



Neighborhood
Parents Network
35 YEARS

SPECIAL SUPPORT ISSUE

PARENT TO PARENT



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LEARN MORE!

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October 9th, 9am

October 23rd, 9am

November 23rd, 9am

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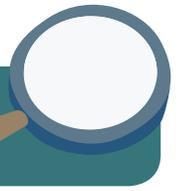
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OUR MISSION

Connecting a diverse community of families with the resources they need to navigate parenting in the city

PARENT TO PARENT

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Parent to Parent contains articles and information straight from our NPN member community. For information about editorial submissions, email newsletter@nnpnparents.org; for advertising, email ellie@nnpnparents.org. We look forward to hearing from you!

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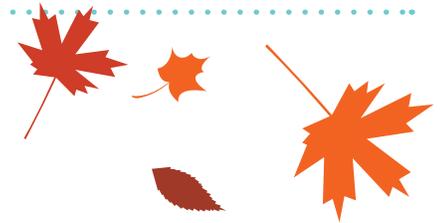
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From the Executive Director

Connecting families with the resources and support they need—it's what NPN has been doing for 35 years! In honor of this milestone, we'd like to dedicate this issue of *Parent to Parent* to you, our valued community. We wouldn't be where we are today without the advice and personal stories our members share with each other. Inside you'll find advice to folks experiencing the ups and downs of parenthood from those who've been there, with topics including:

- **Single parenthood**
- **Traveling with kids**
- **Infertility**
- **No local family**
- **Developmental differences**

Have a personal story of your own you'd like to share? Tell us how you found the support and community you needed, survived the first few years of parenting or managed through an especially challenging period in your life.

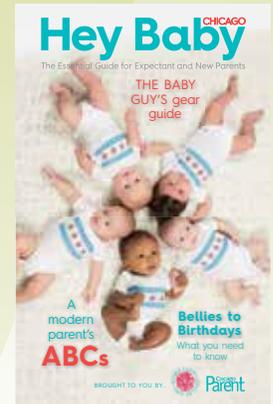
Submit your story at nnpnparents.org/write-for-npn or email newsletter@nnpnparents.org for more information. We'd love to hear from you!



The NPN team celebrating 35 years of connections and support. Photo by Eva Ho Photography.

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STARTING THE PRESCHOOL SEARCH

By *Tiffany Norwood*, NPN member since 2013

WHATEVER SCHOOL YOU CHOOSE, MAKE SURE TO DO YOUR RESEARCH, AND ALWAYS REMEMBER TO PUT THE BEST INTEREST OF YOUR CHILD AND FAMILY FIRST.

Are you new to the area, expecting or raising a young child? In conversations about preschool, you hear the words Independent, Private, Public, CPS and Ready-To-Learn. What does all this mean? Don't know where to start when looking for a preschool?

When I began my research, I got a better idea of the meanings of those terms. I started one year prior to my child's first year of school and was mindful that the admissions age for the majority of schools is age three by September 1.

One tool that helped me was NPN's Online School Directory, which I made a priority to check out. It helped immensely, was easy to use and provided detailed information that helped me navigate the preschool options.

During my search, I discovered five types of programming:

Chicago Public Schools (CPS) offers two types of preschool through the Options for Knowledge application: Montessori and Dual Language. Currently, there are four preschools in these categories (three Montessori, one Dual Language). These full-day programs are tuition-free but only through the lottery application. The application deadline is typically in mid-December of the year before your child will start school, and notification arrives the following spring. I have found the lottery to be a nail-biting experience but patience is key.

Ready-To-Learn Preschool (RTL), a second option offered by CPS, is typically a two-and-a-half-hour-per-day, five-days-per-week preschool program with admission by lottery via a centralized on-site application process. Tuition is on a sliding scale based on your household income. If your child is eligible to receive an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for accommodations and special education services, tuition is waived.

Tuition-Based Preschool (TBPK), a third CPS option, is a full-day, full-tuition program with admission on a first-come, first-served basis.



Photo courtesy Tiffany Norwood.

Based on what I've learned, I believe the Options for Knowledge, Ready-to-Learn and Tuition-Based Preschool programs would be a great introduction for familiarizing a child with the academic and social settings at a public school.

Independent Schools, also tuition-based but at a much higher rate, offer unique components to their curriculums. Even though these schools do not follow the same standards as CPS, they use an innovative approach to implementing educational standards. These schools might be excellent for exposing your child to progressive approaches to education.

Private Schools, which include parochial and other religious schools (e.g., Catholic, Christian, Jewish) address education using a religious-based curriculum.

For me, having so many great preschool options right here in the city of Chicago has made the process a lot easier to navigate. Many of these schools have the potential to be a good fit for your child, but whatever school you choose, make sure to do your research, and always remember to put the best interest of your child and family first.

Happy searching!

Tiffany Norwood resides in the Hyde Park/Kenwood neighborhood with her husband and three children (ages five, 19 months and three months). An avid fan of NPN, she looks forward to checking out the calendar of events every week to find out what's happening around the city.





NPN'S TOP 10 TIPS TO START YOUR SCHOOL SEARCH

1. Determine your family's **school search criteria**. Consider factors such as cost, location, public or private, schedule, after-school programs, etc.
2. Go to the **NPN School page** (nnpnparents.org/schools):
 - a. Check out upcoming **School Fair** details and RSVP.
 - b. Visit the NPN Online **School Directory** and enter your search criteria/must-haves to explore the right schools for your family.
3. Use the **NPN My Directory** to narrow your search:
 - a. Save up to 30 schools on your list.
 - b. View your schools on a map.
 - c. Download your list to Excel or a **customized PDF** to use as you go.
4. Dip into the **NPN Discussion Forum**. Gain access to our members' thoughts about school search. Search within existing post categories such as "preschoolers" and "school days." Or start your own topic!
5. Take advantage of **CPS resources**:
 - a. Check out your **CPS neighborhood school**. Identify your neighborhood school (schoollocator.cps.k12.il.us/) and talk to parent groups for firsthand feedback and plans for the near future.
 - b. Visit the **CPS Office of Access and Enrollment** (cpsoae.org) for information on magnet, gifted and enrichment programs.
 - c. Get updated information on **Chicago Public Schools** (cps.edu).
6. Attend **NPN's Chicago School Choice** sessions. Panelists and school search experts discuss the process and answer audience questions. Space is limited (nnpnparents.org/groups/chicago-school-choice).
7. Reserve spots early for **school tours and visitation days**. Dates are usually available by September 1, and on-site contact with the school, students and administration helps facilitate your decisions.
8. Attend the **NPN School Fairs**. More than 100 public and private preschools and elementary schools send representatives to meet parents, giving you one-stop access to make personal connections, consider new options and determine next steps in the application process.
9. Seek out valid **word-of-mouth recommendations**. Ask your friends, acquaintances, neighbors and co-workers for their opinions on school options. Parents are usually willing to talk about their school, especially if they are particularly happy or unhappy with their choice. There is a plethora of free information available if you take the time to ask around for thoughts, advice, etc.
10. Remember, there is likely **more than one solution** for your family. Try not to get your heart set on one school. Spread your net as wide as possible. Many wait lists move and no decision is permanent.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR FOR NPN'S ANNUAL SCHOOL FAIRS

Sep. 19

South Side Preschool & Elementary School Fair

Hosted by Hyde Park Neighborhood Club. Free and open to the public.

