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Catch Austin Family magazine live on “Good Day Austin” every Thursday morning.

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LEARNING CURVE
ALISON BOGLE



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SMART SCREEN
DR. BENJAMIN KRAMER



Sofia loves everything pink and unicorn. Her favorite things to do are play with her little brother, ride roller coasters and spend time with her family. Sofia has a December

birthday. Photo taken by Jordan Ashley Photography, Cedar Park.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

JESS ARCHER

Archer is a writer, a mom of two kids and a wife. She is the author of the memoir, "Finding Home with the Beatles, Bob Dylan and Billy Graham."

Thirteen years ago this December 9th my son was born and I became a mother. Time seemed to stop that day, though the world around me was bustling around getting ready for the holidays.

Now, every time December rolls around I wonder how I ever managed to have a baby during the holidays. Who can find the time? That's why I'm particularly grateful for our feature article this month about finding ways to celebrate December birthdays with intentionality, despite the busyness of the season.

In that same vein of thought, our Lifelines article this month is all about ways to reduce holiday stress, and we could all use a reminder about that.

In our education column, Alison Bogle provides parents of high schoolers with a "cheat sheet" for thinking about the college application process. It's a great article to bookmark for when that stage of life rolls around. Don't forget to watch Fox News 7 on Thursday mornings to catch Alison discussing articles from Austin Family magazine.

We know you're juggling a lot during the holidays, so remember to breathe deeply and be thoughtful about carving out family time. 2024 will be here before we know it, so live in the present and enjoy the holiday season.

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Kids On Key

KMFA Classical 89.5 has launched the new Kids on Key initiative aimed at building access to music in Central Texas schools by providing free musical instruments and other classroom resources. Area public school teachers can register at www.kmfa.org/kidsonkey using their school district email. Registration includes selecting instrument needs and other benefits they wish to receive. To date, more than 40 classrooms have signed up with registration still open.

While the current resource list is dedicated to elementary levels, KMFA looks to expand the program to accommodate middle and high school levels. Current resources include: ukeleles, boomwhackers, recorders, percussion sets, xylophones, instrument repair kits and online music curriculum subscriptions.



All resources will be supplied and delivered through a partnership with local Austin music retailer, Strait Music.

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8-Year-old Entrepreneur

Anna Claire started teaching herself how to hand tie balloons when she was seven years old. With her mom's help, she practiced for almost six months and then decided to start her own business. Now Anna Claire's custom balloon business, What's Poppin', is attracting quite a lot of attention.

Anna Claire loves to try cool new designs and can be contacted for business on her Instagram account @whatspoppinac.



Anna Claire and her What's Poppin' balloon banner

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Clients purchase their balloons on Amazon or in stores and then Anna Claire goes to work creating her beautiful designs. Recently, she was asked to create the balloon garland for Bowie High School's homecoming dance and for their cross-country banquet.



Early Submissions for ARTFEST 2024

An early call for artists and food vendors is now open for the 16th annual Sunset Valley ARTFEST2024. ARTFEST is a one-day, free admission event hosted by the City of Sunset Valley Arts Commission, held at the Tony Burger Center in Sunset Valley. Parking is FREE and readily available on-site.

The event includes a wide variety of unique art from over 100 artisans showcasing their handmade works, including oil paintings, drawings, sculptures, pottery, glass creations, jewelry designs and much more. ARTFEST also showcases live music from local musicians on two stages, a separate area for family and children's fun with interactive activities and local food trucks.

ARTIST and FOOD VENDOR registration is now open for the event.



Shark!

Sharks, a new special exhibition, is now open at the Bullock Texas State History Museum. The exhibition brings to life the incredible diversity of sharks with dozens of life-sized models. The exhibit offers visitors a unique look at prehistoric and modern species, their habitats and hunting styles and the conservation threats these spectacular animals face today. Sharks is a bilingual exhibition, presented in both English and Spanish.

Programs and events celebrating sharks and other sea life will be offered throughout the run of the exhibit, including talks with experts, children's activities and film screenings.

Sharks will be on view at the Bullock Museum until March 24, 2024. For more information, visit www.thestoryoftexas.com.



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How to Reduce Holiday Stress

LIFELINES
CHELSEA COHEN

Cohen is a Licensed Professional Counselor-Supervisor (LPC-S) at Ascension Seton Behavioral Health.

While the holidays are meant to be a time of joy, they can also be a time of stress for many people because of work pressure, relationship conflicts or feeling overwhelmed by expectations.

According to a study by the American Heart Association, there is an increase in the occurrence of heart attacks and heart-related deaths during the holiday season, which may be due to stress, heavy alcohol consumption, a fatty diet or a combination of such factors.

Stress causes a number of both short-term and long-term adverse effects on the body, and it can lead to high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes and obesity. It's important to monitor stress levels, particularly during the holidays and find ways to manage stress.

Strategies for managing holiday stress:

Limit spending

- Set a budget to ensure all your usual expenses are accounted for, and plan for any additional holiday spending including travel plans and parties you may be hosting. Budget for what you must spend on gifts – be organized and realistic.
- Avoid temptation by limiting the amount of time you spend at stores or shopping online. Manage impulsive spending by making a list of gifts to buy and sticking to it, as well as your budget.

Manage expectations

- Remember what is important during the holiday season in order to help manage your expectations. Hosting the perfect party or giving the perfect gift is less important

than quality time spent with loved ones.

- Plan ahead. Think first before committing to any responsibility or social event. Don't make any snap decisions and give yourself time to reflect on any proposed commitment or responsibility. You can always tell others you need to double-check your calendar before committing.
- Take some time out to recharge and refocus. Be sure that you find time to relax and recharge your body and mind.
- Keep your reflections and goal-setting positive. During the holiday season, individuals are more likely to reflect upon their achievements for the year (or lack thereof). Failures to reach certain

goals such as losing weight, addressing health issues or getting a promotion at work can weigh on you at the end of the year. Instead of focusing on what went unaccomplished, try maintaining a positive outlook as you reflect and set goals for the new year.

Practice mental health self-care

- Acknowledge your feelings. The holidays bring on a variety of feelings – not all of which are joyful. If you recently experienced a loss, remind yourself that it's normal to feel sadness and grief. It's okay to cry and express your feelings, as such expressions can often bring a sense of relief.
- Ask for help. If you feel lonely or isolated, ask for help from family, friends or members of your community. Lean on your support groups for companionship and reminders that you are not alone.

Avoid overindulging

- Excessive stress raises appetites and cravings for sugary and fatty foods, and chronic drinking can lead to increased stress levels. Aim to maintain a healthy diet during the holidays to avoid weight gain and additional stress.
- If you choose to drink alcohol, keep the number of drinks to a minimum and alternate between water or club soda between alcoholic libations.
- Maintain a healthy diet by eating high-protein snacks throughout the day so you don't over-indulge in one meal. Make simple food swaps, like eating whole-wheat bread instead of white, or brown rice instead of white. And be mindful of portion sizes, especially when enjoying seasonal treats.

Go for a walk

- Regular exercise can help lower stress levels by decreasing tension and boosting and stabilizing your mood. Exercise releases endorphins that can improve your ability to sleep and reduce stress.

