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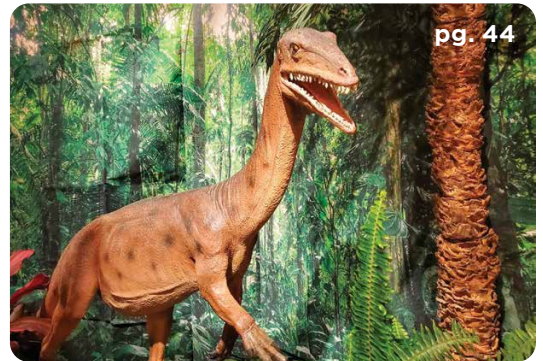
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Sensory Island

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In Our Spring Era

There's something special about raising a family in New York: access, energy, and the feeling that we live in a place with resources and possibilities. This issue is rooted in that idea.

This month's cover story on Sensory Island (page 16) shares the new safe-haven community for Neurodivergent children and families coming right here to Long Island!

We're also taking a closer look at accessibility and inclusion with our Special Needs Education and Resources Guide. Check out our guide to sensory-friendly spaces in NYC airports (p. 22), which highlights how travel is becoming more thoughtful for children with different needs, Mattel's

first autistic doll (p. 18), which signals an important shift toward representation in everyday play, and our super helpful Special Needs Education (p. 28) and resource listings (p. 26).

And it's spring (someone PLEASE tell Mother Nature). Whether you're planning a birthday party (p. 32), helping your teen land their first job (p. 36), or mapping out spring adventures (p. 40), this issue is filled with resources to make life a little easier, and a lot more fun.

As always, we're so glad you're here.

New York Family

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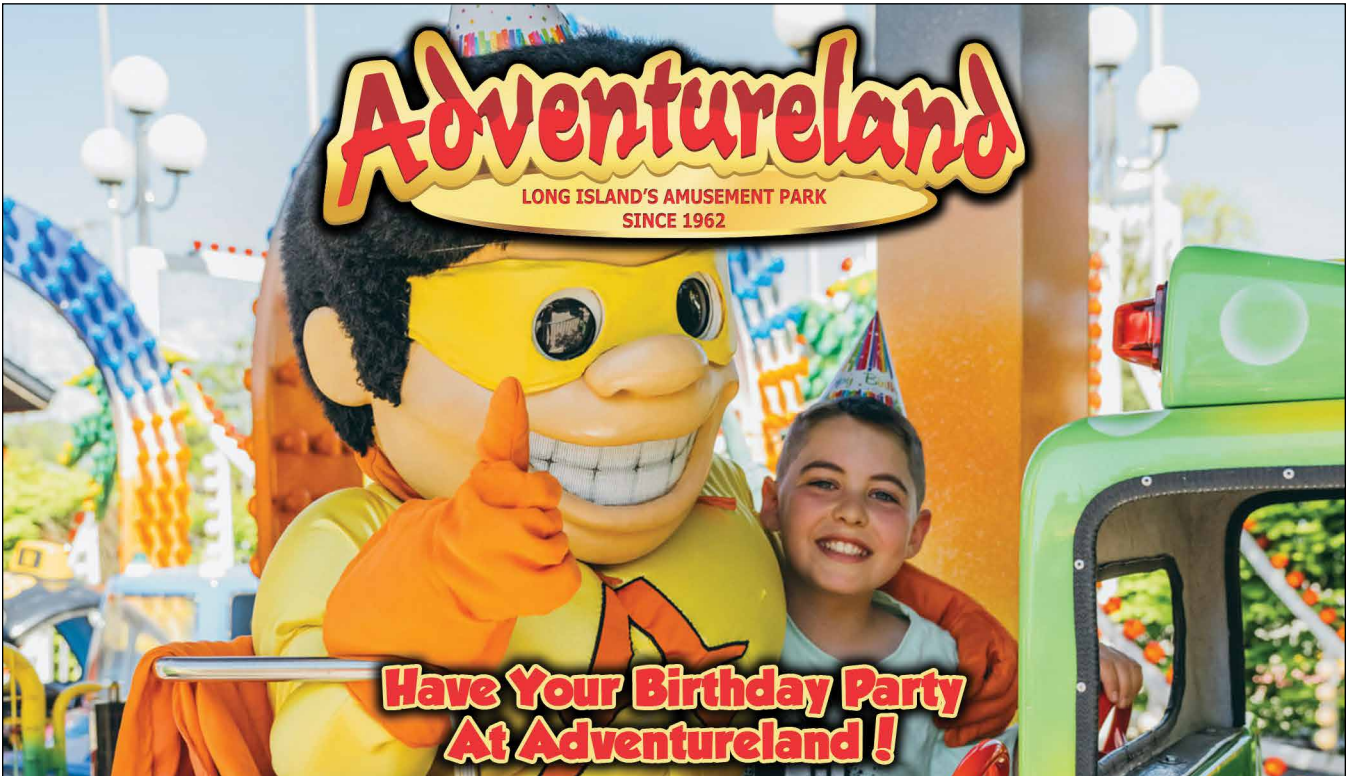
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10 Cool Aviation Activities for Kids Near NYC

Museums, plane watching and more

BY SOE KABBABE

For kids who can't stop talking about airplanes, jets, space, and everything that soars through the sky, the New York area delivers a surprisingly rich lineup of aviation-inspired adventures.

From world-class museums and hands-on flight experiences to peaceful plane-watching hotspots and career-focused youth programs, this local family guide with cool, fun aviation activities for kids near NYC will help you plan unforgettable outings for your little aviation enthusiast.

Aviation Museums & Hands-On Exhibits

Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum

Pier 86, W 46th St & 12th Ave, Manhattan

Hours: Daily, 10 am–5 pm

Price: \$38 per ticket; check website for discounts and bundles

Set on an actual aircraft carrier docked on the Hudson, the Intrepid Museum blends maritime history with aviation thrills. Kids can explore historic jets on the flight deck, climb into helicopters, and learn about space and aircraft design in interactive exhibits. Highlights include the Space Shuttle Enterprise, a Bell 47 helicopter to climb on, hands-on areas designed to spark curiosity, and my personal favorite: the British Airways Concorde—the only one on display in the northeast of the country!

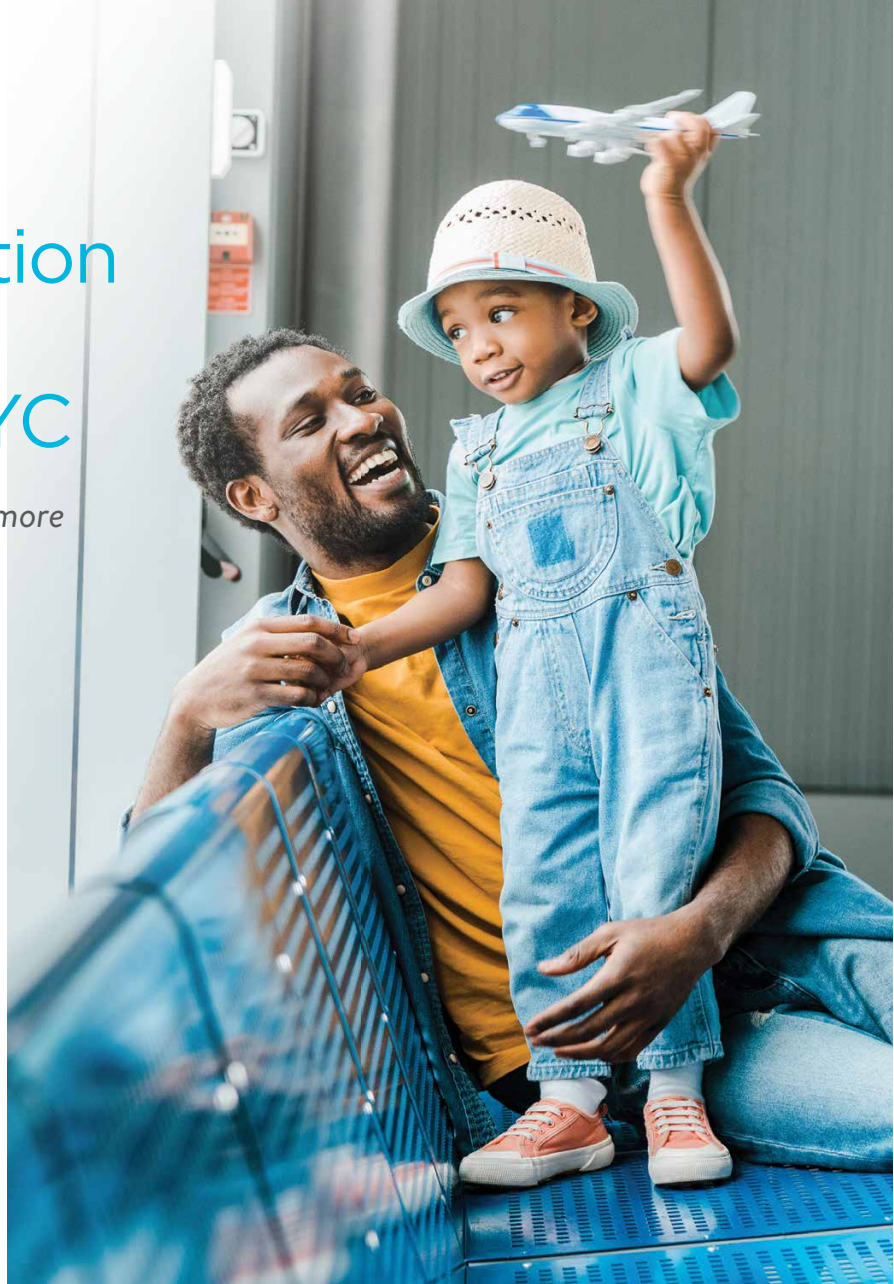
Cradle of Aviation Museum

Charles Lindbergh Blvd., Garden City

Hours: Tuesday–Sunday, 10 am–5 pm

Price: \$18 adults per ticket

One of the most comprehensive aviation destinations in the region, the Cradle of Aviation celebrates flight history from hot air balloons to lunar modules, all under one roof. With more than 75 aircraft on display, interactive exhibits, and STEM-focused activities, it's a full day of discovery and aviation activities for kids who love planes



and space. There's even the Junior Jet Club, a special play-oriented area for younger children included with admission.

American Airpower Museum

1230 New Hwy (Republic Airport) East Farmingdale

Hours: Wednesday–Sunday, 10:30 am–4 pm

Price: \$18 per ticket

Located right on Republic Airport, this aviation museum offers a deep dive into historic aircraft and the role they've played in shaping flight history. With classic jets and planes from different eras, it's a great complement to a plane watching trip near one of Long Island's busiest general aviation hubs.

Plane Watching & Outdoor Experiences

Parking Areas Around Republic Airport, Farmingdale

A favorite local pastime is watching aircraft take off and land at Republic Airport.

Families often stake out spots near Stew Leonard's parking lot or neighboring parks where runways are visible—a perfect casual outing with snacks and lawn chairs. From vintage flights to training planes, aviation lovers will find plenty to gaze at. Bring binoculars and plan your visit based on runway usage (runway 19/01 gives the best views according to local spotters!).

Wings Café & Airport Views Near Brookhaven/Southampton Airport

135 Dawn Dr, Shirley

Hours: 8 am–2 pm

For a more relaxed plane-watching experience with food, Wings Café sits right near the runway at Brookhaven Airport. A fun combination of lunch and aviation observation for young flyers.

