

A woman is relaxing in a bathtub filled with white foam. She has a white towel wrapped around her head and is wearing cucumber slices over her eyes. She is smiling and looking upwards. In the background, there are several lit candles on a shelf, including two large green ones and two white ones, along with some smaller tealight candles in glass holders.

# project you

Pursue your passion  
one dream at a time.

A Role  
Mommy  
Magazine  
FALL 2010

Back AT  
School Issue

TEA WITH  
"NANNY MCPHEE"

When YOUR Kid  
is the Bully

Energy Zappers  
-and Solutions



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Pursue your passion  
one dream at a time.

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*Passion: To inspire others to stop talking about what they want to do and show them how to just do it!*

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**RoleMommy.com**

Role Mommy is an online community and events company dedicated to inspiring today's busy parents to pursue their passion while raising a family. Role Mommy hosts online writing and career workshops as well as events that bring entrepreneurs, authors, parenting experts and bloggers together to share how they've reinvented their lives while raising a family.

For more information, visit [www.ProjectYouMagazine.com](http://www.ProjectYouMagazine.com) and [www.RoleMommy.com](http://www.RoleMommy.com).

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**editor's LETTER**

# Welcome to Our Back AT School Issue

Ever since my events company Role Mommy launched, I've made it my mission to propose ways for parents to pursue their passions while raising a family. In the five years RoleMommy has existed, we've hosted a range of online workshops, blogging symposiums, and a humor anthology (*See Mom Run*).

And now this: a magazine that zigs when everyone zags. Which means, once all those "Back to School" publications hit the stands telling you what to buy your kids (backpacks again?) or how to deal with first day of school jitters (been there/done that!), we'll be providing you with "Back AT School" advice on guiding your kids while also staying true to yourself.

This magazine is about YOU and the joys and challenges you face while also being nurse, confidante, chauffeur, teacher, and mentor to your kids. The bottom line: You're still "you" with hopes, dreams, and passions. We know that because we're right there beside you. Take me, for example: My dream in life has always been to sing and to write. Through *Project You*, I hope to continue to fuel my own passion while helping others to focus on their dreams and turn them into reality. Starting RoleMommy was the first step towards putting my career on a new path.

Which is why I feel so passionate about this project. Through our articles and the interactivity of the web, we hope you'll cry with us, laugh with us, question us, debate us, and use us as a resource to get the information you need to live your best life. Here's one of my secrets: I surround myself with like-minded souls. Their inspiring stories always seem to rub off on me and get me thinking. Which is why I felt so blessed when I was invited to a breakfast event with Academy award-winning actress Emma Thompson. Over tea and some fattening (but delicious) scones during a promotion for *Nanny McPhee Returns*, she told a room of writers that even when you've found a fulfilling career, you have to make sacrifices for your children.

"You think... I'd love to do that job and I would get so much pleasure out of it... and then you look at the timing and realize it's just when your kid is starting school and so you say to yourself, I can't do that. Because the one thing you're not going to be thinking on your death bed is 'Gee, I wish I made more films.' Or 'I wish I had spent more time at the office or I wish I had written more articles.' You're going to be remembering hopefully, all the lovely times you spent with your kids."

And there you have it. Thanks, Emma, for putting so eloquently the mission of this magazine: To inspire you to do what you love while also inspiring your children to follow your lead. I hope you enjoy our inaugural issue. But most of all, I hope you'll write to us with suggestions, comments, critiques, and inspiration. We are what you make us. After all, our project is YOU.



**Beth Feldman**  
Editor in Chief

# between US

## What Teachers Wish Parents Knew

By Jeanne Muchnick

Now that school has started and you're deep in your routine (ha ha,) step back for a moment and think about how you can better enhance the student-teacher (and teacher-mom) relationship. Here, some tips from Vicki Panaccione, Ph.D., a child-clinical psychologist and founder of the Better Parenting Institute ([www.BetterParentingInstitute.com](http://www.BetterParentingInstitute.com)).

- 1 Remember you're a team.** Teachers want parents to know that they have their children's best interest in mind. Even when parents don't like what a teacher has to say, they need to understand that the teacher's intention is in the right place—caring about the child.
- 2 Agree to Disagree.** Be willing to forgive if your child's teacher makes a mistake or fails to devote full attention to your specific issues. Move on to the new challenge you face together, but consider how you can best approach the next situation with her.
- 3 Let your child form a relationship with his/her teacher without your constant intervention.** Although it's tempting to emphasize your child's skills and strengths, let him/her demonstrate his talents to the teacher himself.
- 4 Make your child's education a priority.** There are far too many activities that are getting in the way of homework and study time. To that end, be as diligent at attending academic events as you are sports events.
- 5 Speak respectfully of school, teachers and administrators.** Disagreeing with something is not synonymous with talking negatively and disrespectfully about the institution or your child's educators.
- 6 Hold your children accountable.** Teachers want to partner with parents to raise responsible children. That means allowing them to experience the consequences of their actions, i.e. if your child forgets his lunch, then he gets a peanut butter



sandwich from the lunch room; if he leaves his homework at home, he gets a zero; if he does not study for a test, he fails. Kids will learn from their mistakes, only if parents are willing to allow them to do so.

- 7 Keep your word.** Teachers are partial to parents who follow through on their promises, who keep private conversations confidential, and who do not participate in gossip with other parents. If you approach your child's teacher in a focused, honest, and tactful way, the teacher will be more willing to help you. ■





## Tea Time with Nanny McPhee...

There is something magical that happens when you get the opportunity to spend a morning with an Academy award-winning actress and screenwriter. The experience leaves you energized and inspired to tackle anything that life throws out you—and as a mom—life can certainly throw many curveballs your way. Recently, I got the chance to meet Emma Thompson, when the *Nanny McPhee* star sat down for tea and conversation with parenting bloggers. To say I was thrilled is the understatement of the year.

In *Nanny McPhee Returns*, Oscar®-winning actress and screenwriter Emma Thompson returns to the role of the magical nanny who appears when she's needed the most and wanted the least in the next chapter of the hilarious and heartwarming fable that has enchanted children around the world.

In the latest installment, Nanny McPhee appears at the door of a harried young mother, Mrs. Isabel Green (Maggie Gyllenhaal), who is trying to run the family farm while her husband is away at war. But once she's arrived, Nanny McPhee discovers that Mrs. Green's children are fighting a war of their own against two spoiled city cousins who have just moved in and refuse to leave.

Relying on everything from a flying motorcycle and a statue that comes to life to a tree-climbing piglet and a baby elephant who turns up in the oddest places, Nanny McPhee uses her magic to teach her mischievous charges five new lessons.

Our group had the privilege of chatting with Emma about the film, the sacrifices women make in order to juggle work and motherhood and what she hopes audiences of all ages will take away from *Nanny McPhee*. Take a look...

### What about the film resonates with you?

I think everything because I wrote it... You know the screenplay is ready because the frequency is right. When you get the frequency right that's when you get the comments from mothers from all over America who say, "I knew that my children were enjoying it at the time because they forgot to eat their popcorn." I love that.

There's a point (in the film) when Celia goes up to the Rolls Royce expecting her mum and she opens the door and her mum's not there and there's that exquisitely touching exchange where she says, "I expect she's very busy" and the chauffeur says, "Yes she's very busy and they're both hiding the fact that she doesn't care and she's not there because she doesn't care."



**Lucky me got to meet Emma Thompson along with other writers. It was great hearing she considers herself a mom first, an actress second.**

**What do you feel is the more demanding profession, writing or acting?**

Well, writing is a gift—I can write and be entirely available. I can get my daughter to school, be there weekends, pick her up from school, muck about, cook dinner, chat, put her to bed. I can be a writer and a mother, I can do both of those things and I love it, that's great. Acting is different.

**Because the one thing you're not going to be thinking on your death bed is 'Gee, I wish I made more films. Or I wish I had spent more time at the office or I wish I had written more articles.'**

PHOTOGRAPHS ©NBC/UNIVERSAL

Because not only are the hours different because you sometimes leave before your kids get up and get home after they've gone to bed and you don't see them for days on end. Also, and this is slightly more complicated, you're actually pretending to be someone else which is psychologically very demanding and I realized that my attitude and my relationship with acting changed completely when I became a mother because a new identity was born that I couldn't slip out of.