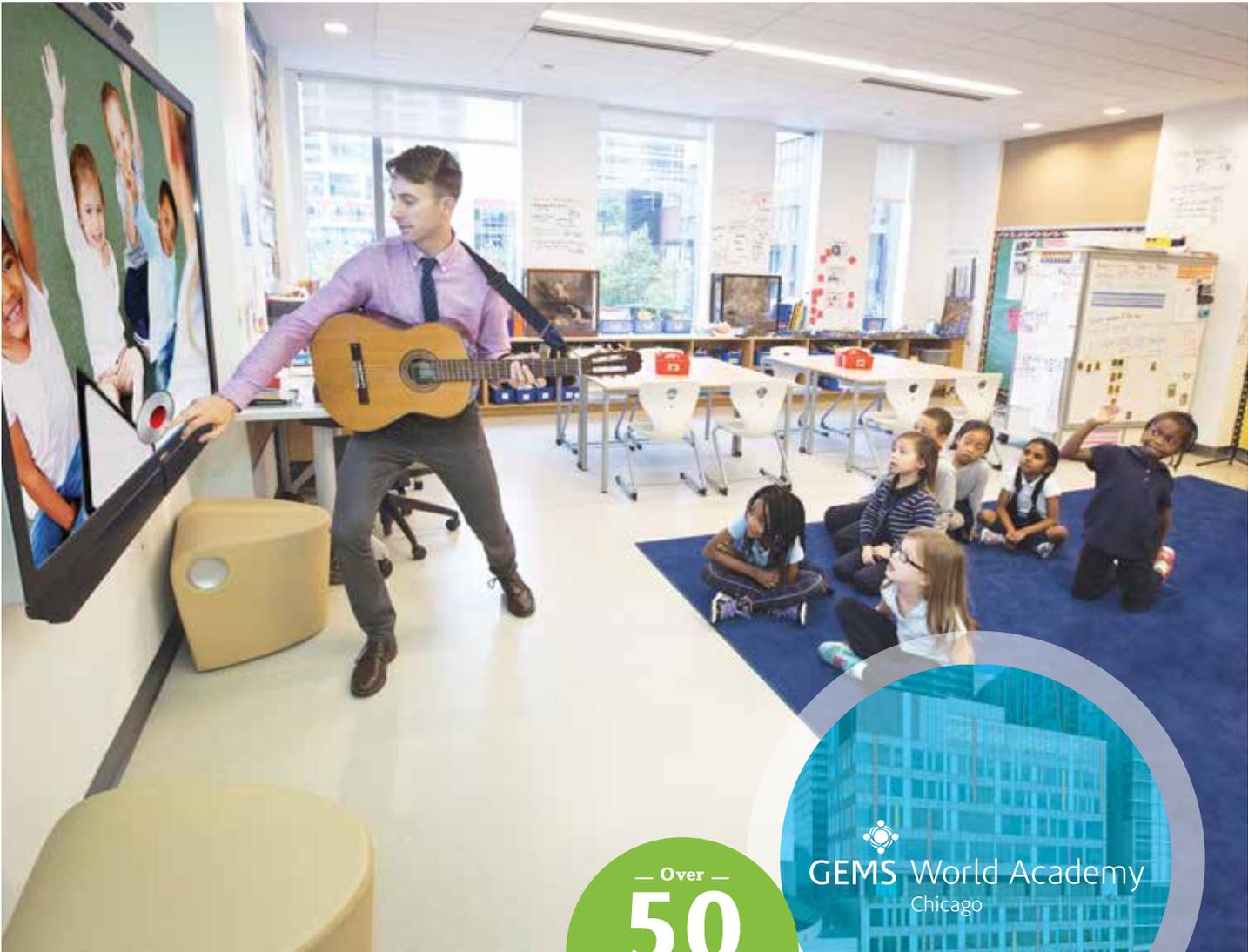
Oct. 18

Annual Preschool & Elementary School Fair

A unique opportunity for members to interact with representatives from 150+ public and private schools and enrichment programs. Hosted by Grossinger City Autoplex.

Visit the [NPN Calendar](#) for the latest event details and to RSVP.





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YOU AND YOUR CHILD WILL BE OK

By Candice Blansett-Cummins, *The Wishcraft Workshop*, NPN member since 2009

Wherever you are in the process, whatever you are feeling, however you are handling it, you're going to be OK.

Discovering that your child braves something out of the ordinary can feel like a full stop. That something can be a developmental difference or a chronic disease, but whatever it is, it can feel like the end of your world. In the middle of the night on an eerily quiet street, as I collapsed into the fresh snow outside the local children's hospital, I felt that helplessness. You've taken care of this child's every need and now you, Super-Mom, can't fix it. You wonder what you could have done differently. You might be praying your child makes it through the week or eventually lives an independent life. Whatever the child's diagnosis, one thing is true, Mom: your oxygen mask comes first. So take a deep breath. Repeat. This child depends on you.

Survival mode

Adrenalin surges. You make plans. Maybe friends and family rally. You are determined not to let a diagnosis be your child's prognosis. Your super-human energy and focus get you and the rest of your family through the crisis. Keep breathing: they need you.

Mourning mode

Kids can be so resilient. The family routine, though different, eventually becomes habit. The schedule of medical or therapy appointments has become your new normal. You begin to exhale. And maybe you cry. At some point, perhaps even before your child was born, you've tended dreams of his/her bright future. And now? Now you're just not sure what comes next. Some days will suck. Get help if you need it. Your child needs you.

DISCOVERING THAT YOUR CHILD BRAVES SOMETHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY CAN FEEL LIKE A FULL STOP. SO TAKE A DEEP BREATH. REPEAT. THIS CHILD DEPENDS ON YOU.

Networking mode

It might have taken a while to get to this place but you've made it. You've organized your thoughts. Your emotions have stabilized (or at least for a good part of most days). There are many resources available (NPN is a great example). No one will understand your story the way you do, but there are likely many parents and experts with something to add to your toolkit, one that may need new approaches or new contacts as your child's story evolves. Meet them. Assemble your team, your tribe. You need them and they need you.

Survival (surviving and thriving) mode

Is there something you miss doing for yourself? Do it. Is there a friend you haven't seen in a while? See that person. Is there another family adrift with a situation similar to yours? Help anchor them. Imagine what the future might look like for your child. Is there a silver lining? Find it. Your child needs it.

Our stories won't be identical. Every parent, every child, every diagnosis, carries many variables. The thread that connects us is that we need you and they need you. You need you. Wherever you are in your journey, know that it is a journey. Pack your oxygen mask and some healthy snacks. I'll see you along the way, and we'll be OK.

.....

Candice Blansett-Cummins, founder of *The Wishcraft Workshop* (wishcraftworkshop.com) in Chicago, is a parent, wife, friend, artist, teacher, student and concerned global citizen. She aspires to be a good person, caring for others, ourselves and our planet and helping others to grow their confidence and curiosity to do the same.



