, change the subject, show anger, and/or misbehave. Acknowledge their reactions. Validate their feelings. Clarify their misunderstandings. Answer their questions. It is important that they understand that though the situation is out of their control, they can still voice their thoughts, feelings, concerns, and desires. Their feelings and experiences will evolve over time, and when they do address the topic again, pay attention to your reaction and welcome the conversation.

Speak with simplicity, honesty, and love

Talking about changes that are about to occur does not need to be overly dramatic or long-winded. Simple sentences are best, alongside a brief explanation as to what may change for your children. Keep the conversation positive. Give them an opportunity to express their questions and thoughts. If you don't have all the answers, it is okay to tell them that you don't know or you aren't sure. Provide them with as much age-appropriate information as they feel they need, but again, it is important to be honest with them. Carefully choose the facts of the matter, and avoid making promises.

It is also a time to reinforce your love for them. Express that love often and in a manner that is consistent with your previous behavior. Pay attention to them without obsessing over them. Avoid buying extra gifts, taking special vacations, or doing anything outside the

norm just to make your children feel better. That does not mean avoiding doing these things altogether; it simply means that you buy gifts or take vacations with intention. They will know they are loved and feel secure during the change.

Be consistent

Consistency helps children cope. If everyone involved in the situation is having separate conversations with the children, keep the messaging consistent. Keep routines and schedules the same and stay consistent with rules, expected behaviors, and discipline, but recognize and acknowledge that there will be inconsistencies. Children will sometimes make an effort to exploit the circumstances or the differences they notice to get something they want. Respond with grace and understanding when it creates a problem. The consistency in your behavior and reaction will help your children understand that it is not okay to manipulate you, but it is okay to discuss what is happening without feeling anxiety, stress, discomfort, or caught in the middle.

My daughter came out of her room one night and told me she missed her dad and could not sleep. My heart broke, so I invited her to sit and we talked about it for a while, then I let her stay up and watch a movie until she fell asleep. The next three nights, she still couldn't sleep because she missed her dad. Those nights I hugged her and put her back to bed. While I knew she genuinely missed her dad, I also knew she was being a 5-year-old who did not want to go to bed.

In speaking with many single moms and co-parenting counselors, I found that the best advice was to be gracious with yourself and your children. You are going to make mistakes. Forgive yourself. Learn from it. Make better choices. Pay attention to the example you are setting for your children. One mother said it best when she shared her experience having these hard conversations: "In the end," she explained, "you want your children to be proud of you. Make them proud. Walk humbly through the experience, love mercifully, and rise strong." ♦

Rachel is a sensational single mom of two adorable children. She has her doctorate in education from UCLA, masters in school administration, and undergraduate degrees in child development and English. When life hands you lemons, make limoncello.



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Talking to Kids About Race

*Honest conversations about race are important for children of all ages.
Parents should foster healthy discussion and lead by example.*

By Bobby Shukla Photographs by Anna Psalmond Photography

On July 6, 2016, cafeteria supervisor Philando Castile was killed by Minnesota police during a routine traffic stop with his 4-year-old stepdaughter in the car. Castile was described as soft-spoken and deeply loving by those who knew him. His death impacted the more than 500 children he served each day at J.J. Hill Montessori Magnet School. Castile learned each of the children's names, kept track of special diets, and always made sure kids got enough to eat. His killing sparked waves of protests and necessitated difficult conversations with the children left saddened and confused by his sudden absence. Many echoed the sentiment of Castile's mother,

who stated broken-heartedly, "I think he was just black in the wrong place."

The urgency around discussing race and racism with our children often arises after a nationally publicized event. As educator Micia Mosely, who holds a doctorate in Education and Social and Cultural Studies, reminds us, "the idea of how and when to talk about race assumes [there is] a choice." Many families don't have this choice; they face the darkest realities of racism every day. For those of us with the privilege to choose when to start the conversation, experts in the field say the time is now.

