

THE MOM & CAREGIVER™

SEPTEMBER 2023
VOLUME 25 ISSUE 09

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The Magic of Movement

WHY DANCE CLASSES ARE BENEFICIAL FOR CHILDREN

From graceful ballet leaps to energetic hip-hop routines, dance is a captivating art form that not only entertains but also provides numerous benefits for children. Beyond the glittering costumes and dazzling performances, dance classes offer a wealth of physical, mental, and social advantages that contribute to a child's holistic development.

1. **Physical Development:** Dance classes enhance balance, coordination, and flexibility in children. Through movement, they develop body awareness and proper posture, laying the foundation for a healthy lifestyle.

2. **Cognitive and Emotional Growth:** Dance fosters focus, memory, and problem-solving abilities. It also provides a creative outlet, boosting self-confidence and emotional well-being.

3. **Social Skills and Teamwork:** In group settings, children learn cooperation, communication, and teamwork. Dance classes create lasting friendships and a sense of unity.

4. **Discipline and Goal Setting:** Dance instills discipline and perseverance as children work towards mastering techniques and routines, teaching them the value of hard work.

Enrolling children in dance classes not only introduces them to the joy of movement but also provides a multitude of physical, mental, and social benefits. From improved physical fitness and cognitive development to enhanced social skills and a sense of discipline, dance classes nurture the holistic growth of children. So let your little ones take center stage, feel the music, and experience the magic of dance—it's a gift that will accompany them throughout their lives.

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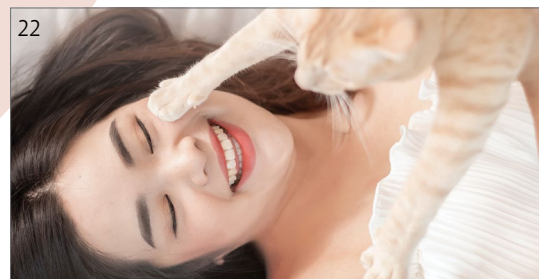
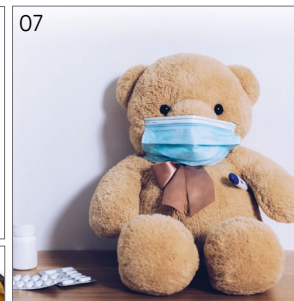
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Grayson and his autism assistance dog guide, *Lapas*, are two cool dudes who came strutting down the sidewalk in style for our photo shoot. Grayson giggled when *Lapas* gave him hugs, and mom was so calm and collected with a six year old boy and new dog in tow!

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THE MOM & CAREGIVER

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SEPTEMBER IS MY NEW YEAR

Did you know that a new year celebration happens every couple of months around the world? The new year many of us celebrate is the Gregorian New Year on January 1st. Lunar New Year, celebrated in China, Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore, Vietnam and other places, falls in January or February. Vikram Samvat, or the Hindu New Year, and Nowruz, the Persian New Year, are both observed in March or April. Songkran is the Buddhist New Year and is honoured in April as well. Muslims celebrate Hijri New Year, or Islamic New Year, in July or August. And Rosh Hashanah, Jewish New Year, is commemorated in September.

I have always found September to be the start of a new year for me. I know it's not official, but September's back-to-school time brings the feel of a new year – the starting fresh, the making of resolutions, the return to schedule, the celebration of a new time. It is a time for fresh paper and pencils, maybe a new outfit or backpack, and a pause to honour a new moment in a person's life (I know those first day of school pictures can be chaos and craziness, but they are worth it to show your child that these are important memories).

Our September issue is full of first-day vibes and new school year freshness! Check out:

- “Class is Back in Session... At a New School!” (page 15) if your fresh start is even fresher (with your child beginning at a new school).
- “Reducing the Stress of a New School Year” (page 17) if your whole family needs to get back into routine and make this school year a stress-free zone.
- “Learning Today, Leading Tomorrow” (page 11) if you want to hear from real students (ages 7 and 9) who are going to run this world someday!
- “Lunchbox Alert! Homemade Fruit Roll-Ups” (page 14) if you are a parent who hates making school lunches and needs some new ideas (if you are not a parent who hates this task, I want to meet you, your Rareness!)

We're wishing all families a safe, calm, wonderful and memorable start to school. Happy new year!

Sabina



For More Details and Events Visit

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SEPTEMBER 2023 & EVENTS



Handprint Apple Tree

What's more fall than gathering the kids and heading to the orchard to pick apples? We love fall and crafts so we combined both into this handprint apple tree craft!