Photo courtesy Candice Blansett-Cummins.

BEING A NICU PARENT

By Mike Santoro, NPN member since 2015

THE IMPORTANT THING IS TO TAKE IT DAY BY DAY AND REMEMBER TO PUT YOUR FAMILY'S NEEDS FIRST.

You've joined a club nobody wants to be a part of. My time as a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) parent was one of the hardest points of my life.

After my wife Amanda went into labor at 24 weeks, she was admitted to the hospital and put on bed rest. When the doctors asked us if we wanted to tour the NICU, we declined the invitation. We didn't want to admit it was a possibility.

Amanda gave birth to our twins, Cheyenne and Evan, at 25 weeks and six days. We spent four months in the NICU and brought home only one of our babies. Evan is now a happy, healthy four-year-old boy, but not a day goes by that we don't remember Cheyenne and her impact on our lives. We founded the Little Giraffe Foundation (LGF), an organization dedicated to funding neonatal research and supporting NICU patients and parents, in her memory.

My hope is that no parent ever has to endure the NICU. For those who do, I offer this advice.

Embrace the uncertainty. Every day is different in the NICU—one day you might take two steps forward, the next you could move four steps back. You'll learn how to deal with the highs and lows on a roller coaster of emotions and do your best to navigate constant uncertainty and continuously changing conditions. You need to prepare yourself for anything and everything.

Document the journey. Take lots of pictures and record video when you can. Though this is not the brightest time of your child's life, it's a crucial part of the journey, and you'll want to have memories to look back on. During any down time at the hospital, jot down your thoughts and feelings in a journal to help document your journey in the NICU.

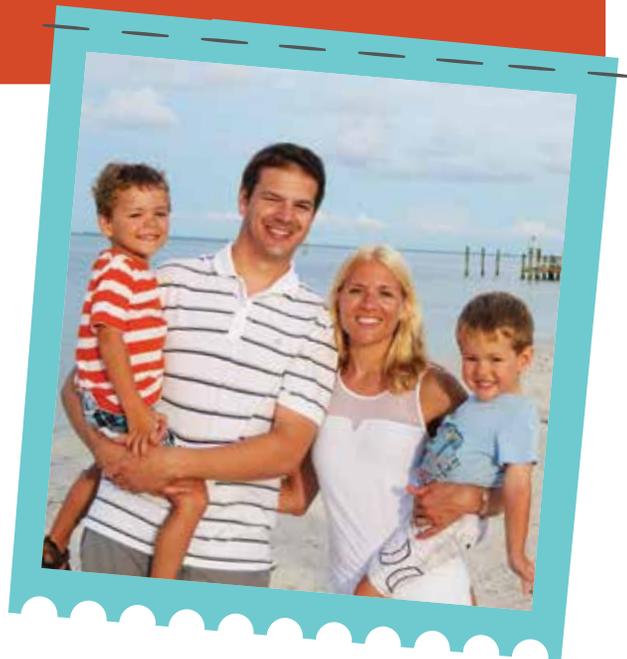


Photo courtesy Mike Santoro.

Find ways to connect with your baby. Amanda and I weren't allowed to hold our twins much of the time we were in the NICU. It's crucial for NICU parents to find other ways to connect with your baby. Talking, reading and singing to your baby help form crucial bonds and can even spur much-needed growth. A recent study funded by the LGF found that exposure to biological maternal sounds may improve weight gain in low-birth-weight infants.

Ask for support. Your family and friends can help by bringing dinner, but they won't ever completely understand what you are going through. Find the resources your hospital offers and try to connect with other parents who are/have been in the NICU. This journey is a tough one, but you don't have to take it alone.

I know firsthand how challenging life as a NICU parent can be. The important thing is to take it day by day and remember to put your family's needs first.

.....

Mike Santoro is the cofounder of the Little Giraffe Foundation (littlegiraffefoundation.org), a Chicago-based nonprofit dedicated to supporting neonatal research and preeemie families in the NICU. Since 2011 the foundation has delivered more than 4,000 holiday gift bags and funded more than \$50,000 in medical research and NICU support grants.

YOUR CHILDLESS FRIEND WANTS TO HELP

By **Nicole Johnston**, NPN member since 2015

Hi, remember me? Your friend who doesn't have children? I'm still here. I still love you and want to be part of your life. But I can see that your life has undergone a huge change that I can only partially understand and relate to. If we were to follow societal norms, our friendship would fade over time as I keep inviting you to social events that you can't attend, and your friendships would deepen with others who are at a similar stage of life.

Here's the truth: I want to support and help you in this next phase of life, but I don't know how. I think I have had a pretty average experience for a woman growing up in American culture. I've seen babies before, I've even held several for short periods of time. I've pinched their cheeks and fought the urge to eat up those chubby thighs. I moved out of the house as soon as I graduated high school, went to start my independent life at university, entered the workforce and got my first real grown-up job working in an office. University and work had a lot of new things for me to experience, but neither of them had any babies. My experience with children is tragically limited. I blame it on a loss of communal spirit in our society.

I don't know at what point the myth emerged in our individualistic society that needing help makes you weak or that charity is only for those who are destitute. We have been receiving and giving help to each other our entire lives. So why do we have such a hard time asking for help? I'm terrible at it, truly terrible, but I have noticed, as you no doubt have, my quality of life has been significantly higher when I have made myself more open to receiving and giving help.

HERE'S THE TRUTH: I WANT TO SUPPORT AND HELP YOU IN THIS NEXT PHASE OF LIFE, BUT I DON'T KNOW HOW.

So, please, let me help you. It may be hard at first; I won't know what will be helpful to you, and you'll have to explain it to me. You'll have to articulate your needs and be vulnerable. I will be intimidated and feel out of my element as I watch you navigate motherhood with what feels like some kind of magical prowess that I do not possess. There will be times when I still won't get what your new life means. And there will be times when I'll see something you wish I hadn't. But you will be helping me, too—and not just in the way we all grow when we help others and are helped by them. You will help me gain exposure to what it means to be a mother and a chance to develop those capacities. Fingers crossed, I will be a better mother for it when the time comes. And that's got to be better for everyone, right?

Nicole Johnston lives in the Logan Square neighborhood of Chicago. Though not a parent yet, she lives with a family with three young kids and is passionate about helping new families connect to the resources and help they need.





STRUGGLING WITH INFERTILITY

By **Katie O'Connor**, NPN member since 2010

YOU WILL OVERCOME THIS AND BE STRONGER FOR GOING THROUGH IT, PERSONALLY AND IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP.

If I could write a letter to a woman going through infertility, I would tell her all the things I learned along the way on my journey, all my best advice, and it would go something like this.

Dear [Desperately Wanting To Be A] Mom Struggling With Infertility,

As you read this you are probably in a deep dark place, wondering “why me?”.

I am here to tell you: the sun will shine again. Your morning routine won't always include a trip to the infertility clinic to get your blood drawn and ultrasound for monitoring. Your stomach bloat will deflate. Your butt won't be bruised and lumpy forever from the shots. You will have your life back.

And it will all be worth it.

I want to tell you it sucks—it's OK to have a personal pity party (but keep it short), then stand up, brush yourself off and keep going.

