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THE JOY OF FAMILY

What children
remember most
isn't what we
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MY DREAM CAREER



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Welcome to the Twooky Community

At Twooky, we believe every child deserves the opportunity to discover who they can become.

Whether it's landing their first role in a school musical, mastering the math, or making lifelong friendships, every experience helps shape their future.

We're more than a place or a program — we're a community that supports families at every stage, with early learning, tutoring, sports and activities that grow with your child.

Inside, you'll find real stories, expert advice and ideas to help you feel inspired, supported and connected.

Together, we help kids grow, learn and thrive.

Let's grow
together.



Community

Local providers and families, all in one place.



Opportunity

Childcare and activities near you.



Growth

Advice to help your family thrive.



Connection

Real stories from your community.



The Twooky Journey

Growing with your child,
every step of the way.



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Running on Empty: Understanding Parental Burnout

There's ordinary tired — the kind a decent night's sleep can fix. And then there's the other kind: the bone-deep weariness that's still there in the morning, the feeling of running on fumes with nothing left in the tank. If that sounds familiar, you may be brushing up against something with a name: parental burnout. It's more common than most parents realize, and recognizing it is the first step to feeling like yourself again.

More than a bad week

Everyone has rough patches. A teething baby, a school project the night before it's due, a week where nothing goes to plan — that's parenting. Burnout is different. It builds slowly, often over months, and it tends to show up in three ways: a deep emotional exhaustion that rest doesn't touch, a sense of distance from your own children (going through the motions rather than enjoying them), and a nagging feeling that you've become a worse parent than you used to be. That last part is the cruel twist. Burnout convinces you it's a personal failing, when it's really a sign you've been giving far more than you've been getting back. It's not weakness. It's depletion.



The signs worth noticing

Burnout rarely announces itself. It creeps in, and you adjust to it without quite realizing. A few things to look out for: Dreading the day before it has even started. Snapping over small things, then feeling guilty about it. A flat, numb, going-through-the-motions feeling, even during moments you'd normally love. Struggling to switch off, even when you finally get the chance to rest. Physical signals: headaches, a churning stomach, getting every cold going, or sleep that doesn't refresh you. One or two of these on a hard week is just life. But if they've settled in and become your normal, it's worth paying attention.

Why parents are so prone to it

Parenting is one of the few roles with no clocking-off time, no weekends, and no obvious finish line. A few things make burnout especially likely:

It never fully stops. Even when the children are asleep, the to-do list keeps running. There's no point in the day when you're truly off duty.

The mental load is invisible. Someone has to remember the dentist appointment, the friend's birthday, who's out of clean socks. That background admin is exhausting precisely because no one sees it — including, sometimes, the people we live with.

Modern parenting comes with an audience. Between well-meaning relatives and the endless highlight reel online, it's easy to feel you're falling short of a standard nobody could actually meet.

We pour out without refilling. Most parents are great at meeting everyone else's needs and quietly putting their own at the bottom of the list. Do that long enough and the well runs dry.



How to start refilling the tank

Recovering from burnout isn't about a single grand gesture. It's about small, repeatable changes that tip the balance back towards taking in as much as you give out. Name it, don't blame yourself. Simply recognizing "I'm burned out" rather than "I'm failing" changes everything. You're not a bad parent. You're a depleted one, and depletion is fixable.

Actually, hand things off. Delegating in your head doesn't count. Pick one or two tasks and give them away properly — to a partner, a relative, a paid hand if you can, or an older child. Then resist the urge to redo them.

Lower the bar on purpose. Cereal for dinner, a skipped bath, a messy living room — none of it will matter in a year. Choosing "good enough" isn't giving up; it's deciding where your limited energy goes.

Build in micro-refuels. You don't need a weekend away (lovely as that would be). Five quiet minutes with a hot drink before the house wakes, a song you love on the school run, two minutes of fresh air at the back door — small refuels, taken often, add up.

Reconnect with one adult. Burnout thrives in isolation. A single honest conversation with someone who gets it — a friend, your partner, another parent — can lift a surprising amount of weight.

Protect a sliver of sleep. Staying up to "get things done" feels productive but quietly deepens the hole. Where you can, guard your own bedtime the way you guard your children's.

Move, gently. Not punishing workouts — just a walk, a stretch, a dance around the kitchen. Movement is one of the most reliable ways to discharge stress that's built up in the body.



You can come back from this

Parental burnout isn't a life sentence, and it isn't a verdict on the kind of parent you are. It's a signal — your mind and body telling you the balance has tipped too far for too long. Tip it back, a little at a time, and the warmth and energy you're missing tend to return. Looking after yourself isn't a reward you earn once everything else is done. It's what makes everything else possible.

When it's more than burnout

Burnout and depression can look alike, and they can overlap. If low mood, hopelessness or anxiety lingers for weeks, gets in the way of daily life, or you find yourself feeling that your family would be better off without you, that's a moment to reach out to a professional — soon, and without embarrassment. Support exists, it works, and asking for it is a sign of strength, not failure.

Where to find support Wherever you are, your doctor or midwife is a good first step — no diagnosis needed.

UK — PANDAS Foundation (perinatal support):

WhatsApp 07903 508334, or

pandasfoundation.org.uk. Samaritans: 116 123.

USA — National Maternal Mental Health Hotline: call or text 1-833-TLC-MAMA (1-833-852-6262), free, 24/7. In crisis, call or text 988.

UAE — National Mental Support Line: 800-HOPE (800-4673), 8am–8pm, Arabic and English. In an emergency, call 999.



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Nobody Warns You:

The Honest Truth About Becoming a Mom



The physical, emotional and life changes no one quite prepares you for

Welcome to the start of motherhood — a journey of ups and downs, hairpin twists, hard days and heart-melting moments in equal measure. It isn't for the faint-hearted, and it arrives without a single warning label. So if you're expecting your first or you've just met your new baby, this one's for you.

You can read every parenting book on the shelf, scroll the entire internet at 3am, and sit through every prenatal class in town. And still, nothing will quite prepare you for what hits you once your baby actually arrives. Becoming a mother is so much more than the birth itself; the real work begins afterwards, alongside the tidal wave of physical, emotional, hormonal and relationship changes that come with it.



The truth about tears

Every birth story is different, and how yours unfolds has a real bearing on how you feel in those first few weeks, even months. A straightforward labor and delivery usually means less pain afterwards, which makes it easier to be present and hands-on with your baby.

A long or complicated birth, on the other hand, can ripple through your whole body and recovery — so be gentle with yourself, and know that everything below is normal and common.

Your bladder has other plans

A little leak every time you sneeze. Or laugh too hard. Or sprint for the bus. Unless you've been blessed with a pelvic floor of steel, a bit of leaking is par for the course early on. The good news is that pelvic floor exercises really do help — and if things don't improve, your doctor or nurse can point you towards a women's health physical therapist.

Feeding is hard — and “fed is best”

For years, moms-to-be were told relentlessly that breast is best and anything else was a failure. The conversation has thankfully moved on, and the phrase you'll hear now is “fed is best.” If breastfeeding works for you, it's wonderful — but don't believe the myth that it's effortless and instinctive. It's often a steep learning curve of trial and error, it can be genuinely painful, and sometimes, despite everything, it just doesn't work out, leaving everyone frazzled and hungry. Whatever you decide, a fed, thriving baby and a well mom is the goal. Do what's right for your body and your baby, and tune out the noise.

Your hormones will be everywhere

For nine months your body ran on a cocktail of pregnancy hormones, and although the baby is here, those hormones take a good few months to settle. Add the excitement, the worry, and the bone-deep exhaustion of new motherhood, and your emotions will be all over the map. Sometimes that can tip into something heavier.



Postpartum depression is real

Yes, it happens. Yes, it's far more common than people admit. And yes, it's okay. Don't let guilt over not feeling a rush of love convince you that you're a bad mom — you aren't. Postpartum depression and anxiety are recognized, treatable conditions, not character flaws. The bravest, most loving thing you can do is name it and reach out, whether that's to your partner, your doctor, your nurse or one of the many support lines now available. With the right help, the fog does lift, and you will enjoy your baby again.