- What you need:**
- Coloured cardstock or construction paper
 - Red or green pom poms
 - Glue stick
 - Scissors
 - Pencil

- What to do:**
1. Trace your child's hand and arm on a piece of brown paper and cut it out.
 2. Draw a tree shape big enough for the handprint on a green piece of paper and cut it out.
 3. Glue the handprint to the middle of the green tree piece, leaving the arm part of the handprint hanging off, this is the tree trunk.
 4. Glue the red or green pom poms all around the green portion of the tree and handprint.

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01ST End of Summer Free Carnival,
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04TH *It's the last long weekend of the summer - Happy Labour Day!*

08TH Western Fair, Western Fair District,
www.westernfair.ca

15TH Street Salsa Fridays,
Dundas Place,
www.london.ca/living-london/our-core-area/dundas-place

17TH Terry Fox Run London,
Springbank Gardens,
www.terryfox.org

23RD Happy first day of fall!

30TH National Day for Truth and Reconciliation

02ND Immersive Disney Animation,
100 Kellogg Lane,
www.lighthouseimmersive.com/disney/london/

06TH Have a great first day of school!

09TH Airshow London SkyDrive 2023,
London International Airport,
www.airshowlondon.com

16TH The Chicks World Tour,
Budweiser Gardens,
www.budweisergardens.com

19TH Skate and Bounce,
Victoria Park,
www.instagram.com/oasisldn

25TH Have a blessed Yom Kippur!

*Editorial photography
by Cynthia Moore.*

**“Somebody is learning how to be a person
by watching you. Let that sink in.”**
- unknown

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FEELING LOST WHEN IT COMES TO POTTY TRAINING?

Toilet learning (teaching, training, potty training) can sometimes cause stress for families.

WHEN TO START?

Toilet learning depends on a child's readiness, not age. Most children seem ready between 18 to 24 months, but others may be older.

HOW DO I TELL IF MY CHILD IS READY?

- Seems interested in others on the toilet or likes books about the 'potty'
- Often has a dry diaper for 2-3 hours at a time
- Can tell when they are 'peeing' or 'pooping'
- Clutches at their diaper or has another way of signalling that they need to go
- Can sit steadily on the toilet or potty
- Is able to follow simple instructions
- Seeks to be independent

HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE?

It can take three to six months until a child can be out of diapers for the daytime. Staying dry and waking up to use the toilet at night could take many more months. As with many parenting adventures, it is helpful if parents and caregivers are patient and try to read their child's cues.

SETTING YOUR CHILD UP FOR SUCCESS

- Try not to start toilet learning during times of stress such as moving, sickness, travelling or the birth of a sibling. Sometimes it can't be helped, but stress can make the process longer.
 - Choose clothes for your child that they can pull down and up easily
 - Use common words like urine/pee, bowel movement/poo
 - Role-play yourself or with dolls/stuffed animals
 - Inform all caregivers about your plan
 - Don't forget about washing hands afterwards

WHAT TO DO ON THE POTTY

- Only put your child on for a few minutes at a time. Forcing them to stay for long periods of time will make the potty seem like punishment.
- Establish a routine. Have the child sit on the potty after every meal or snack and whenever they say they need to. When learning a new skill, having a schedule helps.
- Allow them the time they need.
- Be available to help.
- Praise every effort and result!
- Have boys start sitting down. They can stand up later.

REWARDS FOR USING THE POTTY

The best reward is lots of praise from you! After a week of successes, you might shop together for some special underwear. A child should never be punished for having an 'accident'. Stay positive and plan for them. Accidents will happen!

ADVICE FROM OUR EDITOR, SABINA:

Keep going. Remember, no one goes to college in diapers. This too shall pass. Buy more wipes, stop feeling guilty and enjoy your little one. Take the pressure off. One day, you wake up, and they are off to kindergarten!

If you have concerns about your child's progress, call the Middlesex-London Health Unit at **519-663-5317** to speak with the telephone nurse or speak to your health care professional. 🧡

REFERENCES AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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Toilet learning.

www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/behavior-and-development/toilet_learning

Mayo Clinic. (2021).

Potty training: How to get the job done.

www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/infant-and-toddler-health/in-depth/potty-training/art-20045230



BACK TO... RESPIRATORY SEASON!

