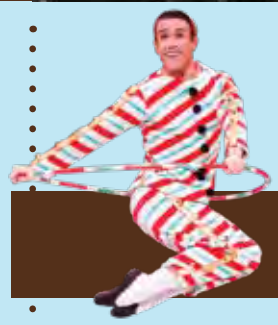


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An allergy-free holiday

What do we want this December? No allergic reactions, please! Whip up party-worthy dishes that all can enjoy with this roundup of festive recipes. Includes food free of dairy, soy, gluten, nut, corn and or eggs. parentmap.com/allergy-free



Ga-ga for Gilmore!

Whether you've already binged on the Netflix reboot of *Gilmore Girls* or haven't even started (yet), celebrate the magic of Stars Hollow with a fellow fan. parentmap.com/gilmore

Enough with the stuff!

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parentmap.com/holiday-traditions



Happy Hanukkah!

Celebrate the Festival of Lights with these crafts and recipes. This year, the holiday begins the evening of Dec. 24 and goes through Jan. 1. parentmap.com/hanukkah

Take comfort in this food

Dig in to two tasty recipes — one for latkes, the other for pancakes — from the recent rerelease of Cynthia Lair's classic cookbook, *Feeding the Whole Family: Recipes for Babies, Young Children and Their Parents*. parentmap.com/pancakes



Parenting amid the refugee crisis

An American expat living in Germany reflects on the refugee crisis: "My second grader came home from school with a new assignment: Draw a picture of her greatest fear. My daughter drew a bee with a giant stinger. Most of her classmates drew pictures of war." parentmap.com/refugees



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3 GET QUIET

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4 SEE SANTA

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5 TRIP THE LIGHTS FANTASTIC

Add some sparkle to your December with our guide to holiday lights — from huge zoo displays to local mom-and-pop shows. parentmap.com/holidaylights



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TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR HOLIDAYS

As the holidays approach, here's some practical advice to reduce stress and make the most of the season. Start with plenty of the following: sleep, laughter, sunshine and exercise. Be realistic about what you can do, and don't over schedule. Stick with normal routines for meals and bedtime. In short, do less but enjoy more.

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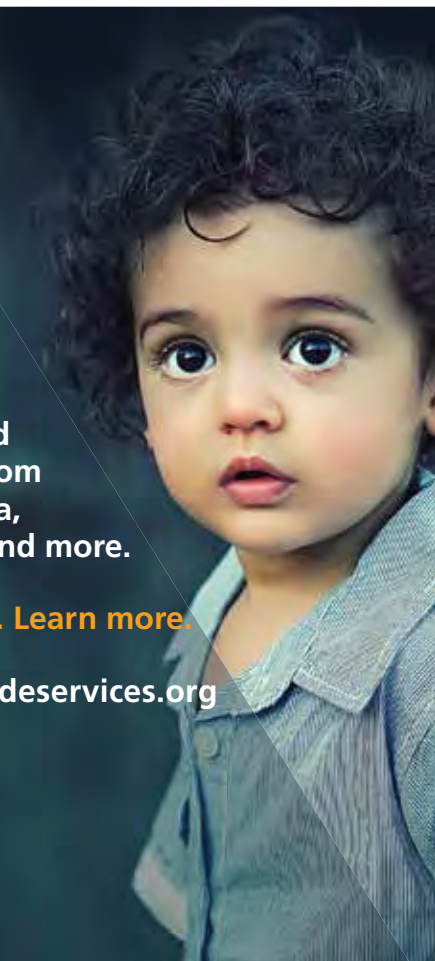
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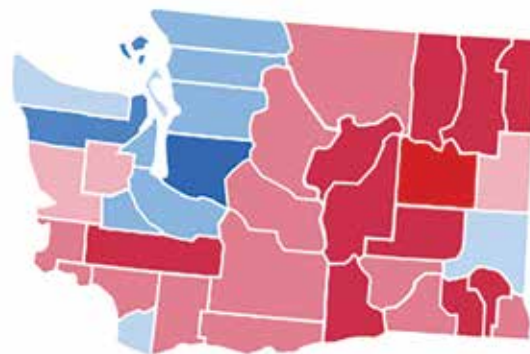
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Leading by example

"You shall not oppress a stranger, since you yourselves know the feelings of a stranger, for you also were strangers in the land of Egypt."

— Exodus 23:9

After the election, I have an absolute need to understand what I didn't know, that I clearly didn't know about "the stranger," *our* neighbors in the red zone. I've been labeled a pathological optimist, but I am sure these 61.5 million Americans are not racists or haters. But what don't we know about "the stranger" down the street?

In times like these, I turn to the great wisdom in our religious traditions. They anchor how we show gratitude, connect, empathize and treat the stranger. Every Jewish kid who attends a Passover seder learns her ancestors were slaves in Egypt. We were oppressed for more than 400 years, just as so many people today have been oppressed for many generations. The Exodus narrative teaches the importance of optimism, gratitude, how to embrace challenges, take action, ask questions, responsibility for each other and the meaning of freedom.

As parents, we are our children's first and most important teachers. Do we need guidance from traditional religion in this less "church-going" town to help with our obligation to guide their strong moral compasses ("A rabbi, an imam, a priest and a Buddhist walk into an interview," p. 11)? The wisdom shared by this beautiful cross section of our religious community may inspire us to "love thy neighbor" and name a few New Year's resolutions.

Learning about our neighbors and understanding the stranger, near or far, is essential to peace. Just 33 miles south of SeaTac, where so many of us fly off during these holidays to visit family or hop out for a sunny vacation, live thousands of military families. They sacrifice their lives for our freedom, and face inconceivable challenges. To hear their stories ("Military moms, duty-driven dads," p. 16) is to honor them.

Freedom, to many, means being able to do what you want, when you want. I fought it for a long time, but today, I am grateful for being raised, and for raising my three children, within a religious tradition and finding our way. For us, freedom is the ability to create a meaningful life with authentic values,

living a life of constant growth and striving to live up to our potential.

We'll never get there but we'll keep trying.

May your holiday season be filled with joy, peace, health and love!



ParentMap

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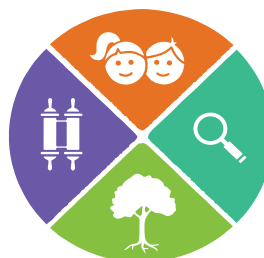
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A rabbi, an imam, a priest and a Buddhist walk into an interview

Reflecting on common values and points of connection this season

By Nancy Schatz Alton

We all want our children to grow into adults with strong moral compasses, yet how do we teach them to be nice, kind and caring? Our kids won't do right just because we tell them to do it, so for guidance that might light the way for us (and help unite us after a divisive political season), we brought our questions about raising empathetic children to four local religious leaders. We spoke with **Rabbi Rachel Nussbaum** from **Kavana Cooperative** (kavana.org), a nondenominational Jewish community group on Queen Anne; the **Rev. Bryan Dolejsi** (parish.stbens.net/people/father-bryan-dolejsi), parish priest at **St. Benedict Catholic Church** in Wallingford; **Imam Jamal Rahman** (jamalrahman.com), a Muslim Sufi minister at **Interfaith Community Sanctuary** in Ballard and an "Interfaith Amigo" (interfaithamigos.com); and **Anita Feng**, a Zen Buddhist master and guiding teacher at **Blue Heron Zen Community** (blueheronzen.org/about/teachers) in Northgate.

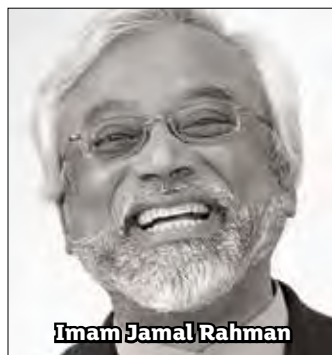
Children naturally gravitate toward stories, routines and rituals. Organized religion is just one way that people find connection and a way to ground individual stories within a bigger story, says Nussbaum. Parents can create their own traditions, drawing (if they like) on religious frameworks. For example, the Jewish Shabbat dinner often becomes the basis for a weekly family check-in that includes sharing highlights or "gratitudes." In the following interviews, you'll find more ideas from traditions and practices that speak to the complicated world we live in today.

Within our current political climate, it's helpful to remember that listening matters. What role does your religious tradition play in listening, uniting and connecting?

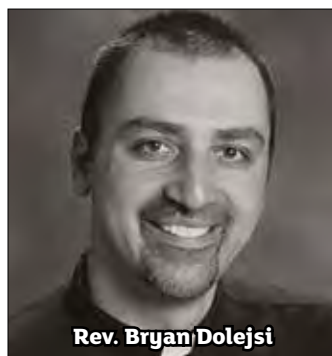
Feng: Practicing meditation teaches us what goes on in the head and the heart, yet meditation is a 24/7 proposition. We use the acronym FACE: 'focus' on counting our breaths; 'accept and acknowledge' the present moment; 'clear,' as in let it go; and 'engage' now in reality in a helpful way. We can teach our children to accept what is being experienced right now. It's up to us — within our families first — to let it go and be clear.



Rabbi Rachel Nussbaum



Imam Jamal Rahman



Rev. Bryan Dolejsi



Anita Feng

Dolejsi: I encourage people to pray for wisdom: knowing what to do and when to do it, what to say and when you say it. We can have disagreements, but we are not called upon to disagree, we are called on to be charitable. A heated exchange isn't the most prudent time to speak your truth. We need to dialogue from a calmer place of respect with each other.

Rahman: Every religion states a person's behavior might be unacceptable but his or her essence is sacred. Protect yourself. Don't allow yourself to be abused. But as you take the right action, remind yourself the person's being is divine. This discernment can shift heaven and earth. In South Asia, people often say the best way to overcome polarization is to share three cups of tea: listen, respect and connect.

Nussbaum: My Rosh Hashanah sermon was about training ourselves to listen to voices that are harder to hear, the ones that push against the grain. This summer while I was in Israel, I spent time in the West Bank meeting with Palestinians because I want to understand a perspective that I had heard less of. Listening and connecting starts really small: Help kids think about how they interact with their siblings, other relatives, teachers and friends.

How does your community discuss the issues that are causing tension in America: violence, racism, sexism, exclusion of immigrants, etc.?

Feng: Our religious community meets weekly to talk about issues within our community and world, knowing these issues are based on dualistic thinking. We practice applying mediation techniques to our dialogue, remembering our common humanity and using love and compassion. Yet as we talk, it doesn't take long for dualism to creep in!

Dolejsi: I like to give ways to focus prayer not only on people who are experiencing difficulties, but also on those who are perpetrating violence. Because we ourselves need constant conversion, we shouldn't look down on others; instead, accompany people along the way. We are all called upon to take care of each other.

Rahman: The Quran says that God has created diversity for one primary reason: that we might come to know the other on a human level in spite of

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Interview

continued from page 11

our differences. Can we share human stories? Can we listen to the other? Do we listen to our children and allow them to ask difficult questions, including those on religion?