- If possible, exercise outside. Being active and getting sun exposure can both lift your mood and reduce the likelihood of experiencing seasonal affective disorder, or SAD.

Have some fun

- Laughter stimulates your heart, lungs and muscles and also releases endorphins. Laughter also goes a long way in helping to

lighten your mood and minimize the stresses associated with this time of year.

- Watch funny movies. There are plenty of options for holiday comedy flicks, and relaxing and laughing with your family can decrease relationship tensions while increasing those happy chemicals.

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The advertisement features a green and white color scheme. At the top, the 'Kid to Kid' logo is in blue and white. Below it, the word 'CASH' is written in large, bold, red letters. Underneath 'CASH' is a green banner with the text 'FOR KIDS' STUFF' in white. Below the banner, 'WINTER STYLES FOR LESS' is written in red. To the left of the text are icons for a yellow t-shirt, a green stroller, a stack of colorful blocks, a blue shopping basket, and a green dollar bill. To the right of the text is a photograph of a young girl in a red dress and white hat pushing a red and black Radio Flyer wagon filled with wrapped gifts. At the bottom, a green banner contains the address and phone number.

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WINNERS ANNOUNCED

Imagine you are stranded on a deserted island. Describe the first day

For the last 20 years Austin Family magazine has hosted a Young Writers Contest for 4th and 5th graders. The magazine provides the topic and students write 50-300 words for their entries. Our judge then selects winners and runners up in each grade and makes a surprise presentation to them at their respective schools. Winners this year were given a party at Dart 'em Up, engraved plaques, signed copies of the judge's latest two books and their essays published in Austin Family magazine. Congratulations to all four winners and thank you to all who participated.



5th Grade Winner
CAROLINE CRISP
Oak Hill Elementary

My eyes flutter open still blurry from when I fell. "green" I mumble. I jolt straight up and look around. "WHERE AM I!?!?" I climb to the top of a rock. "Whoa" In front of me there is a whole island of trees, and a giant building which seems to be an abandoned school. "Creepy" I think to myself. I jump off the rock and realize I'm in my pajamas. "Not important" I tell myself but I still feel slightly uncomfortable even though they were the softest things in the world. I start to try and find something or someone that might help me along my way. I'm wading through a path in the woods when I spot a rusty knife. I pick it up and use it to cut down the plants that are in my way. I peacefully walk as I examine the trees and see odd carvings. "Cool, it must've belonged to Native Americans or maybe cave people? But don't they live in caves. I mean they got to live in caves that's why they're called cave

people. But then aga-" I hear a branch crack. "Who's there?!" I scream holding the knife in front of me as if it were a mighty broadsword. A raven comes out of the mysterious forest of trees and starts nipping at the end of my pajama pants. "Hey stop that! Shoo!" I wave my hand at it but it eventually nips a piece off. "HEY!" I yell. I try to grab it but it just flies to the top of my head. "I guess this is fine" I say blowing a feather out of my face. I keep walking the path with my loyal raven who I had decided to name Martin. Finally, even though it was dark, I reached the doors of the abandoned school. I look at Martin. "This is gonna test your loyalty, dude" I mumble at him. I open the doors of the school and it creaks open. Martin flies off my head into the school and disappears. "DUDE WHAT THE HECK? THATS NOT FAIR!" I screech into the school. Moments later he returns with a flashlight in his beak. He drops it at my feet and fondly plops back

on my head. "Awwww thanks Martin" I say trying to pet him in the best way possible, whatever that is. I turn on the flashlight which surprisingly works and look around the school. Banners are ripped down on the floor. I go into the teachers lounge and find some food that been kept in the refrigerator and start shoving it down, just noticing how hungry I am. I turn around going to go back outside. But I see glowing eyes in the darkness. A tiger steps out jumping to attack me and-"WAKEEEEE UPPPPPPPP" my sister yells at me. I groan. "What time is it..?!" I jolt up and bang my head on the wall. "WHERE'S MARTIN!!!?" I scream, rubbing my head. "I dunno who that guy is but I do know that you should get dressed... or dad will get mad at you." She says seriously. I nod and get out of my bed. I look down at my pajama pants and realize a piece ripped off. "Hm" I say smiling, knowing that it wasn't a dream at all.



4th Grade Winner
SABRA WILLIAMS
Valor Academy South

Mom looks horrified. Her face is as pale as a ghost. "Tsunami warning, get to the basement!" she stutters.

"How could thi----" I don't finish my sentence.

It's too late. Water is flooding the house. I try to come up for air, but the tsunami is already here.

Hours later I wake up and sand is in my eyes. "Where am I?"

I sit up and look around. I'm on a small island in the middle of the

ocean. "Mom? Dad?" I shout. They're nowhere in sight. I take a walk around the island. Over the hillside there is a bunch of plants and berries. I gather as much as I can carry. I start walking back to the shore, then I hear a SNAP of a twig and turn around. There behind me is a huge cat-like creature. But before I know it, it's gone. I see its tracks and follow them to a cave. The sun is setting on the horizon. I lay down. As I close my eyes, I hear a roar off in the distance...I shudder at what may happen next. Then I feel a horrible pain in my leg. I look

down there are rashes all over. Oh, no! The berries I ate were poisonous! I should have known. Then I go back to bed.

There is no one else on the island, so tomorrow I will start working on building a shelter. I'll need to collect supplies and continue to search for food. For now I'll dream of what tomorrow will be like. There are frightening things left and right, but I'm up to the challenge. And Mom would be so proud.



5th Grade Runner Up
JUNGYOON LEE
Elsa England
Elementary School

I shoot my eyes open. I blink a few times before I see my surroundings. I can feel the wet sand and salty water dripping from my clothes. Sadness grips my heart as I imagine my mom and dad looking for me from the boat, thinking I'm gone. I feel tears coming to my eyes and dripping onto the sand. I need my parents to help me. Then, I realized I had to survive first. My belly growled and my throat was itching from thirst. I needed shelter too.

I look at my shadow. It's short. Phew! It's still noon. I have

some time before night. I see a nice, big, shady coconut tree. Coconuts! I find a long piece of wood. I go deep into the woods to find a sharp rock. That was when a loud "CACH!" scared me. I panicked. I ran, fast. I stood next to my "shelter tree", breathing hard. Nothing follows me. "Phew!"

I grab the stone and connect it to the long wood with the strand of ivy I got tangled up in. I poked the coconuts. They're, luckily, brown. I start cutting the parts connecting the coconuts to the tree. I do it for a few minutes

and the coconut bundles come crashing down next to me. Yes! I pick up my pole and tear the stone from the ivy's grip. Then, I crack the coconut shell with a few well-aimed hits. I drink the water. Perfect.

I run to a banana tree. I can eat from there. But, tomorrow and the day after, I will build something to get off this deserted island and find my parents. That is my goal as long as I'm here.



4th Grade Runner Up
EVE THUOT
St. Andrews Episcopal
School

My ship is sinking. I grab my backpack of supplies and jump. It feels like I am falling forever. I hit the freezing water and my life jacket inflates. I'm alone. I don't know how long I was at sea. All I know is I'm on an island. It is early in the morning when I realize I'm hungry, wet and miserable. I open my bag and inside are a tent, a flashlight, a fishing pole and a water filter. I was going to go camping with my dad but not now. When I first explore my island there is a lake with a lot of bushes and

food. I was just exploring the lake when I couldn't move my feet. It is quicksand. Just then I reach out and grab the nearest vine and pull. It feels like I am being pulled in two. I finally get out and I'm exhausted. Next I need to set up my tent. But first I need to find the perfect spot. Not in the quicksand and not in the jungle. I finally find the perfect place to put the tent. Waterfront property! Next I need to find food. I take out the fishing pole and put the bait on it. Then I wait. For a long time.

