

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2024



**GGMG**

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magazine

# Community





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## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR:

# We Are the Village

By Sonya Abrams



Sonya is a mom to three tweens as well as several pets with tween-like qualities. She loves her small neighborhood nestled at the base of a San Francisco hillside and can't imagine living anywhere else in the city.

When I was in my 20s, the idea of being a “local” made me squeamish. I varied my corner stores so that clerks wouldn’t recognize me. I hated when servers asked me if I’d like the same order as last time. I didn’t get to know my neighbors. Part of the appeal of moving to a large city like San Francisco was the opportunity to be swallowed up and remain anonymous. I wanted to exist outside a community, skirt around the edges, avoid putting myself out there, avoid making

myself vulnerable. For an insecure, private person like myself, this situation worked out ... until I became a mom.

Becoming a parent is an experience in endless vulnerability. From the moment the baby is born, we are confronted with new, often confusing, sometimes frustrating, and occasionally terrifying situations. We must seek out support—from health care professionals, to friends, to family, to neighbors—as we navigate our parenthood journeys. For me, this meant pushing my fears aside and stepping into my community for help. When I was swallowed up by the baby blues, simply getting out to the cafe down the street felt like a victory, and the gentle encouragement of the employees bolstered my spirits. I came back often and got to know them. I craved social interaction and discovered a baby playgroup in the basement of a church on my block, where I became friendly with the pastor’s wife. As I dove deeper into motherhood, my desire

for and dependence on community grew stronger. I moved to a neighborhood known for being particularly family friendly, where neighbors came by with housewarming gifts and offers of teenage babysitters. I started neighborhood baby groups and slowly began to weave myself into the fabric of the community.

Our writers in this issue share the power of a wide variety of communities in bringing people together. Yuliya Patsay explores the communities within different educational and cultural institutions, describing the ways in which communities based on shared values strengthen our bonds and chart our courses as individuals and societies. Lisa Jobe dispels myths about the homeschooling community and reveals the ways in

**“As I dove deeper into motherhood, my desire for and dependence on community grew stronger.”**

which homeschooling can provide not only a specialized, engaging academic path, but create many opportunities for social growth and engagement as well. And H.B. Terrell’s discussion of book clubs is a must-read. She posits that reading has always been a revolutionary act for women and examines the history of book clubs, also offering advice on how to set up your own book club for success.

Becoming a part of my community has brought countless rewards, most importantly, a sense of belonging and a sense of responsibility toward the community. As my children grow, they are nurturing their own relationships to and within our San Francisco community. Together, we will grow and thrive.

## LETTER FROM THE BOARD:

# Communities Are All Around Us

By Jessica Kotov



Jessica is a mother of two young kids living in Haight-Ashbury and has been a GGMG member since 2019. She has a Ph.D in Immunology, has been a scientist for 16 years, and currently works at biotech startup ArsenalBio. Her hobbies include cooking and building LEGOs with her son.

To me, a community is a collection of individuals each supporting a common purpose. At home, my community includes my husband Dmitri, my 5.5-year-old son Misha, my latest community member, 11-month-old Vikki, Masha (our chocolate labrador), and “Wolfy” Wolfgang (our German shepherd). Dmitri and I are the main pillars supporting our community, while the others require a great deal of resources from us, including food, money for childcare services while we are out making more money, and, of course, love and affection, which we enjoy providing the most.

Each of us are part of other communities. Misha is currently sampling different summer camps throughout San Francisco. Some days are great—he built a moon rock collector with a handlebar and wheels. However, some days are not as great—he had an unpleasant encounter with some bully goats. I feel for him when I hear about his challenges in this group, but also know it is part of the growing pains that we all have to deal with as we grow up. Vikki is part of a baby community. She makes tribal noises to communicate with them when they are getting too close to her toy resources. Every day she learns how to better navigate her babbling

bunch both physically and verbally. The hounds have a collective at the dog park where they interact with other pups. Their rules seem to be much simpler, and it is easy to tell when they find a good match within their group.

Another valued community for me is my work as a senior scientist at a biotech startup. There, I work with other scientists with a common goal of developing cellular therapies against solid tumors. It is a challenging problem affecting many, and we feel that we have a unique angle and powerful techniques to tackle it. I am passionate about science. I hope to show my kids how much I enjoy my colleagues and the important work I do there, in hopes that they one day can find that kind of community for themselves.

**“Communities are all around us and it is up to us to foster happiness and contribute to the ones we take part in.”**

Communities are all around us and it is up to us to foster happiness and contribute to the ones we take part in. To me, GGMG is a community where I act as the director of partnerships to prop up local businesses by advertising for them, and in return, they provide financial discounts which support our members. If you would like to join me in this mission, please feel free to reach out at [partnerships@ggm.org](mailto:partnerships@ggm.org). I hope this summer you can review the important contributions you make to your communities and how you would like to define your roles there.

## HOUSEKEEPING

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

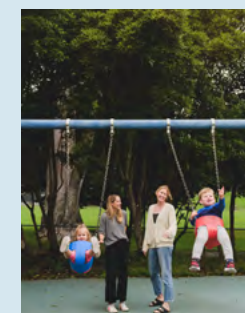
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Have an idea for an issue theme or article? Please email [editor@ggm.org](mailto:editor@ggm.org).

**This issue made possible by:** Iceland; Blown-out tire on a road trip through rural U.S. and endless visitors; Celebrating all the things! Road trip to SoCal and running ‘Camp Mom’ for the summer.

## COVER OUTTAKES



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

Cover photo by Mini Anna Photography  
Models: Myriah Zaytoun, Jonathan Lieberman, Poppy Lieberman (2.5 years old), Joy Phillips, Jeffrey Phillips, Benjamin Phillips (2.5 years old)

# San Francisco Recreation and Park Department: Hidden Gems and Tips

By Sonya Abrams

Despite its large population density and growing skyline, San Francisco is a city exploding with green spaces, most of which are overseen by the Recreation and Park Department. The scope of Rec and Park's job is enormous—it manages more than 220 parks, playgrounds, and open spaces, including Camp Mather in Yosemite Valley and Sharp Park in Pacifica. It also hosts a number of programs, activities, and events open to the public. Many of us are familiar with Silver Tree day camp and the myriad public pool offerings, but that's just the tip of the iceberg. Here are a few lesser-known Rec and Park offerings for parents and kids alike.

**Workreation and Greenager Programs:** Have a child between 14 and 17 who wants to gain valuable leadership experience and bring home a paycheck? For more than half a century, Workreation has been placing more than 500 teenagers in city jobs at rec centers each year, where teens assist in arts and crafts, cooking, gardening, and administrative tasks for up to 10 hours each week. The Greenager initiative was established in 2012 as a paid youth stewardship and leadership program to connect high schoolers with their local environment, by cleaning up parks, raising ecological awareness, and creating place-based projects. Seventy teens have successfully completed the 8-month program, and some have returned as leaders. [sfrecpark.org/1182/Youth-Employment-Programs](http://sfrecpark.org/1182/Youth-Employment-Programs)

**Zumba in the Parks:** Zumba harnesses the power of dance and Latin music for a fun-fueled workout, and Rec and Park has capitalized on the popularity of this fitness fad, offering free drop-in classes in open spaces for all ages throughout the city. With multiple classes happening every day (weather-dependent), there's no excuse to miss out. [sfrecpark.org/1183/Zumba-in-the-Parks](http://sfrecpark.org/1183/Zumba-in-the-Parks)



Sonya is a Cole Valley mom to three tweens. She has been especially thrilled with Rec and Park's efforts to bring more live music to San Francisco.

**Archery:** Home to the oldest archery range in the United States, Golden Gate Park hosts a variety of classes and competitions for kids and adults alike. There are also indoor ranges, including a free range at Moscone Rec Center, as well as cosmic archery, featuring music and glow-in-the-dark arrows. [sfrecpark.org/1769/Archery](http://sfrecpark.org/1769/Archery)

**Classes:** Rec and Park offers an enormous number of classes, both in person and online. In addition to standard aquatic, fitness, and arts classes—among many other options—Rec and Park hosts a number of lesser known classes. This summer's choices included Parkour (ages 6-plus), Women's Self Defense (ages 18-plus), Baby Boomer Sing-a-long (ages 55-plus), and Chess Club (ages 6-plus). The fall course catalog should be online by the time this issue goes to press. [sfrecpark.org/406/Recreation-Programs](http://sfrecpark.org/406/Recreation-Programs)

**Pickleball:** The city is getting swept up in pickleball fever, offering far more affordable court prices than private clubs and organizations. Rec and Park oversees 63 outdoor courts and 8 indoor pickleball facilities, with more on the way. Classes are available for both youth and adults, and there's an easy online reservation system, where players can snag a court spot for a \$5 fee. [sfrecpark.org/1591/Reservable-Pickleball-Courts](http://sfrecpark.org/1591/Reservable-Pickleball-Courts)



## Exploring by Cable Car

By Stephanie AuWerter

Originally published in the September 2016 *Get Moving!* issue.