You will become a pro at getting your blood drawn. The shots aren't ideal, but the build-up in your head is way worse; just hold your breath and go!

Living through infertility treatments is like riding a roller coaster—constant ups and downs of emotions—you are hopeful, yet also bracing for heartache.

It's OK to be selfish, it keeps you sane. It's OK to skip a baby shower if the thought of going makes you think you will lose it.

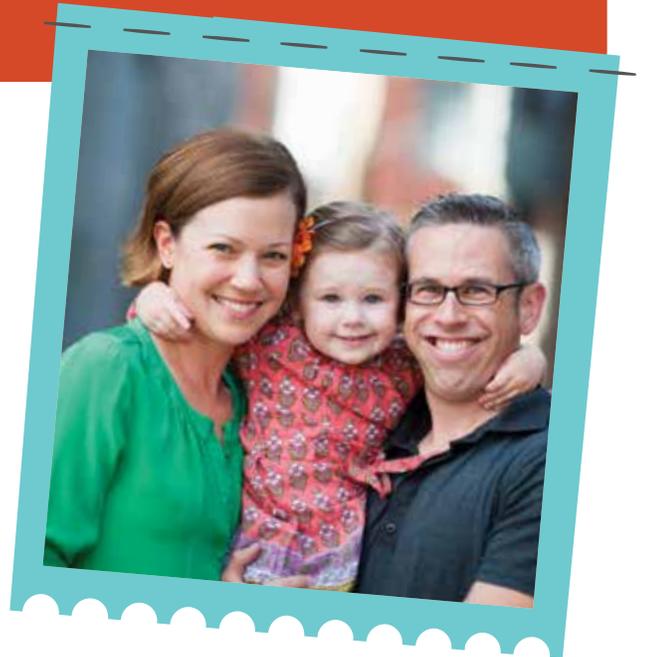


Photo courtesy Katie O'Connor.

You will not care who has seen your private parts. Maybe pre-infertility, you only had women OBGYNs; post-infertility, you might have a male doctor get you pregnant and a male doctor deliver your baby in a room full of medical students, and you will survive both.

I want you to know that you will overcome this and be stronger for going through it, personally and in your relationship. But make sure you communicate your feelings with your partner; you both are struggling, and you need to be open and honest about your needs, your wants and your limits.

Remember, you may have a plan, a vision of how your path to motherhood may look, and remember that plan, vision, path, may change over time, and that's OK! It will make you appreciate being pregnant or being a mom even more, but don't put too much pressure on the experience or yourself to be “perfect.”

.....
Katie O'Connor is the founder of Shine: A Light On Fertility, a unique fertility support community. She is a wife, mom, only child, marathon runner, fitness instructor and fertility advocate.



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GETTING BOWSER READY FOR BABY SIX TIPS TO HELP WITH A SMOOTH TRANSITION

By **Jamie Migdal**, NPN member since 2012

DON'T WAIT UNTIL THE DAY BEFORE THE BABY ARRIVES TO START TRAINING YOUR POOCH.

Be proactive! Don't wait until the day before the baby arrives to start training your pooch. If there are behavior issues you are concerned about, start working on them today. Call in a professional dog trainer if necessary.

Familiarize Bowser with babies. If your dog has never seen a stroller or heard an infant's cry, make those introductions before the baby arrives. If you have friends or relatives with babies, spend time with them. Some dogs can be tentative around unfamiliar objects, so allow him to sniff and experience the nuances of items such as strollers, baby wipes and noise-making toys.

Teach your dog to wait at the top and bottom of stairs. This little trick will prevent the possibility of tripping over your dog while you are carrying the baby up and down the stairs. (Also, if you are using a flexi-lead, get rid of it now and start using a regular six-foot leash.)

Get your dog his own bed. You may not want your dog on the bed or sofa with the baby, especially if you are nursing. Get a super-plush dog bed and introduce it as an alternative. But remember to spend some time on the floor with your dog, as you want to avoid any potential of him becoming too possessive over his new special spot. Another idea is to give him a dog bed for each high-use area of the house so he always has somewhere to "go lie down."

Prepare for visitors. If your dog has a habit of jumping up or being timid around visitors, address this immediately. Put some treats outside your door and ask pre-baby visitors to offer him a treat if he displays good manners: aim for "four on the floor" and give attention to him only when he has all four paws in contact with the ground. If your dog isn't already crate-trained, start that right away; a crate will give him a place to retreat when things get overwhelming, and it will help you know your dog is safe when people are going in and out the front door. You don't want to add "searching for your lost dog" to your to-do list.

Get a dog walker. Things can get pretty hectic with a newborn, and it's in your dog's best interest to have some fun while you are busy with the baby. Additionally, make it a priority to spend quality time with your dog, even if it's just a few minutes a day. Although dogs are known and revered for their resilience in new situations, remember that your dog had been your "baby" for a long time. Do what you can to make sure your dog doesn't resent his new housemate, while maintaining the rules and consistency you've established.

Jamie Migdal has been working with pets and their people for more than 20 years in her five pet industry start-ups. Her experience has made her an expert in entrepreneurship and the pet industry. She lives in Chicago with her husband, daughter, two rescue Collies and a cat.



Photo courtesy Jamie Migdal.





TIPS FOR TRAVELING WITH KIDS

By **Lindsay Bremer**, NPN member since 2012

TRAVEL CAN CERTAINLY BE CHALLENGING AND STRESSFUL FOR BOTH PARENTS AND KIDS, BUT WITH A LITTLE PATIENCE, PLANNING AND EXTRA SAVVY, IT CAN BE A GREAT, MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE FOR EVERYONE.

When I became a mother, one of the things I was most worried I'd have to sacrifice was travel. My husband and I share a passion for visiting new places and taking in new experiences, and I couldn't see how that would be possible while carting around young children. I imagined us struggling through airports with too many suitcases, fighting with folding strollers and carting around car seats, taming toddler tantrums and hiding our faces from other travelers while our children melted down in their seats.

Thankfully, with a few tricks, we've been able to successfully navigate a handful of fun family vacations. Here are some tips that made it possible for my three-year-old to rack up as many stamps in her passport as I had by the time I was 30!

Give yourself extra time. There will be emergency stops, tantrums, meltdowns, shoes that take forever to take off and put back on and more obstacles than you can begin to prepare for ahead of time. Give yourself far more time than you need for everything from catching planes and trains to sightseeing. Trust me, you'll need it.

Have a game plan. Make logistical decisions well ahead of time. Where on the plane is it best to sit? The back row or near the front? Should you book an extra seat? Should you bring a car seat? Plotting out the trip will take the guesswork out of the whole ordeal, and you'll be able to foresee any major issues.

