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Engage your child's senses with this simple and fun pumpkin fluff activity!

Materials

- 1 can of pumpkin puree
- 1 can of extra creamy whipped cream
- 1 teaspoon of cinnamon
- A bowl or dish
- Towel – that can be thrown away

Steps

- Pour one can of pumpkin puree into a bowl
- Add in the can of extra creamy whipped cream to pumpkin puree mixture
- Stir the ingredients together and add in the teaspoon of cinnamon
- The end result is a “fluff” mixture
- Have your little scientists dive into the mixture to ignite their senses to explore, play, and create their own masterpieces!

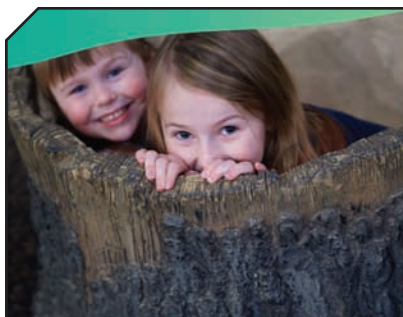
NOTE: This is a nontoxic activity, but will get messy! Putting a towel or any protectant underneath the bowl will avoid stains. This is the perfect sensory activity for kids of all ages to enjoy with an adult!



FUN FACT

This activity activates the senses and facilitates children to use scientific processes while they explore, play, create and investigate the mixture.

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CARNEGIE SCIENCE CENTER

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Talking elections with kids

In this day and age we deal with news constantly, whether it be fake news or factual news, it's everywhere — newspapers, social media, even elevators have screens now that push news at you. Children can't help but be aware of the political news and often ask their parents difficult and complicated questions. As this year's election season rages on, you may find yourself in the difficult position of trying to help your children navigate through the murky, perplexing nature of the United States political system.

Maria Castello, Pittsburgh Parent intern, did the following research on talking to kids about elections for us in 2016. "You may not be sure how to clearly and intelligently talk to your children about these issues - you may not even really understand them yourself. It's still worthwhile, however, for you to make an attempt to help your kids understand the basics of national politics. As the American author James Baldwin wrote, "It is certain, in any case, that ignorance, allied with power, is the most ferocious enemy justice can have."

Talking to your kids about politics might seem like a difficult and daunting task. There do exist many ways, however, for parents to use a competent, respectful conversation about politics as a great opportunity for their children (and maybe even for themselves!) to learn about more than just the election. Says Pittsburgh licensed professional counselor Lindsay Brain: "It's a great opportunity to expand thinking skills of children... and reinforce key values that parents strive to teach."

Here are some ideas for how parents can use the election season as an excellent all-around educational opportunity for their kids:

- Teach the importance of participating in politics/democracy: Whenever possible, take the time to vote, and take your kids with you so they can see the physical process of voting. Watch the debates, and allow your children to watch them, too. This will help them understand the privilege and responsibility held by those of us living in a democratic society like the United States.
- Discuss the existence of moral ambiguity: Areas of grayness almost always exist in life, especially within the political sphere, and the election season is a great time to begin teaching your children this lesson. "When discussing political opinions, above all, parents should be positive and accepting about the fact that differing views exist," says Dr. Deborah Kruglak Gilman, Ph.D., of Pittsburgh. "Help children to see all sides of an issue," she adds.
- Demonstrate respect: Respect is an important and necessary virtue in all aspects of life. Explain the importance of not attacking another person's character (whether they be a candidate or your next-door neighbor), and treating everyone with respect, no matter how difficult this may be. This will be important for your children to remember no matter where they go in life.
- Emphasize the importance of research and proactive learning: Take your children to the library and help them choose books on the United States history, presidents, politics and government. Help them research websites about these same topics."

In my opinion, talking with your kids about important issues, the electoral process and why voting is important not only gives them a mini lesson on how government affects the world, but also shows that every person's opinion counts. Though they can't vote yet, they'll be able to someday, so it's important that they start becoming informed.

Please try to take your kids with you into the voting booth on Election Day to show them firsthand how the process works. Be a role model by setting a positive example that lets them know you value the right to vote. Show your kids the importance of voting — and they'll grow up knowing that every vote counts. ■

Pat

*For more about teaching children about their civic responsibilities, see our article on page 16.

Pittsburgh Parent

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724-898-1898 • PittsburghParent.com
Office hours: Mon - Fri, 8:30am-3:30pm

Publisher: Lynn Honeywill-Norris
manager@pittsburghparent.com

Editor: Patricia Poshard
editor@pittsburghparent.com

Production: Kerri Lutz
web@pittsburghparent.com

Marketing & Finance
manager@pittsburghparent.com

Web/ Social Media: Kerri Lutz
web@pittsburghparent.com

Account Managers
Blythe Burgan Davis
sales2@pittsburghparent.com

Corina Shutack
sales1@pittsburghparent.com

Editorial • Social Media
Maria Castello

Founding Publisher
Marilyn McCabe Honeywill
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Photo credit: Germaine Watkins

Sean & Summer Dean

Family: Summer and Sean with their children, Mila, 6 and Mason, 9

Hometown: Shaler

School: Eden Christian Academy

WHY IS EDEN CHRISTIAN ACADEMY A GREAT EXPERIENCE FOR YOUR FAMILY?

Our family is truly blessed to have Eden in our lives. Both Mason (grade 4) and Mila (grade 1) attend the Berkeley Hills campus, and they have had a wonderful experience.

According to Mason, he loves Eden because, "My teachers are really nice. I have made great friends and we get to learn about God together!"

To hear Mila tell it, "I love morning meeting when we sing songs and pray for our friends." They are both so excited to tell us about their day, and that is important to us. As parents, we have seen tremendous growth in our children's academic preparedness and character.

The teachers pour so much into them each and every day. With the guidance of the dedicated

administrative team, and an infusion of beliefs we value, Eden is a choice we are extremely thankful and grateful for.

HOW WOULD EDEN BE GREAT FOR OTHER PARENTS?

As Eden parents, each day you'll feel as if you've left your children with a family member.

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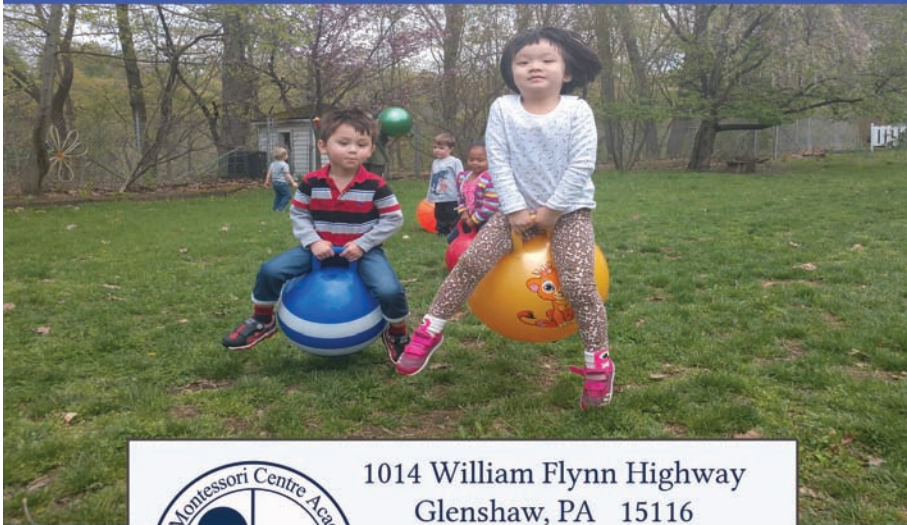
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Dear Teacher

**The road to having
children succeed in math**

Q: Being good at mathematics is such an important life skill. What can I do to help my young children have success in math? – Very Curious



A: Believe it or not, there is one major thing that parents can do to put their children on the road to success in math. It is your attitude toward math. It must be a positive one that promotes a "can do" attitude. Your young children will then more than likely have the same attitude. You must avoid saying that you hated math in school and could never handle math, as your children will also absorb this negative attitude. And your positive attitude must remain evident as your children progress through school.

Once your children are in school, you should praise your children — not for their talent in doing math but for their efforts, especially in using strategies to solve problems. This will encourage them to try hard. With effort, most children can master mathematics.

While it is true that students learn math at school, it should also be part of your life at home. Before your children get to kindergarten, help them learn to count. They can count shoes, socks and books. This is real-world mathematics. They can also sing counting songs with you as well as play games that require them to count a few spaces in order to move around a game board.

Once your children are in elementary school, help your children develop instant recall (three seconds or less) of basic addition, subtraction, multiplication and division facts. Oral practice is just as effective as flashcards. Games and apps can provide solid practice, too.

continued on page 8

Shady Side Academy Middle School: Because "How" Matters

By Shady Side Academy

The middle school years are a time of great transition, when children grow at a rapid pace socially, emotionally and intellectually. It's a time when kids are trying to figure out who they are, searching for their strengths and voices. How can you help your child navigate this journey?

Shady Side Academy believes that *how* you educate children is as important as *what* they learn. With small class sizes, individual attention and a rigorous curriculum, Shady Side helps students develop confidence, critical-thinking and collaboration skills.

SSA's Middle School guides students through this transition by helping them gain greater independence in their academic and overall school life. Supported by a team of passionate educators, students begin to make choices, take on more responsibilities and learn to advocate for themselves in an environment that encourages intellectual risk-taking.

The Middle School enrolls 210 students in grades 6 - 8 on a 35-acre campus in Fox Chapel, which includes a gym, library, three newly renovated science labs, two computer labs, a garden and two athletic fields. Students also use athletic facilities at the nearby SSA Senior School.

"One of the things that makes our school different is the size," said Amy Nixon, head of the Middle School since 2004 and currently the Academy's interim president. "Classes are generally around 15 kids, so the adults get to know each child very well, both as a learner and as a human being."

The curriculum balances inquiry, skill development, critical thinking and subject mastery. Students develop as communicators and as scholars, gaining valuable writing skills and effective study habits. They learn to reason logically, communicate clearly and use factual information to support their ideas.

"Our job is to set the bar high, and then to help them get over it," said Nixon. "All of their peers are in the same boat, so it becomes the norm. It's fun, and it's engaging, and it increases their ability to soar."

Hands-on projects and experiential learning opportunities permeate the curriculum. The math program builds excellent problem-solving skills and offers accelerated courses. The science program utilizes a collaborative, project-based approach and offers high-school-level physics for advanced math students. Three languages are offered, including Chinese.

Each student receives an iPad through a 1:1 program, and teachers incorporate technology into classes in meaningful ways. Computer science classes introduce students to coding, robotics and program design.

A broad arts curriculum includes visual art and music classes, audition-based music ensembles and two drama productions.

At the end of each day, students participate in a required co-curricular program of athletics and activities that encourages them to try new things and uncover hidden talents. Choices include sports, drama, art, Science and Math Olympiad, a literary magazine and working in the garden.

