

February 2026

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## It Started With a Love Letter

### Same House, Different Kids?

### Valentine Chemistry

### 4 Ways to Help the Procrastinating Pupil

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# Introducing the 2026 Cover Kid Contest Winners



**Princee**

**Dylan**

**Lochlam**

**Matilda**

**Archie**

**Gloria**

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## TUNE IN



Catch *Austin Family* magazine live on "Good Day Austin" every Thursday morning.



Seven-year-old Eloise lives in the country, where she enjoys wide-open spaces and quiet days. She loves competitive cheerleading and puts her whole heart into every practice and performance. When she is not cheering, she enjoys spending time with her friends and having fun being a kid. Photo taken by Jordan Ashley Photography.



View the magazine online

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## Editor's Note



CELESTE DIANNE WADE

*Wade is a writer, a public speaker, and a popular health coach in Austin. The eldest of seven children, she loves travel adventures with family.*

February invites hearts into our line of sight, but the symbol is older than the candy aisle. The familiar valentine heart took shape in the Middle Ages, when artists of courtly love began depicting the human heart as the seat of emotion. Over time, that image became shorthand for devotion. Color followed meaning. The color red, long tied to courage, blood, and sacrifice, came to represent passion and commitment. Pink, a gentler tint, emerged later as a sign of tenderness, affection, and care.

Long before store-bought cards, love traveled by hand. The earliest known Valentine's letter dates to 1415, when Charles, Duke of Orleans, wrote from the Tower of London to his wife. Those words, personal and patient, remind us that what endures is not commercial, but connection.

As parents and caregivers, we have daily chances to teach that lesson. We show love when we listen without rushing, apologize when we fall short, share meals, volunteer together, write notes, and celebrate differences. We model kindness in February, and in every other month, by letting our kids see love as action, not transaction.

Love is priceless and forever. From all of us at *Austin Family*, may this season be filled with simple gestures that last. Happy Valentine's Day.

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# Austin IN ACTION

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## February Must Do's

### February 1st-28th

Black History Month

Source: [www.austintexas.gov](http://www.austintexas.gov)

### February 15th

Austin Marathon Event

Source: [www.austintexas.gov](http://www.austintexas.gov)

### February 13th-May 17th

Charlotte's Web

Source: [www.zachtheater.org](http://www.zachtheater.org)

### ATX Open Seeks Young Austinites to Serve as Ball Persons

Young tennis fans in Austin have a unique opportunity to get involved in a professional sporting event this February. The ATX Open is now accepting registrations for Ball Persons for the 2026 tournament, scheduled for February 21 through March 1 at Westwood Country Club.

Ball Persons must be at least 12 years old by February 21, 2026. First-year participants are required to attend three training clinics, while returning Ball Persons must attend one practice session. All Ball Persons must work at least three shifts during the tournament, including one shift during qualifying rounds on February 21 or 22 and two additional shifts between February 24 and 27.

Participants receive an official ATX Open uniform or shirt, a tournament photo credential, and meals and drinks during scheduled shifts. Day shifts may extend beyond scheduled times depending on match length, and participants should be prepared to stay through match completion.

Selections for weekend semifinal and final matches will be announced on February 25. Interested participants must register online and upload a passport-style headshot for credentials.

## It's time to start enjoying life!

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**Free Teen Heart Screening Offered at  
Dell Children's in Austin**

Austin families are invited to take part in a free teen heart screening on Saturday, February 7, 2026, at Dell Children's Specialty Pavilion. The event, hosted by Championship Hearts Foundation in partnership with Dell Children's Pediatric and Congenital Cardiology, is part of the second annual National Youth Heart Screening Day.

The screening is open to teens ages 14 to 18 and focuses on detecting hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, or HCM, a condition that thickens the heart wall and is the leading cause of sudden cardiac death in young people. HCM often presents with no symptoms and affects about one in 500 individuals.

Board-certified cardiologists will provide on-site screenings that include a 12-lead electrocardiogram and a limited two-dimensional echocardiogram, with immediate results shared with families. Each screening takes about 20 minutes, though families should allow up to one hour total.

Screenings are offered at no cost, though optional donations help support future programs. A parent or guardian must sign a waiver, and teens should wear loose-fitting clothing.

Adult and high school volunteers are also needed. Families interested in prioritizing teen heart health are encouraged to attend.

**Texas Education Freedom Accounts Launch  
With Strong Early Momentum**

Hundreds of private schools and education providers across Texas are signing on to the new Texas Education Freedom Accounts program, signaling strong interest ahead of its first year. Acting Texas Comptroller Kelly Hancock announced that about 600 private schools and prekindergarten providers enrolled within the first 10 days of applications. More than 200 education service providers, including tutors, have also joined.

State officials expect participation to continue growing during and after winter academic breaks as additional schools prepare for the 2026-27 school year. The Comptroller's office has launched EducationFreedom.Texas.gov as the program's official website, featuring a regularly updated school finder and a Parent Prep Checklist to help families get ready before applications open.

Family applications open Feb. 4, 2026, and close March 17, 2026. Awards will be prioritized under state law, with a lottery used if demand exceeds available funding. Notifications are expected in early April.

Passed by the Texas Legislature in 2025 through Senate Bill 2, the \$1 billion Texas Education Freedom Accounts program allows families who choose private school or homeschooling to use state funds for approved education expenses. Participating private school students will receive \$10,474 for the school year, students with individualized education programs may receive up to \$30,000, and homeschool students will receive \$2,000, making TEFA the nation's largest first-year school choice initiative.



**Austin Early Childhood Center Named Finalist in H-E-B Excellence in Education Awards**

An Austin early childhood education program is being recognized for going above and beyond for local families. H-E-B has named the Goodwill Exploration Center in Austin a finalist in the 2026 H-E-B Excellence in Education Awards, an annual program that honors outstanding educators and education leaders across Texas.

The Goodwill Exploration Center is one of five early childhood facilities statewide selected as finalists, alongside five public school boards and eight school districts. The program highlights organizations that make a meaningful impact on students, families, and their communities.

This year, H-E-B will award a total of \$90,000 to 18 finalists, with each receiving \$5,000. All finalists will advance to the next round of competition for larger statewide awards. A panel of judges will visit each finalist's campus to meet with administrators, staff members, parents, and community partners.

Winners will be announced at the H-E-B Excellence in Education Awards ceremony on Sunday, May 3, in Houston. One early childhood facility will receive a top prize of \$25,000.

Nominations for the 2027 H-E-B Excellence in Education Awards are now open. Texas educators, early childhood centers, school boards, and school districts may apply through September 30, 2026.