Nussbaum: In the Talmud, we learn all human beings were created in God's image from a single human being to teach us a lesson. No one can say my ancestors were greater than your ancestors. When confronted with societal issues, I guide my community to look at others and try to see the essence of God in them.

From the perspective of your religious tradition, what everyday actions lead to better connections between people?

Feng: Using FACE in everyday interactions leads to better connections. Take a pause to breathe, accept and acknowledge what's happening right now, clear and let go of what isn't helpful and then engage in what's happening right now.

Dolejsi: I encourage parents to pray with their kids in a simple way: blessing meals, and prayers in the morning and before bed. We pray for what we need and then move outward, praying for others. Parents can pray with their children in a way that feels right to them, whether that's praying the rosary or meditating.

Rahman: Gratitude opens the heart and increases the capacity to love God's creation.

Children are taught to touch their heart to express thanks for blessings little or big. This practice connects us to the Source of love and compassion: God resides in every human heart. By connecting to the Source in gratitude, we are humble and kind with others.

Nussbaum: Prayer (or reflective moments) can be a powerful practice for kids and parents to do together. In the Jewish tradition, we say a prayer of gratitude upon waking up, thankful for another day of life. We also pray at bedtime, and this prayer is about forgiveness, release and winding down. We think, 'Tomorrow I will try to do better and be the best person I can be.'

What are the best values and virtues that come out of being part of your religious tradition?

Feng: In Zen Buddhism, our most important direction is to help everyone awaken to their own realized self. As a Zen teacher, I say don't be attached to words, which are a finger pointing at the moon. The moon is the metaphor for awakening, which can happen in a moment and then in another moment. In these moments, dualistic thinking disappears as we feel our oneness. From here, it's possible to be of service to others.

Dolejsi: The foundational starting point for us is that we've been loved by God. From that full place, we can love and serve other people. Our good acts are not based on self-worth, productivity or trying to be better than anybody else.

Rahman: Islam's main spiritual teaching is to practice compassion for self and others. With sacred naming, children choose a word or sentence to use with their names that evokes compassion. I chose 'Brother Jamal.' When I am self-critical, I do a spiritual intervention by saying, 'But Brother Jamal.' Immediately the energy changes; a negative inner conversation becomes merciful and gentle.

Nussbaum: Our most fundamental Jewish values stem from the story that our ancestors were once slaves in Egypt, so we can relate to being the underdog. Biblical texts instruct us to take care of the 'widow and the orphan,' but today I would extend that obligation to trying to help anyone who is vulnerable in our society. ■

Local author Nancy Schatz Alton was raised as a Catholic and loves learning from all religious traditions. Her tween and teen attend Catholic schools while her husband and dogs practice daily walks. Her entire family participates in a daily gratitude practice.

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Military moms, duty-driven dads

*Reflections on military life from local
families that navigate it*

By Bryony Angell



See
pictures of
the families in
this story:
[parentmap.com](http://parentmap.com/military-families)
/military
families

Mismatched family schedules, long work trips, financial stress and crazy work hours: sounds like modern American family life, right? But add in the risk of injury or death in the workplace and a strict culture of conformity, and you've got the life of a family in the armed forces.

Many jobs carry risks and require travel, but what other group of employees commit as much of themselves and their families to an at times structured, at other times erratic, lifestyle — one that often seems to inhabit a near total blind spot in the eyes of their civilian neighbors?

Unless we are “at war” (the prolonged war in Afghanistan officially ended in 2014), the general public has little reason to think about the experiences of families that make up the U.S. military force. Not just the service members but the spouses, partners and kids living this life.

“It’s a lonely place to be,” says Rachel Starnes, the wife of a Navy pilot and mother of two young sons, currently living in Key West, Florida. Starnes’ book, *The War at Home: A Wife’s Search for Peace (and Other Missions Impossible)*, was released in July and explores the challenges of marriage and motherhood in a military family.

“Your spouse is gone, not just their person but their heart and soul; their mind is consumed with the mission,” Starnes says. She writes of a life on various bases while trying to define

her own career and identity in the off-base, civilian world when her husband is deployed. The reality is that the military is not simply a job; it’s an all-encompassing lifestyle that both isolates and unifies.

Military families, despite common challenges of a life in service, remind us that they are not homogenous. Their stories, politics, struggles and experiences vary wildly, just like all families. And yet, family life in the military is different. They urge the rest of us not to forget about them.

Military life in the Pacific Northwest

The United States military is made up of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard. The current national active-duty population is about 1.3 million total, according to 2016 Department of Defense (DoD) data. Washington state hosts seven military bases, with the seventh-largest military population in the country, totaling nearly 66,000 active-duty and reserve members.

And the military is full of families with kids. Fifty-six percent of those serving on active duty are married, and 44 percent have dependent children. While women make up only about 15 percent of active-duty forces, they comprise 95 percent of military spouses.

Whether serving or supporting her military spouse or partner, a woman with children is challenged by the obligation of her partner’s



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Military families

continued from page 17

months-long training, deployment and the mobility needed for military career advancement. For a female soldier who is a single parent, her options are even more limited, as her duty may take her away from family networks that provide child-care support for civilian single parents.

For military spouses, frequent moving might mean underemployment compared to their civilian counterparts (43 percent unemployed versus 25.5 percent unemployed for civilian spouses). Yet despite these challenges, the Washington families we met share a common commitment to the military, which has given them both purpose and a community over the long run.

Creating connections

Fostering strong community among the military's families creates better outcomes for morale. Each base or post organizes spouse groups, which are affiliated with a specific unit. A group's purpose is to assist families throughout the deployment process. Many of the activities are on base, however, so those who live elsewhere might not have easy access.

Some military spouses are creating social groups of their own: Anne Cone is the coordinator of the Fort Lewis Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPS) meet-up and Facebook groups, which serve all types of families, including ones with mom service members, dad service members and families headed by same-sex couples.

"We are a military MOPS, and almost every base around the world has (or has had) a group like ours," she explains. "We serve anyone who holds a DoD ID card — any branch of the military [and] retirees. We don't ever ask for rank in our meetings because we are all mothers and that is what connects us. Rank has no place with us."

Other parents' groups at Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM) specifically serve parents of children with special needs, and another serves parents of children on the autism spectrum.

But not everyone feels totally represented among the community. Neither same-sex

couple I approached for this story would speak about their experience on the record for fear of additional visibility. They both say they feel that discrimination against gay people is still persistent in the military, and they say they do not want to make themselves targets.

In time for this season of reflection and community, we set out to meet military families in our region

that represent a range of experiences, diversity of demographics and different career stages. We spoke to spouses, service members, children and two mothers who were formerly in the military. They all have stories to tell; we invite you to meet them, too.

Alaina Bezold and Lt. Matt Bezold, Oak Harbor, Whidbey Island

The Oak Harbor home of the Bezold family is situated on a quiet cul-de-sac several miles from the naval base where Matt is a weapons systems officer, or "goose," as he explains. He is the officer sitting behind the pilot of an EA-6B Prowler, controlling the electronic shield that protects a squadron. The complex lingo of the military becomes a running joke during the interview with Matt and Alaina, both 33 and parents of twin 7-year-old boys, Lucas and Bradley, and 2-year-old Henry. As I arrive, the boys are sitting down to lunch, stealing glances at me with smiling eyes, as their welcoming dog, Pongo, licks my hand.

The Bezolds were neighbors of Starnes and her husband at Naval Air Station Lemoore in California and feel Starnes' honest portrayal of military family life is important for non-military folks to read. "I love that she shows a candid look at the military system [in the book]," says Matt. "We are humanized. Civilians need to understand

"Civilians need to understand the toll that it has; our job isn't 9 to 5. But that we did volunteer for it."

the toll that it has; our job isn't 9 to 5. But that we *did* volunteer for it."

Matt and Alaina met at Washington State University, where Matt joined the ROTC in his sophomore year. Although he grew up in a military family, he says, his joining the service was primarily a financial decision. He could finish his degree and then know his career trajectory once he started flight school. He has since become a

steadfast enthusiast for his mission: "I like that my job is to keep our guys on the ground and in the air safe. And the fact that I get to do it from a jet is pretty awesome."

The Bezolds appear to live the ideal life of a military family. Matt is a commissioned officer and earns a good living to support his family. He and Alaina love the peripatetic life his job affords them, and they each find strong friendships within his squadron. And despite being in an aviation sector, Matt's job is safer than ever. "There have been advances in gear and technology to reduce fatalities," he says, "plus the fact that we've pulled out of Iraq and Afghanistan, so there aren't as many bodies to get shot at."

The family will be moving again soon as part of Matt's career advancement, which will take them away from family in Washington, and possibly abroad. "We are really hoping to get the assignment to Japan," says Alaina, smiling. That ROTC scholarship Matt committed to more than a decade ago has given the Bezolds a life they love.

Kimberly Sablan, former staff sergeant, Air Force Intelligence, Spanaway

The exchange of military service for academic scholarship does not always go according to plan. Kimberly Sablan's decision to enlist led her down a path that has been distinctly different from those of some other service members. >>



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Military families

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I meet Sablan, 28, and her 4-year-old son, Isaiah, at a fast-food restaurant along an arterial that could be anywhere in suburban America, save for the lumbering din of military transport planes descending into the wooded fortress of JBLM nearby. We are in Spanaway, between Tacoma and Puyallup, where many current and former military personnel make their home. It's where Sablan has lived since joining the Air Force in 2009.

"There is no structured support for single parents, and living alone on base was impossible with a baby"

"At the time, I was looking for ways to pay for my education," says Sablan, who is Chamorro and originally from the island of Saipan, part of the commonwealth of the U.S. "The G.I. Bill would allow me to fund my education."

Midway through her service, she became pregnant and soon after, ended her marriage to her son's father, a Marine. Unable to deploy with her unit because of her pregnancy, she decided to remain and finish out her contract. "If I took an honorable discharge, I'd have no income," she explains.

She is still in disbelief about how she managed active duty and single motherhood with an infant. "My compensation didn't change, no matter that I had a dependent," she says. The monthly on-base child care cost half of her income. So she found help elsewhere. "At first, I asked some of my coworkers and my cousin to watch my son," she says. "All of them did this free of charge."

Although she received custodial relief from her ex-husband, there still was very little to live on. Nor did she qualify for public assistance. "I couldn't believe I was denied WIC and food stamps. I earned \$1 too much." She describes her breakdown in tears at the social service office when she learned she was ineligible. "At one point, I considered giving up my son to his dad," she says. "But I kept going because I wanted to be that role model for my son, for him to be proud of his mom."

Near the end of her service, Sablan's leadership allowed her to make her own hours, but to this day she still has mixed feelings about her time in the service. There is no structured support for single parents, and living alone on base was impossible with a baby, she says. "I took basic housing allowance (BAH) to live off base. But BAH only guarantees rent in the neighborhoods closest to the base, and those may not be safe to live in," she says.