Your actions are already talking

Mosely, who serves as the executive director of Black Teacher Project, holds workshops about race for parents and teachers. She found that each time she has been asked to conduct a workshop, it has been in reaction to an event. She encourages people to stop being reactionary and ask themselves, "What [do] you want your kids to know, and are you waiting for something bad to happen before you explain it to them?"

According to Mosely, self-reflection about your own attitudes and experiences is the real first step in the process. She stresses the importance of taking time to explore your

own beliefs and values around race and how you enforce and reinforce them with your actions.

"It doesn't matter what you say if your actions show otherwise. You are sending strong cues about race...each day by the things you do," she says. In workshops, Mosely has participants recount their earliest memories about race. One woman whose mother had preached racial equality recalled a memory of an African-American man entering an elevator with her and her mother. Her mother immediately clutched her purse and pulled her daughter closer. That experience taught the woman to fear people based on color, despite her mother's words. Mosely cautions that "actions" include who you spend time with. Children notice if you tell them to value racial diversity when none exists in your life. She asks us to consider, "If you have no people of color as friends, how do you expect your children to lead different lives?"

Teaching "color blindness" is not the answer

A study outlined in the book *NurtureShock* by Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman discovered that most white parents never talk to their kids about race. Parents often stop children when they mention race or racial differences because they hope that their children will be color-blind. While this may be well-intentioned, teaching "color blindness" tells kids to ignore race, racism, and its effects.

Bree Carlson is the structural racism program director for the National People's Action (NPA), a network of organizations devoted to advancing economic and racial justice. Carlson states that children talk about race "until interrupted because they're taught that it is not polite to notice and talk about race." Mosely adds, "if you avoid noting race altogether, you send the message that the mere acknowledgment of race is wrong."

Though many of us know that racial inequality is a social construct and not a

biological fact, we still need to acknowledge race and racialized systems, "The process of racialization forms how we understand ourselves in relation to each other," Carlson says. "If you tell people that color does not

All kids, including those who experience racial privilege, need to be taught how to address racism in the world, not to ignore it.

matter, they cannot make sense of the assumptions made about them or the barriers they face" and may attribute the effects of racism to perceived individual failings. All kids, including those who experience racial privilege, need to be taught how to address racism in the world, not to ignore it.

While these realities are difficult, Carlson reminds us that the failure to see color also





greatly limits children’s experiences of the joys of the human experience. “Color blindness is a tragedy where you can’t experience the range of beauty in the world,” she notes.

Be age appropriate

Madeleine Rogin, a teacher who taught elementary school, wrote in her article “How to Teach Kids About Racism” that for years she taught about Martin Luther King Jr. without addressing racism. As a mother of mixed-race children, Rogin learned that “it is impossible to teach my daughter or my students about who Dr. King was without also telling the ugly truth about racism.” While young children need to know the truth about race and its history, it is important to be age-appropriate in the same way you would handle discussions about sex.

Liz Murray, policy director at the NPA, says you need to know what your kids can handle when framing the discussion. Murray also reminds us that you can find entrée into discussions about race in the little things in life, not just national tragedies that are harder for children to comprehend. “Everyday little things are great openings for conversations about race because they give the topic a lot less emotional weight,” Murray says. In a recent example, Murray and her children witnessed another child jokingly make a play on the phrase “black lives matter.” Murray saw the opportunity to engage her children in a discussion, pointing out that joking about such things minimizes the seriousness of the issue.

Acknowledge bias, mistakes, and not knowing

Many parents are afraid of broaching this topic because it forces uncomfortable truths, or they’re afraid of saying the wrong thing or uncovering their own biases. Harvard University’s implicit association test, which measures the association between concepts (e.g. black people or gay people) and evaluations (e.g., good or bad) or stereotypes (e.g., athletic or clumsy), shows that across all races, 70 percent of test-takers show a preference for whites. This confirms fears about implicit racial biases, but it should not stop us from engaging in these conversations. “It’s not about being a good or a bad person. It’s impossible to be free of racial bias,” says Carlson. She advises to just assume you have racial bias and then move forward from that premise. She notes that acknowledging racial bias actually “helps develop healthy

self-doubt about your opinions,” which ultimately fosters racial progress.