The fall brings with it crisp air, vibrant colours and a return to a regimented routine at work and school. It also brings with it several illnesses. We shift from poison ivy, sunburn and heat exhaustion to the TOP FIVE OF AUTUMN!

The first four of the top five are infectious - common colds, influenza, throat infections and norovirus. The fifth is seasonal allergies.

COVID was devastating but it taught us how to take infection control into our own (well-washed) hands. We learned to mask when ill, cough into our sleeves, wash our hands and keep distance. All of these principles apply to avoiding other respiratory illness as well. COVID also is likely to make a bit of a comeback in the fall. Applying these precautionary measures may lessen risk of infection.

In addition, updating vaccinations for COVID and influenza may also lessen our risk of infection. It is anticipated that a new

vaccine that encompasses new variants of COVID will become available in the fall. The influenza vaccine is typically available in October in anticipation of flu season, and it is administered in a variety of settings including primary care providers, public health and pharmacies.

Fall also brings gatherings in indoor spaces with others. An attempt to get outdoors may mitigate the risk of illness. Daycares are mandated to have children spend some time outdoors partly for this reason.

Finally, viruses need a host whose defense mechanisms are low. Caring for your health with good nutrition, hydration and exercise makes you a not so

welcoming host for the viruses that want to take up residence. Wishing you a fall that is healthy, and full of colour, bonfires and hayrides! 🍂



Dr. Bhooma Bhayana is a family physician in London and the mother of two young men and proud grandmother of three! She continues to find wonder and enjoyment in family practice despite more than 30 years on the job!



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Sabina Manji 

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PUMPKIN SPICE AND ALL THINGS NICE

Hello September! As the summer days slowly give way to the crispness of autumn, we find ourselves on the threshold of a new school year. It's a time of excitement and anticipation for many, including myself. September brings two things that fill my heart with joy: fall colours and the arrival of this amazing market season!

Although the official day of fall isn't until the end of the month - September 23rd - that unmistakable feeling for all things fall is already thriving in the air. Nature seems to join in the anticipation, as the florals slowly begin to transform, hinting at the beautiful colours that will soon paint the landscape.

There's something magical about fall - a season that captivates our senses and brings warmth. It's a time to embrace the vibrant hues of red, orange and yellow as the leaves put on their stunning show. You can always count on the abundant number of apples and pumpkins filling the shelves. What's better

than the delightful aroma of a freshly baked apple or pumpkin pie wafting through the kitchen? For those seeking the perfect ingredients, I can recommend Havaris Produce and Dorris Family Produce. Their selection of perfectly ripe apples is unparalleled, making for the most delectable fall treats. My personal favorites are the Fuji and Gala - I prefer the sweetness they bring to any dish!

Happy fall, London!
This is undeniably one of our most beautiful seasons, and I can't wait to soak in its splendor at the Market. So, let's gather

and embrace the wonders of autumn at the Market together! 🍂



Erika Tuljak, Marketing Assistant,
Covent Garden Market



2 AT 2

As we move along the typical path of speech development, the next big milestone to expect – after the big single word boom we see between 11 and 14 months – is short sentences. There are a few things that need to happen before we hear the first “mama, up!”

But I need to define something first. A “short sentence”, in this context, is a group of words strung together to create meaning. We’re looking for children to combine words into novel phrases to express thoughts, and not to necessarily mimic or echo groups of words that they normally hear spoken together. Here’s an example: “Good morning” is a sentence that has two words, but these two words are typically spoken together. They are one common unit. If a grumpy toddler says “bad morning”, on the other hand, it’s likely they combined the words “bad” and “morning” to express a state. In that case,

I don’t blame ya, kid... mornings can be rough! We expect children to use two-word combinations at two years old. And this is a minimal milestone; many toddlers can – and do – say three-word combinations at two. Before they’re able to make these combinations, it makes sense that they need quite a few single spoken words in their inventory first. That magic number is between 75 and 80 single words. When a child has these, it’s not long before they’ll combine “more” and “milk”

to say “more milk” or to combine the sign for “more” with the word “milk”. Remember, signs are words, too.

As always: the number, richness and complexity of the words and sentences children say depends on the number, richness, and complexity of the interactions they have with real people and real things. The environment in which they are immersed matters... a LOT. For more tips and tricks to maximize language development, your Friendly Neighbourhood Speech Pathologist is here to help! 🧠



*Mohamed (Mo) Oshalla, MHSc.
Speech-Language Pathologist
& Executive Director, Ontario
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LIFE IS MESSY

My life in a word has been messy. Amazing, adventurous and fulfilling, but nevertheless, messy.