According to parents, it's the quality of the teachers and the relationships they build with students that set SSA apart.

"I feel confident that every day my children are taught by faculty members who love their discipline," said June Navid, whose four children have all attended the Middle School. "Who ever heard of a Latin teacher being so animated during a class discussion that the class erupts in applause? Or an English teacher who encourages her students to wrestle with the idea of injustice and interview someone who has suffered from it? These experiences are just part of a regular day at SSA Middle School."

Students receive academic and social-emotional support through an advisory program, a full-time psychologist and learning specialist. Students see their faculty advisor three times a day, and a daily conference period offers time to meet with teachers for extra help, developing self-advocacy skills.

"The critical piece is always knowing what you don't know, and then, knowing how to get that information," said Nixon. "Is there any better lesson for life, let alone in school?"

With caring adults to guide them, SSA students become proficient learners and gain an understanding of how to be better citizens in an ever-changing, diverse world.



SHADY SIDE
ACADEMY
BECAUSE "HOW" MATTERS

To learn more, visit www.ShadySideAcademy.org/MiddleSchool or call 412-968-3155.

An Admissions Open House is scheduled for Saturday, December 1, at 10am.

RSVP at www.ShadySideAcademy.org/Visit.

Finally, talk about and show them how math is used in our daily lives. And remember that it is practice, practice, practice that supports success in math. So, support and encourage their efforts to do their math homework.

School locker searches are permissible

Q: Our school searches for drugs in lockers using dogs. Do they have the right to do this and other searches? – Concerned Parents

A: As long as a school official has “reasonable suspicion” that a student has broken a school rule or law, they can search a student or his or her belongings. School officials have more freedom to search a student than a police officer who needs probable cause or a search warrant in order to search you or your belongings.

The use of trained dogs to sniff out drugs in students’ lockers definitely raises a threat to a student’s fourth amendment guarantee against unreasonable searches and seizures. However, schools look at lockers as school property.

Courts have generally allowed dogs in searches of school property, like lockers, if students are given advance notice and allowed to be there. Locker searches cannot be performed in an arbitrary or discriminatory manner.

Schools can do other searches. For example, urine tests for drugs can be given to students who are participating in extra-curricular activities. Also, many schools are now using breathalyzer tests before school dances. However, drug or alcohol testing outside of voluntary extra-curricular activities could be a violation of their rights.

Science fair projects – The roles of children and parents

Q: My elementary school child has to do a science fair project. I have been looking online for guidance along with project ideas. What are some of the best of the many websites that will help me? – Confused

A: First of all, parents need to realize that it is the child who has been assigned the project. So, parents should limit their participation to the role that the teacher has assigned to them. Unfortunately, parents may need to provide considerable guidance if a teacher has not prescribed definite steps to be followed by their students.

One of the most difficult aspects of science fairs is for a child to select an appropriate project. Parents can give input that will help a child select a project that he or she is fully capable of doing. They should also stress the importance of finding a project the child finds to be interesting. Doing these two things can lead to a child successfully completing a project.

Some children can devise their own projects. Many rely on looking at projects others have done. There are definitely plenty of websites devoted to science fair projects as well as apps, and don’t forget about books describing science fair projects. Here are some websites to get your child started:

- www.all-science-fair-projects.com
- www.sciencebob.com
- www.sciencebuddies.org

Besides providing an abundance of project ideas, these websites offer helpful advice to parents as well as scientific resources. You can also search for science fair project apps on your phones and tablets. However, you need to be aware that many apps are not truly free but require in-app purchases.

Finally, for a project to be successful, it is essential that children understand the scientific principle that is key to their experiment. Parents should ask their children to explain the principle in their own words. ■

Parents should send questions and comments to dearteacher@dearteacher.com or ask them on the columnists’ website at www.dearteacher.com.





The McCleery Family

Family: The McCleery Family

Hometown: New Gallie, PA

School: 21st Century Cyber Charter School

In 2013 we found ourselves searching for a new cyber charter school. After eight years of schooling with another cyber school, we were confident that cyber schooling was the right education model for our children, but knew that our current cyber school was no longer the right fit for our kids. This realization is what led us to seek out other possibilities.

WHY IS 21CCCS A GREAT EXPERIENCE FOR YOUR FAMILY?

It was through that search that we discovered 21st Century Cyber Charter School. Research and conversations with 21st Century families, staff, and teachers made it quite clear that this school was unique and offered the exceptional, yet personal, educational environment we were looking for.

As we enrolled the first of four children in the school

we soon discovered why 21st Century's test scores exceeded those of other cyber schools in the state. The curriculum was extraordinary and their approach was creative and engaging. I watched as my children were academically stretched, while still having their personal academic challenges and IEP goals addressed.

HOW WOULD 21CCCS BE GREAT FOR OTHER PARENTS?

I think the reason 21st Century stands apart from its contemporaries is because it is so personal in its approach. It is a school built for the individual, and in contrast to so many public schools that try to mold each child to fit a pre-determined slot, 21st Century Cyber Charter School helps each child to find individual success. The teachers at 21st Century are a key component to its greatness. They know the students personally, work to help them discover their unique gifts, and support them as they overcome personal challenges, allowing each child to shine, including mine. ■



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Avoiding childhood obesity: Turn your kids on to healthy, happy living

By Pamela Power Scanlon

Do you ever struggle to get your kids to make healthy choices and worry they may not be getting adequate nutrition or enough physical activity? Or perhaps you've felt judged or guilty because you've been told that your child falls outside the "ideal" range for weight.

Read on and you'll learn about startling new projections for our kids' long term health and some shame-free, stress-free strategies you can use to help motivate your kids to want to live a healthy lifestyle.

The reality

The challenges of trying to raise healthy kids today are real ...

- Advertisers and big food corporations spend billions of dollars each year marketing processed, high-sugar foods directly to our kids.
- Practically anywhere you go, high-sugar, high-sodium foods are readily available and strategically placed at kids' eye-level.
- Technology reduces our kids' need to move, while personal devices and video games reduce our kids' motivation to move.
- The busy lifestyle that's become the norm for families today makes mindfully enjoying healthful, home-cooked meals a rare occurrence for most.
- The average American family eats out 4 - 5x per week, but the average kids' menu entree far exceeds the recommended amount of calories, saturated fat and sodium. And 80 percent of kids' beverages contain high amounts of sugar and calories. This is leading to at least three major issues:

1. These meals are not providing our kids with the nutrients they need to thrive.

2. These meals are shaping both kids' and parents' beliefs around what children will eat.

3. They're influencing our children's taste preferences.

What's also real is the grim prediction for our kids' long-term health. Currently one in five school-aged children are considered obese and for the first time ever, children are now being diagnosed with what were once considered adult-onset diseases, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and certain cancers.

Perhaps you are reading this and thinking that your kids' long-term health is safe because your children don't have a weight issue. But what you need to understand is that even though they may not be experiencing issues now, their current habits, patterns, preferences and environment may still be setting them up for weight-related health conditions as they get older.

An eye-opening study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* highlighted the fact that it's not just the long-term health of obese children that's a concern, but for all of our children. The researchers predict that if the current trend in children's weight

continues, 57 percent of our kids will be obese by age 35, regardless of whether they are obese in childhood.

The implications

What will our children's quality of life be like as young adults if they're forced to deal with the physical ramifications of these health conditions on a daily basis?

And what impact will this have on their emotional health and happiness when weight issues often lead to low-self esteem, anxiety, loneliness and depression?

I'm a parent so I know how difficult, even exhausting, it is to champion a healthy family. Not only does society have a long way to go to support our efforts to raise healthy kids, the majority of our schools serve meals that are subpar in nutrient content at best and build in little to no time for our children to move throughout the day.

And then there are the issues we face in our own homes. Unlike the Brady Bunch, most of us don't have an Alice to do the grocery shopping and cooking. And unlike the Brady children, most of our kids are not smiling and politely accepting whatever it is you're offering at mealtime.

Shame-free, stress-free strategies

If we don't pay closer attention to the messages that our children are being taught and the habits and preferences they're forming, we may be compromising our children's chances to lead a long, healthy, happy life.

So what can parents do to break the current trajectory and set our children up for success?

Teach kids to value their health

I began to value my health when I was a young adult and struggled with body image issues, a dislike for all things athletic and emotional eating issues during my childhood. When I shifted my focus off of the flawed girl I saw in the mirror and onto the gratefulness I felt for my life and health, things started to change. I began to make healthful choices that nurtured my body, mind and spirit. And I discovered that honoring my body made me feel inspired and confident, rather than guilty and alone.

As I got older, I started to see that the difference between me and the people in my life that struggled with their weight boiled down to how we valued health and overall well-being.

This difference became even more apparent when I worked as a Lifestyle Interventionist with children diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. Despite what my colleagues and I were trying to teach them, we found it extremely difficult to get the kids to buy into adopting new, healthier behaviors. It was not only a shift away from the lifestyle they'd grown accustomed to, but healthy living was not something they were raised to value.

When I became a mom, I read tons of parenting books. Most of them encouraged parents to teach kids to value qualities such as kindness, generosity, forgiveness and compassion. But not one that I read discussed the importance of raising our children to value their health or to teach them health-promoting qualities such as self-compassion, self-acceptance, self-care and self-love.

The fact is that 13.7 million children are overweight or obese and researchers say that this generation may be the first in history not to outlive their parents. This shows that we're missing something in our current approaches. So the question is, if we teach our kids when they're young to value their health and wellness, would they develop the internal motivation to live a healthy lifestyle?

According to researchers whose findings were published in the *Journal of Personality and Individual Differences*, values actually do influence motivation! Research published in the *Journal of Happiness Studies* also showed that values are related to both external and internal motivation.

In plain English, what does this mean for our kids? It means that if we teach them to value their health, and connect the dots between making healthy choices and experiencing benefits they find meaningful, we can help them cultivate the desire to WANT to make healthy choices!

Focus on kid-friendly benefits

I recently attended the Partnership for a Healthier America Summit in Washington D.C. There, 800 representatives from organizations across the U.S. gathered with the goal of ending our nation's pediatric obesity crisis. In the last session of the summit, the panelists started by saying that none of us were going to like what we were about to hear. They told us that we're shooting ourselves in the foot by using the word healthy to try and motivate our kids to make healthy choices.

They believe kids are associating healthy things with medicine, which is causing two problems.

1. Kids assume that because medicine tastes awful, healthy food tastes awful.
2. Medicine isn't fun, which means exercise isn't fun. "What???!?"

I'd just given approval to my publisher to go to print on the first book in the series of children's books I'm writing to teach kids about how to unleash their inner superpowers. The first book introduces kids to five things the superheroes in the book do each day to keep themselves in super condition – all of which are different health behaviors. And yes, I'd included the word healthy!

