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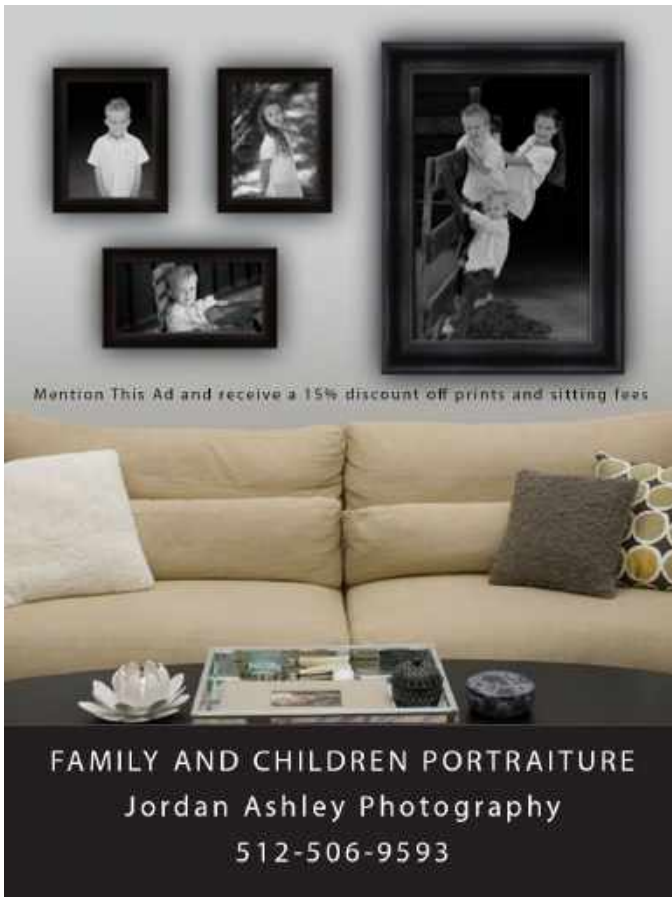
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7 Things You Should Know About Generation Alpha



FILM review

By Jack Kyser
West Side Story

Read online at:
www.austinfamily.com/films



Dylan, a 2022 Cover Kid Winner, loves reading and playgrounds. Photo by Jordan Ashley Photography in Cedar Park.



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We are dedicated to serving the Greater Austin area by providing up-to-date information and ideas that promote smart parenting and healthy homes. We promote our clients' businesses by increasing their customer bases and enhancing their public images.

Austin Family is published monthly by KKKemper, Inc.

Mailing Address:

P.O. Box 7559, Round Rock, Texas 78683-7559

Phone Number: 512-733-0038

On the web at: www.austinfamily.com

Advertising rates are available upon request.

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Subscriptions are available for \$30 per year.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

ANNETTE LUCKSINGER

Lucksinger is a mom of two and author of the guidebook and app "Exploring Austin With Kids."

I have never been one to celebrate big for New Year's. I think it may stem back to a family tradition of eating black-eyed peas for good luck on New Year's Day. For a child who hated vegetables, any holiday that celebrated peas was not a favorite.

What I do enjoy about the new year, though, is its feeling of renewal. At the stroke of midnight, we experience a moment of timelessness that offers the briefest respite from world events and troubles when we pause, reset and wake to new beginnings. I love the questions of this season: What do I want in the new year? What changes can I make to my life that would enrich it? What positive

forces can I bring into my family's life? The answers are what I celebrate.

Our writers seem to feel the same. None of the articles this month deals directly with resolutions, yet there are many wonderful ones contained in these pages. Our education columnist helps you resolve to find the best preschool for your child, equipped with personal insight, knowledge and resilience. "Smart Screen Time" calls for improving your child's literacy skills in ways that also increase family bonding time. Our health column shares smarter ways to manage social media for our preteens' and teens' well-being.

I also encourage you to read the feature article, which provides insights into the youngest generation, Generation Alpha. It's not as much about the world these kids will inherit as the world they are bringing!

Wishing you and your family a very happy, refreshing new year.

Annette

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Government Recalls Children's Robes



Mark of Fifth Avenue is recalling about 10,000 **children's robes** that fail to meet the federal flammability standards for children's sleepwear. The long-sleeved, 100% polyester robes were sold in children's sizes 2 to 10/12 in a variety of colors. The robes have two front pockets and a matching belt. They were sold online at amazon.com and walmart.com from August 2019 through June 2021

for \$35 to \$45. Consumers should take the recalled children's robes away from children and contact Mark of Fifth Avenue for a refund by emailing mofaproductsafety@gmail.com. All known purchasers will be contacted directly.

The US Consumer Products Safety Commission works to protect the public from unreasonable risks of serious injury or death from more than 15,000 types of consumer products.



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Catching Up With Literacy



SMART SCREEN TIME

BENJAMIN KRAMER, PHD

Benjamin Kramer, PhD, is the director of education for Austin PBS.



Literacy development has been especially difficult to foster during the pandemic. Access to libraries was dramatically curtailed, and when virtual instruction was the only form available, phonics and other technical aspects of reading were very hard to get across.

