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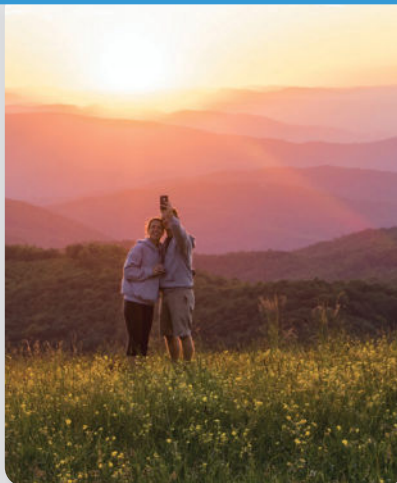
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EDITOR'S NOTE

Hello May!

Washington Parent joins you in celebrating Mother's Day this month and all year long. In this issue we have gift ideas from two local mom writers: an article about eco-friendly gifts for Mom and where to shop for them locally, plus our More for Moms & Dads department with suggestions for B&Bs around the DMV that would be perfect for gift certificates or a trip together that's your treat!

We've got lots of great spring-sliding-into-summer stories and tips for you in this issue of Washington Parent. You'll want to consult *12 Beautiful Gardens Around the DC Area to Visit With Kids* for outings not just to enjoy the gorgeous spring in the DMV but also to remind your kids (and yourself) to appreciate being outdoors in nature. And if you're looking for more activity in nature where you can find a level that suits every member of the family, bicycling is the way to go – we have articles on family biking, local trails and bike safety to get you moving.

As the countdown to camp begins, you know you're making a list and checking it twice, so read how savvy campers pack and where savvy parents can save on camp clothes and supplies. If your camper is differently abled, a mom who has been through it has advocacy tips and resources for *Helping Your Child with Differing Abilities Succeed in Camp*. And if you haven't signed up for camp(s) yet, our Camps & Summer Programs Guide offers options for all interests, across and around the DMV.

If one of your hatchlings is about to graduate from high school, you'll enjoy and maybe be inspired by an essay inviting you to consider that the photos you take at the ceremony needn't only be of your child but also of the other parents who've helped them get to this point through their service to their school, their sports team, their arts class, their mom! and more.

We're all concerned about the mental health crisis among kids and teens. If it's time to take your own to get help, a local clinical, child and family therapist walks you through *How to Talk to Your Child About Going to a Therapist*. And kids need parents who are being supported themselves, so you'll want to read this month's Parenting Insights with PEP department on *How to Overcome Parent Burnout: Self-Care, Self-Study and Parent Education*, as well as our Brain Talk column which this month offers you tips for successful family meetings. Speaking of support, don't forget grandparents. In the May Washington Parent, we also feature ideas on how grandparents can help with their neurodiverse grandkids: check out the sidebar for info on a special grandparent networking and book signing event June 1.

If you're in the midst of the natural process and life milestone that is perimenopause, or have a partner who is, learn more in *Perimenopause & Moms' Mental Health*. The authors, experts in this field, note, "While it's encouraging to see more open discussion, the critical conversation around how perimenopausal symptoms affect parenting is often absent." They open the conversation with you.

We're all worried about changes affecting our kids' education, so Washington Parent sent a writer on assignment to talk to some local K-12 educators about possible impacts of the U.S. Department of Education closure on their work and their students and schools. You'll find their thoughts informative. On a lighter note, we also tasked our assistant editor to share unique venues for kids' birthday parties in the DMV. And on a note that could be light, or could be heavy, (depending how you and your family eat), check out tips on *Dining Out Around DC on a Budget with Kids*, including restaurant recommendations that let you save money while still enjoying some of the diverse and delicious dining out options in our area.

Enjoy the rest of spring before summer comes in hot!

Karen

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Celebrating Sisters, with Books

Sisters giggle and argue with their siblings. They share, support, compete and love. Childhood hugs and squabbles can help forge a bond that lasts a lifetime. As the 19th century poet Christina Rossetti put it: “There is no friend like a sister in calm or stormy weather.” These books explore that complex, often delightful, sometimes challenging role.

Tots–age 7

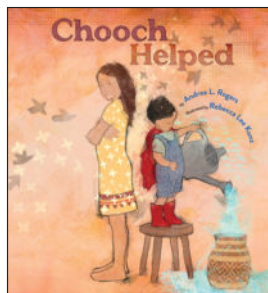
Chooch Helped

By Andrea Rogers

Illustrated by Rebecca Lee Kunz

Levine Querido, 2024, \$18.99

Like many older sisters, Sissy grows impatient with 2-year-old Chooch. He wants to help but often only slows the process or messes up. Together, author and illustrator – both members of the Cherokee Nation – paint a tender portrait of a contemporary Cherokee family. Sister and brother learn that their relationship can be mutually beneficial and supportive, sometimes in unexpected ways. This book won the prestigious Caldecott Medal in 2025, for stunning collage art by first-time illustrator Rebecca Lee Rogers.



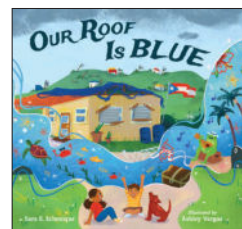
Our Roof Is Blue

By Sara Echenique

Illustrated by Ashley Vargas

Charlesbridge, 2023, \$17.99

Sara Echenique drew upon memories of the hurricanes of her youth in Puerto Rico for this endearing sibling tale. When a storm damages their home, the first-person narrator sees her brother change from imaginative storyteller to mute, fearful child. Over time, with kindness and patience, she helps him reengage with life. Lush illustrations and a surprise ending honor their bond and the blue tarp that was their roof for months.



Preteens

More to the Story

By Hena Khan

HarperCollins, 2019, \$17.99

In her moving acknowledgements, Maryland author Hena Khan names beloved classic *Little Women* as the inspiration for this lively novel of four Pakistani American sisters in contemporary Atlanta. Like Jo March, 13-year-old Jameela Mirza is fiercely dedicated to her writing. She yearns to pen an award-winning article – a desire she sometimes prioritizes over family and new friend Ali. Khan beautifully develops the sisters as distinct personalities. There is glamorous Maryam, bratty Aleeya and gentle Bisma, whose cancer diagnosis dramatically impacts the family’s decisions and dynamics. But it is flawed, impetuous Jameela whom we take to our hearts and root for.

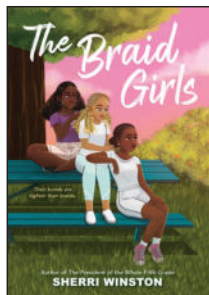


The Braid Girls

By Sherri Winston

Little, Brown, 2023, \$16.99

Maggie's world is upended when half sister Callie moves in. She's sure Callie will interfere with her summer plans with BFF Daija. The two friends hope to start a hair-braiding business called Braid Girls. Callie, though, is dealing with very different feelings and hopes. She's mourning her recently deceased mother and trying to find her place in her new home. Narrated by each girl in alternating chapters, the novel allows access to the thoughts and emotions of each and fosters understanding of all perspectives. The three finally begin to connect when threatened by another girl-operated braiding business. Readers will cheer the moment they all become as close as sisters.

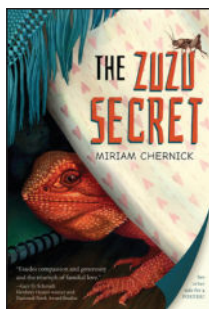


The Zuzu Secret

By Miriam Chernick

Charlesbridge, 2025, \$17.99

A 12-year-old sister and older brother harbor secrets in this compelling first novel by Maryland author Miriam Chernick. Josie is hiding a rescued bearded dragon, Zuzu, in their Silver Spring home, in violation of her father's no-pets rule. And Abe plans to see a Baltimore Orioles game on his own, despite a genetic disorder that requires careful monitoring. When Abe takes off on a bus, Josie follows, desperate to protect him from possible harm. Little do they know that Abe's quest may also affect Zuzu's safety. Alternating first-person point of view throughout enhances empathy for both characters. And details about Prader-Willi syndrome and bearded dragons add vivid layers to this beautifully written sibling story.



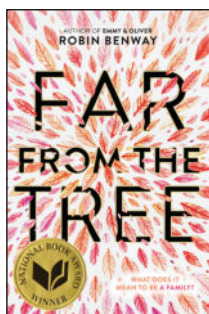
Teens

Far From the Tree

By Robin Benway

HarperTeen, 2017, \$17.99

This powerful novel, winner of a National Book Award, plumbs the connections and complications of family. In their teens, Grace, Maya and Joaquin discover that they are siblings. As babies, the girls were adopted and raised in different families; their older brother has long been part of the foster care system. Now, they are on a mission: to find the mother who gave them up. Along the way, they learn much about themselves, one another and the parents who adopted them. And in one another, the sisters and brother find trust, support and laughter.



Mary Quattlebaum lives in Washington, DC and is the author of 30 award-winning children's books, most recently *Queen Elizabeth II, an early reader biography*. She teaches in the graduate program in writing for children at Vermont College of Fine Arts, writes frequently for *The Washington Post* and is a popular school and conference speaker.



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Why Family Meetings Matter – Especially for Neurodivergent Kids



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When my kids were about 8 and 5, we started having (infrequent) family meetings. We mostly talked about screen time, chores and who was supposed to do what around the house (including the adults!). What I'm going to describe here is the "gold standard" for family meetings, but don't let that scare you off! Remember that **Done is Better than Perfect**. We had about three meetings a year (mostly around school transitions) for about five years, and they were memorable mostly when screen time limits were increased! But I did take notes during those meetings, and I can see in hindsight how they were a super valuable tool in creating culture in our family where everyone felt seen and heard in a constructive way.

Family meetings might sound like something only super-organized families do, but they're actually one of the best ways to make home life easier for everyone. Schools, sports teams and jobs all have meetings to make sure things run smoothly; it's not a stretch to include families into that group.

In his book *The Secrets of Happy Families*, author Bruce Feiler talks about how regular family meetings help families communicate better, solve problems and make sure everyone feels heard. This is true for all families, but it's especially helpful when there are neurodivergent kids in the house. Whether a child has ADHD, autism, anxiety or another neurodivergence, family meetings can create a safe and predictable space where they feel valued and included.

When Should You Start?

Kids as young as 4 or 5 can be part of family meetings in simple ways. At this age, they will not sit through a long discussion, but some 4s and 5s can share something about their week, give ideas or help with a fun family decision like picking a movie or a weekend activity.

By ages 7 or 8, most kids can understand basic problem-solving and follow a structure for a meeting. They can take turns talking, listening to others and even helping come up with rules or family plans. If you have a mix of younger and older kids, you can adjust the meetings, so everyone gets something out of them.

Why Family Meetings Are Important

1. They Give Everyone a Voice

One of the best parts of a family meeting is that everyone, no matter their age, gets a chance to talk. For neurodivergent kids, who might struggle to express their thoughts in everyday conversations, this is huge. Having a set time where they know they can share their feelings, concerns or ideas without being interrupted or rushed helps build confidence and communication skills. If your kiddo's not a talker, do not worry, and do not treat

family meetings like a test: let your complicated kid sit and soak up the atmosphere without pressure to contribute if they really can't or don't want to. (Hint: When you settle upon an idea they don't like, they're likely to pipe up!)

2. They Reduce Surprises and Stress

Many neurodivergent kids do best with structure and predictability. If something is going to change – like a new bedtime routine, a different carpool schedule or a big family event – talking about it ahead of time in a family meeting can make the transition easier. It gives kids time to process and ask questions rather than feeling overwhelmed when changes suddenly happen. Talking about events in advance will also let you know what additional supports your child might need between the meeting and the actual event.

3. They Teach Problem-Solving

It's common for siblings – especially when one is neurodivergent – to feel like things aren't always equal. A neurodivergent child needs extra attention or different rules, which can make siblings feel frustrated or left out. Family meetings give everyone a chance to talk about these feelings openly. Instead of bottling up resentment, siblings can ask questions, share their own needs and work together as a family to find solutions. This helps create a home where everyone feels respected and included.

4. They Encourage Independence

Feiler's book emphasizes that kids feel more confident when they're part of making decisions. Family meetings are a great way to let kids practice this. For example, instead of parents always planning the weekend, let kids make suggestions. Instead of just assigning chores, let kids help figure out a system that feels fair to everyone. These small choices help kids, especially neurodivergent ones, feel like they have control over parts of their world. Caveat: there WILL be times when your kids' ideas are terrible. This is also part of the learning process! Let them have their terrible ideas (as long as no one's getting hurt right out of the gate) and talk about it after. What went well? What didn't go so well? What did we learn? (And "what did we learn" in a collaborative, curious way, not an "I told you so" way!)