Once I got over my alarm, I thought about my own motivation. I realized that it wasn't being healthy that's kept me motivated for over 20 years, but how much more energized, strong, confident and happy I feel when I make healthy choices.

Then a lightbulb went off. That's exactly the strategy I'd used with my own kids since they could eat real food! I'd come to the table armed with a list of the benefits of each food item in terms that would appeal to my competitive little boys.

Before they had a chance to turn up their noses, I'd explain that veggies help them feel their best and make their bodies and bones strong, lean protein helps their muscles grow big like Daddy's and whole grains give them energy to run fast. And it almost always worked! So I wanted to find out if any professionals used this tactic, and if they found it effective.

I interviewed Mary Beth McCulloch, the Director of the University of Pittsburgh's Child Development Center who has 145 kids in her program. She said, "Teaching kids how to eat healthy and exercise in terms that are meaningful to them is something we do all day everyday. We believe it's as important as teaching cognitive skills because it sets up our children for good long-term health."



Photo credit: Neil Price

Pamela Power Scanlon teaching yoga



The University of Pittsburgh
Child Development Center



Illustration from *The Super Dynamos, Fuel Up!*: Max's Transformation Begins -
By Pamela Power Scanlon



Dr. Dana Rofey
& her daughters

continued on page 12

I also spoke to a parent whose children attended Mary Beth's Center. She told me that she attributes her children consistently choosing salad over French fries to the way Mary Beth's program exposed them to a variety of healthy food and enhanced their understanding of the benefits of eating nutritious food.

Then I interviewed Dr. Dana Rofey of the Pediatrics Division at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine. She spoke to the need to focus on what rewards motivate our kids when she said, "If it was easy, all of us would be walking around eating salads and running marathons. We need to tap into what motivates kids. For some, it may be focusing on the social aspects of getting involved on a sports team. But for other kids, it may be getting to spend one-on-one time with parents so maybe it's walking or running a mile a few times a week."

I also interviewed Chrissa Sullivan, Registered Dietician and teacher of Family Consumer Sciences in a local middle school. She teaches her students the tenets of mindful eating because, "The goal is not to lose weight, but rather to develop a positive relationship with food. Weight loss and better health are outcomes. Our program focuses on the social, emotional and even the artistic components of eating that are often overlooked and highlights the benefits, such as enjoyment, increased self-awareness, a new sense of self-trust and improved body image."

Make it a Family-Based and Fun!

During my interviews, I noticed two threads that connected all of our philosophies, which are counter to the messages in our current culture.

1. Restrictive diets can create shame and guilt, damaging a child's relationship to food. Developing a long-term positive relationship to food is the key to developing skills such as portion control, emotional control and enjoyment!
2. Living a healthy lifestyle needs to be important to everyone in a household regardless of weight status, and is most successful when the messages around healthy food, exercise and body image are positive, consistent and fun!

Stay focused on the big goal: To raise healthy, happy kids!

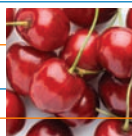
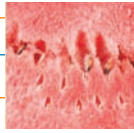
As parents, our primary goal is to raise healthy, happy kids. To reach that goal, I invite you to focus on helping your children learn to value their whole health — physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wellness — so they can grow up fully experiencing the benefits of making choices that make them feel healthy and happy from the inside out. ■

Pamela Power Scanlon is a local holistic health writer, author, coach and creator of *The Super Dynamos*. Learn more by visiting www.pamelapowerscanlon.com or www.superdynamos.com.

Use positive, empowering language

Two of the biggest predictors for weight issues in kids are parental influence and attitude. This chart contains suggestions that will not only help you be a positive role model and foster positive, empowering attitudes in your home, but will also help foster greater self-compassion, self-acceptance and self-esteem in your kids!

A Quick Reference Health-Promotion Tool for Every Household	
Negative / Degrading	Positive / Empowering
Making judgmental or condescending comments about your own body size or shape.	The messages your children hear influence their self-image and self-esteem. Choose your words wisely and offer yourself and others the same compassion, acceptance and love as you want your children to offer themselves.
Having an overly positive reaction to the taste of high-sugar or processed food and not giving an equal reaction to the taste nutrient-rich food.	Neutralize your children's preferences for processed or high-sugar food by responding equally to the taste of nutritious food and less-nutritious food.
Labeling food as good or bad.	Use terms such as nutritious or processed and limit using good and bad to describe eating patterns or habits.
Acting like the food police.	Allow your children to feel some autonomy. If you plan meals, offer them some mealtime choices. Let them pick a new fruit or vegetable in the grocery store. Involve them when you cook. Serve family style meals and allow them to serve themselves.
Resorting to bribery or threats.	Don't worry if your kids refuse to eat their veggies. Each day is a new chance to help them create a positive relationship with food and exercise by focusing on the positive outcomes and making it fun.
Expecting perfection or immediate changes.	Focus on making one - two small changes at a time and build on them. Remember, small, consistent changes will lead to big changes over time.



Create

your own fall decor

By Tiffany Doerr Guerzon

Here is an awesome autumn decor project that is both simple and stunning. Create a stuffed fabric pumpkin for a personalized and fun Thanksgiving table centerpiece.

No-Sew Fabric Pumpkins

These are not only easy to create, but make fun table centerpieces or decor for any part of the house. Make just one or several in a variety of fabrics. Choose a black and white palette for an elegant display, cute fall patterns for a whimsical look or solid warm colors for a neutral arrangement.

Supplies:

- Fabric in fall patterns or colors. Cotton material works best. If buying fabric off of the bolt, purchase a quarter yard of each. You can also often find bundles of "fat quarters" in the quilting section of fabric stores. Fat quarters are simply a quarter yard of precut fabric.
- Stuffing for your pumpkins. A polyester stuffing such as Poly Fil works well.
- Toilet paper roll - one per pumpkin
- Scissors
- Green pipe cleaner - one per pumpkin
- 3-4-inch long stick - just get them from your yard!

Instructions:

- Lay fabric right side down on work surface. Trim fabric into a square shape. For a large pumpkin, you will need approximately 18 x 18 inches. Cut smaller squares for littler pumpkins. You can eyeball this, it doesn't need to be perfectly measured or even have straight edges, as the edges won't show when the project is finished!
- Place toilet paper roll upright in the center of the fabric square.
- Place stuffing all the way around the toilet paper tube. Don't worry about adding too much or too little stuffing, you can adjust the amount if needed later.
- Holding the toilet paper roll with one hand, bring one corner of the fabric up and tuck it into the inside of the tube. Repeat with the other three corners. Tuck in the rest of the fabric in the same way. If there isn't enough fabric to tuck into the tube, remove some of your stuffing. Or, if your pumpkin isn't plump enough, add some stuffing!
- Once all of the fabric edges are tucked into the tube and the pumpkin is stuffed to your liking, poke some stuffing into the top of the tube to hold the fabric in place. Put the stick inside the tube for a stem and then push the stuffing down into the tube so that it doesn't show.
- To make a vine, wrap a green pipe cleaner around the stick a couple of times, then curl the ends by wrapping the pipe cleaner around a pencil or your finger. ■

Tiffany Doerr Guerzon is a freelance writer and mom of three.



Holiday Gift Idea!

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Why can't I **survive** a week of **meal planning**?

To make life easier, some people follow the once-a-month meal planning and cooking approach, where you basically buy, prepare and cook a month's worth of meals in one day and then freeze them until you need them.

I am not one of those people.

I like the idea of stockpiling 30 days of ready-to-heat dinners in my freezer like an end-of-the-world underground bunker. But that would require way more planning than I'm capable of. And a Costco-size freezer. Besides, even my best-laid plans usually fall apart with my family's hectic schedule. Top that off with the typical craziness of the meal-prep witching hour and you can understand why I shy away from once-a-month cooking.

But I figured I could handle seven days of meal planning. So I buckled down one Sunday afternoon to tackle the weekly chow plan. I knew that weeknights would run smoother when I planned what to make for dinner and stocked my kitchen with all the necessary ingredients. Sounds simple enough.

But the reality of meal planning took a turn for the worse mid-week, as my carefully crafted meal plan morphed into a meal ban, one dreadful dinner at a time.

Here's how it all went down.

Meatless Monday

I make a no-fail vegetable soup for veggie-haters, falsely believing that my take-no-prisoners recipe will convert my meat-loving-men to healthier eating at least once a week. My carnivore clan (less than thrilled with the lack of a dead animal in their entrée) immediately start dissecting their soup. My husband stealthily pushes all the carrots to one side hoping no one notices. In between looks of disgust, the boys pick out the onions while asking, "Ew! What's that green stuff floating next to the potato?" I lie and call it parsley, knowing I will burn in hell for trying to conceal chopped kale. After much cajoling and a few spoonful's later, my finicky teens push their half-empty bowls away and claim they're both "full" as they grab a couple more slices of bread and bolt upstairs. Day One: Fail.

Tasty Tuesday

Tonight, I tempt taste buds with gourmet cuisine, taking my cue straight from The Barefoot Contessa herself. I channel my inner Ina Garten as I whip together an elegant meal of chicken with Asiago cheese and basil, oven-roasted dill carrots and penne pasta with roasted red peppers, garlic and sun-dried tomatoes. It's piping hot and ready to serve—until family plans go awry. My husband Kevin needs to work late, my older son Trevor has to help with a group project at school and my younger son Parker has his soccer practice rescheduled. After an extra two hours of keeping dinner warm, my epicurean entrée and sumptuous side dishes meld into charred chow. I'm 0-2.

Win-them-back Wednesday

I attempt to appease everyone's picky palate with a family favorite: a crockpot full of chili simmering all day. I toss a couple pounds of beef in the slow-cooker, add some chopped onions, herbs and diced tomatoes and we're good to go—perfect for our super busy day ahead. Eight harried hours later, we walk through the door, anticipating the spicy aroma of chili to welcome us home. Strangely, we smell nothing. I head to the kitchen and see the cord dangling next to the crockpot like a lifeless snake. Crap! I forgot to plug it in before we all left today. The opposite of last night's overcooked dinner, tonight's meal sits raw and bloody in my cold crockpot, practically mooing when I crack open the lid. I grab a bag of tortilla chips, dump salsa in a bowl and dub it a Tex-Mex appetizer. I suck at meal planning.



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Thankless Thursday

After three failed attempts, I'm cursing the meal plan and popping open cans of condensed soup, wondering if anyone will even notice it's not home-made. Trying to make me feel better, Parker and Trevor both remark how delicious the soup is and encourage me to "make this more often." Yeah, I'll hold on tight to that Campbell family recipe. Dear God, why do I even try?

Free-for-all Friday

With everyone on a different schedule tonight, I ditch the idea of a home-cooked meal together. Trevor eats at the mall food court with his friend before they see a movie. Parker eats a PB&J in the car on the way to his soccer game, while I chug some water, grab a cheese stick and pop a few pretzels in my mouth as I drive him there. Kevin (if he remembers to bring cash) hopes to eat a concession-stand hot dog at halftime. My meal plan is dying a slow and painful death.