And then I get the bite. I reel it in and it is a huge green bass. Dinner is served. I get back to camp and make myself a bed from some palm leaves from a coconut tree. I eat my roasted bass for dinner and lie down under the bright stars twinkling and shimmering. And close my eyes. I may be alone, it is only me, but I am going to make it. Just wait and see.

7 Tips for Celebrating December Birthdays

CATHERINE MICHALK

Michalk is a native Austinite, writer and mom of three. You can follow her family's adventures at www.catherinemichalk.com

December is touted as the “Most Wonderful Time of the Year,” but parents know it’s really the “Most Jam-Packed Time of the Year.” With Christmas parties, winter recitals, and travel plans galore, it’s a wonder that any family can fit in holiday traditions, much less plan and host a birthday party. So, how can parents of December babies be intentional about celebrating their kids during this busy time? If you’re the parent of a December-born child, try these tips to help your child feel special on his or her birthday.

MAKE THEIR DAY

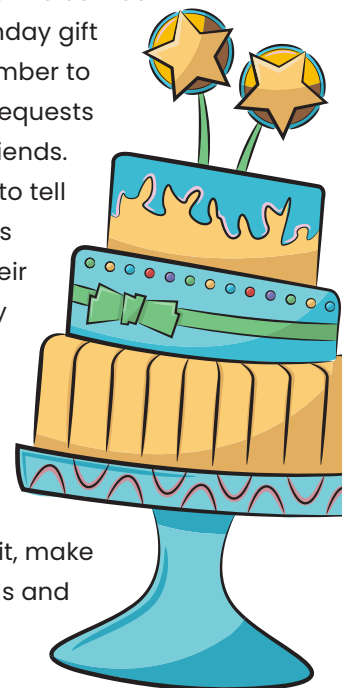
If holiday commitments can't be set aside on his actual birthday, designate another day in December as the “substitute” birth date. On the designated day, fill his room with balloons, let him choose every meal or take him to his favorite trampoline park or fun zone. Play his favorite (non-Christmas) music during a birthday breakfast. The goal is to make sure your child feels seen and loved amidst the craziness that is December, and that can happen on any day that works for your family.



memorable. Care and love don't have to come in wrapping paper—ask your friends and family to give your child something as small as a Facetime call or birthday card in the mail. It will remind your child that he isn't forgotten in all the holiday bustle.

MAKE GIFT REQUESTS

To try and avoid the combo Christmas/birthday gift situation, remember to make specific requests of family and friends. Don't be afraid to tell family members to designate their gifts specifically for birthday or Christmas, and don't set the birthday gifts under the tree. While you're at it, make sure your friends and family know to wrap birthday



ENLIST HELP

While you are the most important influence in your child's life, there are plenty of others who also think your child is pretty great. Whether it is a grandparent, family friend, or even your child's teacher, reach out for help to make the day

gifts in birthday paper. While it may seem like a silly detail, we promise your kid will appreciate it.



SETTING THE DATE

People are partied out in December, so when you're planning a December birthday party, remember: the further away from Christmas Day the better. If your child's birthday is during the first few weeks of December, plan a party right after Thanksgiving before the focus is all on Christmas. If his birthday is during the second half of December, consider planning a party for the first week of January when friends are more likely to be in town. Whatever you do, send out your invitations early so that your child's friends can get the date on their calendars ASAP.

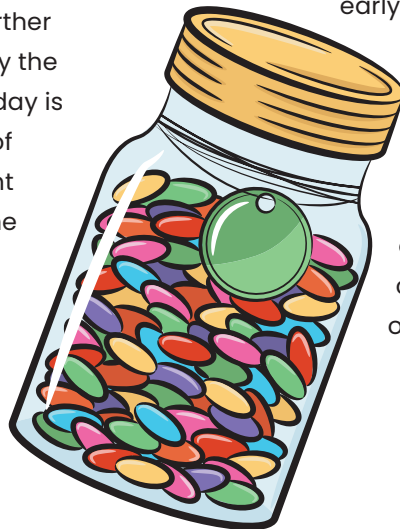
GET OUTSIDE

December in Austin is typically mild enough for an outdoor party. (In fact, most native Austinites have childhood memories of wearing shorts on Christmas Day.) After weeks of candy, cookies and hot cocoa your guests will appreciate some outdoor time. Choose a theme

that isn't related to Christmas so that your guests don't feel like they're at another Christmas party. Just remember to have a backup plan in case the weather turns sour.

ORDER PARTY SUPPLIES EARLY

Experienced parents say it is surprisingly difficult to find birthday party supplies in December because most retailers switch their merchandise to holiday themes. If your little one is dead set on a cowgirl-themed birthday party, start shopping for supplies in November. If nothing else, getting your supplies



early will keep you from running around town the morning of the party or ordering overpriced cowgirl plates off Amazon.

CONSIDER A SUMMER PARTY

Finally, consider skipping a winter party altogether. Ask your child if he would like to host a half-birthday party in the summer. This is a really fun alternative for December babies who have always wanted a pool party. Just make sure your kid is truly on board with waiting six months for a party and do something low-key like a family dinner with a few small gifts on his actual birthday.



No matter how you celebrate, just remember the goal is to make your child feel seen and special during one of the busiest seasons of the year. A little intentionality goes a long way in making December "The Most Wonderful Time of the Year," for December babies.



Holiday Guide

Fun Activities

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ALISON BOGLE

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.

How to 'Think College' in High School

The college application process has certainly changed. While I was aware that I needed to keep my grades up in high school, I didn't give much thought to college until I entered my junior year. Today's students are encouraged to keep college in mind beginning in 9th grade. With this Austin Family "cheat sheet," the process of preparing your child for college might still seem daunting, but much more manageable.

9TH GRADE

- **Grades.** Course grades in high school are what colleges will look at to determine eligibility and grades will paint a picture of how your child might perform in college. Talk with your child about the importance of starting right and putting in the effort to keep up his grades.
- **Extracurriculars and Community Service.** Questions about extracurricular activities and community service almost always appear on applications for both college and scholarships, but joining a

lot of extracurriculars does not equal a more attractive applicant. Being involved, sticking with something over the long term, and finding a way to lead or give back are what will help your child stand out.

- **Employment.** Holding a job outside of school is not necessary, but if your child does work, talk to him about performing well and building a relationship with his manager so that the manager can serve as a great reference.
- **References.** Over the next four years, your child should strive to build a strong relationship with at least one teacher, coach, manager, pastor or non-profit leader. The stronger the relationships, the better. It will help your child to have robust references for his applications. In addition, being able to communicate with adults is an essential skill that many students in today's digital world tend to lack. This a way for your child to really stand out.
- **Keep a log.** Encourage your child to keep a record of everything he does from

freshman to senior year that could be used on a college application. It will make life much, much easier when it comes time to fill out applications.