With students now back in schools, masks still make it difficult to make sound-symbol connections explicit for kids. Overall, there is a desire to catch up in literacy, and parents can help.

The greatest contribution that you can provide is to fill your kids' lives with the joys of reading. In that regard, the pandemic illuminated some remarkable innovations at our disposal. The digital revolution has dramatically expanded our access to digital print and picture books, with plenty of free options.

Many public library systems allow checkout of e-books, and our friends at bookspring.org have compiled websites from around the world that offer free access to books in a multitude of languages. Some of these offerings allow read-aloud voices, text highlights and other features.

I offer two suggestions if you want to make e-book reading part of your routine. First, keep the focus on the story or text. Resist the temptation to click on the "Easter eggs," those items that animate or speak to the reader when clicked. Keep the story front and center. Save the Easter eggs for later.

Secondly, if reading on devices at bedtime, dim the screen, even to the point where you need a light in the room to see the text. You want your kids to wind down, and screens at full power may have an opposite and undesired effect.

Happy New Year from Austin PBS!

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Award-Winning Magazine

The Parenting Media Association hosts a convention every year and announces awards for best editorial, design and general excellence in parenting magazines across the nation.

This year, our editor, Annette Lucksinger, won a Bronze Award for her November 2020 article on "Kid Power, How Do You Make Big Change? Start Local, Start Little." Judges called it "a great primer for politically minded parents. ...

It's a wonderful introduction to civic action." Austin Family magazine's designer Susie Forbes also won a Bronze Award for layout design of the "Spring Education Guide." Congratulations to Annette and Susie!

Local Schools Compete at State Level



Area marching band and football teams perform at state competitions.
Photo courtesy of Round Rock ISD.

Competing against the best in Texas, Round Rock ISD's Cedar Ridge High School marching band earned seventh place in the 6A division during the University Interscholastic League State Marching Band Contest. The competition was held at the Alamodome in San Antonio. The Raider band performed its show entitled "Superstition."

The Jaguar football team from Austin ISD's LBJ High School made it to the state 4A Division I championship game, making the team the first from AISD to play for a state football title since 1973. It was also the first time in LBJ's history.

In Eanes ISD, the Westlake Chaparrals made it to the 6A Division II state football championship for a third consecutive year.

by the numbers



74% of Americans resolve to learn something new, make a lifestyle change or better themselves in the new year.

Source: finder.com



2010 year that birthed the iPad, Instagram and first kids from Generation Alpha.

Source: nytimes.com



12 number of days that most New Year's resolutions last.

Source: nypost.com

Things To Do

Jan. 1

Polar Bear Plunge
Barton Springs Pool

Jan. 1-4

Go Ice Skating
Dreamland

Jan. 17

MLK Day Parade
Old Town Leander

New Pool Facility Coming

Nitro swimming, which provides swim lessons and competitive swim lessons, is expanding south of Austin near Kyle and Buda. Work begins this year on a 40,000 square-foot, state-of-the-art facility. The plan is to have swimmers in the water by September.

The new Nitro Kyle facility will boast two pools. A 25-yard, learn-to-swim pool will be UV-filtered and kept at a constant 88 degrees. Another full-size Olympic pool will contain 24 competitive swim lanes along with starting platforms, electronic timing and a scoreboard.

Nitro will be hosting competitions that accommodate up to 400-500 athletes, with plenty of room for spectators. (More information at nitroswim.com.)



Nitro Swimming breaks ground on a new pool facility south of Austin.

Texas Bar Foundation Supports Youth Program

Youth and Government is a nationwide YMCA program held each fall. It culminates with a conference that brings students of diverse backgrounds and a variety of opinions together to give them a platform to raise their voices, collaborate and build skills to shape our world.

A \$5,000 grant from the Texas Bar Foundation will help purchase new technology tools to enhance the conference experience for both participants and judicial volunteers.

YMCA Texas Youth and Government is a one-of-a-kind program which provides a hands-on learning environment. State conference events will take place in and around the Texas State Capitol, where

students gain access to the House and Senate Chambers, Hearing Committee Rooms, Texas Supreme Court and other important places of power.

The High School State Conference will be held Jan. 27-30, followed by the Middle School State Conference on Feb. 25-27. During the conferences, students will apply their learned knowledge and skills within the judicial, legislative, executive and media program areas.



Students in the Youth and Government program head to the Capitol. Photo courtesy Austin YMCA

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7

Things You Should Know About GENERATION ALPHA

Did you have a Speak & Spell? I got one after seeing it in the movie “E.T.” and I was obsessed, especially with its version of hangman: Mystery Word! I showed a Speak & Spell to my Generation Alpha sons recently and you’d think I’d shown them an artifact from prehistoric times. No graphics! No color! And that computer voice!

Every once in a while, I get little reminders that my kids are growing up in a very different world. Generation Alpha, or kids born after 2010, are going to be unlike any of their predecessors, especially now, thanks to the pandemic. If you’ve got kids in this group (or one on the border), here are seven things you need to know about them.