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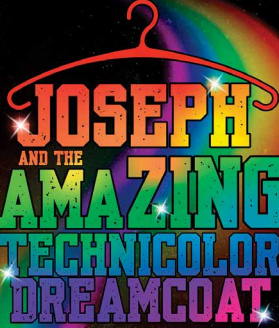
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TWA Hotel & JFK Runway Views

1 Idlewild Dr, Queens

Though technically a hotel stay, the TWA Hotel's runway viewing areas are iconic for aviation lovers. Families can sip a snack or grab breakfast in the sunken lounge or the Paris Cafe while watching jets take off and land, offering a true New York aviation experience. Outdoors, you'll be able to find another classic aircraft (and one of my favorites!): the Lockheed Constellation. Nicknamed as the Connie, there's a cocktail lounge where kiddos can hangout while parents enjoy a drink or two.

Flight Simulators Lessons & Youth Programs for Kids

Aviator.NYC

131 Varick St #928

Price: Starting at \$190 per hour for kids.

Inquiry for bundles, discounts, and package lessons

Flight simulator lessons and youth aviation group programs for children ages 8–16 guided by real airline pilots, how cool is that? For kids who love aviation beyond museums

and plane watching, this program brings flight simulation to life. Under professional mentorship, older kiddos can learn how real airplanes are flown and connect their simulator skills to pilot concepts—a unique way to turn a hobby into a potential future passion.

Historic Airfields & Trailblazers Bayport Aerodrome

60 Vitamin Drive, Bayport

Hours: Seasonal, April through November, Sundays only 10 am-4 pm

Price: No fee, but donations accepted

This grass runway airfield feels like stepping back in time. With vintage aircraft and special events, it's a serene place to explore early aviation and watch classic planes in action.

Republic Airport Aviation Walk of Fame

7150 Republic Airport, East Farmingdale

Hours: Same as the American Airpower Museum

Museum

Price: No fee

Stroll this aviation walk to learn about Long Island's contributions to flight history, with plaques honoring pioneers like Charles Lindbergh and Leroy Grumman. It's a nice self-guided educational break between spotting sessions.

Airplanes & Model Shop near New York City

The Airplane Shop

24 Stewart Pl #4, Fairfield, NJ

Hours: Check website for updated hours, as sometimes it can be temporally closed. Online shop available

Price: Free to browse; prices vary by model

Just over an hour from New York City, Airplane Shop is a must-visit for aviation-obsessed kids and collectors alike. This hobby and model store is known for its large selection of die-cast and plastic aircraft models in popular scales, from commercial airliners to classic military planes—perfect for hands-on play or display. If you're planning a day full of aviation activities for kids, you can pair this with a visit to nearby airports, like Newark.

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Meet East Woods' Next Head of School Alex Carter

At East Woods School, it's the faculty and staff who truly shape the student experience. Deeply committed to their work, they bring care, dedication, and professionalism into the classroom each day. What stands out most is how intentionally they build relationships with students, taking the time to understand each child as an individual and creating an environment where students feel supported, challenged, and valued.

For the soon-to-be Head of School Alex Carter, that sense of connection is exactly what drew him to East Woods. Before arriving, he spent many years teaching and working at two boarding schools in Connecticut. While those experiences were meaningful, he was ultimately drawn to East Woods for its strong sense of community and its commitment to developing the whole child, academically, socially, and emotionally.

Now 30 years into his career in education, Mr. Carter reflects on a path that wasn't always obvious. While attending Wesleyan University, where he played ice hockey and served as team captain, he initially considered more traditional career routes. Like many of his friends, fields such as finance or business seemed like the expected next step.

That changed in a moment. As part of the hockey team's community involvement, players would spend Sundays skating with younger children. One day, his coach pulled him aside and suggested he might make a great teacher. The idea stuck. After spending a summer teaching and coaching, he realized that working with students was not only rewarding, but something he felt passionate about. From that point on, education became his path.

Over the decades, that decision has proven to be the right one. He describes his career as incredibly fulfilling, grounded in helping students grow, learn, and discover their potential. That same philosophy continues to guide his work at East Woods today.

Outside the classroom, Mr. Carter's commitment to community is just as strong. He believes in starting locally



and giving back to the places you call home. He currently serves on the board of Rising Stars, a nonprofit youth basketball organization, and is also president of his neighborhood civic association. As he settles into Oyster Bay, he looks forward to becoming even more involved in the local community.

On a personal level, he is a longtime sports enthusiast with a deep appreciation for theater. He and his wife are also embracing a new chapter as their two children attend college.

Originally from Plattsburgh, New York, near Lake Champlain and the Canadian border, he grew up with long, snowy winters that stretched from October

through March. But he remembers the trade-off fondly; those short but beautiful summers on the lake made it all worthwhile.

It's this combination of passion, and leadership that helps define the culture at East Woods School, an environment where students are not just educated, but genuinely known.

This new chapter follows the remarkable tenure of outgoing Head of School Laura Kang, whose leadership and vision helped shape East Woods into the thriving and respected community it is today. The school's strong foundation is a testament to her lasting impact and dedicated years of service.



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Bryanna Copeland and Jayda

Bryanna is mom goals. She is a single mom graduating this May with her Master's in Social Work. She is passionate about advocacy, inclusive parenting, and creating space for disabled mothers to be seen and heard. She is wearing a long black dress styled with a vibrant red printed scarf, an easy day-to-night chic look.

Jayda, 19 months, is a bubbly, active toddler who loves ducks and being outdoors. She is super stylish in a pleather pinafore layered over a crisp white shirt, finished with classic Mary Janes.

Daria, Aiden and Rocco

Daria runs two businesses, a daycare and a cleaning company, and enjoys unwinding at the gym when she can. Daria is wearing a flowing polka-dot maxi dress paired with a black cardigan finished with delicate white trim at the neckline, a classic look that feels just right for the transitional weather April brings.

Aiden, 7, loves to draw and is a standout on the soccer field. This is his third year playing, and he's known as a top player who regularly scores goals.

Rocco, 2, is playing soccer for the first time and loves construction toys, always busy building something new.

Both boys wear pointelle polo knit short-sleeve sweaters paired with classic khakis for an easy, timeless look.

Location: Abrams Fensterman

3 Dakota Dr. , New Hyde Park, NY 11042
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Staci Leibson**

Interested in being featured with your child(ren) in an upcoming issue? Email familylipress@schnepsmedia.com

Sensory Island

A place for families of all children, specifically designed for the neurodivergent & sensory-sensitive

BY MIA SALAS

For many Long Island parents raising neurodivergent or sensory-sensitive children, everyday outings can come with an extra layer of planning and uncertainty. A simple trip to the playground or a playdate with friends might start with excitement, but quickly turn stressful. You're constantly scanning for exits, thinking about noise levels, crowds, and how your child might respond—while also hoping they get to experience the same joy and connection as other kids.

It can often feel isolating as parents. You might cut outings short, skip out on birthday parties, or say no to plans altogether—not because your kids don't want to join, but because the world isn't always built with them in mind. And in those moments, many quietly wonder: Why isn't there a space where my child can feel comfortable, included, and free to just have fun? A place where typical children learn empathy and provide peer role modeling?

This spring, a new destination on Long Island aims to change that. Sensory Island, opening with a ribbon cutting on April 2 in honor of World Autism Awareness Day, is more than just a play space. It's an integrated, thoughtfully designed environment where children of all abilities can partake, and where parents can find support. And with an estimated 1,388 to 2,778 autistic children on Long Island alone, accessible specialized services, including occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech therapy, and ABA therapy, are in high demand.

At the heart of Sensory Island is founder Dr. Ralu Onubogu, whose vision grew out of her own deeply personal experience raising her son, Toby, now 15. "When Toby wasn't meeting his developmental milestones and we received his diagnosis, it was devastating for me and my entire family. None of the children in our family had ever been diagnosed with autism. I blamed myself, I felt guilty. It took me many years to realize that it's not my fault," she shares.

Like many parents, Dr. Ralu Onubogu



faced years of uncertainty, trial and error, and emotional strain navigating therapies and daily challenges. "Toby went through phases. We went through a 3-year period when he'd only eat Doritos. When that phase passed, we entered another where he'd eat everything. As Toby got older, he would get frustrated with not being able to communicate well and act out. Even with speech therapy, he is still minimally verbal.

One moment, in particular, became a turning point. "I remember one day coming home from work and Toby had wrecked my entire closet. He was sitting on the floor, crying, and I sat next to him and cried. I knew all the support was still not enough. I felt inadequate, like I was not giving him all he needed."

After struggling to access services and

extracurricular activities with long waitlists and rigid criteria, Dr. Ralu Onubogu began imagining something different—something more holistic and inclusive.

"One day, I went to Tanger Outlet in Deer Park to meet my friend for a playdate with our kids. As we got there, Toby became overstimulated, and I knew he was melting down. We had no choice but to cancel. My heart was so heavy because my two other kids were upset since they wanted to play with their friends, and I also was looking forward to seeing my friend," she shares. "I asked myself in that moment, what if a place existed that would be fun for kids like Toby, so that as a mom, I wouldn't feel bad taking a moment for myself. A place where all kids can have fun together in the same environment, and the environment will cater to all their needs. And, maybe, just



Photos by Chokolat Studios

maybe, I could take an hour and have an adult conversation with a friend.”

From that day forward, Dr. Ralu Onubogu set out to create Sensory Island: “An integrated space with different areas. If a child is overstimulated, there is a calming space just for them. If they want to engage and be part of their environment, if they seek socialization, there would be a place for them.”

Walking into Sensory Island, families are greeted by a welcoming reception area and a curated shop featuring sensory toys, adaptive devices, and practical tools. “We make sure we vet and try things out that will actually help kids and they’ll use, products we can stand behind so moms don’t have to shop blindly,” Dr. Ralu Onubogu explains.

Beyond the entrance, the space unfolds into a series of purpose-driven rooms—each



inspired by real-life needs from her own parenting journey. A motor skills room encourages movement and physical play, with ball pits, rock climbing walls and obstacle courses designed to help kids release energy in a safe, engaging way. “I wanted a space where Toby could run around so much that he would come home exhausted and want to sleep,” she explains.

The sensory café offers a social hub where children can meet for playdates, work on homework, or even participate in therapy sessions that feel like play. “Children look forward to going to therapy because it’s masked as play time,” Dr. Ralu Onubogu says. “Caregivers can grab a cup of coffee, too.”

Creative expression is woven throughout the space. A music room invites exploration through instruments, dance, and sound, focusing on the therapeutic benefits of music. An arts room features textured walls, a dry erase board, chalkboard surfaces, a smart board, and even a water wall—designed to engage multiple senses at once.

For families who have struggled with traditional celebrations, Sensory Island also includes a party room tailored for sensory friendly birthdays. “I wanted to have parties for Toby like my other kids... but in the middle, he would be overstimulated... In this space, we created a little sensory nook. If a child starts to feel overstimulated, they can go and relax in a separate environment to decompress.”

Practical life skills are another key part of the space. The ADL (Activities of Daily Living) suite helps children practice essential tasks like folding clothes, doing dishes, making beds, and choosing outfits—skills that build independence over time through repetition.