Such is the irony of enlisted military pay, which others I interviewed agreed with. "Life is a lot easier for a single guy on enlisted pay," says Matt Bezold. "You can live on base, eat on base, work on base. But that would not be easy for a family, relying on that one income."

Sablan feels proud of how she navigated the struggle of being a single mother in the military. Sablan's mother helped with her son's care for a year following her discharge. She has amicable joint custody with her former spouse, a new boyfriend and is now finishing her accounting degree at the University of Washington, Tacoma.

Christy Aguirre, former Army Specialist/E-4, and Chief Warrant Officer 2 Randy Aguirre, Puyallup

For some, the military has meant salvation. That is how Christy Aguirre, 35, describes her decision to enlist. "I was not where I needed to be at the time," she says. "The military was a way to get myself out of a bad situation and start over." For Aguirre, that meant leaving a troubled first marriage and finding a new path in the Army.

Happily for Christy, whose direct manner leaves no room for doubt, she met her goals and found a family. "The Army placed me in flight school, and I was able to pay off bills and finish school in elementary education after my service."

She also met her second husband, Randy, 39.

Randy is career military; he enlisted out of high school, has served 21 years and earned a degree in aeronautics in the process. He has one more duty station tour (from two to three years in length) before he retires. Christy left the service in 2007 after four years as an Army air traffic controller. She worked as a teacher before the couple's now 3-year-old daughter Amelia was born, and is now a stay-at-home mom.

Randy is currently in South Korea until May, at a base close enough to the North Korean border that his family cannot accompany him. So far, this deployment to Korea is the longest he's been gone since Amelia was born. "He's only missed six months away from us until this post," says Christy. "The long separations are hard. Yes, it's the life we chose, and we're not complaining, but that doesn't mean it's still not hard."

Amelia offers me a freshly baked muffin as I sit at the kitchen table with her mother. Amelia will soon have a sibling: Christy is expecting a second child in February. Randy will fly in for the planned C-section, then return to finish his tour. Christy shows me a photo of him on her phone, and her voice breaks a little. "I don't have a recent photo of us all together," she says.

It's a reminder of the milestones that military families can miss, milestones that civilian families take for granted.

There is a feeling of both reserve and mutual respect that these three families have for their civilian counterparts; while Sablan and Christy Aguirre are now civilians and Alaina Bezold has been one all along, all three remain very much anchored within the military community and fiercely proud of their families' service. Whether they are on active duty, a veteran or a military dependent, the military will remain a part of their lives. ■

Bryony Angell loves nature, art and mid-century architecture and can find a way to connect all three to parenting. You can see more of her writing at bryonyangell.com and follow her on Twitter @bryonyangell. She lives in North Seattle with her family.

emotional challenges

What are the most common emotional challenges faced by military families during deployment? **TroopTree**, a free private video messaging platform for the military and their families, conducted a nationwide study of 5,000 veterans, active-duty military members and their immediate families, using a third-party research group. The study looked at homesickness, communication challenges and other obstacles military families face during deployment and after returning home.

Missing family and everyday life

42 percent of military personnel say they are most sad to miss out on children growing up while deployed; 38 percent are most sad to miss out on everyday "normal life" moments.

Longing for home overrides feelings of endangerment

53 percent say the hardest part of life during deployment is being away from family and loved ones, compared to 44 percent who say it's the risk and danger of the area stationed.

Agonizing over erratic communication

41 percent say frequent communication during deployment leaves them feeling anxious waiting for a reply or receiving a response that feels distracted or out of character; 17 percent feel stressed trying to find "safe" conversation topics; and 41 percent say coordinating time-zone differences is the biggest challenge with staying in touch.



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For those dreading that report card home, consider one of these research-backed sites. Vetted by Common Sense Media, each offers a different resource for a particular subject.



Take **Bedtime Math**, for example. Recommended for kindergarten through third grade, this free app serves up math problems in the form of stories. Families sit together and follow along, like a new bedtime ritual. Building math into each day? Consider it the happily ever after.

Also of note: **Get the Math**.

Geared toward older grades (seventh through tenth), this free game answers that eternal question: When am I ever going to use this in the real world? With a focus on algebra, Get the Math demonstrates how algebra pays off.



For students who need help with letters more than numbers, there are apps like **Starfall**. It encourages kids kindergarten through second grade to cruise through words by learning basics like letter recognition and skill repetition. It's also free, though additional content is available via membership.

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4

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Fantasy Lights. Load everyone into the car for this 2-mile drive lined with sparkling light displays. Daily through Jan. 1, 5:30-9 p.m. \$14/car; half-price nights listed on website. Spanaway Park. co.pierce.wa.us

5

Meet-up Monday. Meet up with a friend to receive \$3 off admission. Mondays, 9 a.m.-noon. \$7 with discount; adults and under age 1 free. WiggleWorks Kids, Bellevue. wiggletworkskids.com

ONGOING EVENT OmTots Play Gym. Bounce around, swing from the ceiling and get wild indoors. Monday-Friday, 9:30 a.m.-noon. \$12; discounts available. Ages 1-5 with caregiver. OmCulture, Seattle. omculture.com

ONGOING EVENT

6

Black Santa Visits NAAM. Visit the Northwest African American Museum to have your picture taken with Black Santa. Tuesdays, Dec. 6, 13; 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Seattle. naamn.org

Holiday Wreath-making Workshop. Stop by to create a personalized wreath while enjoying holiday music and light refreshments. 5:30-8 p.m. \$15/wreath. Magnuson Community Center, Seattle. seattle.gov/parks

11

Unplugged Family Game Time. Let the devices rest and play board games with family and friends; snacks provided. 2-4 p.m. **FREE.** All ages. King County Library System, Federal Way Branch. kcls.org

Santa Train. Ride a vintage train to visit Santa and have a treat. Through Dec. 17. \$24; under age 2 free. Northwest Railway Museum, North Bend Depot. trainmuseum.org

12

Toddler Time at the Aquarium. Stop by for fishy fun and marine-themed activities for little kids. Dec. 4-6, 11-13; 9:30 a.m.-noon. Included with admission. Ages 0-5 with caregiver. Seattle Aquarium, Seattle. seattleaquarium.org

Redmond Town Center Skating Rink. No ice needed at this nifty synthetic skating rink, outdoors but under cover. Daily through Jan. 1 (closed Dec. 25). \$7 includes skate rental. Redmond Town Center. redmonttowncenter.com

13

Issaquah Reindeer Festival. Meet Santa, try out his sleigh, feed reindeer and enjoy story time with an elf. Daily Dec. 1-23, 10:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. \$10.50-\$14.50; ages 1 and under free. Cougar Mountain Zoo, Issaquah. cougarmountainzoo.org

Christmas Ship Viewing. Watch the lighted parade of ships and listen to the choir sing at the Edmonds Fishing Pier (7:20-7:40 p.m.) and at Richmond Beach Saltwater Park (8:20-8:40 p.m.). **FREE.** nwboatinfo.com

18

Klez Chaos. A motley group of musicians plays klezmer music in a light-hearted concert, part of Winterfest's free entertainment series. 12:30-1:30 p.m. Seattle Center Armory. seattlecenter.com

Snowflake Lane. It's a nightly holiday parade with lights, drummers, dancers and more. Daily through Dec. 24, 7 p.m.; similar Celebration Lane runs Dec. 26-31. **FREE.** Bellevue Way and N.E. 8th St., Bellevue. snowflakelane.com

19

Polar Plaza Ice Skating. Bundle up and enjoy the sights and sounds of downtown Tacoma while you glide across the ice. Daily through Jan. 1 (closed Dec. 5-6, 12-13 and 25). \$5-\$11 including skate rental. Tollefson Plaza, Tacoma. polarplaza.com

Swansons Reindeer Festival. Meet a real-live pair of Santa's reindeer and their camel buddy, plus admire the model train village. Daily through Dec. 24. **FREE.** Swansons Nursery, Seattle. swansonsnursery.com

20

Winter Train and Village. Admire the expansive model train display; "drive" the train during select hours for a \$2 donation. Daily through Dec. 31 (closed Dec. 25). **FREE.** Seattle Center Armory. seattlecenter.com/winterfest

Light the Night: A Solstice Walk. Join a candle-lit walk through the trails of Bloedel Reserve to mark the shortest days of the year. Tuesday-Thursday, Dec. 20-22, 4 p.m. \$15; preregister. All ages. The Bloedel Reserve, Bainbridge Island. bloedelreserve.org

25

Fiddler on the Roof Sing Along. "Tradition!" Sing your heart out with Teyve and his family; Kosher Chinese food buffet included. 11 a.m. \$25. SIFF Cinema Uptown, Seattle. siff.net

Zoolights. Revel in the dazzling light creations — sharks, sea turtles, a polar bear family and more. Daily through Jan. 1, 5-9 p.m. (closed Dec. 24). \$8.50-\$10; ages 2 and under free. Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, Tacoma. pdza.org/zoolights

26

Winter Fishtival. Dive into local marine life with hands-on activities and special talks. Today's theme: plankton. Dec. 26-Jan. 3. Included with admission. Seattle Aquarium. seattleaquarium.org

Hanukkah Celebration. Students of Chabad Hewbrew School present a holiday program. 6:30-8:30 p.m. **FREE.** Crossroads Bellevue. crossroadsbellevue.com

27

Festivals of Light. The Children's Museum explores winter holidays including Kwanzaa, Pasko, Hanukkah and more. Daily Dec. 1-Jan. 15 (closed Dec. 24, 25 and Jan. 1). Included with admission. Ages 3-10 with families. Seattle. thechildrensmuseum.org

30 Americans. Groundbreaking exhibit showcases the work of African American artists influencing the contemporary art scene. Through Jan. 15. Included with admission. Tacoma Art Museum. tacomaartmuseum.org

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

Photos with Black Santa, Northwest African American Museum, Seattle, Dec. 6 and 13

7

Caspar Babypants. Dance and sing along to holiday tunes from this popular kids' performer's new album. 10:30-11:30 a.m. **FREE.** Ages 0-5 with caregiver. Third Place Commons, Lake Forest Park. kds.org
Macy's Santaland. It's a holiday tradition to get your photo taken and tell ol' St. Nick what's on your wish list. Daily through Dec. 24. Photo packages \$21 and up. Macy's Downtown, Seattle. macys.com

14

Conservatory Story Hour. Sit among the lovely flowers for stories and a hands-on project. 11 a.m. Suggested donation \$3. Ages 3-8 with caregiver. W.W. Seymour Botanical Conservatory, Tacoma. seymourconservatory.org
Story Time with Santa. Get comfy and listen to some books read by the big guy in the red suit and feel free to snap a photo. 11 a.m. **FREE.** Ages 3-7. University Bookstore, Mill Creek. ubookstore.com