Suck-it Saturday

By the weekend, the boys are fighting, Kevin's cursing his way through a plumbing project and I'm crying into my cookbook as I throw frozen fish sticks at the kids and run for the front door, pretending not to hear their pleas for "just one more chance."

Sanity-saving Sunday

Tonight I'm dining alone with a glass of wine and my head buried in a copy of Erma Bombeck's *Aunt Erma's Cope Book*, reminding myself that I cannot divorce my family or just opt-out of dinner for the rest of my life. I eye-up the stack of menus on the counter and realize it's time we start supporting the small businesses in our community. I pick up the phone, dial and hear the words that bring joy to my ban-the-meal-plan heart: "China Wok, may I help you?" ■

Lisa Beach is a freelance journalist and copywriter. Her work has been published in The New York Times, Good Housekeeping, USA Today Back to School, Parents, Edible Orlando, and more. Check out her writer's website at www.LisaBeachWrites.com.

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Fun ways to teach your kids about civic responsibility

By Sandi Schwartz

Sometimes we need a shake up to wake up. One major positive that has come out of this interesting time in American history is the immense uptick in people getting involved in politics and their local communities. This is major progress since a *Washington Post* article just before the election in September 2016 discussed how many Americans know nothing about their government. For example, the article referred to a new survey by the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania that found how only a quarter of Americans could name all three branches of government (executive, legislative and judicial—in case you were wondering).

But this trend has been taking place for many years. Since the 1950's, Americans have drifted apart and been less engaged in their communities. A report even back in 2001 explained how Americans sign fewer petitions, belong to fewer organizations that meet in person, do not know their neighbors, meet with friends less frequently and socialize with family members less often. This has only gotten worse with technological advances. Spending all our time glued to televisions and communicating in brief snippets on our computers and phones does not make for much personal interaction and civic engagement.

But now that more and more people are concerned about what is happening in Washington, D.C. and throughout our country, they are coming out from behind their screens to attend meetings and organize together. Local groups are sprouting up all over and people are really connecting and talking about their hopes and fears. This new energy is ultimately a positive change for society because research shows that we are happier when we build relationships and open up with others in our community. How can we

use this time to teach our children the importance of civic engagement?

Benefits of civic engagement

There is a clear link between social connection and happiness, so when we interact with our neighbors on issues that impact our lives we can experience a greater sense of connection to those we otherwise would not have met.

Experts have found that civic involvement helps us build personal connections in addition to the typical ones we have through family, work and leisure activities. When we participate in social action, community service and political groups, we increase personal satisfaction as we engage with others on issues of mutual interest.

These activities also involve participating in the decision making process, which has been found to boost our happiness as well. Another connection with happiness comes from helping others less fortunate than ourselves because it gives us a sense of living a meaningful life.

The largest survey on American civic engagement from the Harvard Kennedy School of Government revealed that quality of life and happiness are highest in communities where residents are more socially connected. About 30,000 individuals were asked about their com-

munity involvement. The survey found that levels of civic engagement—such as how much residents trusted, socialized and joined with others—predicted the quality of community life and residents' happiness better than education or income. The survey also showed that if other individuals in a community had higher civic engagement, the whole community was happier overall.

The connection between community involvement and happiness for children and teens has also been evaluated. According to youth.gov:

- Youth who volunteer are more likely to feel connected to their communities, do better in school and are less likely to engage in risky behavior.
- Youth are more likely to volunteer if their entire family is involved and this experience results in strengthened family bonds.
- Students who performed voluntary community service were 19 percent more likely to graduate from college than those who did not.

Additionally, Tufts University Professor Peter Levine studied the relationship between civic engagement and psychosocial well-being among college students. He concluded that people are happier if their daily activities tend to be helpful to and valued by society. They also need to feel a sense of belonging and support from their community.

Moreover, students who engaged in civic activities that impacted social change had significantly better happiness scores. They felt more connected to others, were more motivated to learn and managed stress more effectively. He expects civic



engagement programs to boost happiness.

Fun ways to teach your kids about civic engagement

Our children will spend some time in school learning about American history and government, but you can enhance their experience from a young age by doing the following:

- Read books about American politics and government based on their age and interests.
- Watch movies and documentaries about history and government.
- Volunteer together as a family to instill community service values.
- Encourage them to join the student government or debate team at school.
- Bring them to a political event or rally.

Learn together online using these amazing resources

iCivics – Provides a platform to engage students in meaningful civic learning. They provide free inventive resources to ensure every student receives a high-quality civic education. As the largest provider of civics curriculum in the country, it is used in 50 states by over 110,000 teachers.

Kids in the House – A public service website provided by the Office of the Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives. Its mission is to provide educational and entertaining information about the legislative branch of the United States Government to students of all ages. Topics covered include the role of the U.S. House of Representatives, the legislative process, and House history.

Kids.gov – The official kids' portal for the U.S. government. It links kids, parents, and teachers to information and services from government agencies, schools, and educational organizations, all geared to the learning level and interest of kids. It is organized into four audiences: Kids (Grades K-5), Teens (Grades 6-8), Teachers, and Parents. Each audience tab is divided into educational subjects like Arts, Math, and History.

A Kids Guide To Running For President
A cute kid-friendly document that explains the Presidency, voting, and the inauguration. ■

Sandi Schwartz is a freelance writer/blogger and mother of two. She has written extensively about parenting, wellness and environmental issues.



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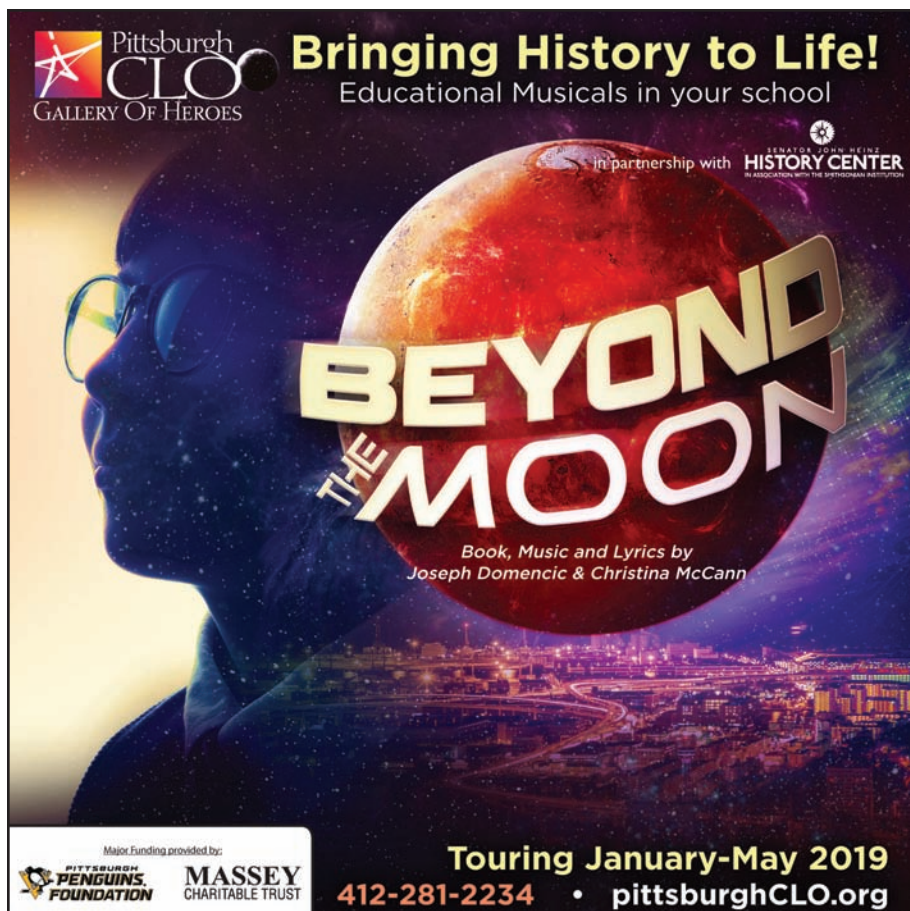
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Homewood kids harness the power of

Dr. Andre Samuel is bald, lightly-bearded, tattooed and wearing a black T-shirt that reads I HAVE A DREAM. WHAT'S YOURS? He's got to be the coolest scientist I've ever met. He's showing me a vial that contains what looks like dirty pond water I don't want my dog to drink.

That's not too far from truth because, according to Dr. Samuel, the vial contains special bacteria that come from MUD.

Since August 2017, a small group of kids from Homewood have been coming weekly to the Citizen Science Lab (CSL), located in the Energy Innovation Center in the lower Hill District. They have been working on a project to turn muddy water into a battery that runs on bacteria to compete in iGEM, an international synthetic biology competition.

Dr. Samuel, who must have seen a bewildered look on my face, explains that synthetic biology is "taking something and altering it to do something else." Thank you.

The International Genetically Engineered Machine (iGEM) Foundation hosts a competition every October in Boston and the CSL kids will be the first high school team from Pittsburgh to participate. In a field of 371 teams, they will be competing against 76 other high school teams from around the world.

Originally founded in 2015 as a collaboration between Urban Innovation 21 and Duquesne University, CSL is Pittsburgh's first and only community life sciences laboratory for students, do-it-yourself scientists or anyone interested in conducting "real, hands on experiments" under the guidance of professional scientists.

Although similar facilities exist in other cities like Boston, New York and Baltimore, none of those labs have full time staff and run year round. Dr. Samuel wants Citizen Science Lab to be the national model for a life science makerspace.

At CSL, iGEM is a grant-funded program and its sole purpose is to get more minority kids from Homewood interested in STEM professions.

"The most difficult part was trying to recruit kids," Dr. Samuel admits.

Some of the students came from other CSL offerings, like the robotics, drone or computer coding programs. Dr. Samuel also visited schools, talked to science teachers, administrators and students and tried to convince them how fun it was to work in a science lab.

As a result, 17-year-old Julianne, an eleventh grader at Pittsburgh Science and Technology Academy, joined at the recommendation of her high school principal, who recognized her potential.

Although a strong background in the biological sciences is probably nice, it's not necessary. The only requirement to be on the iGEM team is a desire to learn and the ability to carry out sophisticated experiments. When the kids started a year ago, they spent the first semester training and learning about lab procedures and didn't start working on the project until the second semester.

Preparing for iGEM competition is grueling. Not only do the kids have to build a genetically-engineered system that addresses a real-world problem, they are also required to produce a Wiki page and scientific poster and give an oral presentation in front of an audience and judges.

Dr. Cheryl Telmer, a research biologist at CMU who "clones stuff" for a living, serves as an advisor to the team. She strongly believes that all of the students must participate in the oral presentation based on their specific assignment in the project. For example, Jerome, an eleventh grader from Serra Catholic, is responsible for building the Wiki site and will discuss his piece of the project during the oral presentation.