1. They represent a brand-new start.

In naming Generation Alpha, some suggested “Generation A” since we’d just had X, Y and Z. But choosing “A” would be like going back to repeat what has already happened. This is the first generation to be born entirely in the 21st century, so “Alpha” was chosen intentionally to represent the start of something completely new. Many of us are putting a lot of hope in these kids.

2. Many have a digital presence starting at birth.

A generation of children is shaped not only by the environment around them but also by the people parenting them. My Boomer parents still don’t care about technology or having an influence outside the people sitting around our Sunday dinner table. Generation Alpha is being parented primarily by Millennials, so many have had their names and faces online since birth, and some even have their own social accounts set up for them. The impact of that – not knowing true privacy or anonymity – is profound.

3. They will be more financially advanced.

We saved up cash in piggy banks to buy candy or to raid the aisles at Toys R Us once a year. Meanwhile, our kids are able to spend money from the couch on an ordinary Friday night. With one \$10 Robux gift card, they will get more practice in spending and budgeting than we did in a year. The challenge, as we all know, is making the connection between virtual money and actual money.



4. And therefore they have spending power.

A 2016 Cartoon Network New Generations study revealed that children ages 4 to 14 have an annual spending power of \$1.8 billion. You and I had influence over the economy by shouting during Saturday morning commercials – “Mom! Will you buy me that for my birthday?” – and then praying she’d actually buy it. Meanwhile, Generation Alpha can make spending decisions daily. If you think kids were being marketed to before, just wait.

5. They are adaptive.

Short of call waiting and CDs, our childhoods didn’t require much adaptation to new technology. These kids have done it since birth and now they’re helping their grandparents adapt. As your Generation Alpha daughter helps her Nana transfer her vacation photos to the cloud, she’s growing in self-esteem. This will serve her well as she grows up and is eager to adapt to new things.



6. They see life in terms of services and goods.

I watched a documentary about the only remaining Blockbuster Video in the United States. One interviewee shared how sad she was to see the end of the act of going to the store, selecting and taking home the videocassette, and then, of course, rewinding it before returning. Generation Alpha will grow up with video streaming as just one of many services that have replaced goods. Their understanding of a need for “things” will be quite different from ours and a complete 180 degrees from their Boomer grandparents, who were raised by parents who experienced the Great Depression.

7. They don’t have the same respect for hierarchies or traditional power.

This isn’t to say kids in Generation Alpha don’t respect authority. They just have a different experience with how power can be exercised. One person on Twitter can be heard by just as many people as the president on a nationally televised address. Kids in Generation Alpha know that everybody has the power to get their voices heard. Let’s hope they can be more discerning about which voices are wise enough to listen to.



BONUS: Generation Alpha lived through a pandemic.

Anyone reading this lived through a pandemic, but these kids were between the ages of 0 and 10 when COVID-19 hit home. The question is not if it will affect them but how. The downside is that many kids lacked much social interaction during these key years. But the upside is they spent more time with their families and witnessed resilience and positivity in a time of major stress.

By Abby Watts

Abby Watts is a wife and mother of two. She’s the content manager for iMOM.com, a program of the national nonprofit, Family First. This article originally appeared on iMOM.com and was used with permission.



Picking the “Right” Preschool Isn’t as Easy as 1-2-3



THE Learning curve

ALISON BOGLE

Alison Bogle is a writer living in Austin with her husband and three children. A former fourth grade teacher, she now enjoys writing about children and education. You can also catch her talking about articles from Austin Family magazine each Thursday morning on FOX 7 Austin.

The saying, “Little kids, little problems, big kids, big problems,” may be true in general, but when it comes to making important choices for our little kids, those choices can feel pretty big! Preschool is your child’s first formal learning experience, and it’s likely that you feel some pressure to pick the “right” school. Here are some things to consider when making your choice:

Play-based vs. Academic

Little did you know that choosing your child’s preschool would involve a

philosophical question! In choosing a program, you’ll want to consider both your child’s personality and interests, as well as your own desires for your child’s early education.

In a play-based school, also known as a “child-centered” or “child-centric” school, a large amount of time is dedicated to free play and unstructured activities. Teachers monitor and encourage play, helping the children to develop social skills. They will also lead group art, storytime or science activities. Early literacy concepts, such as letter, shape and number recognition as well as basic handwriting, are often taught, although somewhat organically.

In an academic program, the environment is more structured, students are expected to participate in planned activities, and they spend a significant part of their day sitting and working. Children are actively taught to perform basic math and to recognize shapes, colors, letters and letter sounds, with the goal of preparing for kindergarten.

There is no one right choice. Some children enjoy the less-structured nature of a play-based program and benefit

from the social skill development that it offers, while others do best with a very structured environment or need more time to work on their letters and numbers.

Research shows that while an academic-based program confers some test score benefits for students entering kindergarten, the gap is closed for most by the end of kindergarten and for all students by the end of first grade.

Other Considerations

Once you’ve chosen your preferred philosophy, there are other criteria to consider. Cost and location are obvious factors, but you should also look into the preschool’s schedule. Is it a half-day or full-day program? Are there long holiday or summer breaks? Is there an early drop-off or late pick-up program to accommodate your schedule?