21

Live Reindeer. Stop by for holiday shopping, lights and to visit two of Santa's reindeer pals. Daily through Dec. 24. **FREE.** Country Village, Bothell. countryvillage.com
Holiday Train and Horse Carousel. Take a spin on these seasonal delights. Daily through Jan. 1 (closed Dec. 25). \$4 (credit/debit only) for train; \$4 suggested donation (cash/check only) for carousel. Redmond Town Center. redmondtowncenter.com

28

Winterfest Ice Rink. Take a twirl on the ice at this compact indoor rink. Daily through Jan. 3 (closed Dec. 25). \$2-\$7 cash only; includes skate rental. Fisher Pavilion at Seattle Center. seattlecenter.com/winterfest
Wondering about Wildlife. Get out of the house and take part in wildlife-centered activities for all ages. 10 a.m.-3 p.m. **FREE.** Cedar River Watershed Education Center, North Bend. seattle.gov/util

1

Teddy Bear Suite. Check out the bears' fanciful hotel room, a downtown holiday tradition. Daily through Dec. 26. Donations encouraged for Seattle Children's Hospital. Fairmont Olympic Hotel, Seattle. fairmont.com/seattle
Nordic Stories. Listen to a story called *The Christmas Wish* and do a creative craft project. 10 a.m. **FREE.** Ages 3-6 with caregiver. Nordic Heritage Museum, Seattle. nordicmuseum.org

8

Play to Learn. Last day this cycle for community play and circle time. 10-11:30 a.m.; additional weekly times and locations. **FREE.** Ages 6 and under with caregiver. Pierce County Library, Lakewood Branch. playtacoma.org
Bellevue Magic Season Ice Arena. Go for a spin in this large, open-air rink; check website for Stroller Skate Thursdays and other special sessions. Daily through Jan. 8. \$9-\$12; skate rental included. Bellevue Downtown Park. bellevuedowntown.com

15

SAM Lights. Stroll the brightly lit path, do art activities, grab dinner from a food truck and more. 6-9 p.m. **FREE;** RSVP requested. Olympic Sculpture Park, Seattle. seattleartmuseum.org
Singin' in the Rain. High-energy production features well-loved song and dance numbers and real "rain" on the stage. Through Dec. 31 (Jan. 6-29 in Everett). \$35-\$78. Ages 8 and up. Village Theatre, Issaquah. villagetheatre.org

22

The International Exhibition of Sherlock Holmes. Visit historic London to help solve a crime using Holmes' ahead-of-his-time techniques. Daily through Jan. 8. \$7-\$9 in addition to admission or membership. Pacific Science Center, Seattle. pacificsciencecenter.org
Ivar's Clam Lights. Stroll a one-mile path with thousands of lights decorating trees and shrubs in fanciful shapes. Daily Dec. 2-Jan. 1, 5-9 p.m. **FREE.** Gene Coulon Memorial Beach Park, Renton. rentonwa.gov

29

Winter Wildland. Resident animals enjoy winter-time enrichments such as fruit, tree treats and snowmen. Thursday-Friday, Dec. 29-30. Included with admission. Northwest Trek Wildlife Park, Eatonville. nwtrek.org
Edible City: A Delicious Journey. Explore how we find, grow, shop for, prepare and eat our local foods. Daily through Sept. 2017, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. (closed Dec. 25). Included with admission. MOHAI, Seattle. mohai.org

2

Giving Marketplace. Shop for holiday gifts from socially conscious organizations, supporting the well-being of people around the world, plus donate your old bike. Friday-Saturday, Dec. 2-3, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Free entry; items for purchase. Gates Foundation Visitor Center, Seattle. gatesfoundation.org
Free First Friday Night at Hands On Children's Museum. Have a blast playing indoors on a chilly Friday night. 5-9 p.m. **FREE.** Ages 0-10 with families. Hands On Children's Museum, Olympia. hocm.org

9

Who's Got Game? From Duke Kahanamoku to Kristi Yamaguchi, exhibit opening today showcases the accomplishments of Asian Pacific Americans in sports. 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Included with admission. Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience, Seattle. wingluke.org
Kruckeberg Solstice Stroll. Wander the trails of this hidden garden awash in lights. Friday-Sunday, Dec. 9-11, 4:30-7:30 p.m. \$10 suggested donation. Kruckeberg Botanic Garden, Shoreline. kruckeberg.org

16

A Warm Winter Home. Discover how local critters take shelter against the elements. 10-11 a.m. Preregister; \$2 suggested donation at the door. Lake Hills Greenbelt Ranger Station, Bellevue. bellevuewa.gov
Hollydaze Float-in Movie. Catch a classic holiday family movie from the vantage point of the pool. Fridays, Dec. 2, 9 and 16; 8-10 p.m. \$9-11.25. Covington Aquatic Center. covingtonwa.gov

23

Holiday Carousel. Pick your horse and take a ride to help Treehouse help foster kids. Daily through Jan. 2 (closed Dec. 25). \$3 suggested donation. Westlake Park, Seattle. treehouseforkids.org
The Lights of Christmas. See a million lights illuminating Warm Beach Camp, plus listen to live music and partake in kids' activities. Select dates Dec. 1-28, 5-10 p.m. \$8-\$16; ages 3 and under free. Stanwood. thelightsofchristmas.com

30

Community Hanukkah Potluck. Bring a dish to share and celebrate Hanukkah with the Secular Jewish Circle. 4-7 p.m. **FREE.** Venue TBA, Seattle. secularjewishcircle.org
WildLights. Experience the zoo after dark, illuminated in a wonder of holiday sparkle. Daily through Jan. 1, 5:30-8:30 p.m. (closed Dec. 24-25). \$7.95-\$9.95; ages 2 and under free. Woodland Park Zoo, Seattle. zoo.org

3

Salmon Tour with Harbor Wildwatch. Go on a salmon hunt with a naturalist and spot the spawners while learning about salmon in the ecosystem. 9-10 a.m. or 10-11 a.m. \$2/person suggested donation. Donkey Creek Park, Gig Harbor. harborwildwatch.org
Redmond Lights. Celebrate a diversity of holiday traditions with the lighting of City Hall, a luminary walk and live entertainment. 4-8 p.m. **FREE.** City Hall and Redmond Town Center, Redmond. redmondlights.com

10

Winter Helmet Fitting and Giveaway. Kohl's and Seattle Children's team up to protect kids' noggins. 10 a.m.-12:30 p.m. **FREE.** Ages 4-18 (wearer must be present). Seattle Children's 70th and Sand Point Building. makesurethehelmetfits.org
Green Lake Pathway of Lights. Stroll the path around Green Lake, glowing with holiday luminaria. 4:30-7:30 p.m. **FREE;** food drive donations requested. Green Lake Park, Seattle. facebook.com/greenlakepathwayoflights

17

Model Train Festival. Take in an eye-popping array of model trains. Daily Dec. 17-Jan. 1 (closed Dec. 24-25), 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Included with admission. Washington State History Museum, Tacoma. washingtonhistory.org
Menorah Mania. All invited to make a Hanukkah menorah, decorate cookies, listen to the Klezmatics and buy dinner from a food truck. 5:30-7:30 p.m. **FREE;** donations requested. Stroum Jewish Community Center, Mercer Island. sjcc.org

24

Gingerbread Village. Marvel at a world of wizardry made of cookies and candy in this annual display of culinary creativity. Daily through Jan. 1. **FREE;** donations to the JDRF Northwest Chapter appreciated. Sheraton Seattle Hotel. sheratonseattle.com
Garden d'Lights. Plant and critter shapes created from over half a million lights sparkle and amaze. Daily through Dec. 31, 4:30-9 p.m. \$5; ages 10 and under free; check website for free admission days. Bellevue Botanical Garden. gardendlights.org

31

Noon Year's Eve. Wear your beach gear for Hands On Children's Museum's Beach Blizzard Bash with ball drop every hour and tropical activities. 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Included with admission. Olympia. hocm.org
New Year's Eve Pajama Party. Wear your jammies for special activities, play and a 9 p.m. ball drop. 7-9 p.m. Included with admission. Imagine Children's Museum, Everett. imaginecm.org

Hto-ho holiday shows to light up December

More than 40 plays, concerts and 'Nutcrackers' add sparkle to the season

By Nancy Chaney



Good mousekeeping:
Studio East's *'Twas
the Night* provides
laughs for all ages

We want the holidays to be about connecting with our families, but holiday-related stress can appear as an unwelcome visitor. Fortunately, our region's amazing holiday shows, from fun-filled sing-alongs to plays that celebrate the joy of giving, are a wonderful antidote.

Our suggestion: Park the shopping list and the devices and make a family plan for a joy-filled outing. See an elegant ballet, listen to enchanting music, ponder the message of *A Christmas Carol* or laugh yourself silly at a holiday romp. Here is a list of more than 40 joyous shows to choose from; find more at parentmap.com/holiday-arts.

Note: Shows with regular adult ticket prices of \$15 or less are marked **bargain**.

Musicals, plays and holiday classics

Disney's The Little Mermaid. Warm up in a tropical sea as brave young mermaid Ariel ventures out to explore a new life on land, battling an evil sea witch and ultimately finding her destiny. The show features award-winning songs such as "Kiss the Girl" and dazzling scenery and visual effects. **Nov. 23–Dec. 31. \$36–\$180. Ages 4 and older; no babes in arms.** The 5th Avenue Theater, **Seattle**. 5thavenue.org



MARK KITAOKA

It's a Wonderful Life. Based on the film, this holiday classic spotlights a man in despair who, thanks to an enlightening visit from his guardian angel, realizes his importance to his family and community. **Nov. 25–Dec. 18. \$19–\$25. Ages 6 and older.** Lakewood Playhouse, **Lakewood**. lakewoodplayhouse.org

A Christmas Carol. ACT's annual production of Dickens' classic holiday tale traces the Christmastime redemption of Ebenezer Scrooge. Note: This includes somewhat scary characters; consider the age and sensitivity of kids you take to this show. **Nov. 25–Dec. 28. \$22–\$110. Ages 5 and older; no babes in arms.** ACT —A Contemporary Theatre, **Seattle**. acttheatre.org

Stellaluna. A baby fruit bat flits into a sea of holiday-themed shows to highlight friendship, the joy of trying new things and the importance of being yourself. This Seattle Children Theatre's production is based on the

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Holiday shows

continued from page 27

popular picture book, features delightful music, dance and puppetry. Dec. 1–Jan. 15; sensory-friendly performance Dec. 18. \$22–\$40. Ages 3 and older. Seattle Children's Theatre, **Seattle**. sct.org

A Charlie Brown Christmas. *bargain*

Based on the classic television cartoon special, this story finds Peanuts character Charlie Brown feeling blue about the commercialization of Christmas. Taking on an important job, Charlie Brown, Snoopy and the gang rediscover the true spirit of the season. Dec. 2–22. \$10. Ages 5–12 with families (Sunday shows are all ages). SecondStory Repertory, **Redmond**. secondstoryrep.org