[Editor's note: The Powell Cable Car was out of service during July 2024 due to mechanical issues. Visit [sfmta.com/getting-around/muni/cable-cars](http://sfmta.com/getting-around/muni/cable-cars) for updates, schedules, and tickets.]

San Francisco's cable car lines have serious kid appeal: steep hills, noisy clanging, and a thrilling lack of seatbelts. They offer fun hop-on/hop-off adventures, provided you're game for potential lines, crammed cars, and grumpy conductors.

The most touristy lines—**Powell-Hyde** and **Powell-Mason**—start at Market Street (at Powell Street) and end near **Fisherman's Wharf**. Powell-Hyde is arguably more scenic and has several kid-friendly pit stops. You can grab lunch at 1950s charmer **Lori's Diner** (500 Sutter St.) and then hit the **San Francisco Cable Car Museum** (1201 Mason St.). Visit **Swensen's Ice Cream** (1999 Hyde St.) and work off that sugar buzz at **Helen Wills Playground** (1401 Broadway St.). You'll end up near **Ghirardelli Square**, where you can refuel at **Square Pie Guys** (845 Beach St.), then chase seagulls at **Aquatic Park Beach** (599 Jefferson St.).

To beat the crowds, try the **California Cable Car**, which starts a couple of blocks away from the **Ferry Building** and **Sue Bierman Park Playground** (230 Drumm St.). Jump off at Grant Street to visit **Chinatown's Dragon Gate** (400-498 Grant Ave.) and end your day at the **labyrinths at Grace Cathedral** (1100 California St.).

Stephanie is a freelance writer and editor, who, thanks to her daughter, has ridden more cable cars, puffer trains, and carousel horses than she previously thought possible.

# Volunteer to Support the Elderly

By Jennifer Sato

Originally published in the December 2019/January 2020 *Connections* issue. This piece has been updated for accuracy.

I loved volunteering at Bay Area senior centers, including Kimochi, Inc. and the Institute on Aging, since I was a teen. I first volunteered serving lunch in the Nutrition Program at Kimochi, Inc. Here are local organizations you can help out all year long.

### Institute on Aging

San Francisco, Peninsula, Santa Clara

- Friendship Line, artists, social day program, office support, data entry

### Kimochi, Inc.

San Francisco, San Mateo

- Nutrition Program: Food prep, serving meals on-site, delivering meals to home-bound seniors
- Kimochi Home SF and Kimochi San Mateo: Daily walks, social daycare/companionship, receptionist, group activities (bingo, arts and crafts, calligraphy), various projects (gardening, clerical)
- Kimochi Lounge: Greet visitors, assist with Japanese books/visual rentals, organization and labeling
- Special events, escort/home visitor

### Little Brothers—Friends of the Elderly San Francisco Bay Area

San Francisco

- Visiting volunteer, holiday home or birthday visits, medical escort, office/phone, social excursions, and special events

### San Francisco Village

San Francisco

- Personal assistance, transportation, technology troubleshooting, or a friendly conversation
- Day of Service: in teams of 2 to 3 people, visit members' homes to assist with projects lasting 3 to 4 hours (e.g. deep cleaning, organizing, gardening, tech support)

### Self Help for the Elderly

San Francisco, Daly City, Oakland, San Mateo, San Jose

- Senior Center, office work, data entry, tutoring, phone line, projects

Jennifer is a mother and Registered Dietitian/Nutritionist. You can find her on [nutritionformoms.org](http://nutritionformoms.org).

## Neighborhood Emergency Response Team (NERT)

By Colleen Morgan

*Originally published in the August/September 2021 Beauty in Uncertainty issue. This piece has been updated for accuracy.*

*In lieu of an expert Q&A, our team is highlighting the San Francisco Fire Department Neighborhood Emergency Response Team (NERT) and their critical help educating us and our communities on preparedness and prevention.*



### What is the NERT program?

The NERT program is a free, community-based training program that teaches individuals disaster preparedness and

basic emergency skills.

This volunteer network of San Francisco residents supports

households, neighborhoods, and the city at large to be self-sufficient in a major disaster situation. While you may not have time to dedicate to the 24-hour, 6-day training program, there is much to learn online to get you and your family started on your personal emergency preparedness plan.

### What is the first step in disaster preparedness?

Make a plan—today. While a thorough plan will take time and careful consideration, breaking it down into steps and involving the whole household will make it more manageable. Visit [ready.gov/plan](https://www.ready.gov/plan) to view step-by-step instructions, including considerations for those with children and pets. Then download and complete a family emergency plan before practicing your plan with your family/household.

### What should my disaster supply kit include?

The NERT program suggests individuals and households create disaster supply kits for home, work, and car. A modified version of these lists include:

1. Water: One gallon per person per day for at least 3 to 5 days.
2. Non-perishable food. Enough to feed your family for 3 to 5 days.
3. Cooking supplies.
4. Clothing: Warm, comfortable layers.
5. Safety supplies: Flashlight and portable radio with extra batteries, candles and matches, fire extinguisher.
6. General supplies: Cash, copies of IDs, pen and paper, maps, emergency contact information.
7. Hygiene supplies: Toilet paper, soap (waterless kind), toothbrush and toothpaste, sanitary supplies.
8. Medical supplies: First aid kit, medications, list of doctors.

### What should I include in a kid kit?

In the event of an emergency, many parents' top priority will

be the safety and comfort of their children. Ensure each kid kit has contact information for parents/guardians, ID with names and contact numbers, family reunification plan, a favorite book or toy, yummy nonperishable snacks and juice, a change of clothes, and extra medication if needed. A short note stating *Everything will be alright. I love you!* is a nice personalized touch.

**“The NERT program is a free, community-based training program that teaches individuals disaster preparedness and basic emergency skills.”**

***If I need to leave my house immediately, what should I have in my “go bag”?***

A “go bag” is packed

in preparation of an emergency so you can grab and go quickly. It should be placed in an easily accessible, clutterfree area of the house by an exit. Ensure family members know where the “go bags” are stored to avoid confusion during an emergency. Each “go bag” should include a first aid kit, cash, layered clothing, a crank flashlight, nonperishable food, water, toiletries, and a copy of your ID. Remember that children grow quickly, so look at their “go bag” every few months to ensure their diapers, clothes, shoes, etc are their current size.

While preparing your own “go bag,” don’t forget about your pets. Their “go bags” should include food and water dishes, food, medication, ID, a leash, vaccination records, and veterinarian contact information. For smaller pets, practice getting them into a crate quickly—crating is the best way to get your pet out of the house in an emergency.

### How can I get more information and recommendations from NERT?

Visit [sf-fire.org/nert/disaster-preparedness-information-resources](https://sf-fire.org/nert/disaster-preparedness-information-resources) for a complete list of emergency supplies and planning forms. Pass on this helpful information to friends and family—today! Once you’ve completed your emergency plan, supply kits, and “go bag,” reach out to a neighbor to see how you can help. It is, after all, the spirit of NERT to create a “neighbor-helping-neighbor approach.”

### How can I get involved with NERT?

Class offerings and enrollment are currently limited due to staff availability. Learn more about future opportunities at [sf-fire.org/nert/join-us](https://sf-fire.org/nert/join-us).

*Colleen is a mother of two who has realized how unprepared she is for an emergency while researching this piece.*



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## When Isolation Is Healing

By Tara Hardesty

*Originally published in the December 2014/January 2015 Big Feelings issue.*

Our baby's entry into the world did not go as we'd hoped. We were induced a full 14 days past my due date and then had an emergency C-section after 36 hours of labor. I felt jarred and was certain that my baby did too, based on the seemingly permanent furrow on his brow.

But here's the thing, mama. I did the damn thing. And so will you.

After my son was born, I decided to isolate my family. I had no idea I would choose this isolation, but it created a precious time that I will forever cherish. I had a gut-level feeling that we needed to be together and close out the world while we got to know each other. Looking back, I think we also needed a reset after a rough entry.

**“Our fourth trimester huddle didn't make us lonely; it forged a path for the family to move forward.”**

Because I am from a big family, this was not a popular decision. Nor did it sit well with friends, many of whom wrote off our isolation as a folly of being new parents. Maybe it was. But as we passed on offers for food drop-offs and invitations to load our tiny baby into the carrier and join friends at kid-friendly happy hours, we realized that we needed to chart our own path.

My husband and I were floored by the changes in our lives. Even though we were comfortable and familiar with babies,

and had welcomed the shift in focus from ourselves to our little one, we still were overwhelmed. We still felt like we had lost our lives. We stumbled, and we mourned the days when we slept all night as the norm, and got up early to hit the gym and the farmers market spontaneously.