- **Get to know your school counselor.** Research has shown that high school students have greater college-related outcomes when they interact with a counselor in ninth grade.
- **Consider finances.** If possible, talk to a financial advisor during your child's freshman year to build a plan and to make sure that money is in the right types of accounts well in advance of his junior year. Too much money in a child's name may not be wise.

10TH GRADE

- **Discuss college fit.** Encourage your child to think about the type of school that would be best suited for him. Is that a big school or a small school? Close to home or far away? What type of culture is he looking for? There is no right answer, but it does take some discernment, so

encourage your child to start thinking about it now.

- Plan campus visits. The ideal time to begin visiting college campuses is the summer before your child's junior year and/or during his junior year. By this point, he will have a clearer idea of his interests, the right type of college and his goals. This can take some planning, so start thinking ahead.
- ACT & SAT. It is usually recommended that ACT and SAT tests be taken once the majority of a student's advanced math, language arts, and science classes have been completed. In most cases, this means testing in a student's junior year. Because tests are only given at certain times during the year, be sure to plan ahead.

11TH GRADE

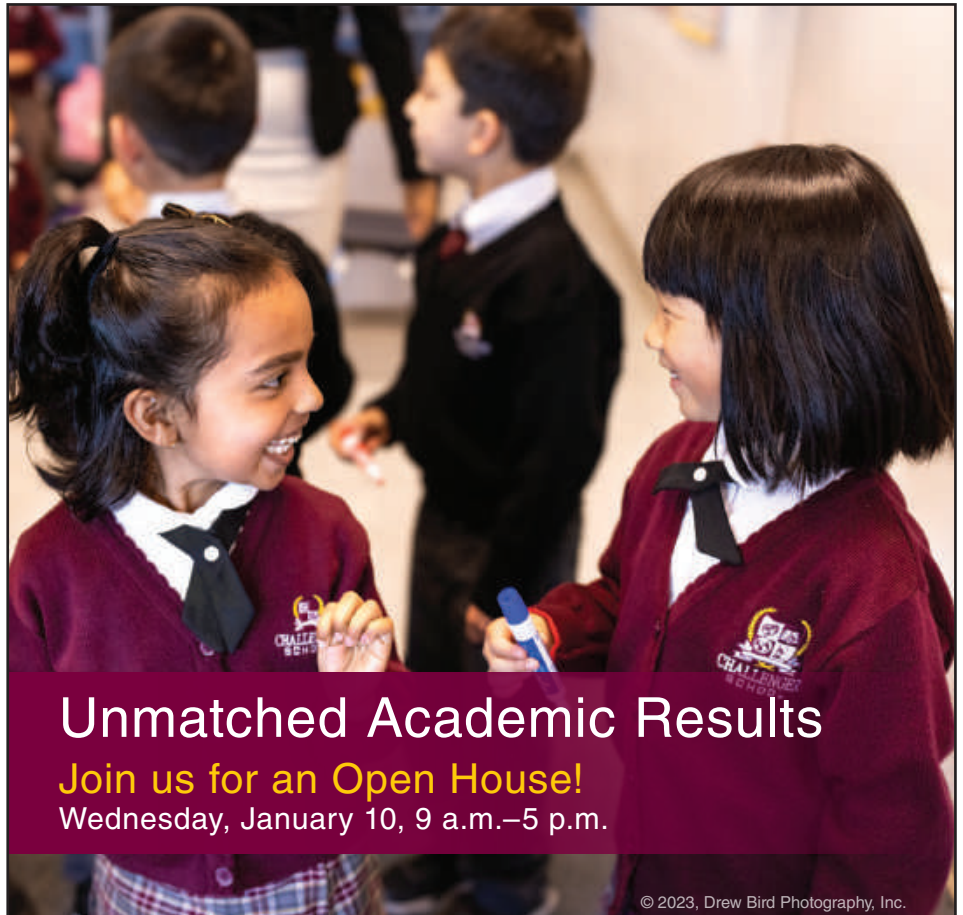
- Explore scholarship options. The start of your child's junior year is a great time to begin looking at scholarship options. There are a number of scholarships out there and not all are based on exceptional grades. Your child's counselor can help point you in the right direction.
- Discuss realistic college choices. An important message for your child to hear is that grades are important, but he does not need to be in the top 10 percent to be accepted to a great school. Also, an expensive school doesn't always equal a great experience. Talk to your child about finding a school that will be the right fit for his high school grades, interests and your family's financial picture and values.
- Essay topics. Beginning junior year, encourage your child to start thinking about topics that would make for a great college application essay. He can even jot them down in a notebook expressly for that purpose. This will help reduce stress and will likely make for a much better essay when the time comes.

12TH GRADE

- Encourage flexibility and resiliency. Many kids picture themselves attending a certain school before the acceptance letter has arrived, which can lead to unnecessary heartbreak. Encourage your child not to get too attached to any one outcome.
- FAFSA. Every family, regardless of income, should fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid

(FAFSA®) during the fall of your child's senior year. Submitting the form is free and it gives access to the largest source of aid available to help pay for college. In addition, many states and colleges will use your family's FAFSA information to determine eligibility for state and school aid.

There is so much to think about when preparing your child (and your family) for college that it is easy to become overwhelmed. Remember, you don't have to get everything right. Prioritize what is most important for your child and don't forget to keep those grades up.



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Written by YMCA staff

At-Home Activities for the Holidays

There's no shortage of family activities around Austin during the holiday season. But sometimes you just want to keep it simple. Here are some ideas from the YMCA for at-home activities that will create special memories for your family.




Decorate your front door. Maybe you don't have the opportunity to put up an elaborate Christmas light display. That doesn't mean you can't show your spirit. One of the simplest and most eye-catching things you can do is decorate your front door like a giant Christmas present. Pick out a bold color of wrapping paper and a sharply contrasting ribbon color. After that, you'll just need tape and scissors to make your display and get in on the fun.

Plan and make a special family holiday meal. Cooking together is an incredible bonding and learning experience. Many valuable lessons go into the process, from envisioning a favorite feast, to finding recipes, to purchasing the ingredients and then making the dish. Take the opportunity to do this together, with each family member responsible for one course. Talk about what you'd like to make. Research your recipes and then go to the grocery together. Once you're ready to begin, be sure to plan out the time requirements for each dish and sequence your preparations so that everything is finished in the appropriate order. Keep in mind, there may be mistakes and minor frustrations along the way. There always are, but that's part of the process. In the end, your kids will feel a new pride and self-confidence.

Pick a gently used toy and donate it. Our children need to understand how blessed we are to live in a community as fortunate as Austin. Parents at all socioeconomic levels can instill a deep sense of gratitude in their children by helping them recognize the abundance that surrounds them and develop a sense of empathy for those who face greater challenges. Start with a simple practice of helping your child pick out a gently used but much-loved toy that

she's outgrown and donate it. Go together to the donation location so she creates a physical connection to the act of giving. As you leave, talk about the fun memories your child had while playing with the toy and help her envision the fun that another child will also have, helping imprint the positive feeling of giving in her heart.

 The Greater Austin YMCA hosts a variety of holiday-themed activities that are free to the community, including Breakfast with Santa, Cookies with Santa and a holiday market. Visit www.austinyymca.org for details.