Fiddler on the Roof. *bargain* Heavier Than Air Family Theatre presents the beloved musical that follows the life of a Jewish family in a Ukrainian village in 1905, featuring popular songs such as “If I Were a Rich Man” and “Sunrise, Sunset.” Dec. 9–17. \$10–\$12. Ages 6 and older; no babes in arms. Green River College, **Auburn**. heavierthanair.com

A Charlie Brown Christmas. *bargain*

Tacoma Musical Playhouse does its own production of the play based on the classic 1965 television special. Dec. 17–24. \$10. All ages. Tacoma Musical Playhouse, **Tacoma**. tmp.org

Comic romps and family fun

How the Penguins Saved Santa Claus.

bargain It's holiday time, and the big guy in the red suit needs some serious help. Can a ragtag group of penguins help get Santa out of a jam? Bellevue Youth Theatre's (BYT) show stars talented kids and is performed in BYT's new Crossroads theater. Nov. 25–Dec. 4. \$8–\$15. All ages. Bellevue Youth Theatre – Crossroads, **Bellevue**. bellevuewa.gov

Little Red Riding Hood. In a beloved annual tradition, Centerstage turns a well-known fairy tale on its head, English panto

Spice 'n' easy: Thistle Theatre's Gingerbread Boy



style, with hilarious twists, corny songs and a few surprises. Nov. 26–Dec. 22. \$15–\$35. Ages 5 and older. Centerstage Theatre, **Federal Way**. centerstagetheatre.com

The Best Christmas Pageant Ever. When the wild Herdman kids show up at church and are cast in the Christmas play, chaos ensues in this show featuring a multigenerational cast and favorite carols. Nov. 25–Dec. 18; pay-what-you-can performance Dec. 2. \$13–\$19. All ages. Olympia Family Theater, **Olympia**. olyft.org

'Twas the Night... Belly laughs are in order as the classic Christmas Eve poem is spun to comical new heights — with surprise twists every year — as the Big family awaits the arrival of St. Nick. Nov. 26–Dec. 18. \$19. Ages 4 and older. Studio East Mainstage Theater, **Kirkland**. studio-east.org

The Elves & the Toymaker. In its annual holiday show, StoryBook Theater presents the heartwarming holiday tale of two generous elves who help out a desperate toymaker and his wife, just in the nick of time. Nov. 27–Dec. 20. \$18. Ages 3–10 with families. Venues in **Renton, Seattle and Kirkland**. storybooktheater.org

Yule Be Rockin' — A Family Holiday Concert. *bargain*

The popular kids' band Eric Herman and the Thunder Puppies (“The Elephant Song”) plays interactive, hilarious holiday tunes. Dec. 3, 6:30 p.m. \$8. All ages. Auburn Avenue Theater, **Auburn**. auburnwa.gov

Gingerbread Boy. *bargain*

Performing with Japanese bunraku-style puppetry, Thistle Theatre presents the story of a gingerbread boy who goes on a sweet holiday adventure. Dec. 3–18. \$10. Ages 3 and older. Venues in **Bellevue and Seattle**. thistletheatre.org

A Christmas Story: The Musical.

bargain Based on the beloved 1980s movie, this musical follows the hilarious misadventures of a boy named Ralphie, his quirky family and his quest for a Red Ryder BB gun. Dec. 9–18. \$13–\$15. Ages 5 and older. Auburn Avenue Theater, **Auburn**.

auburnwa.gov

The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales. *bargain*

Young actors star in this parody of tried-and-true fairy tales, a comic show based on the Caldecott Honor book. Dec. 9–18. \$13–\$15. Ages 5 and older. Emmanuel Episcopal Church, **Mercer Island**. youththeatre.org

The Best Christmas Pageant Ever. The staid traditional Christmas pageant at the local church gets an injection of new “talent,” and comic mayhem is the result, in a production performed by youth actors alongside adult professionals. Dec. 10–24. \$5–\$34. All ages. Bathhouse Theater at Green Lake, **Seattle**. seattlepublictheater.org

Rapunzelstiltskin. *bargain* The Fremont Players and Fremont Philharmonic return with their annual panto production, full of outrageous characters, original songs and jokes aimed at young and old. Expect audience participation, Rapunzel locked in a tower, a donkey called Butterbobb and more fairy-tale wackiness. Dec. 10–Jan. 15. \$7–\$15. All ages. Hale's Palladium, **Seattle**. fremontplayers.com >>

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Holiday shows

continued from page 29

Leapin' 'Nutcrackers' and more dance

George Balanchine's *The Nutcracker*.

Pacific Northwest Ballet leaps into its second year of staging the Russian dancer and choreographer's version of *The Nutcracker*, based on his childhood memories of dancing. Ian Falconer, creator of the kids' book character Olivia the pig, designed the fanciful sets. Nov. 25–Dec. 28. \$22–\$170. McCaw Hall, Seattle. pnb.org

The *Nutcracker* by Evergreen City Ballet.

A period production of the classic ballet features magical sets and costumes. Select one-hour shows for young children take place at each venue. Dec. 2–18. \$16–\$34. Venues in Bellevue, Auburn and Renton. evergreencityballet.org

The *Nutcracker* by Emerald Ballet Theatre.

The North Sound ballet company presents a full-length performance featuring a former principal dancer from the Alabama Ballet and accompanied live by the Rainier Symphony Ballet Orchestra. Dec. 3–11. \$20–\$38. Northshore Performing Arts Center, Bothell. emeraldballet.org

The Gift of Dance. **bargain** Kaleidoscope Dance Company presents its family-friendly



The Gift of Dance at
Kaleidoscope Dance Company



Holiday magic: George Balanchine's
The Nutcracker at Pacific Northwest Ballet

©ANGELA STERLING

holiday performance featuring dancers ages 7–16 who helped choreograph this showcase of imaginative modern dance, this year with live music. Dec. 4, 3 p.m. \$6–\$10. Shorewood Performing Arts Center, Shoreline. creativdance.org

Constellation. Amid a passel of *Nutcrackers*, the Khambatta Dance Company and guest performers take audiences on a global tour of dance with a program that includes works inspired by Korean folktales, performances by the Sergei Burlak's Art Modern Line Dance Theater Company from Russia and more. Dec. 9–10. \$18–\$22. Broadway Performance Hall, Seattle. khambattadance.org

Nutcracker Sweets. This popular, one-hour *Nutcracker* by ARC Dance caters to young audiences, and showcases the talents of student dancers, alongside youth and professional company dancers. It always sells out, so get tickets soon. Dec. 9–17. \$12–\$39. Venues in Seattle and Shoreline. arcdance.org



PACIFIC NORTHWEST BALLET
©ANGELA STERLING

The *Nutcracker* & The Tale of the Hard Nut.

Tacoma City Ballet's annual production includes the seldom-told *Nutcracker* backstory, the story of the magical Krakatuk Nut; accompanied live by the Tacoma City Ballet Orchestra. Note: 2016 is this show's last year at the historic Pantages Theater. Dec. 9–18. \$25–\$100. Pantages Theater, Tacoma. tacomacityballet.com

The *Nutcracker* by Olympic Ballet Theatre.

Olympic Ballet Theatre presents its annual, full-length performance of the holiday favorite, this year featuring a sparkling new backdrop. Special group matinee performances, for 20 or more, are affordable and one hour long. Dec. 9–18. \$25–\$38.50. Venues in Everett and Edmonds. olympicballet.com

The *Nutcracker* by International Ballet Theatre.

The beloved ballet is performed in traditional Russian style with elaborate sets and costumes from Ukraine, plus Arabian dancers and a fierce battle scene. Dec. 10–22. \$25–\$50. Theatre at Meydenbauer Center, Bellevue. ibtbellevue.org >>

Holiday shows

continued from page 31

Beautiful music and sing-alongs

Rob Kapilow's The Polar Express. The Northwest Boychoir Apprentices and Seattle Symphony musicians join talents to present delightful musical accompaniment to the holiday classic *The Polar Express*. Dec. 3, 11 a.m. \$15–\$20. Ages 12 and younger with families. Benaroya Hall, Seattle. seattlesymphony.org

Sounds of the Season. Dynamic Tacoma Symphony Orchestra music director Sarah Ioannides leads the Tacoma Youth Chorus alongside the symphony orchestra in a varied holiday program, which includes a sing-along. Dec. 4, 2:30 p.m. \$19–\$80. Pantages Theater, Tacoma. tacomasymphony.org

Magical Strings — A Celtic Yuletide. Three generations of the Boulding family and guests gather to present enchanting Celtic music, Irish dancing, a guitarist from Dublin, storytelling and more for the 38th year. Dec. 4–16. \$12–\$28. Venues in Kent, Bellevue, Tacoma, Seattle and beyond. magicalstrings.com

Christmas with the Gothard Sisters. This Northwest trio of sisters sings, performs Celtic fiddle tunes and displays dancing talents to entertain families during the holidays. Dec. 8, 7:30 p.m. \$10–\$22. Edmonds Center for the Arts, Edmonds. edmondscenterforthearts.org

Tiny Tots Holiday Hooray! **bargain** Singing twin sisters Lisa and Linda invite the youngest of concertgoers to experience delightful holiday tunes in an interactive sing-along — and move-along — performance. Dec. 9–10. \$12. Ages 0–5 with families. Benaroya Hall, Seattle. seattlesymphony.org

Handel's Messiah. The Seattle Symphony, along with its chorale and talented soloists,



Celebrate Christmas with the Gothard Sisters in Edmonds

GABRIEL BIENCZAK/ZEBRA VISUAL PHOTOGRAPHY

presents this traditional holiday choral work that includes the magnificent “Hallelujah” chorus. Dec. 16–18. \$26–\$89. Benaroya Hall, Seattle. seattlesymphony.org

Brightest Winter Stars. The full roster of Northwest Girlchoir members, ages 6–18, performs a family-friendly program that features international carols, spirituals, pop-music tunes, a sing-along and more. Dec. 17, 3 p.m. \$10–\$23. Meany Hall for the Performing Arts, Seattle. northwestgirlchoir.org

The Klezmatics. Celebrate Hanukkah with this “Jewish roots band” whose songs link traditional Eastern European Jewish music to modern klezmer and Yiddish culture. Dec. 18, 7:30 p.m. \$25–\$30. Stroum Jewish Community Center, Mercer Island. sjcc.org

New Year's Eve with The Harmonica Pocket. **bargain** Dance and sing to welcome the new year with husband-and-wife duo The Harmonica Pocket, playing its upbeat, whimsical songs at a morning concert. Dec. 31, 10:30 a.m. \$15/family of four. All ages. Mount Baker Community Club, Seattle. mountbaker.org

One-of-a-kind shows

Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory in Smell-O-Vision. **bargain** Head to the SIFF Film Center for an aromatic, candy-tastic screening of the legendary 1971 film, starring Gene Wilder and accompanied by goody bags (prepared by Oompa Loompas) to enhance the viewing. Nov. 25–Jan. 2. \$14–\$15. SIFF Film Center, Seattle. siff.net