All the kids have gained experience talking in front of a group by giving regular progress updates on their assignments throughout the year. The two professors acknowledge that public speaking isn't easy for shy kids, but Dr. Telmer is adamant.

"Our goal is to teach kids that it's not just about having a slick presentation. They have to be able to speak and give presentations," she says.

The culminating event of iGEM is the Giant Jamboree from October 25- 29, which features open source information sharing, the project competition and the celebration of team achievements in synthetic biology.

No matter what the CSL kids achieve in Boston, iGEM has already made an impact in their lives. Although Michael and Julianne were already interested in science, Brianna is now considering going into the field of biology because of iGEM.

Good luck, CSL kids! ■



Ann K. Howley enjoys writing about STEAM-related projects, programs, and activities for kids. Contact her at akhowley@gmail.com.

Pittsburgh Parent's

2018 KIDS' BEST DOCS



We went looking for “Kids’ Best Docs” ... because we know that parents are choosy when it comes to medical care for their children. Pittsburgh Parent asked our readers – moms and dads just like you – to tell us what pediatricians they recommend and WHY?

On the following pages you will find over 200 pediatricians and specialists with offices throughout the Pittsburgh region that provide health care for children – infants through teens.

* Danielle Kleer from Moon Township is the winner of the Kids’ Best Docs \$100 Gift Card for submitting the best quote about her child’s pediatrician.

Our thanks to the many parents who took the time to share their experiences with us about the pediatricians who treat their children.

THE DETAILS

* Health professionals are listed alphabetically by specialty: Adolescent Medicine, Allergy and Immunology, Cardiology, Endocrinology, Family Medicine, Neonatology and Pediatrics.

* A name in **boldface** type indicates the physician has purchased advertising space in this issue of Pittsburgh Parent.

* The names of health professionals included does not imply endorsement by Pittsburgh Parent but reflects parent-to-parent input collected between July through October 2018.

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PEDIATRICIANS & SPECIALISTS

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 • Bloomfield, 15224 • Oakland, 15213
 Michelina Fato, MD • E. Liberty, 15206

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“Like most kids, my children didn't want to go to see the doctor. However, my son and daughter always wanted Dr. Janet Breslin who for their yearly physicals. And when they were sick, they hoped it was Dr. Breslin who would be working that day. My kids compare all doctors to Dr. Breslin and she wins every time.

– Chris - Robinson”

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Aleksandra Grudziak, MD
Greentree Division



Amy McGarrity, MD
St. Clair Division



AnnMarie D. Sabovik, DO
Northland Division



Anthony Kovatch, MD
Arcadia Division



Ashley Loboda, MD
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Belle Bautista, DO
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Brian Kilpela, MD
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Sergei Belenky, MD
Allergy, Asthma and Immunology



Susie Saunders, MD
Arcadia Division



Trina Peduzzi, MD
Pediatric Alliance Allegheny



Wendy Bacdayan, MD
Chartiers/McMurray Div.



William Coppula, MD
Arcadia Division



Pediatric Alliance has been your home for quality pediatric care since 1996. We are the largest independent, physician-owned pediatric practice in the Greater Pittsburgh area and we accept all major insurances.

Our board-certified pediatricians offer primary care to children and adolescents in 16 different office locations within the city and in the surrounding areas, including two specialty care offices for Allergy, Asthma and Immunology and Pediatric Endocrinology.

We are proud to offer personalized, patient-centered care to patients from birth to 21 years of age, building strong relationships with families to maximize your children's health. We strive to be your child's medical home, providing convenient access to care with evening and weekend office hours so assist today's busy families.

Pediatric Alliance has earned national recognition for patient centered care by the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA) as a Patient-Centered Medical Home. As

a Patient-Centered Medical Home, our standards emphasize enhanced care through patient-clinician partnership.

The healthcare industry is changing every day. Pediatric Alliance continues to stay abreast of these changes and utilize advances in technology to improve patient care. We utilize electronic medical records to enhance safety initiatives, increase efficiency, and improve communication with other healthcare providers involved in your child's care. The practice takes a progressive approach to meet the needs of busy families.

We seek to increase the quality of life for children and their families through our clinical services and professional management, focus on wellness through injury and illness prevention and provide high-quality comprehensive primary care to infants, children, and adolescents through clinical expertise, advocacy, education, collaboration, research and information management.

Visit us at www.pediatricalliance.com and www.thepediablog.com and on Facebook at www.facebook.com/PediatricAlliance.

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 Bernhard Kuhn, MD • Bloomfield, 15224
 Lizabeth Lanford, MD • Bloomfield, 15224

“Our family just moved to the Pittsburgh area. Finding doctors can be challenging. Finding a doctor to deal with the issues a normal 15-year-old is experiencing can be overwhelming. Dr. Keith Somers was incredible, concentrating on her and talking to her. He made her feel very comfortable – he was able to get through everything and make recommendations from specialists to places to eat.”

– Lisa Marie - Plum Borough

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 Tracey Conti, MD • McKeesport, 15132
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“We chose Premier Pediatrics in Penn Hills before our son was born based on recommendations from family and friends and could not be more happy with our decision! My son was born six weeks premature, Dr. Jeffrey Ubinger came to visit him in the hospital when he was born and he continued to call me every single night until my son was released from the NICU. His care for my son and for me, continues!”

– Maria - East Pittsburgh

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Shari Rozen, MD, Michael Gates, MD, Bryce Palchick, MD, and Nathan Bennett, MD

FAMILY MEDICINE, HEADACHE MEDICINE

Preferred Primary Care Physicians is part of an independently-owned physician group, founded in 1995 in the South Hills of Pittsburgh. Shari Rozen, MD; Michael Gates, MD; Bryce Palchick, MD; and Nathan Bennett, MD are all Board Certified Family Physicians, and also utilize three Certified Registered Nurse Practitioners (CRNP). Our office is bustling with patients of all ages and genders. We provide continuing and comprehensive health care for the individual and family, including general medicine, well-woman care, pediatrics, and geriatrics.

Dr. Bennett adds another unique benefit to our office as the founder and medical director of the Preferred Headache Center. UCNS Certified, Dr. Bennett fills the roles of advisor, consultant and speaker for several companies on the cutting edge of headache medicine. He is also involved in the development of headache guidelines and educational programs on a national level.

Our physicians pride themselves on staying in the forefront of new medicine and medical innovation. They

have been actively participating in Pharmaceutical research studies since 2003, and have seen many of those studies positively impact the medical industry. Studies they conduct range from High Cholesterol to Diabetes to Overactive Bladder. In fact, they have several studies currently seeking Pediatric and Adolescent patients who may have constipation, diarrhea, migraine headaches, Influenza, or Asthma. A dedicated research staff is available to provide you or your family with any information about our currently enrolling studies, or to address any questions or concerns you may have about participating. Feel free to give them a call to see if there's an opportunity for you! Preferred Clinical Research Phone: (412-650-6155).

New patients are welcome at our office. We accommodate both walk-in times and same-day appointments for our established patients. We look forward to treating you and your family!

Shari Rozen, MD
Michael Gates, MD
Bryce Palchick, MD
Nathan Bennett, MD

 **preferred**
primary care physicians
(P) 412-650-5623 • (F) 412-650-7370
www.ppcp.org

1000 Higbee Drive, Suite 203,
Bethel Park, PA 15102

140 Curry Hollow Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15236

“Where do I begin...four kids and 26 years ago, there was this excellent doctors office. The whole office is filled with beautiful murals and the doctors are top rate. Of course our favs have since retired, but Dr. Davies and Dr. Bacdayan have become top notch. Not too nosy with my teens but tell them like it is and gives excellent advice. We love them.”

– Kristine - Pittsburgh

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PEDIATRICS SOUTH

Pediatrics South has been providing care for over 60 years.

A simple statement, but think about what that means. We have patients who not only grew up coming to us, but are now bringing their children and in some cases, their grandchildren to us!

We have built a reputation and a presence in the community for over half a century.

We are one of Pittsburgh's largest independent pediatrics practices providing pediatric and adolescent care. Our practitioners are dedicated to providing care to children from birth through 22 years of age.

We look forward to caring for your children and helping them to have a healthy and happy life!

Mt. Lebanon

240 Mt Lebanon Blvd.
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pediatricssouth.com



CARING HANDS PEDIATRICS

Caring Hands Pediatrics is a privately owned practice providing care to children from birth through 21 years since 2007.

Our goal at Caring Hands Pediatrics is to work with you to provide comprehensive and compassionate health care to each individual child. We inform you of the latest recommendations, so you can help decide what is best for your son or daughter.

For your convenience, we offer walk-in and Saturday and evening appointments in both of our office locations located in the North Hills and Robinson area. We accept new patients and offer additional services such as lactation consultations, behavioral health, newborn

classes and complimentary meet and greet visits for new families.

We are a small group and really enjoy getting to know you and your family! Stop in to meet our providers and staff!

105 Braunlich Drive
Ste. 102, Pgh., PA 15237
412-369-7720

300 Cedar Ridge Drive
Ste. 309 Pgh., PA 15205
412-921-2345

Michael Daly, MD

Lisa Hwang, MD

Dayle Griffin, MD

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Bridget McCafferty, CRNP,CLC

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“Highest Member Satisfaction in Pennsylvania” –J.D. Power

When it comes to the quality of care you and your family deserve, second best just won't do. And when you're a member of UPMC Health Plan, it doesn't have to.

UPMC Health Plan provides access to the world-class doctors and hospitals of UPMC as well as thousands of community doctors and hospitals. Global medical services from Assist America, coverage for children until age 26 no matter where they live, and outstanding member service all mean you get the best health care plan.

Here's the plan for getting the best care. And the best customer service. Learn more at UPMCHealthPlan.com.

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UPMC Health Plan received the highest score in Pennsylvania in the J.D. Power 2016-2018 U.S. Member Health Plan Satisfaction Studies of customers' satisfaction with their commercial health plan. Visit jdpower.com.UPMC is one of only 20 hospitals nationwide to be listed on the U.S. News & World Report Best Hospitals Honor Roll, with national rankings in 14 specialties (August 8, 2017).

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The Solevo Pediatrics Program

Our program mission is to be a resource for all topics relating to medical marijuana for children. It starts with a personal connection and commitment, stemming from our firsthand experience using this medicine to help treat our own families. That commitment shows through our patient-centered care and family-focused dispensary experience.

LEARN MORE AT
SolevoWellness.com/pediatrics

5600 Forward Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15217
(412) 422-0420 • info@solevowellness.com
SolevoWellness.com

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“Dr. Elizabeth Massella is the best pediatrician around. She and her staff know my son by name and are his biggest cheerleaders. My son has special needs and I would highly recommend her to any parents who need a pediatrician that will support you and help you navigate all of the challenges of therapies, medical assistance and the coordination of other specialists. Her bedside manner is kind and caring, not intimidating to children or parents. Dr. Massella is one in a million and I am so glad we found her.”