And in a uniquely thoughtful addition, a “glam room” reimagines haircuts and grooming experiences for children with sensory sensitivities. “Toby struggled with haircuts. Other clients would be traumatized watch-

ing him be held down. I’d go home drained, dreading the next haircut. I wanted to create a space where everyone knows what this is... If it takes an hour to cut their hair, that’s what we’re doing. If they need to lay on the floor, that’s what we’ll do.”

“Even summer camp is something Toby has never been able to experience. We will be offering both half and full days.”

While the physical space is impressive, Dr. Onubogu emphasizes that Sensory Island is ultimately about something deeper: connection and support for families navigating similar journeys.

“I take it to heart when I say I want Sensory Island to be a community,” she says. “We will continue to research best practices regarding neurodivergent children, foster parent support circles, share educational tips, experiences, product reviews, and provide respite, all things that will help make the lives of parents easier.”

One key focus is helping families navigate complex systems like OPWDD (Office for People With Developmental Disabilities), which many parents find overwhelming. “We want to be able to guide parents through the process. We will have staff who can assist with the ‘Self Direction’ application to help families access what their child needs to thrive. I struggled for years to get Toby approved. I hope that by forming this community where we have a support system for parents, it will make a big difference.”

Sensory Island is built on real experiences of raising a child with special needs, making it a unique space that redefines what inclusive play can look like. For families across Long Island, it offers something that’s often hard to find: not just a place to go, but a place to belong.

Want to learn more and be one of the first to check out the space? Head to sensoryisland.com now!

How to Calm an Autistic Child

A parent's guide to managing meltdowns and burnout

BY SHARON KAYE O'CONNOR, LCSW

When your autistic child is having a meltdown, you might feel helpless or confused about how to respond. We want to help and support our kids, but it's not always clear what to do when they're overwhelmed and struggling.

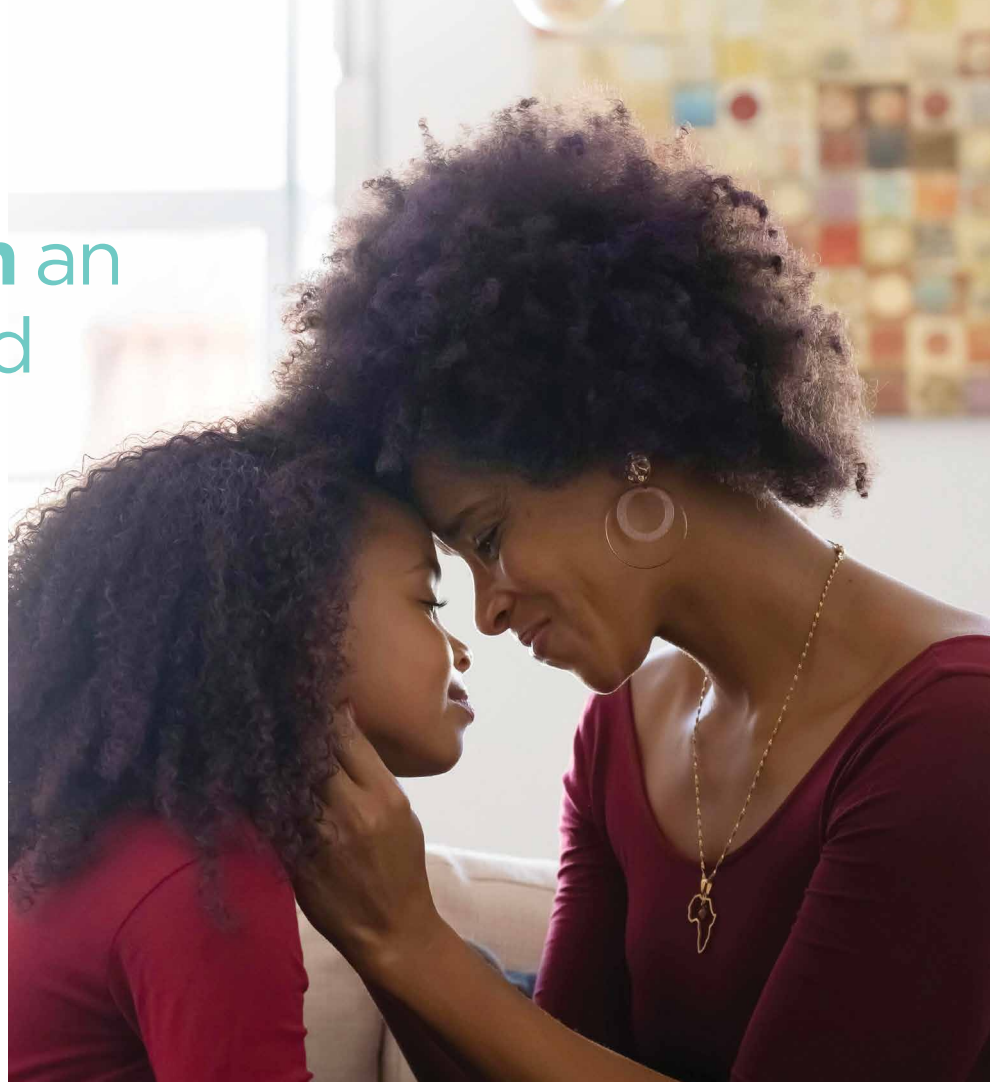
As an autistic psychotherapist specializing in autism and a parent of a neurodivergent child, the question I hear most from fellow parents is how to calm an autistic child during a meltdown. Understanding what's happening for your child in these difficult moments is the first step toward helping them through it.

What Triggers Meltdowns in Autistic Children?

Autistic meltdowns occur when our nervous systems reach complete overload. This is generally due to sensory overload and discomfort, emotional overwhelm, fatigue, and other stressors. Meltdowns can be caused by a combination and accumulation of these elements over time.

At the core of our autistic experience is a difference in how our systems process the world around us. Because autistic sensory systems work differently, some kids frequently experience sensory overwhelm while others struggle to get enough sensory input. As autistic folks, it can cost our nervous systems tremendous energy just to process all the sensory information in the world around us, much of which we can experience as painful.

It can also be taxing and overwhelming to manage interactions with others, as it often requires us to communicate in ways that aren't natural for us while we navigate the non-autistic world. We may mask our autistic traits to appear less different, which can be a major source of exhaustion and stress. As we continue to manage all the stressors, communication differences, and sensory aspects of our environment, sometimes the overload



becomes more than our systems can handle, and that's when meltdowns are most likely.

Some triggers for a meltdown might include:

- Too much interaction, or too many social demands
- Masking over a prolonged period of time
- Not enough downtime or feeling overscheduled
- Sensory overstimulation, understimulation, or discomfort
- Too many demands throughout the course of the day
- Experiencing pain, feeling sick or unwell
- Fatigue or too little sleep
- Stressors, including big or small changes
- Unpredictability within the environment, or inability to access familiar routines

Remember that triggers for a meltdown tend to be stressors that accumulate over time, so the last trigger that happens before a meltdown is usually just the final item in a long list of stressors that have been building.

Keep in mind that our nervous system regulation requires a great deal of energy, and when we are fatigued or running low on energy (such as during times of autistic burnout),

meltdowns can become more frequent. In fact, for many autistic folks, more meltdowns can be a key sign of autistic burnout.

Understanding Meltdowns vs. Burnout

Meltdowns and autistic burnout are often confused with each other, and while they are different aspects of our experience, they frequently go hand in hand. A meltdown is a period of complete overwhelm that occurs when our nervous systems are stressed and overloaded beyond our ability to manage. Think of a meltdown like a thunderstorm: brief and intense.

For some, meltdowns look like outward explosions of emotions. During an autistic meltdown, kids may exhibit tearfulness, yelling, stimming, or other movement. For others, meltdowns resemble an internal implosion that can be invisible. Meltdowns are sometimes confused with panic attacks due to the intensity of stress the child is experiencing.

Similar to a meltdown, autistic shutdowns can also occur. When experiencing an autistic shutdown, kids might literally shut down and withdraw from the environment due to sen-

Calming an autistic child during a meltdown becomes much more possible if we, ourselves, are able to remain calm.

sory overwhelm, social overload, or difficult emotions. During an autistic shutdown, your child might seem to just “stop” and go inward to recover from overwhelm. During shutdowns, it can be helpful to remove demands and give your child space and time to recover from the overwhelm they are experiencing.

Autistic burnout occurs over a longer period—days, weeks, months, or even years—and is a time when an autistic person has run out of energy from managing in a world that was not created with autistic needs in mind. Autistic burnout in children is often referred to as regression, as this is when your child might lose skills they previously had access to.

For example, a child who usually communicates through speaking might start to struggle with speech and communication. A child who previously dressed themselves independently might now require much more support for activities of daily living (ADLs). You might also see more dysregulation or difficult emotions. Autistic burnout is also when sensory differences and discomforts become more pronounced, so your child might suddenly become more sensitive to sound or feel like everyone else is “too close.” During autistic burnout, your child might need more time for rest, unscheduled time, or time to just be in their internal world.

Autistic Meltdowns vs. Tantrums

Autistic meltdowns in kids are frequently confused with tantrums. They can look similar, so understanding the difference is important. A meltdown occurs when a person’s nervous system is overwhelmed and beyond its limit, and there is usually a large component of sensory discomfort.

During a meltdown, the person is not in control; their rational brain is offline, and the meltdown is not an attempt to manipulate or “get” anything. A person having a meltdown is in an incredibly vulnerable state. Tantrums tend to happen when a child experiences heightened frustration, stress, or not getting something they need or want, but they might not have the communication tools to express their feelings or needs in a more helpful way.

Whether a child is struggling with a meltdown or a tantrum, it is so important that they are always met with care, empathy, and love.

What are the 6 Stages of Autism-Related Meltdown?

You might have heard that there are six stages of an autistic meltdown. I tend to think of meltdowns as taking the shape of an arc. At

the beginning, there is an accumulation of stressors and triggers, which may occur over a long period. As overwhelm increases and your child’s stress level rises, they may start to reach their limit of stressors they can manage, and the rumble stage begins.

During the rumble stage, you might notice indicators that your child is becoming more overwhelmed or dysregulated and is headed for a meltdown. In my consulting experience with teachers and parents, I have found it can be easy to miss subtle signs of the rumble stage because autistic communication looks different, and so our nonverbal cues that we are becoming overwhelmed can be difficult at times for others to identify.

Some signs to look for might be increased stimming, heightened emotionality, talking or engaging less, increased sensitivity to sensory aspects of the environment, and a growing sense of distress. As we notice the rumble stage, it’s a great time to reduce stressors, remove demands where possible, and increase sensory comfort. If we’re able to intervene and reduce stress and overwhelm during the rumble stage, meltdowns can often be prevented. If stressors and overwhelm continue to accumulate during the rumble stage, a meltdown becomes much more likely.

The meltdown itself is the crisis point. Picture this as the top of the arc, where distress is at its peak. After stressors build to a point where they become unbearable, the meltdown is like the inevitable thunderstorm that follows heat and humidity in the air. As the meltdown occurs and the thunderstorm passes through, much of that stress and overwhelm is released from our systems. You may notice that your child slowly de-escalates from the meltdown and then, afterward, is in a state of relative calm or exhaustion. They might even fall asleep. During this recovery period, your child might need to rest, have space to be alone, or want connection and reassurance.