# It Started With a Love Letter



## Feature

KIMBERLY FALCONER

*Falconer is married to David and mom to four daughters, one in heaven. She's a mixed media artist under the name Kennedy Benjamin and a national health coach for Weight Watchers. Based in Texas, she shares joy, color, and helps others live their joy life as a podcaster. Follow her @LivingYourJoyLife. Listen on Spotify @LivingyourJOYlife.*

**T**here are the kinds of cards you keep on the mantel for a week or so, and then there are the cards you tuck into a special box or memento drawer, thinking that someday you might want to read them again. They are that special. Maybe they were homemade. Maybe someone included a handwritten message. Perhaps you knew the person sending the card might not be around forever, and you wanted to hang on to it like a future hug. The cards I am about to tell you about are on a whole different level. These are the cards that will forever define Valentine's Day for our family.

We are just an ordinary family, but sometimes something extraordinary happens, and we run with it like a kid in brand-new sneakers. That is what happened in February 2013.

As a mom, I was over the holiday season. Completely done. There were traces of red and green glitter in the nooks of the hardwood floors. Christmas toys were barely interesting anymore. I was still

carrying an extra eight pounds from cookies and fudge, and suddenly it was time to create some kind of holiday hype around Valentine's Day.

My kids were at that age where the DIY lollipop cards were not cool, yet they still expected a full-on pink-heart explosion of candy and stuffed animals. The retail world knows exactly how to gut-punch moms when we are most vulnerable. They know we are slightly melancholy over the end of the big holiday hustle and the return to school routines. We are relieved our kids are back in school, yet part of us wants to hold on a little longer. Then, just as we are about to check out at Target, we run heart-first into the Love aisle, and suddenly our carts are full of satin heart boxes and pink polka-dot plush puppies.

That year, maybe I was ill, maybe I was in a perimenopause predicament. I honestly do not remember. What I do remember is that I had not purchased a single Valentine. No cards. No stuffed kittens. No chocolate. No cinnamon gummy hearts.

It was probably a Tuesday. That sounds right.

I asked the girls, ages 9, 10, and 11, if we could do a fancy Valentine's dinner instead of the usual fuss and fanfare. I must have sold it well, because they agreed. All they

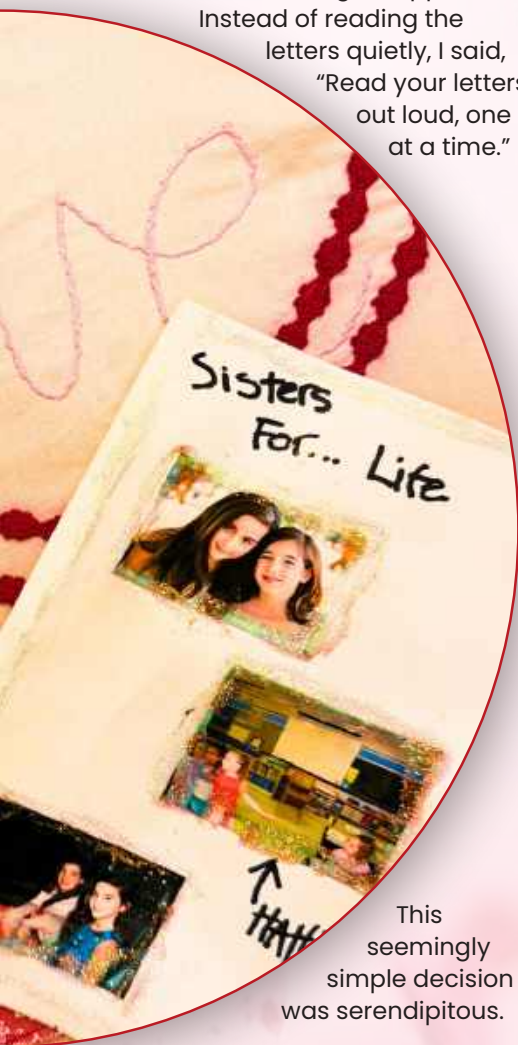


wanted was shrimp scampi and chocolate-covered strawberries. We decided to eat at the real table, use the good dishes, and drink sparkling grape juice.

At some point, the girls started arguing about who would sit where and who ate more strawberries. It is all a blur. To redirect the chaos, I told them they each needed to write a note to their sisters, expressing what they liked about them. My husband and I decided we should also write each child a quick Valentine letter.

There we were, letters scrawled in crayons and markers, passing them out like we used to do in elementary school. We placed a letter at each girl's spot at the table.

That is where the magic happened. Instead of reading the letters quietly, I said, "Read your letters out loud, one at a time."



This seemingly simple decision was serendipitous.

As the first sister read her letter, the sister who wrote it began to grin.

As the words continued, the reader started to gush. Hearing the words out loud made them land differently.

The early letters were not particularly poetic. In fact, they were very simple.

"I like your hair."

"I like that you helped me with my spelling words."

"I like when you sang me that song when I was scared."

My husband and I grew emotional watching what was happening at the table. Then it was our turn. As he read the letter I had written him, his voice began to quiver. He paused to gather himself. A tear slipped out of one eye, blowing his cool-dad cover.

And just like that, a tradition was born. An annual Valentine's dinner with letter writing, shrimp scampi, and side bets on how long Dad could make it without tearing up.

When we moved to Texas during the girls' middle school years, the letters felt especially meaningful. One sister wrote, "I saw you stand up for that girl who was being bullied." Another wrote, "You did a really good job on your high school audition." And another, "I know you want to make the team, and I hope you do."

These are the kinds of words tween sisters often withhold, not because they do not mean them, but because it is easier to poke and provoke than to openly encourage.

Just when I thought the tradition could not get any sweeter, we hosted a foreign exchange student named Giulia. She is a beautiful young woman from Sicily, and hosting her for nearly a year was an incredible experience. Her English was quite good, but writing a letter in English was more challenging.

As we showered Giulia with heartfelt letters about how much she meant to our family, her letters to us were priceless. We all cried. Realizing that

our love had crossed cultures and would be forever remembered was deeply moving.

There was also the year my niece lived with us while finishing college. She is a God-sent angel and very private. She did not grow up with a father figure, so living with us gave her a front-row seat to what my girls have been blessed to have, not just a present dad, but a fully engaged one.

When she read my husband's letter of love and encouragement, she was incredibly vulnerable. It was pivotal. I truly believe it made a lasting impact on her life.

Now that my girls are in college and adulthood, Valentine's Day often includes a FaceTime call while my husband and I gather around the table. We mail our Valentine letters these days. Even without being physically together, the love in each letter transcends the paper. It feels like a cupid's arrow straight to the heart.

It is lovely, to say the least, that a handwritten message can lift our spirits so perfectly. Just like sisters who know each other better than they know themselves, the letters always seem to say "I love you" in exactly the right way.