5. They Strengthen Family Bonds

A lot of families only have serious discussions when something goes wrong. But if you have regular meetings – even when things are going well – it helps create a strong foundation. That way, when a tough situation does come up, kids already trust that their opinions matter and that their family listens to them. This is huge: flexing the muscle of "in this family, we talk about things, and everyone is heard" is a big deal.

How to Make Family Meetings Work

Not every family meeting needs to be formal. In fact, the more fun and relaxed they are, the more kids will want to participate. Here are some simple tips:

- ✓ **Keep them short.** Start with 10-15 minutes, especially for younger kids. You can always go longer as they get used to it.
- ✓ **Pick a regular time.** Sunday evenings or another calm part of the week can work well.

✓ Make a simple agenda.

- What's going well?
- Any problems to solve?
- Plans for the week ahead.
- A fun question (like "What's your dream vacation?").

✓ **TAKE NOTES!** This is one of the most important things. Write things down to refer to later.

✓ **Let kids take turns leading.** Even young kids can help pick discussion topics or set a timer.

✓ **End on a positive note.** Maybe a group high-five, a family game or a treat.

Takeaways

Family meetings aren't about making things perfect – they're about making things better. When kids, especially neurodivergent ones, feel included in decisions and problem-solving, they're more likely to feel safe, valued and supported at home. These meetings don't just improve communication but also create happier, more connected families.

Will you give it a try? Your first meeting doesn't have to be fancy – just set a time, gather the family and start talking. You might be surprised at how much of a difference it makes!

Gabriele Nicolet is a toddler whisperer, child development specialist, parent coach and host of the *Complicated Kids Podcast*. She is passionate about showing families how to help their complicated kids thrive and not just survive. Reach her at gabrielenicolet.com



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Parents, These Are the Pictures You Should Take at High School Graduation

By Katy M. Clark

One of the best parts of my son's high school graduation was unexpected.

It wasn't the processional, with hundreds of young people looking dapper in their caps and gowns marching onto the football field.

It certainly wasn't the speeches – although, thankfully, the ones at my son's graduation were short and generated a few good laughs. It wasn't the fact that I teared up. (No surprise there.)

The unexpected part of my senior's high school graduation that I came to love was what I called the "after-party" – the time after the ceremony, when my son moved from friend group to friend group, hugging, shaking hands and snapping pictures.

He hugged his best friends since kindergarten, then posed with new classmates he met as a high school senior. He shook hands with teammates from all the sports he'd played over the years. Then he caught up with the gang he'd known since preschool. It was amazing to see him mark this moment with so many kids from so many different activities and parts of his life.

And it made me think.

Parents, we should take pictures with each other at high school graduation. Wouldn't it be awesome to congratulate, honor and recognize all the parents who walked alongside us and our high school graduates to this day?

I'd start with the parents I met at daycare, the ones I saw at drop-off or pickup when our kids were so little. They were some of the first friends I made as a new parent. We made strides together in our early attempts to balance work and parent life.

Next, I'd want pictures with the playgroup moms who welcomed me and my messy, loud, crying tot into their homes on a rotating basis. And the summertime moms, with whom I visited the beach or pool or did anything to get the kids out of the house for a few hours. These moms made me feel less alone and sprinkled my days with the sunshine of adult companionship.



BIGSTOCK/ NOSNIBORI137

Then there were the birthday party parents. We spent dozens of weekends with each other at miniature golf, laser tag and bounce house venues, and we weathered the noise and mirth of crowded venues like Chuck E. Cheese on Saturday afternoons for what seemed like five years in a row.

I'd want pictures with the room volunteer parents. Together we staffed craft tables at holiday celebrations, helped small groups with reading or spelling and ran activities in the hot sun on field day.

A big shout-out to the parents who chaperoned field trips. They know how hard it is to keep a group of kids from wandering off on your watch! I'd snap a picture of that mom who partnered with me on a middle school overnight trip. Without her, I don't know how I would have endured a rowdy group singing the SpongeBob SquarePants theme song over and over, for the umpteenth time.

I'd want pictures of the church parents who greeted my family every Sunday, prayed for my child, taught his youth group and Sunday school classes and walked alongside my child in his faith journey from tot to teen.

Also, I'd pose for pictures with the sports team parents. They cheered for my kid as I cheered for theirs. They shivered

with me in the rain by soccer fields and sometimes shared blankets in the hockey rink so our butts didn't freeze.

Looking around the crowd after my son's high school graduation, there were so many more parents I didn't know and whose photos someone else might treasure. The parents who helped with scout troops, or the debate or robotics teams. Parents who prepped for band competitions or theater performances. Parents who ran the parent-teacher organizations.

If I were to attend a high school graduation all over again, I'd snap pictures with all the people who had been part of our family's journey to this momentous occasion. I'd hug and high-five these other adults. After years of trying to coordinate our schedules to hang out, we were actually all at the same event. Our gathering was something to commemorate and celebrate.

Because we did it! We helped shepherd each other's kids from toddlers into young adults. Together, we made raising our kids a little easier, less lonely and a lot more fun.

Katy M. Clark is a writer and mom of two who celebrates her imperfections on her blog *Experienced Bad Mom*. This article was originally published by *Your Teen for Parents*.



By Jennifer Brechbill

Impact of Department of Education Closure:

DC, Virginia and Maryland Educators Speak Out

By Jennifer Brechbill

Project 2025's mission for the Department of Education ("DoE") was blunt: "[U]ltimately, the federal Department of Education should be eliminated." President Trump is now executing on that mandate.

What is the DoE?

In 1979, Congress passed the Department of Education Organization Act, which established the DoE. The agency creates policy for, administers and coordinates most federal education assistance. As of this writing, its website still proclaims its mission: "to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access."

Dismantling the Department

Since taking office, President Trump has taken an axe to the public education system. On March 20, 2025, he issued an [executive order](#) directing the Secretary of Education to “take all necessary steps to facilitate the closure of the Department of Education and return authority over education to the States and local communities[.]” The order further requires that federal funds may not be used for programs “promoting gender ideology.”

Legally, the president cannot unilaterally remove an agency created by Congress. He likely can, however, render it impotent.

As a parent, I have questions about these actions. But what do our local educators say?

Math Specialist, K-5 (Alexandria, Va.)

“The Executive Order creates an atmosphere of uncertainty. Whether it’s a school or a school district, we don’t know how funding will be impacted or what regulations will be impacted. This idea of doing things without a plan, without foresight, is really what I see as the biggest issue.

One of the things I worry about is our most vulnerable students: students with special needs. How will [504 plans](#) and [IEPs](#) be monitored and enforced? We don’t know the plan and we don’t have any kind of guarantee. It’s undermining a system that already needs bolstering and support.”

Educational Consultant Supporting Public and Charter Schools in Maryland, Virginia and DC

“Since 2019, there has been a national effort in education to shift the way we teach reading to better align with cognitive science. A big part of that initiative is to change how teachers are taught and the curricula we use for teaching children how to read.

Fairfax County has already implemented a new curriculum, for the first time in 30 years, and some of the money it used for this change was through federal grants. I was recently in a school in Maryland, however, in a small district with high needs, that is also shifting its reading instructional practice and is ready to pilot new reading curricula. The money they were going to use to fund this change was from a federal grant. Because of the executive order, the district is worried about not being able to get reimbursed and is not moving forward.

There is such a lack of clarity about what it means to shut down the Department of Education. People are concerned, and they’re making decisions not based on what is best for kids, but because they’re confused. This will have direct impacts on the students currently in school and on future students.”

Elementary School Teacher (Washington, DC)

“What concerns me most about the dismantling of DoE is how it will impact funding for academic support in our schools. For example, our school employs teachers who specialize in assisting English language learners. Will we have enough funding for those positions? I fear what cuts will be made and how it will impact our students. Education should not be a privilege in our country, and every child should have access to a quality education. Moving forward, I fear the education gap will only continue to grow.”

High School English Teacher (Montgomery County, Md.)

“The truest victims of these cuts are the ones whom politicians routinely pledge to defend and support: the students.

The federal government – through the Department of Education – is a primary source of important funding for many essential programs: namely special education services and free and reduced meal provisions. These cuts will have dire consequences for millions of kids across the country. How can we expect a kid – whether 5 or 15 – to concentrate in class all day when they haven’t eaten since lunch the day before?

We in Montgomery County Public Schools won’t see the precise impact of the federal cuts yet. We also have school and elected officials who’ve done their best to brace our system for what they knew was to come. But no amount of reallocation of funds or creative budgeting can protect kids from the irreparable harm that these cuts will bring – and the consequences they will reap on our nation’s future for generations to come.”

Social Studies Teacher (Maryland)

“In the past I have had some very positive interactions with the DoE, participating in numerous roundtables on a wide variety of topics, especially global education and supporting our religious students in our public schools. For me the most worrisome direction of the DoE is that many of our most marginalized and vulnerable students will no longer have the legal and financial support of the federal government and all of the gains that marginalized student groups have made in our schools will be lost. My resume is full of DEI [diversity, equity and inclusion], which is the heart of who I am as a teacher.”

The DoE executive order is shrouded in confusion and we might not understand the full impacts for years to come. In the meantime, we could all benefit from listening to our teachers.

Jennifer Brechbill is a writer, lawyer and mom of three. You can find her on LinkedIn or Instagram (@jenniferbrechbill or @glutenfree_with_g). Want to read more about local impacts of federal cuts? Check out Jennifer Brechbill’s insightful article, [Exit Interviews: Hear From Parents in the DC Area Laid Off From Federal Jobs](#) on [washingtonparent.com](#).



Family Peda Adventure

for National Bike

5 Great Local Bike Rides for the Whole Family

By Liam McCrickard

As the weather gets warmer, you may be tempted to go out and bike as a family, but unsure what routes will meet every biker's needs. Here are five trails in the DMV that any member of the family can enjoy.

1. **Anacostia Riverwalk:** A 12-mile, fully paved trail that runs along the Anacostia River. With plenty of places to hop on and off, this might just be the best bike ride in the city.
2. **Bethesda Trolley Trail:** An easy, 4-mile ride in Bethesda, largely sheltered by trees and avoiding main roads. Being paved throughout, it's an ideal easy ride for when the weather gets hot.
3. **Lake Accotink Park:** A loop around the titular lake and the surrounding areas, this trail has multiple points to enter and exit from, allowing families to choose whether to stick to the paved portions or take on the full loop.
4. **Northeast Branch Trail Hiking Trail:** Connecting Lake Artemisia to the Anacostia Trail system, this 3.4-mile paved path has many fun stops on the way, including community parks and the College Park Airport.
5. **Arlington Loop:** A 16-mile circuit, this "trail" actually consists of four unique trails – the Mount Vernon, Custis, Washington & Old Dominion (W&OD) and Four Mile Run. Complete the loop over multiple adventures or make it a marathon.

By Beth Brown

May brings with it the celebration of National Bike Month, a time when the allure of the open road beckons to both seasoned cyclists and newcomers alike. As someone deeply passionate about cycling, the great outdoors and the joys of family bonding, this annual event holds a special place in my heart. With each pedal stroke, there's a sense of liberation, a feeling of freedom that transcends the ordinary.



Cycling Adventures Month in the DC Area

Amidst the excitement and anticipation, a wonderful opportunity presents itself: how can we further ignite the enthusiasm of families and children to wholeheartedly embrace the enchanting world of cycling during this delightful month-long celebration?

With this thought in mind, here are some key insights to ignite the spirit of adventure and inspire families to embrace the magic of National Bike Month:

1. **Explore Local Treasures:** Explore the monuments and other historic sites of the capital. Dive into your community's bike paths, uncovering unique gems and scenic routes waiting to be discovered. Take leisurely rides through quaint neighborhoods, where colorful houses line the streets, and friendly faces greet you along the way. Explore nearby parks and nature reserves, immersing yourselves in the sights and sounds of the natural world. Pause to admire blooming flowers, listen to the chirping of birds and feel the breeze against your skin as you pedal through serene landscapes.
2. **Gear Up for Safety:** Prioritize safety by ensuring everyone in your family wears helmets, reflective gear and follows traffic rules diligently. Equip your bikes with bright lights and reflective accessories to enhance visibility, during both daylight and evening rides. Teach children the importance of bike safety, including hand signals, proper lane positioning and awareness of their surroundings. Practice emergency stops and maneuvers in a safe environment, ensuring everyone feels confident and prepared before heading out on your biking adventures.
3. **Savor Memorable Moments Along the Way:** Slow down and appreciate the journey by pausing for picnics in scenic spots, wildlife watching breaks or impromptu games in local parks. Pack a delicious picnic lunch filled with your family's favorite snacks and treats and find a cozy spot to relax and refuel amidst nature's beauty. Encourage children to collect leaves, rocks or flowers along the way, creating cherished mementos of your outdoor escapades. Take photographs to capture special moments and create lasting memories that you can treasure for years to come.
4. **Discover Hidden Trails and Secret Paths:** Encourage the safe exploration of off-the-beaten-path trails in local parks or nature reserves, where surprises and discoveries await around every bend. Navigate through dense woodlands, across babbling streams and over rolling hills, uncovering



hidden treasures and secret hideaways along the way. Engage children's imaginations by weaving stories about the magical creatures and enchanted landscapes you encounter, turning each outing into a grand adventure. Foster a sense of wonder and curiosity as you explore the great outdoors together, creating memories that will last a lifetime.