Loneliness and losing yourself

Ask a new mom whether she's had a moment to herself lately. The unwashed hair and the milk-stained top will answer for her. And here's the strange part: even with a baby attached to you all day long, you can feel lonelier than ever. No other adults to talk to, no workplace to head off to, no agenda beyond keeping a tiny human alive — it's no wonder so many new moms describe a real loss of identity.

Your whole world now orbits one little person, and as magical as that is, it's also seismic. That isolation, stacked on top of raging hormones, can sometimes pull you towards low mood and depression. Some moms even feel a flash of resentment watching their partner's life carry on much as before.

All of this is normal in the early weeks — but you don't have to just ride it out. Talk to your partner or a relative about how you really feel. Carve out small pockets of time that are yours alone: meet a friend, walk somewhere green, lose yourself in a book, pick a hobby back up. Reclaim a piece of yourself. You can't pour from an empty cup.

Your relationship will feel the strain

You'd think a baby would only deepen the love between two people. Then exhaustion and upheaval arrive, and the reality is more complicated. Slowly, you can stop being partners and become only "Mom" and "Dad." Date nights vanish, and the quality time goes with them.

Even when you do get a rare evening to yourselves, the odds are one or both of you is too shattered for anything remotely romantic. Intimacy becomes scarce — and if you're still healing from a tear, the very thought can make you wince, never mind that most new moms feel a long way from their most attractive.

It's all too easy to let the romance slip when everything revolves around the baby. But once you've found some rhythm and a bit of your spark returns, make time for each other doing something — anything — that has nothing to do with parenting.

There will be enormous changes after your baby arrives, and nothing prepares you completely. For many, the transition is genuinely hard. But it's also joyful, stitched through with moments of connection and discovery you'll never forget. Whatever twists your journey takes, trust yourself, do what feels right — and know that you can handle every bit of it.



Nicole Arsiwala

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What Fatherhood Taught Me the Hard Way

I'm a father of five, with ages spanning from nine-year-old twin girls all the way up to three grown-up children. As you can imagine, the years have thrown plenty of challenges my way.

If I'm honest, I've met and beaten a good many of the challenges my kids have set me. I've also failed at plenty of others — spectacularly, I might add. But that's exactly what makes fatherhood so exciting and so rewarding. It's also what makes it a minefield. There are days I feel certain I'm about to tread on something explosive as I wander into the trickier corners of being a dad.

For me, the challenges began the very moment my first child arrived.

After nine months of waiting, the big moment came — and yes, it was everything I'd hoped for. Emotional, overwhelming, and a memory I'll treasure for the rest of my life, above almost anything else.

Once I'd floated back down to earth, reality set in: I was now responsible for this tiny human being.

In those first months, one challenge caught me off guard — bonding with my daughter. It was largely because I felt redundant. She was breastfed, so I told myself I had no real job to do beyond the odd cuddle to settle her or a diaper change. Looking back, I wish I'd known then what dads are encouraged to embrace now: that the bath times, the carrying, the skin-to-skin, the simply being present all count for far more than I gave them credit for.

Slowly, my role grew. As my daughter moved on to solid food, I found myself far more involved, and those early worries faded the day she took her first wobbly steps and started stringing together a few words — including "Dadda." I'll never forget that moment as long as I live.

One of the biggest challenges facing dads today is striking the right balance between work and family, and I've certainly wrestled with it. We all have to earn a living and pay the bills — and the bills climb sharply the moment you become a parent. It's all too easy to pile on extra hours chasing the money to cover them.

I worked far too many of those extra hours before the penny finally dropped: I was missing the formative years. I realized that if I didn't ease off, I'd miss things I could never get back. So I cut my hours to be there for my children, determined not to live with regret — and I made it to most, if not all, of those milestones. If there's one silver lining to how much working life has changed lately, it's that flexible and remote working has made that balance a little easier to strike than it was for me back then.

As I said, I'm a dad of five. Three of my children are from my first marriage, and one of the hardest things I've ever done was sit my three older children down and explain that their mom and I would no longer be living together — that I wasn't leaving them, but I was leaving their mother.



In time I moved on and remarried, and we were lucky enough to become parents to twin girls, now nine. But I never imagined that this would be when I'd face my greatest challenge of all.

The pregnancy went perfectly well until around 28 weeks. At a routine scan, we were told one of the girls wasn't growing as she should for that stage. In that instant, it felt as though the floor had vanished beneath me. It was frightening and bewildering, and we were heading into completely unknown territory.

Our twin girls arrived prematurely, at roughly 34 weeks, by C-section. From that moment I was strapped into an emotional rollercoaster. They were rushed straight to neonatal care the second they were born, and to make matters harder, we were far from home — our local hospital had run out of neonatal beds.

The challenges came at me thick and fast. Above all, I was helpless and utterly out of control. I had to take a leap of faith and trust the doctors to keep our girls safe. At one point, one of the girls struggled to breathe and had to be placed on a ventilator.

The weeks that followed would test me more than I'd ever known. The image of that moment is burned into my memory forever. Holding myself together was hard enough — and then I had to go and break the news to my wife while somehow keeping it all in. To this day, I don't know how I managed it.

Thankfully, after 27 days, the girls were discharged and came home with us. Every single one of those difficult days in special care was worth it to bring our family home together.

The challenges I've faced as a dad have come in every shape and size. Having five children doesn't prepare you for the next hurdle, because every child is different. Just when I thought I could handle a familiar problem by drawing on past experience, I'd be proved wrong — each of them has their own personality, their own character, their own way of catching you off guard.

What fatherhood has taught me, through all the curveballs it keeps throwing, is to try to take them in your stride. I've found that when I trust my instincts, they're usually right. And — oh yes — I've learned exactly when to keep my mouth shut, especially during the teenage years!



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The First Week With Your New Baby

Congratulations — your little one has finally arrived! What follows is quite possibly the most surreal week of your life as you fold this tiny new person into your home and your heart. When my first, Violet, turned up, it genuinely felt like the world had tilted on its axis; the love hit me with a force I hadn't braced for. I had no real idea what I was doing or what to expect. It was one of the best weeks of my life and, in the very same breath, one of the most daunting.

I assumed I'd be spared that earth-shifting moment second time round. I was already a mom, after all — surely I knew the drill. I was completely wrong. Meeting Pearl was every bit as extraordinary.

I wouldn't trade that newborn week for anything; it's pure magic, and I count myself lucky to have lived it twice (and yes, I'm getting broody all over again just writing this!).

That said, it can knock you sideways. Your baby looks impossibly small and breakable, and the self-doubt creeps in fast. I second-guessed myself constantly, running on no sleep after the birth and then the relentless round of night feeds. For the first stretch I more or less survived on coffee and sugar, convinced I was making it up as I went along.

So I've pulled together a few tips for that first week. Nothing can truly prepare you for how it feels to meet your baby, but these practical bits and pieces should help things run a little more smoothly.

Get skin to skin

Drink in those first cuddles with plenty of skin-to-skin contact. It helps the two of you bond, settles you both, keeps your baby's temperature steady, and gives feeding a gentle nudge in the right direction. Don't rush past it — these are the moments you'll replay for years.



Batch-cook before the big day

In the run-up to your due date, cook and freeze as much as you possibly can, because hot meals are the last thing you'll have the energy to make. And don't be shy about putting visitors to work — let them bring the snacks and stick the kettle on while they're at it.

Pack a grab basket

I assembled a little basket of essentials and carted it around the house with me, ready for the moment a feeding or napping baby pinned me to the sofa.

Mine held my phone and charger, lip balm, a snack, a book, nipple cream, a pack of wipes, and a muslin — and it earned its keep over and over. A big glass of water is non-negotiable, and don't you dare forget the remote.

Set up a diaper station

Before the baby arrives, create a spot with everything you need within arm's reach. It's a small thing that saves enormous amounts of time, especially at 3am.

Keep baskets topped up with newborn diapers, barrier cream, and gentle wipes. I used WaterWipes with both girls — they're almost entirely water with a drop of fruit extract, which felt kind on delicate newborn skin.

Be ready for the night shift

Those first nights, you'll be awake far more than asleep, so set yourself up before bed. If you're bottle-feeding, sterilize everything in advance and pre-measure the formula into pots so it's ready to go.