– Elizabeth - Imperial

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“We chose Kids Care Plus because of their free weekly Mom's Coffee Groups and their Breastfeeding Center. We have stayed because our son loved Dr. Lucas Godinez. Every pediatrician has waiting room toys, fun bandages and stickers, but not everyone has doctors who are thorough and up-to-date on research with a calm and caring demeanor. And the most important thing is – our toddler loves him.”

– Chelsea - Cranberry Township

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Jeffrey Ubinger, M.D.



Jill White, M.D.



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Finding the Right Pediatrician Can Be Difficult. *We Know... We FOUND Nine!*

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Phone (412) 371-6414

Irwin
4044 Route 130, Suite 240
Irwin, PA 15642-7830
Phone (724) 744-7337

Call us for a free prenatal visit.

Before the new baby arrives, we are happy to welcome expectant parents to our pediatric offices to meet our physicians and staff. Premier is an awarded, national leader in care offering a full range of collaborative medical specialties and services to provide care for your child.

Know the value of *BETTER* pediatric care.



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Ophthalmology | Optometry | Pain Management | Pediatrics | Podiatry | Pulmonology | Radiology | Rheumatology | Sleep Medicine



Holiday Happenings & Gift Guide 2018

Activities & Parades

Nov. 2 - 4 – Christmas in the Village
Craft festival, parade, carriage rides, breakfast with Santa & much more,
10am - 5pm, Burgettstown
• christmasinthevillagepa.com

Nov. 10 - 11

Christmas on Main Street

Sat., Breakfast with Santa, outdoor movie, crafts & more, 10am - 6pm; Sun., carriage rides, cookie walk, live music & more, noon - 5pm, Volant Village, Volant
• volantshops.com

Nov. 10 - 11

Harmony Museum's annual WeihnachtsMarkt (Christmas Market)
Artisans, quilters, weavers, model railroad displays & more, Sat., 11am - 6pm & Sun., 11am - 4pm, Harmony's National Historic Landmark District, Harmony • harmonymuseum.org

Nov. 16 - Jan. 2

Spirit of Giving from Around the World
Open 7 days a week, PPG Place, Pittsburgh • ppgplace.com

Nov. 16 – Science Sleepover: Light Up Night

Start your holiday season with a bang with a science-y twist on this special night in Pittsburgh. It's festive, fiery and full of fun, themed activities, continental breakfast & more, Fri., 6pm - Sat. 9:30am, Carnegie Science Center
• carnegiesciencecenter.org

Nov. 16 – Santa's First Stop

Santa, tree lighting, crafts & more, 6 - 8pm, Cranberry Municipal Center, Cranberry Twp. • twp.cranberry.pa.us

Nov. 16 – Santa Spectacular

Festive performances featuring local music groups & activities for all ages, 5 - 9pm, Point State Park
• events.dcnr.pa.gov

Nov. 17

Flashlight Scavenger Candy Cane Hunt

Bring a flashlight and look for candy canes that are hidden around the Carousel Shelter, 6:30pm, Alameda Park
• visitbutlercounty.com

Nov. 17 - Dec. 16

It's a Wonderful Life Festival
Parade & lighting of Christmas tree, 7pm, Nov. 17; Festival, Fri. - Sun., music, crafts, entertainment & more, Downtown Indiana • downtownindiana.org

Nov. 16 - Dec. 23

Peoples Gas Holiday Market
Inspired by the German Christkindl-markts, crafts, food & entertainment, Market Square, Pittsburgh
• downtownpittsburghholidays.com

Nov. 17 – Holiday Dazzle

Carriage rides, crafts, firework display & more, 4 - 7pm, Pine Community Center, Wexford • twp.pine.pa.us

Nov. 17 - Dec. 22

Horse Drawn Carriage Rides

Free, Fri., Nov. 23 & Saturdays thru Dec. 23, Fourth Avenue next to the PPG Place Plaza • ppgplace.com

Nov. 17 – Holiday Light Up Parade

6 - 9pm, E. State St., Hermitage
• hermitage.net

Nov. 23 – Holiday Parade

Parade, Cookies with Santa, live nativity & more, 7pm, Saxonburg
• visitbutlercounty.com

Nov. 23 – Light Up Ligonier

Santa, horse-drawn sleigh ride & more, the Diamond, Ligonier • ligonier.com

Nov. 23 – Light Up Festival

FREE pictures with Santa, parade, fireworks, live entertainment & more, 5 - 9pm, Beaver • beaverareachamber.com

Nov. 24 – Creation Stations All About Santa

FREE, share your wish list with Santa, and receive a special surprise, make Santa Ornaments, face painting & more, featuring the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh, 11am - 2pm, Fifth Avenue Place • FifthAvenuePlacePA.com



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Beauty & the Beast Holiday

Nov 24th - Dec 16th

Gemini Children's Theater
412-243-6464
geminitheater.org

Up Next ...

Peter Pan

Jan 19th - Feb 3rd

Western Pennsylvania Model Railroad Museum 31st Annual Holiday Train Display



For more information visit us on...

**Fridays and Weekends
Nov. 10 through Jan. 13, 2019**



Website: wpmrm.org
Facebook: facebook.com/wpmrm
Twitter: @wpmrm_org
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Google+: google.com/+wpmrm
Phone: 724-444-6944

Hours:
 Fri., 6 - 9pm • Sat. & Sun., 11am - 5pm
Extended Hours:
 Nov. 23 & Dec. 28 11am - 9pm
Special Holiday Hours:
 Dec. 26 through 31 11am - 5pm

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SPARK
 IMAGINATION
GIVE THE
 GIFT OF PLAY



CREATION STATIONS

FREE Holiday Activities featuring the
 Children's Museum of Pittsburgh

All About Santa

Saturday, November 24 - 11am-2pm

Share Your Wish List with Santa and Receive a Special Surprise! Make Your Own Santa Ornaments and Trinkets. Display the Colors of the Season with Creative Face Painting.

Santa's Helpers

Saturday, December 8 - 11am-2pm

Design Your Own Elf Snow Globe and Rudolph Magnet! Show Off Your Holiday Spirit with a Fun Face Painting. Visit for Story Time and Enjoy Holiday Classics as Read by Mrs. Claus.



www.FifthAvenuePlacePA.com Follow @FifthAvePlace

Nov. 24 – WPXI Holiday Parade
9am, 21st and Liberty Ave., down Liberty Ave. to Grant St.; right on to Fifth Ave., then left onto Liberty Ave; left on to Stanwix St., then ending on Boulevard of the Allies near Point State Park.

Nov. 24 – Spirit of Christmas Parade
5:30pm, Main St., Butler
• visitbutlercounty.com

Nov. 24 – Candy Land Celebration
Life-sized Candy Land game, petting zoo, selfie station, mascot mania, warming station & outdoor skating rink, noon - 5pm, locations are throughout downtown Butler • butlerradio.com

Nov. 25 & 26 – Gingerbread Houses
Bring a decoration to share and a baking sheet to use as a foundation, we provide the graham crackers & building materials, Western Allegheny Community Library, Oakdale
• westernalleghenylibrary.org

Nov. 29
All Events Elf on the Shelf Kick-Off
Story, craft, treat & movie, 6:30 -7:15pm, Peters Township Public Library, McMurray • ptlibrary.org



Nov. 30 – Christmas on the Square
Santa will arrive via firetruck, caroling & more, 6 - 8pm, Mercer County Courthouse Square
• visitmercercountypa.com

Nov. 30 – Hopewell's Holiday Express
Light-up night, The Polar Express movie, cookies & more, Hopewell Twp. Municipal Bldg. • visitbeavercounty.com

Holiday Performances

Nov. 17 – A Swingin' Holiday Affair
Starring Steve Lippia and featuring the SRU Jazz Ensemble, 7:30 - 11pm, SRU Smith Center • visitbutlercounty.com

Nov. 23 - 24 – Junie B. Jones in Jingle Bells, Batman Smells
Junie B. Jones, First-Grader, is super-excited about the upcoming Holiday Sing-Along and Secret Santa gift exchange at her school. Too bad tattletale May keeps ruining all of Junie B.'s fun, Byham Theater, Pittsburgh
• trustarts.org

Nov. 23 - Dec. 16 A Christmas Story: The Musical

Nine-year-old Ralphie Parker is on the quest for the Holy Grail of Christmas gifts—an Official Red Ryder carbine-action 200-shot Range Model air rifle. Ralphie schemes to achieve his desperate desire for the coveted BB gun. Join us for this holiday musical treat, based on the movie classic!, Thur. - Sunday, Little Lake Theatre Company, Canonsburg • littlake.org

Nov. 24 – The Latshaw Pops Big Band Christmas
Christmas songs & carols are performed in an impressive display of music & choreography, 8pm, The Strand Theater, Zelienople • thestrandtheater.org

Nov. 24 - Dec. 16 Beauty & the Beast Holiday

It's the holiday season at the Beast's castle, and Belle is feeling lonely spending her first winter holiday away from her family, Sat. & Sun. 1 & 3:30pm, Gemini Children's Theater, McKees Rocks • geminitheater.org

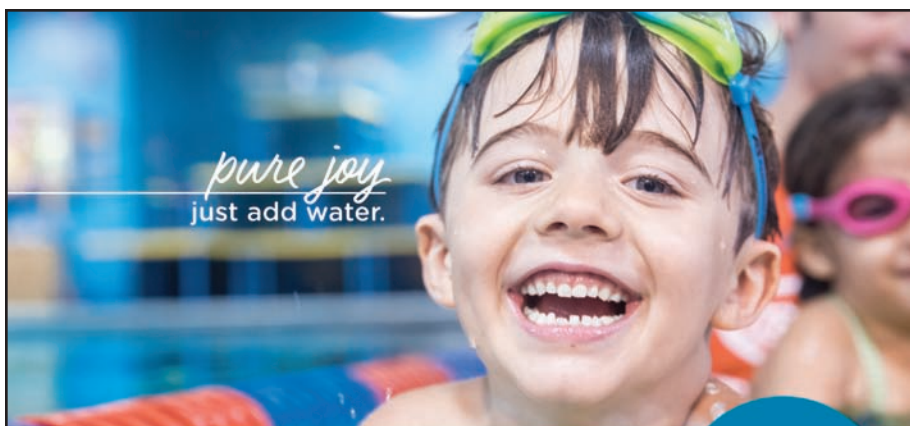
Nov. 25

A Charlie Brown Christmas
Join Charlie Brown and the rest of the Peanuts gang as they rehearse a play, save a tree & uncover the true meaning of Christmas, 2pm & 5pm, Byham Theater, Pittsburgh • trustarts.org

