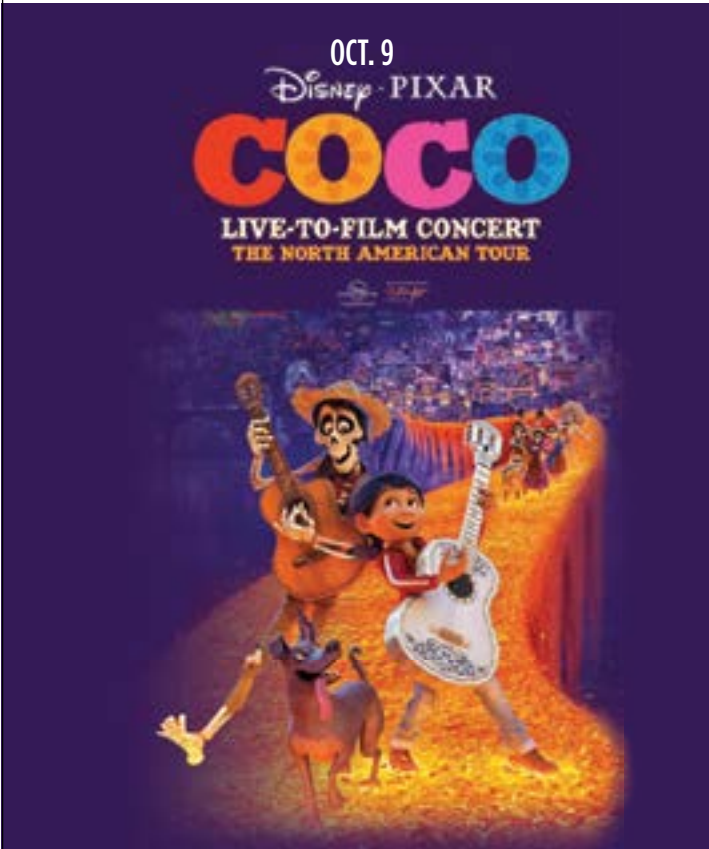


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— Inside —

Set your kids up for back-to-school success17

How students can get the most out of tutoring17

Top baby names for 202318

'The P Word' book review18

Enriching non-sports extracurricular activities 20

Make a back-to-school shopping game plan 21

Routine childhood vaccinations 22

5 ways to get your kids on a healthy track 23

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Set your kids up for back-to-school-success

Whether you're dreading hectic school-day schedules or excited for kids to be back in the classroom, most parents agree the transition back to school can be a stressful time.

Change can be trying for kids and adults, but it doesn't have to be if you tackle the season a little at a time - mentally, emotionally and logistically. Consider these five school-readiness tips from KinderCare experts to help parents ease the jitters, prepare for school days and set goals to help ensure their children have great years.

Ease into school-year routines. Many children thrive on routines. Prep for the transition to a school-day schedule as early as possible by slowly moving your children's bedtimes up a little each evening. You should also establish school-year breakfast, lunch and dinner routines to help children adjust to regular mealtimes.

Take a trial run and figure out what hiccups need addressing. Ask your children's school if you can take an after-hours tour to increase familiarity and practice your routine. Now is the time to make before- and after-school care arrangements and discuss them with your children. Help ease their nerves by making sure they practice the little things like opening and closing



lunchboxes, water bottles and backpacks, and finding their drop off and pick up locations then adjust as needed to make sure they feel confident in each of the tasks.

Start back-to-school conversations at home. Children sometimes experience big feelings. Whether it's excitement, jitters

or anxiety around the unknown, having open conversations at home about school can give children a comfortable space to share what they feel and help quell their nerves. This is also a good time to gently remind your children about kindness and acceptance of others.

Build strong home and school partnerships. One of the best things you can do for your children is give them the resources they need for success then support them along the way. One way to do this is by building partnerships with your children's teachers to create a strong foundation for the entire school year. Whether it's joining the local parent group at school, downloading a classroom app, following your children's school social media pages or sending an informal "getting to know you" email to your children's teachers, consistent and effective communication is often beneficial when you face challenges or have questions down the road.