Keep water by the bed and find whatever keeps you upright at silly o'clock — we worked our way through an alarming amount of telly during those small-hours feeds. Funnily enough, I look back on those quiet streaming-and-feeding sessions almost fondly now.

Expect the highs and lows

Your hormones and emotions will be doing somersaults that first week, and that's entirely normal. One minute you're floating, the next you're in tears for no clear reason — day three in particular catches a lot of people off guard.

I sobbed buckets both times, then felt guilty for it, sure I was meant to be nothing but happy (I was, deep down). It's a tender time, so go easy on yourself.

Ask for help

There's no shame whatsoever in leaning on friends and family, and your midwives will be checking in too.

I struggled with feeding, so mine visited daily, and they were wonderful. Tell them honestly how you're feeling — that's exactly what they're there for.

Above all, slow down and soak it up

The first week is surreal, exhausting, overwhelming — and one of the best of your life. Take it slowly, drop the pressure you're putting on yourself, and savor every last second of your brand-new baby.



Helen Copson



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Helping Your Baby Sleep: A Calm, Current Guide

Getting a baby to sleep can feel like the hardest part of early parenting. Newborns wake often, fight sleep, and seem determined to be wide awake exactly when you're longing for a break from the feeds, the changes and the dishes.

The good news: while you can't force a baby to sleep, you can build the conditions that help sleep come more easily — and do it safely. Here's an up-to-date guide.

Safe sleep comes first

Before any routine or method, the sleep environment matters most. Current guidance from pediatric organizations is remarkably consistent, and worth following for the whole first year:

Always place your baby on their back for every sleep, day and night.

Use a firm, flat surface — a cot, crib or bassinet with a well-fitting sheet, never an incline.

Keep the sleep space bare: no pillows, duvets, bumpers or soft toys — and skip weighted swaddles and sleeping bags, which are no longer recommended.

Share a room, not a bed, for at least the first six months; it's linked to a lower risk of sudden infant death.

Avoid overheating — roughly one more layer than you're wearing is plenty.

If your baby drifts off in a car seat, swing or bouncer, move them to a flat surface as soon as you safely can.

Build a wind-down routine

Babies feel calmer when they know what's coming. A short, predictable wind-down — the same steps in the same order each night — signals that sleep is near, and you can begin gently from the early weeks.

Keep it simple: a warm bath, into pajamas or a baby sleeping bag, dimmed lights, a quiet feed, a song or short story, then down to sleep. Many babies find a bath soothing. Save a favorite calm activity for last, in the room where they'll sleep, so the space feels familiar and reassuring. Babies who follow the same wind-down each night tend to settle faster and wake less, so the real magic is in repeating it — not in the exact steps you choose.

Gentle white noise or a fan can be a useful cue too, though it's best treated as comfort rather than a sleep aid: keep it soft and not too close to your baby's head.

If they wake in the night, keep things as they were at bedtime — low light, quiet voices, minimal fuss — so the message stays clear: this is still sleep time.



Set a day-and-night rhythm

Newborns aren't born knowing day from night. You can help by keeping daytime bright and lively, with active play and normal household noise, and evenings calm, dim and hushed. Over the early months, that contrast helps their body clock settle. It's also worth knowing that frequent waking is completely normal in the early weeks — many newborns stir every two to three hours to feed. That can be exhausting, but it's expected, and it eases as they grow.

Be patient — and kind to yourself

Learning to sleep is a skill, and progress is rarely a straight line. Teething, growth spurts, illness and new milestones can all knock a settled sleeper off course — that's normal, not failure. Stay flexible, follow your baby's cues, and try not to compare your nights to anyone else's.

And look after yourself in the thick of it. Sleep deprivation is hard on anybody, so take rest where you can, share the night shifts where possible, and don't hesitate to ask your nurse, doctor or pediatrician for advice tailored to your baby. You know your little one best — and you're doing better than you think.

A word on sleep training



Once a baby is developmentally ready — often around four to six months, when night feeds become less essential — some parents choose a more structured approach to night wakings. There's no single "right" method, and plenty of families never formally sleep-train at all. What matters most is picking something that sits comfortably with you and staying consistent. The main approaches:

1. The Cry It Out Method

This sleep training method is also known as extinction or full extinction. In this method, parents tuck their babies into bed, cuddle with them, leave the room and then completely shut themselves out if they cry. They do not respond. Eventually, the baby grows tired of crying and goes back to sleep. This method is quite controversial, albeit influential.

2. The Check And Console Method

If you're uncomfortable with the Cry It Out Method, this one's for you. Parents will come in every time their little one cries and soothe them for the first few nights. But, after this, you can gradually expand the time you let the child cry before reentering the room, eventually reaching a point where the baby self-soothes.

3. The Fading Method

This method encourages parents to stay in their child's room until they fall asleep. But instead of leaving the room, they sit in a chair next to the crib for a while. When the baby wakes up and cries in the middle of the night, the parent sits in the chair and gives slight assurances (maintaining physical distance). They move the chair further and further away every few nights until they're out of the room.

4. The "No Tears" Method

This method focuses on accomplishing sleep training without any crying. It relies on a steady sleep schedule. This routine ought to follow the same pattern of activities every night, done similarly so that the baby can anticipate what this pattern means. This method takes a long time and often leaves parents with sleep deprivation.

Whatever you choose, give it a couple of weeks before deciding whether it's working. Visit www.twooky.com to read more parenting focused articles.





Raising a Confident Learner:

How to Help Your Child Believe in Themselves

Ask most parents what they want for their child at school and "good grades" is rarely the first answer. What they really want is a child who feels capable — one who'll tackle a tricky problem instead of shutting down, who isn't crushed by a mistake, and who believes that effort actually gets them somewhere. The good news is that confidence in learning isn't something children are simply born with or without. It's built, day by day, often in the smallest moments at home. Here's how you can help.

Praise the effort, not the brains

It's tempting to tell a child they're "so clever" or "a natural" — but research into how children learn suggests this can quietly backfire. A child praised for being smart can start to believe success should come easily, and may avoid anything hard in case they're "found out." Instead, praise the things they control: the effort, the strategy, the sticking with it. "I love how you kept going when that got difficult" tells your child that struggle is normal and worthwhile, not a sign they're not good enough.

Make mistakes safe

Few things hold a child back more than the fear of getting it wrong. If a wrong answer is met with a sigh or a correction, children learn to play it safe and stop taking risks — which is the opposite of learning. Try treating mistakes as useful information rather than failures. Talk openly about your own slip-ups and what they taught you. When a child sees that errors are just part of the process, they become far braver about having a go, and bravery is where real progress lives.

Turn homework from battle to routine

The nightly homework standoff is one of the most common flashpoints in family life, and it rarely improves with nagging. What helps is rhythm. A consistent time and a calm, clutter-free spot — even just a cleared corner of the kitchen table — signals to the brain that it's time to focus. Keep sessions short and realistic for your child's age; little and often beats a marathon. And resist the urge to hover or take over. Your job isn't to do the work or check every answer, but to be nearby, encouraging, and ready to help if they're truly stuck.





Let them be a bit independent

It's hard to watch a child wrestle with something you could solve in seconds, but stepping in too quickly robs them of the satisfaction — and the skill — of working it out themselves. When they ask for help, try answering with a question instead: "What do you think the first step might be?" or "Where did it start to feel tricky?" You're teaching them to think, not just to get the answer. Over time, that independence becomes the quiet confidence that carries them through bigger challenges.

Protect their downtime

In a busy, achievement-focused world, it's easy to fill every hour with something improving. But children learn better when they're rested, and downtime isn't wasted time — it's when the brain consolidates everything it's taken in. Unstructured play, fresh air, hobbies and plain boredom all have their place. A child who's burnt out can't absorb much, however good the support around them. Balance, not busyness, is what keeps a young learner motivated for the long haul.

The bottom line

Confidence and a love of learning are the real foundations beneath every good report and every passed exam. They come not from pressure or praise for being clever, but from feeling safe to try, supported when things are hard, and trusted to have a go. Celebrate the effort, make room for mistakes, keep the pressure gentle and the curiosity alive — and you'll be raising not just a better student, but a child who genuinely believes in what they can do.

And when a child believes in themselves, there's very little they can't learn.