5. **Share the Joy with Others:** Spread the love for cycling by inviting friends, neighbors or extended family members to join in your biking adventures. Organize group rides, bike picnics or community biking events to foster a sense of camaraderie and belonging. Encourage newcomers to discover the joys of cycling for themselves, sharing tips, tricks and favorite routes along the way. By sharing the joy of biking with others, you'll not only enrich their lives but also strengthen the bonds within your community.

National Bike Month is more than just a celebration of cycling: it's a testament to the enduring spirit of adventure that resides within each of us. By embracing the magic of cycling and fostering a sense of wonder and curiosity, we can unlock new realms of possibility, forge deeper connections with our loved ones and create memories that will last a lifetime. So dust off your bikes, gather your loved ones and embark on a journey of discovery together. The road awaits, filled with endless possibilities and boundless adventures.

Beth Brown, Ph.D., is a lifelong educator on a mission to inspire families and kids to have fun, become more active and learn life lessons through sports in her children's book series *Adventures with Divot & Swish*. After picking up a basketball at age 2 and swinging her first golf club at age 8, Beth was hooked on sports. She currently serves as Senior Athlete Development Specialist for the United States Golf Association (USGA) U.S. National Development Program.

Here's Your Helmet!

Bike Safety Tips for Your Family

By Safe Kids District of Columbia

Now that May is here and the weather is getting warmer, children are more likely to go out and explore their world on their bikes. May not only marks the arrival of warmer weather but also brings attention to two important safety observances: National Bike to School Day and Bike Safety Month. These occasions serve as timely reminders for parents and caregivers to teach children about traffic rules, road signs, signals and safe biking practices.

From wearing helmets to understanding hand signals and navigating intersections safely, educating children about the importance of biking safely is important for their safety and the safety of those around them. Follow these tips to keep your family safe while enjoying bike rides.

BIKE SAFETY TIPS

1. Always wear a helmet

Helmets should be worn by children and adults every ride, every time. Bike helmets reduce severe head injuries in children by 45% in the event of an unexpected fall or crash. Be sure to discuss the significance of wearing a helmet and making sure it fits correctly with children.

2. Find the proper fit

Use this easy three step process to properly fit a bike helmet:

- **Eyes.** Put the helmet on your head and look up. You should see the bottom rim of the helmet. The helmet should fit firmly on the head and not move from side to side.
- **Ears.** The straps should form a "V" under your ears when buckled. The straps should be a little tight but not uncomfortable.
- **Mouth.** Say "Ahhh!!!" Open your mouth as wide as you can. Does the helmet hug your head? If not, tighten the straps.

3. Is your bike in safe condition?

Conduct a quick **ABC Quick Check** before your ride!

- **A is for Air:** Be sure you have enough air in your tires. Check the sidewall of the tire and inflate tires to the rated pressure indicated.
- **B is for Brakes:** Look to see that your brake pads and cables are not worn down. For hand brakes, give them a squeeze to check cable tightness.
- **C is for Chain and Cranks:** Always check that your chain is clean (free of gunk) and lubricated (rust-free).
- Don't feel comfortable doing this on your own? Check out a local bike shop in your area.

4. Be safe. Be seen.

- Do you know the rules of the ride? Always use proper hand signals to alert other road users of actions. Click [here](#) for a quick reference guide.
- It is also helpful to familiarize yourself with [bike laws](#) in your local jurisdiction.
- Wear brightly colored and/or reflective clothing. For added safety, reflectors or head and rear lights can be added to your bike.
- Avoid loose or draped clothing and secure shoes with laces to avoid them being caught in the bike chain, pedals or wheels.

5. Follow road rules

Help your child to understand the rules of the road when riding his or her bike. It's important that your child know to ride on the right side of the road, with traffic, not against it; respect traffic signals, stopping at all stop signs and stop lights, and looking left, right and left again before entering a street or crossing an intersection.





“Bike helmets reduce severe head injuries in children by 45% in the event of an unexpected fall or crash.”

HOW TO TEACH KIDS ABOUT BIKE SAFETY

1. Start early, start simple

Introduce simple and easy traffic rules to children at an early age, even before they start riding bikes. Take advantage of everyday opportunities to teach kids the fundamentals of road safety, such as looking both ways before crossing the street, stopping at stop signs, yielding to pedestrians and using hand signals to indicate turns.

2. Make it interactive and enjoyable

When teaching children about bike safety, incorporate games and activities to make it enjoyable. Include toy cars and bikes to demonstrate and engage the senses and imagination. In addition, visual aids, such as road signs, posters, charts and flashcards can help children recognize and understand different road signs and signals. Take them on bike rides in the neighborhood to point out various signs and explain their meanings in real-life context. For educational activities and information related to bike safety, check out resources like [Safe Kids Worldwide](#), [Bicycle Safer Journey](#) and [Safe Routes](#).

3. Don't forget about helmets

It's important to discuss the significance of wearing a helmet and [making sure it fits correctly](#) when teaching kids about bike safety. Demonstrate the correct way to wear a helmet, making sure it sits level on the head, covers the forehead and is snug but not too tight. Explain to children that helmets are like a protective shield for their heads. Encourage them to always wear a helmet whenever they ride a bike regardless of how short the trip may be.

4. Be a role model

Children learn by example, so it's essential to model safe biking behaviors yourself. Always obey traffic laws, use hand signals when turning and demonstrate polite behavior towards pedestrians and other cyclists.

By combining these safe biking practices and strategies to teach children about traffic rules, road signs and signals, you can help them become confident, responsible and careful cyclists. Together, let's create a culture of safe biking for children of all ages.

[Safe Kids District of Columbia](#) is a nonprofit organization working to help families and communities keep kids safe from injuries. This article originally appeared in [Rise and Shine from Children's National Hospital](#) and was reprinted with permission.

12 UNIQUE VENUES FOR KIDS' BIRTHDAY PARTIES IN THE DC AREA

By Liam McCrickard

If you have a child, you've surely been to the same party a dozen times. Go to the celebrant's house, a bowling alley, an arcade or a movie theater. Year in and year out, the same scene plays out, leaving kids and parents alike wanting something fresh. If you and your child want something different this year, why not check out one of these 12 unique types of venues?



1. **Explore Beneath the Waves at the Aquarium:** The mysteries of the ocean are at the fingertips of each child who comes to a birthday party at the Glen Echo Park Aquarium (Glen Echo, Md.), with guided interactive tours, opportunities for craft making and a chance to see a shark fed live.
2. **Play Mini-Golf by Blacklight:** An indoor mini-golf course with spooky theming and striking blacklights, [Monster Mini Golf](#) (Gaithersburg, Md. and Chantilly, Va.) also has an arcade for guests to enjoy.



3. **Visit the Children's Museum:** Young children will delight in a party at the [National Children's Museum](#) (Washington, DC), as it's a space made for kids to explore STEM and the arts in interactive ways. Kiddos with all interests will be able to find something that piques their curiosity.



4. **Learn Parkour in a Safe Environment:** Parkour is still having a moment. The movement play gym [Scramble](#) (Alexandria, Arlington and Falls Church, Va.) has play structures designed to be, as the name suggests, scrambled all over, giving budding acrobats a place to show off their skills without crashing into concrete.
5. **Feel All Grown Up in a Kid City:** A party at a kid city like [Little Towns Children's Museum](#) (N. Bethesda, Md.) lets children celebrate getting older by exploring a facility built for simulating life as an adult in a fun, safe way.
6. **See a Live Theatrical Performance:** Movie parties are done to death, but live theater is another thing all together. Celebrating a birthday by seeing a show somewhere like [Adventure Theatre](#) (Glen Echo, Md.) supports the local arts and exposes the whole party to a form of entertainment that can't be had anywhere else.
7. **Take to the Skies with Indoor Skydiving:** Humanity has yet to master self-propelled flight, but the closest we can get right now is with indoor skydiving at locations like [iFLY](#) (Ashburn, Va. and Gaithersburg, Md.).
8. **Hold a Gaming Tournament:** Game shops and game trucks are tween- and teen-friendly birthday party options sure to be hits. Bring the venue to you with the mobile game theaters from [Next Level Gaming](#) (serving the entire DMV), transporting guests to a video game wonderland.
9. **Make a Puppet and Bring it to Life:** Puppetry is something everyone has tried, even if it was just with hands and shadows. Parties at the [The Puppet Co.](#) (Glen Echo, Md.), for example, let you both see a show and learn how to make and move puppets of your own.
10. **Crack the Puzzle of an Escape Room:** A party both older kids and chaperones can enjoy, collaborative puzzle solving on a strict time limit is the name of the game here. There are many escape rooms in the DC area, including [Bond's Escape Room](#) (Fairfax and Arlington, Va.), [Escapology](#) (National Harbor, Md.) and [Escape the Room](#) (Washington, DC)



11. **Build at the Birthday Party:** Building things holds appeal for kids of all ages, so check out places that offer this type of fun STEM opportunity, from play centers to science centers. At a [National Building Museum](#) (Washington, DC) party, children can explore and build trains, castles and even books, using LEGO and Duplo bricks and many more materials.
12. **Enter the World of VR:** You can only ask guests to travel so far for a party, but with virtual reality at places like [VR Zone and VR Arena](#) (Rockville, Md. and Washington, DC) the whole party can leave reality itself behind for a gaming experience unlike any other.



The Savvy Camp Parent:

Pack Lightly to Maximize a Sense of Summer Adventure

By Christina Katz

No one at your kids' camp is hoping you will overpack. Camp staff are busy scheduling the type of summer adventures that make lifelong memories. So resist the urge to overpack your kids for camp. Keep your approach simple. Here are a few tips that will make your job easier and save you money and headaches.

Save on Camp Supplies

- ▶ Forget what other kids bring
- ▶ Rock those hand-me-downs
- ▶ Borrow from friends or neighbors
- ▶ Shop resale
- ▶ Search for online coupons
- ▶ Leave irreplaceable things at home
- ▶ Break shoes in well
- ▶ Bring enough, but not too much
- ▶ Focus on enjoying the experience

— Christina Katz

BIGSTOCK/ EVGENY ATAMANENKO

Follow the Camp Packing List. Heed the [camp packing list](#), even if you don't understand every piece of advice. The staff has done this before and they know what is necessary and what is not. If you have a question, send an email in advance. Don't wait until the last minute to pack. Divide and conquer the list early by laying everything out where it can be checked and double-checked. Expect it to all come back home in a jumble, of course.

Invest in a Duffel Bag for Camp Packing. If your camp does not tell you how to pack, invest in a large, sturdy duffel bag and do not overfill it. You want to leave a bit of room for everything to come home after camp when it's not packed as well as you packed it. In fact, tuck a collapsible nylon bag into one of the duffel bag pockets. It's sure to come in handy on the way home. If your camp requires a trunk, consider a soft trunk for easier mobility.

Don't Invest in All New Clothes for Camp. Don't go on a spending spree and send your child to camp with a whole new wardrobe. These clothes will likely come home stained and ripped, if they even make it home at all. Suffice it to say, pack old clothing that won't be missed if it does not return. Anything of irreplaceable sentimental value needs to stay home, even if it's just an old T-shirt. Send favorites as long as they are replaceable. Have a variety of appropriate shoes. And if you buy new shoes, definitely break them in before camp starts.

Label Almost Everything for Camp. Use a black laundry marker or a silver Sharpie for black items. If you shop online, you can find a white laundry marker that will last a couple of years. But don't go so far as labeling socks. Buy inexpensive socks of the same type and make sure your camper can identify them. Keep markings simple for most things by using three initials. No one wants to have the label-crazed parent. However, mark important items like boots, sneakers and water bottles with full names. Also label luggage.