Set school-year goals. This may help your children understand what they're working toward. Maybe they want to try a new sport or learn a musical instrument. Maybe they would like to increase their math competencies by a letter grade or demonstrate more patience while learning new things. Make a mental note to continuously revisit these goals throughout the year to celebrate progress and growth. Watch for ways you can help them accomplish these objectives with support from counselors, coaches and instructors as well as at home.*

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Top baby names for 2023

Olivia and Liam are once again the most common baby names in the United States while Luna joins the top 10 baby names list for the first time. The rankings below are based on the most recent data on birth from the Social Security Administration.

Boy names:

1. Liam
2. Noah
3. Oliver
4. James
5. Elijah
6. William
7. Henry
8. Lucas
9. Benjamin
10. Theodore
11. Mateo
12. Levi
13. Sebastian
14. Daniel
15. Jack
16. Michael
17. Alexander
18. Owen
19. Asher
20. Samuel
21. Ethan

22. Leo

23. Jackson

24. Mason

25. Ezra

26. John

27. Hudson

28. Luca

29. Aiden

30. Joseph



12. Camila

13. Sofia

14. Scarlett

15. Elizabeth

16. Eleanor

17. Emily

18. Chloe

19. Mila

20. Violet

21. Penelope

22. Gianna

23. Aria

24. Abigail

25. Ella

26. Avery

27. Hazel

28. Nora

29. Layla

30. Lily

Girl names:

1. Olivia

2. Emma

3. Charlotte

4. Amelia

5. Sophia

6. Isabella

7. Ava

8. Mia

9. Evelyn

10. Luna

11. Harper



Kids have questions about their bodies, now you have answers

Children have a lot of questions about the way the world works and parents hope to have straightforward answers. But when it comes to questions regarding the body, parents and kids alike can find these conversations awkward, uncomfortable and embarrassing. Experts say that destigmatizing a child's curiosity about their body will not only help them take better care of their health, it may even spark their interest in science.

"Kids have so many questions about their bodies, some practical, some pure curiosity. Sadly, society sometimes chastises children for even asking these questions. By better understanding their bodies though, they can adopt good habits that stay with them for life, and learn about physics and biology in a fun way," says David L. Hu, Ph.D., a professor at Georgia Institute of Technology and author of *The P Word: A Manual for Mammals*.

Dr. Hu, an award-winning scientist, animal expert and author, wrote *The P Word* for his 10-year old son, who like many children his age, is eager to learn more about his body. While previous books dealing with this topic are written with teenagers in mind, Dr. Hu believes it's important for younger kids to enter puberty already having all the facts about their biology. His book, meant for ages 7-12, is meant to serve as a gender-neutral, definitive resource about the penis for kids, providing tools kids need to recognize and name their body parts, understand when something might be wrong and practice good hygiene.



If you're a parent of a curious kid, or a parent of a child who hasn't yet voiced their questions, Dr. Hu offers the following tips:

1. Try not to shy away from these conversations or make your child feel ashamed for asking a question about their body. Keep in mind that many children will turn to the internet for answers if you aren't open to answering their questions, where they may encounter false information

or inappropriate content. Instead, acknowledge their curiosity by answering their questions as best you can, and by pointing them to trustworthy resources.

2. Don't wait until your child reaches puberty. If you start talking to kids about their bodies when they are young, you'll normalize and desensitize the subject, and the act of talking about it. Helping a child feel comfortable in their own skin before things start to change, will set the stage for less stress during puberty.

3. Help kids understand that their body is natural and normal. In *The P Word*, Dr. Hu intentionally presents colorful, engaging images and facts about different mammals around the globe alongside information about human bodies, including how animals use their penises to pee, mark their territory and reproduce. "My hope is that kids realize that every question they have, no matter how embarrassing it is, can be addressed by the tools of science. They should be proud of being curious about their own bodies," he says.

The P Word: A Manual for Mammals is available online at Amazon.com and BarnesandNoble.com.*

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Life outside the classroom

Enriching non-sports extracurricular activities

A school experience goes beyond lessons learned in the classroom. Part of what helps shape well-rounded students are the skills they sharpen and memories they make while engaging in extracurricular activities. Extracurricular involvement shows that students can stick with activities for extended periods of time, indicates they have passions and interests, and illustrates that they can take initiative outside of their schoolwork.

Athletics is a popular extracurricular activity. A love of sports often develops in elementary school, with children participating in recreational or school-based leagues each year. That enjoyment of the game only builds in middle school and high school. However, there are plenty of students who are not sports enthusiasts but still fill their after-school hours with activities that can help cultivate leadership, teamwork, time management skills, confidence, and much more. The following are some extracurriculars that go beyond the scholastic playing fields.