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Help Your Child Nix the Nightmares

FAMILY MATTERS

DR. BETTY RICHARDSON

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

Q Our son Matthew is seven years old and has begun to have scary nightmares. He has dreams about being kidnapped and hidden in a closet where no one can find him. How common are nightmares in kids? What causes kids to have nightmares and what can parents do to reduce or eliminate night-time fears?

A Researchers have found that nightmares are most common in children ages 6–10. Preschool children tend to worry about monsters under the bed while older kids tend to dream about being kidnapped or shot or bad things happening to their parents. A study by Dutch researchers found that nearly 70% of kids said their nightmares were about something they saw on television. Other causes include being stressed or overly tired. When children are anxious or exhausted their chances of having nightmares increase. Medical

conditions such as sleep apnea and certain medications can increase the chance of nightmares. Additional causes include issues at school such as bullying or issues at home such as abuse, neglect or some other type of domestic trauma.

Ways parents can help reduce or eliminate a child's nightmares:

1. Monitor what your child watches on TV and make certain it is age-appropriate. Be cautious about watching the news with your child as feature stories often contain sensitive subject matter that can be very disturbing.
2. Make sure your child is getting enough rest and sleep. Have your child do something restful or quiet after an energetic sports activity. The National Sleep Foundation (NSF) recommends 10–13 hours of sleep with a bedtime of 7:15–8:30 p.m. for children ages 3–5; children ages 6–13 need 9–11 hours of sleep with a bedtime of 7:15–9:00 pm. Children also need a consistent bedtime routine. Eliminate screen time at least two hours before bedtime as the blue light from screens may

interfere with the production of the sleep hormone, melatonin.

3. Identify any stress at school or home and discuss ways to reduce the stress with your child. Talk with your child's teachers to identify any stressors at school. Help your child practice relaxation techniques. Practice circle breathing (breathing in with one nostril and out the other) or practice four-count deep breathing.
4. When your child shares about a nightmare, be understanding. Empathize with your child that the nightmare "must have been scary, but it isn't real."
5. Have fun with your child by rewriting the nightmare. Talk about smart or silly ways the nightmare could be rewritten to eliminate the scare factor.

For parents, it's important to remember that what goes on during the daytime will affect a child at night.

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SMART SCREEN TIME

DR. BENJAMIN KRAMER

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

Senses and Stories

My wife recently brought home a bag full of pinecones drenched in cinnamon. Our son was thrilled because for him this signaled the kickoff of the holiday season. Those pinecones and their not-subtle scent also got me thinking about how the holidays intentionally engage all the senses. It's easy to conjure up the sights and sounds of the holidays - in fact, the first string of lights and the first carol of the season let the world know that something different is happening in our lives. Consider also how much taste and smell play into our impressions and memories of the holidays. Certain foods only appear in our lives

during these days, and we go out of our way to bring seasonal smells into our homes, like cinnamon pinecones! Finally, the season is different in a tactile way - special items are unpacked and placed in positions of prominence, and who doesn't like the feel of glossy wrapping paper and ribbon?

Screens are somewhat limited when it comes to sensory input. They offer plenty of sights and sounds, but they cannot compare to the full sensory experience of decorating a tree, preparing latkes, lighting kinara candles, wrapping gifts or breaking out in song. When you know all five senses are going to be engaged in a particular activity, take a moment to power down all the screens in your midst so that you and your kids can get the full effect.

This is also a time of the year when we reach for stories. First, there are the origin stories for each holiday, each with an element of mystery and wonder. Other stories have come along for the ride, adding to the magic and charm of the holidays. Here, screens can be our

holiday companions, not only offering us a cornucopia of video specials but also instant access to written stories from across eras and around the world.

As you watch or read holiday stories with your kids, help them to see patterns that emerge. What makes a story a holiday story? What feelings do they associate with them?

Finally, be sure to tell your own holiday stories - those you have already lived, and those you are creating in the here and now. Help your kids to see that they are not only recipients of the holiday spirit, they are active creators of holiday joy and writers of their own stories.



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December 2023 calendar

Go to www.austinfamily.com for expanded listings.

Check our calendar online which is updated daily. Any family-friendly events can be posted at www.austinfamily.com and will be made live once approved. Certain restrictions apply.

For Storytimes please go to

www.library.austintexas.gov

www.wblibrary.org

www.westbanklibrary.com

www.laketravislibrary.org

www.leandertx.gov/library

www.cityofkyle.com/library

www.budalibrary.org

www.library.georgetown.org/events-calendar

Fri 1

Holiday By the Tracks. 10 a.m. 'Tis the season for holiday-themed children's activities, Santa's reindeer games, Christmas carols and festive food trucks. Select a limited-edition holiday souvenir mug and enjoy hot cocoa with the chamber's annual hot cocoa stroll. Shop local businesses in historic downtown Elgin and enjoy Elgin's lighted Christmas parade. FREE www.elgintexas.gov/185/Annual-Community-Events.

Blue Genie Art Bazaar (BGAB). 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Blue Genie Art Bazaar (BGAB), Austin's beloved holiday shopping experience, returns for its 23rd year featuring more than 200 artists. Blue Genie Art Bazaar, 6100 Airport Blvd. FREE. www.bluegenieartbazaar.com.

Old Town Christmas Festival. 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Holiday activities include the old town Rudolph run, Christmas marketplace, hometown parade, pictures with Santa, live performances and local food and craft vendors. 105 N. Brushy St., Leander www.leandertx.gov.

42nd Annual Christmas Stroll. 5 to 9 p.m. Kick off your holiday season with some jolly, family-friendly fun. Over 150 artists, music by locals, schools and other groups. Downtown Georgetown, Main St. FREE. www.visit.georgetown.org.

Wild Lights at Cameron Park Zoo. 6 to 9 p.m. 'T'was a night before Christmas and all through the park not a creature was stirring as the evening grew dark. Cameron Park Zoo, 1701 N 4th St., Waco. \$10 - \$15. www.cameronparkzoo.com.

Hometown Holidays Concerts. 6 to 8:30 p.m. Our Hometown Holidays season will include 40 free evening concerts for the community, all taking place in a variety of locations in downtown Round Rock, 221 E. Main St. www.roundrocktexas.gov.

Light Up the Lake. 6 to 9:30 p.m. The event will feature SPECTACULAR giant balloons hovering over Bright Lake, an amazing light show, live music, holiday displays, holiday food and refreshments, crafts, family activities, yule log and more. Old Settlers Park, www.roundrocktexas.gov.

Peppermint Parkway. 6 to 9 p.m. Experience the drive-thru Parkway come to life with millions of lights, the Grinch, snowflake roller-skaters, the greatest holiday hits and more. Circuit of the Americas, 9201 Circuit of the Americas Blvd. \$40 - \$99. www.peppermintparkway.com.

Lights On! 6 to 8 p.m. Kick off the holiday season with lights. 1102 Lohman's Crossing Rd. www.lakeway-tx.gov.

The Smartest Girl in the World. 7 to 8:30 p.m. Leo and Lizzy Martinez want to be the smartest kids in the world. Oscar G. Brockett Theatre,

23rd and Robert Dedman. \$10 - \$15. www.theatredance.utexas.edu.