**What would you like young moviegoers to learn the most from the film?**

I want them all leaving the cinema feeling different. I want them to feel inspired. And I want them to feel they can sort their own problems just with a little nudge here and there... because child problems are often much better solved with child solutions and our solutions might be very wise and good but they may not work a lot of the time and I think that children need to know their own capacities. And I think they often feel their limitations too strongly. ■

**Emma on...**

**WORK AND MOTHERHOOD**

At moments, you have to make sacrifices for your children and in my case, it would be the sacrifice of work. You think, 'Oh I'd love to do that job and I would get so much pleasure out of it, I'd be able to do it so well' and then you look at the timing of the job and you realize it's just when your kid is starting school and you think, I can't do that. Because the one thing you're not going to be thinking on your death bed is "Gee, I wish I made more films. Or I wish I had spent more time at the office or I wish I had written more articles." You're going to be remembering hopefully, all the lovely times that you said "I'm not going to do that, I'm going to trot off to Spain and learn Spanish with my daughter." The things that you do with your kids are the things that you remember.

**OVERPROTECTIVE PARENTING**

I think because we're so frightened (about what could happen to them), we're always trying to protect our children. If you're not allowed risk as a child, you will not develop independence, you will not make the mistakes that will save your life later on, that's the thing. Risk is like a vaccination. Accidents are like a vaccinations... And you may say "I remember when I fell off that chair" and it may have been a tiny little accident but you remember and it's a muscle memory and that's what saves your life.





# Comeback Mom Survival Guide

If you've been a stay-at-home mom for a few years, going back to work after time away can be a bit daunting. Fortunately, being a mom makes you the master of all things daunting—you once changed a diaper blow-out in the back seat of your car while taking down directions to the super-secret sample sale, and you weren't even late for mommy & me. With a little confidence and some tech-savvy, you can find a job that works for your new lifestyle. Here are some tips for you, Comeback Mom!

● **Get support.** Before you dust off your old resume and start plastering it on every street corner, get yourself an on-ramp “Board of Directors” that can provide insight, strategy and compassion as you start your journey back to the workplace. Find moms that have blazed the way successfully, and schedule phone calls and lunch dates to learn all they know. How much can you expect to make if you ask for flex-time? What skills would you need to brush up on? So many moms are blogging about their comeback experiences, and are part of great communities like [Your On-Ramp](#) and [My Work Butterfly](#), so soak up all their brilliance and get the support you need to get started.

● **Google yourself.** Have you ever Googled yourself? (Go ahead, I'll wait.) A potential employer is very likely to check you out on Google to learn more about you. Don't exist on Google? You're putting a muzzle on a megaphone that can speak volumes about you to a potential employer. Start by creating a Google Profile—the easiest way to control how Google represents you to the world. Now boost your search results by writing guest posts or submitting expert articles to search engines like [SearchWarp.com](#) and [EzineArticles.com](#). Leave smart, relevant comments on business-related blogs, share your expertise in forums, or create a YouTube channel with great



industry-related how-to videos. Suddenly you've gone from Google nobody to Googleverse expert.

● **Build a 2.0 resume.** You're not flat, so don't let your resume be. You want a resume that paints a colorful picture and makes it easy for your future employer to find out how awesome you are. Bring your resume into the digital age. Create a simple “About Me” website or use a service like [VisualCV.com](#), then link it to all the elements of your personal brand. Add things like portfolio slides, Powerpoint

presentations, PDFs, audio, video, and you're prettiest “don'tcha-just-want-to-hire-me” picture—you'll leave all your competitors with paper resumes in the dust.

● **Get Social.** Yes, there are many blow-hards on Twitter who want you to know what they—or their cat—had for breakfast. Smart Comeback Moms get past the mindless chatter and use Twitter as a powerful job-hunting tool. Use it to follow industry leaders, management at your dream company, and other moms who dispense great information about heading back to work. Then Retweet all the musings of the big-wigs you're following (a great way to get on their radar) and great industry-related articles you've read—even if you didn't write it, you look smart just for staying informed. Bonus points for tweeting about blog posts you've left a comment on—now potential employers can see what you're reading and your point of view.

● **Be kind to yourself.** You're about to radically alter your lifestyle and experience a rollercoaster of emotions. If you thought motherhood was full of ambivalence, wait until you try working motherhood! Try not to get overwhelmed, and don't be too hard on yourself. The skills and experience you built before kids is ready to spring back into action, and it's only a matter of time before the right employer jumps at the chance to hire you. ■

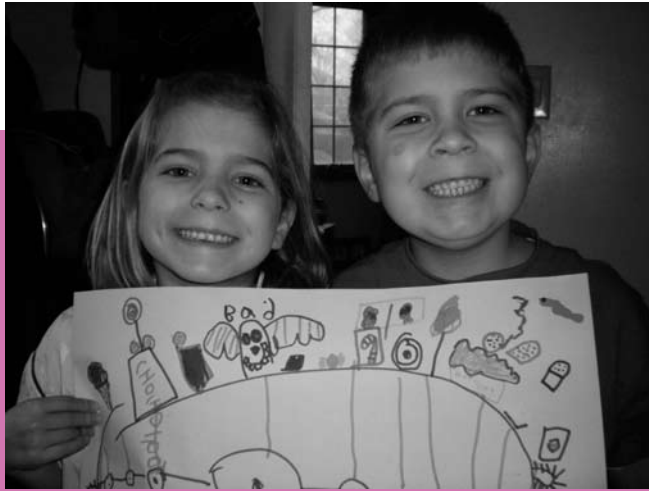
## Carley Knobloch

### [GetSyncOrSwim.com](#)

Carley Knobloch works with busy households, solopreneurs and corporate employees to introduce them to technology that will help them live and work smarter. As a tech outfitter, she has helped hundreds of moms and professionals simplify and organize their systems. Her weekly newsletter Sync or Swim dispenses digital lifesavers and demystifies technology that helps her readers simplify and organize their lives. Subscribe at [www.GetSyncOrSwim.com](#).







**KIDDICTIONARY WORD:**  
**GARBOFLAGE** (GARR-boh-flahj) v.: To hide a piece of your child's artwork under other trash in the wastebasket so they don't catch you throwing it away.

## Musings on Kindergarten

I remember my first day of kindergarten. Got on the bus and sat next to Charles, a boy who'd become my friend. He was jovial, smiley and, much like me, excited to be on the bus to big-boy school. He reminded me of a pre-school friend. I said to him, "You remind me of my friend Gregory." He replied, in jest, "You remind me of my friend 'Punch-In-the-Nose.'" As he said it, he threw his fist toward my face pulling back before he hit me. Or that was his intention. In reality he cocked me square in the snoot. I bled.

So rather than report to kindergarten, I had to go straight to the school nurse, the incredibly compassionate, Mrs. Shefner. "Your nose is bleeding!" she barked, "Were you PICKING IT!?!?" Now, to a 5-year-old, that's something of a rhetorical question. But the fact of the matter was that it wasn't my finger that caused this bleeding but Charles' fist. "...Or did someone hit you?!?!" This got my 5-year-old, pre-school educated brain thinking - Did I want to get this kid, thus far my only friend in school, in trouble? "No,



Ma'am. Picking it," I replied, my head hanging in shame.

So she got me a wad of tissues and sat me down with my head back until it clotted. Then she sent me to class. My teacher, Mrs. Glen, introduced me to the class upon my late arrival.

"This is Eric, he had to start out his day at the nurse because he had a nose bleed... He was picking it." Charles, you still owe me. ■

### Eric Ruhalter

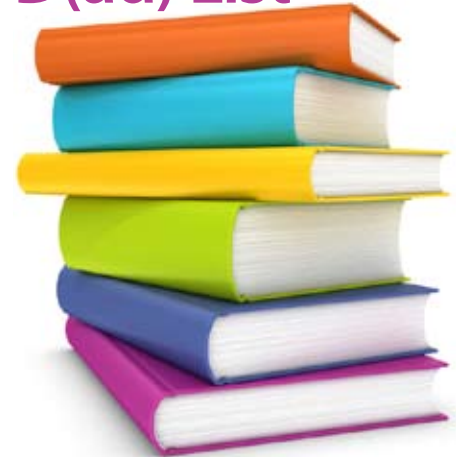
#### TheKidDictionary.com

Eric Ruhalter studied economics at Dickinson College, in Carlisle PA, where he learned, first and foremost, that he's not the least bit interested in the theories and principles of economics. So rather than study, he began spending most of his time writing. Don't tell his father.