Murray emphasizes that “kids will ask questions you don’t know the answers to. They will make you go find things out, and make you question your own assumptions, constantly. You will screw up...but that doesn’t mean you stop trying.”

Keep the conversation going

Discussions about race should be ongoing, provide an open forum for children to ask anything, include examples of progress, and convey hope for further progress. According to Mosely, “everyone needs to have an intentional conversation with their children about race, no matter how they identify. The conversation should include a historical understanding of how we got here and what each individual can do to make the vision of racial equity true. Talk about what’s possible [in terms of equitable opportunities for everyone] because people get discouraged.” ❖

Bobby is a lawyer who represents employees in a variety of employment law areas, including discrimination, harassment, retaliation, whistleblowing, and severance negotiations.

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NEIGHBORHOOD MEETUPS

Looking for a regular playgroup or play date? Well, look no further, Neighborhood Meetups is here for you!

Neighborhood Meetups volunteers are active in 11 neighborhoods around the city, organizing events for GGMG members throughout the year. These events include wine nights, book clubs, special/holiday events, and weekly play dates. You don't have to live in the neighborhood subgroup to join, and you are welcome to join as many subgroups as you would like.

Here is just a small taste of the fun meetups going on in a playground or cafe near you. Information about each one is posted on BigTent, available to all GGMG members after joining the subgroup.

The **Noe Valley Infant Mothers Meetup** has been going strong, with a bi-weekly meetup on Thursdays from 2 to 3:30 p.m. at La Boulangerie on 24th Street.

In the **Marina**, join other moms for the weekly stroller run/walk on Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m., starting at the blue fitness court at the corner of Marina Boulevard and Webster Street. Wrap things up with a delicious treat at the Croissant Meetup, which occurs every Thursday from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Le Marais Bakery on Chestnut Street, and enjoy "la savoir vivre."

If you're looking for a playgroup in the **Richmond**, try the Blue Playground at Fulton Street and 9th Avenue inside Golden Gate Park on Thursdays at 9:30 a.m.

In the **Mission**, moms meet up every other week at different parks in the area.

For moms in the **Heights**, there is much to consider, from the Monday Playgroup at Lafayette Park at 11 a.m. to the Tuesday Playgroup at Presidio Playground (at Clay and Walnut Streets) from 9:30 to 10:30 a.m. And every third Friday, moms meet up for Coffee & Kids, from 9:30 to 11 a.m.; meet at Starbucks on Fillmore Street at 9:30 a.m. and walk to Alta Plaza Park at 9:45 a.m. Be sure to RSVP on BigTent so we know to expect you!

In **SOMA**, moms meet every week for a walk or a play date, at places like the Mission Bay Playground, the Farmer's Market at Mission Bay, Philz by the ballpark, Crossroads, and various common rooms in condos in the area.

And don't miss the **Tuesday Morning Weekly Meetup at Sunnyside Playground** from 10 to 11 a.m. to chat with other moms and let your kids roam free. This playgroup is hosted by the Bernal Heights/Glen Park Neighborhood Meetup subgroup, which covers most of southeastern SF.

GET CONNECTED

To find out more about the playdates hosted in your neighborhood and beyond, and to RSVP, join the neighborhood subgroup on BigTent for the neighborhood(s) you are interested in at www.bigtent.com/group/subgroup.

Tip: You can set up your settings in Bigtent to have events and discussions from your neighborhood forum sent to your email—this way you won't miss anything!



KIDS ACTIVITIES

Kids Soccer Session with SFF Soccer Juniors

Get your budding soccer stars out on the field to learn new skills and have fun. SFF Soccer Juniors provides soccer-based games and coaching for kids aged 18 months to 7 years. Our games and activities promote physical activity, develop confidence, and improve coordination in a fun and safe environment suitable for all skill levels. After the class you can enjoy some down time on our field and take advantage of the variety of food trucks from our neighbors SPARK. There is a maximum capacity of 15 kids per group, so RSVP soon.