It is also important to ensure that the preschool is accredited. Accreditation is a rigorous review process performed by a nationally-recognized outside agency. Accrediting agencies have high standards that go beyond Texas’ minimum licensing requirements.

It is also good to ask about the school's safety record and procedures, as well as its discipline policies. It can be helpful to ask how communication is handled, both between the school and parents, and between the teacher and parents.

You will also want to learn more about your child's potential teacher, such as her teaching credentials, what her personality is like, and why she enjoys teaching young children.

Finally, by visiting the school in person you can get a feel for the classroom and the outdoor space. Ideally you can also meet your child's potential teacher in person. You know your child better than anyone, so trust yourself when deciding whether or not the school is a place your child will thrive.

Wait List

You've found your favorite preschool only to realize that there are no openings! Most preschools have a waiting list and the sooner your child is on it, the better.

Many schools charge a small fee to join the waiting list. If it's financially feasible, you might consider signing up for at least two schools. It's much easier to decline a spot than to be without any options.

If your child's name is way down on the list, don't fret. Since many people sign up for multiple schools, it is likely that your child will move up the list faster as a result. Also, preschools fill classrooms by age and also attempt to keep a general balance of genders, so your child may be selected over others higher up on the list.

Course Correcting

Your little one has started preschool and you've given it some time, but he still isn't adjusting. You're worried that you made a mistake. Children thrive on stability and predictability, so switching preschools is not something to be taken lightly. That said, you should absolutely change schools if your child's safety or well-being is compromised.

You might also consider switching if your child's needs aren't being met. Maybe you chose an academic-based school and your child is struggling with the structure. Or maybe a play-

based classroom is too unstructured for your child who is itching to begin to read. Perhaps your child is having an unresolvable issue with a classmate that is souring his love for school.

If your child seems strongly resistant to attending school, beyond a reasonable adjustment period, or if your child shows any negative changes in personality, you may need to consider switching schools.

Choosing your child's preschool can feel daunting. At the end of the day, if you start early, do your research and trust your gut, you really are doing the best you can. While you hope that your first pick is the "right" pick, just like most aspects of parenting, we can learn, adjust and correct. Our children will only be the better for it. You've got this, parents!



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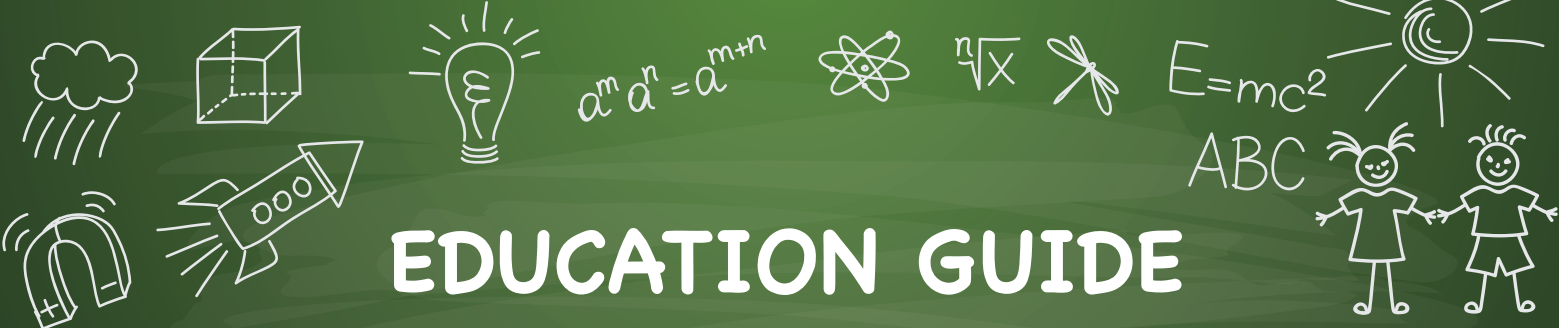
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Helping Children To Have Better Behavior

Q *I'm the grandmother of five grandchildren of varying ages. None will do what I say when I ask them to put away toys or help with chores. I hear, "I don't want to. You can't make me." I know teachers who complain that the behaviors in school are much worse than they have ever been. They describe more bullying, fighting, cussing and not following the teachers' directions or the rules. What is causing these unacceptable behaviors? How can I get better behavior from my grandchildren?*

A You ask what causes kids to refuse to do what you or others ask of them. The simple answer is the lack of consequences for their behavior. A more complex answer includes the fact that kids are suffering from not having gone to "in person school" and thus they have become out of the habit of following classroom rules. Other causes include seeking attention and feeling frustrated due to a lack of confidence or skills. A common reason that kids misbehave is that they get something out of acting out. In an article entitled "Breaking the Behavior Code," experts explain that "usually it is a response from other people that fuels inappropriate behavior." Whining and cursing get attention from adults. Sometimes this behavior may get children sent from the classroom or to their room, which grants them the escape they were seeking. Parents, grandparents, teachers and others

dealing with inappropriate behavior need to identify the reason behind a child's acting out. Not getting needs met can be a factor. Additional causes can stem from curriculum-related struggles and the classroom environment.