What to Avoid During Meltdowns

There are many ways we can support our kids during meltdowns, but first, let’s talk about what to avoid during meltdowns, or when

your autistic child is overwhelmed. Because meltdowns are caused by extreme overload and stress, we want to avoid adding any more overwhelm to what our kids might be currently experiencing. During a meltdown, we can avoid:

- Pushing them to talk or explain how they are feeling
- Punishment or talk of punishment
- Trying to negotiate
- Trying to “correct” behavior
- Making other demands
- Yelling, shaming or admonishing
- Taking away a favorite object or comfort item
- Withholding support or connection in exchange for changed behavior

How to Calm an Autistic Child During a Meltdown

The most important thing we can do when our child is having a meltdown is to recognize that they are in a state of extreme distress. Calming an autistic child during a meltdown becomes much more possible if we, ourselves, are able to remain calm.

Stay calm: When our kids are dysregulated, we can co-regulate with them if we are able to stay more regulated ourselves. By maintaining our own calm, we can help them to de-escalate their overwhelm. So the first thing that can be helpful is just taking a moment to take a deep breath and center yourself.

Stay safe: When a child is having a meltdown, it’s most important to keep them and everyone else safe. This could include having others move out of the room or space, and making sure there aren’t any hazardous items that might be within the child’s reach. Having fewer people in the space can also help reduce any overwhelm that your child may be experiencing.

Offer words of support: Giving your child space during the meltdown, but also letting them know you’re nearby to support them, can be helpful. For some kids, it can be reassuring to hear a few gentle words of support and empathy, such as “I’ll be right over here if you need me” or a gentle reflection like “I see you’re having a really hard time.” Others might prefer not talking at all during these times, as they might find this more overwhelming and more sensory information to process.

Make the environment as sensory-friendly as possible: If you know your child is sensitive to bright lights or loud sounds, see if it is possible to dim the lights a bit or reduce

any noises that might be present in the space.

Hands off: During times of meltdown and overwhelm, it can be helpful to avoid touching your child unless they have specifically let you know that they would like hugs or deep pressure.

You may notice your child may start to de-escalate gradually, and may return to a place of feeling calmer. It is important to continue to reduce stressors and demands for a while during this recovery period, even if it appears as if they've recovered from the meltdown, as they may still be extra sensitive and vulnerable to overwhelm for a period of time.

Preventing Autistic Meltdowns

When it comes to meltdowns, prevention tends to be the best cure. When we are more able to identify and accommodate our kids' needs related to sensory differences, communication and interaction preferences, and the need for rest and downtime, we can actually help to prevent meltdowns, or at least help them to become fewer and farther between.

Here are a few tips that can help keep the meltdowns away!

Identify any sensory needs that may be present for your child. This can be done with the help of an occupational therapist (OT), or by observing how your child responds to the sensory elements of daily life. Is your child generally more sensory sensitive, sensory seeking, or a combination of the two? What sensory supports would be most helpful for your child?

Make sure your child has the rest and downtime that they need. For many kids, just getting through the school day can be overwhelming, and they may need lots of downtime after they come home. Does your child need extra time to rest and decompress?

Consider your child's socialization needs. Do they prefer lots of interaction and social time, or do they need lots of time alone to decompress and enjoy their internal worlds?

Many of us thrive on routines or at least the predictability of knowing what our day or week is going to look like. Can you give your child a heads-up to any upcoming changes in the schedule or new things that might be happening on the calendar soon?

During times of big changes, such as back-to-school time or traveling over a holiday, try to minimize other demands or stressors wherever possible

Time outside or time in nature can be helpful in reducing our stress levels. Is there

a favorite location outside where your child likes to go?

We may find comfort in listening to our favorite songs, watching our favorite shows, or movies many times. If your child is experiencing more stress than usual, would they find comfort and familiarity in one of their favorite songs or movies?

Notice if your child might be showing any signs of stress, losing any skills, or having a generally more difficult time than usual, and see if there may be any demands or sources of stress you can reduce for now.

Giving our kids time and space to just be fully and freely themselves without needing to mask can go a long way in reducing stress levels, preserving energy, and preventing meltdowns.

When to Seek Additional Support

While it can be difficult to navigate parenting an autistic or neurodivergent child, you don't have to do it alone. If you find that you're using every tool in your toolbox but you and your child are still struggling, it may be time to seek additional support. Some excellent sources of support include:

Occupational Therapists: Occupational therapists, or OTs, can be an excellent resource to help us better understand our children's sensory needs and the sensory tools and accommodations that can be most beneficial for them. They can also help with activities of daily living (ADLs) and any challenges with fine motor control.

Speech and Language Pathologists: Speech and Language Pathologists, or SLPs, specialize in supporting speech and communication. If your child is struggling with communication, an SLP can assess and provide support for any challenges that may be present and help your child find a mode of communication that feels most comfortable for them.

Neuroaffirming Health Care: It can be so helpful to have a neuroaffirming medical provider on your team. As meltdowns can sometimes be an indicator of pain or physical illness,

it is important to consult with your child's doctor if you're noticing any changes, new symptoms, or an increase in meltdowns or discomfort to assess possible health conditions.

Additionally, consulting with a psychiatrist, nurse practitioner, or developmental pediatrician can help you to explore any medication options that might be helpful for your child.

Neuroaffirming Therapy or Parent Coaching

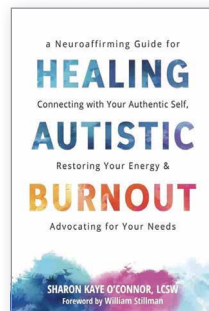
A growing number of neuroaffirming therapists and parent coaches can work with you individually to help you understand your child's needs, strengths, and how to most effectively support them. Many neuroaffirming therapists and coaches are autistic or neurodivergent themselves, which can offer deeper insight into your child's autistic experience and needs.

Support for Yourself

Taking care of yourself and accessing your own support can also be instrumental. Whether that's formal support through therapy or counseling, parent support groups, or simply connecting with other parents of autistic and neurodivergent children who share similar experiences. Connecting with other parents can help us to share information and resources, and find community among those who truly understand our experiences.

Moving Forward

When supporting an autistic child through meltdowns, overwhelm or autistic burnout, it can be helpful to remember that these moments of struggle are temporary. We can think of these difficult moments as storms that can pass, and with the right insight and accommodations, meltdowns and burnouts can become less frequent. And as we grow in our understanding of our kids' autistic worlds- including their strengths, challenges, and all of their wonderful qualities- we can also grow in our confidence that we can authentically support them in the moments when they need us most.



Sharon Kaye O'Connor, LCSW is an autistic psychotherapist, autism consultant, and parent of a neurodivergent child in New York City. She is the author of Healing Autistic Burnout (New Harbinger) and co-author of Academic and Student Affairs in Collaboration: Creating a Culture of Student Success (Routledge). Sharon trains special education teachers and families from an autistic perspective and works with autistic individuals in her private practice.

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Sensory-Friendly Spots in NYC Airports

BY SOE KABBABE

Traveling through an airport with a sensory-sensitive child can be a challenge—bright lights, loud announcements, crowds everywhere. But if you know where to look, NYC airports now offer places and tools designed to make the journey calmer, kinder, and more manageable for kids with sensory needs and special needs families.

Whether you're heading out of town or flying in for a visit, these are real, accessible spots and resources at LaGuardia, JFK, and Newark airports that help turn sensory overwhelm into a moment of peace.

Sensory-Friendly Spaces at LaGuardia Airport

Terminal C Sensory Room

1 Central Terminal Dr, East Elmhurst

LaGuardia's Terminal C features a dedicated sensory room just beyond security: a quiet place designed for travelers who need a break from noise and stimulation. The space has soft lighting, soothing music, bean bag chairs, and gently swaying egg-shaped seats where kids can settle in, decompress, or just enjoy a pause before boarding.

KultureCity Sensory Bags

100-15 Ditmars Blvd, East Elmhurst

In Terminal B, LaGuardia has partnered with KultureCity to offer complimentary sensory bags for anyone who might benefit from them. These bags include noise-canceling headphones, fidget tools, sunglasses, and visual cue cards, all helpful for kids who get overwhelmed by airport noise, bright lighting, or long waits. You can request these at guest service desks, and they're free to use.

Sensory-Friendly Options at JFK Airport

While JFK doesn't have a dedicated space yet for sensory-sensitive travelers, the airport participates in programs and has calming spaces that can make a big difference for kids.

Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Lanyard

Terminal 4, 1 JFK Access Rd, Jamaica

JFK participates in the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Program, which gives families a discreet way to signal that a child or traveler may need extra time, patience, or quiet support during the airport process. The



sunflower lanyard is free to request at Welcome Centers and information desks, helping airport staff identify travelers quietly needing support without calling attention to kids in a loud way.

Meditation & Quiet Rooms

In some terminals (like Terminal 1 and Terminal 4), JFK offers interfaith meditation spaces and quiet rooms that are not strictly sensory rooms but can serve a similar purpose: a calmer environment away from terminal noise, crowds, and announcements. These are great spots to take a breather, read a book, or just hang out with less commotion.

Full Sensory Room Experiences at Newark Airport

Terminal A, 10 Toler Pl, Newark

Newark's Terminal A offers two sensory rooms—one pre-security and one post-security—making it one of the most supportive experiences in any major U.S. airport for neurodivergent travelers and families with sensory-sensitive kids, and the first of its kind across NYC airports. Both were developed with the Anderson Center for Autism to ensure they're genuinely calming and helpful.

Pre-Security Sensory Room: This quiet space evokes a tranquil forest riverbank with soft lighting, bubble tubes, interactive wall elements, and seating that feels gentle and soothing.

Post-Security Underwater-Themed Room:

After screening, families can also access a larger 1,400-sq-ft calm room with sea life projections, a fish tank, interactive bubble tubes, and even an aircraft cabin replica, making it perfect for kids who might be anxious about flying.

These sensory rooms are free to use by passengers and provide a peaceful refuge from the hustle of the terminal, especially valuable if travel delays or long layovers are in your day.

Traveling with Sensory-Sensitive Kids: Airport Tips for Special Needs Families

If you're flying with a child who could benefit from less stressful security screening, you can enroll in TSA Cares ahead of time (call or submit a request at least three days before your flight). This service can help connect you directly to the sensory room before screening and onwards through a dedicated lane, keeping the whole process calmer.

It's also worth noting that across all three major NYC airports, you'll find the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Lanyard program, which lets families discreetly communicate that a child may need extra patience or quieter spaces. This is an easy tool that can make big moments feel more supportive. Just as we mentioned above with JFK, the lanyards are available for free at Welcome Centers and information booths in both LaGuardia and Newark, and nearby airports like MacArthur and Westchester County.



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Mattel Unveils First Autistic Barbie Doll

BY SOE KABBABE

In a major milestone for inclusive toys, Mattel released in January with its first Barbie doll representing autism, created in partnership with the Autistic Self-Advocacy Network (ASAN), a nonprofit organization run for and by people with autism.

This autistic Barbie isn't just another toy. She was intentionally crafted to include features that many autistic children and families may recognize and relate to. When dolls and toys reflect a range of abilities, sensory needs, and ways of interacting with the world, they do more than entertain: they validate, empower, and open the door to empathy.

In a nutshell, it's a Barbie that reflects real-life experiences and shows how some autistic people process the world. This includes:

- Articulated elbows and wrists, to allow natural gestures like stimming.
- A slightly averted eye gaze, which can mirror how some children avoid direct eye contact.
- Sensory-friendly, comfy clothing, like loose-fitting dresses and flat shoes.
- Accessories like a fidget spinner, noise-cancelling headphones, and a tablet, to support communication and sensory regulation.