He works in television in New York City, and resides in New Jersey with his wife, Kara, three children, and their two cats who will not stay off the dining room table no matter what Eric says or does to them. (Eric often speaks in the third person with hopes that it will make him seem more important.)



## THE LATEST HILARIOUS D(ad) List



In honor of the late Dr. Seuss's Birthday, Role Daddy Eric Ruhalter pays tribute to some of his lesser known works, with the (D)ad List of Banned Dr. Seuss Books:

- \* Green Eggs, Ham and Funny Cigarettes
- \* The Cat in the Hat Comes Back to Silence Any Witnesses
- \* 2 Things , 1 Cup
- \* How the Grinch Acquired Arms-Grade Uranium
- \* Yertle the Transgender Turtle
- \* And to Think That I Turned Tricks on Mulberry Street
- \* Horton Sniffs Some Glue
- \* McElligot's Pool of Undocumented Immigrant Workers
- \* The Star Belly Sneetches Riot in Prison And Other Stories
- \* Thidwick the Big Hearted Moose's Ponzi Scheme
- \* Oh, the Places You'll go Running Numbers!
- \* The Lorax Can't Live Within 500 Feet of a School
- \* Marvin K. Mooney Will You Please Text a Naked Picture of Yourself?!

# Customization is the Name of the Game

Back at school means back to shopping. This year, it's all about customization. Here, some ideas on personalizing—and individualizing—your child's closet.



## 1 Get Your Kid a Pair of Custom Kicks...

My kids had a ball designing their own Converse sneakers and it's so much fun that I might even hop on the website and order a pair for myself. My daughter went for turquoise high top sneakers with a leopard stripe and her nickname on the back. My son opted for low tops in blue camouflage and my niece picked out a pretty pair of pink sneakers. Once you design your own Converse, it takes about three to four weeks for your shoes to be delivered - let's hope their feet don't grow!

1



## 2 Kids Shirts by Switchitz

Here's a brand new creation that's sure to be a hit with pre-schoolers to pre-tweens. With Switchitz, your child picks a shirt with a scene that they love—from princess, to outer space, to jungle safari, and then they make the t-shirt their own by adding fun patches that you can easily take on and off with velcro. Who needs silly bandz? Available in stores nationwide this October.



## 3 Get Your Tween to Design their Own Note Cards with Design her Gals

One of my favorite things to do this summer was to design a package of note cards that look exactly like my daughter. At Design her Gals, your tween can visit the site, customize their gal, dress her up and put her on everything from note cards, to e-messages to note pads and much more. Plus, a portion of all proceeds are donated to the Gal to Gal Foundation, assisting patients and families battling stage IV breast cancer.







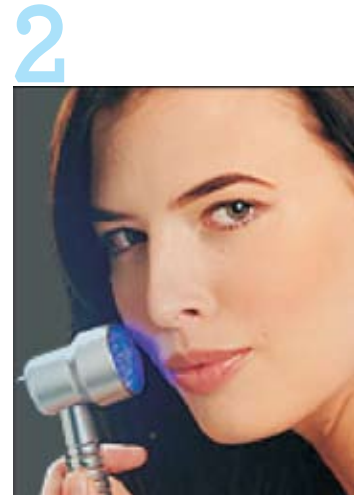
# Mom stuff we love

You've bought the backpacks, the notebooks, and the pencils for your kids: now it's time for a little shopping for YOU.

**1 Invisibelt** Ladies, this is the must-have accessory! No more unflattering bulge from bulky belt buckles! This flat undetectable and adjustable belt instantly gives you a sleeker, slimmer look! Ingenius! Kudos to a fashion editor for inventing it.



**2 Baby Quasar** The hottest anti-aging skin care treatment for the home. By using LED light photo rejuvenation, you will see softer, smoother skin and increase collagen production.



**3 Momagenda** Love to get organized this year? MomAgenda is a calendar that offers categories for party planning, gift giving, kids schedules, and your own schedules all in a beautifully presented bounded book.



**4 The Glo Bag** Get Organized & Get in Shape with The Glo Bag! Never worry about leaving things in your gym locker, this well designed backpack makes it so easy to keep your things in one place!



**5 The Nuddle** Look no further for the most luxurious blanket to "nuddle" with. Three different sizes to fit your family's needs- adult, kids and baby. This Nuddle has foot and hand pockets, arm holes to give you access for reading etc.



## Dhana Cohen



### TheNextBigZing.com

Dhana Cohen is founder of [www.TheNextBigZing.com](http://www.TheNextBigZing.com) an innovative new way to shop online. Through video reviews, consumers can watch, shop and buy their favorite trendy products. Dhana is a mom of two boys—Austin, 14 and Spencer, 9. Dhana is originally from Indianapolis and now lives in the suburbs of Chicago. She loves cooking, painting, and being with her husband, Freddy, and the kids at their lake house.

# What's for Dinner Tonight?

Asking that question is like fingernails against a chalkboard. Who has time to figure it out? Answer: The Dinner Mom.

It's no secret moms are stretched. Thinking about what's for dinner, let alone a starch, a vegetable, a fruit, a fiber, and an entrée is hard enough when you need a GPS navigational device to track every person's whereabouts thanks to soccer practice, piano lessons, tae kwon do or art class.

The pressure-cooker that is parenthood means the family dinner has virtually disappeared. Today, less than half of American families eat dinner together—despite the fact that 98% of moms say it's important. And when they do, most meals last less than 30 minutes and are often lacking in proper nutrition.

Study after study proves time spent gathered at the kitchen table is a significant way to strengthen family bonds. Counted among the benefits are higher quality of food, better nutrition and portion control, as well as emotional nurturing, sense of belonging, better grades, less delinquency, and family unity, not to mention cost savings. With the recession in full swing, there's a shift towards saving money and staying home, making the dinner hour more important than ever. All of which sounds great in theory, but how does one make it work—and stick?

## SOME TIPS:

- **Plan to plan.** Set aside two to three hours a week to cook, shop and plan. Mark it on your calendar with just as much importance as other things in your life.
- **Keep your expectations realistic.** Take this dinner thing in baby steps. If it's the main course you get stuck on, then buy a rotisserie chicken and cook the side dishes. If it's prepping the vegetables that bogs you down, buy frozen or pre-cut.
- **Keep your pantry well-stocked.** Staples such as pasta, pasta sauce, canned beans, rice, soups, etc. can make throwing together something easy possible.

**You don't have to be a cook to get a decent meal on the table.**



- **Love your freezer.** Stockpile food in your freezer, either by buying frozen foods that your family likes or take a Sunday to cook a bunch of things, and then freeze for later.
- **Plan for leftovers.** Making lasagna? Make two so one goes in freezer. Chicken cutlets? Prepare some with BBQ sauce, use others for stir-fry, salads or soups.
- **Think pre-packaged.** By purchasing pre-ready meals or cut up veggies, you're saving yourself extra time.
- **Delegate.** Involve your children with chores from a young age. Kids can learn how to set the dinner table, put groceries away, make their beds (depending on ages).
- **Use technology to your advantage.** Shop online. Keep your grocery list for favorite items online.
- **Make friends with your crockpot.** Toss food in in the morning and by 5 p.m. you have a hot-home-cooked meal. Throw in chicken with veggies and some marinade (even salad dressing!) or mushroom soup—even non cooks can do!
- **Eat the right "mood foods."** The right foods can help you relax/make you feel better physically and emotionally. Boil a few eggs and refrigerate them so you have a quick protein on hand.
- **Don't stress over dinner.** Breakfast for dinner is always a great alternative. A baked potato also works—top with cheese, broccoli, chili and it's a meal. Same with soup. Soup and a sandwich are another easy solution... simply make it "fun" by setting up a sandwich buffet.
- **Accept "the best you can do."** It's a mantra I'm always saying to my kids, my hubby, myself. Good enough is OK. ■

Jeanne Muchnick

[TheDinnerMom.com](http://TheDinnerMom.com)

Jeanne Muchnick has published hundreds of parenting and lifestyle articles for various publications and websites including *The New York Times*, *The Boston Globe*, *Woman's Day*, *Parents*, and *Westchester Magazine*. Tonight, she's having her "famous" mustard chicken for dinner (go to her website for the recipe.)