### The Rules of Valentine Letters

- **Everyone writes to everyone.**
- **Say what you admire, not what is easy.**
- **Read letters out loud, one at a time.**
- **No phones, no distractions, and no rushing.**

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- Sarah F. (6yrs old)

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**Family Matters**

DR. BETTY RICHARDSON

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



# Same House, Different Kids?

**Q** My wife and I have two boys, Michael, who is 14, and Austin, who is 10. Our older son seems amazing at everything he does. He is highly motivated to win, outgoing, and competitive. Our younger son, is quieter, slower to try new things, and works at a steady, deliberate pace. As parents, we want both of our boys to be successful and happy. What suggestions do you have for us?

**A** You describe your outgoing son as “amazing,” but you do not use that word for your more introverted son. It is worth pausing to consider that while one child’s strengths may be more visible, the quieter child likely has his own incredible and amazing qualities that are less public. Those qualities still matter. Taking time to notice, name, and

appreciate them can make a powerful difference. You asked for suggestions to help both boys thrive, and the following ideas may help guide you.

First, praise both boys equally, focusing on specific behaviors or efforts, such as staying on task, showing persistence, or finishing a challenging assignment. General praise like “Good job” loses its impact when used constantly and does little to encourage growth.

Second, avoid comparing the boys to one another. Each child is a unique individual with his own temperament, strengths, and timeline. While many parents hope for outgoing children, some kids are naturally quieter, and that is perfectly healthy.

Third, discover each boy’s interests. A trip to the library where they can

choose their own books may reveal what truly captures their attention. Talk with them about different careers, hobbies, and skills, and, when possible, visit with people who work in those fields.

Fourth, help them develop those interests. One mother noticed her son’s fascination with sports cars and began taking him to places where he could see them up close. She also bought him a large LEGO set featuring a car’s working parts. Today, he is studying mechanical engineering in college. His brother was the outgoing, competitive one, while he remained quiet, yet both found meaningful paths.

Fifth, consider offering separate lessons tailored to each child, such as music, cooking, sports, or other interests. Some lessons build life skills, while others provide enjoyment

or even lead to a future career.

Finally, consider joining or starting a parenting group where you can share concerns and learn from others facing similar challenges.

One of the most beautiful aspects of the world is that people come in billions of varieties, each with unique interests, abilities, and goals. You are to be commended for recognizing your sons’ differences. By nurturing those differences, you help each child grow into a productive, confident, and contributing member of the community.

VISITAR [www.austinfamily.com](http://www.austinfamily.com)  
¿Misma casa, hijos diferentes?



# AUSTIN ADVENTURES

ANNETTE LUCKSINGER

*Lucksinger is author of the local guidebook Exploring Austin with Kids. She is currently at work on a hybrid memoir that combines graphic novel and essays about her life in Austin, Texas.*

## Austin Winter Adventures: Animal Excursions

February can be a tricky time for family outings. The excitement of holiday festivities winds down, but there are still days to fill before school starts, plus weekends of unpredictable weather ahead. I find it the perfect month for short outings and day trips. Here are some

flexible, fun options centered on a favorite focus among kids: animals.

### Austin Nature & Science Center

The Austin Nature & Science Center makes for a great adventure, no matter the weather. On chilly days, head indoors to the Visitor Pavilion. Axolotls greet you upon entering, unless the Naturalist Workshop distracts you first. It is filled with bones, fossils, pelts, and other intriguing finds. Turn the corner to an interactive cave topped with native Texas animal facts, plus a great view of the lily pad-filled pond. Take the short trail around the pond to the indoor Small Wonders exhibit for sneak peeks into glass displays featuring lizards, snakes, turtles, fish, and salamanders.

If the weather is nice, it is easy to extend your stay. Pack a picnic. Dig in the Dino Pit. Play in the creek. Visit the outdoor rescued animals and birds of prey exhibits. Or hit the hiking trails of the Zilker Nature Preserve to keep an eye out for even more wildlife. Check the website for themed storytimes and fun community programs at [austintexas.gov/ansc](http://austintexas.gov/ansc). Bonus: it is all free.

### Austin Zoo

Hidden among ranchland and subdivisions in Southwest Austin, this nonprofit zoo is not your standard one. It houses rescued animals. Signage near

each pen shares animal facts, as well as the story of how each resident came to be here. Pro tip: This information also comes in handy if you download the online scavenger hunts for your outing.

As you wander down winding dirt pathways, you will find lions, tigers, bobcats, llamas, monkeys, parrots, lemurs, alligators, and pot-bellied pigs. Zookeeper chats and animal feedings occur throughout the day. See the schedule online. We even got to watch black bears eat lunch. To feed barnyard animals yourself, head to the Red Barn.

For break times, consider hopping aboard the miniature train. Rolling through Hill Country terrain, you might spot Texas longhorns, deer, and ostriches. Or pack snacks to enjoy at picnic tables among free-range peacocks.

### DAY TRIPS

**Looking for a fun-filled day trip with more animals and activities?**

#### HEAD NORTH

**Cameron Park Zoo**

**Waco, Texas**

[www.cameronparkzoo.com](http://www.cameronparkzoo.com)

#### HEAD SOUTH

**San Antonio Zoo**

**San Antonio, Texas**

[www.sazoo.org](http://www.sazoo.org)



Photo credit: Annette Lucksinger. Photos 1–5: Austin Nature & Science Center. Photo 6: Austin Zoo.