A Christmas Carol. 7:30 to 10 p.m. Austin's hottest holiday tradition returns with new music and surprises to ring in the season. ZACH Theatre, 202 South Lamar. \$25. www.zachtheatre.org/shows-events/2023-24-season-2/.

Sat 2

Round Rock Market Days. 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Arts and Craft vendors, live music, food and fun. Downtown Round Rock, 221 E. Main St. FREE. www.mainstreetproductionsrr.com.

Old Town Christmas Festival. 9:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. Every first Saturday of December, Old Town comes alive with Christmas joy. 105 N. Brushy St. www.leandertx.gov.

DeSTEMber Extravaganza 9:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. Join Girlstart for free, hands-on STEM fun for the whole family. Discover STEM careers, enjoy star shows in our mini-planetarium and more. Girlstart, 1400 W. Anderson Ln. www.girlstart.org.

Yule in the Garden. 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Zilker Botanical Garden Conservancy hosts an annual yule celebration, with nature-based activities and festive family fun. Zilker Botanical Garden, 2220 Barton Springs Rd. \$3, \$8 members free. www.zilker garden.org.

Ascent Academy Children's Business Fair. 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. The Ascent Academy Children's Business Fair is open to the public, offering a chance to kickstart your holiday shopping, support Ascent Academy, 5701 Cameron Rd. FREE. www.childrensbusinessfair.org.

Markets for Makers. 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Support local makers and small businesses when you shop at Markets for Makers, Events Center, 900 Barton Springs Rd. \$8-\$18. www.tickets.marketsformakers.com.

Snow Ball Dance Party. 10:30 to 11:45 a.m. Join us for a snowy story time dance party. Yarborough Branch, 2200 Hancock Dr. FREE. www.library.austintexas.gov.

Sir Knightsalot and The Great Dragon Dance-Off. 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. Eric, known sometimes to his friends as the mighty Sir Knightsalot, is a 10-year-old medieval boy who aspires to become a knight one day. Scottish Rite Theater, 207 W. 18th St. 15-\$22 www.scottishritetheater.org.

Winter Cheer Festival. 12 to 2 p.m. Get ready for the winter season with crafts, hot chocolate and

tons of fun. Ruiz Branch, 1600 Grove Blvd. FREE. www.library.austintexas.gov.

Ballet Austin's 61st Annual Production of The Nutcracker. 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. Join us for this family holiday tradition. The Long Center for the Performing Arts, 701 W. Riverside Drive. \$15 and up. www.balletaustin.org.

Vista Brewing Saturday Screenings: Home Alone. 5 to 9 p.m. "Merry Christmas, ya filthy animals!" Join us in Driftwood for an outdoor movie under the stars to kick off the holiday season. Vista Brewing, 13551 Ranch to Market Rd 150. FREE.

Holiday Sing-Along & Stroll 2023. 5 to 9 p.m. Join KUT, KUTX & the Downtown Austin Alliance for our 29th Annual tree lighting, sing-along and stroll. Let's ring in the holidays together. Texas Capitol, 1100 Congress Ave. FREE. www.downtownaustin.com.

2023 Austin Trail of Lights Fun Run presented by Chuy's. 5:45 to 10 p.m. The 12th Annual Austin Trail of Lights Fun Run presented by Chuy's is back. Zilker Park, 2100 Barton Springs Rd. \$20 and up. www.austrailoflights.org.

Coco With Cowboys. 6 to 8 p.m. Enjoy free cookies and cocoa with your favorite cowboy characters. Williamson Museum, 716 S. Austin Ave. FREE. www.williamsonmuseum.org.

Hometown Holidays Concerts. 6 to 8:30 p.m. Our Hometown Holidays season will include 40 free evening concerts for the community, all taking place in a variety of locations in downtown Round Rock, 221 E. Main St. www.roundrocktexas.gov.

CONTINUED: **Peppermint Parkway**, see Fri 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazaar**, see Fri 1; **Wild Lights at Cameron Park Zoo**, see Fri 1; **A Christmas Carol**, see Fri 1; **The Smartest Girl in the World** see Fri 1; **Light up the Lake**, see Fri 1; **42nd Annual Christmas Stroll**, see Fri 1.

Sun 3

The Muppet Christmas Carol. 12 p.m. Experience the magic of the holidays in a special effects screening of "The Muppet Christmas Carol." Bullock Texas State History Museum, 1800 Congress Ave. \$8 - \$12. www.thestoryoftexas.com.

Mexic-Arte Museum Free Sundays. 12 to 6 p.m. Sundays are free for everyone. Mexic-Arte Museum, 419 Congress Ave. www.mexic-artemuseum.org.



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McCallum & Lamar Fine Arts Academies Concert. 2 to 4 p.m. Join musicians from APMC's in-school chamber music programs at Lamar Middle and McCallum High to celebrate all of their hard work this semester. McCallum High School, 5600 Sunshine Dr. FREE. www.austinchambermusic.org.

Christmas Tree Lighting. 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Join us for an unforgettable evening of holiday magic at Hotel Viata's Christmas tree lighting celebration. Hotel Viata, 320 S Capital of Texas Hwy. FREE. www.hotelviata.com.

Mistletoe Magic. 6 p.m. Bring the family for the 28th annual choral concert to kick off the holidays benefiting Senior Access. First United Methodist Church, 1004 S. Mays St. www.senioraccessstx.org.

CONTINUED: **Blue Genie Art Bazar**, see Fri 1; **Peppermint Parkway**, see Fri 1; **Wild Lights at Cameron Park Zoo**, see Fri 1; **A Christmas Carol**, see Fri 1; **Ballet Austin's 61st Annual Production of The Nutcracker**, see Sat 2; **Yule in the Garden**, see Sat 2; **The Smartest Girl in the World** see Fri 1; **There's Something About Merry: An AGMC Holiday Concert**, see Fri 1; **Markets for Makers**, see Sat 2.

Mon 4

Teen Central Presents: Movie Mondays. 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. This event is for teens 13-18 only. Join us for a movie screening on select Mondays of each month! Central Library, 710 W. César Chávez St. Gallery. FREE. www.library.austintexas.gov.

CONTINUED: **Blue Genie Art Bazar**, see Fri 1.

Tue 5

Redeemer School Invites you to Kinder Connect. 9 to 10 a.m. Come experience kindergarten at Redeemer School. Meet our teachers, see our classrooms and visit the campus.

Redeemer Lutheran School, 1500 W. Anderson Ln. FREE. www.redeemerschool.net.

Hometown Holidays Concerts. 6 to 8:30 p.m. Our Hometown Holidays season will include 40 free evening concerts for the community, all taking place in a variety of locations in downtown Round Rock, 221 E. Main St. www.roundrocktexas.gov.

CONTINUED: **Blue Genie Art Bazar**, see Fri 1; **A Christmas Carol**, see Fri 1.

Wed 6

Star Weaving with One Million Stars Texas. 3 to 5 p.m. In this workshop we will share information about the One Million Stars Texas project and participants will learn how to weave stars. Twin Oaks Branch, 1800 S. Fifth St. FREE. www.library.austintexas.gov.

CONTINUED: **Blue Genie Art Bazar**, see Fri 1; **Wild Lights at Cameron Park Zoo**, see Fri 1; **A Christmas Carol**, see Fri 1.