# I'm a Kid Hater

We're all supposed to like children unequivocally and think they're cute. But honestly? Some of them can drive you to drink. Here, one mom's saga of how she copes with annoying kids (Admit it: you can relate.)

When my kids were two or so, we took a class at the Children's Museum of Manhattan. There was one little girl in the class, a beautiful blond, about the same age as my twins. She had a lovely smile, a cute little laugh, and I couldn't stand her.

Something about her rubbed me the wrong way. Even at two, it seemed to me (and I know this sounds insane) that she was full of herself, like she was some miniature adult who knew how cute she was, and was flaunting it. I'm not proud of feeling this way. But there you have it.

See, we're supposed to like all kids. Think they're special, or cute, or funny. Like babies. Who hasn't heard the dictum: all babies are cute? Well all babies are not cute. Some babies look like a cherry tomato after it's been in the fridge too long: wrinkled, red, and ready to burst with something that probably won't look or smell too good.

Kids are the same way. I'm here to tell the truth: there are kids—little kids—that I don't like. They're bratty, or pushy, or too whiny. They're bossy, they don't share. They just rub me the wrong way. Kids are people too. And I don't like all



people, so I don't like all kids. Do I think this makes me an exemplary parent? Of course not. Can I help it? Not a chance.

Take the little girl who I let have a sleeper on a school night, while her own parents were on vacation. In the morning, I offered her some breakfast.

"I have bagels, and cereal, and waffles and pancakes. Or toast. Or English muffins. What would you like?"

"French Toast."

"I don't really have time to make French Toast, honey. We've got to get to school. Maybe if you stay here some weekend?"

"French Toast."

"How about pancakes or waffles. That's kind of like French Toast, and they come right out of the freezer."

"My mother always makes French Toast. You're just lazy."

Oh yeah? I thought. Then how about calling Mom back from her vacation so you can leave my house and go back to hers? Do I feel guilty about thinking this? Sure I do. A reasonable, non-horrible person would think "clearly, the girl is obnoxious because she is upset about

her mother leaving her to go on vacation." Me? I thought—if she doesn't eat a damn bagel I'm gonna tell her where she can put that French Toast. Not a nice thought. Not nice at all.

Of course I know she was upset. But here's the thing: that didn't make her any less of a brat. It just explained her brattiness. Justified or not, the girl was mean. Luckily, this is not a child I spend too much time with.

I have a good friend, though, whose kid I do have to see all the time. Were she my daughter, I'd probably think she had a charming, big personality. She's not my daughter, though. So I find her pushy and overbearing. The other night, my family was having dinner with hers. In the middle of our conversation—which included parents and children—she practically screamed out "May I say something?" Now, on the face of it, that seems polite. She said "may I" after all. Except that this kid screamed it out as an order, while someone else was in mid-sentence. And she did it at least three times. I'm sure her mother is pleased as punch that

**I've reconciled myself that not all kids are created equally likable. But I am having a harder time reconciling being annoyed at my own kids.**

she's saying "may I." As for me, I'm just thinking about the punch.

There's the girl in my daughter's class who is constantly telling me and any other mom who will listen all the terrible things our kids have done to her. "R." was mean to me two weeks from last Thursday." She'll whine. Or "You should yell at 'A.'" He once said that I'm a tattle tale." If the "tale" fits, honey, wag it as you walk away.

There's a daughter of a friend who, though she's known me since she was two, still won't say hello to me; the kid in the playground who's always throwing rocks at the pigeons; the seven-year-old at my daughter's day camp last summer who wore belly shirts and platform shoes, and always had a big wad of gum in her mouth; and the boy with table manners so atrocious that I can't have him to dinner anymore. Last time he was here, he picked his nose with his fork and ate it. I kid you not.

So I've reconciled myself to the fact that not all kids are created equally likable. But I am having a harder time reconciling being annoyed at my own kids. Aren't I supposed to love everything about them?

Mama, mama, did you see my drawing, mama? Do you like it, mama? Mama, mama, I made my own bed, come see, mama. Mama, mama, I ate all of my lunch. Isn't that good mama? Mama mama mama mama...

It's enough to make me want to change my name to... Dada.

I know I should be compassionate. My kids are going through a transitional time—the neverland between being little kids and big ones. They are working out how to balance their desire to grow up with their desire to crawl back into my uterus and never come out. Outwardly, I am compassionate. I smile and nod my approval. I spend lots of time doing things alone with them. Doing things I don't even particularly enjoy, like playing Barbies, and fishing, and learning

### Don't you just love when your child's playdate refuses to eat what you have to offer?



about Pokemon—which, incidentally, is impossible for anyone over the age of eleven. Outwardly, I am understanding and smiling, and spending an incredible amount of time reassuring them.

Inwardly, however, I am screaming "shut up shut up shut up!!!"

Great. Not only am I annoyed, but I'm guilty for feeling annoyed. I am a terrible, horrible person, doomed to an afterlife spent living amongst children fluent in whinese.

As much as they bug me, I love my kids unconditionally, unequivocally, completely. But sometimes, I ask them if I look like a banana, because they're driving me bananas. And maybe that's the answer: have a sense of humor about it. Just like incessant nighttime crying in infancy (her), and potty training issues in toddlerhood (I won't divulge who), this too, shall pass.

Maybe all of the horrendously guilt-inducing feelings I have about my own kids are just a way of protecting myself from that moment it does stop. Because when it does, what comes next is an adolescent's complete lack of interest in me at all. Maybe I'm steeling myself for when the kids are gone from the house, leaving my husband

and I to wonder how it all went so fast. How we neglected to notice how much we loved it all as time whizzed by.

You know how I'll feel then? I'll miss the Mama Mama, wish I were tripping over them, and wonder how I let it all bug me so much.

But that's just my kids. Other people's annoying kids? Well, they're just annoying. I'm not going to beat myself up over it. Remember that little blond two-year old I mentioned? The one that got on my nerves? Several weeks into class her father showed up. Long hair, sandals, a toe ring, a leather choker with a silver peace charm hanging from it. A pushing-forty trying to look pushing thirty. Then he looked up. "Hi Nancy" he said. It was an old boyfriend. He had been condescending, manipulative, and an overall jerk. It had been years since we broke up, and I still couldn't stand the sight of him. So maybe that was it! Could I have sensed all along that that kid was his and that's why I didn't like her? I'm gonna say yes. Guilt zero, intuition one. I'm done with feeling guilty about not liking certain kids. From now on, I'm just gonna trust my instincts. ■

## Nancy Friedman

### From Hip to Housewife

Nancy Friedman is a married mother of 10-year-old boy/girl twins living in NYC. Before she started blogging, she spent nearly 20 years as a freelancer working for just about every cable station in New York. Her humor essays on motherhood have been syndicated in the online versions of *The Miami Herald*, *The Sacramento Bee*, *The Charlotte Observer*, and *The Fresno Bee*, among others. In print, her work has appeared in the multiple award-winning *Brain*, *Child* magazine, and in the anthologies *The Knitters Gift*, *The Bigger the Better the Tighter the Sweater*, and *See Mom Run*.



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# Got Food Questions? This Mom has Answers

## Kombucha's Alcohol Trouble

**Q** I heard kombucha has been pulled from all stores due to irregularity (inability to efficiently regulate) the alcohol levels over time. Is this true?



**A** Yes, kombucha has been pulled from market shelves because of its alcohol content.

Kombucha is a fermented beverage that combines bacteria and yeast with green or black tea that contains sugar. The popular unpasteurized version of the drink can produce alcohol when the live yeast converts the sugar into alcohol. Tested samples were found to contain above the maximum allowable limit of alcohol in a beverage. As a result, kombucha's now considered an alcoholic beverage and the government is debating whether to label it as wine or beer. Many local markets have removed the beverage until a decision is made.

## Quick and Easy Breakfast Ideas

**Q** I am a mom of two children ages five and seven. Mornings are busy in our house. Can you please provide me with some healthy and easy to prepare (or grab) breakfast choices for myself? I don't have the time to cook everyday.