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|------------------------------------|--------------|--|--------------|-------------------|
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| ARMSTRONG COMMUNITY MUSIC SCHOOL   | 3-10 yrs     | www.acmsaustin.org                           | 512-474-2331 | W                 |
| ART CAMPS OF CORDOVAN ART SCHOOL   | 5-16 yrs     | www.cordovanartschool.com                    | 512-275-4040 | CP/NW/SW/RR/GT    |
| BADGERDOG CREATIVE WRITING CAMPS   | 9-18 yrs     | www.austinlibrary.org/creative-writing-camps | 512-542-0076 | C                 |
| CAMP CHAMPIONS                     | 6-17 yrs     | www.campchampions.com                        | 830-598-2571 | Marble Falls, TX  |
| CAMP DOUBLECREEK                   | 4-14 yrs     | www.campdoublecreek.com                      | 512-255-3661 | PF                |
| CAMP STEWART FOR BOYS              | 6-16 yrs     | www.campstewart.com                          | 830-238-4670 | Hunt, TX          |
| CAMP SWITCH WILLO                  | 6-13 yrs     | www.switchwillo.com                          | 512-920-0554 | N                 |
| CAMP WARRIOR ST. MICHAEL'S PREP    | 4-18 yrs     | www.smcprep.org/student-life/summer-camps    | 512-327-7755 | SW                |
| COUNTRY HOME LEARNING CENTER       | 5-13 yrs     | www.countryhomelearningcenter.com            | 512-288-8220 | N/S               |
| DANCE DISCOVERY                    | 3-18 yrs     | www.dancediscovery.com                       | 512-419-7611 | C/RR              |
| IDEA LAB                           | 5-13 yrs     | www.austin.idealabkids.com                   | 512-710-9654 | C/N/NW            |
| JUMP! GYMNASTICS                   | 3-10 yrs     | www.jumpgymnastics.com/campjump              | 512-593-6226 | N, S, NW, H       |
| KIDSACTING SUMMER CAMPS            | 4-18 yrs     | www.kidsactingstudio.com                     | 512-836-5437 | 16 Locations      |
| MAD SCIENCE SUMMER CAMPS           | 4-12 yrs     | www.madscience.org                           | 512-892-1143 | Multiple          |
| MASTER GOHRING TAI CHI AND KUNG FU | 4-Adult      | www.mastergohring.com                        | 512-879-7553 | C                 |
| NEWK'S OUTBACK ADVENTURE CAMP      | 8-17 yrs     | www.newktennis.com                           | 830-625-9105 | New Braunfels, TX |
| NITRO SWIM                         | Inf-Adult    | www.nitroswim.com                            | 512-259-7999 | NW/LT             |
| PARAGON PREP SUMMER CAMP           | 3-8th        | www.paragonprep.org                          | 512-459-5040 | N                 |
| PENFOLD THEATRE CAMPS              | 6-18 yrs     | www.penfoldtheatre.org/summer-camps          | 512-850-4849 | RR                |
| SPICEWOOD COUNTRY CAMP             | 3 ½-10 ½ yrs | www.spicewoodcountry.com                     | 512-346-2992 | NW                |
| STEPPING STONE SCHOOLS             | 5-11 yrs     | www.steppingstoneschool.com                  | 512-459-0258 | 18 locations      |
| SUGAR & SPICE RANCH CAMP           | 5 & up       | www.texasHORSECAMPS.com                      | 830-460-8487 | Bandera, TX       |
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| KIDSACTING SUMMER CAMPS            | 4-18 yrs     | www.kidsactingstudio.com                     | 512-836-5437 | 16 Locations   |
| MAD SCIENCE SUMMER CAMPS           | 4-12 yrs     | www.madscience.org                           | 512-892-1143 | Multiple       |
| MASTER GOHRING TAI CHI AND KUNG FU | 4-18 yrs     | www.mastergohring.com                        | 512-879-7553 | C              |
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| PARAGON PREP SUMMER CAMP           | 3-8th        | www.paragonprep.org                          | 512-459-5040 | N              |
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| PARAGON PREP SUMMER CAMP         | 3-8th        | <a href="http://www.paragonprep.org">www.paragonprep.org</a>   | 512-459-5040 | N            |
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# Austin Then *≡ and ≡* Now

## The Pennybacker Bridge

### Then

Before it became one of Austin's most photographed landmarks, the Pennybacker Bridge solved a problem. In the late 1970s, the city needed a way to complete Loop 360, connecting north and south Austin. A key priority was minimizing environmental impact on the scenic Colorado River and Lake Austin area.

Percy V. Pennyback, an engineer with the Texas Department of Highways and Public Transportation, pioneered the bridge's design west of downtown. He proposed using weathering steel, a material that eliminates the need for paint while allowing the structure to age naturally and blend with the surrounding hills and limestone cliffs. It was a forward-thinking approach that respected the landscape rather than competing with it.

Construction began in 1979. Stretching 1,150 feet across Lake Austin, with a road deck rising 70 feet above the water, the arched bridge was built entirely from land, with no scaffolding placed in the lake. The structure required more than 600 million pounds of steel and 3,400 tons of concrete. This method was chosen deliberately to protect the lake's natural environment during construction. Engineers erected large temporary towers to support the massive arch ribs as the bridge took shape. Once complete, the towers were removed, leaving a clean span that appears almost effortless.

When the bridge opened in December 1982, it quickly became a beloved landmark recognized for balancing engineering and nature. At the time, it was the second bridge of its type built in the world and one of the longest single-span steel arch bridges ever constructed.



### Now

Today, the Pennybacker Bridge is more than a way across Lake Austin via Loop 360, also known as the Capital of Texas Highway. Its 600-foot arch, 72 steel cables, and uniform rusty hue, often likened to a copper penny, have made it a symbol of Austin. Tourists take a short, rocky hike to the overlook for sweeping views of the bridge, the lake, and the surrounding Hill Country.

Locals return again and again to watch the light shift across the water and steel. Sunrise and sunset turn the bridge into a moving painting, different every time. It is a place for photo shoots, engagements, and quiet moments, shared by visitors and residents alike.

With roughly 50,000 vehicles crossing each day, the bridge carries two lanes of traffic in both directions, along with a six-foot-wide pedestrian and bike lane. A southbound turnaround allows limited parking beneath the bridge for those who want to linger and take in the views.

At a December 12, 2024, Austin City Council meeting, members voted unanimously to move forward with eminent domain proceedings to acquire 1.1 acres of land bordering the Pennybacker overlook for parking, along with an additional 1/3-acre easement for a sidewalk, trail, and recreational use. The decision reflects the city's ongoing effort to manage growing crowds while improving safety and access.

Open year-round, the bridge's legacy runs deeper than a perfect photo. With a \$10 million price tag, the Pennybacker Bridge represents money well spent and a lasting reminder of Austin's effort to grow while honoring the landscape that defines it.



#### TRACIE SEED

*Seed, an Austinite, has won numerous awards for writing, art, and design. She's the happiest while writing, sewing, painting, or spending time with family.*



## The Learning Curve

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.*



# 4 Ways to Help the Procrastinating Pupil

Picture it: your average American home. It is 9:45 p.m. on a Wednesday, and Mom and Dad are making one last pass through the living room, straightening pillows and switching off lights before bed. Suddenly, a voice calls from the stairs. "Mom! Dad! I forgot. I have a project due tomorrow." Cue the panic, frustration, and last-minute scramble.

There is a reason entire marketing campaigns have been built around this familiar scene. It plays out in households everywhere, especially those with a child who regularly procrastinates or seems to forget assignments until the final hour. While it may feel humorous on television, in real life it can leave parents exhausted and children overwhelmed.

To adults, procrastination can look like poor organization, bad time management, or a lack of effort. In reality, the reasons kids procrastinate are often more complex. Helping children learn to plan ahead is not just about getting homework done earlier. It is about helping them build confidence, reduce stress, and develop trust in their own abilities. These skills form the foundation of healthy self-respect and self-care.