Keep a healthy view of exams

Tests and exams are a fact of school life, but the pressure around them does children no favors. A child who's terrified of an exam rarely performs at their best. You can take the temperature down by talking about exams as a chance to show what they know rather than a verdict on their worth. Help them prepare steadily rather than cramming, make sure they're sleeping and eating well in the run-up, and remind them that one result never defines them. Calm preparation beats last-minute panic every single time.

Read, talk and stay curious together

Some of the most powerful learning happens away from the desk entirely. Reading together, chatting about the world, asking each other questions, watching a documentary, cooking and measuring as you go — all of it builds vocabulary, reasoning and, above all, curiosity. Children who see the adults around them genuinely interested in learning tend to catch the bug themselves. You don't need to be an expert in anything; you just need to be curious alongside them.

visit www.twooky.com for more articles.





Raising a Happy Eater



If family mealtimes sometimes feel like a stand-off — you with the broccoli, your child with their arms folded — you're in very good company. The encouraging news is that raising a child who enjoys good food has far less to do with willpower (yours or theirs) and far more to do with the gentle habits you build around the table. Here are some fresh, practical ideas to take the pressure off and make eating something everyone can enjoy.

Know whose job is whose

Feeding specialists describe a simple "division of responsibility" that takes a surprising amount of stress out of mealtimes. Your job is to decide what food is offered, when, and where. Your child's job is to decide whether they eat, and how much. That's it. When you trust them with their side of the bargain, you can stop being the food police — no negotiating, no aeroplane spoons, no clearing-the-plate battles. Children are remarkably good at regulating their own appetite when we let them.

Fussiness is normal — not a fault

If your toddler suddenly rejects foods they happily ate last month, relax: this is a recognised developmental stage, not bad behaviour. Wariness of new foods tends to peak in the toddler and preschool years, and it's thought to be a built-in protective instinct from our ancestors. It passes. Treating it as a phase rather than a problem keeps the table calm and saves your sanity.

The power of trying again

Here's a fact worth pinning to the fridge: it can take a child 8 to 15 tastes of a new food before they accept it — yet most parents give up after only three to five. So that snubbed pepper isn't a failure; it's try number two. Keep offering small amounts alongside familiar favorites, with zero pressure to eat. And "a taste" counts loosely: letting a wary child touch, sniff, lick, or simply have a new food sitting on their plate all help it become familiar over time. Familiarity does the work that nagging never will.

Drop the bribes

It's tempting to say "two more bites and you can have dessert," but rewarding eating tends to backfire. It quietly tells children that vegetables are the price they pay for the real treat — making the treat more tempting and the veg less. Offer everything matter-of-factly, treats included, and let the drama fall away.

Make them part of it

Children are far more likely to eat food they've had a hand in. Let them push the cart and pick a new fruit, wash the veg, tear the salad, stir the bowl, or grow a pot of cherry tomatoes on the windowsill. A child who helped make dinner has already started to like it. Even a quick "which color shall we add tonight?" turns eating into something they own rather than something done to them.



You're the menu they copy

Long before they listen to advice, children copy what they see. If they watch you enjoying a varied plate — and eating together when schedules allow — they absorb the message that this is simply what food looks like. You don't have to be perfect; you just have to be seen genuinely enjoying the good stuff.

Keep drinks simple

When it comes to what's in the cup, the everyday choices are easy: water and milk. Sugary drinks and even fruit juice are best kept as occasional extras rather than mealtime staples — they fill little tummies with sweetness and crowd out hunger for food. A water bottle within reach does more good than any clever beverage on the supermarket shelf.



Play the long game

Some days your child will eat beautifully; other days they'll live on air and enthusiasm. That's normal — appetite naturally swings from meal to meal and day to day. What shapes a healthy eater isn't any single dinner but the relaxed, repeated experience of good food offered without a fight. Tastes change, palates widen, and the fussy three-year-old often becomes the adventurous ten-year-old. Try not to keep score meal by meal; it's the whole week, and the whole childhood, that counts.

So serve the rainbow, sit down together when you can, and let the rest go. A happy, unhurried table is the best recipe of all — and you're already doing better than you think.





How Being a Single Parent Helped Me Build My Dream Job

Do you remember those careers tests they made you sit at school? A hundred-odd questions about whether you preferred the great outdoors or a calculator, and at the end a computer confidently announced what you were destined to become. Tick "yes" to "do you like animals?" and you could all but guarantee it would crown you a future dog groomer. Half my class came out as dog groomers.

I sat mine in 1992, aged 14, genuinely convinced the machine was about to hand me a crystal-clear picture of my future. I answered every question with great care, then waited as the printer wheezed its verdict into life. "Your ideal career is an insurance underwriter," it declared, rather pleased with itself.

An insurance underwriter? I had no idea what one even was — only that it didn't sound like much fun. In fairness to the test, the job I do today simply didn't exist back then. I wouldn't even type my first Google search until 1999, and "blogger" wasn't yet a word anyone used, let alone a way to pay the bills.

Yet here I am, more than thirty years later, earning a living by writing a blog and posting photos on Instagram. Part of me is still glancing over my shoulder, half-expecting someone to declare it isn't a "proper" job — but in the meantime, I adore the life I've built for myself and my family.

Single parents tend to get a rough write-up, and most of it is unfair or flat-out wrong. For me, raising my daughter alone sharpened my determination and gave me a focus I'm not sure I'd have found otherwise. It forced me to work out exactly what mattered, at work and at home — and I'm enormously proud of where that's led.

So to every single parent out there feeling the squeeze, wondering whether to change tack or maybe start something of your own: you have everything you need to become whoever you want to be. Here's why.

You're hard-working

This one barely needs saying. Just look at all you already do, single-handedly — running a home, raising your kids, holding the whole show together. Pour even a fraction of that drive and stamina into a project of your own, and you'll be unstoppable.

You know your priorities

For me, the whole point of going self-employed was flexibility. As a single parent, you're the one who has to show up — for the poorly child, the dentist's appointment, the school assembly, all of it.

You understand in your bones that being there for your family comes first, and that clarity is worth its weight in gold. When I handed in my notice to go freelance, I held tight to a picture of the flexible life I wanted and how much it would mean to all of us.

You're creative

Don't sell this short. You might not always feel inventive, but think of every wet afternoon you've filled with games, every meal cooked while keeping small people entertained, the endless rounds of make-believe and homework wrangling.

You're resourceful, adaptable, quick on your feet — and those are exactly the qualities that build a career from scratch.

You're resilient

You've weathered some genuinely hard times, and yet here you are: getting through each day and still managing to see the good in people. Single parents are extraordinarily tough — we have no choice — and that resilience transfers to everything else you turn your hand to.

When I started out writing for money, the rejections came thick and fast. It would have been the easiest thing in the world to pack it in, but honestly, the thought never crossed my mind.

It's now well over a decade since I left my job to work for myself, and I'm happier with that decision than ever. I don't think it's any accident that I took the leap less than a year after separating from my daughter's dad — single parenthood handed me a sense of purpose and a hunger to succeed that nothing else ever has.

Single parents may get a bad press, but it falls to us to shatter those tired stereotypes and show the world just how strong we really are.



Jo Middleton



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What I Wish I'd Known About Grandparents

Forty-one. That's how old I was when Joey made me a grandmother. The math is simple enough: I had my first daughter at 17, she had Joey at 23, and suddenly I was a grandparent who still didn't quite feel like a grown-up. I'd barely got used to the idea of being a mom. Because it all happened so young for me, the frustrations of early parenthood are still vivid — and a lot of that frustration, I'm sorry to say, was aimed squarely at my own mom.

I was certain she was undermining me, ignoring how I wanted to raise my kids, doing her own thing on purpose. Looking back, I was stretched thin and, in all honesty, a bit immature. I simply didn't grasp what a grandparent is for — understandable, perhaps, when I was still half a kid myself.

A quarter-century of parenting later, and now on the other side of it as a grandparent, I've come to see that the bond between a child and their grandparent is its own distinct thing. Handled with a little patience and grace on both sides, it can be a genuine joy. Here's what I've worked out from living it twice over.