I've been a single mom for pretty much ever. I'm divorced twice with two children from two different dads. I've lived at the poverty level and enjoyed financial freedom. I've had to learn hard lessons the hard way. Yet, I am also an apt teacher, a respected professional and an innovative entrepreneur. Trust me, you have what it takes within you to do awesome things!

Messy doesn't have to mean incapable, daft or unenlightened. The truth is we're all some degree of messy - that's what makes us relatable. It's how we help others, sharing what we've faced and how we fought through it. Your mess isn't who you are, but rather what you've overcome. Your mess can be your greatest masterpiece - your legacy of living, not surviving.

Be reachable and teachable. Learn how to be resilient, persevere when every ounce of you says give up, and discover what unrelenting determination feels like. Boldness, courage, vulnerability, and humility are required.

I prayed for clarity and was given courage to face my fears.

I prayed for hardship to pass quickly, and I learned patience to walk out my healing.

I prayed for restoration and endured heartache to teach me true forgiveness.

I prayed for strength and was given endurance to run the race.

I prayed for what I wanted. The answers were what I needed. &




Marcy Demelo is an Entrepreneur, Career Coach and Educator, teaching you how to reinvent yourself to live out your passion. Find her on Instagram at [waymaker_inc](https://www.instagram.com/waymaker_inc) and at www.waymakerinc.ca.

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Additional lyrics by RICHARD STILGOE Book by RICHARD STILGOE & ANDREW LLOYD WEBBER

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OKAY, SEE YOU!

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BMO



HOMEMADE FRUIT ROLL-UPS

It's back to school time, which means back to routines, earlier mornings and... drum roll please... packing lunches! This is my all-time favorite recipe for homemade fruit leather that is guaranteed to be a hit with the kids for back-to-school.

INGREDIENTS

- 3 cups ripe fruit, chopped up (e.g. peaches, strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, plums)
- 1 Tbsp honey or maple syrup (more or less depending on how sweet you want the leather to be)

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Preheat oven to 150 degrees F (or the lowest temperature your oven will go). Line a baking sheet with a silicone baking mat. If you don't have a silicone baking mat, you can use parchment paper.

- 2 Puree the fruit and sweetener in a blender or food processor until smooth. Pour the mixture onto the baking sheet and spread out so it's evenly distributed on the sheet.
- 3 Put baking sheet in the oven and bake for 6-8 hours until the fruit leather is set and the center is not tacky.
- 4 Remove from oven and let cool to room temperature. Gently peel off the fruit leather from the baking mat and cut into squares or strips using a pizza cutter, knife or scissors. You can also roll into fruit roll-ups. Store in an air-tight container. The fruit leather will keep up to a month in an air-tight container. 🍓



Jenn Giurgevich is the founder of Spark Nutrition & Health, a virtual nutrition consulting business. Visit www.sparknutritionandhealth.ca for more information.

CLASS IS BACK IN SESSION... AT A NEW SCHOOL!

As the fun days of summer end and we prepare for another school year, we parents may be faced with some unhappy little faces, especially if your child is starting at a new school. Understandably so, as they may be missing their besties, and the thought of starting at a new school in a new building with new faces is challenging.

As parents, we can help our kids get into a positive mindset in a few steps. Easy-peasy right?

RE-ESTABLISH ROUTINE

Kids thrive with routine and sometimes without it they can become quite dysregulated. Reintroducing their school routine in your new place makes a gentle transition.


ENCOURAGE INDEPENDENCE

Your child may be feeling a lack of control in their new surroundings. Consider supporting their independence by involving them in decision making while preparing for school. If back-to-school shopping is on your agenda then encourage their participation with picking colours of clothes or backpacks. When our kids feel a little sense of control, they are more likely to accept the transition back to school with more ease.

SQUASH THOSE FEARS

For some kiddos, starting at a new school can be fraught with fear and anxiety, thus making the transition from summer to school very difficult for the entire family. Consider:

- Visiting the school several times before the school year begins. If possible, walk the halls or meet their teacher. Point out all the positives like a cool library or fun playground.
- Making the visit to the new school fun, like having a picnic or playing on the playground. Kids readily open up about their fears while playing and it's a great way to connect with them and validate worries.
- Rehearsing the drop-off on a couple of weekends so they know what to expect and start to feel comfortable with their new routine.
- If they struggle with separation anxiety, letting someone in the school know - set up a meet and greet so that your child has a go-to-person.