## Why Do Kids Procrastinate?

From the outside, procrastination often appears to be a motivation problem. Parents may think, "If they cared, they would have started earlier," or "They are not taking this seriously." However, procrastination is frequently a coping strategy rather than a character flaw.

When an assignment feels overwhelming, intimidating, or unclear, avoiding it can serve as emotional self-protection. Doing nothing feels safer than risking failure, disappointment, or criticism. For some children, the hardest part of a task is simply knowing where to begin.

Other children procrastinate because they are perfectionists. The fear of doing something wrong or not well enough can make starting feel impossible. Still others struggle with executive functioning skills such as planning, organizing, prioritizing, and managing time. These abilities continue to develop well into adolescence.

For children with anxiety, ADHD, or learning differences, procrastination may be layered with additional challenges. Recognizing that procrastination often reflects emotional or developmental needs, rather than laziness, allows

parents to respond with empathy and effective support.

## Learning Styles Matter

Addressing procrastination effectively also means understanding how a child learns best. Learning style plays a significant role in how children process information and approach tasks. Flexibility is essential, especially when a child's learning style differs from a parent's own.

Visual learners benefit from seeing information laid out clearly. Calendars, color-coded planners, charts, and visual timelines help them understand expectations and deadlines. Breaking projects into steps on a whiteboard or poster often works better than repeated verbal reminders.

Auditory learners process information through listening and speaking. These children may benefit from talking through assignments, hearing instructions explained aloud, or recording voice notes for themselves. Discussing a plan together can help the task feel more manageable.

Kinesthetic learners need movement and hands-on engagement. Sitting

still to plan or write can feel frustrating or overwhelming. Short work sessions, opportunities to move or fidget, and tools such as note cards or hands-on materials can help these learners stay engaged.

Reading and writing learners gravitate toward lists, notes, outlines, and written plans. Creating checklists, rough drafts, or written timelines early in the process can help them organize their thoughts and stay on track.

### Teach the Skill of Breaking Tasks Down

One of the most important skills parents can teach young procrastinators is how to break large tasks into smaller, manageable steps. To adults, “start your project” may seem straightforward. To a child, it can feel vague and overwhelming, often leading to shutdown.

While it may be tempting to outline every step for them, taking over removes the opportunity for children to develop independence. Instead, guide them through the planning process by asking questions such as: What is the final product? What steps will it take to get there? How long might each step take? Which step feels easiest to start with?

Writing the steps down and placing them in a visible location can make a big difference. Celebrating progress as each step is completed helps replace anxiety with momentum. Over time, children begin to internalize this process and gain confidence in their ability to manage future projects independently.

### Teach Routine and Predictability

Planning ahead becomes much easier when it is part of a consistent routine. Families do not need elaborate systems or complex schedules. What matters most is predictability.

A simple weekly check-in, perhaps over Sunday breakfast, can help everyone review upcoming assignments, activities, and commitments. Daily homework check-ins at the same time each afternoon can also reduce last-minute surprises. When planning becomes a regular habit rather than a reaction to crisis, children are more likely to engage with it.

### Focus on Progress, Not Perfection

Even with guidance, routines, and support, children will still procrastinate at times. Mistakes will happen, deadlines will be missed, and lessons will occasionally be learned the hard way. That is part of the learning process.

The ultimate goal is not perfection. It is helping children learn to anticipate challenges, manage their time, and trust themselves to handle responsibilities.

When kids learn to break tasks into steps, schedule their time, and ask for help when needed, they are protecting their energy, confidence, and sense of calm.

That shift in mindset is powerful. Planning ahead becomes an act of self-care, teaching children that they are capable, resilient, and worthy of support. And that lesson will serve them far beyond the next homework deadline.



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## Lifelines

CATHERINE MICHALK

*Michalk is a native Austinite, writer, and mom of three. You can follow her family's adventures at [www.catherinemichalk.com](http://www.catherinemichalk.com).*



# Valentine Chemistry

Everyone knows Valentine's Day is celebrated in February, but did you know February is also American Heart Month? With hearts everywhere you look, what better time for an annual reminder to pay attention to your heart health? Valentine's Day and American Heart Month are linked in more ways than you might think. Love can actually lead to a healthier heart, both emotionally and physically. The connections you have with those around you, whether your spouse, children, extended family, or friends, can have a significant impact on your overall health.

### Love Hormones

If you are a parent, you have probably heard of oxytocin, also known as the love hormone. One of oxytocin's roles is creating feelings of love and attachment between mother and baby after childbirth and during breastfeeding. Oxytocin is released by the pituitary gland and helps us feel happy and connected to those around us.

But did you know oxytocin also affects your heart? Studies show it

can reduce cortisol levels and blood pressure, lower heart rate, and help the heart heal physically from damage. Similarly, dopamine and serotonin are hormones often associated with falling in love because they affect the brain's reward center and promote feelings of happiness. These hormones also improve cardiovascular function by helping the heart pump more effectively and improving blood flow. The next time you feel overwhelmed with love for your spouse or child, remember those feelings are more than a fleeting sense of love and well-being. They are also supporting your heart health.

### Stress and Heart Health

High-stress situations increase cortisol, a stress hormone produced by the adrenal glands. Like all hormones, cortisol plays an important role in the body, including regulating blood pressure, glucose levels, and sleep cycles. However, when cortisol levels are too high or too low, problems can occur.

So what does this have to do with your heart and being in love? Living with chronically high cortisol levels can keep your body in a constant state of stress,

which is harmful to your heart and overall health. Strong connections with loved ones can help reduce that stress. Having someone you trust to talk with not only reminds you that you are not alone, but it can also help lower cortisol levels. You do not need a romantic partner to experience this benefit. A trusted friend, neighbor, or family member can help reduce stress and support a healthier heart.

### How Love Can Lower Your Blood Pressure

A kiss on the cheek, holding hands during a walk, and a warm hug are common expressions of love. Physical touch plays a key role in how we show affection, and it can also benefit your heart. Studies show that physical touch from a loving partner can help lower blood pressure. Simple gestures such as holding hands or rubbing someone's back can improve heart health and reduce the risk of serious conditions such as heart attacks and strokes.

### A Support System for Your Life

Being surrounded by people you love offers benefits beyond hormone balance and blood pressure. Your

lifestyle choices are often influenced by those around you. Friends and family form your support system and can encourage healthier habits for your heart and your life. Here are a few ways that support system can make a difference.

