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kern county **Family** magazine **free**

JANUARY 2021

Into the Unknown

What Might
LOCAL
EDUCATION
Look Like
in 2021?

Public vs. Private
Schooling:
What to Consider

plus: hello, happy mama: decorating with kids in mind *pg 14*
soul warming potato soup *pg 16* learning & life skills for your student *pg 7*

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MEMBERS OF



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Cover Feature:

Into the Unknown: What will Education in Bakersfield Look Like in 2021?

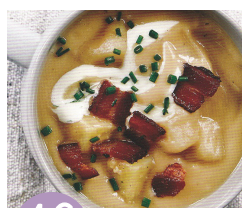
Photo by StaceyLeigh Photography staceyleighphotography.com



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Vaun Thygerson,
Contributing Writer

This time last year I had all kinds of plans and resolutions, but now as I hang the 2021 calendar on the wall, I feel like my world has shifted and I have different priorities and expectations. This past year has been a constant reminder that you can make all the plans you want, and you can learn to rally when those plans get changed.

When the stay-at-home order happened in mid-March 2020, my goals became different. All of a sudden I had to learn all kinds of new technology and verbiage to move my Bakersfield College Communication classes online and help my kids adjust to a new, virtual school day. Before March, I had never even heard the word “zoom” in reference to a teaching tool. Now it’s a word said daily in our home!

I’m sure everyone can agree that 2020 was an unprecedented year full of twists and turns and ups and downs. One thing this crazy year has taught me is that your attitude is everything. You have to keep a positive perspective in spite of what life hands you – it makes all the difference. So, my one and only New Year’s Resolution for this year is to find happiness in the little things!

KCFM asked its readers what they are making for their goals in 2021. In the article, “Readers respond: Plans to make 2021 a better,” on page 18, find out how these readers plan to focus on the positivity and hopefulness. The ideas range from eating more cupcakes to doing a kind deed every day! I love it!

Some of the happiest times you can have is when you use your creative mind to create a new adventure. In Julie Willis’s Humor at Home article, “Creative Minds: Incomprehensible Chaos,” she writes about how her children were born with a creative spark inside them. Although it’s good to be creative, she doesn’t necessarily like the mess that comes along with such crazy antics! To read about some of their creative capers, turn to page 13.

When thinking about kids and chaos, many people have used all the hours during this downtime to redecorate their homes! Our new writer for the Hello Mama article, Stacey Payne, writes about this very topic in her first contribution, “Decorating Your Home WITH Kids in Mind... (and underfoot),” on page 14. In her article, she interviews Nancy, a designer for Castle and Cooke and Gaskill Rose Luxury Home Builders, and gives eight tips for young families to incorporate all the stages in their lives to match their environment.

There is a popular quote attributed to many different people that reads, “Enjoy the little things in life because one day you’ll look back and realize they were the big things.” This is my mantra for 2021! I am determined to find the happiness in the small things and really try not to have too many expectations – just enjoy my family and pray every day they stay healthy!

"Enjoy the little things in life because one day you'll look back and realize they were the big things."

Wishing all our amazing readers a Happy & Healthy 2021!





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SUBMIT YOUR EVENTS!

Our happenings section is dedicated to bringing the most current events to you, but we need your help! You can submit your calendar events at

kerncountyfamily.com

by choosing Calendar on our website's menu bar and clicking the pull down tab, "Submit Calendar Event." Please submit calendar events by the 10th of each month. Best of all, it's FREE!

New Year, New Happenings

Even though this New Year looks different from last year and virtual events are on the rise, you can find out what's happening around town, or online, or visit our website's calendar. If you are an organizer and want to publish your event, please visit www.kerncountyfamily.com to add it to our digital calendar and maybe even see it printed in the magazine.



National Pickleball Central Valley Classic

You can participate in one of America's fastest growing sports and sign up for the National Pickleball Central Valley Classic on February 6 and 7, at 10 a.m. at Jastro Park. As a United States of America Pickleball Association sanctioned event, the tournament is open to men's and women's doubles and mixed doubles of all skill levels. Pickleball is a game similar to tennis where players use a paddle to hit a perforated plastic ball over the net.

To sign up and check for COVID19 restrictions and updates, visit www.pickleballtournament.com.



Bulky Waste Collection Event

Kern County Public Works Department will host its free Bulky Waste Collection Event on Saturday, January 9, from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. Drive-in and drop off your unwanted residential waste and household items such as home appliances, mattresses, furniture, water heaters, televisions, and e-waste.

No hazardous waste, household trash, tires, construction and remodeling waste, and green waste accepted. Usable items will be donated to Goodwill and Salvation Army. Drop off locations: Meadows Field International Terminal, 1401 Skyway Drive (off Airport Drive and Skyway Drive), Kern Medical, 1700 Mt. Vernon Avenue (Flower Street parking lot), and Kern County Fairgrounds, 1142 P Street (Northwest Corner of parking lot). Face coverings are required.

For more information, please visit www.kernpublicworks.com.

January 24 is National Compliment Day

Find A Reason To Give Someone A Shout-Out.

It can be as simple as an appreciative "Thanks for being a great friend."

Research shows that both the giver and receiver get an emotional boost.

In fact, one study showed that getting a compliment has the same positive effect as receiving a cash reward.



Chevron Donates to Kern County Firefighters Association

Chevron recently donated funds to the Kern County Firefighters Association to help purchase wildland fire jackets for its members. With over 4.1 million acres burned to date this year and the near year-round fire season, these new, improved jackets will increase safety and bring them to industry standard.

"Chevron places safety at the forefront of our operations so that we protect our people, partners, communities, and the environment. Chevron's contribution to the Kern County Firefighters Association will aid in supplying improved personal protective equipment to Kern County firefighters, strengthening safeguards that protect them as they engage in high-risk work and continue to contain the California wildfires. Chevron greatly appreciates the heroic work Kern County firefighters are doing to protect their fellow Californians," says Carolyn Cleary, Chevron San Joaquin Valley Business Unit HSE Manager.

For more information, visit www.kerncountyfirefighters.org.