Great Figgy Pudding Caroling Competition. **bargain** Revel in the holiday spirit while watching and listening to dozens of caroling teams outsing each other on downtown Seattle street corners. Dec. 2, 6–8:30 p.m. FREE; donations for the Pike Market Senior Center and Food Bank accepted. Westlake Center, Seattle. pikemarketseniorcenter.org

Sing-along with Santa. **bargain** St. Nick leads families in singing a selection of heartwarming holiday faves with live musical accompaniment. Santa also reads a story and poses for photos. Dec. 3, 10 a.m. \$10. Tacoma Musical Playhouse, Tacoma. tmp.org

Christmas Carol. **bargain** Seattle Radio Theatre performs a live radio production of the classic holiday story, complete with sound effects. Be there to watch (audience tune-up starts at 7:45 p.m. sharp) or listen at home on KIRO-FM, huddled around the radio like in bygone days. Dec. 9, 8 p.m. \$5–\$15. Ages 6 and older. Town Hall, Seattle. [>>](http://townhallseattle.org)



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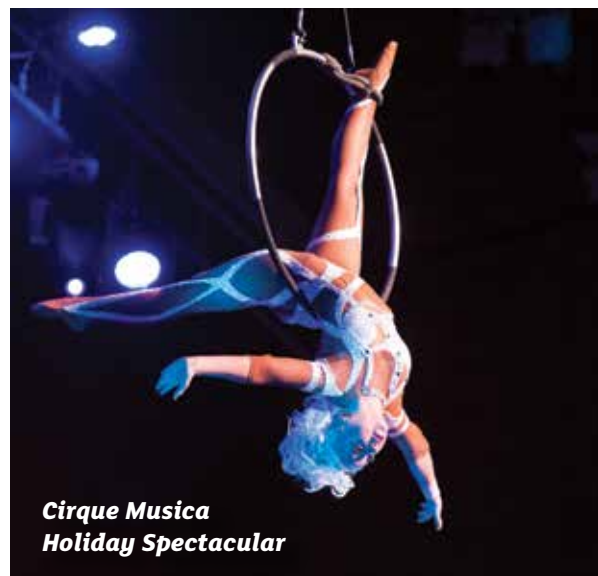
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For program details and restrictions, please visit StevensPass.com/5thgrade.

Holiday shows

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**Cirque Musica
Holiday Spectacular**

Cirque Musica Holiday Spectacular. This family-friendly show stars Cirque Musica's acrobats and circus artists performing breathtaking feats, choreographed to beloved holiday music that's played live by an orchestra. Dec. 18, 6 p.m. \$32–\$78. All ages. Xfinity Arena, **Everett**. xfinityarenaeverett.com

Fiddler on the Roof Sing-along. Get ready to belt out "If I Were a Rich Man" and "Tradition" with the inimitable Topol while watching this beloved 1971 film. A Chinese food buffet and live klezmer music beforehand, included in ticket price, are part of what is now a SIFF tradition. Dec. 25, 11 a.m. \$25. SIFF Cinema Uptown, **Seattle**. siff.net ★

Nancy Chaney is ParentMap's calendar editor and a Seattle-based writer.

holiday cheer on the cheap

The wonderful thing about December is that you can find live holiday performances (often for free) while you're out and about for other reasons. Find more at parentmap.com/holidaymagic.

Winterfest: Seattle Center's winter celebration features numerous free performances in the Armory, including Northwest Boychoir apprentices, klezmer musicians and youth circus artists. seattlecenter.com/winterfest

Pacific Place After you've marveled at Sheraton Seattle's Gingerbread Village and taken a spin on the Westlake Carousel, stop by Pacific Place for shopping, snow flurries (nightly through Dec. 24) and free holiday performances. pacificplacesettl.com/events

Christmas Ship Festival: Bundle up, gather your crew and spend an evening listening to ethereal choral music broadcast from one of the Argosy Christmas Ship's many stops on the Sound or Lake Washington. argosycruises.com

Molbak's: Pick a perfect poinsettia or two, admire the amazing holiday greenery, nosh on a kringle and listen to live holiday music on weekends in December. molbaks.com

Snowflake Lane Exhilarate the kids with a visit to see the lavish music and light show — complete with live toy soldiers — that takes place on the sidewalks around the Bellevue Collection nightly through Dec. 24. snowflakelane.com



ParentMap 2017

PRESCHOOL Previews



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parentmap.com/preschoolpreviews

See
pg 14!

City of DuPont Holiday Festivities

Events and Activities in Historical DuPont

Nov. 19th
Holiday Bazaar
9AM–4PM

Dec. 3rd
Santa Breakfast
9AM

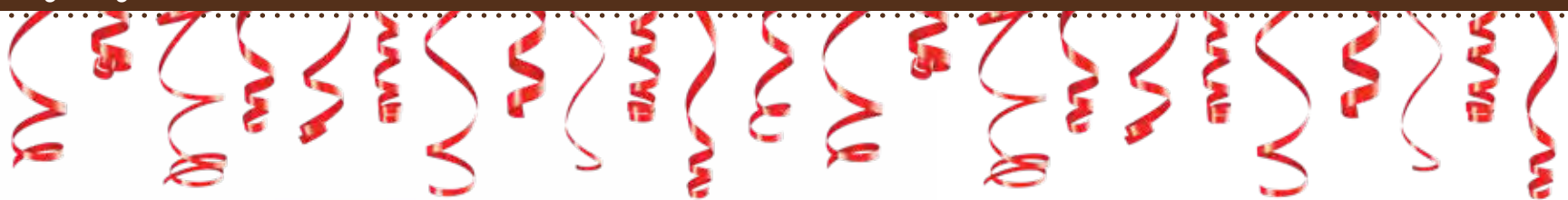
Dec. 10th
Santa's Workshop
12PM–3PM

**Tree Lighting
Ceremony**
5PM



dupontwa.gov // visitdupont.com





Experience

An A-to-Z guide

Leave the stuff behind with these ideas for fun, learning and giving back

BY E. ASHLEY STEEL

As we all know, the spirit of the holidays can all too easily get buried in stuff. Too many kids have unopened craft sets, well-intended science kits, unread books, neglected puzzles and partially built Lego sets literally everywhere. Giving more can seem wasteful or unappreciated.

So, what can you give your kids, your friends' kids, your nieces, nephews and grandkids this holiday season that won't end up tucked into the back of their closets? Give an experience! Older kids are usually mature enough to appreciate how special a longed-for experience can be; for younger kids, consider combining the activity with something tangible that they can unwrap and touch right away.

We've gathered 26 of the best ideas for gift experiences for Puget Sound-area families. Options range from nearly free to seriously extravagant to experiences in giving to others. Want to share your favorite stuff-free gifts? Comment online at parentmap.com/experiencegifts.

gifts for kids

‘Adopt’ a child

Give hope and happiness with a personal connection to a child in need. **Save the Children** (sponsor.savethechildren.org) allows you to select a specific child around the globe or within the United States to support, starting at \$30 a month. You are encouraged to develop a friendship through exchanges of letters and drawings. One-time gifts are also possible, such as a \$45 Emergency Newborn Care Package, which you can give in a child’s name.

Book club bonanza

A terrific way to spend time with a child, especially one who is far away, is to **create a long-distance book club**. Choose a set of books that you want to read together over the next year and schedule a series of phone or video calls to discuss each one. Try books with a theme, such as “ancient Greece” or “kids’ lives in America: past, present

and future.” To keep it completely free of stuff, choose books that are available at the library or as e-books.

Children’s theater

Live theater is always in style and a fun experience for even very young kids. You could give tickets to a show or a full subscription at the **Seattle Children’s Theatre** (sct.org), which will be performing *Stellaluna* over the holidays. Other theaters to check out include **The 5th Avenue Theatre** (5thavenue.org) featuring *The Little Mermaid* in December; **Thistle Theatre** (thistletheatre.org), which specializes in engaging bunraku puppet shows perfect for young kids; **StoryBook Theater** (storybooktheater.org), which stages funny 45-minute musical versions of fairy tales; and **Tacoma Musical Playhouse** (tmp.org), which is performing *Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott* this spring.



PHOTO COURTESY BOEHM'S CANDIES & CHOCOLATES

Deliciousness

Give young chefs a chocolate-making class at **Boehm’s Candies & Chocolates** (boehmscandies.com) in Issaquah. Classes include a factory tour, a tour of the founder’s residence and the opportunity to create chocolate masterpieces, such as rocky road. Note: Kids have to be 8 or older for the class. For a fun tour that includes chocolate tasting, try **Theo Chocolate** (theochochocolate.com) in Fremont.



IFLYWORLD.COM/SEATTLE

Enroll in a special summer camp

Summer camps can create memories and friendships that last a lifetime. Find a camp that taps into your kid’s passion, from rock ’n’ roll camps to basketball camps run by the Seattle Storm, sailing camps and traditional outdoor camps full of campfires and sing-alongs. See parentmap.com/camps for ideas.

Fly inside

Why not give a kid wings? A coupon for **iFly Seattle** (iflyworld.com/seattle), an all-glass vertical wind tunnel facility, will do just that. Kids as young as 3 can “fly” at iFly, experiencing free-fall conditions that are similar to skydiving — but accompanied at all times by highly trained instructors. Look for a variety of packages, starting at \$69.95 for two short flights; or book a family package. >>

continued from page 37

Glass skills

A glassblowing or stained-glass class can be the perfect experience for a child who loves art or fire. Many locations offer short trial classes in which participants create one particular item. Check out Seattle's **Pratt Fine Arts Center** (pratt.org/classes/glass) or **Tacoma Glassblowing Studio** (tacomaglassblowing.com) for courses. **Marcia Wiley**, a local glass artist, offers kids' classes and camps as well as custom family classes (marciawiley.com). For inspiration, throw in tickets to **Chihuly Garden and Glass** or the **Museum of Glass** in Tacoma.



Ice cream insanity

A sweet gift even in the dead of winter is a gift certificate to your child's favorite local ice cream shop such as **Molly Moon's Homemade Ice Cream** (mollymoon.com), **Full Tilt** (fulltilticecream.com) where you can also play pinball and video games, or one of the serve-yourself frozen yogurt shops around town. A creative twist is to give a homemade coupon for an at-home sundae bar.

Jump

Rent a bouncy house for your favorite young friend from **Seattle Bounce House** (seattlebouncehouse.com), which rents themed bouncy houses and inflatable obstacle courses for your backyard. Or buy passes for spots such as **Elevated Sportz** (elevatedsportz.com) in Bothell or Olympia's huge new trampoline facility, **Boom Shaka** (boomshaka.us).

KidsQuest

Spark fun and learning in your kids by giving them a membership to the new **KidsQuest Children's Museum**, which opens in downtown Bellevue in early 2017. Aimed at kids 10 and younger, together with their families, the new KidsQuest will feature exhibits both adventurous and educational, from a 28-foot climbing sculpture in the opening gallery to an "on the go" exhibit starring a new Paccar truck. Similar gift ideas include memberships to other children's museums or passes to local indoor play areas.