Thu 7

First Day of Hanukkah

Baby Snow Ball Dance Party. 12:30 to 3 p.m. Join us for a snowy dance party. Yarborough Branch, 2200 Hancock Dr. FREE. www.library.austintexas.gov.

CONTINUED: **Blue Genie Art Bazar**, see Fri 1; **Wild Lights at Cameron Park Zoo**, see Fri 1; **A Christmas Carol**, see Fri 1.

Fri 8

59th Annual Austin Trail of Lights Grand Opening. 6 to 10 p.m. The most beloved, and longest running holiday tradition, Austin Trail of Lights, powered by H-E-B, welcomes hundreds of thousands of guests back to Zilker Park, 2100 Barton Springs Rd. www.austintrailoflights.org.

Grinch Movie. 6 to 8 p.m. Bring your whole family as we will have games, vendors and hot chocolate. Plus, the Grinch himself will be there to entertain all the guests that attend. City Hall, 1102 Lohman's Crossing Rd. www.lakeway-tx.gov.

CONTINUED: **Peppermint Parkway**, see Fri 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazar**, see Fri 1; **Wild Lights at Cameron Park Zoo**, see Fri 1; **A Christmas Carol**, see Fri 1; **Ballet Austin's 61st Annual Production of The Nutcracker**, see Sat 2.

Sat 9

Pancakes & PJ's. 8 to 11:30 a.m. Show off those Christmas jammies at this fun event at the Leander Activity Center, 11880 Hero Way West Ste. 600. www.leandertx.gov.

Christmas Dreams and Snowy Things. 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Join us for a day full of fun. There will be "real snow" activities, a giant slide, games, interactive holiday booths, food, music and more. YMCA Central Texas, 1801 N IH 35. FREE. www.ymcactx.org.

Mini Horses & Cocoa @ Westbank. 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. There's a chill in the air, and the backyard at Westbank is full of miniature horses, Silly Sparkles balloon creations and cups of hot cocoa. Westbank Community Library, 1309 Westbank Dr. www.westbanklibrary.com.

Evergreen Winter Warm-up. 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Join us for our first Evergreen Winter Warm-up, a botanical-inspired celebration of seasonal

flavors, crafts, music and activities for the whole campsite. Shield Ranch, 10417 Crumley Ranch Rd. \$0 - \$12. www.eventbrite.com.

Passport To the World Festival 2023. 12 to 3 p.m. Join Austin Sister Cities International ASCI Austin Central Library, 710 W Cesar, 710 W Cesar Chavez. FREE. www.austinsistercities.com.

Kwanzaa Celebration with Elizabeth Kahura. 1:30 to 2:30 p.m. Umoja, Kujichagulia, Ujima, Ujamaa, Nia, Kuumba and Imani. Spicewood Springs Branch, FREE. www.library.austintexas.gov.

Movies on the Lawn at Dreamland featuring Polar Express. Movies on the lawn at Dreamland featuring "Polar Express." Dreamland Dripping Springs, 2770 US-290. www.dreamland.us.

CONTINUED: **Peppermint Parkway**, see Fri 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazar**, see Fri 1; **Wild Lights at Cameron Park Zoo**, see Fri 1; **A Christmas Carol**, see Fri 1; **59th Annual Austin Trail of Lights**, see Sat 8; **Ballet Austin's 61st Annual Production of The Nutcracker**, see Sat 2.

Sun 10

Star Weaving with One Million Stars Texas. 1 to 3 p.m. One Million Stars Texas is part of One Billion Stars, a global star weaving project that invites communities around the world to weave these symbols. Central Library, 710 W. César Chávez St. Gallery. FREE. www.library.austintexas.gov.

CONTINUED: **Peppermint Parkway**, see Fri 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazar**, see Fri 1; **Wild Lights at Cameron Park Zoo**, see Fri 1; **A Christmas Carol**, see Fri 1; **59th Annual Austin Trail of Lights**, see Sat 8; **Ballet Austin's 61st Annual Production of The Nutcracker**, see Sat 2; **Mexic-Arte Museum Free Sundays**, see Sun 3.

Mon 11

CONTINUED: **Blue Genie Art Bazar**, see Fri 1.

Tue 12

Millennial Choirs and Orchestras. 5 p.m. Know Before You Go Millennial® Choirs & Orchestras proudly presents "The World Was Waiting," featuring some of the most beloved Christmas carols. Bass Concert Hall, 2350 Robert Dedman Dr. \$15. www.texasperformingarts.org.

CONTINUED: **Blue Genie Art Bazar**, see Fri 1; **A Christmas Carol**, see Fri 1; **59th Annual Austin Trail of Lights**, see Sat 8; **Redeemer School Invites you to Kinder Connect**, see Tues 5.

Wed 13

Discovery! Holidays Around the World with Elizabeth Kahura. 4:30 p.m. Join storyteller, performer, singer and educator Elizabeth Kahura in this celebration of culture. Laura Bush Community Library, 9411 Bee Cave Rd. www.westbanklibrary.com.

CONTINUED: **Blue Genie Art Bazar**, see Fri 1; **Wild Lights at Cameron Park Zoo**, see Fri 1; **A Christmas Carol**, see Fri 1; **59th Annual Austin Trail of Lights**, see Sat 8.

Thu 14

Central Library Sing-Along: Holiday Big Sing with Conspire. 6 to 7:15 p.m. Grab your friends and family and celebrate the season with Conspire. Central Library, 710 W. César Chávez St. Gallery. FREE. www.library.austintexas.gov.

How the Grinch Stole the Holidays. 7 p.m. Bring the entire family for this holiday show. This is the 167th year for educating deaf students. R.L. Davis Auditorium at Texas State School for the Deaf, 1102 S. Congress Ave. Purchase the tickets at 512-256-4343, \$5 - \$10. www.tsd.state.tx.us.

CYT Austin presents Frozen Jr. 7:30 to 9 p.m. Do you want to build a snowman? You'll love this fanciful and heartwarming stage adaptation of the top-grossing animated film of all time. Brentwood Christian School: Worley-Barton Theater, 11908 N. Lamar Blvd. \$16. www.cytaustin.org.

the GREATER AUSTIN YMCA

scan for more information

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everline counseling

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CONTINUED: **Peppermint Parkway**, see Fri 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazar**, see Fri 1; **Wild Lights at Cameron Park Zoo**, see Fri 1; **A Christmas Carol**, see Fri 1; **59th Annual Austin Trail of Lights**, see Sat 8.

Fri 15

The Armadillo Christmas Bazaar 2023. 11 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. The Armadillo Christmas Bazaar, Austin's cherished holiday tradition for nearly five decades. Come shop these talented artists. \$12 and up. Palmer Events Center, 900 Barton Springs Rd. www.armadillobazaar.com.

CONTINUED: **Peppermint Parkway**, see Fri 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazar**, see Fri 1; **Wild Lights at Cameron Park Zoo**, see Fri 1; **A Christmas Carol**, see Fri 1; **59th Annual Austin Trail of Lights**, see Sat 8; **Ballet Austin's 61st Annual Production of The Nutcracker**, see Sat 2; **How the Grinch Stole The Holidays**, see Thu 14; **CYT Austin presents Frozen Jr.** see Thu 14.