**A** Studies show that breakfast is the most important meal of the day (yes, even for mom). There are quick and easy options available and with a little advanced planning, it's all possible. Here are five ideas to get you started:

- 1 **Oatmeal:** Cook up a batch of oatmeal the night before and store in the refrigerator. The next morning, pop it in the microwave for 30 seconds. Don't forget to top with fresh fruit or a handful of nuts.
- 2 **Eggs:** Hard boil a dozen or so eggs and store in the fridge. The next morning grab two along with a fresh fruit or a slice of 100% whole wheat bread with a teaspoon of jam.
- 3 **Cereal:** Whole grain cere-



al with low fat (1%) or skim milk is always my top choice when I'm in a rush. Don't forget to top with fresh fruit or two tablespoons of raisins. Healthier whole grain cereal choices include:

- ✓ Kashi's Heart to Heart Barbara's Shredded Spoonfuls or Puffins,
- ✓ Cheerios (original or multigrain)
- ✓ Fiber One (original).
- 4 **Breakfast Bar:** In a real time crunch, grab a breakfast bar and pair it with a fresh fruit or yogurt. Healthier breakfast bars include:
  - ✓ Health Valley Organic Blueberry Cobler Bar (140 calories)
  - ✓ Trader Joe's Cereal Bars (120 calories)
  - ✓ Kashi TLC Baked Apple Spice Cereal Bar (100 calories)
  - ✓ Nature's Choice Cereal Bar: Triple Berry (150 calories)

5 **Greek Yogurt:** For a little extra protein kick, choose nonfat Greek yogurt (it has more protein per ounce than traditional yogurt) and top with 2 tablespoons of granola, nuts or fresh fruit.

## Defrosting Food Safely

**Q** Is it safe to defrost food out of the refrigerator?

**A** No—there are several safe ways to defrost meats, but leaving them out on the countertop can potentially make you sick.

Bacteria thrive at temperatures between 41 to 135 degrees Fahrenheit—the exact temperature of your kitchen. Leaving meat out for numerous hours to defrost gives bacteria the perfect environment to grow to such high amounts that even cooking won't necessarily destroy all of them (or the poisons they produce).

There are three ways safe ways to safely defrost food:

- 1 **Refrigerator:** Please frozen food in the refrigerator the night before and place on a tray to catch any juices. If you are defrosting large foods (i.e. Thanksgiving turkey) or a lot of meats, put in the refrigerator a day or two beforehand.



2 **Running Water:** Place food in the sink and let the cool water run over it. As meats, poultry and fish potentially carry bacteria, be sure dishes or other food isn't in the sink at the same time. Thoroughly clean the sink when you are done defrosting your food. This method works well for smaller food items like frozen shrimp.



3 **Microwave:** Food can be safely defrosted in the microwave. As the microwave unevenly distributes heat, leaving some parts of the food cold and others partially cooked, it's important to cook the food right up (i.e. bake, grill) after defrosting in the microwave. ■

*Toby Amidor, MS RD CDN*

### TobyAmidorNutrition.com

Toby Amidor, MS, RD, CDN is a registered dietitian with a master's degree in clinical nutrition and dietetics from New York University and a nutrition expert for [FoodNetwork.com](http://FoodNetwork.com). She has appeared in a variety of media outlets including *Good Morning America Health*, *Good Day New York*, *Self Magazine*, *Us Weekly Magazine*, *WebMD*, and *Working Mother Magazine*.

# Seven Ways to Refuel (No Coffee Required!)

PTA meetings, laundry, errands, food-shopping... and that's just what you've done by 8 a.m. Here, some tips on how to get your groove back.

Sometimes, I feel like my body is a vending machine, constantly dispensing money, offering advice, helping with homework, dealing with deadlines, and always—providing, giving, doing. It's exhausting! And, truth be told, there are days where I'm literally drained. Depleted. Zonked. Yet as an active wife, mother, friend and worker-bee, it's just not possible for me to close down the ATM for a day (or two!) and sleep it off.

So, how do you solve your energy vampires and find a way to recharge? First, look at what's consuming you, say experts. Tops on the list: family commitments, work, aging parents, spousal demands, children, low self-esteem, lack of community, debt, clutter, chronic procrastination, jealousy/envy and constant worry (one of my problems). Here, seven energy drains and how to solve them (no ATM password required!).

## 1 Over Committing

You know the drill. The PTA president asks you to bake cupcakes on the day you have a presentation due in to your boss. Meanwhile, it's your husband's birthday, and you promised him his favorite dinner. Over committing is the good little girl syndrome, explains Debbie Mandel, author of *Turn on Your Inner Light*, "Saying yes, when you mean no—you become the martyr because you're the only one who can do it right!"

✓**Antidote:** Give up control and delegate, delegate, delegate. "When you say no to others, you say yes to yourself. Don't hand your family a fish, but instead, teach them how to fish!" she stresses. "Begin by saying no to small things, and it will get real easy, real fast."

Another tactic: think of your life as time



segment, suggests Mimi Doe the founder of [www.SpiritualParenting.com](http://www.SpiritualParenting.com). Just as some people give ten percent of their income to their IRA, you might give ten percent of your non-working hours to something that moves you. This clear delineation of how you give your time makes responding to requests much easier. Remember, too, it's okay to ask for time to think it over.

## 2 Living Up to Other's Expectations

This is a big energy drain because you're suppressing your own personality while you strive to accommodate other's value systems. According to Mandel, this stems from childhood where you needed to please the giants in your life: parents, teachers, etc.

✓**Antidote:** Express yourself in little things, like dress, makeup, opinions, hobbies, etc. You should also come up with a clear set of standards or principles that govern your life. What is it you believe in? What are your most important priorities? Once you've captured all that on paper...

you won't really worry what other people think of you because you have a clear set of guidelines for what you think of you and what you expect of yourself. Gradually, you'll step out of your box.

## 3 Holding Onto Jealousy and Envy

When you compare yourself to others, you sabotage your own individuality.

✓**Antidote:** Realize that everyone gets a turn to shine. Today it might be your friend, tomorrow it will be you. Everyone has buried treasure—cultivate your own uniqueness. Know what you specifically contribute to the table of life! Anna Maravelas, author of *How to Reduce Workplace Conflict and Stress*, says she turns this one inside out by turning her jealousy into admiration. She says she's made some fabulous friends by practicing this. "Many talented, beautiful people are lonely because others can't cope with their talent. They are grateful to be appreciated by someone who doesn't compare themselves to them and come up short."



## 4 Chronic Frustration

Research says we face about thirty “heart hassles” a day; mini-crises that short circuit our goals and increase the time we need to complete a task. Knowing that frustration is an integral part of living helps us respond in ways that maintain our momentum and mood. For me, this often happens around the 4 p.m. hour. That’s when most of us face kids returning from school, commutes, day care, food preparation, mail, errands, and evening schedules. This is also the peak time for food cravings, particularly chocolate.

✓**Antidote:** Plan for this low point. Stock the car or kitchen with water, high-quality chocolate (or trail mix) and soothing music. If children are returning from school, stop everything for half an hour and do nothing but help them transition to home, have a light snack, and enjoy a cuddle with mom. Take time to remember what you appreciate about your day and family.

## 5 Being a Worrywart

Worries are those negative thoughts that whirl around in our brains, particularly at bedtime or in the middle of the night. Often, daytime sheds a different light on those negative what ifs.



✓**Antidote:** Put things in perspective—will they be important an hour from now—fifteen minutes from now? Most of them won’t be. Give yourself a break. If someone or something upsets you, don’t exacerbate the problem by getting on your own case for reacting. Reactions are normal—it’s what we do with them that counts.

## 6 Family Demands (including children, spouses and aging parents)

Feeling overwhelmed is a big problem for most women today. There just isn’t enough time to get everything done.

✓**Antidote:** Give from your heart, not from a sense of obligation. When you give from a sense of obligation, the other person knows it. The other answer? Do what you can to make your life easier. Buy pre-packaged foods. Shop online. Call a sitter. Lean on a friend. Don’t think YOU are the only one that can help your family.

## 7 Clutter!

As I write this, my desk is overflowing with papers, there are dishes in my kitchen sink and I have a week’s worth of laundry calling to me from my bathroom floor. But, alas, I have a deadline! What’s a girl to do? The answer is simple: SIMPLIFY!