Gift Idea We



For more product reviews, see page 20 and visit nappaawards.com

Loop Lab STEM Subscription

We know Mad Science from fun after-school enrichment programs and now you can bring home the hands-on experiments with their new STEM subscription boxes. Different theme for each box include Gross Science, Spy



Science and Sense-ational Science. \$32.99/box, ages 8-12, <https://shop.madscience.com>

Learning and Life Skills:

11 Ways to Support Students this School Year

Supporting students has taken on a new meaning throughout the pandemic. Although 2021 begins with optimism for a better year overall, the issue of academics being in-person, virtual or a combination of both looms large. Rather than meeting students where they are in a classroom setting, helping them learn where they're quarantined or otherwise away from a school building presents new challenges with motivation, material resources, and finding an approach that works.

Note: It's important to recognize that both parents and teachers are doing their best right now. That effort, the best try method, is enough, even when it doesn't always feel like it. If you need a new approach, try something different. Some of the suggestions below can help.

At Kern County Family Magazine, we recognize the challenges of teaching children this year and the extraordinary response required. Be encouraged and know that your effort is enough. No one has parented in a pandemic before who is alive today to tell us how. You have pressed on and prevailed. Rest assured, you've made the best of these unusual circumstances. We join with you in hoping for a better year for our children.

Here are 11 ways to help a student right now:

1. Try a new routine

Work with your child to create a routine that works for all involved. Getting their buy-in is key. Don't let past issues stand in the way of a fresh start. Knowing what not to do can be just as important as you continue to move forward.

2. Go outdoors

If the usual routine isn't working, or even if it is, take the lesson outdoors. Research continually shows the benefits of outdoor play and children's improved cognitive abilities when learning in nature. Soak up the sun with a change of scenery.

3. Trade lessons

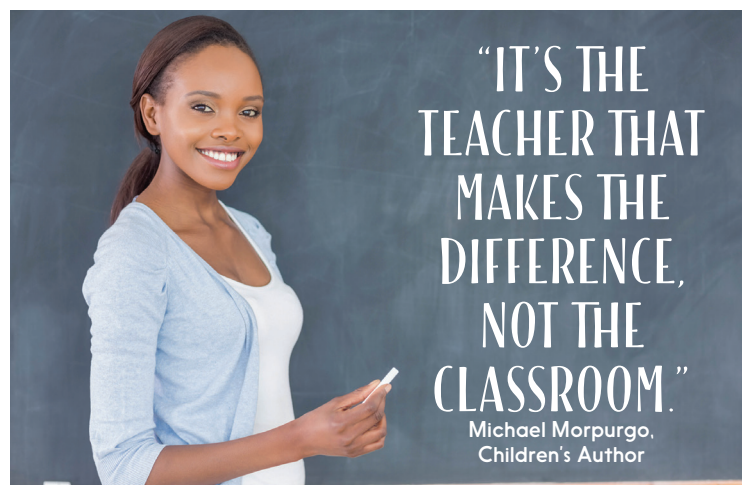
If you are your child's teacher this semester, consider trading lessons with other parents. For example, if you enjoy history, consider teaching it in exchange for French lessons or help with math. Everyone is good at something in school, and it comes back quickly if you loved it in another phase of life. You don't have to be good at everything to make it work.

4. Connect with others

Whether you're in a virtual classroom or come together through social distancing, there are ways to find peers. Talk with other parents or caregivers. Let children see and hear each other.

5. Get outside help

Whether your child isn't finding the right fit in their academic setting or you are overseeing their lessons as the parent turned teacher through strange circumstances, there's no shame in admitting when something is not working. Many options exist for a child's education. Talk with teachers and administrators, get a tutor, or look at what else is available. Don't go it alone.



6. Find study resources

Kern County Library offers a range of services without charge online, including the ability to access materials from home through Hoopla. Visit <https://www.kerncountylibrary.org/> for more information. Free WIFI is also available in the parking lot of most local libraries.

7. Drop everything and read

Early childhood experts cite reading as the main predictor of a child's likelihood of attending college. Take a break with a favorite book. Try "Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing" by Judy Blume for middle elementary readers. Let older readers show you their favorite books and share your own favorites with the youngest family members who cannot yet read.

8. Be mindful of basic needs

Hunger, fatigue, and safety rank on basic needs hierarchies. If your child is struggling during school lessons, try a snack, a break, and assurances that this too shall pass. If you need help with food assistance, your local school district has resources available. Other resources exist in our community as well, including through Boys & Girls Club of Kern County, food pantries, and more. Visit Community Action Partnership of Kern at <https://www.capk.org/programs/food-bank/> for more information, including upcoming distribution events.

9. Focus on other issues

Set a timer for 20 minutes and do something else. Put schoolwork aside and take a break or break out something else kids need to learn about. Teaching life skills is also valuable, like how to boil an egg, sew on a button, or use the washing machine. Safety first is the key to age appropriate activities.

10. Host an "old school" day

Stream "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood," remember the peace Bob Ross brings, and share your own childhood experiences. Love and nostalgia can be unifying.

11. Name it to tame it

Talk through the problems. Write down what's bothering you. Phone a friend or make a virtual therapy appointment. Your child may also need to speak with others who can help. School counselors, pastors, friends, and family can be a resource at this time. Although we may not be able to reach out in person, people still need one another.

Accessing Health Coverage & Health Care During COVID-19 Online Event

Join the Kern County Network for Children for the Accessing Health Coverage and Health Care During COVID-19 Online Event on **Tuesday, January 12, from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.** Hosted by the Greater Bakersfield Legal Assistance, Inc. (GBLA), this virtual event will discuss timely health care topics such as Covered California enrollment, qualifications, barriers, and the January 31, 2021, deadline to apply.

Other items discussed will be health coverage rights for immigrant communities, unemployment and access to health care, Medi-Cal and Medicare during COVID-19, and more. Event speakers will be representatives from organizations such as GBLA, Kern Health Consumer Center, Greenfield Family Resource Center, Garden Pathways, United Farmworkers Foundation, GBLA Volunteer Attorney Program, Ghuman Law Firm, and more.

To log onto this event, visit <https://kcsos.zoom.us/j/6016178075>.

At-Home COVID-19 Tests



Home COVID-19 tests are now available at Costco.com. The test uses a saliva sample rather than a nasal swab. Collect the sample then mail it to the lab; results are available online through the HIP-PA-compliant AZOVA app within 48 to 72 hours of arrival at the lab.

Should You Get Stuck On Magnetic Eyelashes?

Women have long relied on false eyelashes to intensify their natural lashes with thickness and length. False eyelashes have come in many varieties through the years, from the classic adhesives to lash extensions individually woven onto lashes in specialty salons.