Mental health problems and staff or caregiver exhaustion can also lead children to misbehave. According to research reported by The Child Mind Institute, every classroom usually has one or two students dealing with stressors associated with poverty, neglect, abuse or trauma. Teachers can, and do, report suspected abuse or neglect. If parents don't get care for children with mental health issues, it's often because they don't know where to go or believe they cannot afford the care. Searching online for local, free or low-cost mental health care for children can offer several options.

How can you get better behavior from your grandchildren? Instituting consequences for the undesirable behavior is the answer. Another grandmother told me she was in the pool with several kids who were strangers to her. The kids had scattered toys all over the pool. The children started to leave without picking up the toys. This grandmother, a former teacher, said, "you have to pick up and put away the pool toys." They responded with, "We don't want to." She informed them that unless they picked up the toys, they could

not come back to the pool. The toys were picked up. If kids don't help with kitchen chores around meals, the consequence might be "no dessert unless you help." Even little kids can understand consequences.

Some readers who have never used consequences and have very well-behaved kids may argue that consequences are not necessary for good behavior. They should consider themselves lucky, or perhaps their children get the attention they crave by being good. Or maybe these parents shoot that look that my dad gave me which said, "You'll regret it if you get out of line."

What's important when a child does misbehave is to determine the reason for it and to set clear, logical consequences for misbehavior. Equally important is to offer children positive reinforcement when they behave well.



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Richardson, PhD, RN, CS, LPC, LMFT, is an Austin-based psychotherapist.



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SAVVY KIDS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

5 TIPS FOR PARENTS



LIFELINES

BRENDA SCHOOLFIELD

Schoolfield is a freelance medical writer based in Austin.

Recent news coverage about the negative effects of social media on kids have concerned parents.

"We make body image issues worse for one in three teen girls," reads an Instagram internal slide as reported by The Wall Street Journal. Other internal research found that "using Instagram is associated with increased risks of physical and mental health harms on young people, including depression, eating disorders and even suicide."

Now is the perfect time to reevaluate the impact of social media on your kids. Here are five tips to get you started:

Tip #1. Understand What Communication Platforms Your Child Uses

Kids access a variety of online communication platforms, depending upon their ages and interests. After a lecture by her dad about the potential harm that Instagram can cause, Claire, a Round Rock middle schooler, responded, "Why are you telling me all this? I don't even use Instagram." So, target your efforts based on the platforms your children use.

Popular apps other than Instagram include TikTok, YouTube, Snapchat, WhatsApp and Discord. Ask your child to show you the chat apps, social media and online games they use on a frequent basis. Ask for a "tour" of how each platform works and what activities your child engages in. You may want to download a few of your kid's favorite apps on your device and establish your own accounts to learn more.

Tip #2. Maintain a Supportive Communication Style

All parents want their children to talk with them freely and openly. Yet, some parents don't realize that an accusatory or blaming response may block future communication.

Focus on listening. Listen more than you talk. Validate your child's feelings instead of brushing them aside with comments such as "you know better than that!"

If your child summons the courage to tell you about something he shouldn't have done, don't immediately jump in with consequences. Stay calm. Express gratitude that your child confided in you. Give yourself some space to process the information and develop a sound strategy to avoid damage to future communication.

"Now is the perfect time to reevaluate the impact of social media on your kids."

Tip #3. Set Digital Boundaries

Most apps come with safety settings. Many have default privacy settings based on age. Sit with your child and look at the privacy settings in each of the apps. Check to see whether the account is public or private, who can see what your child shares, and who can send messages. Make sure the location services are turned off.

Caution your kids to preserve online anonymity. They should avoid sharing full names, addresses, phone numbers, passwords or credit card numbers. Encourage them to use a username to stay anonymous. Online friends should remain online.

Teach your child about the "block" feature. It can be used to avoid getting messages from particular people or seeing their posts. Talk to your child about cyberbullying and what to do if he or his friends are a target. Go to stopbullying.gov to learn more.

Make your child aware that anything sent out online will be available forever. Some people think that it's safe to send explicit photos through SnapChat because they self-destruct within about 10 seconds. However, the recipient could take a screenshot before the photo disappears and post it online.

Tip #4. Expand Your Child's World

If most of your child's free time is spent online, these interactions can disproportionately impact her sense of happiness and well-being. Here are some strategies that might help add balance:

Decrease screen time. Put away all devices during family mealtime and at least one hour before bedtime. Don't allow devices in your child's bedroom during sleeping hours – fix a charging station in the parents' room to eliminate after-hours use. Set limits on daily screen time.

Encourage hobbies, sports and extracurricular activities. Bring more fun to your children's lives by helping them develop new hobbies to channel creative energy. Enroll your child in a neighborhood sports team or afterschool activities at your church or community center.



Make one hour of daily exercise a priority. Physical activity reduces the risk of depression and builds a strong, healthy body. It can also be fun!