Loan

Give your child the chance to fund a deserving small-business owner in a developing country through **Kiva** (kiva.org), which makes microloans to entrepreneurs across the globe. Kids can choose from hundreds of exciting loan requests, such as a rickshaw for a taxi driver in Pakistan or fabric for a community sewing cooperative in India. As the loan is repaid, choose new projects to fund. Note: The minimum loan is \$25.

Magazines

Children's magazines and periodicals make a great, year-long gift for curious kids. For example, **Ask** (*Art and Science for kids*,

Kids.html) spotlights stories about how science infiltrates everyday life; **ChopChop** (chopchopmag.org) is a seasonal cooking magazine full of glossy photos and healthy eating tips; and **Wild** (cwj-fcf.org/en/news-features/magazines/wild-magazine.html) is packed with photos, puzzles and stories about animals and their habitats. After reading the magazines, your child can pass them on or donate to the library.

New room

You've been meaning to give your **kid's room an upgrade**, so create a gift certificate for the experience. Provide a budget and a few guidelines then work together to choose paint colors, design new curtains and refurbish existing furniture. In the process, help your child sort through old toys and clothes to donate to worthy organizations, such as **Eastside Baby Corner** (babycorner.org) or **Treehouse** (treehouseforkids.org).

Order up!

Go around the world with your child throughout the year by giving a **once-a-month dinner "package" to 12 ethnic restaurants**.

Include a world map with each country highlighted, along with menus (which can be picked up at nearby restaurants or printed from the internet). Rent movies or borrow books about each country to enhance the dinner expedition. >>

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continued from page 38

Parkour

Looking for something both active and creative? Give **parkour**, the up-and-coming sport that combines climbing, jumping and acrobatics, using everyday structures such as benches, walls and stairways. **Parkour Visions** (parkourvisions.org) offers classes and camps at its Beacon Hill facility, while **MoveFree Academy** (movefreeacademy.com) offers classes on the Eastside.

PARKOUR VISIONS / BRUCE MIYAKE



Quirky tours

A gift that will impress the teenager who has seen it all is an expedition to Seattle's **Nevertold Casket Company** (nevertoldcasket.com), which curates "the unique, the curious, the frightening and the overall most beautiful haunted goods and antiques collected in one place." Pair it with passes for a horror movie or an **Underground Paranormal Experience** (undergroundtour.com/about/paranormal.html).

Rafting

Some of the best gifts involve anticipation. In the cold of December, your kids will love dreaming about a trip down the mighty Wenatchee River that you've booked for next summer with **River Rider** (riverrider.com), a Leavenworth-based outfitter that supplies professional guides, wetsuits and a barbecue lunch.

Swim with sharks

Sign up your risk-taking kid for a heart-pumping **Eye to Eye Shark Dive** at Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium in Tacoma (pdza.org/dive). Kids ages 8 and older can get up close to the sharks via an underwater cage and a specially designed dry suit. (Note: Dives start at \$75 for nonmembers. Buy zoo gift cards to pay for the dive or book at the dive webpage.)

Terracotta warriors

Terracotta warriors, life-size statues that "guarded" the burial site of China's first emperor, are coming to Seattle in the spring of 2017 in a highly anticipated exhibition at the **Pacific Science Center** (pacificsciencecenter.org/terracotta-warriors). Make it a big event by choosing a Thursday afternoon exhibit time followed by a **Guest Chef Night dinner at FareStart** (farestart.org/guest-chef-night), which supports job-training programs for adults in need.

Underwater fun

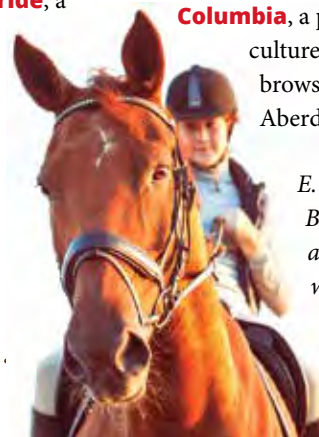
Great Wolf Lodge (greatwolf.com), just south of Olympia, is wintertime swim-party central. It's a hotel and it's an epic waterpark (indoor!). Or consider an annual membership to the **Lynnwood Pool** (lynnwoodwa.gov/PlayLynnwood/RecCenter/Aquatics.htm) with wading areas, spray jets, a lazy river and a family hot tub. Farther north, the **Snohomish Aquatic Center** (snohomishaquatic.com) boasts exciting water slides and the region's only surfing wave simulator, a FlowRider.

Visitor in your hometown

Give a child the thrill of a **travel day** (discovering new places, tired feet and afternoon ice cream) without the hassle of travel. If you choose Seattle, a sample itinerary is the **Gum Wall**, the **Great Wheel**, the **Space Needle**, the hidden **Waterfall Garden Park in Pioneer Square** and **Pike Place Market**, which will unveil its biggest expansion in 40 years this summer (pikeup.org). Include a map and a guidebook.

Whoa!

Time spent with a horse is a very special gift. **Give a trail ride**, a set of lessons or a week at a riding summer camp. Many stables offer onetime trail rides as well as lessons, in both English and Western styles of riding. See parentmap.com/horsecamps for tips on choosing.



E. Ashley Steel is a Bellevue-based scientist and author; find her work at familyonthehouse.com.

X-country' (cross-country) skiing

Slide through a winter wonderland as a holiday-gift adventure. Make a gift certificate for a few hours of exploring the trails at **The Summit at Snoqualmie's Nordic Center** (summitatsnoqualmie.com/mountains/Nordic); or a lesson at **Stevens Pass Nordic Center** (stevenspass.com/site/lessons-rentals/other/nordic-lessons). Include a picnic with winter treats.

You-and-me time

Time together is the best gift. Create a **custom coupon book for shared adventures**. Include coupons for making a fancy dessert together, volunteering, going on a special hike, taking a bus downtown, practicing a sport or learning a craft. You can use web tools (try canva.com) to design the coupon.

Zip out of town

A getaway gift can be as simple as a night in a genuine caboose car at the **Iron Horse Inn** (ironhorseinnbb.com) in Cle Elum or as extravagant as a weekend in **San Francisco** with a CityPass. For an exciting in-between option, plan an overnight trip to **Richmond, British Columbia**, a paradise of Asian culture, where you can browse for hours at the Aberdeen Centre. ■

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Wild Kratts Creature Christmas
MON Dec 5 | 7a

Thomas and Friends
MON-FRI Dec 12-16 | 12:30p

Peg + Cat + Holidays
TUE Dec 13 | 11:30a

Curious George: A Very Monkey Christmas
FRI Dec 16 | 8:30a

The Cat in the Hat Knows a Lot About Christmas
SAT Dec 17 | 7a

more Peg + Cat + PBS kids shows
KCTS9.org/kids-picks

INQUISITV  **KCTS9**

Hey Dad: Can my boyfriend sleep over?

Navigating the reality of a sexually active teen

By Nancy Schatz Alton

You consider yourself a progressive parent, one who's always talked openly about the human body with your children, priding yourself on your family's easy communication style. Long ago, you decided you'd be a parent who respects your children, nurtures their independence and understands what they face as they develop and mature.

So you're cool with a romantic teen sleepover, right? Intercourse under your roof?

If you're thinking *Whoa, whoa, whoa — I'm clearly not as progressive as I thought!*, you probably aren't alone.

While we know about one-third of teens say they're sexually active, the idea of teens having their romantic interest sleepover receives a titanic assortment of responses. Some parents figure, "Heck, we found places to have sex as teens; why can't our kids?" Others recall young adulthoods with parents who allowed casual sleepovers that they, now adults, consider too lax. Regardless, many of us feel caught off-guard by the idea — wide-eyed and open-mouthed with not-my-kid, not-yet, let's-change-the-subject-please looks plastered on our faces.

That's normal, say experts. It's also nearsighted. "We are sexual, our kids are sexual and our kids are going to have sex eventually," says Amy Lang, sexuality and parenting expert and founder of Seattle-based Birds+Bees+Kids (birdsandbeesandkids.com). "They are going to have sex before we are ready. It does not matter if they are 47 when they have sex for the first time; we are still not ready."

Experts like Lang say the decision about condoning sexual activity at home must be carefully made, and is directly tied to an ongoing conversation about healthy sexuality — particularly as it relates to teenagers.

Take, for example, the work of University of Massachusetts—Amherst professor Amy Schalet.



"Teenagers are young people in need of our guidance [and they] want [the adults in their lives] to have real conversations about sex."

Schalet interviewed 130 parents and teens in America and the Netherlands, two countries that offer a compelling contrast in healthy sex ed. On one end of the spectrum: the United States, with one of the world's higher rates of teen pregnancy; on the other, the Netherlands, with one of the world's lower.

What did Schalet find? The surveyed Dutch typically emphasized relationships as being important and believed a 16-year-old can remember to use birth control, while the surveyed Americans focused on hormones and the idea that sex is hard to control and can overwhelm teens.

Schalet notes that the average age of first intercourse is similar in both countries (age 17), but the teen's level of preparedness varies. For example, at the time Schalet wrote her book on the topic, which published in 2011, 3 out of 5 young women in the Netherlands were on the pill by the time they first had sex; that number was 1 in 5 in the U.S. That number has narrowed in recent years (between 2011 and 2013, U.S. females using contraceptives by first intercourse reached 79 percent) but there's still work to be done, says Schalet.

"In the U.S, there's a belief that teens must break away from their family and establish themselves as independent and then maybe sex is O.K.," she

says. "In the Netherlands, people become adults in the context of relationships with their parents with no need to break away."

Why the difference? Schalet points to a major societal shift in the 1970s in the Netherlands that helped normalize talking about sex between parents and kids, a change she hopes to encourage through her own work.

"It can be better for both parents and teens in this country," she says "Teenagers are young people in need of our guidance [and they] want [the adults in their lives] to have real conversations about sex."

So, how to normalize sex

Being able to talk about sex is the first step to normalize it, and these conversations happen before any family decides whether or not sleepovers are right for them, says Jo Langford, a Seattle-area therapist, sex educator and author of *Spare Me 'The Talk': A Guy's Guide to Sex, Relationships and Growing Up*.

"In other countries, it's just part of the conversation, with condom ads on billboards and in magazines that kids read," he says. "The more something is discussed, the less scary, mysterious, uncomfortable [and/or] interesting it becomes."

Discussion starters include commercials, song lyrics or asking what your teen thinks about



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Home alone? 3 ways to stay sane



Staying home with tots all day can be draining (to put it mildly). If you're starting to feel a touch batty, deploy one of these strategies to help meet your child's constant need for companionship and distraction.