At the end of the day, these tips may help the transition. Best of luck parents! 

Becky Morrison is a Nurse Practitioner based out of Calgary who has specialized in mental health for over a decade. She is finally, after years of infertility, a mother of two busy little boys, and doting fur mom of her gentle giant, Stella. She is, and always will be, a strong advocate for mental wellness at all ages.



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Each month we introduce you to a business that offers families in London and the surrounding area services or products you won't want to miss. &

A social enterprise is a business with a social purpose – with a mission. We proudly call our social enterprise the Micro Enterprise (ME) because it's all about empowering one incredible woman at a time. As she sets her sights on self-sustainability and unleashes her creative vision, she becomes part of our amazing team of artisans who craft unique jewelry and fashion accessories.

Since its inception in 2007, the Micro Enterprise program has been a force of empowerment. Micro Enterprise equips women with a comprehensive set of skills that lead back into the workforce, helping them pursue further education, or even kick-starting their own businesses. This covers everything from marketing and business planning to sales and inventory management. Each jewelry piece or textile isn't just a beautiful creation; it's a representation of countless hours of learning, mentorship and community building within our collective.

Micro Enterprise artisans are women who are ready to take the leap into the next phase of their journey. It's a step that demands unwavering commitment and discipline. Our close-knit network of supportive artisans warmly welcomes new members who have been carefully selected. We value teamwork immensely. To guide and nurture this venture, a dedicated Micro Enterprise Facilitator is there every step of the way, inspiring women to take charge of crucial business aspects. Our ultimate goal is to uplift their socioeconomic status and overall well-being. The atmosphere is one of respect and encouragement, often resulting in friendships blossoming beyond the program itself. New women welcomed into our Micro Enterprise family are introduced to the ME philosophy and guided by the group's collective wisdom. Our artists earn 80% of the sales proceeds from the items they create, while the remaining 20% stays within the collective to help us acquire tools and cover other necessary program expenses.

SHOP THE COACH HOUSE

Stop by the beautiful Coach House behind My Sisters' Place to shop with a social conscience, Tuesday - Thursday from 10 AM - 12 PM and 1 PM - 3 PM.

DONATE

You can donate seldom worn or broken jewelry by dropping off at My Sisters' Place from 10 AM - 8 PM Monday - Friday.



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REDUCING THE STRESS OF A NEW SCHOOL YEAR

The beginning of the school year can be exciting but also challenging. Kids may worry about fitting in, liking their teachers, not being in the same class as their friends, and their marks. As parents/guardians we have lots to consider – making lunches, helping with homework, extra-curricular activities, after school care and chaotic mornings.

The beginning of the school year is a perfect time to establish a new rhythm in your house. Routines help you and your children develop self-discipline and feel more confident. They create healthy expectations for everyone. Here are a few tips to help:

- Mornings are much easier when everyone has had enough sleep. Create an evening ritual that ensures everyone gets to bed at their scheduled time. This can be tricky, especially when you or your child have evening activities. It's OK if bedtime schedules need to be adjusted – it teaches children to be flexible.
- The night before, have your children help prepare lunches, choose their clothes and pack their bags. This alone will increase your mental well-being in a very positive way by helping you feel more relaxed.
- Allow enough time in the morning to get ready, eat and chat in an unhurried manner. This sets the tone for the rest of the day.

Let's face it – implementing new routines may be met with resistance and trigger a roller coaster of emotions. Helping your child deal with them can be challenging, especially when you are also feeling overwhelmed, frustrated and even exhausted.



Try these 3 steps to help your child with their emotions:

- 1 Listen to what is bothering them without trying to use logic to get them to feel better.
- 2 Help them name the emotion(s) they are experiencing.
- 3 Give them examples of what they can do to move through their emotions in a healthy way. Practice the strategies together.

With you as their guide, your child will be able to enjoy their new school year feeling prepared, excited and supported. Until next time... &

Sara Westbrook is a professional speaker and creator of UPower Inc, offering keynotes, presentations and workshops on 'Emotions Change Choices' to audiences ages 4 -100. She can be found at sarawestbrook.com or on Instagram @iamsarawestbrook.