Involve your child in family activities and chores. Bring your child along as you walk the dog. Take a family bike ride. Help your kids learn new kitchen skills by making dinner together.

Tip #5. Model Self-Acceptance

Parents' behavior impacts how children see their world. Express acceptance of different types of body shapes, including your own. Focus on good nutrition and healthy eating as opposed to eating plans with the main goal of losing pounds. Practice self-care as a priority.



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January 2022

calendar

Go to austinfamily.com for expanded listings.

Any family-friendly events can be posted at austinfamily.com and will be made live once approved. Certain restrictions apply.

Saturday 1st New Year's Day

Texas Farmers Market at Lakeline. The market is located in the parking lot of Lakeline Mall across from Dillard's. Open every Saturday, rain or shine. 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Lakeline Mall, 11200 Lakeline Mall Drive. cedarparkfun.com.

Fortlandia at LBJ Wildflower Center.

Fortlandia is a collection of creative custom forts that invite play. Designed and built in the Texas Arboretum. Pick up an interactive "Passport" upon check-in. 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, 4801 La Crosse Ave. \$6-\$12. wildflower.org.

Ice Skating at Dreamland. Come enjoy ice skating with the entire family. Dreamland, 2770 W. Highway 290, Dripping Springs. \$10 includes skates. dreamland.us/ice-skating.

Holiday Light Stroll. Enjoy a holiday light stroll, horse-drawn hayrides, a decorated Christmas tree grove, family activities and more. Tree lighting ceremony at 5:30 p.m. on opening day. Lost Pines Resort, 575 Hyatt Lost Pines Road. hyattregencylostpines.com.

Cameron Park Zoo's Wild Lights. Join us for a holiday light spectacular with thousands of tiny lights, carolers and tasty treats at the zoo. Kids of all ages can visit with Santa. 6-9:30 p.m. Cameron Park Zoo, 1701 N. Fourth St. \$15. cameronparkzoo.com.

Winter Reading Challenge Begins (18+). We want to help you get through your TBR (to be read) pile. Pflugerville Public Library, 1008 W. Pfluger St. FREE. library.pflugervilletx.gov.

Sunday 2nd

H-E-B Free First Sunday. Celebrate the season with free exhibition admission. 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Bullock Texas State History Museum, 1800 Congress Ave. FREE. thestoryoftexas.com.

CONTINUED: Fortlandia at LBJ Wildflower Ctr, see Sat 1; Cameron Park Zoo's Wild Lights, see Sat 1; Ice Skating at Dreamland, see Sat 1.

Monday 3rd

CONTINUED: Fortlandia at LBJ Wildflower Ctr, see Sat 1; Ice Skating at Dreamland, see Sat 1.

Tuesday 4th

Lego Lab on the Porch. Build Lego WeDo 2.0 robots in an indoor, socially distanced workshop for ages 5 and older. Registration required. 3:15-4:15 p.m. Wells Branch Community Library, 15001 Wells Port Drive. FREE. wblibrary.org.

Teen Cosplay Club. Hang out with other cosplayers, share tips and tricks and decorate a mask (supplies provided). Registration is required. 6:30-7:30 p.m. Pflugerville Public Library, 1008 W. Pfluger St. FREE. library.pflugervilletx.gov.

CONTINUED: Fortlandia at LBJ Wildflower Ctr, see Sat 1; Ice Skating at Dreamland, see Sat 1.

Wednesday 5th

Tween Graphic Novel Book Club. An in-person graphic novel book club for kids ages 8-12. Registrants will receive a copy of the book to keep. 4:30-5:15 p.m. Pflugerville Public Library, 1008 W. Pfluger St. FREE. library.pflugervilletx.gov.

CONTINUED: Fortlandia at LBJ Wildflower Center, see Sat 1; Cameron Park Zoo's Wild Lights, see Sat 1.

Thursday 6th

Kids 5-8 Club: Sewn Reindeer Craft. Families with children ages 5 to 8 may register to participate in a reindeer craft activity. 3:30-4 p.m. Pflugerville Public Library, 1008 W. Pfluger St. FREE. library.pflugervilletx.gov.

Cirque Italia. Have you ever had such a vivid dream you thought it was real? Cirque Italia has pulled out all the stops this year to take you on a magical dream adventure. 7:30-9:30 p.m. Barton Creek Square, 2901 S. Capital of Texas Highway. \$10 and up. cirqueitalia.com.

CONTINUED: Fortlandia at LBJ Wildflower Center, see Sat 1; Cameron Park Zoo's Wild Lights, see Sat 1.

Friday 7th

CONTINUED: Fortlandia at LBJ Wildflower Center, see Sat 1; Cameron Park Zoo's Wild Lights, see Sat 1; Cirque Italia, see Thu 6.

Saturday 8th

CONTINUED: Texas Farmers Market at Lakeline, see Sat 1; Fortlandia at LBJ Wildflower Center, see Sat 1; Cameron Park Zoo's Wild Lights, see Sat 1; Cirque Italia, see Thu 6.