These thoughtful touches help make playtime feel seen and understood, not just for fun—and they do reflect meaningful input from autistic advocates throughout the design process.



What It Means for Special Needs Families

For families of children with autism, representation isn't just symbolic—it's affirming. Being able to see one's experiences, your own kid at that, reflected in toys helps build confidence and a sense of belonging. It's a conveyed message for special needs families and caregivers: your child's life journey matters, and their story deserves to be seen. Many parents and advocates say this is a warm, encouraging step forward for inclusion in kids' playthings, especially in a world where toys often shape how children see themselves and others.

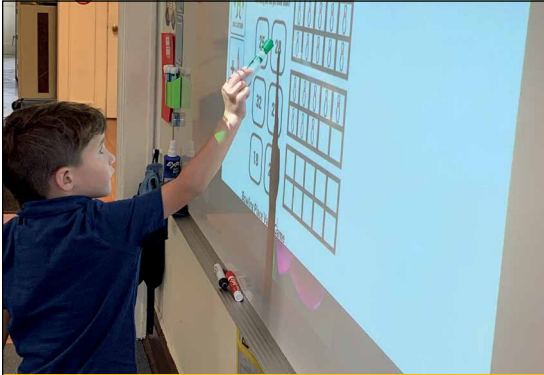
After all, playtime is one of the first ways kids learn about their very own characteristics without feeling self-conscious about it. Whether your kid is non-verbal, sensory-sensitive, or simply looking for a doll that feels a little closer to home, this autistic Barbie offers a meaningful, empowering option for them—one that celebrates diversity while normalizing differences.

Where to Find Mattel's First Autistic Barbie Doll

The new autistic Barbie, with an accessible price point, is already making her way to consumers: she's available now at Mattel's online shop and major retailers like Target. It is now sold at national brick-and-mortar and online stores, like Walmart and Amazon.



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The Hagedorn Little Village School

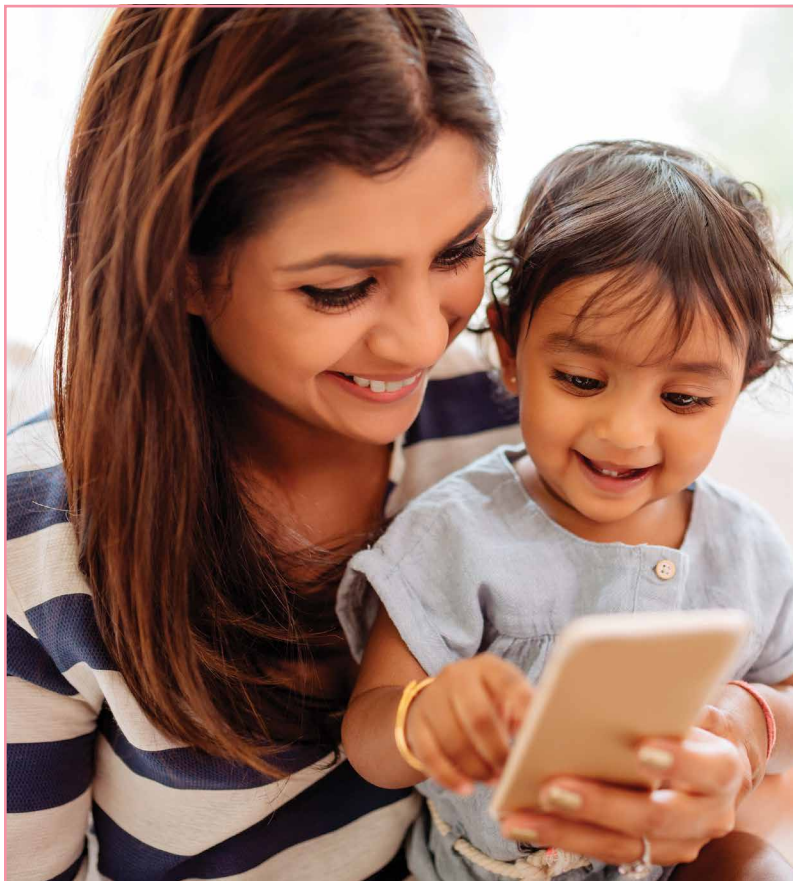
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Sensory Island will open its doors at Tanger Outlets in Deer Park in Spring 2026 as a thoughtfully crafted environment for families of all children but specifically designed for neurodivergent and sensory-sensitive children, including those with autism. Sensory Island aims to foster a calm, predictable, and welcoming atmosphere where children can engage in sensory play, support self-regulation, build confidence, and feel secure in their own bodies. Stimming is embraced, meltdowns are met with compassion, and every child is acknowledged for who they are.

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In this guide, you'll find schools that cover special needs education, enrichment, speech, and physical therapy, and more for New York families. Each one offers resources designed with your child in mind, helping to support their development, build confidence, and meet them where they are.



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203-622-9240, eaglehillschool.org
admissions@eaglehill.org

Set on a historic campus in Greenwich, Connecticut, Eagle Hill School offers an environment where students with language-based learning differences and executive function needs are truly understood and empowered. For more than 50 years, Eagle Hill has served students in grades 1–8 through tailored learning that reflects how each child learns best. Academics are strengthened by integrated services and enriched through arts, athletics, and co-curricular opportunities, creating a connected, 360-degree educational experience. The five-day boarding program extends learning beyond the classroom, helping students build executive function skills, independence, and confidence in a warm, structured setting. At Eagle Hill, students are known, encouraged, and inspired to grow into confident, capable learners.



Gillen Brewer School

410 East 92nd St., New York, NY 10128
212-831-3667, admissions@gillenbrewer.com
gillenbrewer.com

The Gillen Brewer School (GBS) partners with families to expand possibilities for K–8th grade students with language-based learning disabilities. Since 1992, the GBS integrated academic-therapeutic approach has helped children grow into confident, independent learners — proud of their progress and prepared to engage with the world. Speech-language therapy, occupational therapy, counseling, and social groups are seamlessly woven into each child's school day, alongside a rigorous, hands-on curriculum. Located on the Upper East Side, GBS welcomes students from across NYC into a vibrant, inclusive community where every child belongs.



Green Chimneys

400 Doansburg Road, Brewster, NY 10509
845-279-2995, info@greenchimneys.org
greenchimneys.org

Green Chimneys is an accredited special education program for students in grades K-12 who have been unsuccessful in a traditional school environment, and benefit from a highly structured and supportive setting. Therapeutic day and residential programs include an enriched curriculum for individualized academic, behavioral and emotional support, based in experiential learning. An innovative nature-based approach integrates animal-assisted activities, horticulture and outdoor exploration into treatment and education plans for enhanced learning and development. Green Chimneys strives to give students every opportunity to connect with nature, discover their own special talents, and develop skills and confidence to grow into independent young adults.



The Hagedorn Little Village School

750 Hicksville Road, Seaford, NY 11783
516-520-6001, information@littlevillage.org
littlevillage.org

The mission of The Hagedorn Little Village School (HLVS) Jack Joel Center for Special Children is to provide the finest educational and therapeutic programs to infants, pre-school and elementary school children with a wide range of developmental delays and disabilities. Their philosophy is to facilitate each child in achieving his or her highest potential socially, educationally and emotionally, to provide support and direction to families, and to collaborate with outside service providers in fulfilling this mission.



The IDEAL School of Manhattan

5 Hanover Square, New York, NY 10004
212-769-1699, admissions@theidealschool.org
theidealschool.org

The IDEAL School of Manhattan is a new kind of private school, where students of all abilities learn together and reach their goals. Lower School (K-5) classes are co-taught by a general educator and a learning specialist. Middle School (6-8) classes cultivate lifelong learning skills. High School (9-12) is student-driven and flexible, focusing on life skills. The Next Steps Transition Program (18-21) is an alternative or ramp to college with student internships. Join an open house to learn more about IDEAL's generous financial assistance and Lower Manhattan location with five-borough accessibility.



The Vincent Smith School

322 Port Washington Blvd. Port Washington, NY 11050
516-365-4900, admissions@vincentsmithschool.org
vincentsmithschool.org

Vincent Smith School has been the premier school on Long Island for those seeking small classes, specialized teaching for learning differences, and a supportive environment for grades 1-12. Vincent Smith is widely known for its personalized programs for students with learning disorders such as Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, Dysgraphia, and school anxiety. They offer on-site, certified professional services for speech, reading, counseling, and occupational therapy. They emphasize academic success, differentiated instruction, and a strong home-school connection in small classes. Approximately 85% of graduates go on to college. Vincent Smith students have achieved successful careers in the arts, media, education, and entrepreneurship.

The Windward School

1275 Mamaroneck Avenue, White Plains - Lower School
40 West Red Oak Lane, White Plains - Middle School
914-949-6968
212 E. 93rd Street, NYC - Lower and Middle Schools
212-222-8628
thewindwardschool.org

The Windward School is an independent day school serving students in grades 1 through 9 with dyslexia and other language-based learning disabilities. With campuses in Manhattan and Westchester, Windward provides a structured, evidence-based curriculum designed specifically for students' learning needs, equipping them with the tools to succeed academically and beyond. For decades, Windward has operated on a foundational belief: a language-based learning disability need not hold anyone back from a life of accomplishment. When students are given the right instruction and environment, they thrive. Windward alumni go on to succeed in high school and college, and lead across industries—in education, business, policy, the arts, and more—carrying with them the skills, confidence, and self-knowledge that a Windward education instills.





10 Fun Things to Do in Port Jefferson with Kids

BY SOE KABBABE

Whether you're planning a summer beach day, a fall festival outing, or just looking for something different to do with the family year-round, here are the best things to do in Port Jefferson, New York, with kids—all grouped so you can plan your visit with ease.

Harbor Views, Boats & Waterfront Outings

Port Jefferson Village Center

101 E Broadway, Port Jefferson

Hours: Open daily, 8 am–8 pm (check site for seasonal hours)

Admission: Free

Right along the harbor, this community hub is a must-stop for families. Kids can watch boats come and go, run around the open green space, or attend seasonal events like outdoor concerts and family movie nights. Inside, there's often art exhibits and cultural

programming—making it one of the easiest (and free!) things to do in Port Jefferson with children.

Port Jefferson Ferry Terminal (Bridgeport & Port Jefferson Steamboat Company)

102 W Broadway, Port Jefferson

Hours: Open to the public, but check the website for the ferry schedule (if you're taking the ferry, it's recommended to be there 30 minutes prior to departure time)

Passenger fare: \$23 (one way) & \$39 (round-trip) per adult; free for children up to 12 y/o

Even if you're not sailing to Connecticut, watching the massive ferry dock is thrilling for little ones. If you're up for an adventure, hop aboard for a mini getaway—kids love the novelty of riding a “big boat,” and the harbor views are gorgeous year-round.

Harborfront Park

101A E Broadway, Port Jefferson

Hours: Sunrise to sunset

Admission: Free

Pack a picnic and spend time overlooking the water. There's open space to toss a ball, benches for parents to relax, and plenty of room for stroller-friendly walks. In warmer months, you'll often find families fishing along the dock.