DATE: Saturday, October 29
TIME: 1 to 3 p.m.
PLACE: Mission Bay Soccer Field (Mission Bay Blvd. N at 4th St.)
COST: FREE

REGISTRATION: www.bigtent.com/home/calendar/event/98295210

Pumpkin Decorating and Book Swap Play Date at Presidio Heights Playground

Meet some new playmates for your little one and bring a few gently used books to trade or donate. We'll provide the art supplies and accessories for anyone who wants to decorate their pumpkin in time for Halloween. Coffee and bagels will also be served to fuel your creativity. Any leftover books will be donated to the Homeless Prenatal Program. Looking forward to seeing you there!

DATE: Saturday, October 22
TIME: 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
PLACE: 3437 Clay St.
COST: FREE

REGISTRATION: www.bigtent.com/home/calendar/event/98661217

Nutcracker at the SF Ballet

Join Kids Activities and the Tutu School for a night of holiday wonder by purchasing your rear balcony tickets on BigTent. This is a family performance so the first 500 children through the doors receive a special gift. The SF Ballet recommends that children be at least 5 years old for the performance. **To redeem this special offer and be eligible for the Tutu school gift certificate raffle and kids' gift, please purchase your tickets on BigTent by October 14.**

DATE: Tuesday, December 13
TIME: 7 to 9 p.m.
PLACE: 301 Van Ness Ave.
COST: \$25 (with GGMG discount)

REGISTRATION: <http://www.bigtent.com/group/calendar/event/98915702>

PARENT EDUCATION

Get Prepared for the Private Kindergarten Admission Process with Little & Molligan

Join Betsy Little and Paula Molligan of Little & Molligan as they discuss the challenging private kindergarten admission process in SF. Leverage their extensive experience assisting parents as authors of several books about private schools in SF and the Bay Area.

DATE: Thursday, October 13
TIME: 6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m.
PLACE: TBD
COST: FREE

REGISTRATION: www.bigtent.com/home/calendar/event/98732710

Sleeping Through the Night: Turning Your Dream into Reality

Worried you may never sleep through the night again? Certified Sleep Consultant Melissa Zdrodowski explains what it takes for your child to sleep through the night. Melissa is a certified maternity and child sleep consultant and the co-founder of Sleep Sisters. She'll cover actions you can take to lay a foundation, and troubleshoot common problems. Ideal for families with babies ages 4 to 12 months.

DATE: Tuesday, October 18
TIME: 10:30 a.m. to 12 p.m.
PLACE: 200 Brannan St., Community Room
COST: FREE

REGISTRATION: www.bigtent.com/home/calendar/event/98732777

Countdown to Kindergarten with Parents for Public Schools

Come to this informative workshop to better understand your public school options and navigate the enrollment process for transitional kindergarten (TK) and kindergarten.

You will:

Learn more about the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) Student Assignment System

Get tips and advice from parents

Find out key dates and other important enrollment information

DATE: Tuesday, October 18
TIME: 6:30 to 8 p.m.
PLACE: 1111 Gough St.
COST: FREE

REGISTRATION: www.goo.gl/ZHfHCH

Your Willful 3-Year-Old at Recess

Join Rebecca Walsh of Early Childhood Matters to find out why 3 can be more difficult than 2 from a developmental perspective, and learn helpful, positive discipline strategies to meet the 3-year-old challenge, heart open, and head on! Topics include engaging your child in problem-solving, strategies for transitions (e.g., mealtimes, bedtimes), and ways to support your child's growing independence while creating more peace and harmony at home.