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BIRD FEEDING FOR BEGINNERS

Feeding our backyard birds is not only beneficial for them and the environment, but it can bring us so much pleasure as well! Birds are fun, quirky and extremely entertaining. During COVID, there was a notable increase in those who started bird watching, as well as feeding. With being home, confined to our houses and backyards (and balconies), many of us took up a new hobby and found so much enjoyment in such a simple activity.

Choosing a bird feeder can feel overwhelming, as there are many factors to consider - *location, types of birds you want to attract, style of feeder, where you want to hang it, and more.* To keep it simple, we often recommend starting with a general seed feeder, and if you have any squirrels at all, a Brome Squirrel Buster is always the best choice! They are Canadian, come with a lifetime warranty, and are a safe and friendly way of keeping squirrels from eating all of your bird seed.

Picking the right seed for your birds doesn't have to be complicated. The most important things you want to consider are quality/freshness and types of birds you are attracting. Sometimes seed blends use filler, such as seed that birds don't actually eat, so looking for a blend that has no fillers and is non-GMO is important. Because we have such a variety of wild birds in London and Southern Ontario, a blend of seeds is a great option to appeal to them all. If you don't like the mess from empty shells or weeds popping up from dropped seed, look for an option that is already shelled and non-germinating, like our 'Garden Friendly' blend.

Lastly, water sources such as birdbaths and fountains are extremely beneficial to backyard birds. They not only provide birds with a source of water to drink, but give them somewhere to bathe.

There are many specifics that make for effective bird feeding, and it can feel daunting in the beginning. Speaking to

a knowledgeable staff member will help simplify things, as they can answer any questions and guide you in the right direction! 🐦



Ashley Satchell, owner, Featherfields

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LET'S ABANDON "STICKS & STONES"

I'm a Gen Xer who was bullied and heard the saying "sticks and stones may break your bones, but words will never hurt you" a lot growing up. However, 35 years later, I'm still healing from those hateful words.

Words, or the absence of them, possess immense power. They shape our perceptions of ourselves and influence others. Unlike bones that mend with time, the weight of words lingers in the shadows, slowly eroding your psyche. Hurtful remarks chip away at our self-esteem, leaving scars that snowball into health issues like:

- anxiety
- depression
- weight gain
- skin disorders
- digestive issues
- self-destructive behavior


This is where I found myself last year. After a lifetime of negative self-talk, I had broken the barrier, and connected it to my obesity

and self-limiting behaviours. While broken bones heal within months, emotional wounds inflicted by words may persist a lifetime if never addressed authentically. The power of words lies in their ability to penetrate deep into our core. Negative comments about our appearance, abilities or character can erode our self-confidence.

I fear for our children in this world of connectivity. Hurtful words can be amplified on social media, causing widespread damage to an individual's reputation and mental well-being. An error in judgement, essential in the growth process, can be broadcasted and scrutinized without facts or compassion. I certainly don't think I would be where I am today if I grew up with this added complexity. I was far from perfect.

I've spent the last year working on me - my body, my career, my mental health and my mindset. It has been a challenging journey with an army of therapists, self-reflection

and support from friends. Every time I peel back another layer of the onion, my life begins to change significantly and quickly.

Teaching our kids the potential harm that words can inflict will help foster a culture of empathy and kindness. By choosing our words carefully, we can contribute to a society that uplifts and supports one another. Realizing the weight our words carry will encourage us to use them to inspire, comfort and empower. 

Janet Smith is a proud single-mom of one daughter and a marketing professional who is grateful for her rural roots in the London area. She is a big believer in connecting with people through laughter and honesty.





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BACK to SCHOOL

We are praying for an amazing school year
 where children flourish, are safe, and make good friendships.
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I'M READY NOW, MOM

"Mom, I don't need you to lay with me before I go to sleep anymore," my son Spencer, 10, said to me the other evening as he popped himself out of his bedroom to advise. I spit out the charcoal-based toothpaste from my mouth into the sink, looked up and asked him to repeat what he had just said; I didn't think I had heard him quite right.

"It's just time for me to grow up. I'm going into grade five now, and I don't need you to sleep with me anymore. I remember I had a nightmare at Dad's when I was five, and since then I've been afraid to go to sleep at night by myself. But I'm ready now, Mom. And...I

love you." Just as quickly as he appeared, he vanished back into his room, to do whatever a 10 year old boy would need to do next.