We looked down from our seventh-floor condo and watched people outside walking around at 8 p.m., thinking to ourselves, *That used to be us.*

I can't remember many of the details from those first three months, but I do remember the anxiety that hung over me like the fog. I also remember the wonder and coziness of that time. Our fourth trimester huddle didn't make us lonely; it forged a path for the family to move forward. The first time my momma wisdom made itself heard, it insisted on isolation. And to this day, I feel proud that I listened.

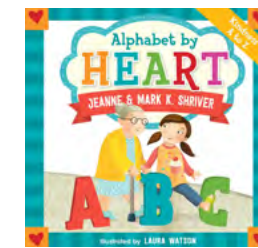
*Tara is a freelance writer and marketing professional who specializes in commercial real estate ventures. At TheDailyWrites.com, she blogs about the hairy underbelly of life, urban mommyhood, and entrepreneurship in downtown San Francisco.*



## Cultivating Community

By Laure Latham

Some kids develop close relationships within their family or school, while others search for a community to fight loneliness because they feel different. Learning to care about and respect others can be a tough process, but with the right emotional tools, it becomes a lot easier. Thankfully, these fabulous books provide a whole list of tools for kids to learn how to belong in all sorts of communities!



### Alphabet by Heart

Written by Jeanne and Mark K. Shriver, illustrated by Laura Watson

This alphabet book takes the concept to a new fuzzy level, by associating emotional intelligence words with letters of the alphabet. C is for Care!

E is for Empathy! Promoting a healthy relationship between young ones and their caregivers or family, this book sets the alphabet in a context of community and being around others. **Ages: 1 to 3 years**



### The Island Before No

Written by Christina Uss, illustrated by Hudson Christie

One day, an unruly child shows up on an island full of walrus whose only answer to questions is “Yes.” The child starts taking advantage of the happy-go-lucky walrus. How could they say “No” when they only know “Yes,” even when they're

asked to don itchy shirts or get haircuts? The kid brings other kids and chaos ensues. Gradually, the walrus learn that they need to be able to say “No” too. How difficult could it be? Using claymation illustration, this funny book is great at teaching kids how to set boundaries in a good way, because “No” is not always mean.

**Ages: 3 to 7 years**



### Oddbird's Chosen Family

Written and illustrated by Derek Desierto

It can be rough to find a community where you belong when you are the odd one out. Grey and colorless, Oddbird is used to being alone and about to celebrate his birthday by

himself. Around him, all sorts of families partake in activities together, making the feeling of loneliness bite even harder. Good news though, Oddbird does have friends who care for him, and at the end of the day, they surround him when it matters. This book spreads a positive message about belonging. **Ages: 2 to 5 years**



### Our Nipa Hut: A Story in the Philippines

Written by Rachell Abalos, illustrated by Gabriela Larios

As Yelena Mendoza's father likes to say, “The hut is family too.” Their nipa hut is a traditional Filipino woven house built on stilts. After storms, Yelena looks over the house for cracks that require repair. Emphasizing the bonds of family and

community, this story shows neighbors coming together under rainbow skies in a rural area of the Philippines. As a wonderful bonus, a detailed guide to nipa huts and the effects of global warming follows the fable. **Ages: 5 to 8 years**



### SCRAM Society of Creatures Real and Magical

Written and illustrated by Rory Lucey

Rockhurst is no ordinary town. After an unexpected encounter at the library, young Jenny is convinced of the existence of magical creatures. She enrolls two friends to look for more “local cryptids” and together, they form the Society of Creatures Real And Magical (SCRAM). Their first quest: to meet a troll! Throughout the friends' mad adventures (how do you spot a troll?) and tales of growing up, the reader meets the madcap characters of not-so-ordinary Rockhurst. With fun and exciting action, this graphic novel will draw even reluctant readers.

**Ages: 8 to 12 years**

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

## NEW ARRIVALS



### Katie Bhargava Baby Daniel Kumar

Congratulations to **Katie Bhargava**! She will be getting joyful moments captured by Anna Munandar from Mini Anna Photography. Anna specializes in capturing joy and every milestone in your family, from birth to college. See her work at [minianna.com](http://minianna.com).

To announce your new arrival in the magazine and for a chance to win a \$150 gift card from **Mini Anna Photography**, fill out the form at [ggmg.org/about-us/ggmg-magazine](http://ggmg.org/about-us/ggmg-magazine).

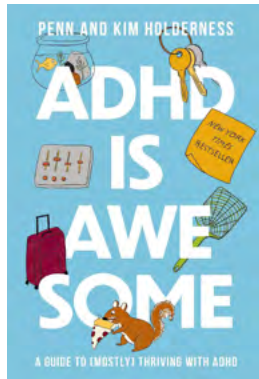




## We Can Relate

By Gail Cornwall

It's summer, and I have lots of children, which means this issue's theme of "community" transmogrified into a theme of "books Gail read recently." Both titles seem niche, but are relevant to all caregivers—no tests or ADHD diagnosis required.



### ADHD Is Awesome

After reading around a dozen books about ADHD, I can confidently say this one is a treasure. It's for adolescents struggling with ADHD *and* their neurotypical parents and siblings. It's easy to read. It's comprehensive. And it's as engaging as you'd expect, coming from Penn and Kim Holderness of *Amazing Race* and YouTube fame.

The book's effectiveness begins with Penn building credibility as someone who has it—and gets it. "A lot of people with ADHD mask their difficulties using adaptive strategies, so to the average observer, they may not even appear to have ADHD," he writes. "It's a bum situation—the more successful you are, the harder it is for people to believe you have an actual disorder. They'll look at you and wonder why you are not able to complete a seemingly simple task like filling out a form at the DMV. On top of that, because ADHD ebbs and flows, it can look to the outside world as if the people who have it are simply not trying. Sometimes, we knock it out of the park. Other times, we can't even get our jerseys on." Much of the book is written like this, with plural first-person pronouns that ooze empathy and invite buy-in.

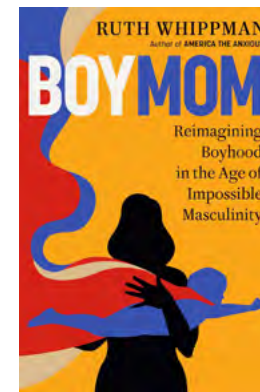
Color-coded pages, text broken up into manageable bits, frequent asides—the Holderness family is *on it*. Analogies abound, as does humor. Penn explains:

The frontal lobe is like the CEO of a company, providing oversight for every system of the body and making sure things hum along smoothly and successfully. The CEO in a neurotypical person's head will look over their shoulder and ask, "Are you sure you want to do that?" ... When it comes to an ADHD CEO, the frontal lobe ... really believes in you and your interests. It says yes to everything, even if it means abandoning the project you were just working on or letting you take a lunch break at 9:25 a.m.

Best of all, the book is vigilantly strength-based, careful to avoid a deficit mindset when it comes to ADHD, but also careful not to let a normalizing and appreciating of the condition translate to a sense that behavioral change isn't necessary or possible: "While it is terrific to live authentically, sometimes a too-quick or too-big reaction causes collateral damage." Here's another example of the book's tightrope walk of non-toxic positivity: "It is a constant battle to remember that you are not a screw-up. You just screwed up." *ADHD Is Awesome* also steers clear of complacency, with a whole chunk of the book dedicated to "new tools and strategies [to] support your areas of weakness and arrange your life so you can thrive," including "mindfulness for people who suck at meditating."

Caregivers too are offered realistic, actionable strategies to harness the power of ADHD, while also embracing self-compassion. Kim writes, "Let's get real: It is insanely hard at times to be connected to a person with ADHD. No matter how much you love them, no matter how many times you remind yourself that they are doing their very best, at times you will want to scream."

That phrase, "be connected to," is why I recommend the book for everyone. In these pages, you will recognize coworkers, your kid's classmates, maybe even a parent, and you will come away better prepared to thrive alongside them and prepare your children to as well.



### BoyMom: Reimagining Boyhood in the Age of Impossible Masculinity

It's been a long time since a book made me feel as conflicted as Ruth Whippman's *BoyMom*.

She opens with the question of whether boys are really predestined to be rowdy. Many books on that topic contain regressive junk science and others call bullshit on them, like neuroscientist Lise Eliot's *Pink Brain, Blue Brain* and Cordelia Fine's *Delusions of Gender*. The latter concludes that no one has definitively proven that the differences we see, on average, in the behavior and preferences of girls and boys—and even discrepant fMRI scans—are driven by biology rather than socialization. Whippman, sadly, doesn't get there. She catalogs a lot of the relevant studies and issues many of the right caveats ("Our struggles could have nothing to do with gender at all, and everything to do with individual temperament or parenting"), but ultimately, her first chapters are so plagued by gender essentialism ("When my sons are their least boyish is when I find them easiest to be around") that I fully expected to pan *BoyMom*.