DATE: Tuesday, October 4
TIME: 7:30 to 9 p.m.
PLACE: 470 Carolina St.
COST: \$38 single/\$58 couple; save \$5 with promo code GGMG16

REGISTRATION: www.bigtent.com/group/calendar/event/98744336

MEMBERSHIP

Prenatal Yoga Class

Are you pregnant and want to meet other soon-to-be moms? In need of a relaxing midday break? Join us for a GGMG exclusive prenatal yoga class at It's Yoga Kids, followed by mingling and refreshments. Space is limited to 25 women.

DATE: Sunday, October 23
TIME: 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
PLACE: 569 Ruger St.
COST: FREE

REGISTRATION: www.bigtent.com/group/calendar/event/98608067

Committee Spotlight: **Recruiting Committee**

Describe the personality of your committee.

The Recruiting Committee is actually the Recruiting and Onboarding Committee. We do more than recruit new volunteers; we are responsible for training new volunteers on how GGMG operates. We also want all of our volunteers to feel like they can continually reach out to us about their volunteer experience. In some ways, we think of ourselves as the "HR" of the organization.

Why do you do what you do? What has been an unexpected benefit of being involved with the Recruiting Committee?

I (Jennifer Friedland) got involved with GGMG because I wanted to give back to an organization that I had gotten so much from. When I had my first child, I had only lived in San Francisco for a year, and I didn't know other parents. The group that I met when I first joined GGMG was a lifeline for me, and I am still friends with the moms from that group. Recruiting appeals to me because I get to see a little of everything that is happening inside GGMG. At the New Volunteer Orientation, held quarterly, I get to meet volunteers from nearly every committee.

What types of activities or projects do you undertake?

Aside from our quarterly new volunteer brunches, which all volunteers are welcome to attend, we also have recently started a new initiative to hold regular recruiting fairs. We are aiming to have one every year, and if they are successful, we could add another.

How do you know when you are making a difference?

The difficult part of recruiting is that it can sometimes feel like a Sisyphean task. Just as you gain a lot of new volunteers, you also lose some. We always need our members to step up and help out. But we know that we are doing a good job when we see committees fully staffed and running.

Who are your current volunteers?

We are small but mighty. The committee is Jennifer Friedland, Kaitlin Kertsman (who recently welcomed baby number three), Mareen Weber, and Aditi Chandarana. We are on the hunt for a new co-chair as well.

What's next for the Recruiting Committee?

The training of new volunteers is something that we have taken on recently. So we need to keep that going, and get the word out about our new role within the organization.

How can interested GGMG members get involved in the Recruiting Committee?

We never turn down any volunteer! Everyone can be useful, and there are so many different positions. Email us at volunteer@ggm.org.

Back-to-School Jitters

Parents are gearing up to tour preschools, elementary schools, and middle schools. This time of the year can be especially stressful to parents. The veterans of GGMG would love to share some tips for your search for the best SF school for your children.

No school will have everything you'd like, but that's OK. Schools are run by people, and people are imperfect. Especially for younger children, a warm, nurturing environment where you feel comfortable leaving your child is important. Unless you have a lot of flexibility, logistics make a big difference to your day-to-day life; consider school location, hours, holiday schedule, drop-in/extended care, cost/financial aid, and lunch policy. Ask about the teachers and the student-to-teacher ratio.

During the touring and application season, be kind to yourself. It's easy to panic about preschool or kindergarten choice as essential to the future of your little bean. It sometimes even feels like the application process is a judgment of you as a person. To handle the stress, take a breather and schedule some time for self care, whether that's a yoga class, a workout, a walk, or a date. GGMG has lots of these activities offered for this very reason! Go to a Just for Moms event or plan a moms' night out with your friends. Talk with friends whose children are past this point if you start to panic and are in need of perspective. It will all work out in the end.



It's almost time for GGMG's Annual Fall Festival!

Please join fellow GGMG families as we usher in fall at Sharon Meadow in Golden Gate Park on October 8 from 10 a.m to 1 p.m.