Sat 16

CONTINUED: **Peppermint Parkway**, see Fri 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazar**, see Fri 1; **Wild Lights at Cameron Park Zoo**, see Fri 1; **A Christmas Carol**, see Fri 1; **59th Annual Austin Trail of Lights**, see Sat 8; **Ballet Austin's 61st Annual Production of The Nutcracker**, see Sat 2; **CYT Austin presents Frozen Jr.** see Thu 14; **The Armadillo Christmas Bazaar 2023.** See Fri 15.

Sun 17

CONTINUED: **Peppermint Parkway**, see Fri 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazar**, see Fri 1; **Wild Lights at Cameron Park Zoo**, see Fri 1; **A Christmas Carol**, see Fri 1; **59th Annual Austin Trail of Lights**, see Sat 8; **How the Grinch Stole the Holidays**, see Sat 16; **Ballet Austin's 61st Annual Production of The Nutcracker**, see Sat 2; **The Armadillo Christmas Bazaar 2023.** See Fri 15; **Mexic-Arte Museum Free Sundays**, see Sun 3.

Mon 18

CONTINUED: **Peppermint Parkway**, see Fri 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazar**, see Fri 1; **A Christmas Carol**, see

Fri 1; **The Armadillo Christmas Bazaar 2023.** See Fri 15.

Tue 19

CONTINUED: **Peppermint Parkway**, see Fri 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazar**, see Fri 1; **Wild Lights at Cameron Park Zoo**, see Fri 1; **A Christmas Carol**, see Fri 1; **59th Annual Austin Trail of Lights**, see Sat 8; **The Armadillo Christmas Bazaar 2023.** See Fri 15.

Wed 20

CONTINUED: **Peppermint Parkway**, see Fri 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazar**, see Fri 1; **Wild Lights at Cameron Park Zoo**, see Fri 1; **A Christmas Carol**, see Fri 1; **59th Annual Austin Trail of Lights**, see Sat 8; **Ballet Austin's 61st Annual Production of The Nutcracker**, see Sat 2; **The Armadillo Christmas Bazaar 2023.** See Fri 15.

Thu 21

CONTINUED: **Peppermint Parkway**, see Fri 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazar**, see Fri 1; **Wild Lights at Cameron Park Zoo**, see Fri 1; **A Christmas Carol**, see Fri 1; **59th Annual Austin Trail of Lights**, see Sat 8; **Ballet Austin's 61st Annual Production of The Nutcracker**, see Sat 2; **The Armadillo Christmas Bazaar 2023.** See Fri 15.

Fri 22

CONTINUED: **Peppermint Parkway**, see Fri 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazar**, see Fri 1; **Wild Lights at Cameron Park Zoo**, see Fri 1; **A Christmas Carol**, see Fri 1; **59th Annual Austin Trail of Lights**, see Sat 8; **Ballet Austin's 61st Annual Production of The Nutcracker**, see Sat 2; **The Armadillo Christmas Bazaar 2023.** See Fri 15.

Sat 23

Movies on the lawn at Dreamland featuring The Grinch. Celebrate the holiday season with a showing of *The Grinch* on our stage lawn. Dreamland Dripping Springs, 2770 US-290. www.dreamland.us.

CONTINUED: **Peppermint Parkway**, see Fri 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazar**, see Fri 1; **Wild Lights at Cameron Park Zoo**, see Fri 1; **A Christmas Carol**, see

see Fri 1; **59th Annual Austin Trail of Lights**, see Sat 8; **Ballet Austin's 61st Annual Production of The Nutcracker**, see Sat 2; **The Armadillo Christmas Bazaar 2023.** See Fri 15.

Sun 24

Christmas Eve

CONTINUED: **Peppermint Parkway**, see Fri 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazar**, see Fri 1; **Wild Lights at Cameron Park Zoo**, see Fri 1; **A Christmas Carol**, see Fri 1; **59th Annual Austin Trail of Lights**, see Sat 8; **The Armadillo Christmas Bazaar 2023.** See Fri 15.

Mon 25

Christmas Day

CONTINUED: **Peppermint Parkway**, see Fri 1.

Tue 26

CONTINUED: **Peppermint Parkway**, see Fri 1; **A Christmas Carol**, see Fri 1.

Wed 27

CONTINUED: **Peppermint Parkway**, see Fri 1; **Wild Lights at Cameron Park Zoo**, see Fri 1; **A Christmas Carol**, see Fri 1.

Thu 28

CONTINUED: **Peppermint Parkway**, see Fri 1; **Wild Lights at Cameron Park Zoo**, see Fri 1; **A Christmas Carol**, see Fri 1.

Fri 29

CONTINUED: **Peppermint Parkway**, see Fri 1; **Wild Lights at Cameron Park Zoo**, see Fri 1; **A Christmas Carol**, see Fri 1.

Sat 30

CONTINUED: **Peppermint Parkway**, see Fri 1; **Blue Genie Art Bazar**, see Fri 1; **Wild Lights at Cameron Park Zoo**, see Fri 1; **A Christmas Carol**, see Fri 1.

Sun 31

New Year's Eve

CONTINUED: **Wild Lights at Cameron Park Zoo**, see Fri 1; **A Christmas Carol**, see Fri 1.

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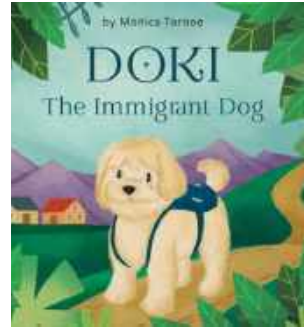
Feeling Welcome in Two New Children's Books

It's the most wonderful time of year again. As your kids become increasingly immersed in paper crafts and gift lists, here are two new books to help them also think about the blessing of family.



A new favorite in our house, "Our Italian Christmas Eve" by Danielle Sedita and Francesco Sedita is a charming tour through a resplendent Christmas Eve dinner with many intriguing asides about Italian Catholic culture. The two main characters step into Aunt Babe's house (with presents for all and a big pot for pasta) and immediately join the dinner preparations. They even take it upon themselves to solve the problem

of dessert. Starting with a helpful (if somewhat superfluous) family tree page and ending with baking instructions for 'Mom's Cheesecake' the book exudes the wonderous delight of slipping into someone else's vibrant family evening. Coupled with Luciano Lozano's intricate illustrations – the tablecloths! Aunt Babe's dress! The sweater patterns! – this book may convince you to start saying "Into the oven you go, and God bless you" for every dessert you make.



With great sensitivity and heart, "Doki the Immigrant Dog," written and illustrated by Monica Tornoe, follows a Venezuelan girl, her dog and her family as they journey through Mexico and seek asylum at the US border. It is a subject matter that Tornoe thoughtfully handles as she distills the experience of immigration into consumable language for children. The illustrations neither

trivialize nor sensationalize the story. Doki, the dog, is briefly separated from the family in compliance with immigration rules, but while receiving help from a church, the family and dog are reunited with the approval of an immigration officer. The book will be a beautiful way to enter into conversation with children about the immigrant families in our Austin community, and how they can be welcomed.

We hope your holiday season is full of family and good community! Let us know what your children think of the books. Drop us a line on Instagram @atx_family.

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