A new contender in the lash market, magnetic lashes are the latest trend to make news. But do magnetic lashes have staying power? And what are the health concerns, if any, with magnetic lashes?

Instead of fussing with glues and lashes, magnetic lashes offer a new twist. These products work by sandwiching natural lashes between a false lash set that adheres with small magnets. To apply, one simply places the top lash and the bottom lash on the lash line with her natural lashes in between. The false lashes, which are reusable, click into place and are designed to be easily removed by sliding the magnetic strips apart.



Magnetic lashes seem to present some of the same concerns of other false lashes and eyelash extensions. Eyelash extensions have reportedly caused irritation to the conjunctiva (conjunctivitis) or cornea (keratitis). The irritation may be caused by direct contact from the lashes themselves or hypersensitivity to the substances used to attach them. Also, the College of Optometrists in England has warned that "repeated use of eyelash extensions or false lashes can cause traction alopecia, a condition where the hair falls out due to excessive tension placed on the hair shaft."

False lashes have been associated with other problems as well. According to a study from Guillermo Amador, a Ph.D. candidate at the Georgia Institute of Technology, changing the proportion of eyelash (which ideally is one-third the width of the eye in length) can increase airflow around the eye and lead to more dust hitting the surface of the eye. Consequently, this air and dust can dry out the eyes quickly.

Women interested in trying magnetic lashes should first speak with an eye doctor to gauge their safety prior to use, and as with any false lashes, give the eyes a chance to rest between uses.

3 Allergens That Trigger Asthma Attacks

Asthma affects millions of people across the globe. While some asthma attacks, which can occur at any time, may end quickly, the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America notes that more severe



attacks can last hours or days. Coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath, rapid breathing, and tightness in the chest are some common symptoms of asthma attacks, which can be triggered by a number of allergens.

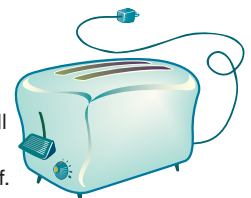
1. Dust mites: Dust mites are so tiny that they're invisible to the naked eye. But just because you can't see them does not mean they're not there. Sometimes as small as one-quarter of a millimeter, dust mites thrive in environments where temperatures are between 68 F and 77 F, such as homes. Dust mites feed on tiny flakes of skin that humans shed each day, so they tend to make their homes in the inner layers of furniture, carpets and bedding. Even stuffed children's toys might make great homes for dust mites. Asthma sufferers whose attacks have been linked to dust mites can cover their mattresses and pillows in dust-proof covers, wash their sheets and blankets in hot water and utilize HEPA filter vacuum cleaners to keep mites and mite waste from reentering the air after a cleaning.

2. Cockroaches: According to the AAFA, cockroach allergies are common asthma triggers. In fact, the AAFA notes that studies have indicated children who are allergic to cockroaches must visit the hospital for asthma more frequently than other children who do not have asthma. Cockroaches need food, water and shelter to survive, so people whose asthma attacks are being triggered by cockroach allergies can cover their trash cans tightly, store their food in airtight containers, clean all of their dirty dishes immediately after use, and promptly sweep up any food or crumbs that accumulate on their counters, tabletops, stoves, and floors.

3. Mold: Molds live everywhere, and upsetting a mold source may send mold spores into the air, potentially triggering asthma attacks. While allergic reactions from mold spores can occur at any time of the year, the AAFA notes that allergic symptoms from fungi like mold are most common between July and early fall. Mold spores that get into the lungs can trigger asthma attacks. Some reactions may occur immediately after the spores reach the lungs, while others may be delayed, resulting in asthma symptoms like nasal congestion gradually worsening over time. Reducing exposure to mold spores both inside and outside can prevent allergic reactions. Limit outdoor activities when mold counts are high and wear a mask when tending to lawns and gardens. Relying on central air conditioning equipped with HEPA filter attachments and lowering indoor humidity are two ways to reduce exposure to mold when indoors.

January 10 is National Cut Your Energy Costs Day

Look around your home to see where you can make changes. Start by plugging small appliances - computers, toasters, coffee makers - into a power strip you can turn off. Also make sure the water heater is 120 degrees F or below, and lower the thermostat to 68 degrees F during the day. **Energy.gov has more tips.**



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Kern Autism Network

"Autism Society Chapter-Kern Autism Network provides support, awareness, information and education to families and the public throughout Kern County"



Happy New Year

from the Autism Society-Kern Autism Network, Inc!

All Events & Activities have been suspended due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

We are dedicated to helping families and adults with autism during these times of uncertainty and have face masks available, so please contact us if you are in need.

Please see our website www.kernautism.org or our Facebook page for the latest updates and subscribe to our newsletter for further information.

Covid-19 Resources <http://www.autismsocietyca.org/ca-affiliates.html>

EARLY SIGNS OF AUTISM:

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- Little interest in friendships

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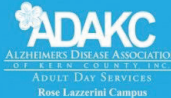


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Into the Unknown

What Will Education in Bakersfield Look Like in 2021?

by Stacey Payne



As 2020 drew to a close, we all stared with a wary, but hopeful gaze toward the new year. What will 2021 bring us? Will the kids get to go back to school? Will people be able to play and watch live sports again? When can we go to a concert or church again? Will the vaccine that scientists rushed to create be our savior? Or, will the side effects from such a new medicine outweigh its possible benefits? With coronavirus numbers spiking in the winter again, is the mask-wearing, social distancing behavior we've grown accustomed to our forever normal? So many questions and still no clear answers, only hope for some sort of resolution.

During the past twelve months, the coronavirus knocked us down and whether we contracted it or not, it has affected EVERY. SINGLE. HUMAN. In some way or another. A huge casualty of the pandemic has been our children's education. Last March, students across the country were told to go home and quarantine "for a few weeks" while we "flattened the curve." Kids didn't understand what it meant to "flatten the curve." All they knew was that they weren't going to get to go back to school again for a while, they wouldn't see their teachers in person, have recess, ride the bus, or even see their friends everyday. Just for a few weeks, they were told. Those weeks turned into months as the virus continued to spread, and the hope of finishing out the school year in a standard classroom, was extinguished. "Drive by and pick up a packet!" the schools said, "See you on Zoom!"