The only thing that kept me reading was Whippman's refreshing transparency about her internal struggle: She's a feminist—really! she swears!—but worries her boys won't get a fair shake in a #MeToo world and wants to be off the hook for their obstreperous behavior. Yet as the anecdotes unfurl, it turns out Whippman doesn't talk one son's way into mermaid class; she doesn't ensure that the media her sons consume feature stories of emotional connection and labor; and their ADHD explains much of what she wishes wasn't so (and much of what I struggle to tolerate from a daughter with ADHD). In that context, I found the defeatism around an individual parent's ability to counter-act gender stereotypes grating.

But thank goodness I stuck with her, because when Whippman moves on from the nature-nurture debate, when she shifts to using the term "male socialization," the book takes off. With skillful reporting and analysis, she covers male movie stars becoming increasingly jacked, gendered screentime excess, misogynistic influencers like Andrew Tate, teens' sexual cancel culture, and more. These later chapters are intensely thought-provoking. "In a deeply twisted way, the incels have found that sense of friendship and brotherhood that so many of the boys I had spoken to had been craving and were never quite able to access."

Throughout *BoyMom*, Whippman is right about many things. Baby boys *do* get less warmth from adults than baby girls, and as they grow *are* given less encouragement and fewer tools to form deep relationships. We *have* created and funded programs encouraging girls to resist type casting when it comes to STEM, athletics, and more, but provide little "designed to help boys challenge masculine stereotypes." Media targeted at boys *is* "aggressive and emotionally limited." It *can* "start to feel as though male emotions get dismissed from both sides. For every right-wing tough guy urging his crying son to man up, there is a voice from the left telling him that to voice his problems is to take emotional airtime away from a woman."

Whippman effectively makes the case that all this needle-threading boys must do as a result of the "strange blend of indulgence and neglect at the heart of male socialization" can be stunting and paralyzing. But I still can't help but imagine Whippman struggling alongside them, a would-be seamstress repeatedly jamming a limp thread into the side of a needle's eye with statements such as, "Some of this is biology, sure, but a huge piece of it is the masculine socialization." In other words, I still worry that her readily confessed desperation for self-exoneration produces a skewed recital of the nature-nurture debate and ultimately reinforces the stereotypes she hopes to challenge. I think her framing encourages parents to throw their hands up in the face of cultural forces. Nevertheless, this review alone demonstrates that Whippman succeeds in her mission of creating "a climate of critical thinking around these issues ... rather than casting boys as either the enemy, a bunch of would-be predators, or fair game for mockery."

Gail works as a mom and writer in San Francisco. Read about parenting and education from the perspective of a former teacher and lawyer at [gailcornwall.com](http://gailcornwall.com) or by finding her on Facebook and Twitter.

## Today's Kid Slang Is Sus

By Yuliya Patsay



*Yuliya (it rhymes with Goo-lia) Patsay is Soviet-born and San Francisco-raised. She is a storyteller and voice actor. Her debut memoir, Until the Last Pickle, is available now!*

**I walked in on my teen and her group of friends singing something that sounded like "Skibidi Toilet." What does this mean? It seems these days I can't understand half of what they are talking about. What should I do?**  
— Worried in Walnut Creek

Dear Worried,

It's true, I have no idea what kids say these days either! Remember when we used to say "lit"? So here's a cheat sheet for us old folks broken down by generations. Depending on who you ask, Gen Z includes those born between 1997 and 2012, and Gen Alpha (is still being defined) is likely to be those born between 2010 and 2024.

### Gen Z slang

**Sus:** short for "suspect," meaning suspicious or doubtful. "That meatloaf grandma made seems sus; don't eat it."

**Extra:** excessively dramatic or unnecessary. "Our teachers are being extra about homework this week."

**Lowkey/Highkey:** used to emphasize something in a casual way. Lowkey means somewhat, while highkey means very. "I'm lowkey stressed about the math test" or "I'm highkey obsessed with Taylor Swift's *The Tortured Poets Department*."

**Yeet:** expresses excitement, triumph, or throwing something. "Yeeted the test! Aced it!" (Can also be used ironically.)

**Salty:** upset, bitter, or angry. "I'm salty mom grounded me."

**Gucci:** something good, cool, or positive. "Those shoes are gucci!" (Not referring to the brand specifically.)

**GOAT:** Greatest Of All Time. "LeBron is the GOAT of basketball."

**Shook:** surprised, shocked, or bewildered. "I was shook when I saw the drama club cast list."

### Gen Alpha slang

**Ate:** something impressive or outstanding. "You ate that presentation!"

**Bop:** a catchy or enjoyable song. "That new song is a bop!"

**Sheesh:** surprise, disbelief, or disapproval. "Sheesh, that test was hard!"

**Bussin':** something very good or delicious. "This food is bussin!"

**Sigma:** used to denote someone who is among the most popular. "He always leaves the party so early because he's such a sigma. He doesn't care what people think."

**Rizz:** short for charisma, especially in a romantic or flirtatious way. Rizz was the word of year for 2023, according to the publishers of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. "He's got mad rizz."

None of these helpful phrases explain "Skibidi" and, for that, I had to do some Internet sleuthing. According to *Today* show contributor Elise Solé, "Skibidi" is a "silly word that means ... literally nothing." Urban Dictionary defines this nonsense teen slang as "a word usually used to start a convo, specifically a convo filled with brain rot."

According to Know Your Meme, "Skibidi Toilet" refers to a series of Source Filmmaker videos by YouTuber DaFuq!?Boom! featuring a remix of "Give It To Me" by Timbaland and "Dom Dom Yes Yes" by Biser King in which an army of toilets with men's heads coming out of them are shown singing the song in various settings. The series follows a plot about the Skibidi Toilets taking over the world and men with cameras for heads known as CameraHeads fighting against them. The first episode was uploaded as a YouTube Short in February 2023 and inspired more episodes over the following months, each gaining tens of millions of views. The series became a popular subject of memes, inspiring fan art and videos and other content on sites including YouTube, X, and TikTok.

So you see Worried, there's nothing to worry about—or, "Don't be so salty. Your kid's got mad rizz and is lowkey obsessed with Skibidi. Today it's a bop but tomorrow it'll just be basic," as the kids might say!

## Walking Differently? What to Be on the Lookout For

By Nirav Pandya, MD, and Brian Feeley, MD

**M**ovement and its various manifestations of walking, running, and jumping are integral to our childhood. How each child moves will vary within our communities. At events where kids gather you may hear these concerns:

*"My kid really needs to learn how to run better; their arms and legs are all over the place!"*

*"Her grandmother keeps telling me that we need to get her walking checked by the pediatrician. She is worried that my daughter's feet are pointing the wrong way!"*

*"My son's teacher tells us he is always tripping during recess because his toes point inward. Maybe we should get him some special shoes or braces."*

As orthopedic surgeons, we are called upon to analyze the gait of young children frequently. Walking and moving are not only integral to our health but also something that is quite visible to everyone around us. One of the most common conditions we see is intoeing, more commonly known as being "pigeon-toed." What exactly is this condition, and do you need to be concerned?

Intoeing, on a very basic level, is when the foot turns inward when we walk. This can be caused by three issues:

- (i) femoral anteversion: the thigh bone (femur) is rotated inwards
- (ii) tibial torsion: the shin bone (tibia) is rotated inwards
- (iii) metatarsus adductus: the foot is rotated inwards

The most common cause of intoeing is femoral anteversion. In these cases, children are able to rotate their thigh at the hip joint inwards more than outwards. They will typically sit in the "W" position and in the early preschool/elementary ages may frequently trip. Very rarely do radiographs or other imaging need to be taken as the diagnosis is made on a physical exam. In rare cases where the intoeing is unilateral, occurs after trauma, and/or is accompanied by pain/limping, further radiographic workup is warranted.

Dr. Coleen Sabatini, professor of orthopedic surgery at UCSF, states, "Intoeing will often improve without intervention over the first decade of a child's life and even if it doesn't, it is not known to cause any long-term problems. I generally tell them to point their feet straight like headlights of a car. Also, watch how they sit on the floor—they want to avoid 'W' sitting."

The good news is that the vast majority of children will have their thigh rotation correct by age 10, so no surgery is



needed. Furthermore, prescription braces and custom shoes are not needed since the issue is rooted in the hip turning inwards and not the foot; the foot simply "goes along for the ride" with the hip.

Patience is key if your child is diagnosed with intoeing from femoral anteversion. This is also true for the less common tibial torsion.

What happens if femoral anteversion is hindering a child significantly in day-to-day activities (i.e. they are tripping a lot) or it is not corrected by middle school? Physical therapy can

be initiated for younger children whose functional activity is being limited.

Neeraj Baheti, a physical therapist at UCSF's Sports Medicine Center for Young Athletes, states that, "Intoeing has been associated with increased knee pain in athletes who run a lot."