Here are four things I've learned as a parent and a grandparent:

1 Grandparents WANT to help

I used to agonize for hours over asking my mom to babysit, convinced it was an imposition and that she'd find it tiring or tedious.

What I didn't realize is how different it feels from her side. As a grandparent, you get the joy without the constant responsibility, which turns it from a burden into a pleasure.

That said, boundaries still matter. I work full time, and a long day with a toddler can be exhausting, so it's important to have an honest conversation upfront — and make it clear that “no” is always okay. Help only stays generous when it isn't assumed.

3 Grandparents know what they're doing

Spare a thought for the grandparent nervously checking their hold on the baby or worrying about lunch vegetables. They've raised children to adulthood too.

New parents often feel they know best, but a little credit goes a long way.

Yes, things have changed, but the basics — feeding, safety, and love — haven't.

Grandparents should hold a unique and uncomplicated place in your child's heart. While ideally, grandparents will always back you up and respect your opinions on the things that matter, I'm saying that sometimes it's okay to let the little things slide. Embrace the special place that grandparents have in your family and enjoy it.

2 Grandparents WILL dish out treats

There was a time my mom's habits drove me mad — finishing my daughters' carrots so they could have dessert, or handing out sweets when I wasn't looking. I realize now it was pointless to worry; spoiling grandchildren is part of the job.

Think back to your own grandparents' house — mine always had Mini Milks in the freezer, and that's what I remember most.

A few treats won't do harm, and what lasts isn't the sugar, but the warmth.

4 Grandparents are on your side

I know it can feel like meddling, but most of it comes from love. I do it myself now too — a gentle nudge or offer, even if it risks sounding like a nagging granny, because no parent can do everything.

So when I say, “Shall I take Joey to get his feet measured?”, I don't mean you've fallen short — I mean I see you're juggling and want to help. Try, when something stings, to take the kinder meaning; it's usually the true one.

Grandparents should have a warm place in a child's life. Let go of the small stuff and make space for what they bring while you can.



Jo Middleton

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Best Friends in the Making: *Bringing Toddlers and Pets Together*

Somewhere along the way, a myth took hold: that a new baby and the family pet can't safely share a home, and that one of them has to go. I've heard it from friends more times than I can count — "you'll have to find the dog a new family now." It's the sort of advice that sounds responsible and is almost always wrong.

Take Didi, our Golden Retriever. She came to us from a neighbor who couldn't keep her, and far from being a complication, she became one of the best things to happen to our kids. Sunny, patient, endlessly sociable — she folded into family life as though she'd always been part of it.

Here's the truth most worriers miss: with a bit of patience and a plan, toddlers and pets are far easier to manage together than you'd think. Young children seem almost wired to bond with animals — often more readily than adults do — and that natural warmth gives you a real head start. The trick is simply to guide the friendship rather than leave it to chance.

If you're welcoming an animal home for the first time, these are the steps I'd swear by.



Be the supervisor, every time

In the early days, treat yourself as the referee who never leaves the pitch. Stay close, watch each interaction, and step in before things tip over. Your presence protects the pet from an over-enthusiastic toddler and protects your child from an animal that feels crowded or startled.

Keep this going until you're sure your child knows how to behave around the pet — and even then, hold the line on the cardinal rule: small children and animals are never left alone together. Both are gloriously unpredictable, and that's precisely why.

Set the emotional thermostat

Calm is contagious, and so is panic. When the pet does something that makes your toddler jump — or your toddler does something that makes the pet flinch — your reaction is the one everyone in the room copies. Gasp and lunge, and you've just taught your child that the animal is a threat. Stay relaxed, and you've shown them there's nothing to fear.

Give the whole arrangement time to settle, too. The first few weeks are an adjustment for all three of you, and steadiness from you is what smooths the edges.

Soft hands win

Animals largely give back what they're given. A pet handled gently tends to stay gentle; one that's grabbed and squeezed learns to brace for trouble. So make "soft hands" a lesson, not an afterthought.

My favorite method is hands-on, literally. I sit with my three-year-old and have her hold my fingers so I can feel how hard she's gripping and ease it down.

Whatever she practices on me is almost exactly what Didi will get a moment later — so it's worth getting that touch calibrated first.

Rules that respect everyone

A few clear, consistent boundaries do wonders. In our house, Didi is strictly off-limits when she's sleeping or eating — no surprises, no poking. We also keep set windows for play each day and set times to leave her be.

Keeping that rhythm the same day after day does double duty: it teaches your toddler what's allowed, and it quietly plants a bigger idea — that other living things have needs, and our behavior affects them.

Teach them to read the signals

The deepest lesson here is empathy. Pets, like people, have good days and grumpy ones, and a toddler can learn — with help — to tell the difference between an animal asking for attention and one asking for space.

Show them the cues: a wagging, wiggly approach versus ears pinned back, a turned head, a low rumble. When Didi isn't in the mood, the kids know to back off and give her room, and they're genuinely proud of getting it right.

Why it's worth it

Introducing a child and a pet is really an exercise in helping two very different creatures understand one another — and the payoff is huge. A pet is one of the first and best teachers a child will have: of responsibility, of gentleness, of the simple fact that what we do lands on someone else.

Give them the chance and the guidance, and what starts as a cautious first sniff becomes one of the great friendships of childhood. Didi proved that to us every single day.



Didi - Aged 9



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Potty Training:

Gentle Steps, Lasting Success



Few milestones loom quite as large in a parent's mind as potty training. It can feel like a test you're somehow expected to pass on a schedule — and the moment you mention it, everyone from your neighbor to the internet has a strong opinion. So let's take the pressure off. Potty training isn't a race, and there's no prize for finishing first. The children who get there most happily are almost always the ones who were allowed to go at their own pace, with plenty of warmth and very little fuss. Here's our gentle, tried-and-tested approach.

Watch for readiness

The single biggest thing that makes potty training easier is starting when your child is genuinely ready, rather than when the calendar says they should be. Readiness shows up in small ways: staying dry for longer stretches, taking an interest in the toilet or in what you're doing in there, or telling you when they need changing. Some children show these signs around their second birthday, others closer to three, and a few later still — all of it is perfectly normal. If the signs aren't there yet, there's no need to worry or push. A child who isn't ready will only find the whole thing confusing and stressful, and so will you. Wait a little, keep an eye out, and you'll know when the time is right.

Praise the effort, not just the result

When you do begin, how you respond matters enormously. It's natural to celebrate the big wins, but in the early days the effort is the real achievement — and that's what deserves the praise. "You sat on the potty all by yourself — well done!" is often far more encouraging than waiting to cheer only when something actually happens. Why? Because it tells your child that trying is what counts. It keeps the potty a positive, low-stakes place rather than somewhere they feel they have to "perform." Confidence builds from those small, praised moments, and confidence is what carries a child through.

Don't rush — and don't panic about regression

Here's the part we most want parents to hear: setbacks are completely normal. Even children who seemed to have it cracked will have off days, accidents and full-blown wobbles, often triggered by something else going on — a new sibling, starting nursery, a poorly tummy, or simply being tired. This is not a sign that anything has gone wrong, and it's certainly not a reason to scold.

If things start to feel frustrating for either of you, it's absolutely fine to ease off and try again in a few weeks. Keeping it light and positive will always get you further than pressure ever could. Accidents are part of the journey, not a failure — a calm "never mind, let's pop you in some clean pants" teaches your child far more than any telling-off.

Top tip from our team

Read potty-themed storybooks together. Sharing a few favorite books about using the potty is one of the simplest, most effective things you can do. It normalises the whole process, gives your child the words to talk about it, and quietly reduces any anxiety — all while you're snuggled up together. By the time the real thing comes along, it already feels familiar and friendly rather than strange and a bit scary.



A few small things that help along the way

Beyond those three pillars, a handful of practical touches can smooth the path. Let your child help choose their own potty or some "big kid" pants — that little bit of ownership goes a long way. Dress them in clothes that are easy to pull up and down, so a sudden dash doesn't end in tears. Keep the potty somewhere accessible and familiar, and build in regular, relaxed opportunities to sit on it, such as before bath time. And try to stay consistent between home and any nursery or childminder, so your child gets the same gentle, encouraging message wherever they are.