Sunday 9th

Sunday Funday: Family Embroidery. The Neill-Cochran House Museum welcomes children of all ages to do a traditional activity on the lawn. 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. 2310 San Gabriel St. FREE. nchmuseum.org.

The Adventures of Tortoise and Hare. The Paramount Theatre Discovery Series presents "The Adventures of Tortoise and Hare," a glow-in-the-dark adventure that blends puppetry, technology and dance. Crafts begin at 1 p.m. Show at 2 p.m. Paramount Theatre, 713 Congress Ave. \$21 and up. tickets.austintheatre.org.

CONTINUED: Fortlandia at LBJ Wildflower Center, see Sat 1; Cirque Italia, see Thu 6.

Monday 10th

CONTINUED: Fortlandia at LBJ Wildflower Center, see Sat 1; Cirque Italia, see Thu 6.

Tuesday 11th

Kindergarten Tour. If you are considering a private Christian education for kindergarten, come explore our campus and see what Redeemer has to offer. 9-10 a.m. Redeemer Lutheran School, 1500 W. Anderson Lane. FREE. redeemerschool.net.

Texas History Tuesdays: Singin' the Blues in Texas. Connect with the Bullock Museum over videoconference during this live presentation. 10-11 a.m. Bullock Texas State History Museum, 1800 Congress Ave. FREE. thestoryoftexas.com.

Homeschool Club: Towel Origami.

Homeschool families with kids and teens ages 5-18 are invited to learn to fold animals with small towels (towel origami) together at the library. Registration is required. 2-3 p.m. Pflugerville Public Library, 1008 W. Pfluger St. FREE. library.pflugervilletx.gov.

Wednesday 12th

CONTINUED: Fortlandia at LBJ Wildflower Center, see Sat 1; Cirque Italia, see Thu 6.

Thursday 13th

Kids 5-8 Club: Torn Paper Snowman. Families with kids ages 5 to 8 may register to participate in an in-person holiday craft activity. 3:30-4 p.m. Pflugerville Public Library, 1008 W. Pfluger St. FREE. library.pflugervilletx.gov.

Little Texans: Mystery. Share stories, sing songs and expand your imagination. Bullock Texas State History Museum, 1800 Congress Ave. FREE. thestoryoftexas.com.

Friday 14th

After-hours Movie Night: Black Widow (rated PG-13). Join us at the library for an after-hours movie screening of "Black Widow." Registration required. Registration begins at 8 a.m. one week before the event. 7-9:45 p.m. Pflugerville Public Library, 1008 W. Pfluger St. FREE. library.pflugervilletx.gov.

Saturday 15th

Kirby Hall School Open House. Looking for new school options? Visit Kirby Hall School to learn more about this private school located in Central Austin near the UT campus. 10 a.m. to noon. Kirby Hall School, 306 W. 29th St. FREE. kirbyhallschool.org.

CONTINUED: Texas Farmers Market at Lakeline, see Sat 1; Fortlandia at LBJ Wildflower Center, see Sat 1; Cirque Italia, see Thu 6.

Sunday 16th

CONTINUED: Fortlandia at LBJ Wildflower Center, see Sat 1; Cirque Italia, see Thu 6.

Monday 17th

MLK DAY

Martin Luther King Jr. Walk. Remember! Celebrate! Act! A day on, not a day off! Join the walk for peace, justice and equality that begins at Elgin Depot Museum at 14 Depot St. at 10 a.m. A program follows at 11 a.m. at Booker T. Washington Elementary School. elgintx.com.

Tuesday 18th

CONTINUED: Fortlandia at LBJ Wildflower Center, see Sat 1; Lego Lab on the Porch, see Tue 4; Kindergarten Tour, see Tue 11.

Thursday 20th

Science Thursday. Discover the science of the Story of Texas. Bullock Texas State History Museum, 1800 Congress Ave. FREE. thestoryoftexas.com.

Saturday 22nd

CONTINUED: Texas Farmers Market at Lakeline, see Sat 1.

Tuesday 25th

Homeschool Club: Cartooning Workshop. Homeschool families with kids and teens ages 5-18 are invited to a hands-on cartooning workshop with cartoonist David Pitts. Registration is required. 2-3 p.m. Pflugerville Public Library, 1008 W. Pfluger St. FREE. library.pflugervilletx.gov.

CONTINUED: Lego Lab on the Porch, see Tue 4; Kindergarten Tour, see Tue 11.

Wednesday 26th

Kawaii Club. A craft club for fans of manga, anime and everything kawaii. Recommended for kids ages 9-14. 4:30-5:15 p.m. Pflugerville Public Library, 1008 W. Pfluger St. FREE. library.pflugervilletx.gov.

Thursday 27th

Kids 5-8 Club: Cardboard Treasure Box Decoration. Families with children ages 5 to 8 may register to participate in an in-person craft activity to decorate cardboard treasure boxes. 3:30-4 p.m. Pflugerville Public Library, 1008 W. Pfluger St. FREE. library.pflugervilletx.gov.



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I Hate January

JUST FOR GRINS

CATE BERRY

Berry is an Austin-based children's book author and mother of two. She also teaches writing workshops for young people at cateberry.com.