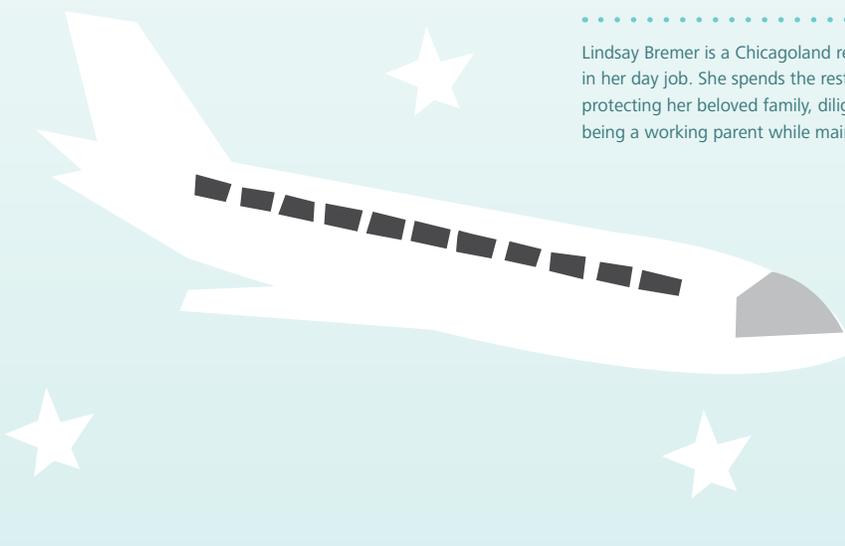
Be prepared for illness. Between exhaustion, new foods and new germs from sneezy travelers, there's a good chance your little ones could come down with a bug while you're away. If there are certain medicine flavors they tolerate that treat ailments they may be prone to, bring them. These remedies may not be easy to find while away from home.

Occupy their time. Bring lots of activities and treats just for the trip. The novelty of new things to do is guaranteed to keep a little one entertained for at least a few precious minutes! Even if you're not a family who watches TV, bring the iPad, loaded with TV shows, movies and games the kids might not expect. Bring or purchase lots of snacks in the terminal. When all else fails, a treat will be good bribery to keep kids quiet and happy for a bit.

Be ready for messes. Bring along a sippy cup to avoid spills, a bib, more diapers and wipes than you think you'll need, a change of clothes and a trash bag or two for diapers and discarded food. The less mess you have to deal with, the better.

Travel can certainly be challenging and stressful for both parents and kids, but with a little patience, planning and extra savvy, it can be a great, memorable experience for everyone.

Lindsay Bremer is a Chicagoland resident of 15 years and a marketer in her day job. She spends the rest of her time caring for and fiercely protecting her beloved family, diligently navigating the challenges of being a working parent while maintaining her sanity.





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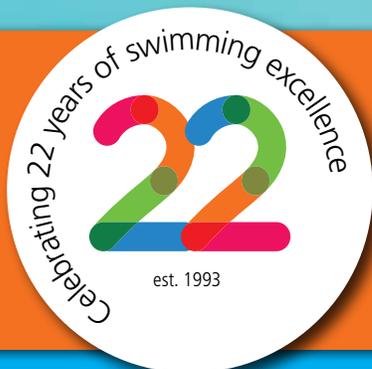
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GET IN THE GAME! CHOOSING SPORTS FOR PRESCHOOLERS

By staff members of *Lil' Kickers*, NPN member since 2009

CHILDREN NEED PREPARATION TO FEEL CONFIDENT ENOUGH TO ENJOY COMPETITIVE PLAY—MORE THAN LEARNING HOW TO PLAY PHYSICALLY.

Your four- or five-year-old child is ready to take on new challenges! With their toddler days behind them, kids are poised for a period of rapid growth and development—physically, emotionally and socially—so it's important to choose non-competitive sports and activities that help them develop these emerging skills.

Preschoolers are at the height of their creative play, which makes interacting with them fun! They're still in awe of how things work in the world and are not afraid to ask questions. Their vocabulary has grown to more than 13,000 words! However, sharing may still be difficult, and the fear of embarrassment from not doing well can produce shyness and timidity.

Children need preparation to feel confident enough to enjoy competitive play—more than learning how to play physically. Children must understand the team concept, build trust and learn good sportsmanship. So, how do we create a culture of teamwork when these concepts involve a strong emotional element?

Building self-esteem through trust

Children at this age can't yet articulate or define trust, though they know it when they feel it. When preparing children for team sports, it's about getting children to trust themselves, trust that others won't laugh if they do something incorrectly and establish a level of trust that evokes camaraderie. Strong self-esteem provides courage to try new things and risk making mistakes, as well as the emotional wherewithal to handle disappointments.

Rewarding effort, not outcome

Good sportsmanship is tough at any age because it requires the ability to control emotions. Cognitively, children at this age can't see beyond the emotions attached to winning and losing. By emphasizing the goal of giving their personal best, children redirect their focus and learn how to manage their emotions.

According to world-renowned clinical psychologist John Gottman, in his book *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child*, when we help children become aware of their feelings and then empathize with them, soothe them and guide them, children learn to control impulses, delay gratification, self-motivate and read others' social cues. Learning to experience their emotions, validate them and move on is essential in developing a sense of good sportsmanship because it helps players develop the necessary resiliency to move beyond a game's physical aspects.

Keeping it creative

Dramatic play is an important tool in a child's developmental toolbox, offering a safe venue for practicing new skills, taking on new roles and resolving stressful situations. Dramatic play also has strong links to language development, problem-solving skill development and other cognitive strategies. Games that may appear "silly" often capture the attention of this age group. Parents should look for activities that are playful, yet intentional, giving them the challenge and fun to be successful in learning.

When choosing extracurricular activities for your preschooler, keep these principles in mind and look for programs that focus on child development and age-appropriate skills. And remember that you can enforce all these concepts through play at home in addition to class time. Consistency is key!

Lil' Kickers is a child-development program to help children ages 18 months to 12 years, at suitable developmental levels, to build strong physical, intellectual and emotional skills toward their success on and off the field. More than 3,600 kids are enrolled at five indoor and five outdoor locations.



Photo courtesy Lil' Kickers.

SOCIAL SNAPSHOT

CONNECTING CHICAGO PARENTS

SOCIAL SCENE OUT AND ABOUT WITH NPN



Mixing, mingling and pampering with moms-to-be at NPN's quarterly Expectant Moms Mingle, presented by Babyganics at The Land of Nod.
Photos by A Little Photo Studio.



Nearly 200 parents joined NPN for a morning of learning at the Annual Toddler Expo at Erikson Institute.
Photos by Little Monsters Photography.





NPN New Moms Group “graduates”—still playing and having fun seven and a half years later!
 Photo courtesy Joyce Webster.

Check out the NPN blog and connect with us on Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest to get the latest buzz on hot parenting topics, such as:



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- Child care options
- Doctor recommendations
- Family-friendly parties, prizes and more!



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MOMMY WARS

By *Christa Reed, NPN Associate Executive Director, NPN member since 2011*

WE'RE SO OBSESSED WITH BEING THE BEST PARENTS WE CAN BE, WE QUESTION EVERYTHING—OURSELVES, WHAT'S RIGHT.

My child was formula-fed, was sleep-trained and eats food that is not organic. The old me would take 20 minutes to explain how these things happened (although never part of my plan). The new me recognizes you probably don't give a hoot.

There's been a lot of talk about the so-called "mommy wars." After three and a half years of motherhood, and reading the endless stream of social media posts on the subject, I think I have found the root. We're so obsessed with being the best parents we can be, we question everything—ourselves, what's right. But we don't care what you're doing with your children unless it directly affects ours.