- **Eating Healthy:** Following a heart-healthy diet is easier when you and your spouse or family commit to it together. Look up recipes, plan meals, shop, and cook as a team to support better heart health.
- **Exercise:** Staying motivated to exercise is easier when you are accountable to someone else. That person might be your spouse, neighbor, gym partner, or even your teenager. Walking, running, swimming, playing tennis, or taking a fitness class for at least 30 minutes five times a week can provide the greatest heart health benefits.
- **Forming Good Habits:** Healthy habits do not happen by accident. Friends and family can encourage you to sleep more, eat better, and maintain positive routines. They can also support you in breaking unhealthy habits such as smoking or excessive drinking, all of which affect heart health.
- **Visiting Your Doctor:** Parents regularly take children for well-checks, but adults often delay their own appointments. While some aches and pains come with age, others may signal heart issues or chronic conditions. Loved ones can encourage regular checkups because they care about your well-being.
- **Mental Health:** Poor mental health can increase stress hormones that negatively affect heart health. Friends and family often notice when you are overwhelmed, stressed, or irritable, and they want what is best for you. Whether that means taking time for yourself or seeking support from a mental health professional, they can help you recognize when a change is needed.

Do not let February pass without taking time to consider how your relationships are supporting your heart health.

### 1. Love Hormones in Family Life

That rush of love you feel when hugging your child is powered by oxytocin. Along with dopamine and serotonin, these hormones help lower stress, support emotional bonding, and promote heart health for parents.

### 2. Everyday Family Moments That Help Your Heart

Family walks, bedtime cuddles, cooking meals together, or laughing around the dinner table all strengthen connection while supporting a healthier heart.

### 3. Parenting Stress and Your Heart

Busy schedules, lack of sleep, and constant multitasking can raise stress levels. Talking with a partner, friend, or fellow parent can help lower cortisol and protect your heart.

### 4. Your Parenting Support System Matters

Parenting is not meant to be done alone. Trusted friends, family members, and neighbors can encourage healthy habits, remind you to rest, and support your physical and mental well-being.

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# February 2026 calendar

Go to [www.austinfamily.com](http://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](http://www.austinfamily.com) and will be made live once approved. Certain restrictions apply.

## Sun 1

### Black History Month Story Walk.

8 a.m. From February 1–28, experience our Black History Month display honoring 28 influential figures whose achievements have profoundly shaped society. Lakeway City Hall, 1102 Lohman's Crossing Rd. [www.lakeway-tx.gov](http://www.lakeway-tx.gov).

### Miss Nelson is Missing!

11 a.m. and 1 p.m. Miss Nelson can't control her crazy classroom because she's just too nice. But when she disappears, her replacement is the hard-as-nails, detention-loving, recess-canceling, homework-overloading substitute teacher Viola Swamp. With the Big Test approaching, the kids suddenly realize how much they miss Miss Nelson and they'll do anything — including hiring a private eye — to solve the mystery of her disappearance and bring her back. Scottish Rite Children's Theater, 207 W. 18<sup>th</sup> St. \$24 adults, \$20 seniors, \$17 kids, under 2 free. [www.scottishritetheater.org](http://www.scottishritetheater.org).

**Free First Sunday at the Bullock.** Join Girlstart for hands-on STEM fun at the Bullock Museum's Free First Sunday. Enjoy engaging, family-friendly STEM activities designed for all ages. Bob Bullock State History Museum, 1800 Congress Ave. [www.girlstart.org](http://www.girlstart.org).

**Austin Symphonic Band: "These United States."** 4 to 5:30 p.m. Celebrate the spirit of America as the Austin Symphonic Band honors the nation's 250<sup>th</sup> birthday with a stirring musical journey across time and Luis "Chico" Portillo. Performing Arts Center, Connally High School, 13212 N. Lamar Blvd. \$0 – \$15. [www.austinsymphonicband.org](http://www.austinsymphonicband.org).

## Tue 3

**The Sound of Music.** 7:30 to 10:15 p.m. For 65 years, The Sound of Music has been one of our "favorite things." With its timeless story and irresistibly charming score, this Rodgers & Hammerstein musical isn't just meant to be enjoyed — it's meant to be shared. Bass Concert Hall, 2350 Robert Dedman Dr. \$42. [www.texasperformingarts.org](http://www.texasperformingarts.org).

## Wed 4

CONTINUED: **The Sound of Music**, see Tue 3<sup>rd</sup>.

## Thu 5

**Art for Teens: Origami Butterfly.** 4 to 5:30 p.m. Teens and tweens, come get crafty after school at Westbank. Each month we will have a new project, and all materials will be provided. Westbank Community Library, 1309 Westbank Dr. [www.westbanklibrary.com](http://www.westbanklibrary.com).

**Lantern Tour at Laguna Gloria.** 6 to 8 p.m. On Thursday evenings experience the magic of art and nature in perfect harmony with our Lantern Tour at Laguna Gloria. The Contemporary Austin – Laguna Gloria, 3809 W. 35<sup>th</sup> St. FREE. [www.thecontemporaryaustin.org](http://www.thecontemporaryaustin.org).

CONTINUED: **The Sound of Music**, see Tue 3<sup>rd</sup>.

## Fri 6

**Wood Reclamation – Large logs, great for art projects and milling.** 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. The Austin Parks and Recreation Urban Forestry Unit is giving away free large logs – great for art projects and milling. John Trevino Jr. Metro Park. [www.austintexas.gov](http://www.austintexas.gov).

**A Night for Sweethearts All Abilities Dance.** 5:30 to 8 p.m. Come dressed in your finest attire for a night of music, dancing, and delicious food. Let's capture memories at our photo booth, make new friends, and create moments to cherish. \$3 for Kyle residents, \$5 for non-residents. Gemstone Palace, 1101 Bunton Creek Rd. [www.events.cityofkyle.gov](http://www.events.cityofkyle.gov).

CONTINUED: **The Sound of Music**, see Tue 3<sup>rd</sup>.

## Sat 7

**Central Texas Math Carousel 2026: 5th-Grade Math Competition.** 8 a.m. to 12:45 p.m. Join us for an exciting third annual math competition for 5<sup>th</sup>-grade students. Harmony School of Endeavor, 13415 FM 620 N. FREE. [www.HarmonyTX.org](http://www.HarmonyTX.org).

**中文游乐园-Chinese Learning Playground.** 2:30 to 4:30 p.m. 中文游乐园-Chinese Learning Playground"

is a Mandarin Chinese study group for school-age children. Westbank Community Library, 1309 Westbank Dr. [www.westbanklibrary.com](http://www.westbanklibrary.com).

**Puzzlepalooza: Speed Puzzling Competition & Swap.** 6 to 8 p.m. Puzzles are for lovers. Yarborough Branch, 2200 Hancock Dr. FREE. [www.library.austintexas.gov](http://www.library.austintexas.gov).

CONTINUED: **Miss Nelson is Missing!** see Sun 1<sup>st</sup>; **The Sound of Music**, see Tue 3<sup>rd</sup>.