- 1 Keep it visual.** We all know the importance of routines but sometimes the delivery is just as important as the message. Create a visual timetable to show your child what's in store. This will provide her with that much-desired structure and give you a guide rail to follow during the day.
 - 2 Chore time!** Just because you're at home doesn't mean you should do all the housework. Kill two birds with one mop, er, stone by splitting tasks with your children. Even the youngest pair of hands can stay busy with simple housekeeping tasks like wiping down the table or sorting laundry.
 - 3 Encourage independence.** Easier said than done, we know, but by stepping back and letting your child lead the way, you'll both get a much-needed break. One tip: Don't overwhelm with toys. Instead, keep it simple.
- More tips for success at parentmap.com/home-alone

— Rachel McClary




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Can my boyfriend sleep over?

continued from page 41

sleepovers with a partner. Focus on making sexuality a comfortable topic, or at least one that is discussed despite any awkwardness, while also providing your child the necessary tools to become a sexually and emotionally healthy adult. Schalet's ABCDs of adolescent sexuality helps guide these talks:

- **Autonomy of sexual self:** Development of their individual sexual self is necessary for teenagers. This includes relating to their bodies, self-regulation, recognizing what they want and making decisions.
- **Building healthy relationships:** Teenagers need the opportunity to talk about what defines a healthy relationship: mutual respect, trust, care and interest.
- **Connectedness:** Maintaining a sense of connection with parents, guardians and other adults through conversations is vital for teens. If parents are too strict, teenagers may lose that connection.
- **Diversity:** Parents should emphasize differences in terms of orientation and gender identity, culture and when teenagers are developmentally ready to engage in aspects of sexuality.

Is it right for your family?

After all this, the question still remains: Is your family comfortable with allowing your child's significant other to spend the night in your

child's bed? Seattle parent Beth Tucker* says she taught her daughter about safe sex, but when her daughter told her she was ready to visit the doctor to acquire birth control and have sex, Tucker couldn't find any guidance about deciding *where* her daughter and boyfriend would actually have that safe sex. That's why she offered her house.

"I didn't want my kid to be having sex in cars [or] up against alley walls," she says. "It didn't seem right to give her relationship guidance but expect her and her partner to conduct the most private part of their relationship-building in the woods."

While the decision was uncomfortable, Tucker says she knew she had her daughter's best interests at heart. "I know my kid. I know me. I only need to agree with myself and my spouse, so I dug in and felt what is really right for my family," she says. For other parents, she asks: "What is going to work for you, your kid, your family? Think about the practicalities of setting your kid up for a sexual life."

Regardless of your family's decision, all parents need to talk with their teens about sex, says Dr. Cora Collette Breuner. An adolescent physician at Seattle Children's Hospital, Breuner says talking about sex should cover topics including consent, contraception and STIs. As for sleepovers: "If you allow them, set clear boundaries. Teenagers need to know how to be safe and should talk to responsible adults about proactive and responsible behavior." And if you don't to allow sleepovers? "Say 'no' and mean it!"

For her part, puberty educator Julie Metzger doesn't love the idea of teens spending the night together but believes it's important to keep talking.

"Aim for the gray space while avoiding shame or an open invitation," says Metzger, co-founder of Great Conversations (greatconversations.com), which offers classes about puberty for parents and preteens. "Speak authentically, seeing your teen as a healthy, capable, curious, passionate, sexual person. Perhaps 'What I hope for you is a sexual relationship that grows over time that is mutual, satisfying, mature and responsible.' This invites a reciprocal response, like 'Thanks, but here's where I'm at.'"

That's the advice Seattle dad Nate Swanson* keeps in mind when it comes to his 15-year-old son.

"My wife and I don't want to see it, hear it or smell it, but yes, [he] may have sex in our home," Swanson says of his family's decision. "I don't want there to be one excuse about not having a condom and I don't want him to be at someone else's house and have the parents flip their shit. I want my son to know sex is about communication, respect, being smart and safe." ■

Nancy Schatz Alton is the coauthor of two holistic health care guides, *The Healthy Back Book* and *The Healthy Knees Book*. Find her blog at [Within the Words](http://WithintheWords.com).

*Name changed for privacy

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LEGO BUILDER

By Tiffany Doerr Guerzon

Many artists work in paint or clay, but Dan Parker prefers what most people think of as children's toys: Legos. Since starting his business in his garage nearly 20 years ago, Parker and his Tacoma-based team have created more than 2,000 custom Lego art pieces.

These include mosaics, sculptures and mechanical pieces, all completely built from Lego bricks. His work has been featured at the Seattle Center, the Museum of Pop Culture, the Seattle Aquarium and many other private and public events worldwide. In his portfolio: a 6-foot-diameter Death Star, a 10-foot-tall Statue of Liberty, a life-sized Nativity display and even a coffin.

Lego has been a part of Parker's life since he was a kid but it wasn't until his 30s that he began investigating how to monetize his hobby. Already a member of an adult Lego club that created train displays, Parker decided to jump full time into Lego when he was laid off from his job in engineering.

Now one of only a handful of professional Lego builders in the U.S. offering a broad range of events and services, Parker is a founding member of the Lego Certified Professional Program, a community-based organization of adult Lego enthusiasts who have turned Lego into a part- or full-time job. He is also a co-founder and charter member of the annual convention NW Brick Con, president and design director of Dan Parker Brickable Designs (brickabledesigns.com) and operator and principal creative artist of Brickable Designs' sister studio City Blocks in Tacoma.

Part of his goal: to educate the public about Lego. To do this, Parker created what he calls "Display and Play." He implements this concept at his "Brick by Brick" events, which he offers 10 to 12 times a year (updates for events are posted



on the City Blocks Facebook page, facebook.com/cityblocks). At such an event, Parker divides an exhibit space into zones and anchors each with a piece of Lego art. The display is surrounded by long tables filled with Lego pieces based on the same theme. For a set admission fee, which differs by event, all attendees, no matter their age, can sit and free-build using the provided pieces, consulting with Parker and his team members as needed.

I spoke with the commercial master Lego artist and father of two to learn more about his work. Here's what he had to say.

What's typical day of work look like for you?

There is no typical day! I work like a musician: One day you're composing. Then you're on your way to an event. Or I'm doing a school assembly. Or I might be cleaning an old collection or kitting [making custom kits for clients]. Then there is paperwork.

"Lego can be as pervasive, adaptable and fundamental as music. It bridges cultures, generations and interest groups."

You've done so much work over the years. Do you have a favorite?

I have a 10-foot Statue of Liberty. It didn't come together in a quick way. In 2000, Lego came out with a 30-inch-tall Statue of Liberty kit. I decided I wanted a stronger piece, so I bought several kits [and] I built a very large statue in my garage. One of the first clients to lease it was the Seattle Center in 2002, which [has] used it in their naturalization ceremony.

During one ceremony, one lady, a newly sworn-in citizen, was so overcome with emotion that she ran over, jumped the pedestal and threw her arms around the statue. As I watched it sway, I nearly had a heart attack. I thought it was going to come crashing down! But it didn't and I later built a better pedestal.

In your experience, what can kids learn from building with Legos?

A whole range of vital, basic skills: visual discernment, spatial interpretation, motor and



cognitive skills, imagination, creativity, even eye-brain-hand coordination, language and verbal skills.

It gives kids a place to express their creativity, which is huge. So many kids today have trouble finding the proper outlet for creativity. Lego helps cultivate and foster that. Lego can be as pervasive, adaptable and fundamental as music. It bridges cultures, generations and interest groups.

Have you seen a change in the way kids play with Legos over the years?

I've seen good and bad trends. The bad is a trend away from open-ended thinking. It's color in the lines. It doesn't allow for creativity or personal expression. Yet, in certain capacities kids are more flexible and adaptable. Before, kids would build a tree or a car; today they tend to build more specialized, pop-culture items, like Mario, Halo, Star Wars and superheroes. They approach teamwork in a casual way.

In your experience, do boys and girls play with Lego differently?

When I first started teaching, I expected boys and girls to play with Lego in the same way. But that wasn't true. Boys will build things that are transitory; they have to move, whether it be a car or tank. And there is a degree of confrontation; they tend to battle with their creations — go head to head.

Girls, on the other hand, will build collaborative things. They tend to build things like a house or a tower. But in the last few years, that gender line has blurred, and I

see more crossover. I'll see boys and girls playing together. And I'll see girls get a little more aggressive.

Are you seeing an increase in adults and teens playing with Lego?

Yes, the licensing [of such popular brands] as superheroes and Star Wars has fueled more complex pieces. This draws the teens; it encourages teens that Lego is still cool. Also, post-adolescent builders are using stop motion and minifigures to create storylines. They make videos using anything from basic digital cameras to sophisticated computer programs.

Did your kids influence your art?

When my daughter was 3, I was building a European palace. Parts of that house were inspired by Cinderella, which was her favorite movie at the time. My son uses Lego in ways that still baffle me. I learn from my kids. Having kids added to my art. My son has encouraged me to think outside of the box.

Final question: What's the best Lego set to start kids with?

Lego Creator is good, old-school building. Creator works around a theme. Then kids can try variations. With Creator sets you also get more pieces for the money; because they don't commission any new colors, shapes, all the money is put into a higher brick count. They launch new themes every six months. ■

Tiffany Doerr Guerzon is a freelance writer and the mother of three children, all of whom love Lego. Read more of her writing at TDGuerzon.com.

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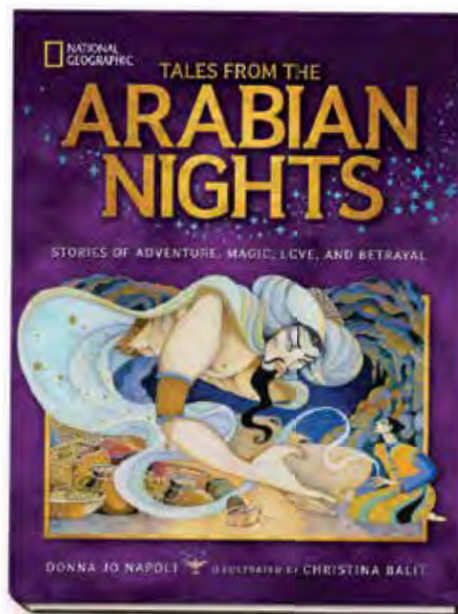
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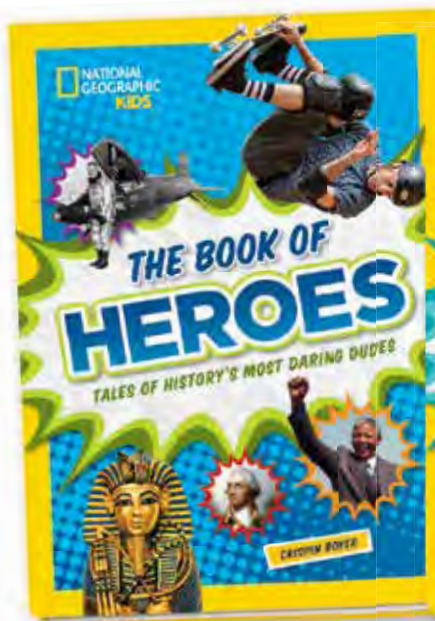
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