ARTS ACTIVITIES: These can include painting, sketching, ceramics, jewelry-making, and yarn work.

BAND, ORCHESTRA OR CHORUS: Music instruction is ideal for those who want to explore a passion for singing or playing an instrument. For those who want to learn to play the piano or guitar, there are private lessons available.

THEATER: Students can participate in theater productions after school. It's possible to get involved both in front of the curtain and behind with positions in the cast, crew and even promotional team.

SCHOOL NEWSPAPERS: Many schools produce student-led newspapers in print or digital versions. Students handle all of the roles, from reporting, editing, photography, and managing the publication. Joining the Yearbook Club is also an option.

FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLUBS: Students may want to expand on their foreign language studies by participating in language clubs. Often these clubs include learning more about the cultures where specific languages are spoken, including exploring culinary delights and possible travel.

PHILANTHROPY: Like-minded students may want to participate in school-organized volunteer activities. These keep students busy, but also benefit recipients in many ways. Activities can include beach sweeps or volunteering at animal shelters.

CODING AND PROGRAMMING: Students can learn the basics of writing code and building computer applications or websites.

CULINARY ARTS: Certain schools may be equipped with kitchen facilities and still offer elective courses in culinary arts, while others may reserve cooking classes to extracurricular activities. If a school does not have a culinary club, chances are students can find a cooking class offered through a private group.

Other extracurricular activities include dance, robotics, photography, woodworking, chess, anime, honors and debate club. Students also can start new clubs if there are deficits in offerings at their schools.*

Children, teens and parent support: Are you a parent concerned about your child/teen's social and emotional health and well being? You are not alone. The Sunshine Prevention Center, 468 Boyle Road, Port Jefferson Station offers evening parent and social groups starting in the Fall that give strategies and tools that he/she needs to be able to cope and grow in more positive directions. These groups use creative arts, communication and support and are divided into groups by age. Contact Amber Ayala at amber.sunshinecenter@gmail.com or call 631-476-3099.



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Make a back-to-school shopping game plan

Gearing up for a new school year is always exciting for both parents and kids but between navigating store aisles and online sales for everything from clothes and shoes to supplies and sports equipment, back-to-school shopping can be a time-consuming and expensive endeavor. To help stay on budget while still getting everything you need, consider these tips from Slickdeals.

Take stock of current inventory — Before you hit the stores, take inventory of items you already have at home or in the office to see what you truly need. Knowing what you already have on hand can help you avoid the temptation of stocking up on items you may not even need just because they were on sale. That 50-cent pack of crayons may be a good deal, but too many of those can add up, especially if you realize later you had the same item sitting unused in a closet or drawer at home.

Shop without your kids — Leaving the kids at home when shopping may help save money, according to a survey commissioned by Slickdeals and conducted by OnePoll. The study of 2,000 parents in the United States found 2 out of 3 respondents believe shopping with



their kids tends to be more expensive than shopping by themselves with solo ventures costing an average of \$133 compared to \$179 when taking children along.

Check with teachers — Don't be afraid to email your children's teachers before classes start to find out what supplies are absolutely necessary. Sometimes a school will put out a list, but the teachers may not require you to have all the items on the list,

particularly if students may be sharing and supplies may need to be restocked later in the school year.

Buy pre-owned — From uniforms and sporting equipment to clothing and more, not everything needs to be new each school year. Visiting online consignment shops can help you find big savings on like new, often brand name clothing, accessories and more.

Avoid buying equipment for extracurricular activities all at once —

If your children are trying new sports, clubs or extracurricular activities for the first time, consider waiting to purchase all the necessary equipment. Oftentimes, you may be able to borrow or buy pre-owned items from other parents whose kids have outgrown the equipment or no longer participate. If your children end up deciding a sport or activity isn't for them, you're not stuck with things that may end up collecting dust in the garage or basement.

Take advantage of student discounts — If you have children in college, you may be able to use their student ID cards to your advantage to save even more money. Before making purchases on big-ticket items like tablets or laptops, be sure to inquire about discounts available only for students. Some companies even offer student-only memberships for discounted services, such as shipping, video, music and more.

Staying on top of consumer trends can make for a better shopper experience this back-to-school season, helping you land the best deals on the right products at the right time.*



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Keep your child safe and healthy this school year

As students return to classrooms, doctors say that it's important to ensure that children are up-to-date with *The P Word: A Manual for Mammal*.