In the rare case of an older adolescent child whose femoral anteversion does not self-correct and is leading to functional limitations, surgeries can be performed. These surgeries are rather large and invasive, and involve rotating the thigh bone into the correct direction. These types of surgeries can also be performed for tibial torsion that does not self-correct via rotation of the shin bones.

**"Intoeing, on a very basic level, is when the foot turns inward when we walk."**

Finally, metatarsus adductus deserves some special consideration as it is not as common as femoral anteversion or tibial torsion. If your child is diagnosed with it as the cause of their in-toeing, the vast majority of cases will resolve when children are very young. In certain cases where it does not resolve, bracing and/or casting can be performed to help.

Lastly, you may be one of those adults that still intoes. Don't worry! If you don't have pain, it isn't something to worry about—about 10 percent of the population will intoe into adulthood without any significant consequences.

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





# It Takes a Village

A sense of belonging and shared purpose is essential for human well-being.

By Yuliya Patsay

It's 8:27 a.m. on a foggy Thursday across the Golden Gate Bridge, and at the sonorous call of a gong, children of all ages begin to trickle into a large light-filled room with a pastel pink piano in one corner, fresh flowers in vases all around, and knitted gnomes and creatures tucked away in the alcoves. Accompanied by kindergarten teachers Chako San and Spadarina Marta (their honorifics a nod to their respective cultures, Japanese and Bulgarian), the youngest students snuggle up alongside the oldest middle school students and greet their teachers in the language of that teacher's home country or culture. They continue with a song to start the morning meeting, a gathering that takes place most mornings at a small independent school in Sausalito, founded

on the belief that it takes a community to raise children—or rather that it takes a village—and thus its name: The New Village School.

Conceived in the living room of Greg and Aimee Price in 2008, The New Village School was founded on the principle of a singular commitment to community, recreating a time when we all lived together in villages and took care of one another's children. The families who came together did more than just send their kids to school; they also made meals together, spent vacations together, and truly showed up for one another. The Price family reflects on those early days with fondness, "We felt like we were co-parenting each other's children, we felt like a family."

The Prices, along with several dedicated

teachers and parents, created a school based on *Homo sapien's* primal survival instinct: when we live in community with others—whether in a simple village or a modern school—we thrive, both individually and collectively.

## Village life

There are many reasons that living in community was essential to our survival as human beings, rooted in both our biology and history. Early humans needed to band together to hunt larger animals and defend themselves. Working as a group allowed people to build better shelters, gather more food, and provide care for the young and elderly. Being in an intergenerational community also meant that you could share and pass down skills and knowledge. And

when members provided diverse abilities and ways of thinking (what we now call neurodiversity) the group as a whole would thrive.

For children in particular, being a member of a community is foundational to their growth and social, emotional, and intellectual development. A strong community provides children a sense of belonging—a fundamental human need—as well as a safe place to explore their identity. "When you're in community, you can experience yourself through other people," observes Amber Allen-Peirson, a poet, community builder, mother, and CEO/Founder of Clearly Clarity LLC. She explains, "You need other people to learn to develop your emotional toolkit and navigate relationships [and] ... being with other people allows children to practice critical skills—grace, patience, kindness, how to set boundaries, and how to navigate disagreements."

## All shapes and sizes

Communities vary greatly, but they share key characteristics:

- There is a common thread that binds community members together. This could be anything from a geographic location (e.g., a neighborhood), to a common interest (e.g., fitness), or to a shared identity (e.g., culture or a religious community).
- The members of a community feel a sense of belonging, a connection to the group, and a sense of acceptance for who they are. This feeling of belonging is crucial for fostering trust and emotional well-being.

- In all communities, there are interactions and channels of communication between the members. This could be face-to-face or virtual.
- What often knits the community together is shared values or goals: a sense of common purpose or shared beliefs that unite the community and motivate members to contribute.
- Ideally, there's a sense of mutual support and reciprocity where members help each other out, share resources, and celebrate each other's successes.

**"A strong community provides children a sense of belonging—a fundamental human need—as well as a safe place to explore their identity."**

## Nurturing a village

Once a community has been established, nurturing and maintaining it requires:

- Actively cultivating a welcoming environment so members both new and old can feel comfortable and supported.
- Fostering engagement by providing opportunities for members to connect, share ideas, and participate in activities that are relevant to their interests. This can involve events, online forums, discussions, or volunteer opportunities.
- Open communication and transparency: leaders should be clear and upfront about decisions and the community's direction, and encourage open communication and feedback from members to address concerns and improve the community experience.

- Recognizing and rewarding contributions: show appreciation for members who volunteer their time, share their expertise, or contribute to the community in positive ways. This can be through public recognition, awards, or simply expressing gratitude.
- Adapting to change: communities need to evolve over time to stay relevant and meet the changing needs of their members. Be open to new ideas, incorporate member feedback, and adapt activities or resources as needed.

## Finding your village

Strong communities can be found both near and far. The TIKVAH School of Music and Dance, which offers a unique bicultural kids program taught in Russian by native-speaking instructors and operates out of the Jewish Community Center of San Francisco (JCCSF), explores Jewish culture through music, dance, art, and Shabbat celebrations. This program has kept the community of Russian-speaking immigrants in San Francisco and their children together and united them through shared love and appreciation of the Jewish culture and Russian language, conducting classes in Russian and English. Semi-annual performances draw crowds of supportive parents, grandparents and friends eager to get to know their friend's cultures and traditions.

Similar to the JCCSF, community centers like the YMCA, Boys & Girls Club, public libraries, rec centers, and other neighborhood or faith-based centers, share many common goals aimed at enriching the lives of their members and the surrounding community. They provide spaces for people to meet, build relationships, and feel like they're part of something bigger than themselves as well as offer support services, educational programs, workshops,



and classes to help people learn new skills. One local organization that's building and nurturing community is Play Marin, whose work addresses two fundamental challenges Marin City youth face: adequate access to extracurricular and athletic opportunities in Marin City, and the lack of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity in the broader Marin community. The benefit of a more diverse peer group for the children participating cannot be overstated.



Diversity in a global context is especially important since we tend to form communities based on geography, but need to learn to engage globally. Allen-Peerson shares her work in establishing the program Bridge the Gap, which brought African-American students from Marin together with students from Daraja Academy in Kenya, and has been instrumental in shaping global citizens. The program took three cohorts of teens to Kenya and focused its curriculum around building identity as young women. They explored topics like empowerment, cultivating a sense of belonging, and the similarities and differences of racism and tribalism. The connections forged by those involved in the program are maintained to this day with the women staying in touch and supporting each other's lives.

And we can't ignore the impact technology has had on introducing endless opportunities to join and cultivate virtual communities. From weekly video chats with grandparents across the country to neighborhood WhatsApp groups, individuals can stay connected with others more easily despite their location or availability. When appropriate limits are set, kids and

teens can socialize, collaborate, or compete by gaming with local or international peers. A healthy amount of game time, when balanced with other "real life" activities (e.g. extracurriculars, homework, family game night) can have a positive impact on children as they navigate our ever expanding technological world, especially those who find in-person socialization overwhelming. Busy parents have access to engaging at-home virtual exercise groups, from yoga to cycling to total body workouts, many with apps that provide variability, motivation, and connection with other members near and far. And for those who may feel like outliers in their local communities, virtual groups can provide support and comfort. One parent of a profoundly gifted Autistic/ADHDer states, "Connecting virtually with parents whose kids have similar learning profiles as my child validates my concerns and experiences. We share stories about school successes and failures or suggest enrichment activities and supports. Each family's story is different, but we share a common thread of parenting a neurodiverse child in a neurotypical world. In many

ways, it's like free group therapy."

### Growing together

Sixteen years after the establishment of The New Village School, the community is vibrant. As the school day draws to a close at 3:15 p.m., parents and caregivers gather to pick up kids. Many arrive an hour early to support the third-grade play performance attended by all of the younger grades. A few sixth graders, with the help of teacher Yana

Meydbrey, set up shop in the Shefe—a cafe in a shed—to sell treats they've baked to support next year's trip to Europe, for which they must raise the funds themselves. A fourth-grade mom tracks down a second grader her daughter has befriended to hand over a bag of hand-me-down clothes her child has hand-selected to go to her younger friend. Greg Price, who has returned to the Board of Directors and visits the school frequently, reflects that while the components—teachers, students, families—may change, the core of what makes this a community remains.

The threads of our villages weave a vital tapestry into the fabric of our lives. From the nurturing embrace of a school to the global bridges built through cultural exchange, a sense of belonging and shared purpose is essential for human well-being. By appreciating and fostering diverse and inclusive communities, we can ensure that future generations inherit a world rich in connection.

*Yuliya (it rhymes with Goo-lia) is Soviet-born and San Francisco-raised. She is a storyteller and voice actor. Her debut memoir, Until the Last Pickle, is available now!*

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# Women Reading: Book-bound Communities

Book groups can support belonging while expanding our concepts of community and refining our worldviews.