As much as I love the holidays, I loathe January with equal fervor.

Some months remind you of colors. January is the color of baby poo. Its very existence birthed the shade of ochre. Not everyone gets an official holiday in January. The shortest month of the year has two holidays. One with a president!

January is so fresh. So new. So squeaky clean with that extra week and everything. Sure, New Year's is fun. But let's face it, the aftermath isn't pretty. And the whole resolutions thing is a spiral of shame countdown.

The kids are extra grumpy. Who can blame them? Visions of sugar plums have melted down the drain, replaced by the stark hell of back to school and cold mac and cheese lunches. Parents aren't far behind with work catch-up and breaking in another January in stretchy pants.

I hate waiting for February. And I hate the bills arriving that I charged in a George Bailey stupor of jubilee. I hate the never-ending pile of recycling. And the sad streetlights, naked of tinsel or anything fun, switching from red to yellow to green in their ordinary, timely fashion. I miss the garlands, the haphazard Santas, and that nonstop Mariah Carey song that's paved new neural pathways in my forever altered holiday brain.

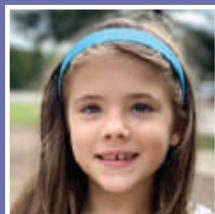
I hate the whole stinking month.

I hate that this column is taking forever to write. And that my fingers hurt from typing out so many things that I dislike about January. I'm aging thinking about the Januaries yet to come. And the ones I've endured so far. But as I fire off my laundry list of January unpleasanties, I'm reminded that time marches on.

Unlike the long, slow slog of January.



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CLIMB ON!

Welcome to "Places To Go and Things To Do!" Each month, we'll alternate between cool, new places to go and a family-friendly thing to do at home. This month, Heather O'Keeffe Gardner takes us climbing!

Climbing is one of the fastest growing sports in the country, especially after its inclusion in the 2021 Olympics and American Nathaniel Coleman's podium finish.

Austin is fortunate to have a wealth of opportunities for climbers of all experiences and skill levels. In addition to building superb strength and stamina, the sport provides excellent lessons in logic and problem solving. Figuring out how to get from Point A to Point D is half the fun.

If you and your family are interested in giving it a try, here are some pointers.

INDOOR CLIMBING

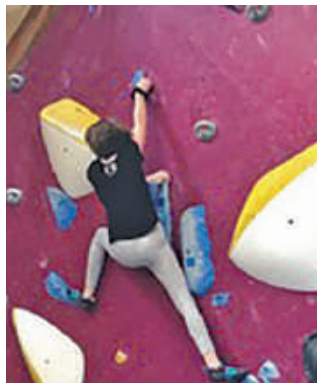
Currently, we have two excellent climbing gym companies with two locations each: Austin Bouldering Project and Crux Climbing Center. They offer general day-pass admission along with structured climbing lessons and programs.

Even better, both gyms offer all levels of youth programs from parties to parents' nights out to recreational and competitive teams. If you are looking for activities to keep your kids busy during school breaks, each offers week-long camps.

Climbing does require some special equipment; fortunately, the gyms provide rentals. You'll need climbing shoes, which are long and narrow with stiff soles to help you balance on the tiniest of holds on the wall. Running shoes, with their flexible soles, won't work.

Powdered chalk is another essential. Climbers dust it on their hands to absorb sweat so their hands and fingers don't slip off holds. Be prepared to come home covered in the powder, possibly with a chalky handprint or two on everyone's shirt. Climbers of all ages and abilities seem unable to resist putting chalk handprints on each other, especially if the other person is wearing a black shirt.

Currently, Crux South is the only gym that has roped climbing. If you and your kids want to give it a try, Crux provides rental harnesses.



OUTDOOR CLIMBING

Often climbers who have done a few sessions in a gym want to head outside to climb. Central Texas boasts some of the best climbing spots in the state, with areas at Enchanted Rock, Milton Reimers Ranch and the Barton Creek Greenbelt. However, climbing outside is very different from climbing in a gym, and you'll need some extra equipment as well as instruction. It's not as simple as heading out and finding big rocks.

There are two excellent companies that lead outdoor climbing sessions: Rock-About and Texas Climbing Adventures. In addition to providing expert instructors and guides, they supply the ropes, harnesses, crash pads and helmets you'll need to climb safely in the wild.

Climbing is a unique sport that is welcoming and inclusive to everyone. Climbers like to hang and talk about climbing and provide tips to each other. Competitive climbers, especially at the elite levels, are all business on the wall, but once they are back on the ground they cheer on their competitors, no matter which team.

My oldest and youngest kids have been involved in competitive climbing for more than a dozen years, and their teammates are like a second family. The sport has provided lessons that help them outside of the gyms from learning to conquer fear to being willing to take on new challenges. So grab your kids and head out to one of the gyms. As they say in the sport, Climb On!

HEATHER O'KEEFFE GARDNER
Heather is a mom of four and mild-mannered copy editor. She has spent the past 13 years hanging out in gyms while her kids climb.



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