Sports were canceled, class trips postponed, graduations were even held virtually. No senior prom, no preschool graduations, no 8th grade trips. Everyone had hoped by fall the virus would be under control, but it wasn't. So our kids continued to Zoom and learn virtually as best as they and their

parents knew how. Though parents and caretakers are getting better at navigating distance learning through a screen, it's still not working for a huge number of students. Learning at home with no physical interaction with teachers or peers is HARD. However, if distance learning with the public school system isn't working for your family, there are a few other options.

Whether you choose to distance learn, homeschool, or turn to a private school, only you, the parent, can make the best choice for your child.

Instead of using the public school distance learning model, a number of parents have opted to homeschool privately, using their choice of curriculum. When the world shut down, the homeschooler had an advantage, since they had already been used to learning outside of a classroom. They knew the ropes and could offer advice to the first-time homeschool parent. Many of these seasoned homeschool families also belong to a charter, or "umbrella school," which helps with curriculum guidance and funding for private programs.

As the months of distance learning stretch on, those who don't want to homeschool may want to research another option - a private school. Private schools have mostly had the benefit of operating under a daycare classification, so while the children are still required to wear masks, social distancing, and learn behind plexiglass, they have not had to shut down as often as the public sector. There are no less than 20 private educational facilities in Kern County, and while the majority have a religious background, there are still plenty that do not, if a parent prefers that route.

While exploring options for schooling this new year, parents and children may be wondering what is going to become of their favorite sports. Just last month, the California Department of Public Health released new guidelines for both outdoor and indoor sports. The article released on December 14 mentions that,

"Youth and adult sports include varied activities that have different levels of risk for transmission of COVID-19. Outdoor activities that allow for consistent wearing of face coverings and physical distancing are lower risk than indoor activities that involve close contact between sports participants and high exertion that increases spread of exhaled particles and limits the ability to wear face coverings consistently. The competition between different teams also increases mixing across groups and outside of communities, which also contributes to the potential for spread of COVID-19 disease."

Face coverings are still recommended for participating in any type of sport, during low contact sports such as running and tennis, moderate sports, such as volleyball and cheerleading, and high contact sports like wrestling, football, and basketball.

The unknowns of the new year seem daunting. When will we go back to normal? Are children going to get to go back to in-person school? Will my child's favorite sport return? Are we wearing masks forever? It seems they are here to stay, at least for a while and are going to be recommended, if not mandated almost everywhere in public for sports AND schooling. Going back to in-person schooling, private or public, will require masking, social

Photo by Stacey Payne



distancing and other measures to limit transmission of the virus. But, at least there are a number of schooling and sporting options for parents and students to choose from.

Whether you choose to distance learn, homeschool, or turn to a private school, only you, the parent, can make the best choice for your child. As we navigate into the unknown waters of another pandemic year, one thing is for certain; the community of Bakersfield will continue to support each other and come out stronger on the other side.

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Tips For Making the Switch From Public to Private School

Parents have many different reasons for sending their children to private schools. Switching from public schools to private schools can require a significant emotional and social adjustment on the part of students and their families.

Transitioning to private school also may require adjusting to an entirely new educational philosophy and curriculum. These tips can help make the transition from public school to private school go smoothly.

Class size

Class size plays a significant role when parents decide to send their children to private school. According to Noodle, an online education search and rating resource, public school classes may include 20 students or more, with some even as large as 34 students at full capacity. Private schools tend to have much smaller class sizes and a smaller teacher-to-student ratio. This can translate into more individualized attention for each student. It also may mean heightened scrutiny, which is something students may quickly discover and not be accustomed to from their public school days.

Students who thrive with more frequent teacher feedback may like the change to private school. Others who prefer not being in the spotlight may need more time to adjust.

Take a tour and get involved

Familiarizing oneself with the school can make the first day of school that much easier. Most schools will offer tours for prospective new families; otherwise, parents can reach out to the administration to schedule private walk-throughs. Some private schools also pair up potential new students with current student ambassadors to provide a students' perspective, which can be very helpful.

Families also can attend school-sanctioned functions, volunteer for parent-teacher association committees or encourage students join sports teams or extracurricular clubs early on to help with making friends.

Be open to change

Many private schools do not have to conform to state- or province-sanctioned curriculums. This can come as a shock to students who were working on a certain math or language arts program at their previous schools. Other changes to expect may be uniforms, religious-based foundations and classes, and less leniency when rules are broken. Some schools also may be male-only or female-only. These issues can be discussed before the first day of school.

Keeping an open mind and getting the support of parents can help students navigate the transition from public to private school.

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Principal

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(661) 393-3566



Rusty Rhodes,
Principal

Olive Knolls Christian School is looking for parents who want to build resilient and capable kids of character.

The culture we live in does not want to pay the price to grow resilient children who will mature into prepared, confident, and moral adults. The price seems too steep. It requires adults to allow their children to struggle. It's the struggle to learn a new academic skill; it's the struggle of working through difficult relationships with their peers; it's the struggle that comes through all their endeavors to excel that will transform them so that they experience lives of happiness, meaning, and success.

But the struggle, the pain, the strenuous effort, needs to happen within a happy environment of caring adult partnerships – parents, faculty, and staff – in order to bring about the victory we envision for our children.

OKCS is that school for the few parents who are not afraid to guide their children through the normal pains of life – instead of avoiding them! OKCS is that safe environment where children will learn NOT to live as victims. Instead, no matter what circumstance your child faces in life, and no matter what sort of hand your child has been dealt, your child will know that he/she is strong enough to overcome it! We build resilient and capable kids of character! Is this what you want for your child? Then Olive Knolls Christian School may be for you.

Olive Knolls Christian School was established in 1979 and has an accreditation from both ACSI and WASC.



Creative Minds Incomprehensible Chaos

I didn't mean to make my kids creative. I never shoved them in a corner with nothing to play with. I never said, "Here is the box. Think outside of it." Their creative minds were already in their little heads from as far back as I can remember, so I'm rather certain that I need take no credit for it.

When Samantha was 2, she was a "dolphin with a hurt tail." Like every day. (Except for the days when she was a dog and lifting her leg on complete strangers at the park.) She would wrap dish towels around her ankles and insist on being carried. (Hurt tail or no, dolphins don't walk.)

Now she catches grasshoppers and lizards and fish. We go to the pond for some peace and quiet and to see if there are any wood ducks or maybe that blue heron we've been watching. The next thing I know, she is holding up a gallon-size Ziploc bag with a five-inch sun fish swimming inside it. (We released the fish after both kids had felt its "slimy"-ness and taken pictures to text to Daddy.)