✓**Antidote:** Get organized! Break large tasks into smaller, more manageable ones. Think of your energy drain as an invitation to recharge. Once you can see the calm after the storm, you will have more energy to deal. ■



## Recognize these energy zappers

Any of these people look familiar? UCLA psychiatrist Judith Orloff, MD ([www.DrJudithOrloff.com](http://www.DrJudithOrloff.com)) has the following suggestions for dealing with these energy vampires, who often “suck” the life out of you:

- **The Sob Sister.** Limit the time you spend talking to this perpetual victim with her “poor me” attitude. Have an excuse of “no time” at the ready when you see her coming.
- **The Drama Queen.** A day never goes by that there aren’t off-the-chart catastrophes, mishaps, and dramas in this vampire’s life. Set firm limits, and let him know that you won’t tolerate poor job performance or excuses.
- **The Constant Talker or Joker.** If you can’t get a word in edgewise, interrupt this attention hog and ask her to please ex-

cuse you for not talking a long time. Then leave quickly.

- **The Fixer-Upper.** It’s not your job to be this vampire’s therapist. Tell this needy person that you empathize and are sure he’ll find a solution. Disengage; don’t rescue.
- **The Blamer.** Just being around this person fills you with guilt, self-doubt, and defensiveness. Next time she approaches, imagine yourself surrounded by a cocoon of white, protective light, inside which you are safe and secure from her negative barbs.
- **Go for the Jugular Fiend.** You never feel safe around this vampire because his put-downs are vicious and unexpected. Try a visualization that puts you at a distance from him, and don’t take anything he says personally.

Who says Angelina Jolie and J-Lo are the only hot mamas around? Check out some real life moms who put the fork down and are now ready for their close up!

# Winners

# The Biggest Losers



Jenn  
AFTER



BEFORE

## ► Jenn Mitchell

Throughout my life, I was always a relatively active person, but after having two children, and approaching my late 30's, I really lost my motivation to work out and my metabolism went down the drain. I was nearly 50 pounds overweight, unhealthy and very unhappy. I had horrible insomnia and my doctor even recommended that I go on an anti-depressant. My daily activities really just included taking care of the house and my two young children. I had little motivation to do anything else.

My children were both under age four and I felt like I could barely keep up with them. When I wanted to go to bed BEFORE them, I knew that something had to change. One day, I saw a commercial for P90X (an intense 90-day fitness program) and thought, I'd love to do that someday, but felt like it was far out of my reach to achieve something that looked so advanced.

I started my workout program with a small goal to ride my exercise bike 10-20 minutes each day. Once that felt easy, I decided to up my goal to 30-45 minutes. During one of my 45-minute rides, I saw a commercial for Turbo Jam. I thought it looked like fun so I decided to give it a try. The combination of my bike rides and the Turbo Jam DVDs helped me to lose my first 25 pounds.

As a stay-at-home mom with two young children, putting ME first to fit in my workouts was a challenge. But, I asked my husband to watch the kids as soon as he got home from work so that I could make the time. Adjusting my diet was also a challenge with my "meat and potatoes" husband and kids who eat the usual kid food like hot dogs and mac-n-cheese. I began tracking my calories and tried my best to eat as clean as possible.

One I felt up to it, I decided to tackle P90X as well. It was probably the most intense 90-days of my life, but it was so worth it to change my body and truly change my lifestyle for the better. During this time, I also decided to start blogging about health and fitness at [personalfitcoach.com](http://personalfitcoach.com). It has been so wonderful to share my experiences with a wider audience and the support and feedback has been amazing.

After my weight loss, I am almost speechless to describe how good I feel. I now have an understanding that fitness is not all about the superficial but making yourself healthier, more confident and positive.

I think my extra-special accomplishment has been becoming a fitness coach for the Beachbody line of product. I now have the confidence to help others to achieve their health and fitness goals. As a mom,

all other moms ask me how I did it. I am now finishing up my Personal Training certificate and will be doing one-on-one and group training in the fall.

*Jenn Mitchell (aka Coach Jenn) is the Chief Motivational Officer at PersonalFitCoach.com whose passion is helping other moms make health and wellness a priority. Stop by PersonalFitCoach.com to keep up with Jenn's experiences and advice or sign up for her free fitness coaching at [BeachBodyCoach.com/coachfitjenn](http://BeachBodyCoach.com/coachfitjenn).*

## ► Dian Farmer

I wasn't looking to lose weight. But like most things in life, it was something else that made me realize I needed to get healthier.

It all started when I had blood work up prior to surgery for a partially ruptured Achilles tendon. At the time, I was also diagnosed with type II diabetes. I was in denial and told the doctor this could not be happening to me. He encouraged me to work towards getting healthier. Right around this time, a friend told me she had lost 20 pounds. I was intrigued because she wasn't exercising to do it.





It sounded do-able and so I bought the book she had used, *The Weigh Down Workshop* ([www.WeighDown.com](http://www.WeighDown.com)). I also began watching a lot of Dr. Oz. Slowly, I made a plan that works for me: Eat what you want - just eat less!

After surgery, I was bed ridden for months and unable to exercise. The doctor asked how I was still losing weight and I replied, "I put the fork down." Really, folks, it's just that easy. Even when I was hungry (not starving, mind you, simply hungry) I made conscious choices on what I would and wouldn't eat. I also started chewing slower to really enjoy my food.

What I learned is that if you eat what you want, but less, you are cutting down on salt, fat, cholesterol, sugar and carbs. You don't have to cut them out - just cut them down by cutting down your intake. The Weigh Down Workshop also suggested watching skinny people eat and ask yourself why they do the things they do. I saw my son throw away a half of a French fry one day. When I asked him why, he said "Because it was brown on the other end." What?! It's still edible! But it was a lesson.

The notion of "cleaning your plate" came from the depression era when most people didn't know where their next meal might come from. I grew up with parents who were forever telling me I had to eat everything before I left the table and so I had to learn to change my mindset. There have been many times when I have smelled good food and said to myself "Oh, I want that. I am so hungry!" But when I really stop and think about it, I'm really not hungry. It's just my nose telling my brain that food smells good and it's time to eat. I now really stop and make a choice before rushing to grab my fork and dig in. Now, eight months and about 70 lbs later, I am diabetes free, feeling great, and proud of myself for finally learning to control my eating habits.

*Dian Farmer is the owner/author of **Grocery Shop For FREE!!** where she vlogs, blogs, and loves teaching people how they can shop for FREE! She is a home-schooling mom of four.*

## ▶ Lisa Douglas

Once upon a time, I was a woman who never had to worry about what I ate or try on anything in a store - I could purchase a size four and walk out of the store knowing it would fit. My first child was a traumatic pregnancy, fraught with metabolism-killing bed-rest to ensure our safety. I had gained over forty pounds and it's been a battle ever since in trying to lose it.

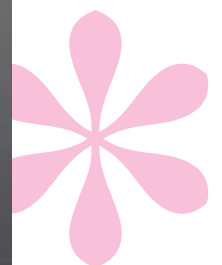
Over the years I've joyously birthed eleven-billion kids (or so it seems), ballooning our family's size and my waist size alike. I'd like to be one of the ones who can wholeheartedly say breastfeeding helped melt the weight off, but I can't. It didn't. Only dieting and exercise (when I could fit it in) would help, but I never got down to my original size or weight. Ever.

Until this past year.

I wasn't sleeping, in constant pain, and feeling more tired than ever. Drinking coffee and taking vitamins wasn't helping. I felt ill constantly, and caught every sickness my kids were exposed to. After being rushed by ambulance from my home on my son's birthday, I knew things had to change, permanently. I purchased the Wii Fit, EA Sports Active and Jillian Michaels 30 Day Shred. Together with dieting (eliminating sugar, salt, fat and red meat) and regular, butt-kicking exercise, I lost almost forty pounds and I can finally say I'm at my pre-pregnancy weight again.

I feel better than ever! And chasing after forty-kajillion kids? No problem!