Some days are better than others—you made it through the day without any major tantrums or guilt that you've impeded your child's development. But most of the time, we're desperately seeking validation because secretly we're winging it. Virtually every aspect of our parenting is an exercise in uncontrolled experimentation. Is this restriction on screen time working? No idea. Are these five stories at bedtime soaking in? Beats me. Is my extra income worth the trade-off of less time with him? Good question. Will any of this organic food make him healthier as an adult? Ask me in 20 years—and I still won't know. That's the thing about raising a child—you don't get to rewind or perform a do-over, so you never know where the path not taken leads. So we go with our guts and hope for the best.

We're terrified everyone will see right through that and call us out on it. Thus, we hunt for validating studies or Huffington Post op-eds that conform with our impromptu parenting choices. But, as the saying goes, opinions are like rear ends (everybody has one), and you can find a study that says anything. Inevitably, conflicting opinion or evidence will pop up on your Facebook page.

"Here it is!" you think. "They've finally figured out I'm a fraud!" No doubt, social services has already been alerted to your unfit mothering. But rather than come clean, you double down. These are not simply conflicting opinions, they are personal attacks. These are Mean People who dare to undermine you.



Photo courtesy Christa Reed.

Congratulations—you've enlisted in the Mommy Wars.

Except there is no war. There are simply millions of mothers with millions of opinions, all with only slightly more than no idea what they're doing.

I've been guilty of it. I've posted the Formula Child Turns Out OK, Studies Show Working Moms Have Awesome Kids and This Much Screen Time is Fine stories. I'm sorry.

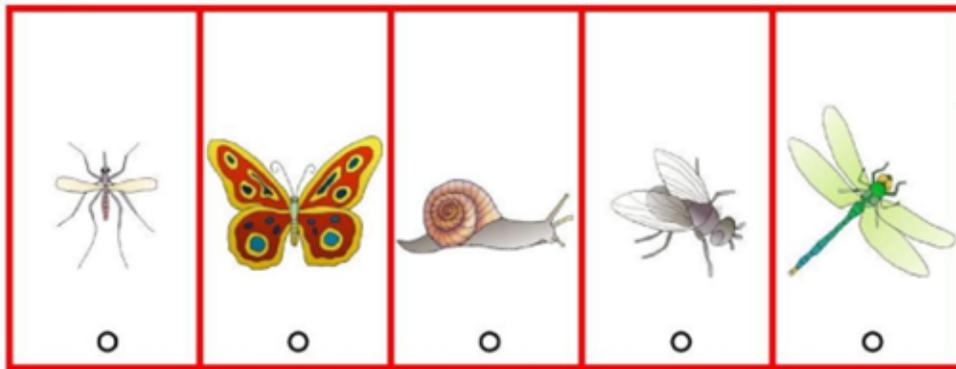
Today, I'm officially a deserter in the Mommy Wars. Frankly, there's no such thing—we've created them to distract us from our insecurities. I'll probably never get over that insecurity, but I'll try. In the words of David Foster Wallace, "you will become way less concerned with what other people think of you when you realize how seldom they do."

Christa Reed, born and raised a Chicagoan, considers herself a "lifer" and loves frequenting Lincoln Park Zoo, as she did when young. She enjoys drinks with umbrellas, insane amounts of caffeine and watching college basketball. She lives in her dogs' Lakeview home with her son, Lucas (three), and husband.

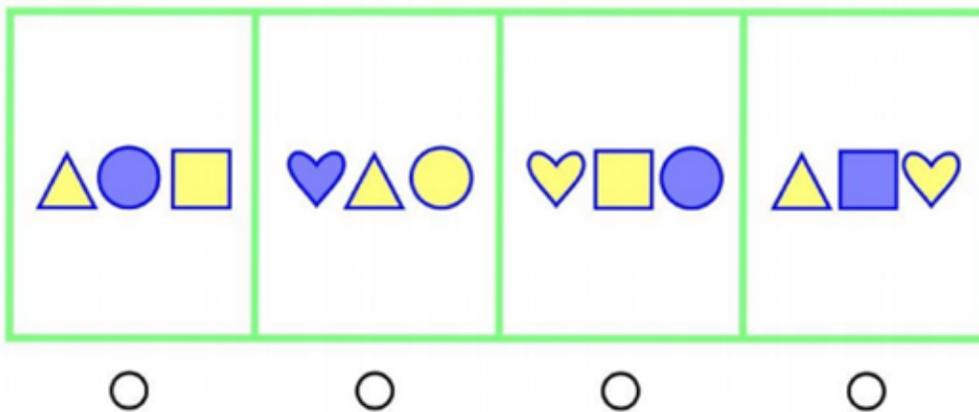
Are you smarter than a 4-year-old?

These are types of questions your child will face on the CPS test.

1) **Look at the pictures below.** They go together in a certain way. But one picture doesn't belong with the other pictures. Can you point to the picture that doesn't belong?



2) **Look at the boxes below.** Point to the box that shows this: There are 2 yellow shapes. Neither of those shapes is square, nor is one a circle.



Answers | 1) Box #3 (snail does not have wings) | 2) Box #4

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YOUR BABY, YOUR FAMILY, YOUR DECISIONS

By *Alyssa Deal-Antoine*, NPN member since 2014



TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS. REMEMBER THAT PEOPLE HAVE BEEN HAVING BABIES SINCE THE DAWN OF TIME.

Hey there, new moms and dads! I made it through the baby and toddler stages with my own kids, babysat countless others and have a sister who had a baby in March. So I've been there and have some wisdom to impart.

You're going to get advice from every corner. If you weren't already inundated with it during the pregnancy stage, you will be now. Random people on the street, on the el, on the bus and at the grocery store are going to share their opinions with you. Your parents, siblings and friends will chime in, and so might your co-workers. They are all well-intentioned (I hope), and most of them will give you good tips, whether you want them or not. But here's the thing I want you to keep in mind because it's the most important thing you should repeat to yourself daily:

This is your baby. You are the parent. You get to make the decisions. You get to lead this tiny new person through the wonder and craziness that is our world. It's a huge responsibility, but what an amazing privilege, too. You can do this! Trust your instincts. Remember that people have been having babies since the dawn of time.

Sure, you'll have questions. Nobody knows everything (not even after several kids). That is where all those people, plus your pediatrician, can be helpful. NPN has great discussion forums, and there are books, mommy blogs and medical websites galore. But no matter how many nights you stay up reading and wondering why you're not sleeping, no matter how many times you are sure your baby's rash is really impetigo or chicken pox and it turns out to be mild irritation from your wipes, you're going to get through it. You will.

The fact that you care enough to be reading this advice says a lot about you. You have the most important characteristic of a rock star parent already. You care. And that means you'll do your best to find the right answers—for you and your child—even if it's not what's right for everyone else.

Write it on a sticky note and put it somewhere you'll see it often, like on your bathroom mirror or above your kitchen sink: "Your baby, your family, your decisions." Welcome to your newfound confidence. You deserve it.