"The evidence around vaccinations is abundantly clear; they're safe, effective and will help protect you, your loved ones and your community from preventable diseases. If you have questions about vaccines, their safety, or effectiveness, please speak to your physician. We are here for you, eager to answer your questions, and ensure your family is protected," says Jesse M. Ehrenfeld, M.D., M.P.H., president of the American Medical Association (AMA), pictured above.

In an effort to promote a safer, healthier school year for everyone, the AMA is sharing these vaccine facts and insights:

Vaccines are safe, effective and save lives. Routine childhood immunization is highly effective at preventing disease over a lifetime, reducing the incidence of all targeted diseases, including measles, mumps, rubella, polio and chickenpox. For the U.S. population in 2019, vaccines prevented more than 24 million cases of disease.

The benefits of vaccines can be quantified. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), vaccination of children born between 1994 and 2021 will prevent 472 million illnesses, almost 30 million hospitalizations and more than 1 million deaths, saving nearly \$2.2 trillion in total societal costs, including \$479 billion in direct costs.

Vaccination rates have fallen. Even before the rise in vaccine misinformation and disinformation associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, vaccine hesitancy was increasing, elevating the risk of community outbreaks, which put under- and unvaccinated children at risk for serious illnesses, like measles. According to a mid-January 2023 report from the CDC, vaccination coverage decreased in most states for all vaccines among kindergarteners for the 2021-22 school year when compared with the previous school year, which was already below pre-pandemic levels.

Speak to your child's physician. With increased misinformation around vaccinations, it is critical that you seek out reliable, evidence-based sources for information. These sources may begin with websites like getvaccineanswers.org, but they should also include your child's physician.

Physicians can also answer questions on the new monoclonal antibody therapy, *nirsevimab*, available for infants and children under the age of 19 months, for the prevention of RSV disease.

Don't let cost be a barrier. Programs like Vaccines for Children (VFC) are federally funded to provide no-cost vaccinations to children whose families otherwise could not afford them. Parents can learn more by contacting their state or local health department.

"Make an annual well-child visit and immunizations a part of your household's back-to-school routine," says Dr. Ehrenfeld. "Doing so will protect you and your family from a number of preventable illnesses. It's something I do for my own children, and I urge you to do so, too."*

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5 ways to get your kids on a healthy track

Childhood obesity is a serious medical issue affecting children around the world, but notably in North America. While the issue has been around for decades, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says American children and teenagers have witnessed a significant increase in weight gain since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

A recent study found the percentage of obese children and teens increased to 22 percent compared with 19 percent before the pandemic. One of the study's authors, Dr. Alyson Goodman of the CDC's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, described the results as "substantial and alarming."

Being less physically active, overweight and eating the wrong foods can start children on a path toward problems that once were only considered conditions of adulthood, namely hypertension, diabetes and high cholesterol, offers the Mayo Clinic. To reverse course, parents, guardians and educators can focus on helping children become more physically fit. The following are a few ways to do so.

Encourage participation in sports or other physical activities. Sports practices, games, competitions, and other activities



may keep children moving for an hour or more several days per week. However, the American Academy of Pediatrics states that only 25 percent of children get the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity per day. Emphasize a fun activity with a focus on movement

that produces shortness of breath, body warmth and sweat. These are indicators that the heart rate is really pumping.

Use exercise as a reward and not a punishment. Make exercise something kids can look forward to. Reward a job well done on a test with extra time

biking with friends or a hiking trip to a scenic national park. Kids will begin to associate exercise with fun.

Offer a variety of foods. Kids who eat a variety of foods are more likely to get the nutrients the body needs, according to Kids Health® by Nemours. These healthy foods should include at least five servings of fruits and vegetables a day, with an emphasis on vegetables.

Limit screen time. Children may be inclined to entertain themselves by heading for the television, mobile phone or tablet first, especially after a year-plus of being stuck indoors. But parents can make a concerted effort to limit kids' screen time in favor of more physically challenging pursuits.

Teach healthy eating habits. Teach children that weight loss is accomplished when more calories are burned than consumed. Pay attention to portion sizes and explain how beverages like fruit juices can be sneaky sources of extra calories.

Children may need a little extra help getting fit, especially if they gained weight during the pandemic. Teaching healthy habits now can help kids enjoy healthy futures.*

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