*Lisa Douglas is a military wife and mom to six who pens the parenting blog **Crazy Adventures in Parenting**. A northern transplant struggling to accustom to southern living, you'll often find her hip-deep in changing diapers, kissing boo boos, working out, all while ingesting coffee by the gallon-full. ■*



# projectparent

How real moms cope with the realities of everyday pressures at school. • *By Elise Goldman & Maggie Vink*

## MEAN *Girls*



*I* never thought it would happen to my child. The well-adjusted, independent, friendly, good natured kid who seemed to be friends with everyone. If someone had a birthday party, she was always on the invite list. And her own parties—well, we used to have over 30 screaming girls in our house at one time and while we were completely frazzled by the experience, we were happy they all seemed to get along. “Seemed” being the operative word.

But now she's in the fifth grade. The same year my self esteem took a tremendous blow when I was taunted by the girls and ridiculed by the boys because I was more than 30 pounds overweight. I thought since my daughter didn't have a weight problem, she'd never have to endure what I went through when I was her age. But I was wrong. It doesn't matter the decade, it doesn't matter the cause, mean girls last a lifetime.

It first started happening a few years back when she wasn't accepted into a gifted program at our local elementary school. Even though she missed the cut-off by one point, she handled the news like a trooper and soared academically. But her friendships faltered. The girls who had made that program and had been her friends for years, suddenly stopped making play dates with her. When she started to talk to one of the girls in their "clique" they'd pull her own friends away and tell them not to hang out with her. And then the worse offense of all. She stopped getting invited to their birthday parties.

I know as a parent, I'm not supposed to interfere, but something inside of me wants to reach out to all the parents of these girls and tell them what is going on. But I can't. I have to let my daughter handle this on her own. No



matter how heart-breaking it is to hear that she is losing friends, the only thing I can do is offer her advice on how to handle those mean girls.

And trust me, I have had experience on that front. Come step into my time machine. One of the single worst moments I ever experienced with one of my so-called "girlfriends" was when she invited me over to her house and decided to show me how one of our friends talked about me all the time. She proceeded to call the unsuspecting "friend" and then chatted about how fat I was and how I wore the same clothes to school every day. As they laughed at my expense and I listened in, I wanted to run straight home and into my mom's arms. But I didn't. I don't even think I told my mom about that incident until I was an adult. Instead, I became determined to lose weight, went on weekend shopping jaunts with my mother and cut those awful girls out of my life.

By the time I hit middle school, I found an entirely different set of kids to hang out with and then by high school, I finally connected with my lifelong friends. Was I the most popular girl in school? Nope. Did I have the most friends? Nope. Was I happy? Absolutely. The reason? I did what I loved whether my friends wanted to or not. I played tennis. I sang. I was the only girl trumpet player in the school stage band. I joined B'nai Brith and made new friends. I hung out on weekends with my mom. And after that deplorable incident with those two girls, I swore off making plans for a very long time and you know what, everything worked out.

I wish I could peer through a crystal ball and know that everything on the friendship front will work out for my child. And considering my own history, it's extremely difficult for me to just watch from the sidelines. All I can do is counsel her to ignore those girls and remain friends with the ones she knows in her heart she can trust. It's going to be a bumpy ride these next few years, but at least I've had my own experiences to help guide her through. Growing up is not easy, but I guess that's why my daughter has me. I'm her biggest cheerleader, her strongest supporter and no matter how old she gets, I will always be her very best friend.

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## THE Bully

*I* think all parents have that desire to stand up and protect their kids when they're being hurt or wronged in any way. But while it is a parent's job to advocate for and protect our children, if we're not honest about our kid's behavior we're missing a great opportunity for education.

I adopted my son just before he started fourth grade. Soon after starting school, he came home with stories about this kid or that kid being mean to him. My inner Mama Bear was riled but — being a newbie parent — I wasn't sure exactly what to do about it. Should I call the school? Call the other parents? While I hesitated on the best way to support my son, I did talk to him about how to handle the situation — I suggested ignoring it, playing with different kids, or telling an adult. What I didn't do, was pause and question whether the story my son was telling me was the whole truth.

One day I had the opportunity to go to my son's school and watch the kids playing on the playground. Just sitting back and watching your child interact with a group is something all parents should do from time to time. What I saw surprised me... and not in a good way. My son was continuously being unfair or downright mean to other kids. He was literally push-

ing and shoving kids in order to be first in line. When playing basketball, he'd hog the ball and never pass it to teammates even when there was no way for him to get a shot. He would boot others out of the pitching position in kickball and then wouldn't give up the position long after it should have been someone else's turn. While he never called any other kids names or said mean things, he was clearly ignoring the needs and wants of other kids in order to get his own way. What's more, he was joyfully playing and seemed completely oblivious to the fact that he was hurting the others' feelings.

While I believed his behavior to be unintentional and I knew he didn't have any desire to hurt others, my son was being selfish. He was being unkind. He was being a bully.

My son spent his first ten years in complete inconsistency, bouncing from home to home in the foster care system. While he was blessed to have several

good foster homes, each had a different set of rules, each had different levels of involvement in his life, and he switched schools with each move he made. What's more, when he was very young and still with his birth family, my son had had literally no exposure to other children and no opportunity to develop social skills.

I immediately began working on social skills with my son. We talked about being a good friend and I'd make sure he treated me fairly when we were playing board games or kicking a soccer ball around in the backyard. I also watched all of my son's soccer practices and would later discuss situations with him — trying to show him how other kids felt when he rudely stepped in front of them in order to be the first in a drill.

My son was still having a difficult time seeing how his behavior could hurt others, yet he was acutely aware of how they could make him feel. It wasn't long before his behavior on the school playground started to annoy and frustrate other kids. One group of boys in particular started making a daily habit of following my son around and quietly taunting him. They'd tease him, call him names, and encourage the other kids to exclude my son from play. My son had gone from being the bully to being bullied.

My son's school had a zero tolerance policy on bullying. While I believe

the system to be good in theory, it's unfortunately flawed. When the other boys would taunt and tease my son, my quick-to-anger child would fight back loudly and without concern of being caught. Subsequently, my son would get in trouble and the boys who repeatedly teased him would get off with no consequences at all.

I could have just let the inner Mama Bear in me out. I could have fought with the school, denying that my maligned child deserved any consequences and arguing that the other kids were the real ones who needed punishment. I could have seen my son as completely innocent in the situation. But that would have done my son no good whatsoever.

It was my job to talk to the school, accept the appropriate consequences my son was given, and to try to make sure that all kids involved were given consequences. And it was also my job to recognize that my son had played a significant role in his playground woes and to help him overcome it.

Bullying isn't always clear cut. It's not necessarily that "bad kids" are bullies and "good, innocent kids" are bullied. Sometimes it's just low self esteem, poor social skills, or previous hurts that lead a child to act like a bully.

At this point, I took a proactive stance. I enrolled my son in a bullying/social skills class at his therapy clinic, friendship skills became a frequent topic with his therapist, I invited other kids over to our house for one-on-one playtime that I could observe, I worked closely with my son's teacher, I watched my son's sports practices and games, and how to "think like a friend" became an ongoing lesson in our house. I also worked with my son on developing empathy and taught him how to read body language.

My son doesn't have a mean bone in his body. When he started to understand how his behavior made other kids feel is when his behavior started to improve. My son has been with me for several years now—he's lived with me longer than he ever lived with any one foster home. His social behavior

**Bullying isn't always clear cut. It's not necessarily that "bad kids" are bullies and "good, innocent kids" are bullied.**



has improved by leaps and bounds, but it continues to be a work in progress. He still likes to be first in line for everything and has to fight down that urge. He still wants to be quarterback or pitcher or goalie and has to actively remember to give other kids a turn. And he has to work hard to control his angry reactions when other kids aren't very nice to him. But he's more generous now, he pays attention to other's feelings, and he's more fair when playing. He now has a large group of great kids he can truly call friends—had his social skills not improved, I sincerely doubt that he would have these friends.

It's extremely hard as a parent to admit that your child can be a bully. But how can we help our kids if we aren't honest about their behavior? My son isn't a bad kid by any stretch of the imagination. But if I had simply fought to protect him when the other kids were teasing and excluding him, I would have missed the root of the problem. I would have missed the opportunity to teach my son how to be a better friend. And my son would have missed out on the opportunity to have real, non-combative friendships like he enjoys today. ■

**I could have just let the inner Mama Bear in me out... denying that my maligned child deserved any consequences... but that would have done my son no good.**



# School is back in session and so will bullying: You can help prevent it • By Ross Ellis

While the start of the school year should be a time filled with wonder and joy, the reality for many kids and teens is often much different. They're the victims of bullying at school, on neighborhood playgrounds and even online.