## Sun 8

**Family Day: Lunar New Year.** 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Welcome in the Year of the Horse at Lunar New Year. This free event features art, performances, and outdoor activities for all families to enjoy. UMLAUF Sculpture Garden & Museum, 605 Azie Morton Rd. FREE. [www.umlaufsculpture.app.neoncrm.com](http://www.umlaufsculpture.app.neoncrm.com).

**Sunday Funday: Valentines for Vets.** 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sunday Funday Valentines for Veterans to make holiday ornaments to take home. Included with museum admission. Neill-Cochran House Museum, 2310 San Gabriel St. [www.nchmuseum.org](http://www.nchmuseum.org).

**Sunday Afternoon Concert Series.** 4 to 5 p.m. Enjoy a performance of "Bits & Pieces" by the Texas Troubadours. Activity Center, 105 Cross Creek. [www.lakeway-tx.gov](http://www.lakeway-tx.gov).

CONTINUED: **Miss Nelson is Missing!** see Sun 1<sup>st</sup>; **The Sound of Music**, see Tue 3<sup>rd</sup>.

## Mon 9

**Crafts for Teens: Zen Gardens.** 4:30 p.m. Hang out after school and relax with a simple craft. Westbank Community Library, 1309 Westbank Dr. [www.westbanklibrary.com](http://www.westbanklibrary.com).

## Tue 10

**FronteraFest 2026.** 8 to 10 p.m. FronteraFest (the "Fest"), Austin's longest-running, and well-known performance festival is back, in its 31<sup>st</sup> year. Hyde Park Theatre, 511 W. 43<sup>rd</sup> St. \$26. [www.hydeparktheatre.org](http://www.hydeparktheatre.org).

## Wed 11

**Stroller-friendly Tour at Laguna Gloria.** 10 to 11 a.m. Enjoy a leisurely, stroller-friendly tour through Laguna Gloria's 14-

acre sculpture park and be immersed in the beauty of art in nature. The Contemporary Austin – Laguna Gloria, 3809 W. 35th St. \$0 – \$10. [www.thecontemporaryaustin.org](http://www.thecontemporaryaustin.org).

**All Ages Storytime with Special Guest: Armstrong Community Music School.** 10:30 a.m. Join Westbank Libraries for a demo of an early childhood music class with Armstrong Community Music School (ACMS). Westbank Community Library, 1309 Westbank Dr. [www.westbanklibrary.com](http://www.westbanklibrary.com).

**Elementary Art.** 4:30 p.m. Elementary-aged kids, come get crafty after school at Laura's. Each month we will have a new project, and all materials will be provided. Laura Bush Community Library, 9411 Bee Cave Rd. [www.westbanklibrary.com](http://www.westbanklibrary.com).

CONTINUED: **FronteraFest 2026**, see Tue 10<sup>th</sup>.

#### Thu 12

CONTINUED: **FronteraFest 2026**, see Tue 10<sup>th</sup>.

#### Fri 13

**Dottie Jordan Recreation Center – Art in Cahoots.** 10 to 11 a.m. Art in Cahoots A Pop-Up Arts Experience for Caregiver and Child. Pop-in for a pop-up. Register on Eventbrite. Dottie Jordan Recreation Center, 2803 Loyola Ln. [www.austintexas.gov](http://www.austintexas.gov).

**Sweethearts Celebration.** 10 to 11 a.m. Celebrate Valentine's Day at the library. We'll start with a fun story time for ages 0-5 years, then dive into crafty Valentine creations. Make a card, design a sweetheart craft, or create a thoughtful gift to share with someone you love. Come spread kindness, creativity, and lots of heart. 550 Scott St., Kyle [www.events.cityofkyle.gov](http://www.events.cityofkyle.gov).

**Valentine Work & Play.** 10:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Families are invited to hang out, where we'll watch Princess and the Frog, play with toys in the morning, and make Valentine crafts. Laura Bush Community Library, 9411 Bee Cave Rd. [www.westbanklibrary.com](http://www.westbanklibrary.com).

**Charlotte's Web.** 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. After Fern saves Wilbur, the runt of the litter, it's up to Charlotte the spider to spin a web of miracles. The Kleberg at Zach Theater, 1421 W. Riverside Dr. \$31. [www.zachtheatre.org](http://www.zachtheatre.org).

CONTINUED: **FronteraFest 2026**, see Tue 10<sup>th</sup>.

#### Sat 14 Valentine's Day

**Puppet Making Workshop at Pease Park Tudor Cottage.** 10 to 11 a.m. Make your very own puppet in the climate-controlled Tudor Cottage with Small Wonders Puppet Theater. This event is open to all. Tudor Cottage at Pease Park, 1100 Kingsbury St. FREE. [www.peasepark.org](http://www.peasepark.org).

**Festival of Learning.** 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Come chat with Girlstart at our info booth to learn more about our hands-on STEM spring programming. Parents can get information on workshops, our Girls in STEM Conference, summer camps, and more—all designed to spark curiosity in science, technology, engineering, and math. Branch Park Pavilion, 2201 Aldrich St. [www.girlstart.org](http://www.girlstart.org).

CONTINUED: **Miss Nelson is Missing!** see Sun 1<sup>st</sup>; **FronteraFest 2026**, see Tue 10<sup>th</sup>, **Charlotte's Web**, see Fri 13<sup>th</sup>.

#### Sun 15

**Texas Dragon Lion Dancers.** 2:30 p.m. 2026 is the Year of the Horse. Come celebrate Lunar New Year with a performance by the Texas Dragon/Lion Dance Team. Laura Bush Community Library, 9411 Bee Cave Rd. [www.westbanklibrary.com](http://www.westbanklibrary.com).

CONTINUED: **Miss Nelson is Missing!** see Sun 1<sup>st</sup>; **Charlotte's Web**, see Fri 13<sup>th</sup>.

#### Mon 16

**Kids Concert with Jodi Jigglejam.** 10:30 a.m. Get ready to wiggle, jiggle, and giggle to Jodi Jigglejam's funtastic interactive originals & your favorites. Laura Bush Community Library, 9411 Bee Cave Rd. [www.westbanklibrary.com](http://www.westbanklibrary.com).

**Minecraft Watch & Play.** 1 to 3 p.m. Families are invited to hang out at Laura's, where we'll watch the Minecraft movie (PG) and do Minecraft inspired activities. Laura Bush Community Library, 9411 Bee Cave Rd. [www.westbanklibrary.com](http://www.westbanklibrary.com).