The bottom line

Potty training goes most smoothly when it's treated not as a deadline to hit but as a stage your child grows into, with you cheering them on. Watch for the signs that they're ready, praise the effort rather than fixating on results, and never be afraid to slow down if it all feels like too much. Throw in a few well-loved storybooks and a generous helping of patience, and you'll get there — every child does, in the end, in their own time.

Gentle steps really do lead to lasting success. Trust your child, trust the process, and try to enjoy this funny, messy little chapter while it lasts.

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Discipline Without the Drama: A Calmer Way to Raise Kids

Most of us were raised on a simple equation: step out of line, face the consequence. A sharp word, a smack, the threat of one — and the behavior stopped, at least on the surface. Try the same approach with a child in 2026 and you'll likely meet a slammed door, a defiant glare, and a relationship that feels a little colder afterwards. Today's kids are informed, articulate, and unafraid to argue back. The old playbook simply doesn't land the way it used to. on a simple equation: step out of line, face the consequence. A sharp word, a smack, the threat of one — and the behavior stopped, at least on the surface. Try the same approach with a child in 2026 and you'll likely meet a slammed door, a defiant glare, and a relationship that feels a little colder afterwards. Today's kids are informed, articulate, and unafraid to argue back. The old playbook simply doesn't land the way it used to.

What it leaves behind, in too many homes, is a tug-of-war that exhausts everyone and quietly erodes the bond between parent and child. So here's the question worth sitting with: is it possible to raise a well-behaved kid without turning every day into a standoff?

A shift in what discipline means

You've probably come across "positive parenting" by now — and maybe rolled your eyes at the version of it that looks like negotiating with a four-year-old while the dinner goes cold. That caricature has put a lot of parents off. But the real thing is sturdier than that, and it rests on a few clear commitments.

You manage your own temperature first, because a parent who can't stay calm can't help a child who's lost it. You guard the relationship, because connection — not fear — is what actually makes a child want to listen. And you keep your love off the table as a bargaining chip: no silent treatment, no withdrawing affection, no making a child earn back your warmth.

The goal isn't to dodge discipline. It's to swap fear for understanding, so a child does the right thing because they get why it matters — not because someone's watching. Get that right and good behavior stops being something you have to police. It travels with them: to school, to a friend's house, into the adults they'll become.

The thinking behind it is straightforward. Punishment tends to leave a child feeling smaller, frays the connection you rely on, and teaches nothing about handling big feelings. Stack those up and behavior usually deteriorates while the battles multiply.

Connection does the heavy lifting

Picture the teacher you'd have walked over hot coals for. You behaved in their class not because you feared them, but because you didn't want to let them down. That's the engine you're building at home. Punishment stalls it, because it casts you as the opponent — and kids don't go out of their way to please an opponent.

So when you hear "you can't make me" or "I don't even care," resist the urge to escalate. Read it as a flat battery in the relationship. Reconnect first; the cooperation tends to follow once the child feels you're on their side again.



The words you choose matter

Children today expect to be spoken to with respect, and shame is the fastest way to lose them. Raise your voice and their guard goes straight up — they feel attacked, so they tune you out. Say the same thing calmly and firmly, with warmth underneath it, and you've got a chance of being heard.

That means retiring the cutting lines: "your room's a disgrace," "are you actually deaf?" They feel like small wounds in the moment and they accumulate into something a child starts to believe about themselves. And a kid who feels rotten inside usually finds a way to share that feeling with everyone nearby.

Boundaries are the whole point

Here's what the critics miss: kids feel safest when the edges are clearly marked. Decide on the rules and hold them without wobbling. Phones go away at the table. Bedtime is bedtime. We speak kindly to each other, and we tell the truth. Your child will test every one of these — that's their job — and your calm consistency is the answer. When a limit gets pushed, crouch down to their eye level and try: "I can see you really want to keep going, and stopping is hard — and it's time for bed now." Or: "I think you were worried about telling me what happened. In this house, we can always be honest with each other." You acknowledge the feeling and hold the line in the same breath. Firm and kind aren't opposites.

Where it all leads

Catch your kids getting it right and let them know — genuine praise tends to grow the behavior you want far better than chasing the things that went wrong. And if you ever reach for a time-out, treat it as a quiet reset for whoever needs to cool down, never as a punishment or a way to shut a child out.

Underneath all of it sits one quiet truth: a child learns to treat themselves the way you treat them. Show them what calm, limits, and self-control look like, and that's exactly what they'll carry forward — into their own lives, and one day into their own homes.

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Childcare Is More Than a Seat:

What Families Deserve in Uncertain Times

By Dr. Charity Holland, aka Dr. MommyC Founder & CEO,
The Family Place Early Enrichment Academy



There is a conversation happening around kitchen tables, in employee break rooms, and during hurried morning drop-offs:

“What are we going to do about childcare?”

For some families, the concern is the changing landscape of CCDF and assistance programs. For others, it is rising tuition, long waitlists, reduced availability, or watching another childcare program close its doors.

Even families who can comfortably afford care are asking another important question:

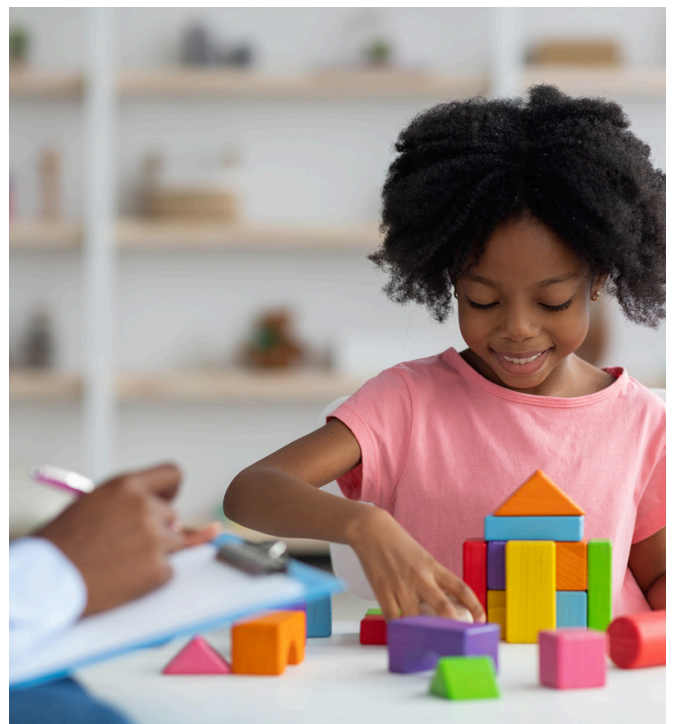
Is my child simply being watched—or are they truly known?

After nearly two decades in early childhood education, I believe we are facing more than a childcare shortage. We are facing a **childcare identity crisis**.

Somewhere between funding formulas, staffing shortages, regulations, tuition increases and enrollment numbers are little people who still need someone to notice that they learned to zip their coat today.

They need someone who recognizes that their challenging behavior may actually be communication. They need teachers who understand that play is learning. And they need parents and educators who see each other as partners rather than people standing on opposite sides of a counter.

That is what community-based childcare must fight to preserve.



At **The Family Place Early Enrichment Academy**, we have spent years building around one simple belief: *A family that plays together stays together.*

Being independent means we may never be the biggest name on the sign. But it allows us to remember the names **inside the building.**

We can know the child who needs an extra hug at drop-off. We can celebrate the parent who finally got the promotion. We can recognize developmental changes, have difficult conversations when necessary, laugh together, learn together and sometimes even cry together.

That is community.

And right now, community matters.

Indiana's childcare challenges cannot be solved by providers alone. Parents cannot carry them alone. Employers cannot solve them alone. Government funding alone will not fix every problem.

We need each other.



Parents should ask questions. Providers should communicate honestly. Communities should support quality local programs. Employers should recognize childcare as part of workforce stability. And those of us entrusted with children must remember that regardless of what is happening financially or politically, **quality cannot become the casualty.**

Whether your family is struggling right now or thriving, receiving assistance or paying privately, raising your first baby or your fourth, you deserve childcare where you feel seen.

More importantly, your child deserves to be known.

At The Family Place, we aren't trying to become the biggest childcare company in Indiana.

We are working every day to remain something increasingly valuable:

A place where families still feel like family.