My kids' bikes and scooters and skateboards and hobby horses all have names. Also, they are all horses. Don't even think about referring to Frozen River (a bike) as a bike. It—ahem, SHE—is a horse.

In some ways, they are just ordinary kids who play with Legos and con Grandma into bringing them candy. But there is this whole other side to

them. They are constantly doing things like making elaborate works of art out of nothing but a pair of scissors and a napkin. Or straddling a low tree branch and pretending they are taming a wild mustang.

I have never heard either of my kids say, "I'm bored." What I hear a lot is, "What are we doing today? Because I want to know if I'm going to have any time to play." And I think, Play? All you DO is play. I have never seen two school-aged kids play as much as they do. They have figured out how to maximize play time by getting their stuff out during transition times: Dinner is almost ready? They set up a world of horses on the floor. Lunch is done? Time to look for worms in the potted plants on the front patio. Just finished showering? Why not read a book while "air drying," wrapped in a towel? They milk these moments. They think I'm not paying attention (and let's be honest, a lot of the time I'm not), and they squeeze in every last moment of play time before being told to do some awful thing I would have thought was innocuous—like setting the table or getting dressed.

Quarantine ruined our vacation? We camped in our living room. In a tent. In sleeping bags. That's it, I thought: no more vacations. Why plan elaborate (and expensive) entertainment, when they are just as happy camping right in the living room and doing things like combing the dog and splashing in puddles?

Isn't there a saying about how a creative mind thrives on chaos? If not, I'm ready to invent some sort of more polished version of that. I walk into a room and cringe when I see the bits of fuzz and scraps of paper and thirty thousand horses (some actual plastic horses, others just household objects posing as horses). But really, I should be celebrating their amazing minds that work in a completely different way than mine.

Nancy Alvarado



Decorating Your Home with Kids in Mind....and underfoot!

Story and Photography by Stacey Payne

When you've got kids, you know that social interaction is a huge deal! From preschool playdates all the way up to high school and group prom dates, kids and parents like to be around each other. Many mamas need the adult bonding and venting time as much as the kids need to learn valuable social skills. It's inevitable that some of these meet-ups will take place at someone's house. No matter the age of the kids, you quickly learn that some homes are more kid-friendly than others. You figure out which ones are cozy and simple, where the kids can run and play without breaking a vase, and the others that are gorgeous, pristine and Instagram perfect, but where you might also want to confine the playdate to the backyard.

Then there are the homes that are a perfect balance of the two - thoughtfully coordinated decor and furniture that is beautiful AND functional for every stage of kid life. It IS possible to have a beautiful home that is conducive to life with children, and Nancy Alvarado is just the person to show you how to do that!

I had the pleasure of meeting Nancy, who is an interior designer for Castle and Cooke. She stages all of the new homes throughout their master-planned communities and also has the privilege of working with Gaskill Rose Luxury Home Builders as their in-house designer. Her

love of design began in college and over the past 20 years she's grown that passion into a successful business. After raising three boys, she is equally passionate about helping others create kid-friendly, attractive homes.

1. How has being an interior designer influenced you as a mother?

My three sons have all worked with me at some point. They know how hard I work, and that I expect the same from them. They may or may not appreciate that I'm a perfectionist, but I think they realize that it makes me so happy to create such beautiful spaces for my clients. It's a



blessing and a curse for them in our own home, because they know I have definite opinions and expectations for their bedrooms ...but they do have great looking bedrooms!!

2. What advice do you offer to clients with children, even before you start the design process?

So, I like to say that three boys is a bit of a theme in my family. My dad was the oldest of 3 boys, my oldest sister has 3 boys, and I have 3 boys. One of the most important things that my sister has taught me is to "make your home the place where your kids and their friends feel welcome and want to hang out." Not only did I take that advice and run with it, I also impart the same advice to all of my clients who have kids. Over the years, the majority of my clients have had kids. They've ranged from newborn to college age, but that advice holds true regardless of age. Obviously, it will need to transition as kids become adults, but I think most people still want to have the house that others want to be in. Creating a space that is welcoming and "family" or "kid" friendly is the way to ensure your home is always the place to be!

3. Are there any must-have items in a family-friendly home?

Storage ottomans or benches are great for a bunch of reasons - they become additional seating, and they are handy for storing soft blankets, games, or lots of little messes when in-laws make a surprise visit!

Floor pillows are also wonderful additions to a family room, living room, or game room. They're perfect for lounging on while watching movies or playing games, and they can serve as beds when your kids have sleep overs. I still utilize floor pillows and throw pillows, a recliner, and every inch of our sectional sofa when teenagers end up "camping out" on the weekend at our house.



I also love lamps! I've had clients who actually believed that they could not have table lamps because their kids might break them. First, never encourage the breaking of anything in your house. Next, there are plenty of "kid safe" lamps out there..metal, wicker, and wood, to name a few. Lamps create warmth and welcome like nothing else, and I recommend timers or smart bulbs so you can pre-program your lights to turn on/off. It's really nice to come home to soft lighting that's already on, and it's a great safety measure too!

4. When it comes to flooring options, what do you recommend for high traffic areas? How would you "cozy up" a space with hard flooring?

So many innovative products have helped with the cleanup aspect of making your home "kid friendly". Luxury vinyl plank flooring is waterproof, pet proof, and crazy durable. There are carpets that actually repel stains, solid surface countertops with no grout lines to keep clean, and some really luxurious looking synthetic fabrics that are easier to keep clean than ever before. It's easy to create a look for your home that is both beautiful and durable, when you have so many innovative options.

If your floor material is hard ...add an area rug, and don't forget a comfy pad underneath to make it nice and cushy for lounging on.

5. With tiny hands (or even grownup hands) touching every surface in sight in a busy home, what are some things to consider when choosing paint and furniture colors?

"Flat" or "matte" paint is a big NO NO for families!! Try paint with at least a "satin" finish so your walls will be easier to clean when finger prints, miscellaneous marks, etc. inevitably find their way to every single wall in your house! (Oh, and "Magic Eraser" is one of the best inventions since air freshener ...invest in both!)