The festival will include *live music* from **JAMaROO** and **Music for Aardvarks**, *live activities* from **High-Five Sports**, **AcroSports**, **SF Tots**, and **My Gym Children's Fitness Center**, age-appropriate *bounce houses*, a *pumpkin patch*, and many other fun activities. Capture all the fun at the *photobooth*! We'll also have an *infant resting station*, a *nursing station*, *stroller parking*, as well as many of our fantastic partners ready to celebrate with you all.

And did we hear that you love raffles? Well we've got one including *awesome prizes* from **House of Air**, **Babyganics**, **Bay Area Discovery Museum**, **Peekadoodle** and more!

We're in need of incredible volunteers like yourself to help us this year. Extra bonus...all volunteers will receive a Starbucks gift card and be entered to win a volunteer raffle prize! Various shifts and positions are available, sign up at the RSVP link below, or email rsvp@ggm.org if you have any questions. Any help you can provide would be greatly appreciated!

Make sure to RSVP on BigTent here: www.bigtent.com/home/calendar/event/98639277.

Interested in Meeting New Friends, Getting Involved in GGMG, and Having Fun? **Volunteer** with GGMG Today!

GGMG is always looking for our members to volunteer with us and help keep this great organization running smoothly. It is an easy way to meet other moms, get involved in the community, and even build your resume! There are many positions open, with a variety of responsibilities and time commitments.

A sample of the current open positions are:

- Partnerships**—Volunteer
- Just for Moms**—Co-chair
- Community Support**—Drives and Events Volunteer
- Kids Activities**—Volunteer
- Web Team**—Co-chair

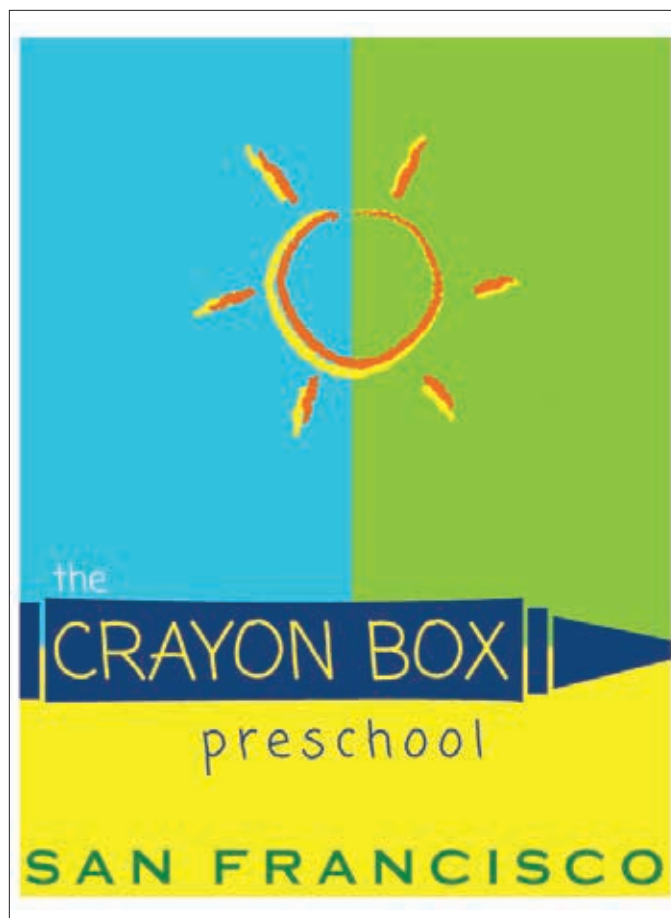
- Magazine**—Writer, Photographer, Graphic Designer
- Playgroup Formation**—Volunteer
- Recruiting**—Co-chair
- Neighborhood Meetups**—Co-chair; Volunteers for Haight, NoPa/Alamo, Mission/Castro, Nob Hill/North Beach, Noe

Email volunteer@ggm.org if you are interested in volunteering with us!

Forum Tips: Posting Anonymously

- Anonymous posts must be approved by a moderator before showing up in the forums. Anonymous posts are generally approved within 24 hours.
- Anonymous recommendations for caregivers, nannies, babysitters, au pairs, etc. will be rejected.
- Posts sharing a positive or negative experience with a specific vendor or person may not be posted anonymously.
- Anonymous posts are truly anonymous; moderators cannot see your identity.