By H.B. Terrell

During the first months of the COVID pandemic, isolation became not only the norm, but a means of survival. The effects of this enforced solitude are still being felt more than four years later. “Americans are lonely and it’s killing them,” runs a *USA Today* headline. Loneliness, isolation, and lack of connection constitute an official public health crisis. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy released the *Surgeon General’s Advisory on Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation* in 2023, laying out a framework for a national strategy to advance social connection.

## Belonging

“Our need to belong is like our need for water,” says psychologist and author Kelly-Ann Allen, whose work focuses on loneliness and belonging. “We can spend some time ignoring our thirst without

any harmful impact, but sooner or later, our body will start to send warning signals that things are out of balance.” Making meaningful connections can support our sense of belonging. One way to foster these connections is to bridge the gap between personal and social interests. Reading groups can be that bridge, where we engage in the private work of reading a book in solitude, and then discuss it in community with others.

## The power of reading

In the Western world, reading has been a revolutionary act for those who do not fit the dominant demographic—white, male, wealthy. Throughout most of history, reading was restricted to nobility and religious leaders, i.e., people with the leisure time, privacy, and education to pick up a book. As people with

something to lose—namely, patriarchal power—they wanted to hold this privilege close. In the pre-Civil War United States, slaves defied anti-literacy laws in the South to fan the flames of abolition. In the mid-nineteenth century, women were finally allowed in libraries, but were confined to sex-sequestered spaces with carpets, couches, paintings, and very few books—so they started their own ladies’ literary societies.

As mothers, we can reclaim the radical history of reading while female to build bonds, learn and grow together, honor our intersecting identities, and expand empathy for fellow marginalized groups.

An extensive body of research on book clubs (1997 to 2023) supports the potential of these groups to support relationships, increase personal awareness, foster individual agency, and serve as comfort in times of crisis. “Repositioning a solitary act of reading into a communal one is well documented to have a powerful impact on people’s lives,” says Laurie MacGillivray, lead author of a 2019 study on the social functions of book club in a residential recovery program. The study suggests that not only does conversation allow readers to come to a richer understanding of the text, but it also allows women to co-create space, establish agency, and relate to other participants through their relationships with characters in a book. “[Their] collective knowledge [serves] as a resource with which to understand, interpret, and address their past, present, and future lives,” says MacGillivray of study participants. Book clubs can meet the often unrecognized needs of individuals and communities.

## A radical history and practice of book groups

In 2016, BookBrowse surveyed 15 years of data on book club attendance and found that 93 percent of attendees are women. An estimated 80 percent of book groups are composed solely of women. Since at least the 1600s, American women have read books together to learn, lean on one another, and make their voices heard in a world that prefers their silence. In 1634, Puritan Anne Hutchinson was banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony for hosting after-church Bible studies



“Readers start with a book but move well beyond it in discussing the connections and meanings each has made with the text—connecting both their inner experience and the perspectives of others.”

discussing—i.e., disputing—the minister’s sermons. Notably, the church didn’t have a problem with this practice until men began attending her reading group. Hutchinson was accused of causing a schism: teaching while female and defying the theology of the ministers in the Colony.

St. Anne’s Lodge (1778) was a female reading salon focused on science and literature. The Society of Young Ladies was established in 1827, one of the first literary societies for Black women in the United States. Margaret Fuller’s “Conversations” seminars (1839 to 1844) were famous among early feminists, using the Socratic method to interrogate philosophical questions about women’s lives, roles, and purpose.

By the turn of the 20th century, women’s literary societies had become a mainstay of high society before the script was flipped by the consciousness raising groups of the 1960s, as popularized by New York Radical Women. The group discussed topics and shared their experiences with one another, a process by which women began to understand that the problems they faced

were systemic rather than personal. Author, journalist, and activist Susan Brownmiller wrote that consciousness raising was “the movement’s most successful form of female bonding, and the source of its most creative thinking.”

In 1996, Oprah’s Book Club catalyzed a boom that has yet to go bust. If a book is on Oprah’s list, you’re soon likely to see it on *The New York Times* Bestseller List. More than 55 million Oprah Editions were sold in the first 15 years of the book club.

Book clubs have become a trope: middle-aged women drinking wine and gossiping between snippets of discussion about the book. If that’s what your book club looks like, that’s as valid and wonderful as the so-called serious book clubs that “high literature” enthusiasts might prefer. Whatever type of gathering is cultivated, the book club is rooted in the radical idea that marginalized folks’ thoughts are important, and a commitment to cultivating space where people can respond to what they read, disagree, change one another’s minds, and strengthen supportive social circles.





### Book Club Considerations

- How often will you meet?
- How big is too big, in terms of group size? How are new members added?
- How will books be selected?
- If you rotate hosting duties, what is expected of the host?
- Is there a structured routine you will follow? Is it okay to digress from the text to veer into personal discussions?
- Can members attend even if they haven't read the book?
- Is there a plan for those who can't attend in person due to illness, childcare, or other duties but want to join the conversation, i.e., a virtual option?

### Practical magic: How to build your reading club

Writer and high school librarian Nikki DeMarco has started countless book groups for her students. She recommends being specific in terms of genre, theme, author, format, or another limiting factor. "When any book is possible, it can feel impossible to choose just one," DeMarco says. "And being specific eliminates one of your biggest battles: boring books."

If you've never attended a book group meeting before, it may feel intimidating baring your soul to a group of people you know only marginally. DeMarco says, "One of the best lessons I learned while teaching is that if you ask an opinion question and wait long enough, you'll get an answer. One brave soul is going to break the silence because either they can't stand the awkwardness, or they have something to contribute."

Some book groups operate in a round-robin way, with the person whose turn it is to pick the book acting as the discussion leader. When you are leading the discussion, do a bit of research on the author, their other works, or the social context in which the book takes place or was written. This can be useful either to draft an intro to the discussion, in developing questions, or to answer questions others may have during the discussion. Consider yourself the expert on the book.

When you aren't the leader, or if your group doesn't employ discussion leaders, come prepared with themes you were interested in, questions you have about the book, questions you want to pose to the group to get conversation started, or notes

on elements of the book such as characters, plot, or any interesting tidbits you may know about the content or context of the book.

A typical meeting might begin with participants chiming in about something that struck them about the book. Someone will reflect on what another member said, either to agree, disagree, or raise a related question, and then it's often off to the races: laughter, re-reading passages, overlapping talk, sharing personal connections, and a full interrogation of the text itself.

No matter how you do it, make sure that the members have consensus on the process, even if consensus on a book is rare! Gretchen Rubin, author of *The Happiness Project*, suggests being explicit about the expectation for the group. "People may have different assumptions, and those different perspectives can cause friction if they aren't discussed."

Educator Nathaniel Petrich starts a book group for his 5th graders each year. He says, "Communities are built through conversation, which enables ... contagious learning where the enthusiasm and struggle is shared."

The struggle (or disagreement) Petrich speaks of is a feature of book groups, not a bug. Robert Clarke and Marguerite Nolan conducted a qualitative study (2014) of five reading groups, finding that the 32 individuals in the focus groups frequently called out their disagreements as a valued quality in their group's practice. Across the five groups, individuals "concurred, voiced disapproval, exchanged comments, questioned one another, compared and contrasted each other's statements and

perspectives," which provided opportunities for the participants to reconsider prior impressions and take others' experiences and understanding into account in formulating and reformulating their own opinions. In other words, book clubs succeed when they provide safe space for participants to express contrasting views.

### Books and belonging

Book groups position reading as a social practice—a space in time where members engage in conversations that reflect and refine their understanding of their own identities, cultures, and those of others who don't share their experiences. In *Book Clubs* (2003), sociologist Elizabeth Long explains, "What goes on in the meetings is primarily a conversation...a creation that takes on the weight of reality [that] comes into being because of the strands that comprise it."

Readers start with a book but move well beyond it in discussing the connections and meanings each has made with the text—connecting both their inner experience and the perspectives of others. "At its best, this kind of discussion is profoundly transformative," Long says.

And at the very least, it's a good excuse to hang out with friends.

*H.B. has been a professional book club leader at libraries, a book club member in her personal life, and has been an inveterate reader from the time she understood that letters corresponded to sounds.*

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# Finding Connection Through Personalized Learning



**Don't let the H-word scare you. Homeschooling provides customized learning and a community that expands together and remains close, even long after the children have grown.**

By Lisa Jobe

Like many parents, I had my children's educational journey mapped out before my eldest even entered preschool. Yes, I was "that mom" who woke up at 5 a.m. one pitch-black morning, poured a thermos of black coffee, and sat in an unlit parking lot for four hours, poised to spring out of the car the minute a line formed at the school's front doors. I was "that mom" who was determined to enroll my child in the most sought-after preschool program in my community. Once enrolled, my son would automatically continue through the school's revered parochial K to 12 program, which would then surely lead to Ivy League degrees. At least, that was my plan...