Send Lightweight Clothing Layers With Your Camper. Even if it will be cool or even cold at night, resist the urge to pack a parka. Go with lightweight layers. A T-shirt, sweatshirt and waterproof shell are plenty warm enough for active kids. For cooler locations, fleece is lightweight and warm. Jeans may not sound fierce but will come in handy on cool nights by the fire. Don't forget a camping chair for damp mornings and evenings outdoors. And if you are going to pack anything extra, consider more socks and underwear, a second

Where to Save on Camp Supplies in the DC Area

- Casual Adventure Outfitters in Arlington County, Va. is a family-owned store that supplies camping gear for adults and kids.
- The Bee Store in Prince William County, Va. offers clothing and supplies in addition to their focus on honey.
- Good Wolf Gear in Fairfax County, Va. allows prospective campers to rent gear if they don't want to purchase it outright.
- Infinity Thrift Store in Montgomery County, Md. plus clothing and might be a way to save on various supplies.
- Great Falls Thrift in Loudoun County, Va. is an eco-friendly thrift store with supplies ranging from toiletries to fishing rods.
- Large chains like REI have multiple locations in the DMV and periodically run sales on merchandise.

— Washington Parent Staff

bathing suit and a backup water bottle. They won't take up much room.

Expect Damp at Camp, and When to Zip It. Sleeping bags should be easy to dry in the sun, just in case. Pack any stationery, books and papers in zip-top bags. You can separate small clothing into zip-top bags when packing. Include a few spare zip-top bags in a pocket to sort laundry into while at camp. Remind your camper not to zip anything damp into a plastic bag to avoid mildew.

Repel Camp Critters Naturally. Make sure camp cabins will be animalproof before sending candy or snacks. Beware of ants and other bugs. When packing toiletries, invest in insect-repelling natural brands for shampoo, conditioner and soap. You can always transfer liquids into small, spillproof containers and leave the remainder at home. Natural scents that discourage bugs include tea tree, rosemary, eucalyptus, lavender, peppermint and lemongrass. Try bath products with these scents and also pack traditional insect repellent.

Pre-Address Letters Home to Ease Pressure. I am sure you want your kids to [write to you](#) from camp, so include self-addressed postcards or stationery. Then when drop-off day arrives, squeeze those campers tight, tell them you love them and let them off the hook to enjoy a summer camp experience of their own creation. They may not write or call or even think of you much, and that's okay. If they send one piece of mail, let it be enough until they return. The less they think about you and home, the better job you did packing them up for independence.

Author, journalist and writing coach Christina Katz is a notorious overpacker. Luckily her daughter, a performer, has learned how to pack expediently yet thoroughly.

HELPING YOUR CHILD WITH DIFFERING ABILITIES SUCCEED IN CAMP:

ADVOCACY TIPS AND RESOURCES FOR PARENTS IN THE DC AREA

By Diana M. Martin

Thinking about what summer camp to send your child to can be filled with anxiety, especially if your child is differently abled. Do not be afraid to advocate for your child to ensure a beneficial camp experience. Advocacy is a skill that you build over time, so it is okay to be a little nervous or uncomfortable at first about speaking out.

Be Proactive

First, to avoid potential problems, be proactive. Choosing an appropriate camp and understanding its policies may prevent misunderstandings. Do research which includes talking to other parents whose children recently attended the camp. Whether it is a camp designed exclusively for children/teens that tailors to their

challenges or if you are seeking an inclusion experience, having this knowledge will help you choose the best fit. If you are able, observe the camp (the summer before or an earlier session) prior to registering.

Practice Good Communication

To help your child get the most out of camp, communication with staff is key. Meet with the camp director and counselors. Ask if the camp communicates with parents via email or other social media so you can be informed about what is happening during the day. Have a conversation with the director about the camp's policies and obtain a copy of them for future reference. Be honest about your child and what they need to succeed. For example, if your child is used to working with a one-on-one aide, make sure you know the camp policy on that before applying. Ask about the staff to camper ratio and if there are extra staff available to help in an emergency. The more informed you are, the better you will be able to advocate for your child.



Discuss Accommodations

If your child needs accommodations – like extra time to get ready, being forewarned about transitions, down time to avoid sensory overload, etc. – make those requests known (preferably in writing) on the application and discuss these accommodations in person so there is not miscommunication. You may also consider sharing your child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) with the camp.

Because camp is such a short period of time and in most cases, a more relaxed environment, make sure your expectations are reasonable and be able to compromise when necessary. Advocacy does not have to be confrontational. It can be a positive experience that builds understanding and teamwork.

Know The Law

Your child has rights. Become familiar with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). If there is a problem or a need not being met, document it and the camp's response in writing so there is a paper trail. Make sure that the appropriate staff are copied as well. If you think your child needs more help than is available at the camp in order for them to be successful, ask if you can provide that help in the form of resources or trained staff (such as a consultation with a behavior specialist, speech pathologist, occupational therapist, etc.).

Bring up concerns as they arise and invite the camp to be part of the discussion by asking them how they will address the problem. Give them a chance to address the problem first. If their attempts to address the problem fail, then consider taking your concerns to the next level and offering possible solutions.

Parents may also hire an advocate or attorney to help them navigate a stalemate or complicated situation. If all else fails, and the camp is not a good fit, ask what the policy is on leaving early and possible tuition reimbursement.

Be Positive

Be sure to tell the camp what it is doing well. Hopefully, this will help staff remain positive and open to suggestions for improvements.

Advocacy is an essential part of your job as a parent, as well as teaching your teen advocacy skills that can be practiced at camp. This will build independence and hone skills for when they are an adult. Summer camp is supposed to be a fun experience, so hope for the best possible outcomes and know that you have the support of many parent advocates who have come before.

Diana M. Martin, MFA, has been an adjunct professor and freelance writer for more than 20 years.

DISABILITIES ADVOCACY RESOURCES IN DC, MARYLAND AND VIRGINIA

Parents are the primary advocates for their children. But having children who are differently abled presents a unique challenge, and parents need reliable, reputable places that can offer assistance. These are local organizations and advocacy groups that offer training and provide plenty of resources to help both parents and children.

- The Arc of District of Columbia, Loudoun County, Montgomery County, Northern Virginia, Prince George's County. The Arc is a nonprofit and each location is dedicated to the human rights, inclusion and community of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- Advocates for Justice and Education in DC offers training and advocacy sessions designed to clarify legal rights and assist parents and advocates in preparing for educational meetings.
- Community Support Services in Montgomery County, Md. assists children and adults with a community approach, focusing on self-advocacy and individual strengths.
- DC Special Education Cooperative works with educators, parents and community members to support and improve the educational environment for students with disabilities.
- DC Special Education Hub provides tools and support to parents for their child's education, but much of their Advocacy page advice could be valuable in any situation, including at camp.
- ENDependence Center of Northern Virginia offers a workshop for students with disabilities, ages 14-22, to improve their self-advocacy skills.
- Parent Education and Advocacy Training Center in Falls Church, Va. provides workshops to help parents understand the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and a variety of other resources to navigate the educational system.
- The Parents' Place of Maryland provides many free resources, including advocacy, for parents.
- *Wrightslaw: From Emotions to Advocacy, 2nd. Edition, The Special Education Survival Guide.* The Wrightslaw website provides a link to the book and many other resources on deciphering special needs law.
- XMinds.org offers free advocacy by parents who have navigated the Montgomery County Public School (MCPS) system in Maryland.

CAMPS & SUMMER PR

MULTIPLE LOCATIONS

Tiny Chefs

Tiny Chefs is a leading children's cooking company offering hands-on culinary experiences for kids. Our summer camps have a strong focus on fostering creativity, confidence and essential life skills. Kids learn to cook in a fun, engaging environment that promotes teamwork, independence and healthy habits while sparking a lifelong love for culinary adventures. DC, Md. and Va. 301-841-7395.

Washington Wizards Jr. Wizards Summer Camp

The Washington Wizards Jr. Wizards camps offer boys and girls ages 6 to 14 the chance to develop their basketball skills in a fun and exciting team-focused environment. These programs are designed for athletes of all skill levels. Register today! Locations throughout the DMV.

DC

Camp Shakespeare

June 23rd-August 16th. Ages 6-18. Under the guidance of theatre professionals, participants unlock Shakespeare's plays with text analysis; transform into characters through voice, movement and improvisation; learn the safety and storytelling of stage combat; and develop fundamental acting skills. Multiple sessions. 610 F St. NW, Washington, DC 202-547-5688.

DC Bouldering Project Summer Adventures

Discover the Olympic sport of fencing at DC Fencers Club summer fencing camps. Fencing camp activities include games, footwork, fencing technique and tactics, group lessons, fencing videos, competition, training with nationally ranked fencers and new friendships. 1611 Eckington Pl. NE, Ste. 150, Washington, DC 202-667-2404.

National Building Museum Summer Camps

Rising 2nd to 5th graders can choose from two themes, each offered in a week-long camp session: "Brick City: World Architecture Brick by Brick" invites kids to explore iconic global architecture using LEGO® bricks and "Invention Lab: Build, Create, Innovate!" is a hands-on introduction to engineering through Rube Goldberg machines. 401 F St. NW, Washington DC 202-272-2448.

National Postal Museum's Stamp Camp

Ignite your child's curiosity and elevate summer fun with our free virtual STAMP Camp! Sign up to receive five hands-on activities by email all summer to be completed at your own pace in this self-guided, synchronous, interactive series. Designed to inspire young minds, each activity

is packed with museum objects, hands-on projects, and engaging challenges. Perfect for learners ages 6-12. *Virtual.*

The Theatre Lab School of the Dramatic Arts

Spend your summer at The Theatre Lab building your acting skills in a high-energy, fun environment with top-level teachers and faculty. The Theatre Lab offers theatre training programs for students from 1st grade to 19 years old. In a collaborative setting, participants grow as artists while forming a supportive creative and ensemble focused community. Visit theatrelab.org for more information. 900 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001, 202-824-0449.





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PROGRAMS GUIDE



VIRGINIA

Acting for Young People Summer Acting Camps

AFYP has provided award-winning programs in the Northern Virginia area since 1997. Our summer programs, for ages 5-18, include production showcases and fun, fast-paced camps taught by professional teaching artists. Acting, on-camera, musical theater, improvisation and more! Weekly sessions with final showcase performances. Presented in conjunction with Mason Community Arts Academy. *Fairfax, Va. 703-554-4931.*

Art Camp at The Art League

Unleash your child's imagination this summer at Art Camp! Kids complete a fun new project daily, including drawing, painting, printmaking, sculpture and more. Camps run Monday to Friday and vary curriculum from week to week. Specialty camps,

like Drawing Camp or Painting Camp, focus on immersion in one particular medium. *Alexandria, Va. 22314, 703-683-2323.*

Beginner Fencing Camp

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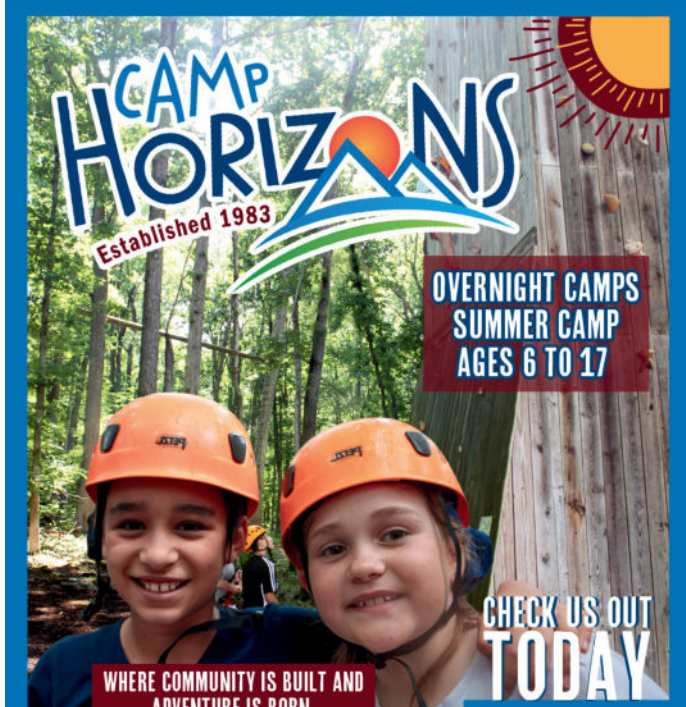
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Camp Forget-Me-Not/ Camp Erin DC

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Camp Holiday Trails

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Camp Inclusion

Camp Inclusion is a summer day camp for any student with or without a cognitive, social or physical disability. At Camp Inclusion, campers participate in many group games and sports such as soccer, kickball and handball. Campers also participate in art & crafts activities such as tie-dye and painting, as well as developmentally appropriate board games. Games are age appropriate and adapted for all needs. *Glenwood Middle School, 2690 MD-*

97, Glenwood, Md. 443-398-8537.

Camp Ramapo

Based on a 250-acre campus in Rhinebeck, New York, Camp Ramapo is a residential summer camp that serves young people who are affected by social, emotional or learning challenges, including those on the autism spectrum. *Rhinebeck, NY. 845-876-8403.*

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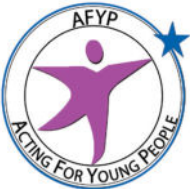
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How Grandparents Can Support Neurodiverse Grandchildren and Their Families

By Meredith Conte

I miss my grandparents. Their sage wisdom, unconditional love and endless hugs were always sources of comfort—something we could all use these days, especially parents.