Beaches & Outdoor Adventures

West Beach

350 Cliff Rd., Port Jefferson

Hours: Seasonal, typically 10 am–6 pm during summer

Admission: Village resident free; non-resident daily fee applies

This small, calm beach is perfect for younger kids who want to splash safely. Bring sand toys and spend a slow morning building castles while watching sailboats drift by. It's quieter than larger Long Island beaches—a hidden gem for families. A couple of minutes away, by car, you can find Belle Terre, an affluent neighborhood known for its magnificent mansions and trails.

Rocket Ship Park

34 Roessner Ln, Port Jefferson

Hours: Sunrise to sunset

Admission: Free

A local favorite playground known for its rocket-themed climbing structure. It's shaded, manageable in size, and close enough to downtown so that you can pair it with lunch or ice cream afterward.

Museums & Educational Stops

Theatre Three

412 Main St., Port Jefferson

Hours: Check website as box office hours vary; performances year-round

Tickets: Typically \$20–\$40

This historic Main Street theater offers family-friendly productions, holiday shows, and youth performances throughout the year. It's a wonderful introduction to live theater for kids: intimate, welcoming, and right in the heart of the village.

Mather House Museum (Port Jefferson Historical Society)

115 Prospect St., Port Jefferson

Hours: Monday and Tuesday, closed; Wednesday-Sunday, 10 am-4 pm

Admission: Free; donations welcome

Step inside this 19th-century home to give kids a peek at Port Jeff's maritime past. It's a quick but worthwhile stop, especially for elementary-aged kids studying local history. Pair it with a longer visit to the Long Island Maritime Museum to win a true ocean lover's heart!

Sweet Treats & Kid-Approved Eats

Kilwins Port Jefferson

109D Main St., Port Jefferson

Hours: Daily, 12 pm-8 pm

Price: Ice cream cones start around \$6

If you're looking for classic small-town vibes, this is it. Handmade fudge, caramel apples, and creamy ice cream make Kilwins a guaranteed crowd-pleaser. The smell alone will lure your kids inside!

The Steam Room

4 E Broadway, Port Jefferson

Hours: Daily, 9 am-9 pm

Price: \$15–\$30 per person; check menu for updated prices

A Port Jeff staple overlooking the harbor. Known for its chowder and lobster rolls, but

also casual enough for families. Outdoor seating makes it easy with kids and babies.

Indoor Fun for Rainy Days

Port Jefferson Bowl

31 Chereb Ln., Port Jefferson Station

Hours: Daily, 9 am-11 pm; check for open bowling times

Price: Approx. \$6–\$8 per game + shoe rental

Just minutes from the village, this is a great backup plan if the weather doesn't cooperate. Cosmic bowling nights are especially fun for older kids.

Seasonal Festivals & Events

Port Jefferson Village is known for its family-friendly events year-round. Some highlights include the Charles Dickens Festival in December with costumed characters, carolers, and Victorian charm throughout Main Street; ice sculptures in peak wintertime; the Harvest Festival during fall, with pumpkin decorating, live music, and kid activities; and free outdoor music at the Village Center lawn, part of the Summer Concert Series.

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DestinationScience.org

LONG ISLAND'S BEST Birthday Party Places

Finding the right resource to celebrate your child's big day can turn an ordinary birthday into something truly unforgettable. Whether your child dreams of a hands-on art party, an epic play-space experience, or a fun outdoor adventure, there's no shortage of creative venues to bring those birthday wishes to life. We've gathered some of our favorite kids' birthday party spots—each with its own unique charm, from themed entertainment to stress-free all-inclusive packages. No matter where you celebrate, these spots deliver fun, laughter, and unforgettable memories.

Blue Balloon Parties

Serving the New York Tri-State Area
718-766-8058
book@blueballoonparties.com
blueballoonparties.com
Blue Balloon Parties specializes in creating unique, personalized entertainment experiences for every occasion. Whether it's a birthday celebration, family gathering, community event, or corporate function, the company's mission is to deliver unforgettable moments with professionalism, creativity, and care. Serving the New York Tri-State Area—including New York City, Long Island, Westchester, Fairfield, Rockland, and Northern New Jersey—Blue Balloon Parties brings the fun directly to its clients. With passionate and engaging performers, the team ensures guests are always surprised, delighted, and thoroughly entertained. From small parties to large-scale events, Blue Balloon Parties guarantees reliable service, exceptional quality, and complete client satisfaction. Their dedication to excellence makes every celebration one to remember—because at Blue Balloon, they truly “Bring the Party to You.”

Cradle of Aviation Museum

1 Davis Avenue Garden City, NY 11530

516-572-4066

cradleofaviation.org

Celebrate a birthday that truly takes off at the Cradle of Aviation Museum. Their exciting birthday parties for toddlers through teens let families relax while the museum staff handles all the details. Designed for different age groups, each party features hands-on activities, friendly guides, and an unforgettable setting surrounded by aviation and space history. Families can choose from two themed experiences. The Sky High Birthday, recommended for ages 4–9, invites young pilots to take to the skies for high-flying fun. The Space Mission Birthday, recommended for ages 3–12, lets kids blast off on an out-of-this-world adventure. With interactive activities and a one-of-a-kind atmosphere, the Cradle of Aviation offers one of Long Island's most unique and memorable birthday party destinations.

L.I. Adventureland, Inc.

2245 Broadhollow Road Farmingdale,
NY 11735

631-694-6868

GuestRelations@adventureland.us
adventureland.us

Give Your Child an Unforgettable Celebration at Adventureland. Adventureland features dozens of rides, a food court, a restaurant, concession stands, two taverns, midway games, an arcade, and more! Big kids can experience the FireBall Coaster, Turbulence Coaster, and the brand new Wave Twister Ride! Little kids will have a blast in Kiddie Land! Rides like the farm train, carousel, and helicopters will keep the little ones entertained for the whole day! Party packages include admission into the park, 2 hours of unlimited riding throughout the park, followed by 45 minutes of eating at your selected dining area, unlimited riding for the



remainder of the day, a party hostess to serve the party, a tablecloth, and happy birthday hats & napkins.

Monster Mini Golf

645 Stewart Ave, Garden City

631-417-5904

gardencity@monsterminigolf.com

410 Commack Rd, Deer Park, NY 11729

631-940-8900

monsterminigolf.com/locations/us/ny/
deer-park-long-island

As guests step into the world of monsters, they are greeted by friendly human staff. The monster birthday parties are designed to create an unforgettable experience for children and their friends. They are filled with laughter, excitement, and plenty of monstrous fun, with private party rooms complete with spooky decorations. In addition to miniature golf and thrilling arcade and redemption games, the locations offer additional attractions. Monster Mini Golf in Deer Park offers a laser maze and a virtual reality experience.



The Garden City location offers a laser maze, bowling and a virtual reality experience. Monster Mini Golf is indoors, ensuring that the event will always take place, regardless of the weather.

Party Mags

631-600-3315
charles@partymags.com
partymags.com

Party Mags services the Tri-State Area, delivering high-energy entertainment with the latest multimedia technology. Each Party Mags event features Mobile Arcade Gaming Systems equipped with two TVs, dual game consoles, vibrant LED lighting, and double-sided play for nonstop fun. Guests can enjoy top video game consoles, crisp displays, versatile tablets, and immersive virtual reality headsets. From thrilling VR adventures to Fortnite battles and gaming tournaments, Party Mags transforms any occasion into an unforgettable experience. Whether for a birthday, school event, or corporate gather-

ing, Party Mags brings excitement directly to your venue. With game trucks, bouncy houses, and jumbo games, they ensure endless fun for guests of all ages—making every celebration truly memorable.

Send In The Clowns

493 Westbury Ave., Carle Place
516-354-1515
gary@sendinthecloowns.com
sendinthecloowns.com

Send In The Clowns offers full-service planning and rentals for every occasion, serving New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. Specializing in events of all sizes, the team provides everything in-house—from tents, tables, and staging to inflatables, DJs, and live entertainment—ensuring seamless execution and top-quality service. Their “do-it-all” philosophy guarantees clean, safe equipment, on-time delivery, and competitive pricing. Whether it’s a child’s birthday, wedding, bar mitzvah, fundraiser, or corporate event, Send In The Clowns offers a complete one-stop

solution for rentals and entertainment. With a vast inventory and creative options, the company brings every celebration to life with professionalism, reliability, and fun, allowing clients to relax and enjoy their event from start to finish.

Social Play Haus

200 Express St., Plainview, NY 11803
516-200-6444

info@socialplayhaus.com
socialplayhaus.com

Social Play Haus in Plainview, NY is a spacious, modern event venue unlike anything else on Long Island. The large open-concept space comfortably hosts up to 90 guests, making it perfect for birthdays, baby showers, baptisms, and milestone celebrations. While kids enjoy the modern play area, adults can relax in a family-friendly beer garden atmosphere with craft beer, wine, and delicious hot food. What truly sets Social Play Haus apart is their in-house event styling team, creating fully customized celebrations with balloon décor, dessert tables, themed crafts, and event design handled entirely in house. They also offer fun weekday craft parties, perfect for smaller celebrations or school groups. Social Play Haus was voted one of Yelp’s Top 10 Small Businesses for Kids in the Nation. Due to strong demand, most weekend events book 4–6 months in advance. The brand is now expanding and offering franchise opportunities. Learn more at www.socialplayhaus.com

Social Snapz Photobooth

347-223-1984
social.snapzz@gmail.com
socialsnapzphotobooth.com

The Social Snapz photo booth experience captures the excitement at every event, creating a fun and engaging atmosphere for guests of all ages. The team’s goal is to craft unforgettable memories for friends, families, and colleagues while providing high-quality keepsakes that guests will cherish for years to come. They offer professional photo booth services for weddings, birthday parties, holiday celebrations, corporate events, and more, with customizable options to match any theme or style. Guests are encouraged to snap photos, share moments instantly, and celebrate together through this ultimate interactive experience that brings people closer and adds lasting joy to every special occasion. With attendants and seamless setup, they ensure a smooth experience, allowing hosts to relax and enjoy the celebration without worry.

CAMPS FOR Preschoolers

Long before the first signs of spring, parents begin planning to ensure their children have a safe, enjoyable, and nurturing summer. Whether parents work throughout the summer and need childcare or just want their kids to have an active, enriching, and fun summer outdoors without screens, day camps have become an essential solution for many parents. For parents of preschoolers, day camps provide structured opportunities for socialization and exploration that can be difficult to replicate at home. With all the different types of camps, costs, schedules, and activities, how can you find the right camp for your child? We're here to help with these sharing day camps where your preschooler can safely enjoy a fulfilling summer, explore new activities, build new friendships, and develop their independence—all while staying close to home!



Beth Sholom Day Camp

401 Roslyn Road, Roslyn Heights
516-620-2022,
deedee@bethsholomdaycamp.com
bethsholomdaycamp.com

Welcome to Junior Camp at Beth Sholom Day Camp! Designed for potty-trained adventurers ages 3-5, this camp offers a summer filled with fun, growth, and creativity. Choose from flexible schedules ranging from 4 to 8 weeks. The Early Childhood Center features a custom playground and climate-controlled classrooms for play and learning. Campers enjoy age-appropriate sports, arts, and engaging activities. They provide Full Days (9 a.m.–4 p.m.) and Mini Days (until 1:45 PM) for ages 3-4, while Kindergarteners attend Full Days only. With a 4:1 camper-to-counselor ratio, certified teachers and staff create a nurturing environment. The Division Head oversees programs, supports staff, and communicates with parents. Transportation, lunch, and towel service are included. Join for an unforgettable summer!