For many parents, choosing our children's educational paths is as easy as enrolling them in kindergarten in a local district. Many others fret over the choices, from public to private, from Waldorf to Montessori. We scour social media, compare notes with other parents, and highlight enrollment dates on our calendars.

Now, as a "veteran parent," recently celebrating that preschooler's 20th birthday and college graduation, I am happy to pass along my discoveries as I look back at all the unforeseen twists in our family's educational journey. As it turns out, it wasn't the minute decisions that made a lasting impact on my family—it was the power of community and shared friendships we all make as we journey in parenting together.

## Playgroups as collaborative learning spaces

Even before preschool, my children found robust learning communities with their playgroups. When my oldest son was 12 months old, I placed my law career on hold to spend more time with him. To build friendships for myself as well as for him, I joined a preschool parent group and found a delightful community of others on similar "sabbaticals." Together, we explored library circles, Kindermusik, Gymboree, and scheduled countless field trips and playdates. While we certainly didn't consider ourselves to be "homeschooling," our days were full of joyful learning, and our hearts were filled with friendships.

Nothing could separate our little community ... until the expected transition to school.

Soon after my son began preschool, his teacher informed me and my husband that he would likely not be a good fit for the kindergarten program—or rather, the program would not be a good fit for him. We learned that our "bright" child was multiple years beyond his classmates not only academically, but also in social and emotional development. His teacher generously lavished extra attention, helping him pick out his first *Magic*

**"Ironically, many homeschool families are rarely at home, integrating learning around a plethora of community activities, classes, and friendships."**

*Treehouse* books at the school fair and sending home exercises to train his tiny hands for "eventual multi-level acceleration." At the same time, I retreated back to the starting line to laboriously reassess our schooling options.

Meanwhile, my younger son's playgroup community was forming. With another set of friends, we continued community enrichment programs, playdates, and field trips. We even created a summer co-op, each parent hosting a week of enrichment fun built around a theme. Our little community was thriving and would have continued for much longer, if it had not been for the school issue.

## Transitioning to school ... and back again

Just before my eldest entered kindergarten, our family moved, choosing a neighborhood with the highest-rated schools. I had a heartwarming conversation with the superintendent, who assured me they had served many advanced children. Unfortunately, this version of my perfect plan lasted for just three days before cracks began to appear, this time when the school asked to assess for grade acceleration. While every parent wants their child to do well on school testing, ours performed "too" well—showing a clear disconnect between his needs and the available options. We considered and discarded several alternatives before his teacher suggested an unexpected idea that

became life-changing. She said, "If he were my child, I would consider homeschooling." Despite all my educational planning, I had never even considered that possibility.

## Homeschooling on the rise

Homeschooling, or educating outside a formal institution or school of record, is an educational alternative sharply on the rise, now becoming the fastest-growing educational choice, according to a survey conducted for a September 2023 *Washington Post* article. While steadily increasing before COVID, homeschooling

## Homeschooling myths

The modern homeschool movement has dramatically shifted from its origins in the 1960s, when, in response to the end of segregation and school prayer in public education, primarily white Christian evangelicals pulled their children from schools. Today, families choose to homeschool for many varied reasons, and, as Genevieve Smith and Angela Watson explain in the Summer 2023 edition of *Education Next*, homeschooling demographics largely mirror those of public schools. Forty percent of parents identify as racial minorities, and household incomes reflect similar diversity.

Homeschool parents have varying professional and educational backgrounds, and homeschool communities exist in every state and across geographical regions. Family budgets for homeschooling vary just as widely, with some families relying more on free or low-cost resources such as field trips and free learning sites like Khan Academy, while others take worldschooling trips or hire individualized tutors for their children. Just as there are many faith-based homeschool communities, (e.g., the Homeschool California group on Facebook), there are also many secular communities (e.g., the SEA Homeschoolers group on Facebook).

I often describe homeschooling as selecting the best of all available options from an a la carte "learning buffet." Many recreation departments, nature centers, sports complexes, and art/dance/music programs have classes. Local meetups host park dates and weekly events.

skyrocketed during the pandemic and remains 45 percent higher in its aftermath, particularly with the development of additional resources to support homeschool families. Despite heroic teacher efforts, parents saw firsthand the inefficiencies of large group learning, including a lack of challenge for cognitively more able learners, and frustrations for the many with learning differences that make attention or learning more difficult.

According to April 2024 national results from EdChoice's Public Opinion Tracker, only 39 percent of families now prefer their district public school over alternative choices, and nearly one in ten families prefers to homeschool. This may not capture additional families like my own, who discover homeschooling only after discarding other models.

The term "homeschooling" scares many families, suggesting a family at home day after day, studying around the kitchen table while mom bakes apple pie. Some may picture a homestead family, homeschooling because of rural surroundings or for faith-based reasons. Or, others react to the H-word by exclaiming, "I could never do that!" or "but I'm not a teacher!" Still others might assume one parent has to give up a career to be home all day long. Then, of course, is the biggest question of all, one that homeschool families often chuckle about repeatedly hearing: "What about socialization?"



Co-ops, or shared parent-led learning groups, draw upon the subject matter expertise of fellow homeschool parents. Enrichment centers where parents may drop off their learners to “school” for a day with peers are also common. Once the traditional school day is over, the classroom and homeschool students rejoin other communities such as dance, sports, Scouts, and youth groups.

Homeschooled teens often take dual-enrollment community college classes, intern while others are in school, work part time, or focus on time-intensive passions. Youth leadership is also popular for homeschoolers. In short: There is no dearth of opportunities for socialization.

### The joys and benefits of personalized learning

While classrooms work well for some learners, many are constrained by time, resources, and the differing needs of its students. When we create a niche learning environment tailored for our learners, rather than asking them to adapt to the environment, how much more can they soar? Families now homeschool for many reasons, with providing more personalized learning at the top of the list. This is why homeschooling is especially popular among families with learning differences and advanced abilities.

### Returning to a collaborative learning community

Within a week of my decision to try homeschooling, I found a homeschool park meetup group and was connected by friends to three veteran homeschool parents, who patiently answered my multitude of questions. Soon afterwards, my son was enrolled in a charter homeschool program with the support of a certified teacher, and he was signed up for weekly enrichment classes. On day one of a multi-age writing class, he made fast friends with two older boys, connecting over Harry Potter. Within a month, we were active in a co-op community and beginning to create our own homeschool community playdates, using our play-group successes as a model for collaborative learning. Once we began, we never looked back.

Choosing to homeschool can feel very isolating until families build their community. As you spend time with your initial support circles, though, you will find that your web of connections will quickly grow. Although school connections often change with each school year as cohorts shuffle around, homeschool communities tend to expand together and remain close, even long after the children have grown.

Homeschool charters are excellent pillars of support for new families. Since charters are funded as public schools, curriculum and other resources are free, and each family has a certified teacher who oversees their education. Charters have their own varied policies, but generally, they also offer more curriculum choice and pacing flexibility for individualized learning than traditional classrooms provide. Homeschool consultants also provide family support and guidance.

### What about parent careers?

Homeschooling can work for many families, even for single parents and dual-career families. Some families create flex work schedules, hire college students as helpers and drivers, and utilize



homeschool coaches to help them manage logistics. It is not uncommon to see parents working in their car while students are in class, or taking conference calls in quiet places at the roller rink. Since homeschooling is flexible, it does not need to mimic classroom scheduling. Best of all, it is much more efficient than classroom models, so individualized learning can be accomplished in a fraction of a time, and without morning runarounds or evening homework.

### Homeschooling and college

Homeschooling can provide a significant boost for a student to stand out from the pack on college admissions, which has become so competitive that even high school students with numerous Advanced Placement classes may be shut out of highly ranked universities. Yet homeschoolers have an advantage. According to college admissions counselors, universities are increasingly looking for students who can demonstrate passion and drive in an area of focus with innovative projects, research, or other evidence of talent development. Homeschoolers uniquely have the time to discover their strengths and build upon them in deep individualized learning projects. They also tend to work for longer or more closely with mentors who know them outside of the classroom and who can write more personalized recommendations.

Sixteen years after our family began homeschooling, I am happy to share our success. My eldest homeschooled with charters and community organizations until 10th grade, then returned to traditional high school to play baseball. He graduated from high school at age 15 and from University of California, Santa Barbara at 19 before heading to law school. My youngest is now a homeschooled high schooler, taking college classes while enjoying competitive swimming and national Scout leadership.

But my personal story doesn't end there. As an educational consultant and advocate, I have now seen hundreds of families discover the joys and benefits of individualized learning within collaborative communities. It is truly an avenue worth exploring.