A recent [Care.com](#) survey of 3,000 parents showed 90% are losing sleep due to stress while 80% have cried over caregiving challenges. This echoes a 2024 report from the U.S. Surgeon General, which identified parental stress as a public health concern. For parents of neurodiverse children, the stress is even higher.

In families with neurodiverse children, grandparents can play an outsized role. My parents have played a very active role with my ADHD daughter, and they are a key piece to her growth.

It's not easy though. How do you determine the best role you as a grandparent can play in a situation as fluid and stressful as raising neurodiverse children? Experts cite five areas where grandparents can offset parental challenges and positively influence grandchildren with developmental disabilities.

Do your homework: Understand the diagnostic details

- The more you understand your grandchild's specific diagnosis, the better equipped you are to help. Experts at [Kennedy Krieger](#), [Children's National](#) and [Georgetown University](#), alongside the many local therapeutic providers in the DC area, offer neurodiversity education to teach you how your grandchild works.

Lean on me: How grandparents can provide emotional support

- **Don't Fix It:** Parents' first instinct is often to fix a problem, but you can't "fix" a developmental disability. Simply being there to listen is a way more powerful choice. Best-selling author [Lisa Damour](#) recommends validating, inquiring and starting with, "I understand. Is there anything I can do that won't make the situation worse?"

- **Encourage:** My mom regularly shares articles and stories of how other parents are managing. Her encouragement keeps me informed, inspired and empowered.

Acts of everyday kindness: Practical ways grandparents can support families with neurodiverse kids

Child Care: Parents of neurodiverse children need meaningful breaks. If you can take your grandkids, even for an hour, that's an hour of self-care for your child.

Transportation: Shuttling kids seems so simple, but it's so exhausting. If you are local, take your grandchild wherever they need to go. If they need a car seat, put one in your car to alleviate the burden of moving gear around.

Household Support: My family has heard me say, "I am not an octopus!". Yet the demands of parenting neurodiverse children require more than two hands. Look for opportunities to help with cooking, cleaning and errand-running.

Lighten the financial load: Providing monetary assistance

Monetary Assistance: Care for neurodivergent children is massive. From PT to OT, medical to mental, the bills add up and aren't all covered by insurance. Contribute what you can without strings.

Resource Management: If money is not an option, help parents navigate financial resources, such as applying for aid or finding grants and scholarships for services.

Let's play: Fostering connection with neurodiverse grandchildren

- **Inclusive Activities:** Engage grandchildren in developmentally beneficial social activities.

- Clemyjontri Park in McLean is one of the area's best sensory-friendly, accessible playgrounds. Enjoy a grandparent play date there with your grandchild, your friends and their grandchildren!

- When it's time to go inside, my mom and daughter had great fun at Music Together classes and the sensory-friendly shows of Imagination Stage in Bethesda. Sensory-friendly movie times are also available at AMC, Regal, Alamo Drafthouse and other area theaters.

Understand the Toys: Toys benefiting neurodiverse children aren't always part of mainstream shopping. Consider indoor swings, kinetic sand, fidget toys and other specialized products. Michael J. Fox shared, "If a child can't learn the way we teach, maybe we should teach the way they learn." The same applies to play.

Family Traditions: Your grandchild may not be able to participate in traditions as you hoped, but they can do A LOT.

- My daughter didn't have the attention span to participate in cooking full recipes but she loved kneading dough and decorating the table so those were her jobs. Find where your grandchild shines!
- My mom often surrounded my daughter's holiday plate with puppets and tactile toys - not screens - and it was a holiday hit.

The best gift of all: Unconditional love and security

Today's parents take pride in raising kids independently, but the truth is, we need you. My parents provided care, stopped by often

DC-Area Grandparent Networking Event and Book Signing of *Good Times with Out-Of-Sync Grandkids: Activities for Grown-ups and Children with Sensory Processing Disorder*

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- ▶ **When:** Sunday, June 1, 2025
- ▶ **Who:** Families, grandparents, colleagues and friends – all are welcome!
- ▶ **Where:** The BECO Building – Fitness for Health, 11140 Rockville Pike, Rockville, Md.

Event Schedule

- ▶ **3 p.m.** – Grandparent Networking Event
- ▶ **4-5:30 p.m.** – Book Talk, Fun Activities, & Signing with Carol Kranowitz, M.A., author of *The Out-of-Sync Child* and her new book, *Good Times with Out-of-Sync Grandkids: Activities for Grown-ups and Children with Sensory Processing Disorder*

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and regularly asked about my children's welfare. Their presence offered mental comfort, physical relief and stability for my kids who knew they had their own village of loving caregivers behind them all the way.

Susan Abrams of The Social Coach has 30 years' experience as a speech-language pathologist in the Washington, DC area and echoes the thought. "Grandparents often provide a sense of security and unconditional love. Their presence allows grandchildren to feel emotionally grounded, especially during challenging times."

Supporting families with neurodiverse children: Key questions grandparents can ask

As a grandparent, if you are unsure of how to engage, ask your adult children, "What are the best ways to support you?" Allow your children the time and space to consider the question and come back to you with thoughtful answers.

Now, go. Your grandchildren await.

Originally from suburban Maryland, Meredith Conte is a writer and mother of two. With the intent of touching the human heart, Meredith draws from her own life experience to write on cultural moments and trends.

How to Talk to Your Child About Going to Therapy

By Jonah Green



BIGSTOCK/KASIA BIALASIEWICZ

Talking to your child about going to therapy can feel daunting. You might be rightly concerned that they could view it as a punishment or a sign that you think there is something “wrong” with them. By approaching the conversation in an attuned and thoughtful way, you might find that your child is more open to it and sees it as a sign of your love and confidence in them.

Choose the Right Time and Space

Find a calm time when you and your child are not rushed or distracted. Don’t have the conversation immediately after misbehavior or “meltdowns.” Make sure it is a time free from power struggles or external demands. The more relaxed the setting, the more comfortable your child will feel.

A quiet moment at the end of the day or during a shared activity, like a walk, may help your child open up without the pressure of a formal “talk.” If your child is still young, consider sitting together and speaking in a way that mirrors the tone and structure of a bedtime story or a comforting conversation.

Demonstrate Attunement and Compassion

Throughout the conversation, demonstrate attunement to their feelings and compassion. Express that you’ve noticed they may have been struggling or feeling upset recently. For example, you could say, “I’ve noticed you’ve seemed a little sad or frustrated lately, and I want you to know I’m here for you. Sometimes, it can feel hard to carry big feelings alone, and that’s OK.” You’ll let them know you care about what they’re going through.

Normalize Their Struggles

Let your child know that everyone, no matter how old they are, faces tough times sometimes. Normalize the idea that struggling is part of life and doesn’t mean something “wrong” with them. You could share a story of when you or someone close to them faced a challenge and sought help. “Just like sometimes we all need help with things, it can be helpful to talk to someone who can listen and help us figure things out.”

Therapy as a Helpful Tool

In describing therapy, stress its value as a space where people can talk about their feelings and learn how to feel better. “It’s like having someone who can help you sort through your feelings, someone who

knows how to help kids (and grown-ups!) feel better.”

If appropriate, share that other trusted people in their lives – you, a family member or a close friend – have gone to therapy, decreasing their fear or shame about it. You can also offer to pair therapy with other fun activities, like snacks together after sessions.

A Place to Play, Too

For younger children, therapy is often more play than talk, and they have free reign to express themselves through various expressive activities. Child therapists frequently use games, drawing or other activities, even with older children. Messages like “You can expect to have some fun” and “You don’t have to talk” can help children feel less pressure.

Offer to Participate

Therapists for both children and teens are usually open to including parents as part of the therapy process. Messages such as “I want support as well” and “It can be an opportunity for us to learn about each other” can feel comforting. If the therapy regularly includes you or other family members, you can frame it as a way to “get along better and have more fun.”

Ask What They Want From Therapy

Engage your child by asking what they would like to get out of therapy. “What do you think it would be like to talk to someone? What might you want to talk about with them?” These questions help them feel they have agency and give you valuable insight into their thoughts and feelings. Let them know that it’s OK if they’re not sure initially and that they can explore these questions further with you or the therapist.

Be Open to Their Fears and Concerns

It’s normal for children to have fears or concerns about therapy. Some may worry about being judged or fear the therapist may not understand them, and others may feel embarrassed about attending. Reflect and validate their concerns: “I know you might be nervous about seeing someone new or talking to someone about your feelings. It’s OK to feel that way. Remember, the therapist is there to listen and not judge. You might also reassure them that attending is entirely confidential.

Offer Involvement in Choosing a Therapist

Depending on your child’s developmental stage, consider allowing them to participate in choosing a therapist. You could

involve them in an initial meeting or discuss what qualities might make a good therapist for them. "Would you like to help me find someone you think would be a good fit? We can choose together." They are likely to feel more empowered and less intimidated.

Sometimes, It's Important to Encourage Participation

You may feel it's essential for them to try therapy, even if they're unsure about it. If so, explain why you think it's worth trying. "I believe it will help you, and we will work together to find the kindest, most supportive person. How about we try it for a few sessions and see how it goes?" Let them know you will support them every step of the way.

Part of Self-Care

Lastly, remind your child that therapy is a process. They don't have to figure everything out all at once. Encourage them to be patient with themselves and with the process. "It's OK if it takes time. Talking about feelings and learning new ways to cope is something we can all improve on, step by step."

By approaching the conversation with love, respect and understanding, you can help your child feel more comfortable with therapy. It's a gift to help them build the emotional tools they need to face life's challenges with confidence, resilience and a sense of agency.

Jonah Green, a therapist at Jonah Green and Associates, LLC, provides therapy for children, teens, families and adults in North Bethesda, Maryland, for clients in Montgomery County, DC and surrounding areas.



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HOW TO OVERCOME PARENT BURNOUT:

Self-Care, Self-Study and Parent Education



BIGSTOCK/NICOLETA IONESCU

By Brian Lewis, MD

Over the past few years, Ohio State University has been conducting research on working parent burnout. Here's what the studies have shown:

- **Two-thirds** of parents reported feeling burnout, as measured by a 10-question assessment (e.g., "Do you feel you are in survival mode as a parent?").
- **Nearly 70% of mothers** and **just over 40% of fathers** reported burnout.
- Burnout was more common among parents with multiple children, those with a history of anxiety, those with children with ADHD or mental health concerns and those with heavy alcohol use.
- **Parental depression and anxiety**, along with increased alcohol use, were strongly linked to burnout.
- Burnout was associated with **negative parenting behaviors**, such as insulting, yelling or spanking children.

What the Authors Recommend

The researchers offered several practical recommendations for parents dealing with burnout:

- **Take good self-care (it's not selfish!):** Even small breaks – like sipping a warm beverage slowly or doing a five-minute meditation – can help restore your well-being.
- **Be kind to yourself:** Set realistic expectations and don't feel guilty for saying "no." Recognize that no one is perfect.
- **Talk to someone you trust:** Stay connected with friends and family to avoid isolation.
- **Build mental resilience:** Practice mindfulness, gratitude and deep breathing to cope with stress.
- **Seek professional help:** If your burnout, anxiety or depressive symptoms are affecting your ability to function, it's important to reach out to a healthcare provider.
- **Build a strong relationship with your child** through connection and active listening.
- **Stay in the present moment** and stop unhealthy thought patterns
- **Reflect, then act** on your priorities

Taking parenting classes and eventually becoming volunteer educators at PEP provided structure, tools and insights that brought unexpected order, discipline and joy to our family life.

My Takeaways From the Research

The studies' findings didn't surprise me. It was helpful, though, to see how common burnout is among parents – particularly those balancing work, family and mental health challenges. However, I wondered: Can parents read this survey and use the findings to actually improve their parenting effectiveness and well-being?

As a practicing cardiologist, I often remind my patients that ordering medical tests is pointless unless you know in advance how the results will inform your decisions. This same idea applies to the Ohio State study. While the findings are valuable, I ask myself: What will parents do with this information? Can they effectively apply the results to make meaningful changes?

My Learning Journey

It wasn't until my wife and I read Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish's *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen* and attended a Parent Encouragement Program (PEP) event that we realized parenting wasn't just about managing kids – it was about learning to be better parents ourselves.

Over the years, my wife and I have come to believe that effective parenting requires ongoing learning. Just as you wouldn't expect to play the piano well without a good teacher, you can't expect to be an expert parent without some guidance and practice.