Nov. 29 - Dec. 20 Annual Holiday Music Program

Two performances each weekday, 11:30am - 12:10pm & 12:20 - 1:00pm, Allegheny County Courthouse
• alleghenycounty.us/special-events

continued on page 34



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Monday, December 10 - 9:30am - 10:30am

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Holiday Exhibits, Lights & Tours

Thru Dec. 31

Kraynak's Santa's Christmasland
Decorated Christmas trees, animated figures & more, Kraynak's, Hermitage
• kraynaks.com

Nov. 16 - Jan. 6

Shadrack's Christmas Wonderland
Drive through hundreds of thousands of brilliant LED lights, Big Butler Fairgrounds • visitbutlercounty.com

Nov. 15 - Light Up Night

Live entertainment, parade, tree lighting & more, 5 - 10pm, Downtown Irwin
• downtownirwin.com

Nov. 16 - Jan. 1

Overly's Country Christmas
Gates open at 5:30pm, Westmoreland County • overlys.com

Nov. 16 - Comcast Light Up Night

Live performances, Christmas tree lighting, fireworks & more, activities start at 11:30am, PPG Place, Pittsburgh
• ppgplace.com

Nov. 18 & 26

Candlelight Mansion Tours
4 - 8pm, Hartwood Acres Mansion
• alleghenycounty.us/Parks

Nov. 22 - Dec. 29

Beaver County Christmas Extravaganza
Indoor & outdoor displays, model trains, Santa Lane, entertainment & more, Brady's Run Park Lodge, Beaver Falls
• beavercountymuseum.org

Nov. 23 - Jan. 2

Christmas in the Park
Drive through lighted displays, Grove City Park, Grove City
• visitmercercountypa.com

Nov. 30 - Dec. 2 & Dec. 7 - 9

Christmas at the Waugh House
Decking The Halls of The Museum, Waugh House Museum, Greenville
• visitmercercountypa.com



Holiday Craft Shows

Nov. 2 - 3

Christmas Spree, Coffee & Tea!
Arts & crafts, free cookies, coffee & tea & more, Fri., 5 - 9pm & Sat., 9am - 2pm, Memorial Park Church, Allison Park
• memorialparkchurch.org

Nov. 3 - Farkleberry Craft Show
9am - 3:30pm, Cranberry Twp. Municipal Building • cranberrywomensclub.org

Nov. 3

Christmas Bazaar & Craft Show
Crafts, homemade soups & more, 9am - 2pm, Harrisville Volunteer Fire Department • harrisvillevfc.org

Nov. 3 - John McMillan Christmas Affair Craft Show

9am - 3pm, John McMillan Presb. Church, Bethel Park • 412-833-4704

Nov. 10 - Saint Ursula Craft Fair

9am - 2pm, Saint Ursula Parish School Cafeteria, Allison Park

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DEVELOPMENTAL HOCKEY LEAGUES

NORTH PARK FALL SESSION 1:

Saturdays:
7-8:30 AM
Wednesdays:
5:30-6:30 PM
Nov. 17-Dec. 22

NORTH PARK FALL SESSION 2:

Sundays:
10-11:30 AM
Wednesdays:
6:45-7:45 PM
Nov. 18-Dec. 23

SOUTH PARK FALL SESSION:

Sundays:
10-11 AM
Wednesdays:
5-6 PM
Nov. 18-Dec. 23



\$175 for residents | \$219 for non-residents
Winter sessions also available. Fall/Winter combo discounts offered.
Open to ages 4-10.
Emphasis will be on individual skill development and team strategies.

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Nov. 10
HUMC Fall Craft and Vendor Show
Crafts, face painting, stories & more,
9am - 4pm, Herminie United Methodist
Church, Herminie • 724-972-6330

Nov. 10 – Annual Craft Show
9am - 3pm, Slippery Rock Volunteer Fire
Company, Slippery Rock

Nov. 10
Band Boosters Craft and Vendor Show
9am - 2pm, Slippery Rock Area
Elementary School, Slippery Rock

Nov. 17 – Mars Fall Craft Show
Over 250 crafts will be available, 10am -
4pm, Mars Area Middle School & High
School, Mars • 724-625-3472

Nov. 24 – Holiday Craft Show
9am - 1pm, Western Allegheny
Community Library, Oakdale
• westernalleghenylibrary.org

Miniature Railroad

Nov. 10 - Jan. 13
3 1st Annual Holiday Display
F, S & S, W PA Model Railroad Museum,
Gibsonia • wpmrm.org

Nov. 15
Miniature Railroad & Village
Daily, Carnegie Science Center
• carnegiesciencecenter.org

Nov. 23 - Dec. 30
Model R.R. Christmas Open House
Fri., Sat. & Sun., Beaver County Model
R.R. and Historical Society, Monaca
• bcmrr.railfan.net

Nov. 23 - Dec. 16 – Santa Trolley
F, S & S, Pennsylvania Trolley Museum,
Washington • pa-trolley.org

Nov. 24 - Jan. 6 – Holiday Train Show
A Model Railroad, Museum and Library,
open Saturdays & Sundays, Ohio Valley
Lines, Ambridge • ohiovalleylines.org

Nov. 24 - Dec. 30
Ridings Family Holiday Train Display
Sat. 10am - 4pm & Sun. noon - 4pm,
McCarl Industrial Museum, Darlington
• 724-827-8841



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Lamp Theatre, Irwin

Feb. 1-3

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A Christmas Story: The Musical

November 23 - December 16

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rifle. Rebuffed at every turn with a similar echoing

response ("You'll shoot your eye out"), Ralphie schemes to achieve his desperate
desire for the coveted BB gun. Join us for this holiday musical treat, based on the
movie classic! *Recommended age: 5+*

Presenting Sponsor



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Made possible, in part, by a grant from the PNC Charitable Trusts

Winter Party Guide

Party manners: Ps and Qs for hosts and guests

When your child uses good manners, other people want to be around them. That's why birthday parties are opportune events to teach children, not only party etiquette, but a graciousness that goes beyond rules. Whether your child is the host or the guest, you can make teaching children party etiquette fun. Stage a mock birthday party so that your child can role play some of these helpful hints.

Be discreet

For hosts – If possible, you might consider inviting the entire team or class. That doesn't always work out, so and snail mail or e-mail invites teach your child not to talk about his party in front of children who aren't invited. It's hard to keep a preschooler or kindergartner from talking about her party. If you start discussions about being discreet when children are young, they will handle the situation appropriately when they are older.

For guests – It is disappointing when your child is not invited to a party, but disappointment provides an opportunity to coach your child through early let downs in life. Explain that he may be invited to the next party when someone else is not. If your child does receive an invitation, teach her to treat the matter with the same delicacy she did as the host.

Be clear with boundaries

For hosts – Human beings need boundaries. When we have them we feel more comfortable about the setting that we are in, so be clear about party guidelines in the invitation. Give a time, date and place and let parents know if the party is a drop-off party or if they should stay. Let them know if adults will be eating too. Sometimes parents are invited to have the main course (for example pizza) and the sweet treat. Sometimes they are just invited to have cake. You also may want to add a note about whether siblings may attend.

For guests – If it is an at-home party, stay in the areas the host is in. Don't go into other rooms without permission and if a

restroom is needed, ask which one is for guests. If the party is at an off-site venue, have your child follow all of the rules of the establishment. If the host doesn't specify guidelines about the party in the invitation, never assume. For instance, don't eat the food or cake or bring your entire family (or even extra siblings) if you haven't asked the host.

Be social

For hosts – Meet and greet each child as they arrive. Have the birthday host play with everyone so no one feels left out. Make an effort to include everyone and give everyone a chance at each game. Say "good-bye" and thank guests for coming when the party is over.

For guests – Let the host know that you are there. Make an effort to play with the host and other guests and not form cliques that exclude other party guests. When you are ready to leave, be sure to tell the host "good-bye."

Be giving

For hosts – Teach your child not to expect to receive gifts, but if she does, complement each guest and stay positive about every item, even if it is something that your child already has or is something he doesn't like. If you have decided to forgo gifts, write "No gifts, please" on the invitation or "Only the favor of your company is requested." Favor bags aren't necessary and some parents may prefer their children not get sugary candy and small plastic items. Instead, your child could pick out a memorable item to pass out to each guest who attends.

For guests – Unless the invitation includes the message "No gifts please," bring a gift. It doesn't have to be expensive and can be handmade. Giving of your time is thoughtful and many parents will be grateful for this in place of another toy that has to be picked up. Consider making a card to add to the gift with a heartfelt message written by your child.

Be courteous

For hosts – Thank each and every guest for coming and for bringing a gift, no matter how big or small. The guest (and sometimes a parent!) has taken time out of an evening or weekend to attend a birthday party. Have your child write a thank you note to send to the guest after the party. Use the same discretion when passing out thank you notes as you did with invitations.

For guests – Remember to RSVP. Be on time, but if you find you are going to be late, call and let the host know. If you have to cancel, let the host know as soon as possible, so that she can plan for enough food and favors.

Birthday party manners are a gateway for graciousness as your child grows into a teen and adult. Embrace the opportunity they present to teach your child ways to socialize, and hopefully they will be invited to more special occasions to celebrate with friends as they grow older. ■

Janeen Lewis is a freelance journalist, teacher and mom. She has been published in several parenting publications across the country.

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M - TH: 10am - 9pm • F & S: 10am - 10pm • Sun: 10am - 9pm

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Around & About NOVEMBER

Thursday | 1

Little Learner Clubhouse - Music Mondays

Location: Carnegie Science Center
Time: Daily • Ages 6 & younger & their families
Cost: \$\$

carnegiesciencecenter.org

Music Mondays occur on Mondays but Little Learner Clubhouse is Daily. Spend family time at the hands-on Gathering Tree, learn through play at the new Stream Table or Tomato Factory and explore sights, sounds and special effects at the Button Wall.

The Art of the Brick

Location: Carnegie Science Center, PPG Science Pavilion
Time: The exhibit runs thru January 7, 2019
Cost: \$\$

carnegiesciencecenter.org

The world's largest display of LEGO® art is at Carnegie Science Center. Discover your inner architect with a Hands-on Activity Area, make your own melody with a Music Box made from LEGO's, design a race car with LEGO's & have a Drag Race plus much more!

Friday | 2

DiscoverE: Hide and Seekers

Location: Point State Park
Time: November 2, 11am - 1pm • Ages 4 - 5
Cost: FREE • events.dcnr.pa.gov/event

Androcles and The Lion

Location: Trust Arts Education Center
Time: November 2 - 10
Cost: \$\$

trustarts.org/production/59750/androcles-and-the-lion

An EQT Bridge Theater Series

Heroes of the Corn

Location: Coolspring Corn Maze, Mercer
Time: F, S & S, thru November 4
Cost: \$\$ • coolspringmaze.com/location
Corn maze, indoor hay maze, jumping pad, mountain slides, barn yard board game & more!