Dr. Charity Holland, affectionately known as Dr. MommyC, is an early childhood educator, author, speaker, mother and founder of The Family Place Early Enrichment Academy, serving families in Hamilton County.



Dr. Charity Holland

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More Than Just Childcare: How the Right Club Helps Your Child Thrive

By Nick and Jenna Williams



Between us, we've spent a good chunk of our working lives running sports clubs and before- and after-school clubs — the early starts, the muddy knees, the wet-play improvising, and the thousands of children who've come through our doors over the years. People sometimes assume these clubs are simply somewhere to park the kids while parents work. We're here to gently push back on that, because what we've watched happen in those church halls and playgrounds is so much bigger than supervision. The right club can genuinely shape a child.

So whether you're weighing up a Saturday football session, a breakfast club to cover the school run, or an after-school place to bridge the gap until pick-up, here's what we've learned — from the other side of the registration desk.

Clubs build far more than skills

Yes, a sports club teaches your child to kick, catch, swim or sprint. But the real magic is what comes alongside it. We've seen shy four-year-olds who wouldn't say boo become the first to volunteer for a team relay. We've watched children learn to lose a game without falling apart, to wait their turn, to cheer a teammate, and to dust themselves off and try again. Confidence, resilience, teamwork, simple physical joy — those are the things that quietly stick, long after they've forgotten the score.

The same is true of before- and after-school clubs. A good one isn't a holding pen; it's a place where children make friends across year groups, get help with homework, burn off energy before they sit down to learn, and have an adult who genuinely knows them and asks how their day was.

Why wraparound care matters for the whole family

We won't pretend the practical side doesn't count, because for working parents it's everything. A breakfast or after-school club can be the difference between a frantic, guilt-laden morning and one that actually works.

But the bit parents often don't expect is how much their children benefit too. Routine is reassuring for kids. Arriving somewhere familiar, with familiar faces and a bit of breakfast and a kickabout before the bell, sets many children up far better for the school day than a rushed dash through the gates.

How to choose the right one

Not all clubs are equal, so it pays to look beyond the timetable. A few things we'd always check:

The staff and the ratios. Ask how many adults there are per child, what qualifications and first-aid training they hold, and — crucially — what their safeguarding and DBS-check policies are. Any reputable club will be happy to talk you through this; if they're cagey, that tells you something.

The ethos. For younger children especially, fun has to come before silverware. Ask how they handle the less confident or less sporty child. The best coaches we know make every kid feel like they belong, not just the naturals.

The practical stuff. Pick-up and drop-off times, what your child needs to bring, how they handle allergies and medication, and how they'll contact you if something's wrong. Watch a session if you can, or ask other parents at the school gate — word of mouth is gold.



Don't over-schedule

One word of caution from years of watching exhausted little faces: more isn't always better. It's tempting to fill every afternoon with a different activity, but children need downtime, unstructured play and the odd lazy evening as much as they need clubs. Let them try a few things, follow what genuinely lights them up, and don't be afraid to drop the thing they've gone off.

The goal isn't a packed calendar — it's a happy, well-rounded child who's discovered something they love.



Easing a nervous child in

If your child is anxious about starting, you're far from alone — it's one of the most common things parents ask us about. A few things that really help: visit beforehand if you can, so the place isn't a total unknown; talk it up without overselling; and resist the urge to linger at drop-off. A quick, confident goodbye is almost always kinder than a drawn-out one, however hard it feels. Nine times out of ten, the tears stop within minutes of you leaving, and we're always happy to text a reassuring update.

Give it more than one go, too. First sessions are rarely a fair test. Most children need three or four visits before a new club starts to feel like theirs.

The bottom line

The right club gives your child a place to grow that's a little bit theirs — away from home, away from the classroom, where they can test themselves, make friends and find out what they're capable of.

As parents ourselves, as well as the people running the sessions, we can tell you the children who flourish aren't necessarily the most talented. They're the ones who feel safe, encouraged and free to have a go.

So choose carefully, ask plenty of questions, and then let them get stuck in. You might be surprised by who your child becomes when they think no one's watching.



Nick & Jenna Williams

 @Nick Williams



First day of school:

The end of an era and the start of an adventure

What a milestone the first day of school is. It feels like the end of an era and the start of a brand-new adventure. Playgrounds across the country will be filled with laughter, tears, excitement, nerves, and anticipation from parents and children alike. As a mom who has waved off two very different little girls on their first day, I understand the conflicting emotions it invokes. Here are a few tips to prepare you both for the first day.

You matter

Day one of school is all about the beautiful child you have raised. It's their big day, their moment in the spotlight, and the first step on their journey to independence.

But it's also a huge moment for you. Whether your son or daughter has been at daycare full time or home with you since day one, sending them to school is a significant change. Be kind to yourself.

Take some time after dropping them off to enjoy a hot drink and work through your emotions.

Worrying about them is normal and healthy. One day, dropping them off at school will be the norm. Until then, give yourself a break.

Be Positive

However you feel deep down, it's essential to be positive in front of your child. Of course, they should know that you'll miss them. But they don't need to know that mommy will be sad at home without them. These little people are sponges and mirrors, soaking up all our emotions and reflecting them when we least expect it.

Even the most anxious child will benefit from hearing about the wonderful aspects of school life. I told my girls all about the friend I started school with who remains one of my favorite people.

Despite living on opposite sides of the world, we stay in touch regularly and meet up when we can. My girls still ask after her when they seek reassurance about enduring friendships.

Recognize the opportunity for you both

Accepting your own emotions comes with the headspace to realize the wonderful things that can come from your child starting school. Their first step towards independence. Learning to read and write, expanding their world, and meeting new people. As parents, our worlds become a little broader too.

Friendship circles naturally shrink as we get older, and making friends is tough. But your little person still has the childlike confidence to stroll over to a friendly-looking peer and ask them to be best friends. They're pretty good judges of character too. Inevitably you'll get chatting to the parents, and your social group will expand alongside theirs.

Remember that they will always need you

When my eldest started school, my biggest fear was that the day she wouldn't need me was creeping up on me. She was such an independent little soul anyway. Watching her walk off in her line, chatting to new friends without glancing back at me, was heartbreaking. But five years on, I can look back fondly on that day. It was the beginning of her strong, fierce, funny character developing. Watching her grow and change has been a pleasure, and of course, she still needs me, albeit in different ways.

Prepare for restraint collapse

After-school restraint collapse is the technical term for the tears and tantrums when children return to their place of safety. They've done as they were told, concentrated on learning, and tried to control their emotions all day long. Once home to you, they feel safe to open up. It's not a sign that they've had a bad day or are not coping with school. After-school restraint collapse is another sign that they need you, love you, and feel safest when you're there. Because even in the face of this vast, exciting change, being with their family will always be their safety net.

Bring a comforting object

Have your child bring a little reminder of home to ease his separation anxiety. If he doesn't have a favorite doll or blankie, even a beloved book or a sippy cup filled with his favorite drink can do the trick. Comfort objects may seem like small stuff to you, but they can provide a real sense of security to kids in an unfamiliar environment.

Create a goodbye ritual

Create a goodbye ritual. A goodbye routine provides comfort and familiarity, so your child knows what's to come. This could be anything you and your child decide on, such as a special hug or handshake followed by a "See you later, alligator!" Once you've said your goodbyes, it's best to skedaddle so that your child doesn't become preoccupied with your presence.

A long farewell scene might only reinforce a child's sense that preschool is a bad place.



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Childcare:

Knowing Your Options

Choosing a childcare provider can be an incredibly daunting task as a new parent. There are many different options available, all with unique benefits. This article will summarize the options available to help you decide which ones best suit your family's needs and budget.

We understand how important it is to find the right childcare service and that one service provider may be more suited to your family's needs than another.

We hope that this document will help guide you through this decision and help you understand exactly how our service differs from alternative care options.

Your childcare options will include:

Family childcare providers
Childcare centers
Early childhood programs
Nanny

- In-home caregivers
- Playgroups and drop-in care
- Au pair
- Informal childcare

Childcare options

Family childcare providers

Family childcare providers are self-employed and usually take care of children within their own homes. They will need to be licensed by their state's childcare licensing agency to ensure they meet health and safety standards.