Alyssa Deal-Antoine recently joined NPN, bringing her love of forming connections between people with her. She holds a degree in advertising and has 12 years of ad agency and media experience. A Chicagoan for 15 years, she lives in Logan Square with her husband, children and colorful fish.



Photo courtesy Alyssa Deal-Antoine.

SINGLE PARENTS: YOU HAVE A LOT TO OFFER

By *Christine DeLoach, Take A Break Playcare*, NPN member since 2015

Parenting is hard. Going it alone is even more difficult, but not impossible. Accept the things you can do, and don't stress over the things you can't. Moms, you can't teach him how to be a man or pee standing up. Dads, you can't teach her to be a lady or understand about her period. What you can teach your son or daughter goes beyond male/female, masculine/feminine.

Teach your child to love and live. Share family values and a moral compass to know right from wrong so your child grows into a law-abiding citizen. Show your child how to be confident, self-respecting and inquisitive and have varying interests among activities and friends. Model courage, compassion, empathy and adventurousness.

Give your child quality time. It's not the amount of time; it's setting aside a time to provide your undivided attention. Would you rather have an hour with your child playing video games and you playing on your phone? Or would you rather sit for five minutes and read a book or play a game together? Make memories you both will treasure. It's the memories of the moments and anticipation of future ones that will get you both through the tough times.

Find a quality child care option and lean on others. Your child care option should be safe and stimulating, offering your child security and you peace of mind. It literally does take a village to raise a child. You can't do it all on your own, and it's OK to ask for help. Maybe someone will offer to cook dinner for your family, or a classmate will suggest a playdate. When you ask, you might be surprised who will offer help and the options available. But no one knows you're in need if you suffer in silence.

Find time for yourself and take care of yourself. While your child is the center of your life, you won't be around to enjoy milestones if you're stressed out. You don't want to give literal meaning to "that child will be the death of me."

ACCEPT THE THINGS YOU CAN DO, AND DON'T STRESS OVER THE THINGS YOU CAN'T.

Set limits, don't feel guilty, and stay positive. Your child and your household need limits that you enforce. Don't spoil your child by overcompensating for being a single parent. If you can't afford it right now, say "maybe later." Work out a way for your child to earn whatever he/she requested. Extra chores, anyone? Or, if the request is unreasonable, suggest an alternative.

It doesn't matter how you became a single parent, whether by choice or unforeseen circumstance. What matters is how you embrace your role and that you lead with self-assurance and resilience.

Does your child need people of the same gender around? Absolutely! But it doesn't have to be in your household.

.....
 Take A Break Playcare is a playroom that also offers on-demand sitter services. Its onsite CPR/First Aid-certified and background-checked staff engages and supervises children up to age 13. Owner Christine DeLoach is a single mom with two children ages three and nine and lives in the South Loop neighborhood.



Photo courtesy Take A Break Playcare.

SHARE 

NO FAMILY NEARBY? YOU HAVE OPTIONS

By Jenny Rowland, *UrbanSitter*, NPN member since 2011

WHETHER YOU'RE MAKING A HOME HERE
PERMANENTLY OR JUST STOPPING ALONG THE WAY,
YOU'RE NOT ALONE!

Maybe you always knew you'd wind up in Chicago. Maybe Chicago is the last place you thought you'd be when you started raising a family (insert raised hand here). In either case, Chicago is home now, and for me, the distance to my own family never felt as great as when I started having kids of my own.

While I still feel pangs of jealousy when I hear another mom talk about dropping off her kids at her sister's house for impromptu afternoon cousin playdates or romantic long weekends away while doting grandparents coddle a new baby, I've come to terms with living in the city with no local family.

Besides doing a lot of Facetime with family all over the country, I've found a few strategies that have helped make the transition to parenthood in the city a bit more manageable.

Create your own local support system. Find other new parents! I do not know what I would have done without my mom friends in the early days when milk and poop and sleep (or lack thereof) consumed my life. It can be isolating having a baby (especially during a long Chicago winter), but don't isolate yourself. Whether you plan to stay at home or return to work, take advantage of those early weeks and months of parenthood to seek out new friends through NPN New Moms Groups, park district classes and "mom & me" yoga classes. The bond you share is universal, and fellow new parents could become friends for life—and willingly dine out with you at 4:45 p.m.!

Save the date. Make plans to see your family. I always like to have my next family visit on the calendar, even if it is months in advance. Although I don't see my family every week, or every month, it helps knowing my own little family will reunite with my larger family at some point in the foreseeable future.



Photo by TK Photography.

Take care of you. When there's no "easy" child care around in the form of longtime friends or family, it's easy to stop prioritizing activities that require leaving your babe. Don't neglect yourself or your pre-baby relationships because you feel like you can't get out. You can. And you should! Swap favors with those new mom friends. Find a mother's helper to give you a break during the day to shower or check email. Build a bench of trusted babysitters that you and your child/ren feel comfortable with. Take care of yourself and make time for yourself so you can better take care of the ones who depend on you!

The city has endless resources to offer new parents. Whether you're making a home here permanently or just stopping along the way, you're not alone! As the saying goes, "You can choose your friends, but you can't choose your family." In some ways, being forced to build your own support system when you have a new baby can be a blessing in disguise!

In 2011, Jenny Rowland brought San Francisco-based start-up *UrbanSitter* to Chicago 10 months after the birth of her first child, when she was sick and tired of not being able to find a trusted babysitter! She lives with her husband and two children in Roscoe Village.

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PARENTING TWINS

By Dana Wurzburger, NPN School Support Liaison, NPN member since 2012

Congratulations on your double whammies! You are in for the best and most challenging adventure of your lives! Here is some information I wish I had heard from other twin parents before mine were born.

Instead of taking turns with your spouse at night, you will both be up. All night. One baby will wake up first, and, after feeding, rocking and gingerly placing the first back into the crib (while holding your breath and crossing your fingers), the second baby suddenly will wake up. It is as if their cribs are booby-trapped, and you now face another screaming baby, who will certainly wake up the first baby, continuing the cycle. Eventually, they will adapt to some type of schedule (hopefully the same schedule!), and you will either get your sleep or perfect your caffeine regimen. Each month seems to get a little easier.

Another thing they won't tell you is how guilty you will feel about not being able to hold/feed/snuggle/bathe/change both babies at the same time. You will worry about their head shapes from lying down too much and they aren't getting the same amount of attention and human contact. You will worry they aren't eating the same amounts or pooping the same amounts, and one has a funky rash when the other one doesn't, etc. because it is only natural to compare them. You will be concerned that one rolls over first, one sits up or crawls first, and one starts communicating first. You will be anxious about the twin who doesn't pave the way and wonder what is wrong and how you have failed that baby. Those feelings subside over time. I vividly remember my anxiety when my son only said, "Yayaya" while my daughter had a handful of words, but now, at age three, he is actually the more verbal child. They will certainly follow their own independent developmental schedules!

Finally, you will humor anyone at Target and the grocery store and your neighborhood and the park who stops you to ask if they are twins and marvel at how lucky and blessed you are. People swarm to babies in general, but with twins they just can't help themselves and lose all control of their social filters. They ask bold questions like, "Were they born naturally?" "Did you do IVF?" (I even had an older man approach me during a walk and ask me, "How did you get them out of you?"). You will summon all the politeness you can muster to respond. Lately,

KEEP YOUR SENSE OF HUMOR, AND YOU WILL HAVE TWICE AS MANY GOOD STORIES TO TELL ALONG THE WAY.