Saturday | 3

Bounty Fall Fest

Location: Boyce Mayview Park, Upper St. Clair
Time: November 3, 11am - 4pm
Cost: FREE • twpusc.org
Live entertainment, petting zoo, kids craft area, s'more making, apple slingshots & more

Sundance Arena Rodeo

Location: Sundance Arena, Fredonia
Time: 1st Saturday of each month thru May & 3rd Saturday of Jan., Feb. & March
Cost: FREE • visitbutlercounty.com

Star Party

Location: Mingo Creek Obsy., Mingo Creek Park
Time: November 3, just before sunset
Location: Wagman Obsy., Deer Lakes Park
Time: November 10, just before sunset
Cost: FREE • 3ap.org

ARTventures

Location: Carnegie Museum of Art
Time: Saturdays & Sundays, 11:30am - 4:30pm
Cost: \$\$ • cmoa.org
Hands-on artmaking for all ages, look for the instructors in the galleries for fun, creative art-making activities. Drop in anytime.

Butler Symphony Magical Music of Harry Potter

Location: Butler Intermediate High School
Time: November 3, 7:30pm
Cost: \$\$ • visitbutlercounty.com/events

Sunday | 4 Daylight Savings Ends

Storytime & More

Location: Powdermill Nature Reserve, Rector
Time: 2pm, 1st Sunday of each month
Cost: FREE • Ages 3 - 9 • carnegiemnph.org
Discover the wonders of nature through a picture book, game, craft or nature walk.

Thursday | 8

Techs Car Seat Inspections

Location: Richland EMS
Time: November 8, 3 - 6:30pm
Cost: FREE • (*PR) patechs.com/inspections



9
Friday

Aga-Boom

Location: Byham Theater
Time: November 9 - 10
Cost: \$\$

trustarts.org/pct_home/events/series/childrens-theater-series

A Citizens Bank Children's Theater Series. Jump headfirst into a chain reaction of absolute silliness and a blizzard of laughter with three former stars of the Moscow Circus!

Highlighted events have an advertisement within the publication.

(*PR) – Pre-registration required
\$\$ – Cost involved

Please visit the website of the event to confirm before you go. All events & costs are subject to change

Meredith Willson's The Music Man

Location: Succop Theater, Butler

Time: November 9 - 11

Cost: \$\$ • visitbutlercounty.com/events

Saturday | 10

6th Annual YouthPlaces College Fair

Location: Nova Place, North Side

Time: November 10, 10am - 1pm

Cost: FREE • youthplaces.org

Jammie Jams: Space Night

Location: Carnegie Science Center

Time: November 10, 5:30 - 9pm

Cost: \$\$

carnegiesciencecenter.org

Put on your PJ's and have a blast exploring space at this evening event designed specifically for early learners! Snack, exhibits & more!

Fiddlesticks Family Concert – Heroes in Our Neighborhood

Location: Heinz Hall

Time: Nov. 10, Discovery Time Adventures - 10am & Concert - 11:15am

Cost: \$\$ • pittsburghsymphony.org

This concert will feature individuals in Pittsburgh that have made a difference to children and families. Meet some new friends and celebrate the lives of individuals that have helped Pittsburgh become a great Neighborhood.

Veterans Day 10K/5K Race and 2 Mile Fun Run/Walk

Location: Butler-Freeport Trail, Monroe Rd.

Time: November 10, 9am

Cost: \$\$ • visitbutlercounty.com/events

Brown Bag Concerts

Location: Pittsburgh Opera Headquarters in the Strip

Time: 2nd Sat. of each month, thru April 13

Cost: FREE • pittsburghopera.org/season/free-low-cost-events/brown-bag-concerts

Sunday | 11 Veterans Day

Tuesday | 13

Preschool Semester II: Big and Small

Location: Carnegie Science Center

Time: Nov. 13, 20 & 27; Dec. 4 & 11, 10am - noon

Cost: \$\$

carnegiesciencecenter.org

Have 'tons' of fun while you learn to measure everyday objects. Compare the weight of your favorite toys, measure your height in LEGO® bricks, and see how far a race car will go!

Wednesday | 14

Parents - Kids Adventures

Location: Carnegie Science Center

Time: November 14 or 19, 1 - 2pm

Cost: \$\$

carnegiesciencecenter.org

Designed around themes for little explorers and their adult helpers.
November 14 - All About Life Cycles & November 19 - Space Adventure.

Hop Into History

Location: Heinz History Center

Time: 2nd Wed. of each month • Ages 2 - 5

Cost: \$\$ • (*PR) heinzhistorycenter.org



Developmental Hockey Leagues

Location: North Park

Time: Session 1: Nov. 17 - Dec. 22, Saturdays, 7 - 8:30am & Wednesdays 5:30 - 6:30pm

Location: North Park

Time: Session 2: Nov. 18 - Dec. 23, Sundays, 10 - 11:30am & Wednesdays, 6:45 - 7:45pm

Location: South Park

Time: Nov. 18 - Dec. 23, Sundays, 10 - 11am & Wednesdays, 5 - 6pm

Cost: \$\$

Open to ages 4 - 10. Emphasis will be on individual skill development and team strategies. \$175 for residents & \$219 for non-residents.

Sunday | 18

Windows Through History - 1800's Lewis & Clark

Location: William Vicary Mansion, Freedom

Time: November 18, 10am - 1:30pm

Cost: \$\$ • bchrlf.org

Giving Thanks on the Frontier

Location: Oliver Miller Homestead

Time: November 18, 1:30 - 4:30pm

Cost: \$\$ • olivermillerhomestead.org

Monday | 19

Mommy & Me Essential Oils Classes

Location: Mind Body Center PLLC

Time: November 19, 9:30 - 10:30am

Cost: \$\$

412-854-4887

Want to have Happy & Healthy kids? Give the PEACE of mind this holiday. Reserve your spot today!

Tuesday | 20

Fiddler on the Roof

Location: Benedum Center

Time: November 20 - 25

Cost: \$\$ • trustarts.org

Thursday | 22 Thanksgiving

Please submit info for our December Calendar by November 1
web@pittsburghparent.com



Educational Open Houses coming up!

Shady Side Academy
November 10 - January 10

The Linsly School
November 10

Saint Joseph High School
December 8

Sewickley Academy
November 14 & December 4

Many feel that Thanksgiving is the best of the winter holidays since it focuses on family and gratitude without the pressure of commercialism. Taking part in yearly rituals gives families a sense of stability, identity and connection. Sharing repetitive but flexible traditions gives families an annual opportunity to demonstrate what makes them unique. This exchange can be vital, since experts believe that the regular participation in rituals like Thanksgiving contribute to the well-being of the entire family.

A study by the Society for Research in Child Development concluded that parents who had pleasant memories of family traditions reported more positive interactions with their own children, who might one day continue this cycle. Now that we've established the importance of Thanksgiving, here are eight easy, meaningful and inexpensive rituals meant to facilitate family connections.

Turn off electronics - Most of us eagerly anticipate intimate conversations with extended family. Because it can be rare to have everyone in one place, we desperately want to catch up and to connect, but electronics often interfere.

A study out of Virginia Tech concluded that technology at the table "has the potential to divert individuals from face-to-face exchanges, thereby undermining the character and depth of these connections."

To avoid these distractions, try for a technology-free table this year. Simply say, "Let's try turning off the electronics for a few hours," and watch the verbal conversations flow.

Share dishes that celebrate your family's identity - Although it's easy to stick with turkey and traditional sides, it can also be valuable to share dishes that are personally meaningful. Many families have certain specialties that are served every Thanksgiving. Often, the foods reflect the family's heritage or experiences.

Don't shy away from special ethnic or regional dishes that reflect guests' identity and personal preferences. Consider cooking such dishes with children so that they can eventually pass these specialties down to their own families. The "perfect" Thanksgiving menu varies from family to family.

Use (add to) family heirlooms - Many hosts serve Thanksgiving dinner on "the good china," so that the meal is particularly special. Some families embrace mismatched but vintage pieces that are specific to the holiday. Those who don't start with a complete set will find that building a larger collection is relatively easy and inexpensive.

Scouring auction sites, garage sales and thrift stores will often turn up matching pieces or items that will



compliment what is currently in use. It's rewarding to add to your collection as your family grows. It's also thoughtful to make the pieces available to whoever hosts Thanksgiving.

Remember absent family members - It can be therapeutic and respectful to remember family members who can't attend Thanksgiving or who have passed away. Many families choose to honor absent family members with gestures like lighting a candle, leaving an open chair or place setting, serving favorite dishes or saying a special blessing.

It's important that all family members know that despite any loss or absence, they will always be held up by generational family bonds. Experts stress that although it can be important to use discretion if grief is fresh, not talking about an absent family member ensures that they are really lost. It is the sharing of memories that keep them close.

Tell family stories - An easy way to bring meaning to dinner conversation is to ask family members to share stories. Doing so ensures that mealtime topics remain positive and that family members gain new insights about one another. Adults can begin this process by asking open-ended questions like, "What was your favorite birthday?" Or, "What personal attribute is most important to you?" The answers may lead to an intimate peak inside a family member's personality, values and experiences.

Provide an ornament, craft or game table for the kids - Even the most engaged and well-behaved children enjoy entertainment or activities meant just for them. One easy and efficient way

to accomplish this is to set up an activity, craft or game table. Many companies offer craft kits that have all needed supplies.

Some families encourage kids to make handmade Christmas ornaments or winter holiday decorations that can be sent home with guests, since many families decorate their homes the day after Thanksgiving. Consider offering games for children who would prefer an alternative to crafts.

Value repetitive rituals, but remain flexible and open-minded

- As valuable as repetitive traditions can be, change is inevitable.

Sometimes, unforeseen events or a shift in circumstances may mean that the food, the people and the activities may be different from year to year. However, an open-mind and a spirit of acceptance ensures that any changes needn't alter the true purpose and enjoyment of the holiday.

Add to growing displays of gratitude -

Many families make a yearly habit of sharing one thing that each person is thankful for. Although some families choose to share verbally, others will create a thankful tree, a gratitude chain or a tablecloth of thanks that can be added to every year. It can be heart-warming to watch these displays change over time.

Placing an emphasis on recurring sentiments of gratitude keeps the focus on what is truly important - on giving thanks, on sharing important traditions and on encouraging familial connections meant to endure for generations.

None of these tips are particularly time consuming or expensive, but experts agree that encouraging deep, ongoing family relationships is worth the effort.

Dr. Marie Hartwell-Walker, author of *Tending The Family Heart Through The Holidays* says, "It is important to be reminded that we are part of something bigger than our individual selves; that our relationships with people are more important than our relationships with avatars and that our time with our families is just as important as time with co-workers and friends." ■

Author Shannon Dean is the mother of two sons. She enjoys writing about the health and well-being of families.



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