Family resource centers

Family resource centers aim to be a one-stop-shop for families. They will have facilities to support early education, childcare, health, family support, and help in employment (for parents and caregivers). Childcare facilities vary between centers – while some may offer daycare facilities, many don't.

Childcare centers

Childcare centers offer care for children from birth to four or five years old. There are different types of centers, including private, community, government-funded, and workplace childcare centers.

Preschool playgroups

Less formal than childcare centers, playgroups only operate for a few hours each day and do not provide full-time care. Parents may be asked to volunteer their support for specific periods.

Drop-in childcare

Drop-in childcare centers provide occasional care for children and are located on specific premises. Parents will use them on an irregular basis, i.e., when they go to the gym or shopping.

Nannies

A nanny is typically paid to look after a child (or children) in the child's home. Depending on their arrangement with the family, they can either live in or live out.

Au pair

These are often students from other countries who are here to study and improve their English. They must also be provided with a bedroom, meals, and a stipend.

Informal childcare

A family member, often a grandparent, may agree to take on some of the childcare. This is frequently part-time, for example, one to two days per week, or after the hours of formal childcare.



Questions to consider

As you decide which childcare option is most suitable for your family, here are some essential questions that you may want to consider:

- Would you prefer the childcare to take place in your own home or outside it?
- If outside it, how far are you able to travel each morning?
- Would it be easier to arrange the childcare nearer to home or work?
- What do you need to have in place if you are delayed at work?
- What would happen if you were ill? If the child is sick? If a childcare provider is sick?
- What happens during your own or a childcare provider's holidays?
- If there was an emergency, would you be able to get to your child quickly?
- Will your chosen method of childcare qualify for financial help with childcare costs, including working tax credit or childcare vouchers?
- If you ask a family member to help out, will they provide care in your home or theirs? You will need to think about illness and holidays too.
- Is there a clear fee structure? Will this include meals, snacks, diapers, and days out?
- Do they have a notice period if you wish to change childcare?

Once you decide on a particular childcare service, additional questions you will want to consider include:

- Does the caregiver have extensive experience working with babies or children of a similar age to your child?
- How qualified are the staff?
- Will there be an opportunity for your child to socialize with others their age?
- What is the ratio of caregivers to children? For children aged two years and under, it should be no less than one adult to three children.
- Has your caregiver completed a course in baby first aid?
- How frequently are environmental risks assessed?
- How will you be kept informed on your baby's progress?
- How will they ensure the safety of your child?

Flexibility

The final considerations that you will want to consider before deciding on a particular care provider are how flexible they are and whether care is available all year round. With this in mind, additional questions include:

- Is your childcare flexible? Do you need it to be?
- Will your child be taken care of if your working day overruns?
- Will you be penalized if you take your child out to go on holiday?
- Will the chosen method of childcare be offered all year round?
- Would you be expected to coordinate your holidays with your childcare provider?
- If your baby is sick, what arrangements do you have in place?

Choosing the right care option will need appropriate time and attention, so it's crucial that you consider all of the above to ensure that you make the best choice for your family.

If you'd like to talk to us more about our childcare service and how our setting can support your child, please get in touch!





Featured provider:
Proudly part of the Twooky Community

The Family Place Early Enrichment Academy

At 5:30 in the morning, the lights at The Family Place are already on, while most of Hamilton County is still negotiating with the snooze button.



By mid-morning, the building is in full swing. A preschooler is patiently showing a toddler where the blocks go. Big brothers and little sisters wave to each other across the room during free play. Somewhere down the hall, a two-year-old is celebrating a potty training win like it's the Super Bowl, cheered on by older friends who remember the feeling well.

That mix of ages, energy, and warmth is what founder Dr. Charity Holland set out to create in 2008. Every family who walks through the door knows her as Dr. MommyC.

A frustrated mom with a better idea

The Family Place began with a mom who wasn't satisfied. Dr. MommyC's son was in an in-home childcare setting, and she kept running into the same problem: nobody seemed to be keeping up with how his needs were changing as he grew. So she did what determined parents do and built the solution herself. She figured that if she wanted better care for her son, plenty of other parents in the community probably did too.

What started as one home grew into three, all serving Hamilton County families through a nationally accredited, Paths to QUALITY Level 4 in-home program. The dream was always to bring that home-style care together under one roof, and in 2014 it happened.

By 2018, the academy had grown to 8,000 square feet of play space and taken on its current name. In 2021, it moved into a facility of more than 12,000 square feet, and in 2024, the long-awaited Carmel location opened its doors. There are two locations today, and both still run on the in-home spirit that started it all.

Along the way, Dr. MommyC earned her Doctorate of Education from National University, specializing in Early Childcare Education and Curriculum. She's a published author, a mentor and business coach to other childcare owners, a wife of more than 27 years, and a mom of two. She sums it up herself: "I now realize that 'I' am the brand. It's truly Dr. MommyC's house."



Classrooms that follow the child

Children at The Family Place are grouped by where they are developmentally rather than by their birthday. A child who's racing ahead gets the challenge they're ready for, and a child who needs a little more time gets it without any fuss. Regular assessments against early development milestones keep every child in the group where they'll grow the most.

Every day also includes mixed-age free play, on purpose. Older children practice patience and leadership, younger ones have someone to look up to, and siblings get to see each other throughout the day.

The curriculum mirrors the Indiana Foundations standards to build real school readiness across English, math, science, social studies, physical education, health, movement, music, and visual arts. All of it is delivered through play. Teachers use "visible thinking" routines, so when children talk, draw, build, or act out their ideas, that thinking is captured and used to shape what comes next.

Parents are never left guessing. Infants go home with a detailed daily report covering what they did, what they ate, and how their mood was. Toddlers receive a personalized weekly grade card that recaps what they tackled and how they responded to new ideas.

Kindness, taught daily

Social and emotional growth gets as much attention as ABCs. Every classroom is guided by the five SPARK values:

Supportive: Assisting friends and cheering them on.

Prepared: Always ready to learn and lend a helping hand.

Attentive & Aware: Listening carefully and noticing when others need help.

Respectful: Being careful with words and actions.

Kind: Spreading kindness to everyone, every day.

Where parents get a head start too!

Dr. MommyC believes childcare is only half done when the children have been taught. The other half happens at home. That's why The Family Place runs parenting enrichment classes, some of them free over Zoom, to help families understand how children learn and keep that progress going after pickup.

The academy's potty training program has become something of a local legend. Asked whether it really works, Dr. MommyC doesn't hesitate: "I guess you should ask the 500 families we have helped." Her approach is also available in her book, *Potty Training for Toddlers*.

What families can count on

- Founded and led by an early childhood educator with a Doctorate in Education
- Serving Hamilton County families since 2008
- A history of national accreditation and a Paths to QUALITY Level 4 rating
- Healthy, chef-prepared meals every day, catering to dietary restrictions and allergies
- Doors open at 5:30 am for parents with early commutes
- CCDF accepted
- Career days and guest speakers that bring the wider world into the classroom
- The Empowerment Training Center at the Carmel location, a 60-seat space for workshops, parent classes, and community events

A team chosen by hand

Every teacher at The Family Place is hand-picked by Dr. MommyC. The teachers come from a mix of backgrounds, ages, and education levels, and all of them share one quality: passion. She leads by partnership, and she keeps her team learning through ongoing training, mentoring, and tuition reimbursement.

Eighteen years on, Dr. MommyC's house has grown a whole lot bigger. The idea behind it hasn't changed one bit. As the team likes to say, a family that plays together stays together, and at The Family Place, every day is child's play.



 www.tfplace.com

 Noblesville location: 9625 E 150th St Suite #101, Noblesville, IN. 46060

 Carmel location: 10455 N College Ave, Carmel, IN 46280



Today's Curiosity. Tomorrow's Confidence.

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Every friendship.
Every goal scored.
Every challenge
overcome.

It all adds up to
the person
they're becoming.

Twooky is
proud to be part
of that journey.



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Nurturing
minds from the
early years.



PLAY

Building healthy
bodies and
strong habits.



GROW

Developing skills,
confidence and a
love of learning.



THRIVE

Creating friendships
and a sense of
belonging.

Explore
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