Buckley Day Camp

2 IU Willets Rd., Roslyn
516-365-7760, info@buckleycamp.com
buckleycamp.com

Junior Camp at Buckley Day Camp in Roslyn is the ideal place for young campers to embark on their camping journey. In a safe and nurturing environment, the youngest campers thrive, develop socialization skills, discover new adventures and have fun! With one of the highest staff-to-camper ratios, the camp guarantees that each child receives the appropriate care and attention. Each day is brimming with fun, socialization, learning new skills, and building self-confidence. Groups are led by certified teachers or experienced adults and supported by dedicated counselors. Campers benefit from small group instructional swim in a pool for young children. Activities led by specialists encompass art, music, science, yoga, drama, dance, and sports, all delivered in a fun, engaging and age-appropriate manner.



Countryside Montessori School

354 Lakeville Rd, Great Neck, LI
516-466-8422, info@cmsgn.com
cmsgn.com

This Montessori summer camp offers a unique blend of fun, exploration, and educational activities designed to inspire and engage children in a way that aligns with their natural development. Guided by the principles of the Montessori method, this camp creates a rich environment where young children can discover the joy of learning through hands-on experiences. Throughout the camp, children will participate in various carefully planned activities, each fostering independence, self-confidence, and problem-solving skills. From outdoor play and nature exploration to creative arts and practical life skills, every day is filled with opportunities for children to explore and grow at their own pace.



Oasis Day Camp LIU Post

720 Northern Blvd Brookville NY 11548

646-519-5066, liupost@oasischildren.com

oasischildren.com/location/brookville-liu-post

At Oasis Day Camp at LIU Post, the Early Start Imagination program offers a warm and joyful first camp experience for children ages 3 through 5. For many families, this may be a child's very first time at camp, and Oasis's caring, experienced staff create a nurturing environment where little campers feel safe, supported, and excited each day. Set on the beautiful LIU Post campus, children enjoy arts and crafts, music, outdoor play, nature exploration, and daily swim designed just for their age. Guided by Oasis's pillars of developing the self, connecting with others, and exploring the world, campers build confidence, friendships, and independence. Tuition includes instructional swim, daily hot lunch, snacks, and extended day from 8am-6pm.



YMCA of Long Island Summer Day Camp

Bay Shore, Glen Cove, Holtsville, Huntington, Patchogue, and East Hampton

855-296-2254, camp@ymcali.org

ymcali.org/camp

The YMCA Summer Day Camp offers the best of Adventure, Aquatics, Creative Arts, Camp Traditions, Special Activities and Trips, and Summer Learning in a safe and welcoming environment. Step away from the school year, the screens, and the routine — and press play on a summer full of laughter, movement, and magic! Variety of camps for Ages 3-15 Kiddie, Youth, Pre-Teen, Teen, Sports Camp, CIT.

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YOUR BEST SUMMER IS ONE CLICK AWAY!

At the YMCA Summer Day Camp, we offer the best of Adventure, Aquatics, Creative Arts, Camp Traditions, Special Activities and Trips, and Summer Learning in a safe and welcoming environment. Step away from the school year, the screens, and the routine — and press play on a summer full of laughter, movement, and magic!

VARIETY OF CAMPS FOR AGES 3-15

Kiddie, **New: 3-Day Kiddie Camp - Bay Shore Only (M, W, F)**, Youth, Pre-Teen, Teen, Sports Camp, Counselor-in-Training Program

CAMP OPEN HOUSE DATES

April 18, 2026: Healthy Kids Day

May 16, 2026 10:00-11:30am

June 6, 2026 10:00-11:30am

CAMP 2026 SESSIONS & DATES

Session 1: June 29 – July 10 **Session 2:** July 13 – July 24

Session 3: July 27 – Aug. 7 **Session 4:** Aug. 10 – Aug. 21*

* YMCA East Hampton RECenter Session 4 ends on Friday, August 14

CAMP CLOSEOUT WEEK | AUG 24-28, 2026*

* Not available in East Hampton, Huntington Closeout Week ends 8/27



REGISTER NOW!



Jobs for Teens

A guide to starting work experience

BY JEANNINE CINTRON

A first job is a rite of passage into young adulthood for any teenager. It's a time when young people earn responsibility and a bit of financial freedom all at once.

I started working at a mall in Brooklyn at just 14 years old, and I have very fond memories of making lasting friendships with coworkers and cashing my first paychecks. I couldn't hit the nail salon fast enough! Now I have children who are teenagers themselves, officially old enough to start earning a paycheck of their own, and I think we are all finally ready for it.

If you are the parent of a teenager who is ready to start working, the guide below will help you decide which types of jobs for teens are available and how to go about landing them.

Jobs for Teens

LIFEGUARD. One of the most popular summer jobs for teens is lifeguarding. This is a great option for strong swimmers. While this is the ideal job for teens – soaking up some sun while hanging at the beach or poolside – this is a very serious job that is only for serious applicants, as you will be responsible for the safety of others (and of yourself). Typically, applicants will need to take a certification test and possibly a class as well. To learn how to become a NYC lifeguard, go to nycgovparks.org. Other options to try include your local YMCA, swim clubs, and even private home parties. Plan ahead: the application and training process happens months in advance. Most positions require certification and often a class, so families should start looking into this in late winter or early spring. To learn how to become an NYC lifeguard, check out NYC Parks. Other places to explore include your local YMCA, swim clubs, and even private pool parties.

BABYSITTING. A perfect job for someone with younger siblings, babysitting can be quite lucrative for teenagers. Older siblings often feel like naturals, but any teen who is good with babies or small children is well suited for this role. Word of mouth is often the best way to find jobs. Ask around your community to see who may be looking for childcare, or offer your services to a couple in need of a date night. The American Red Cross offers online courses for teens looking to get started. Visit redcross.org/



take-a-class/babysitting/babysitting-child-care-training to learn more.

CAMP COUNSELOR. When campers start to outgrow the summer camps where they've made cherished memories, becoming a counselor is a great next step. Many camps offer CIT (counselor-in-training) programs for former campers who are ready for responsibility but not ready to say goodbye to camp. Even if you didn't attend camp, you may still qualify for employment. Each camp has its own hiring requirements. The American Camp Association is a helpful resource for job seekers at acacamps.org/jobs/job-seekers/find-summer-camp-jobs.

DOG WALKER OR PET SITTER. As more and more people welcome fur babies into their homes, animal care opportunities continue to grow. This is the perfect job for any animal lover, which describes a lot of teens I know. To get a gig like this, try advertising your services in the lobby of residential buildings, at the vet's office, or even the library. Just be careful when giving out your personal contact information; either create an email just for your business or use an app that will disguise your real phone number.

LAWN CARE. When summer is ap-

proaching, landscapers and lawn companies begin hiring seasonal help. The work can be physically demanding, but it's ideal for teens who enjoy being outdoors and working with their hands. Tasks may include pulling weeds, mowing lawns, or raking leaves. Call local companies to ask if they're hiring, or offer services to neighbors and friends.

POOL CARE. Like lawn care, pool companies are in need of help as the summer season draws near. Search for companies in your area and call to see if they have any openings available. Work will be mostly outdoors and labor-intensive, so be prepared for long days outdoors.

RESTAURANT STAFF. Many teens begin their work experience in food service. Restaurants offer several positions that might be perfect for any teen: host or hostess, busser, food-runner, dish washer, server, among others. Pound the pavement in search of eateries who offer jobs for teens, then ask to speak to a manager about hiring opportunities. There is no shortage of restaurants in our area. Many restaurants also post openings online.

TUTOR. For students with top tier grades, tutoring can be one of the most rewarding jobs for teens. It allows them to sharpen their

own skills while helping others succeed. While tutoring companies often employ adults with teaching experience, teens can ask friends, neighbors, teachers, or school staff if they know of students who need extra help.

SNOW SHOVELER. If there's one thing this past winter taught us, it's that some people either can't or won't shovel their driveways and sidewalks after a snowstorm. Next time it snows, seize the opportunity to make some easy cash by grabbing your shovel and walking, door-to-door, around your neighborhood to see who needs help digging out.

RETAIL SALES ASSOCIATE. For outgoing teenagers, retail could be a great fit. Clothing stores, department stores, specialty stores, even pharmacies and other merchandise shops can often use extra sales associates, although they might prefer teens on the older side. The mall is a great place to start your search for a retail job; like other large corporations, however, you're likely to be encouraged to apply online.

BARISTA. One thing the world will never get enough of is coffee. As such, there are plenty of coffee shops in need of workers. This is an easy job for any teenager who can

follow simple directions (and maybe spell names on cups correctly). From Dunkin' Donuts to Starbucks, there is ample opportunity for young baristas.

Working Papers

For teens who are not yet 18 years old, working papers are often a requirement. These papers serve to ensure that minors are not working too many hours, and are considered an official employment certificate. If you are under 18, a business is likely to ask for these papers.

The New York State Department of Labor has a helpful guide at dol.ny.gov/working-papers on what you will need to obtain these papers and what they allow for among the different age groups.

Working papers are issued by schools, so teens should visit their guidance counselor to get started on the process and learn more about it.

Things Parents Should Consider

It's so exciting when your child lands their first job, but there are important elements for

parents to consider. That's why it's important for teens to decide together with their parents whether a job is the right fit, and to discuss the following:

School. Work should never interfere with school. If too many hours begin to affect grades, consider cutting back or limiting work to weekends. School must remain the priority.

Commute. Before accepting a job, discuss transportation. Is it far from home or school? Will public transportation be required? Is walking safe and realistic? Will a parent need to provide rides? Make a clear plan before committing.

Finances. That first paycheck is thrilling. While small purchases are fine, this is a great opportunity to emphasize saving. If your teen doesn't yet have a bank account, consider opening one together and discussing smart money habits.

Schedule. Teenagers need adequate rest, something many already struggle with. If late shifts or long hours become overwhelming, encourage your teen to speak with their employer about adjusting their schedule.

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APRIL 11TH & 12TH, 2026
11 AM and 3 PM

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optimum.MADISONTHEATRENY.ORG
1000 HEMPSTEAD AVE, ROCKVILLE CENTRE, NY

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René Marsh on Grief and Resilience

The journalist and Queens native shares how loss shaped the gentle story in her new book

BY DONNA DUARTE-LADD

Books are written for countless reasons, out of adventure, need, memory, and emotion. And sometimes, they're born from grief. As Maya Angelou once wrote, "There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you."

Queens native René Marsh, daughter of Jamaican immigrants and a longtime journalist currently serving as a CNN national correspondent, brings this perspective to her new children's book, *The Nature of Change*. Which is a deeply personal story inspired by the loss of her young son to brain cancer and how Marsh turned to authoring children's books as a way to create a soft place for families to land, especially during moments when life feels overwhelming or uncertain. In this book, she offers a grounded, deeply human perspective on resilience, identity, and finding steadiness in times of change.

The story follows siblings Kit and Amal as they navigate a new home that feels unfamiliar, and slowly discover comfort and courage through the quiet magic of the natural world. What I personally love about this book, *The Nature of Change*, which is written for kids ages 4–8, is that I can read it solo or read it to my almost-10-year-old, who is Autistic, as we both have challenges with transition. I also appreciate that this book reminds me of the power of a great read and how one of my favorite books, one my third-grade teacher read to the class, has always stuck with me (for decades, mind you) because of its thoughtful storytelling.