#### Tue 17

**All Ages Storytime with Special Guest Armstrong Community Music School.** 10:30 a.m. Join Laura's Library for a demo of an early childhood music class with Armstrong Community Music School (ACMS). Laura Bush Community Library, 9411 Bee Cave Rd. [www.westbanklibrary.com](http://www.westbanklibrary.com).

#### Wed 18

**Homeschool Day: Relationships in Nature.** 10 to 11:30 a.m. Is your homeschool learner ready to become

an ecologist? Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, 4801 La Crosse Ave. [www.wildflower.org](http://www.wildflower.org).

#### Sat 21

CONTINUED: **Miss Nelson is Missing!** see Sun 1<sup>st</sup>; **中文游乐园-Chinese Learning Playground**, See Sat 7<sup>th</sup>, **Charlotte's Web**, see Fri 13<sup>th</sup>.

#### Sun 22

**H-E-B Free Fourth Sunday.** 1 to 5 p.m. Enjoy FREE museum admission all day. Spend the afternoon exploring Texas' natural history, from the formation of our planet, through the age of dinosaurs to the wildlife that calls Texas home today. Texas Science & Natural History Museum, 2400 Trinity St. FREE. [www.sciencemuseum.utexas.edu](http://www.sciencemuseum.utexas.edu)

CONTINUED: **Miss Nelson is Missing!** see Sun 1<sup>st</sup>; **Charlotte's Web**, see Fri 13<sup>th</sup>.

#### Tue 24

**SCHOOL DAY PERFORMANCE: Cirque Mechanics: TILT! A Circus Thrill Ride.** 11 a.m. Enter the world of Cirque Mechanics, where breathtaking acrobatics meet mechanical marvels in a one-of-a-kind circus experience. Bass Concert Hall, 2350 Robert Dedman Dr. [www.texasperformingarts.org](http://www.texasperformingarts.org).

**FOSSIL HUNTING: TEXAS.** 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. Come join us for an excellent talk on fossil hunting where you'll be able to learn about what, when, and where, a bit of geology, tips, and tricks on how to find fossils and some of the locations that are accessible to the general public. Terrazas Branch, 1105 E. César Chávez St. FREE. [www.library.austintexas.gov](http://www.library.austintexas.gov).

#### Wed 25

**Toddler Yoga at Pease Park.** 10 to 10:45 a.m. Come stretch, breathe, move, dance, relax, create, and have FUN. Pease District Park, 1100 Kingsbury St. FREE. [www.peasepark.org](http://www.peasepark.org).

**Heart Embroidery.** 4:30 p.m. Whether you're a seasoned stitcher or a novice, this event is perfect for all skill levels. We'll have templates for you to follow and staff to help. Laura Bush Community Library, 9411 Bee Cave Rd. [www.westbanklibrary.com](http://www.westbanklibrary.com).

#### Fri 27

**Asian American Resource Center – Art in Cahoots.** 10 to 11 a.m. Art in Cahoots a Pop-Up Arts Experience for Caregiver and Child. Pop-in for a pop-up. Register on Eventbrite. Asian American Resource Center, 8401 Cameron Rd. [www.austintexas.gov](http://www.austintexas.gov).

**Preschool Imagination Station.** 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. Designed for young learners, Imagination Station encourages learning through play. Milwood Branch, 12500 Amherst Dr. FREE. [www.library.austintexas.gov](http://www.library.austintexas.gov).

**Sat 28**

**STEM Girl Day at UT.** 10 a.m. We welcome elementary and middle school students, families, and educators to a day of free STEM fun across the University of Texas (UT) campus. Texas Science and Natural History Museum, UT Campus, 2400 Trinity St. [www.sciencemuseum.utexas.edu](http://www.sciencemuseum.utexas.edu).

**Story Starts: Improv for kids and their adults.** 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. ColdTowne's Youth Program, Excused Absence Comedy, invites you to Story Starts, our weekly Improv show for kids and families. ColdTowne Theater, 1700 E. 2nd St. \$6. [www.excusedabsence.com](http://www.excusedabsence.com).

**Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban™ in Concert.** 1 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. Relive the magic of your favorite wizard in Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban™ in Concert. Bass Concert Hall, 2350 Robert Dedman Dr. \$45 - \$120. [www.texasperformingarts.org](http://www.texasperformingarts.org).

**Backyard Chickens 101: A Practical Guide to Raising Chickens in Austin.** 1 to 2 p.m. Dreaming of fresh eggs from your own backyard? University Hills Branch, 4721 Loyola Ln. FREE. [www.library.austintexas.gov](http://www.library.austintexas.gov).

CONTINUED: **Miss Nelson is Missing!** see Sun 1<sup>st</sup>; **Charlotte's Web,** see Fri 13<sup>th</sup>.

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# KIDZONE

## Write Your Family Song

Music plays a central role in brain development from the earliest ages, and it is a fun tool for building strong family bonds and lasting traditions. While songs and sing-alongs are a common part of children's lessons in school, parents often do not think about creating their own special compositions. It is easier than you might expect, and it is a great way to teach rhythm, melody, and a healthy attitude toward creative expression.

### Why It Works

Children often learn music through singing, clapping, and experimenting with instruments. Writing a song combines all of these elements and reinforces concepts such as rhyme, tempo, and pitch in a playful setting. It is hands-on learning disguised as family fun.

### How to Begin

- **Pick a theme:** Start with something meaningful or seasonal. For February, Valentine's Day is a natural fit. Write about what you love most about your family, favorite treats, or family pets. Everyday activities such as bath time and bedtime can also inspire new daily rituals.
- **Keep it simple:** For toddlers, focus on short, repetitive phrases such as "We love hugs!" paired with a familiar tune like "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star." For elementary-age children, encourage them to invent rhymes or add verses. This can help incorporate new vocabulary and handwriting skills.
- **Add a beat:** No instruments at home? Improvise. Clap, tap on pots, or use toy instruments to create rhythm. You can even turn your phone into a musical instrument with apps such as GarageBand.

### Fun Themes to Try

- **Family favorites:** Foods, games, or vacation spots.
- **Special days:** Birthdays, rainy days, or holidays.
- **Silly songs:** Funny lyrics about chores or pets.

### Where to Sing It

Turn your song into a tradition. Sing it:

- At bedtime for a calming routine.
- During car rides for entertainment.
- At family gatherings for a laugh.
- On Valentine's Day as a sweet surprise.

### Create a Keepsake

Record your song on a phone and replay it whenever the mood strikes, or write down the lyrics in a "family songbook" and add new tunes throughout the year.

Writing a family song is not about perfection. It is about creativity and connection. Grab a pen, gather your "band," and let the music play.

*The Greater Austin YMCA offers a variety of Summer Day Camp options to help your child discover their creative talents. Registration is open now. Visit [www.austinyymca.org](http://www.austinyymca.org) to learn more.*



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