Taking parenting classes and eventually becoming volunteer educators at PEP provided structure, tools and insights that brought unexpected order, discipline and joy to our family life. Through this experience, we learned that positive parenting techniques could be learned and refined, and that these skills made a profound difference in our children's well-being. In fact, my wife became so committed to the cause of parenting that she wrote a book on the subject (more about that below).

My Recommendation to You

While the Ohio State study offers some valuable insights, nothing compares to the transformation that comes from committing to an ongoing journey of learning about parenting. Good books, like *Positive Discipline* by Jane Nelsen and *The Good News About Bad Behavior* by Katherine Lewis (yes, that's my wife!), are helpful, as are books by Alyson Schafer, whose work blends humor and humility. But I also encourage you to explore programs like PEP's, which offer free online resources, on-demand videos and live workshops.

Parenting, like any skill, requires learning through seeing, hearing, trying and doing. The more you invest in this process, the more likely you are to create lasting positive changes in your family dynamic.

Reading research reports like those by Ohio State is a good start. But for real, lasting change, committing to a life of learning about parenting is essential. It's a journey that requires effort, reflection and growth – but it's one that can truly enhance your relationships with your children and make a lasting impact on your family's well-being.

Dr. Brian Lewis, the father of three confident, capable children, is also a volunteer parent educator with the Parent Encouragement Program (PEP) in Kensington, Md. For information about PEP's online programs for parents and organizations, see pepparent.org

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By Rebecca Singer



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Eating out as a family is a welcome break from daily routine. It's a chance to relax, enjoy time with loved ones and get a reprieve from the never-ending chores of meal planning, cooking and washing dishes. For families in the DC area, the abundance of excellent restaurants makes dining out especially tempting. But this high-cost region also makes it challenging to find affordable, family-friendly options.

In a time when many of us are looking for ways to reduce our expenses, it may feel like we need to cut out luxuries like restaurant meals. But despite rising costs, there are still ways to save while eating out. When you need a break from cooking, here are some ways to make the most of your budget while dining out as a family.

Be Strategic With Timing

Restaurant dining isn't just for Saturday evenings. Dine out on weeknights instead of weekends, or eat earlier in the day, and you're more likely to score special deals on your meal. Not only will you save money, but the restaurant is likely to be less crowded, making for a more relaxed, pleasant dining experience – a win all around!

Families with young kids may prefer eating out on the earlier side anyway, so look for restaurants that offer an early bird special. Or eat lunch out instead of dinner to keep prices down. Many restaurants offer a lunch special or lunch-size portions at lower prices than dinner menus.

- **Mamma Lucia's**, a local restaurant chain with several Maryland locations, offers weeknight specials including Monday night deals on pasta and Tuesday deals on pizza.
- **Buena Vida Gastrolounge** in Arlington, Virginia has a Taco Twosday special offering discounted tacos or a "bottomless taco package" available for the whole table.
- **El Andariego Restaurant** in Ashton, Md. specializes in Mexican and Salvadoran food and offers an early bird special from 3:30–6 p.m. that includes a side soup or salad with your entrée.
- **Fire Works Pizza** in Arlington, Va. has a weekday lunch special offering a choice of sides with a personal pizza, small pasta, taco or half sandwich.
- **Samantha's Restaurant** in Silver Spring, Md. serves Mexican and Latin American food and offers a selection of lunch specials on weekdays, 11 a.m. –3 p.m.

Enjoy Family-Style Dining

Opt for restaurants known for large portions where sharing plates can stretch your dollar. Buffets or all-you-can-eat spots are also worth considering. Another option is to skip the entrée section of the menu and order appetizers for your meal. Many restaurants have substantial appetizer selections with plenty of kid-friendly fare like chicken tenders or loaded nachos.

- **The Brazilian Place** in Silver Spring, Md. has an affordable Buffet Clásico offered daily with a variety of meats, roast vegetables, salads, *pão de queijo* (cheese bread), plantains and more.
- At **Brazil Gourmet Pizzeria & Grill** in Damascus, Md. you can enjoy unlimited pizzas on Wednesdays from 6–8 p.m. And it gets even better – kids ages 10 and under eat for free.
- **Raaga**, an Indian restaurant in Falls Church, Va. has a popular and reasonably priced lunch buffet with a selection of curries, tandoori, biryani, paneer, naan and more.
- **Charga Grill** in Arlington, Va. has a great family-style chicken dinner option for dine-in or takeout. Order a whole chicken prepared in the international style of your choosing (Peruvian, South African or Pakistani), accompanied by a selection of four sides.

Look for Kids' Meal Deals

Many local restaurants offer kids-eat-free deals or have membership or loyalty programs that provide discounts and other perks.

- **Silver Diner**, a locally founded restaurant chain with locations throughout the DC area, has a kids club that provides a variety of freebies and fun swag.

- Kids eat free off the kid's menu on Mondays at **Inca Social**, a Peruvian restaurant with locations in Arlington and Vienna, Va.
- On Mondays, kids also eat free at **Surfside**, a Mexican restaurant in DC.
- On Tuesdays and Wednesdays kids eat free with the purchase of an adult hibachi entrée at **Kabuto Japanese Steak House and Sushi Bar** in Rockville, Md.
- On Wednesdays kids eat free with the purchase of an adult entrée at **Los Churros Restaurant**, serving Salvadoran food in Wheaton, Md.

Stock Up on Gift Cards

Another great money-saving hack is to buy restaurant gift cards at a discount through membership warehouses like Costco or Sam's Club. You can often find a set of gift cards worth \$100 in value for the price of around \$75. These gift cards are typically for chain restaurants rather than local spots, but it is a good way to get more value for your dollar when going out to eat.

Rebecca Singer is an educator, mom and museum professional with over 20 years' experience designing fun, cultural events and activities for kids and families. She lives in the Washington, DC area with her husband and daughter.



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Where to Find Eco-Friendly Gifts for Mother's Day in DC:

Shop Locally, Shop Sustainably

By Rebecca Singer

This Mother's Day, show your mom how much you care for both her and the planet with an environmentally conscious gift. Whether your mom loves beautiful blooms, a day at the spa or the latest fashions, here are some sustainable ways to celebrate her this Mother's Day.

Shop for Sustainable Blooms for Mom

Bouquets are a traditional Mother's Day gift, but with heavy pesticide use, high water consumption and long-distance transport, cut flowers typically have a significant environmental impact. If you're looking for a more environmentally friendly option, Little Acre Flowers, a DC-based florist, offers a solution. By working with local farmers and using Earth-friendly materials, Little Acre Flowers is able to provide sustainable arrangements.

"My studio uses primarily locally grown flowers," says Amber Flack, the owner and lead designer at Little Acre Flowers. "The closer to the source, the less distance there is to travel; that's going to be a more sustainable option."



Flack also encourages consumers to look at the materials florists use in their arrangements. "A lot of traditional florists use floral foam," says Flack, "which is a shortcut, but it is wildly toxic and it's just kind of leaking microplastics everywhere. Try to opt for a company that does not use anything like that in their designs."

With a focus on what's in season locally, Flack says one of Little Acre's most popular items for Mother's Day are peonies.

"There are certain times of year when we get these really amazing, locally grown showstopper flowers. And Mother's Day falls right around when we are flush with a lot of local peonies. They're huge and they smell amazing and come in all different beautiful colors."

Flack's biggest tip for those looking to reduce their gift-giving carbon footprint is to purchase locally.

"Shop local, shop small, support businesses in your own community and you're going to feel good about whatever choices you make."

Get Natural Beauty Products for Mom in the DMV

Giving mom time to relax with a spa day can be a great Mother's Day gift. Bath, skincare or beauty products are also good options. But it can be challenging to avoid brands that rely too heavily on plastics and harmful chemicals. Take Care is a holistic shop and spa in DC that carries natural skincare, beauty and wellness brands.





Becky Waddell, Take Care's founder, started the shop after moving to DC from Oregon. She emphasizes the importance of taking time for self-care, particularly for busy moms in the DC area.

"I felt the pace of life here was so intense that it was difficult to make mindful decisions," Waddell said. "[Opening Take Care] was literally me trying to carve out a corner of DC that felt like it was embracing a more holistic aspect of life, a moment to find personal care in a city that's so focused on the grind."

Take Care sources products that are packaged in glass, rather than plastic. The shop carries brands that use whole plants and organic materials and formulate products in-house, when possible. Waddell also advises that one of the best ways to support sustainability is to reduce consumption.

"Our goal is never to just load you up with a bunch of stuff," she says. By focusing on high-quality products that meet customers' needs, Take Care helps reduce waste and overconsumption.

Waddell has several recommendations for Mother's Day gifts including a bath set by [Well Kept](#) and [botanical perfume by Ojai Wild](#).



Another "really nice treat," Waddell says, would be a gift certificate for a facial at Take Care's spa. "We want people to be able to come here and forget everything else that is going on. That especially goes for moms who have so much on their plate. We value being able to create space for them to nourish their skin and their minds and take time for themselves."



Eco-Chic Style From a DC Boutique

Clothing and accessories make great gifts for stylish moms. Though the fashion industry contributes to carbon emissions and creates significant water waste, DC boutique [Bitter Grace](#) is an excellent source for sustainable brands.

According to Anne Marie Johnson, owner of Bitter Grace, sustainable fashion is about wearability and longevity. "Synthetic-free textiles and materials increase longevity and make it easier to care for the garments at home," says Johnson. She recommends clothing made from natural fabrics including cotton, bamboo, linen, wool, cashmere and silk.

For Mother's Day gifts, Johnson recommends Bitter Grace's [wardrobe services](#) including personal styling, color analysis and a masterclass on style and image.

"One of our most popular services is color analysis," says Johnson. "This is a timeless gift for moms and a great investment for moms and daughters to engage in something fun and meaningful together."

Shop Locally for Sustainable Gifts This Mother's Day

By shopping locally, you can reduce your carbon footprint and support local businesses, while finding the perfect eco-friendly gift to celebrate your mom.

Rebecca Singer is an educator, mom and museum professional with over 20 years' experience designing fun, cultural events and activities for kids and families. She lives in the Washington, DC area with her husband and daughter.



Perimenopause & Moms' Mental Health

By Dr. Emma Basch & Caren Ann Appel

Perimenopause is having a moment. Whether it is celebrities speaking about their experiences or doctors taking to Instagram to share information, mainstream media is starting to pay attention to perimenopause. While it's encouraging to see more open discussion, the critical conversation around how perimenopausal symptoms affect parenting is often absent.

Understanding Perimenopause

Even with the recent surge in media coverage, there is a significant knowledge gap with less than 20% of women having heard of perimenopause or the associated symptoms. So let's start with the basics. Perimenopause is not a singular event; rather, it describes hormonal shifts and body changes leading up to menopause (defined as one year without a menstrual cycle). Estrogen and progesterone levels decline erratically, and testosterone decreases, producing a variety of symptoms that impact the whole body. The most common physical indicators are vasomotor symptoms, such as hot flashes and night sweats. There are emotional symptoms and psychological concerns too, such as mood swings, anxiety, irritability and brain fog.



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The Perimenopausal Parent

While the onset of perimenopause varies, symptoms typically emerge in one's 40s. Unsurprisingly, perimenopause very much intersects with a decade in which many women are parenting. Parenting is demanding, whether navigating the physical needs of young children, or the emotional or logistical demands of older children, parenting through perimenopause symptoms can be a challenge. For example, symptoms such as fatigue or sleep disturbance can make any parenting task more difficult. Mood swings and irritability can impact parent-child interactions and parental patience, and cognitive changes such as brain fog or poor concentration can impact the organization required to navigate parenting logistics.

This was the case for "Gwen," a 42-year-old married woman with two children under the age of four, who sought treatment at our practice due to recent changes in her mood. She reported feeling exhausted and irritable and noted that her mood was affecting her interactions with her children. Before working with our team, she hadn't considered that perimenopause could be a factor in her mood changes. We referred her to a knowledgeable physician and cocreated a treatment plan specifically for her that addressed the physical and psychological symptoms she was experiencing.

Perimenopause at Different Parenting Stages

As the onset of perimenopause symptoms vary, many parents find themselves navigating symptoms at different stages of their child's development. For example, we've worked with many patients who find themselves marching into perimenopause shortly after having children. In addition to the identity shift that comes with entering perimenopause, caring for young children is difficult if your sleep is disrupted and your energy is low. We've also worked with parents navigating symptoms when their children are entering adolescence and experiencing their own hormonal shifts. Parenting tweens/teens through mood swings and volatility is challenging enough but can be harder when one's mood is shaky or reactive. "Holly," a 45-year-old patient in our practice, struggled with parenting her 11-year-old twins who were starting puberty just as her perimenopause symptoms began. Addressing her symptoms was a crucial part of helping her improve her relationship with her daughters.