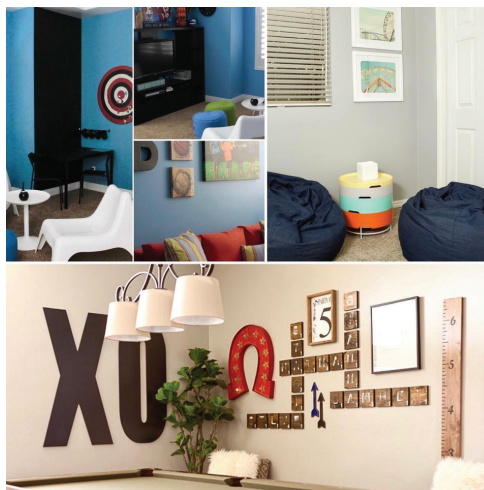
However, don't be afraid of light colored furniture. That's what upholstery cleaner is for! The benefit to light furniture is that you can SEE when it gets dirty. Of course, that's also the bad news.

6. What are some ways to incorporate child tastes in the design of your home?

One of the greatest little secrets I have for anyone who wants to give their kids the opportunity to incorporate ideas is...LARGE PHOTO FRAMES

Yep, frames are a fantastic way to add ANYTHING that your child wants to their space. If they love superheroes, cartoon characters, or princesses, buy/print pictures of those favorites and put them in the frames. If they love to draw or paint, FRAME it. If they love a sport, or a

"Creating a space that is welcoming and 'family' or 'kid' friendly is the way to ensure your home is always the place to be."
-Nancy Alvarado



sports team, buy/print photos of anything related to that sport or team and frame that. It's honestly the easiest, most cost effective, and frankly the most BRILLIANT way to help your kids create a space they love!

OH... and as they grow and their favorite things change, all you have to do is change the photos to their new likes!

7. Any final pieces of advice or words to live by?

Especially now during this global pandemic, people are remodeling and decorating more than ever. This is still the age of HGTV, DIY Network, and my personal favorite...YouTube videos!! TV shows give people what I call "instant and inexpensive" expectations, but it's simply not reality. Most home improvement shows are filmed over the span of months and can take a year or two before they even air. Things change so quickly in the construction and design industry that what you see could be outdated already, or prices and availability could change. It really is true that anything worth having is worth doing well, but that means time and patience. Rushing leads to mistakes or missteps, and that can prove to be more costly. Take the time to

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figure out what you want, what you already have, and what you can afford.

Your home is a reflection of you, your family, and the life you lead. The most important thing is that it should meet the needs of you and your family. It should be the place that you are most comfortable in.

If you desire the house that everyone else is also comfortable in...then the most important thing is always, YOU. It won't matter what is inside your house for people to feel welcome and comfortable, because when you make people feel welcome they will want to be in your home.

And honestly, couldn't we all use that warm and welcoming feeling this time of year, and especially with everything happening in our world? I think so.

Nancy shared some practical and inspiring ways to make our homes more kid and family friendly! Even better is how easy and affordable her suggestions are. Now if you'll excuse me, I'm off to find some new storage ottomans!

Soul Warming Soup

Every home chef should have a rich and filling soup recipe in his or her repertoire. These hearty meals are perfect for cold days, and there's no reason those with food sensitivities should have to miss out on comfort food.

Baked potato soup is a creamy soup that is reminiscent of a loaded baked potato. For those who are avoiding inflammatory foods, such as those in the nightshade variety, of which white potatoes are included, a potato soup may be harder to come by. This version of "Loaded Baked Potato Soup" from "Eat What You Love" (Ten Speed Press) by Danielle Walker is a delicious alternative that can satisfy potato soup cravings.

Loaded Baked Potato Soup

Serves 6

Ingredients

- 6 slices thick bacon, coarsely chopped
- 1 yellow onion, diced
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- 2 pounds Hannah sweet potatoes, peeled and diced
- 10 ounces cauliflower, cut into florets
- 4 ½ cups chicken bone broth
- 1 cup cashew milk
- 3½ teaspoons fine sea salt
- 1/2 teaspoon smoked paprika
- 1/2 teaspoon apple cider vinegar
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly squeezed lemon juice
- Chopped fresh chives, for serving (optional)
- Dairy-free sour cream (optional)



Directions

1. Line a plate with paper towels. In a stockpot, cook the bacon over medium heat until the fat is rendered and the bacon is crisp, about 8 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, remove the bacon from the pot and set it on the prepared plate to drain. Pour off most of the grease, reserving about 2 tablespoons in the pot.
2. Return the pot to medium-high heat, add the onion and garlic, and sauté for 2 minutes, until fragrant. Add half of the sweet potatoes and all of the cauliflower and cook for 5 minutes, stirring frequently. Add the bone broth, bring it to a gentle boil, and cook for 10 minutes, until the potatoes and cauliflower are tender.
3. Using an immersion blender, or working in batches in a blender, blend the soup until smooth. (If using a blender, remove the cap in the blender top and place a kitchen towel over the top to allow steam from the hot liquid to release while you blend.) Return the purée to the stockpot. Add the remaining sweet potatoes, the cashew milk, salt, paprika, vinegar, and lemon juice.
4. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, then turn the heat to low and simmer for 12 to 15 minutes, stirring frequently, until the sweet potatoes are tender and the cashew milk has thickened the soup.
5. Ladle the soup into bowls and top with the reserved bacon, chives, and dollop of sour cream. Serve immediately.

Store leftover soup in an airtight container in the refrigerator for 5 days, or in the freezer for 6 months. Defrost overnight in the refrigerator. Reheat in a saucepan over medium heat, stirring frequently, for 10 minutes.

Ending on a High Note:

Jim Ranger honored after "The Voice" inspires Bakersfield Unity

A national spotlight sometimes shines on the places people call home, with community pride both on and offstage. Jim Ranger, Bakersfield's heralded contestant on NBC's "The Voice," has inspired that variety of admiration.



He returned home to Kern County in late December after the program's conclusion as its official runner-up, with more fans than ever to further his dreams of music stardom.

Local residents joined viewers across the country for the final performance broadcast live on Dec. 16. His tenure as one of the 2020 season's remaining contestants brought that pride to Bakersfield, and mentions throughout featured Ranger's personal life and singing segments.



Jim Ranger with Mayor Karen Goh

Mayor Karen Goh issued an official proclamation declaring Dec. 21 "Jim Ranger Day," a date made memorable with an award ceremony and medal presentation.

"Jim's incredible achievement on the "The Voice" brings much pride and joy to Bakersfield. Jim won the

hearts of viewers locally and across the country with his authenticity and soulful artistry," said Mayor Goh. "At the end of a difficult year, Jim rekindled hope and beautifully uplifted our spirits."