I've taken the approach that anytime someone says something bold or makes me uncomfortable, I classify it as a story to tell at a cocktail party...if I can stay awake long enough to tell it.

Congratulations and best of luck with your double blessings. Remember, life gets easier! Keep your sense of humor, and you will have twice as many good stories to tell along the way.

.....

Dana Wurzburger joined NPN, after her twins were born, for some much-needed new mom support, then started volunteering by setting up family-friendly events in Andersonville/Edgewater. She now manages the NPN Online School/Daycare Directory as the School Support Liaison. Dana loves helping families and schools connect and share resources in Chicago!



Photo courtesy Dana Wurzburger.

SHARE 

RECIPE FOR PARENTING

By **Amanda Brown**, NPN member since 2015

I HAD TO SORT THROUGH RECIPES TO FIND WHAT I LIKED AND DISLIKED. PARENTING IS THE SAME; IT IS ALL ABOUT WHAT WORKS BEST FOR YOU.

I would never have thought a great recipe would equate with parenting. I am a foodie who loves going out to eat and trying new things. But with two small children, I cannot get to all the restaurants I used to indulge in regularly. My solution was to surf the Internet for recipes. Generally, I tended to go through a few recipes and weed out what I liked and didn't like, then combine a few that best suited my taste buds, and voilà, I had the perfect recipe.

This method applies to my adventures in parenting as well. I didn't fully know what to expect of parenthood; anytime I had a question, I logged on to the Internet searching for answers and advice to help me with the unknown of what I was going through. While many websites and blogs offered great support with various ideas and suggestions, I noticed the similarity to the recipes I was searching for online.

Considering everyone's palate is different, I had to sort through recipes to find what I liked and disliked. Parenting is the same; it is all about what works best for you. While choosing to nurse or co-sleep with your child may work for you, it may not work for the next parent.

Many people say each child is different, and each parenting style is also different. I have two children, and my parenting style for each is different, but that is also due to the child. They were like day and night. One was a calm baby while the other was fussy; I nursed one and the other took baby formula.

The ultimate recipe for the best parenting experience might go as follows:

Add a lot of patience. Babies are new to this world. They are trying to take it all in and figure out how they fit and how to express themselves.

Mix it with your own experience. Listen to what others have to say and mix it up with what you feel is best. Try new techniques and feel confident in what you are doing.

No parent is perfect. Remember it's OK to mess up, as long as the baby is safe. It takes trial and error.

Essentially what you put in is what you get out of it. If you put in the hard work and attention a baby needs, your child will match your effort.

While I love food, my love for my children is even greater, and becoming the best parent to them is important to me. So while I am mixing things up and trying new things, having a forum to go to when I want a new recipe is valuable. I encourage expecting and new parents to do the same.

.....
Amanda Brown is a busy mother of two beautiful children trying to balance it all.



Photo courtesy Amanda Brown.



CELEBRATING INTERFAITH PARENTING

By **Amanda Simkin**, NPN member since 2015

After we got engaged and heard an ongoing chorus of well wishes and congratulations, the first question came—then another and another, always from different people, typically those we had never expected. It was shocking. After all, the way we planned to raise our interfaith children, who didn't even exist yet, was none of their business. But questions are inevitable when you have an interfaith family.

My husband was raised Jewish and I was brought up in a Catholic home, but to be perfectly honest, neither of us is very religious. We respect the traditions, celebrate the holidays, but that's about where it stops. Both of us are more comfortable living our lives in a way that shows compassion and respect for all people instead of sticking to a religious doctrine, one of the main reasons we fell in love with each other in the first place. And those are the values we try to model and instill in our young boys—ideals that almost every religion celebrates and encourages.

It is easy to make these statements, but much harder to put them into action. So here are some tips we found that foster the growth and development of our interfaith family.

Listen to each other. As in all marriages, communication is key. When there is a complex situation, such as blending two religions, there are many different viewpoints to acknowledge and address. Don't be afraid to express how passionate you are about something, whether it is decorating a Christmas tree, attending Passover Seder or baptizing a child.

Compromise. This is important for any family situation, especially when dealing with faith, which tends to be a highly emotional topic. We had a few instances of holidays overlapping, such as when Christmas fell during Hanukkah. By compromising, we were able to spend time with both our families, not choosing one over the other.

Do what's right for your family. Attending weekly religious services isn't a priority for us. And that's OK. Having a library filled with different children's books that explain various holidays is a priority for us. And that's OK, too. Just as you use parenting techniques that work best for your family (bottle vs. breast feeding, helicopter vs. free range parenting, etc.), the same is true for celebrating your faiths.

WE LOVE THE FACT THAT OUR FAMILY'S TRADITIONS ARE UNIQUE AND RESPECTFUL OF DIFFERENT RELIGIONS AND ARE NOT DETERMINED BY ANYONE BUT US.

Make your own traditions. Every winter, we set up our Christmas tree next to our menorah. Our Elf on the Shelf plays with our Mensch on the Bench. We love the fact that our family's traditions are unique and respectful of different religions and are not determined by anyone but us.

We have almost finished our fourth year of parenting, and our little guys know more about both our faiths than we did at their age. To us, that is a huge success. And when they ask us to stop off for matzoh ball soup after a frigid Easter egg hunt? Even better.

.....

Amanda Simkin, a lifelong Chicagoan, created her website and blog (queenofthelandoftwigsberries.com) to share how she raises her two Midwestern gentlemen and their Second City finds. She offers "insider's guides" for both well-known and off-the-beaten-path family-friendly gems. Red Tricycle just deemed her one of "11 Chicago Moms to Follow on Instagram."



Photo courtesy Amanda Simkin.



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SEPTEMBER

19

10 a.m.–1 p.m.

South Side Preschool & Elementary School Fair

Hyde Park Neighborhood Club
5480 S. Kenwood Ave., Chicago

This expo-style event features 60+ public and private preschools, elementary schools and enrichment programs from around the city. FREE and open to the public!

SEPTEMBER

29

6:30–8 p.m.

Speed Sitting with UrbanSitter

The Land of Nod, 900 W. North Ave., Chicago

Most parents often seek sitter recommendations from friends. Meet the people of UrbanSitter, which features sitters rated and reviewed by parents you know. FREE!

OCTOBER

18

10 a.m.–2 p.m.

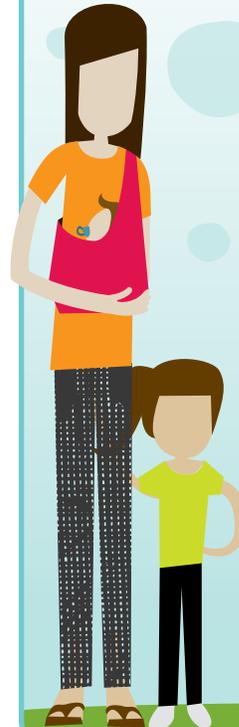
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