Avenues for Support

Thankfully, there are multiple avenues for support to help manage the symptoms of perimenopause. We always recommend our patients consult with a physician trained in menopause management, or better yet, who is a [Certified Menopause Practitioner](#). Treatment options include medication, lifestyle modification, exercise, mental health support and nutritional guidance. Psychoeducation is also crucial and helps our patients better understand their experiences. Making time for self-care is a key part of symptom management and a great way to model healthy boundaries. Lastly, communication with your support network can be very helpful in making sure your needs are met.

Ultimately, if you can address your symptoms and get the support you need, navigating your role as a parent is much easier and much more enjoyable.

The landscape of perimenopause/menopause care is changing, with more and more doctors seeking training, women speaking out and awareness increasing. This makes a huge difference in the lived experience of perimenopausal women. We encourage you to get educated and be your own advocate. Organizations such as [The Menopause Society](#) and books like [The New Menopause: Navigating Your Path Through Hormonal Change with Purpose, Power, and Facts](#) by Mary Claire Haver, MD; [The Menopause Brain](#) by Lisa Mosconi, Ph.D.; and [The Menopause Manifesto](#) by Dr. Jen Gunter are great places to start.

Dr. Emma Basch is a licensed clinical psychologist based in Washington, D.C. She is the founder and director of Dr. Emma Basch & Associates, a group practice specializing in the mental health needs of women and families. She is a board member of the DC Metro Perinatal Mental Health Collaborative and of Postpartum Support International's D.C. Chapter, and she teaches and writes frequently about perinatal and reproductive mental health. Caren Ann Appel is a licensed psychotherapist at Dr. Emma Basch & Associates and focuses on late-diagnosed, neurodivergent female-identifying individuals, helping them better navigate their brains and environs. She is a certified complex trauma professional as well as being certified in ADHD assessment and treatment. Appel also has extensive training and experience working with LGBTQ+ people and their families.

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12 Beautiful Gardens Around the DC Area to Visit With Kids

By Gina Hagler

Spring is in the air. Flowers are blooming. The outdoors is calling! Here are 12 beautiful gardens in the DMV for you to visit. Many have family programs. Some allow pets. Visit the familiar favorites in your area but be sure to also venture further afield for more botanical delights for your whole family.

DC

Dumbarton Oaks

- **Where to Go:** 31st and, R St NW, Washington, DC 20007 (The entrance is at the intersection of 31st and R Streets, NW)
- **Tel:** 202-339-6400
- **What to Do:** When you visit Dumbarton Oaks, you can join a first-come, first-served docent-led tour or visit [the museum](#). If a free-form day is more your speed, get the scoop on [the gardens](#) before you arrive and check the [events calendar](#) for upcoming family events. Be sure to check the hours and get your tickets ahead of time.
- **When to Go:** The gardens are open 2-6 p.m. on Tuesday-Sunday, except for federal holidays. The Museum is open 11:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. on Tuesday-Sunday, except for federal holidays.

- **Cost:** [Daily Tickets, Season Passes, Full Pricing Information](#)
- **Parent Tips:** Not all activities are open to or appropriate for young children. Be sure to check the intended audience and hours, and purchase your tickets, ahead of time. Be aware that the gardens may close in hazardous conditions.
- **Accessibility:** In keeping with its topography and historic design, the hillside gardens present several challenges to visitors with limited mobility, including steep inclines, slippery surfaces, loose gravel walkways, staircases and other impediments. Find additional information [here](#).

Hillwood Gardens

- **Where to Go:** 4155 Linnean Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20008
- **Tel:** 202-686-5807
- **What to Do:** Hillwood Gardens is a happening place for spring fun. Their

bimonthly [Preschool Program](#) explores a new theme each time. [Pajama Party Movie Night](#) is an opportunity for the 3-8 crowd to explore Hillwood, do an art project, and view a film. If those don't fit your schedule, ask for a [printed Family Treasure Hunt at the Visitor's Center](#). Be sure to [check hours and prices](#) and [purchase your tickets online](#).

- **When to Go:** Open Tuesday-Sunday from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Closed on Mondays, most national holidays and several weeks at the end of January.
- **Cost:** Find information about the suggested donation and purchase tickets [here](#).
- **Parent Tips:** Strollers must be left parked outside of the mansion and exhibition spaces. Watch the [Hillwood Orientation Film](#), print the [map](#) and review the touring information and visitor policies [here](#).
- **Accessibility:** Find extensive information [here](#).



Kenilworth Park & Aquatic Gardens

- **Where to Go:** 1550 Anacostia Ave. NE, Washington, DC 20019
- **Tel:** 771-208-1571
- **What to Do:** There's a lot to see at Kenilworth, along with the opportunity to earn a badge for doing the activities in the [Junior Rangers](#) booklet (available at the Visitor's Center). Check the [events page](#) for info about the Water Lily Festival (July) and birding opportunities, too.
- **When to Go:** Open daily 8 a.m.–4 p.m. Closed Jan. 1, Thanksgiving and December 25.
- **Cost:** The site is fee-free year-round. There is no pass required.
- **Parent Tips:** Kenilworth may not be appropriate for your toddler, as many areas are not fenced or designed for young visitors. You can download the app [here](#).
- **Accessibility:** Information is available [here](#).

U.S. Botanic Gardens

- **Where to Go:** 100 Maryland Avenue SW, Washington, DC 20001 (Conservatory and "National Garden"). 245 First St SW, Washington, DC 20024 (Bartholdi Fountain and Gardens)
- **Tel:** 202-225-8333
- **What to Do:** The U.S. Botanic Gardens boasts a [Conservatory](#), Gated Outdoor Gardens ("National Garden") and the [Bartholdi Fountain and Gardens](#). There are [events](#) at the Children's Garden and a [range of on-site activities](#) to keep your kids busy and happy. Don't forget to download the [kid-focused field guides and journals](#) before you go. There are also a number of [tour options](#) available. Children 9 or older, with an adult, can check out a [Junior Botanist Backpack Adventure Kit](#) and complete the activities to become a Junior

Botanist for no fee.

- **When to Go:** Hours vary by what you plan to see:
- Conservatory: open daily from 10 a.m.-5 p.m., including weekends and most holidays (closed December 25).
- Gated Outdoor Gardens ("National Garden"): open daily from 7:30 a.m.-5 p.m., including weekends and most holidays (closed December 25).
- Bartholdi Fountain and Gardens: open daily from dawn to dusk, including weekends and holidays.
- **Cost:** Admission is free.
- **Parent Tips:** The Gated Outdoor Gardens are temporarily closed for updates, so call ahead if that's your destination.

U.S. National Arboretum

- **Where to Go:** 3501 New York Avenue, NE, Washington, DC 20002
- **Tel:** 202-245-4523
- **What to Do:** The National Arboretum is a research facility and public garden run by the USDA. It's also a great place to see a variety of plant collections in the public gardens. Not only will you find herbs and azaleas but also a view of the Capitol from one of the highest possible points. There are also 9 miles of trails and an [event calendar](#) to keep your family on the go.
- **When to Go:** Open daily 8 a.m.-5 p.m. except December 25
- **Cost:** Admission is free. No tickets are required.
- **Parent Tips:** There's an [interactive map](#) for you to spot the plants you'd like to see and plan your visit. There are also [guidelines](#) available.
- **Accessibility:** Find accessibility information [here](#).

VIRGINIA

Green Spring Gardens

- **Where to Go:** 4603 Green Spring Road, Alexandria, Va. 22312
- **Tel:** 703-642-5173
- **What to Do:** Green Spring Gardens has year-round fun for your family. This national historic site has gardens, a valley and ponds, as well as a greenhouse and museum. There are also a number of programs for [youths and families](#) that include story times.
- **When to Go:** Park grounds are open from dawn to dusk with [special hours on holidays](#).
- **Cost:** There is no entry fee for individuals or families.
- **Parent Tips:** There are activity sheets available for download ([Seasonal Nature Scavenger Hunt](#) and [Children's Garden Activity Sheet](#)). There is a [page of Do's and Don'ts](#) for you to review and discuss before you visit.
- **Accessibility:** Info is available [here](#).

Meadowlark Botanical Gardens

- **Where to Go:** 9750 Meadowlark Gardens Ct., Vienna, Va. 22182
- **Tel:** 703-255-3631
- **What to Do:** With 95 acres of ornamental and native plant gardens, three lakes, Great Blue Herons, water lilies, koi and turtles, there's plenty for your family to see. There is also a [Children's Garden](#), designed to be interacted with by both kids and adults, that blends imaginative play with nature education and includes a bat cave surrounded by sand. The [Toddlers Tea Garden](#) is a small, restful but interactive space that's just for kids under 2. The [Bonsai Pavilion](#), a restored 18th-century log cabin and an authentic Korean Bell Garden, a symbol of the friendship between Virginia and South Korea, are also there to explore. There are [Spring Egg Hunts](#) each April and [Winter Walk of Lights](#) each winter.
- **When to Go:** Hours vary by season
January-March 10 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.
Gardens close at 4 p.m.
April-October 10 a.m. – 6:30 p.m.
Gardens close at 7 p.m.
November-December 10 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.
Gardens close at 4 p.m.
Thanksgiving CLOSED*
Christmas CLOSED*
New Year's Day CLOSED*
*Does not apply to Winter Walk of Lights.
- **Cost:** Ages 5 & under free, Ages 6-17 \$4, Ages 18-54 \$8, Ages 55 and over \$4
- **Parent Tips:** Paper maps are not available so be sure to [print a map](#) before you go! There is a picnic area outside the fenced garden property next to the Lilac Pavilion (number 29 on the map). Follow the gardens on social media to receive updates regarding special

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IN OUR OWN BACKYARD

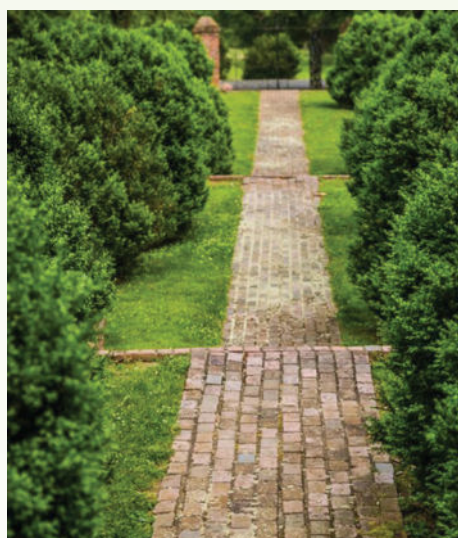
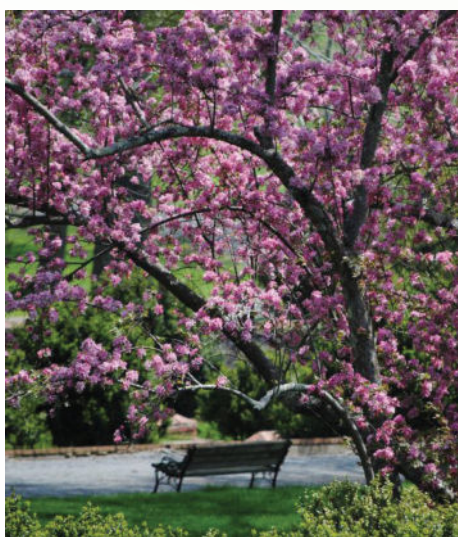
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early openings and late closings. And be aware that gardens may close during the day when ice or snow covers the paths.

- **Accessibility:** Two wheelchairs are available for garden guests to use for free on a first-come, first-served basis. Contact 703-255-3631 to discuss further accessibility questions.

Morven Park

- **Where to Go:** 17195 Southern Planter Lane, Leesburg, Va. 20176
- **Tel:** 703-777-2414
- **What to Do:** Morven Park has 1,000 acres of lawns, fields, and formal boxwood gardens. There are trails for viewing the gardens, as well as an extended trail for hiking. Check the [Family Calendar of Events](#) to see what you'll enjoy the day you visit.
- **When to Go:** Open daily, 7 a.m.-5 p.m.
- **Cost:** Admission is free.
- **Parent Tips:** Check the [trail map](#) to find a route that's appropriate for your family.
- **Accessibility:** Find accessibility information [here](#).



MARYLAND

Brighton Dam Azalea Garden

- **Where to Go:** Brighton Dam Visitor Center, 2 Brighton Dam Rd, Brookeville, Md. 20833
- **Tel:** 301-206-7485
- **What to Do:** If azaleas are your thing, Brighton is your place. There are over 22,000 azalea bushes in this 5-acre hardwood forest. You'll also find Kousa dogwood trees and Montgomery County's champion fringe tree (*Chionanthus virginicus*).
- **When to Go:** Trails are open 7 days a week between 7 a.m. and sunset from March 15-November 30.
- **Cost:** Admission is free.
- **Parent Tips:** Peak bloom generally occurs in early May. Call ahead in inclement weather. Leave your pet at home.
- **Accessibility:** Find accessibility info [here](#).