Ranger chose country music star Blake Shelton after all three performance judges turned their chairs during his blind audition in keeping with the program's format, in which celebrity team captains turn around to indicate interest in having a performer on their team. Fans recognized the triple turn as a rare occurrence on the show. Shelton coached Ranger throughout production. They also collaborated with a duet cover of the Buck Owens and Dwight Yoakam's song, "Streets of Bakersfield" on the program's final night. Teenage contestant Carter Rubin ultimately took the win, a nail-biting victory protested on Twitter with mixed reception but clear recognition of both as outstanding singers.

Ranger, father of three, currently serves as the pastor of New Life Church, where the medal presentation was hosted. Originally from Arkansas, he grew up with both Gospel music and contemporary influences. He was previously featured on season nine of "American Idol," with the support of friends, family and his wife, Camilla.

No matter his next career move as both musician and hometown pastor, Bakersfield residents eagerly await future performances. Find his music on YouTube via the official channel of "The Voice."



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Readers Respond: Your Plans to Make 2021 a Better Year

Compiled by Callie Collins

The year 2020 was unlike any other for so many families in our community. We are choosing to begin 2021 with a renewed focus on hope, after the peace and joy of the holiday season. Our readers seem to share that chosen optimism, as reflected in recent answers to questions we've asked inspired by the prospect of better things to come.

What are you looking forward to in 2021?



The beginning of a new year, with hopes of a better, safer year for everyone. Hopefully, we will go back to being able to see our loved ones and hug them. - Karen Orellana

Better days, better health, better jobs for everyone.
- Vanessa Velasquez

Being able to socialize with people in person.
- Beatriz Olaya



Everyone being healthy and things going back to normal.
- Melissa Barker



Pandemic coming to an end and being able to travel again! - Brandi Serda

A new start with a positive outlook!
- Cassie Deras-Coker

I'm looking forward to new beginnings and hopefully a less crazy year. - Valerie Rivas



Peace, healing in our country, unity among each other. - Judy Boonstoppel

What is your new year's resolution for 2021?

I want to start a nonprofit in honor of my mother who died in 2016.
- April Steward

Do a kind deed every day and pass it forward! - Bobbie Bishop



Practice patience.
- Brenna Smith

To enjoy things and be appreciative of things a lot more than this year and to be able to visit with family and make each moment count.
- Caroline Ryan



To stop procrastinating, but I may wait until next January to start that. Every year I try to be better than the year before.
- Peggy Abrego

Eat more cupcakes! - Alison Burrowes

My new year's resolution for 2021 is to get back to my groove. As a mother, I feel as if I have lost myself. I want to just focus on making sure my family and home is taken care of. I believe my family will benefit from it as well, as I am sure I will be happier. - Laura Gonzalez

To create more family memories. - Luz Garcia

Fully accepting myself at every stage; being one of my biggest cheerleaders. - LaQuesha Wiley



Support small businesses more. - Keith Koski

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How to be a Fitness Role Model for Your Kids

By Sandi Schwartz

As we all know, being a parent is the most important job in the world. Our children look up to us for guidance on everything in life, even if we don't realize it. One way that you can be a positive role model to your kids is in the area of fitness. Staying fit is critical to our health and well-being—including our mental health and happiness. We can help shape our children's views on exercise by modeling healthy behavior and making fitness a fun part of our family's daily routine.

Why Exercise Is Important For Managing Stress and Anxiety

Experts have found a clear link between exercise and stress reduction. Harvard scientists concluded that "Regular aerobic exercise has a unique capacity to exhilarate and relax, to provide stimulation and calm, to counter depression and dissipate stress." According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, some studies show that consistent exercise can be just as effective as medication for some people to reduce symptoms of anxiety. Other research shows that physically active people have lower rates of anxiety than those who do not exercise. In one study, researchers found that those who got regular vigorous exercise were 25 percent less likely to develop depression or an anxiety disorder over the next five years.

Here are several ways in which exercise helps reduce stress and anxiety:

Produces Endorphins. When we exercise, our body releases feel-good neurotransmitters called endorphins. These chemicals in our brain act as natural painkillers, making us feel better and less stressed. Endorphins are responsible for the natural high we get from a hard workout.

Reduces Stress Hormones. Exercise reduces the level of stress hormones in our body like adrenaline and cortisol, helping us feel calmer.

Minimizes Fatigue. Exercise improves blood flow and our body's ability to use oxygen efficiently. These changes in our brain then reduce fatigue and improve alertness, concentration, and cogni-

tive function. This helps us when we are stressed out because we are depleted and need to return to a more balanced level of energy. When we are stressed, many nerves in our brain and throughout our body are impacted. Scientists conclude, therefore, that if our body feels better, then our mind will also feel better.

Improves Self-Esteem. Behavioral factors also contribute to the emotional benefits of exercise. When we gain strength and begin to see a difference in our body, we feel better about ourselves and become happier and more confident. Feeling better about ourselves shifts our focus to positive thoughts and away from fear and anxiety.

Provides A Fun Distraction. One of the best parts about exercise is that it gives us a time to take a fun break from the stresses in our daily lives. Whether you are jogging to your favorite upbeat music or socializing with friends on the tennis court, your mind is distracted and you can just have a good time.

Makes Sleeping Easier. According to Mayo Clinic, exercise can also improve how we sleep. This is great news for those suffering from insomnia due to stress and anxiety.

Encourages Mindfulness. A great bonus of exercise is that it provides the perfect opportunity to enjoy a mindful moment. While we work out, we can fully engage in the present moment instead of letting our mind run wild with worries. Helpguide.org suggests that "as you move, instead of continuing to focus on your thoughts, focus on the sensations in your limbs and how your breathing complements your movement. If your mind wanders to other thoughts, gently return to focusing on your breathing and movement. If walking or running, for example, focus on each step—the sensation of your feet touching the ground, the rhythm of your breath while moving, and the feeling of the wind against your face."

How to be a Fitness Role Model

It's so important that we play actively with our kids from a young age and that we consistently exercise in front of them (and sometimes with them) to show them how importance physical

fitness is. From going on family bike rides to coaching one of their sports teams, there are so many helpful ways for you to be a fitness role model to your children throughout their lives.