*Lisa is a national educational consultant and advocate for families of gifted/2e learners and the co-founder of Sequoia Gifted and Creative, LLC. She speaks to parents and educators regarding the benefits of individualized learning pathways, both in and beyond the classroom. Learn more at sequoiagifted.com.*



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DIVERSITY, EQUITY, & INCLUSION

The DEI Committee Needs Volunteers!

The mission of GGMG's Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (DEI) Committee is to build a safe and supportive atmosphere for all GGMG members through education and community outreach. We organize events and share resources that enhance equity and inclusion within the organization. **We are currently seeking a new Co-chair as well as Committee Members.**

Examples of Co-chair and Committee Member duties include:

- Write and/or edit articles for *GGMG Magazine* 6 times per year (every 2 months)
- Plan and execute webinars, including speaker outreach, that enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion within the organization. Past examples of themes have included: talking to your kids about race, land acknowledgement, and a spotlight on diverse kids entertainment.
- Coordinate and execute drives for non-profit organizations that bring awareness to diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Represent the DEI Committee at GGMG events, such as Spring Fling and Fall Fest
- Additionally, for the Co-chair role only:
  - Serve as a liaison with the GGMG Board and Committees
  - Coordinate allocation of tasks among DEI Committee members
  - Recruit and onboard new DEI volunteers

Please contact us at [diversity@gmg.org](mailto:diversity@gmg.org) if you are interested in volunteering.

MEMBER SUPPORT

Member Support Is Seeking a New Co-chair!

The mission of the Member Support Committee is to change a member in need's life for the better and create a sense of community amongst our members through support, drives, and special events. Member Support exists to provide assistance to our members experiencing challenging times or who are in crisis.

Examples of committee duties include:

- Coordinate meal delivery for members in need
- Coordinate and execute drives to benefit local nonprofits
- Manage the Member Resource List to share valuable resources with members, including crisis, abuse, and child therapy resources
- Proactively monitor the forums and manage requests for member support needs
- Organize events that meet the needs expressed by members, including CPR and self-defense classes

Please contact us at [member.support@gmg.org](mailto:member.support@gmg.org) if you are interested in volunteering.

PARTNERSHIPS

The Friends branch of the Partnerships Committee collaborates with local organizations and businesses to provide substantial discounts and resources for our members. We aim to develop mutually beneficial relationships with businesses in the Bay Area that provide useful services to mothers. Our goal is to work preferentially with small local businesses run by women and/or people of color in an effort to promote their professional advancements in our society.

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

Committee duties in Friends:

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

Committee duties in Partners:

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

Open Roles:

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

To volunteer, email [partnerships@gmg.org](mailto:partnerships@gmg.org).

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NEIGHBORHOOD MEETUPS

Monthly Queer Family Hike

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

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

Moms Supper Club

Explore new restaurants in the city, enjoy dinner and drinks, and meet new moms in your community! Details for each venue will be announced through [gmg.org](http://gmg.org).

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

Monthly Bernal/Glen Park Moms Night Out

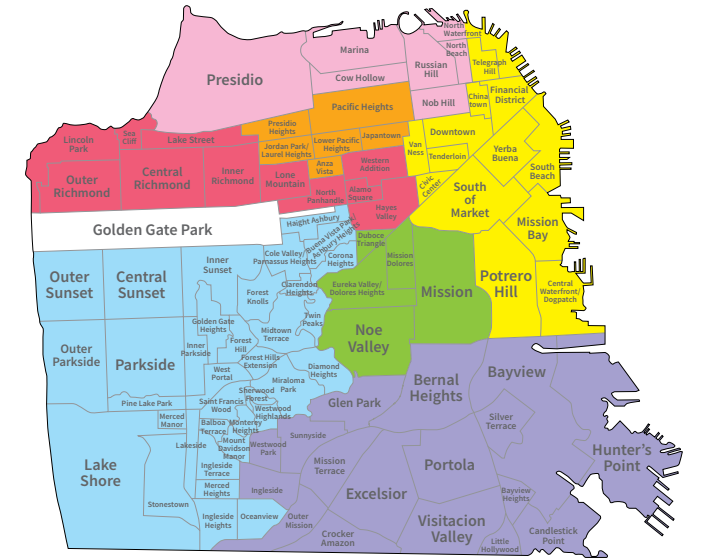
Each month we will visit a different venue in our neighborhood, moms only! After kiddo bedtime, enjoy a drink and some appetizers with other mothers.

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

Monthly Moms Happy Hour

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

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



Marina/Pac Heights/North Beach Monthly Moms Happy Hour

Drop in anytime for drinks and appetizers with other moms!

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

Sunset Stroller Walk for Mommies (and Babies!)

Calling all Sunset (and surrounding neighborhoods) mamas and babies! Would you like to meet neighborhood moms, grab a coffee, and enjoy a stroller walk together? We're organizing this stroller walk for you! You'll meet at Black Bird Bookstore + Café before you go for an hour or two of fresh air, light exercise, and great conversation!

- Date:** Second Friday of every month
- Time:** 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- Location:** Black Bird Bookstore + Café, 4541 Irving St.
- Cost:** Free for members
- Contact:** Email Jessica Meyers for details ([jessmeyers@gmail.com](mailto:jessmeyers@gmail.com))

Register for events at [gmg.org/calendar](http://gmg.org/calendar) unless otherwise noted.

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# I Can Tell That We Are Gonna Be Friends

By Jessica Perry

**Y**ou know that feeling, when you've just signed up your kids at a new school and you don't know who your kids' people will be? You don't know who your new friends will be. I've been through it three times in the last decade and every time this moment brings both low-grade anxiety and excitement about the untapped social potential. As an extrovert, I've always seen these moments of transition as pathways to burgeoning mom friendships. I have felt that if I go into these transitions with an open heart, I will find my community.



friendships. When some of us made the difficult decision to leave San Francisco and our beloved school in 2021, we were each other's closest counsel. Those friendships forged through school, and intensified by the pandemic, will always hold a special place in my heart.

When the pandemic started waning, our family started over again in Marin, hoping that we'd find a community we cherished just as

much. This time, my younger daughter would have a fresh start in kindergarten and my older daughter would jump into an already established group of kids in the second grade. I couldn't believe our luck enrolling our daughters in their new school. It was bathed in sunshine and had a direct view of Mount Tamalpais. So many families had moved from San Francisco to Marin during the pandemic that more than a third of the kindergarten parents were all in exactly the same boat as us. We were all navigating new schools, new social groups,

**"My kids have asked me many times which job I'd choose if I could do anything. I'd like to make friends for a living"**

and the suburbs together for the first time after decades as city people. The jubilation from being able to socialize again combined with our shared circumstances were magical ingredients for creating newfound friendships, which are only getting stronger.

My kids have asked me many times which job I'd choose if I could do anything. I'd like to make friends for a living. Because of a fortuitous set of circumstances (housing, my husband's line of work, and my outgoing personality), I've been lucky enough to live out my dream. Although I don't get paid for it, I firmly believe that having so many people to lift me up from disparate phases of life is a valuable paycheck of its own. My situation is rare and unique, and I am grateful for it every day.

When I was growing up, my mom always told me that you can never have too many friends and you can never love too much. I remind my children of this all the time. If you nurture these relationships and really look around, you'll find your village.

*Jessica is a writer, editor, mom, and social butterfly living in Marin County. She made a new mom friend two days ago and can't wait to hang out.*

When we first joined our preschool community in San Francisco's Outer Sunset, the school had just opened its doors. The kids observed a hippy Shabbat and made challah on Fridays. Art was woven into everything. When joining the school, we anticipated that the other parents would be a lot like us—people who liked the cultural Jewish traditions without an emphasis on the religion itself. As a stay-at-home mom who missed the social interactions of office culture, I figured that my best bet for making friends was to say "yes" to as many social gatherings as I could. I volunteered for every opportunity that I could handle. I embarked on the never-ending circuit of preschool kid birthday parties. After one year in this new community, many of the other families already felt like my own and these bonds fortified over the following years as we watched our older kids grow together, and then their siblings not far behind them.

Leaving the warm embrace of preschool and jumping into the SFUSD lottery system and private school applications four years later was jarring. When we finally settled on a small Catholic school in the Outer Richmond for our daughter, we went through intense culture shock. After our artsy Jewish preschool, the Catholic uniforms and crucifixes were a lot to take in. However, the elementary school itself boasted the same warm and fuzzy feeling as our preschool community. Our second round of friend "expansion mode" (saying "yes" to as much as I could) went more quickly. I found my people again. Other moms and I started meeting up for walks after drop-off and planning afternoon get-togethers.

When the COVID lockdown hit halfway through my older daughter's kindergarten year, these other women became my lifeline. We texted each other during the hellscape that was Zoom kindergarten. We met on each other's front stoops—masked and distanced—for some much-needed friend time. Gradually, commiserating texts evolved into heartfelt





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