I stood there, neon green toothbrush in hand, with feelings of bewilderment, amusement, joy and pride, as I let this new information integrate into my nervous system. My sweet Spencer passed another milestone, and it meant that I had to shift and accept this next new form of personal expression, as he shared his insights and inherent needs.

It's inevitable that our babies will grow up. And, it's important to honour the times in which they proclaim they know what they need as they express themselves with clarity.

Accepting those wishes when we have spent so many years deciding for them what was best as children is what will continue to present itself as a parenting life lesson. To trust they know, to trust they can navigate their own life, to trust that they will be okay.

Sometimes, as we honour our children's decisions, our own insecurities of whether we have done enough to prepare them for independent sleep, driving a car or choosing a life partner will bubble up within. So during those humbling moments that we all experience, may we place our hands on our hearts and remember that we can also trust ourselves. 🧡



Lyndsay Campbell is a Mom of two boys, and the Branch Sales Manager at IS2 Workforce Solutions.

WHY ARE ACCESSIBLE PLAYGROUNDS IMPORTANT?

When it comes to children and outdoor activities, the playground or park is a location that first comes to mind. When you have able-bodied or typically developing children, accessibility does not normally cross your mind when it comes to these outings, nor does it really affect choosing the park you attend. For some families, an accessible playground is a must when it comes to these adventures and finding an inclusive accessible playground can be challenging.

“An accessible playground has unobstructed routes to the play space and connecting play equipment, ground-level play components, ramps with handrails for much of the elevated play equipment, and safety surfacing for wheelchair traction.” The play surface is usually constructed from material such as soft rubber or turf which is level, allowing for easy

movement and wheelchairs. The walkways and ramps must be wide enough to allow for walkers and wheelchair use. Some other accessible equipment you may find at these playgrounds includes but is not limited to:

- Accessible swings
- Interactive games
- Elevated sandboxes
- Inclusive overhead climbers

When a playground is not accessible, this limits the amount some children can participate in with their friends. This not only affects the child with the physical or social impairment, but it also affects the social development of all children, as they cannot participate with their peers and sometimes do not understand why.

The two closest playgrounds that are deemed accessible in and around London are:

- **Hully Gully Park** at Southwest Optimist park, located on Southdale Road just west of Bostwick
- **Alexandra Park**, located at 154 Caradoc Street North, Strathroy, Ontario

Currently, Lambeth is fundraising to reconstruct the Lambeth Public School playground to be more accessible and inclusive for the children in their community.



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THE CATS WHO CHOOSE US

"*He chose me, you know,*" the woman said as her cat swirled at my ankles, asking to be petted. It was the second time I'd heard that sentence during our visit. I wasn't sure if she was reiterating it for emphasis or if her failing memory was to blame. Regardless, for her, it was worth repeating. The cat leaned in as my fingers traced his silver stripes from his shoulders to the tip of his tail. "That seems to be the way it goes", I replied.

Indeed, the universe has a beautiful way of conjuring cats seemingly out of the void and pairing them, unasked, on Earth with the people who need them the most. It gives further weight to the concept that "People don't choose cats... Cats choose people." Online, this is lovingly called the Cat Distribution System.

The Cat Distribution System works through shelters, parking lots and dumpsters. Like a wise matchmaker, it knows what you need better than you know yourself. It scans its inventory,

makes a selection, and often through bizarre circumstances, brings you the cat you never knew you needed.

Of course, I do not mean to glamorize the life of stray cats that freely roam without homes. Many of these cats suffer, decimate local ecosystems, contribute to overpopulation, and even perish before they find a family. But I also believe that no cat comes into our lives without reason.

You'll know this personally if you've already been chosen by the Cat Distribution System. Maybe a cat has brought humour to your household throughout a difficult transition, absorbed the tears of a broken heart, or has been your anchor when you were drowning in the depths of grief.

A few years ago, the Cat Distribution System scanned its shelves, selected a silver-coated tabby, and distributed him onto the porch of an unwilling woman. Reluctantly, she took him in. Little did she know, in the years to come, he would go on to be her joy and stability as her health and memory declined. And then, we'd have the privilege of being trusted with his care today.

Only by opening our hearts, and sometimes our homes, can we receive the gifts that only a cat can give. If you can't relate, then keep patiently waiting... You just haven't been chosen yet. 🐾



Dr. I. Wonder is here to answer your questions regarding your furry family members. If you have a question, email it to us at danielle@NeighbourhoodPetClinic.com. Our team at Neighbourhood Pet Clinic will tap into their collective



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