Here are some more ideas to get you moving:

Go for a hike outdoors. Not only are walks and hikes wonderful, safe exercise that the entire family can enjoy, they are also an opportunity to connect to the beauty of nature to bring you a sense of calm. Try adding some fun to your family hikes by turning them into a race or scavenger hunt, and by venturing to new parks and trails in your area and while on vacation.

Take a mommy and me yoga class together. Yoga offers so many incredible benefits to both you and our children including balance, strength training, time for inner focus, and an opportunity to connect with our bodies in ways we aren't used to. Sign up for a yoga class that you can take together or pop in a video or load an App so you can do some yoga together in your living room, or better yet in your backyard.

Make exercise a priority even in bad weather.

Show your kids that you still go on your morning run even if it's not sunny outside. On days when it's cold or rainy, set up your fitness routine indoors and get your kids involved.

Put on a workout video and have them join in.

There are also lots of fun ways to use your indoor space to get everyone moving. Some of the easiest exercises to perform indoors include jumping rope and calisthenics like push-ups, sit ups, and jumping jacks. Or put on some peppy music and play freeze dance or have a hula hoop contest. Before you know it, you will all be working up a sweat!

Give sports-related gifts. Another way to make fitness a priority in your home is to choose gifts like workout clothes, sports equipment, and how to books about sports during birthday and holiday time. You can also choose some tickets for a sporting event and make it a fun family outing to cheer on your team together.

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january Activity Corner ...answers on next page

Sudoku

	3	2	8			7	9	
	4						6	
6		7	2	4			5	
7			9		5	4		3
8					4		7	
	5	4	3	1				9
		5	4	6	8	2		
	7		5					
					1			8

Level: Beginner

Sudoku puzzles are formatted as a 9x9 grid, broken down into nine 3x3 boxes. To solve: the number 1 through 9 must fill each row, column and box. Each number can appear only once in each row, column and box. Figure out the order the numbers will appear by using the clues already provided in the boxes. The more numbers you name, the easier it gets!

Crossword Puzzle

1		2						3
4							5	
6						7		

ACROSS

- Downhill sport
- Very breezy
- Scary film and book
- In the north
- A bit cold

DOWN

- Frozen precipitation
- Type of metal
- Blades on ice
- Snakelike fish

Computer Word Search

BROADBAND
COMPUTE
DATA
FIREWALL

KEYBOARD
MEMORY
PROCESS
PROTECT

REBOOT
SECURE
STARTUP
VIRUS

P R S S V Y M C U T F K
O U G E R I O B D C I F
Q X T O C M R N N E R U
J R M R P U A U D T E F
H E K U A B R P S O W Y
M Y T A D T D E N R A B
M E O A Y W S C T P L W
X P O R E B O O T Z L D
G R S S E C O R P P H A
B B P T R O F R P A L T
K M K L E F J K D W Z A
Y L O F K E Y B O A R D

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BONUS
PUZZLE!

Wintertime Word Search

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U	M	M	Y	L	L	I	H	C	F	S	F	S	M	F	S	L	E	D	K
K	V	K	D	A	E	D	B	U	F	W	T	C	W	N	B	I	R	R	R
Y	R	G	G	N	W	G	N	U	T	S	D	Y	O	F	O	G	T	I	F
D	O	W	N	H	I	L	L	A	U	D	H	W	G	A	R	M	U	F	W
G	T	C	I	I	H	F	W	G	L	T	A	O	G	U	T	A	L	T	I
O	H	S	T	U	I	Y	Y	N	E	R	S	W	V	F	W	O	C	V	N
U	D	C	A	H	G	K	W	W	M	C	E	T	T	E	N	C	I	S	T
O	F	O	K	I	C	U	S	T	U	N	H	D	U	K	L	O	G	L	E
U	H	M	S	T	S	V	H	F	M	F	S	E	N	B	T	E	B	Y	R
W	K	V	C	V	V	M	L	I	Y	N	G	R	C	O	E	V	B	K	D
F	B	O	F	O	I	U	S	D	O	U	O	D	F	I	W	B	T	H	R
C	M	E	T	K	R	T	F	W	V	M	G	B	Y	F	U	R	N	O	S
D	F	C	R	R	C	N	L	T	W	N	F	R	O	S	T	Y	H	C	H
L	E	B	I	A	H	G	A	A	Y	E	H	D	O	H	U	U	F	K	V
A	K	E	G	O	K	N	O	G	K	K	M	I	M	M	H	E	D	E	U
R	S	L	M	B	U	N	D	L	E	D	N	E	Y	G	C	M	H	Y	F
Y	M	F	D	H	T	E	D	W	T	Y	F	F	U	L	F	A	D	D	H
C	C	C	M	I	D	A	U	F	A	L	B	E	C	V	D	R	A	O	B
V	F	T	R	K	S	N	E	T	T	I	M	Y	O	K	L	O	C	H	U

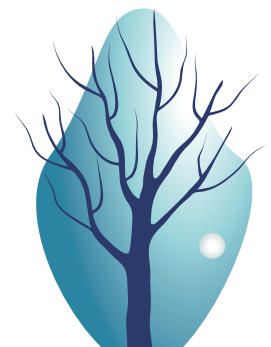
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CHILLY
COAT
DOWNHILL

DRIFT
FLUFFY
FLURRIES
FROSTBITE
FROSTY

GUSTS
HOCKEY
ICE
MITTENS
SCARF

SHOVEL
SKATING
SKIING
SLED
SNOW

TUBE
WARMTH
WINTER
WONDERLAND



ACTIVITY CORNER ANSWERS

CROSSWORD

ACROSS

1. Skiing
4. Windy
5. It
6. Northern
8. Chilly

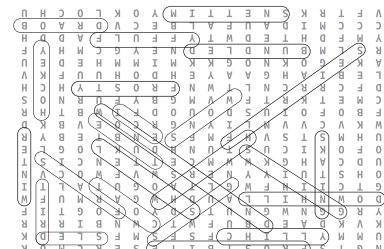
DOWN

1. Snowing
2. Iron
3. Skating
7. Eel

SUDOKU

8	4	5	1	9	7	6	3	2	6
4	7	8	5	3	2	9	1	6	
9	1	5	4	6	8	2	3	7	
2	5	4	3	1	7	6	8	9	
8	9	3	6	2	4	1	7	5	
7	6	1	9	8	5	4	2	3	
6	8	7	2	4	9	3	5	1	
5	4	9	1	7	3	8	6	2	
1	3	2	8	5	6	7	9	4	

BONUS WORD SEARCH (this page)





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