Brookside Gardens

- **Where to Go:** 1800 Glenallan Ave, Wheaton, Md. 20902
- **Tel:** 301-962-1400
- **What to Do:** Located on the grounds of Wheaton Regional Park, this favorite Montgomery County destination features an Aquatic Garden, Azalea Garden, Butterfly Garden, Children's Garden, Rain Garden and much more. It has a Nature Center and trails as well as a variety of [special events](#) in the gardens. Among the most popular is [The Butterfly Experience](#), which is held from April 10 through September 21 this year. You'll also find the [Garden Railway Exhibit](#) and a [Summer Concert Series](#).
- **When to Go:** Outdoor gardens are open from sunrise to sunset.
- **Cost:** Admission to the gardens is free.

- **Parent Tips:** It's a good idea to review the [garden etiquette](#) yourself and then with your kids. (For example, you can't picnic in the gardens proper, but picnic facilities are available nearby at the [Shorefield Area](#) of Wheaton Regional Park.) There is also a virtual tour that is well worth your time before you go. And of course, the park has a great playground, but you'll have to leave your pets at home.

- **Accessibility:** Find extensive details [here](#).

Glenview Mansion

- **Where to Go:** 603 Edmonston Drive, Rockville, Md. 20851
- **Tel:** 240-314-8660
- **What to Do:** A visit to Glenview Mansion is a quick trip to the past. The architecture of the mansion, built in 1926, is Neoclassical Revival. Glenview is on the National Registry for Historic Places and looks out on 28 acres of landscaped lawns and ornamental gardens. In addition to the interior of the mansion, Glenview has an [art gallery](#), formal gardens and a [cottage](#).
- **When to Go:** Weekdays 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Closed 1-2 p.m.
- **Cost:** Free
- **Parent Tips:** Be sure to check before you go; the mansion has a list of times when it is closed due to private events.
- **Accessibility:** Call 240-314-8660 to discuss your requirements.

Ladew Topiary Gardens

- **Where to Go:** 3535 Jarrettsville Pike, Monkton, Md. 21111
- **Tel:** 410-557-9466
- **What to Do:** Ladew features more than 100 topiary forms on its 22 acres. In one outdoor "room," your family will see a life-size hunt scene with topiary horses, riders, hounds and a fox. There are also nature walks and a butterfly garden. Be sure to catch the [Family Nature Explorers](#) programs and the other [Family Programs](#).
- **When to Go:** [Hours](#) vary by the day:
 - Monday, 9 a.m.-4 p.m.
 - Tuesday 9 a.m.-4 p.m. September-October
 - Twilight Tuesdays: May 13-Aug., 9 a.m.-8 p.m.
 - Closed Wednesday
 - Thursday and Friday, 9 a.m.-4 p.m.
 - Saturday and Sunday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.
- **Cost:** [Purchase Tickets](#)
- **Parent Tips:** The gardens are open April 1-October 31.
- **Accessibility:** Find complete info [here](#).

Gina Hagler is a **freelance STEM writer** and author. She also provides parents with family-friendly language arts ideas and materials at [KidWrite!](#)



She Deserves It:

Take Mom to a B&B Around the DMV

By Jennifer Brechbill

Being a mom is the most wonderful job in the world. But you know what else is wonderful? Getting *away* from those kids for a night or two.

So this Mother's Day, treat your partner (or treat yourself!) to a B&B getaway. You don't have to travel too far.

Swann House (1808 New Hampshire Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20009)

With a rich history dating back to 1883, Swann House oozes charm and 19th century craftsmanship. And yet, it has all the contemporary comforts. Christine and Matt Traylor, local parents of two young children, purchased the Dupont Circle property in February 2025 and bring a fresh energy to the historic home. According to Christine Traylor, the most special feature of Swann House is "the level of personal care and thought we put into every guest's experience." She takes pride in creating a warm, welcoming atmosphere where guests feel at home, including by accommodating nearly all allergies and dietary restrictions.

Stone Gables Bed and Breakfast (19077 Loudoun Orchard Rd., Leesburg, VA 20175)

Step back in time at Stone Gables Bed & Breakfast, a home converted from one of the last stone-gable barns in Loudoun County. The inn, which dates back to 1823, is set on 10 acres of countryside. And it's perfect for those child-free getaways (Stone Gables does not accept reservations with children under 12 years, unless it's for a full house rental). While you're not relaxing in the cozy stone and wood-beamed rooms, you can explore Loudoun County – an ideal spot for horseback riding, hiking, biking and wine tasting.

Goodstone Inn and Restaurant (36205 Snake Hill Rd., Middleburg, Va. 20117)

Goodstone Inn and Restaurant sits on 265 acres of verdant hills and offers guests 18 historic suites and cottages. It is a countryside resort that includes a full working farm, focused on sustainability and utilizing regenerative agricultural practices. Indeed, its fine dining restaurant and bistro embody farm-to-table dining at its finest: they source fresh eggs, produce, herbs and honey right from the inn's farm. So you can be sure that the complimentary breakfast is both delicious and fresh! You'll find cows, chickens, sheep, barn cats and even a resident llama named Greyson roaming on the property, along with myriad wildlife. You may also want to take advantage of the extensive wine cellar, equestrian-themed bar and outdoor pool.

Wellspring Manor (11311 Drumsheugh Ln, Upper Marlboro, Md. 20774)

Wellspring Manor is a luxury estate tucked away in Prince George's County. Among its many offerings (including a spa, outdoor pool, afternoon wine and hors d'oeuvres and live jazz performances) Wellspring Manor is home to a dynamic fine arts collection. It houses over 2,000 square feet of exhibition space dedicated to the work of over 40 artists of color from around the world. The manor's daily multicourse breakfasts are freshly prepared and include traditional, organic, vegan, vegetarian and gluten-free options. What's more, Wellspring Manor takes care to support local businesses and sources from local suppliers when possible.

The Inn Berlin Bed & Breakfast (15 Harrison Ave., Berlin, Md. 21811)

For moms with gluten restrictions, look no further than The Inn Berlin, a grand Victorian estate in historic downtown Berlin. The B&B is fully safe for celiacs but also provides a delightful (and delicious) experience for anyone looking for a getaway. The rooms are stocked with luxurious bath products, snacks and smart technology, and decorated with original artwork. Outside, relax by the fire pit, on the charming porches or in the garden. The Inn Berlin is located a short drive from both Ocean City and Assateague Island National Seashore, home of the wild horses. And the staff is eager to help guests plan and customize their local adventures.

Hummingbird Inn (14 N Aurora Street, Easton, Md. 21601)

Hummingbird Inn is an 1865 Queen Anne Victorian mansion in Easton, a historic town on the Eastern Shore. With its wraparound porch, cozy bar, afternoon teas, gourmet breakfasts, and regular parties, community engagement is at the heart of Hummingbird Inn's culture. And the B&B is well-versed in pampering moms (and dads): Hummingbird Inn supports [A Mother's Rest](#), offering 3-night retreats every year for caregivers who have loved ones with disabilities and/or chronic medical conditions. Hummingbird Inn is dog-friendly (it's home to a resident "Inn Dog" named Birdie) and even offers dog-sitting services. Chef, Innkeeper and Owner Eric Levinson also has a keen eye for accommodating dietary needs, ensuring that everyone can enjoy a delicious multi-course breakfast.

With so many charming and varied options in the DMV, you know what to do. Line up some child care and pack your bags. Mom deserves it!

Jennifer Brechbill is a writer, lawyer and mom of three. You can find her on LinkedIn or Instagram (@jenniferbrechbill or @glutenfree_with_g).



CAROUSEL DAY

May 3. Celebrate the opening day of the season for Glen Echo Park's iconic 104-year-old Dentzel Carousel. In addition to riding the carousel – which includes 40 horses, 4 rabbits, 4 ostriches, 1 giraffe, 1 deer, 1 lion and 1 tiger, in case the kids ask – families are welcome to enjoy many other free activities throughout the park. Enjoy live music and dance performances from groups like Step Afrika! and Furia Flamenca, a spring parade and maypole celebration with Washington Revels, kids' arts and crafts, open artist studios and galleries, food trucks and lots more. Glen Echo, Md.

I can put the video here when this goes live on Bluetoad :)



FAMILY FESTIVALS

Sligo Creek Fest

May 3. An annual event which transforms the Sligo Creek Open Parkway into a one-mile street festival featuring multiple stages of music and entertainment, kids' activities including touch-a-truck and tree climbing, roving entertainment, food and drink vendors and hands-on activities and demonstrations from over 15 different Montgomery Parks groups. Silver Spring, Md.



Berwyn Heights Day

May 3. The town of Berwyn Heights is celebrating its local pride with a daylong festival event that includes a free pancake breakfast, a parade, a senior bake sale and live music. Berwyn Heights, Md.

Encanto and Darth Vader at Cinco de Mayo Festival

May 4. Darth Vader and characters from Encanto will host this Cinco De Mayo Kids and Family Festival. Free activities on offer include face painting, arts and crafts, live music, moon bounces, and a full outdoor playground to ensure everyone has a blast. McLean, Va.

World Migratory Bird Day Festival

May 10. For families. Tiny hummingbirds and fierce osprey are some of the many birds migrating northward in spring. Come learn about these and other fabulous flyers with hands-on activities, games, crafts, bird walks and more at this bilingual event. Registration required. Arlington, Va.

MEMORIAL DAY*

National Memorial Day Parade

May 26. The National Memorial Day Parade will again be hosted in DC this year, running down Constitution Avenue from 17th Street all the way to the steps of the Supreme Court. The parade is free to watch, on TV at home or in person, and will feature representatives from every branch of service. Washington, D.C.

43rd Annual Memorial Day Parade

May 26. The 43rd Annual Memorial Day Parade and Festival will take place rain or shine, so be prepared for the weather. Enjoy a day full of fun, food, festivities and honoring those who have served. The all-day festival features vendors, food, inflatables and live entertainment. Falls Church, Va.



***Check WashingtonParent.com in early May for our annual extensive roundup of Memorial Day events in the DC area!**

CROSS-CULTURAL CELEBRATIONS

Teens Create: K-Pop Cards

May 7. Teens are invited to get creative and come have fun by designing their own K-pop card holder. Part of the library's Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month programming. Hyattsville, Md.

Gujarati Storytime

May 12. Come enjoy stories, songs, and rhymes from the Gujarat culture of India and in the Gujarati language. Ages 0-5. No registration. Space is limited. Please arrive early to receive a ticket. Centreville, Va.

Kofi's African Village

May 13. Drummer Kofi Dennis shares the vibrant life of a West African village through music, storytelling and dance. Playing authentic instruments, the Ghanaian native leads lively call-and-response songs and games to get audiences up on their feet in a vibrant exploration of African cultural traditions. Please note, everyone must have a ticket to enter, regardless of age. Hyattsville, Md.



Japanese Koto Recital

May 28. Experience the serene beauty and harmonious melodies of traditional Japanese koto music. The koto, a 13-string instrument made of paulownia wood, is the epitome of elegance and simplicity, mirroring the tranquility of Japanese nature. All ages are welcome. Glenarden, Md.

2025 Bethesda Fine Arts Festival

May 10-11. Over 100 artists from across the country will gather in Bethesda to showcase and sell their original paintings, drawing, photography, furniture, jewelry, woodwork, ceramics and more. Admission to the festival is free, and there will be live entertainment throughout the day. Bethesda, Md.

McLean Day 2025

May 17. Enjoy music, gourmet food trucks, 100+ exhibitors and sponsors, giveaways, balloon animals, games, a magician, petting zoo, amusements, large and small carnival rides and much more at McLean's 110th annual town festival. This event draws approximately 10,000+ patrons throughout the day. Ride tickets sold onsite and online. Advance purchase available. McLean, Va.

Petting Zoo Kids and Family Festival

May 18. This festival features arts and crafts, a magic show, moon bounces and, of course, a petting zoo. Dogs are welcome as well, whether on-leash or at the location's off-leash dog park. McLean, Va.



Asian Summer Festival

May 24-26. A festival stretching from Saturday to Monday celebrating Asian cultures from across the continent through performances, talks, cuisine and activities. Main exhibits highlight Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Filipino culture, but other Asian cultures will be featured in smaller showcases. Tysons, Va.

Saving the Past, Building the Future Festival

May 31. Celebrate National Historic Preservation Month by meeting local construction workers, tradespeople, preservationists and other artisans who work to save historic places. Practice some of their skills like wiring a light or hewing a log. Learn the secrets behind how they keep centuries-old buildings standing for decades to come. All ages and free, but registration is recommended.



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FUN THINGS

TO DO WITH KIDS IN THE DMV

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