If your kids were bullied at school last year and the problem wasn't resolved at the end of the school year, it needs to be resolved now. Parents and schools must work together rather than sweep it under the rug.

Many schools will say they have an anti-bullying policy but they don't enforce it. It is imperative for schools to be committed to addressing and resolving peer to peer abuse and school violence.

And for the parents whose kids are victims, they need to be committed to working closely with their schools.

Kids who are intimidated, threatened, or harmed by bullies often experience low self-esteem and depression, whereas those doing the bullying may go on to engage in more serious antisocial behaviors. Some kids are so traumatized by being bullied, that they contemplate suicide. Bullies often have been the victims of bullying or other mistreatment themselves.

Much can be done to prevent bullying and cyberbullying and setting expectations of how kids treat others in class, on the schoolyard and online should begin early.

Parents can start the school year by teaching their kids and teens these essentials that will help make their school experience easier. Here are some back to school basics for parents:

- ✓ Teach your kids to be kind, compassionate and to respect others in person and online
- ✓ Teach kids to be nice to new kids at school, even if the new kid is not the type of kid they would befriend. They don't have to become friends but they should treat them nicely.
- ✓ Encourage your kids to make new groups of friends in addition to their current network of friends
- ✓ If you catch your child bullying others – don't say "Not My Kid." Recognize their behavior! Have a conversation with your child immediately and institute consistent punishment. If your child has a severe problem with a sense of empowerment, anger, hatred, racism, homophobia or inflicting physical harm on someone, there's no reason to go it alone. Seek psychological help at once.
- ✓ If you observe your kids being nice to others – even their siblings, compliment them. Let them know that their actions are those of a leader and let them know you're proud of them.
- ✓ Get involved with your school PTA and ensure they have literature, books, DVDs, and other anti-bullying materials available in the classroom and school library. The school should promote an anti-bullying theme throughout the school hallways such as posters, etc.
- ✓ Ask your school to invite bullying prevention experts to your school to speak to students
- ✓ When parents are at school, watch out for other kids as well as your own
- ✓ Neither you nor your kids should do anything that makes anyone feel left out. e.g. If you're inviting someone to a party, don't do it in front of others who are not invited -- or if kids are going somewhere after school they should not discuss it in front of



those who are not invited so they don't feel left out.)

- ✓ Teach your kids and teens to stand up for bullied victims
- ✓ Teach kids not to post anything online that they wouldn't say to someone's face
- ✓ Teach kids that what goes online stays online.
- ✓ Parents must keep open communication with their children. Look for signs of your child being bullied by visiting [StompOutBullying.org/Adults\\_Tips\\_BullyingSigns.php](http://StompOutBullying.org/Adults_Tips_BullyingSigns.php).
- ✓ Schools should set up a web site where kids can anonymously report the person who is bullying them. That way victims can feel safe in making the report and the school can deal with the bully.
- ✓ Older kids may want to consider making a serious commitment and starting a peer mentoring group with their school's permission.
- ✓ Kids of all ages can get involved by raising awareness – especially during National Bullying Prevention Awareness Week from October 3rd – 9th. And kids and adults alike can make October 4th the day that bullying prevention is heard around the world by wearing a BLUE SHIRT to STOMP Out Bullying (an initiative of [StompOutBullying.org](http://StompOutBullying.org)).
- ✓ Bullying and cyberbullying is preventable and needs the collaborations of parents, kids, schools, communities, social media companies, law enforcement and legislators. It does take a village! ■

**Ross Ellis**  
[LoveOurChildrenUSA.org](http://LoveOurChildrenUSA.org)

is a parenting, bullying prevention and cyber safety expert and the Founder and CEO of Love Our Children USA, the national non-profit leader of child violence prevention. She also works with other top Internet Safety Advisors and created the program STOMP Out Bullying ([StompOutBullying.org](http://StompOutBullying.org)), which focuses on reducing and preventing all forms of bullying. Ross writes for the Examiner and is a 'go-to' expert to MomLogic.



# A+ Note from a Teacher

Because every child is special in their own way...you just need to look, listen and learn.

I see that child — the small one, the clumsy one, the big one, the shy one, sitting in the corner of my classroom longing for a friend. I know him, the child who smiles and laughs at jokes that are shared at his own expense, the child seeking attention, friendship, acceptance and love.

These are the children that I take particular care with each year; the ones I try to boost with an offhand positive comment meant for others to hear. They're the ones I watch carefully from the corner of my eye, and the ones I steer gently toward a child or group that I know will accept them as one of their own.

Each year I search for those particular souls in my room — they're not hard to find. I wrap them as best I can in my protective arms, all the while hoping that the coming years in school will treat them well — but knowing in my heart that they may not. I try to show the rest of the class by example what is important — his character, her humor, his honesty, her intelligence and his talent.

That child who sits in my room that is too big for his age; the one who is too shy, too small, too loud or too clumsy? The one who won't speak, or talks too much, or who is much too silly? I know him intimately. He's my child.

My child is the boy who will climb on the roof, fly down the hill on his bike, climb way too far up the tree, but is afraid to participate in class. My child is the boy who collects insects in the summer, identifies their tracks, does science experiments in his room, but hates to read. My child is the boy who didn't look where he was going and stumbled over the recycling bin and fell flat on his face on the first day of school, and is the boy who fell down the stairs during the first fire drill of the year.

My child is the one who sleeps with the bathroom light on because he is a little afraid of the dark. My child is the boy whose smile and sense of humor brighten our lives, but who just can't keep his mouth shut at school! The one who gets caught by the teacher, but won't tattle on the other children who have been participating in whatever mischief has drawn her attention.

As teachers, we know our mission; to ensure each child in our care makes significant academic progress during the school year. However, we all know our most important charge of all.

To hold the hand of the child who doesn't quite fit in, and gently guide him along the way. And when he sits up a little straighter, when he laughs a bit louder, and smiles more often — we know. We know in our hearts that what we've done in that regard is even more important than our original mission.

We have helped that particular soul be brave enough to fly. ■

*Debbie Patrick*

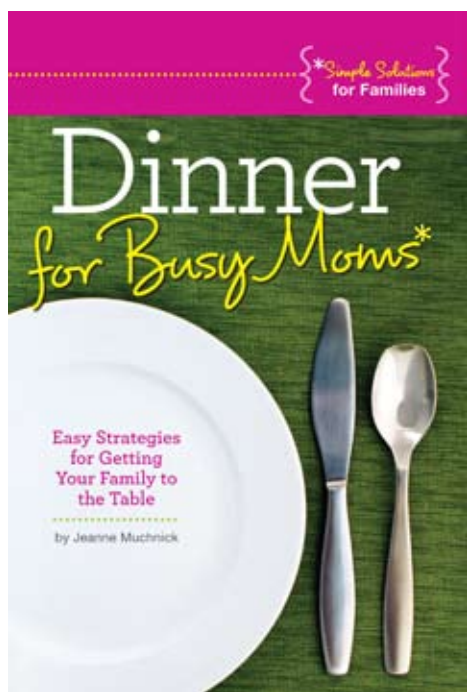
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Debbie is a teacher, newspaper columnist and the mother of three children whose decided she'll never give up. No matter how many battles she loses; no matter how many tears she sheds; no matter how many martinis she drinks, she will continue to fight the good fight. She loves to laugh and believes that every day is a new day.





# Worried about how to get dinner on the table when you're NOT a cook?



So were these other busy moms...who found solutions in *Dinner for Busy Moms* (Plain White Press):

“ Your book is chock-full of wisdom and humor. I really appreciate how your advice helps assuage the guilt I often feel when I serve take-out...again. I now have a firm conviction that no matter what ends up on the table, my family and I will eat dinner together. ”

—Marsha G., New Rochelle NY

“ You have made brilliant use of other’s tips, etc. Your approach to the whole book is fabulous. This should go viral. ”

—Laurie Z., San Francisco, CA

“ I started the book at 1 a.m. and finally put it down around 2:15 a.m... LOVE IT! ... makes me want to head out to the grocery store and fill my empty cabinets! ”

—Jenn K., Indianapolis, IN

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