Moderators are unable to contact anonymous posters; contact the Web Team (webteam@ggm.org) if you have any questions.



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I ♥ Mom

Meeting My History

By Carolyn Soling

I always knew I wanted to find out about my birth parents, and I referenced it as a life goal throughout my childhood. As I got older, however, it became less and less at the forefront of my mind. I still wanted to do it, but it seemed like so much work.

The medical history that came with my adoption documents was spotty at best; I was given the year of my birth, 1982, and the age of my birth mother, 17. This never bothered me when I was young, but when I got pregnant, I came to the realization that my lack of family medical history no longer just affected me. So, when six months pregnant, I began the search for my birth mother using Google and social media. Within one month, I had a name.

On my 33rd birthday, I mustered up the courage to send a Facebook message to the woman I believed gave birth to me. "Hi, today is my birthday and I believe this date may have some significance to you as well (or at least stick out to you)," I wrote. I told her where I was born, where I grew up, and how I found her name. And then I waited.

Two weeks after I hit "send" and 12 days after seeing that the message had been "seen" (that function of Messenger was a curse), I got a reply from my birth mother: she was open to talking.

There were so many things to cover in those first conversations, so I researched ways to open the doors of communication, poring over blogs and websites that advised how to properly approach the situation. Some sites said to show interest, but not so much as to come across as pushy. Others suggested using medical history as a good way to start a conversation, so that my birth mom didn't feel like I was trying to get too involved in her life. Still others said not to rely heavily on asking about medical history, as it could imply that that was all I was after. I felt like I was being directed by the Scarecrow from *The Wizard of Oz*, constantly pointing me in opposite directions.

I chose to mostly stay quiet and let my birth mother tell me what she wanted to tell me. Unfortunately, this approach came across as if I had no interest in my birth story or history, she told me later. I then explained to her all about my online research and my hesitation to push, as I was feeling lucky to have found her at all.

I had heard so many horror stories of adoption reunions by this point, which made our story pretty mellow in comparison. Six months after the initial contact, we met in person and talked about things neither of us could bring up over email. It turned out that the man she wrote about in the small paragraph that came

with my adoption records was not my birth father. At the time she had hoped he was, because she did not know the name of the other man. It was weird finding the only history that had been laid out for me for the past 30-plus years was not real, but the news was not as devastating as she had been worried it would be.

She had decided early on that adoption was the best course for us. She was open with her husband (not my birth father) when they started dating, and told her three sons about me when she

felt they were old enough to understand.

My relationship with my birth mother has continued to blossom as she has introduced me to her children, her siblings, and their spouses. Many of them have friended me on Facebook and are active commenters. We have all benefitted from the reconnection.

My parents, on the other hand, have had the most difficult time of it. They have asked me to stop sharing details with them about my conversations and meetups with my birth family. Before my last meeting with my birth mother and my half-brothers, my mom told me to have

fun with my "friends" at dinner—she had actively blocked the reality from her mind. I hope that over time my mom and dad will get more comfortable with everything. Most recently, I brought up

When six months pregnant, I began the search for my birth mother using Google and social media. Within one month, I had a name.

the possibility of them meeting my birth mother sometime down the road. The conversation ended quickly when they told me they are not at all interested and do not understand why she would want to meet them either.

I feel blessed by how my life, my parents' lives, and my birth mother's life have all turned out. I attribute it to my birth mother's brave decision to seek a better life for me and to my parents' decision to welcome and love me. Someday I hope I can invite my birth family to my daughter's special events without hurting my parents. I am not sure it will ever happen, but I plan to continue to talk about it, no matter how difficult it may be. ♦

Carolyn is a San Francisco-based photographer and mother who still calls Chicago home after 15 years of being away. She regularly runs on coffee and fumes during the holiday season.



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