I touched base with Marsh, who shared about how grief shaped this book, why nature can be such a powerful teacher, and how parents can use stories like this one to open gentle conversations about big feelings,



change, and resilience.

NYF: Your story is rooted in your own experience of loss. How did becoming a mother shape the way you wrote this book?

René Marsh: My motherhood journey involves becoming a first-time mom, experiencing the vulnerability and the deepest, purest love a mother can have for her child and then losing it. It is a devastating story, but it is mine.

The loss of my son, Blake, to pediatric brain cancer led me to write my second children's book. In the depths of my grief, I spent a great deal of time outdoors, just staring into the distance, struggling to make sense of the world. In those quiet moments, the nature around me began to illustrate some of life's most profound lessons.

My grief had paralyzed me to make me still enough to notice and receive those lessons. I watched the trees lose everything in the fall, letting go with grace but they remained standing tall despite their bare branches. I saw a cracked tree limb that had snapped under the weight of a massive snowstorm, dangling by a shred of bark for an entire season, only to my surprise sprout leaves the following spring. What looked broken and dead was still blooming; a reminder that even in a fractured state, growth is still possible.

Those lessons meant everything to me in those moments. They gave me the encouragement I needed. It was through that experience of loving, losing, and continuing to live that this book was born. My intention is to share those lessons with the younger

generation, in hopes of better preparing them for life's inevitable challenges.

I often say this book was inspired by my late son but written for my now two-year-old daughter. The lessons within it are the ones any parent would want to make sure their child carries into the world. That journey of love and loss not only inspired but deeply shaped my second children's book, "*The Nature of Change*."

NYF: In *The Nature of Change*, Kit and Amal learn resilience through observing the natural world. Why do you think nature is such a great teacher?

René Marsh: I honestly never saw nature as a teacher until grief gave me a new perspective. I had always appreciated its beauty, but I can't say I had ever truly taken the time to learn from it. Now I see how closely it mirrors our emotional lives, and that's what makes nature such a great teacher.

I've spoken about the trees, but there is so much more. The persistence and consistency of the sun, the clouds that get pushed and carried by the wind. Together, they illustrate something profound: life is part consistency, part surrender. Knowing how to move between those two states is essential.

There is so much wisdom surrounding us, if only we slow down enough to notice.

NYF: As a mom myself with a 7-year age gap, the youngest high on the ASD spectrum and the other a teenager, transitions are big in our home. How can parents use this book to support siblings who process change in their own unique ways?

René Marsh: This book is a starting point for conversations about navigating big change, including the kind of change that is unwanted. The best way to teach children abstract concepts like hope and resilience is through metaphor. When we engage kids visually and symbolically, we help them grasp lessons that can stay with them for a lifetime. Rather than over-explaining resilience, we can point to something tangible from the story. For example, the spider in the book isn't afraid to start over. Instead of delivering a long explanation about perseverance, you can simply say, "Remember the spider." In that moment, resilience becomes something they can see and understand. They recognize that they can rebuild too.

NYF: So many families today are navigating big life shifts — what are some gentle ways you hope this book helps parents start

"It was through that experience of loving, losing, and continuing to live that this book was born."

conversations that can otherwise feel overwhelming?

René Marsh: Whether it's the trees, the spider, or the morning glories in this book, I hope these metaphors for hope, resilience, and determination give children something tangible to hold on to; a visual they can return to when they need courage and strength.

NYF: Your book encourages slowing down and being present in nature. What are some simple ways parents can bring those calming, grounding moments into everyday life?

René Marsh: After reading "*The Nature of Change*," encourage your child to look for their own lessons in nature. By simply asking "What did nature teach you today?" it builds focus, intention, and a deeper appreciation for the outdoors.

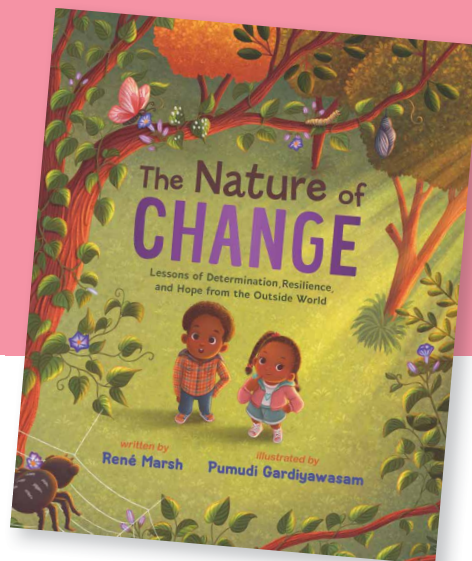
To extend the experience, there is also a free downloadable journal on my website, renemarsh.com, with guided prompts that invite children to slow down, observe, and reflect. For example:

The wind changes all the time. It can move fast, it can move slow. It reminds us that change is ok. It's a part of life. What changes are happening in your life?

We've also created a curated Spotify playlist featuring the sounds of nature, designed to make this a multi-sensory experience. If bedtime is a struggle in your house like it is in mine, the audio experience can be a nice way to wind down before bedtime and after story time. Both resources are available as free downloads on my website.

NYF: This project continues your advocacy for pediatric brain cancer research. How do you balance sharing your personal story with creating something that feels hopeful and accessible to children?

René Marsh: Yes, it continues my advocacy in that I donated 14% of my advance from "*The Nature of Change*," to the Pediatric Brain Tumor Foundation, a

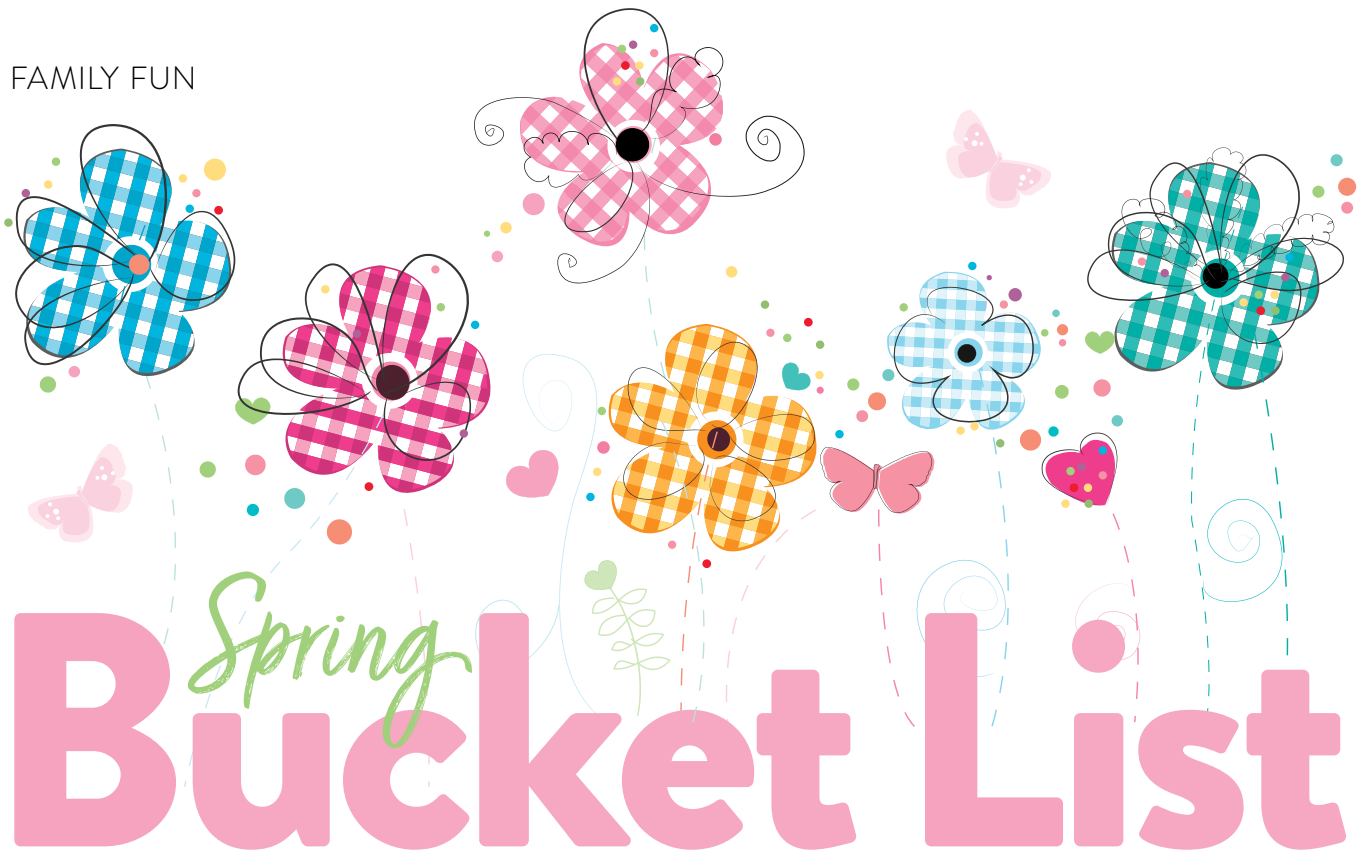


nonprofit I've built a partnership with to raise funds and identify promising pediatric brain cancer research to support financially. I chose 14% because I consider that to be my late son Blake's number. His birthday is March 14th. I created something called the 14% pledge in which I donate 14% from all of my creative projects' revenue to pediatric brain cancer research. So the creative stories I create really have three goals: to inspire, to entertain, and to help solve this stubborn disease.

Although both my first children's book, "*The Miracle Workers, Boy vs. Beast*," and my second book, "*The Nature of Change*," were inspired by my loss, the stories I write are rooted in overcoming. They focus on teaching the critical lessons that we need in order to rise above life's hardest moments. These books are less about the problem itself and more about triumphing over it. In many ways, they are a guide for how to do just that.

I speak from experience when I say that hope, resilience, and determination belong in every human being's life survival toolkit. By teaching these lessons early, we give the next generation a tremendous advantage by equipping them with the mental endurance they will need to navigate whatever challenges come their way.

René Marsh is a CNN national correspondent who has spent more than two decades telling stories as a journalist. She was inspired to write children's books following the diagnosis and loss of her son, Blake, to brain cancer at age two. Her first book, "The Miracle Workers: Boy vs. Beast," was featured on Today, ABC, and CNN, with 100% of proceeds donated to pediatric brain cancer research. Marsh lives in the Washington, D.C., metro area with her husband and daughter. See more at renemarsh.com.



Spring Bucket List

BY SHARA LEVINE

Now that the days are getting longer and the weather is getting warmer, it's time to stop hibernating and start exploring all that Long Island has to offer. Check out our Bucket List to get your family started with some springtime fun!

1. Jones Beach is known for its outdoor amphitheater, views of the iconic Bethpage Air Show that takes place every Memorial Day weekend, and, of course, their beach. But Jones Beach is also home to the Jones Beach Energy and Nature Center, where families can take part in nature programs, including seal spotting, beach cleanups, and stargazing.
2. Stunning architecture and breathtaking views are only some of the reasons to visit the Suffolk County Vanderbilt Museum & Reichert Planetarium. Nature and holiday-related workshops for children and adults alike are available, as well as award-winning shows displayed under the 60-foot dome of their planetarium.
3. Pickleball is the fastest-growing sport in the country, so if you haven't played yet, now you can on the courts at Andrew J. Parise Park.
4. Tiptoe through a magnificent array of blooms when you make a trip to the annual Long Island Tulip Festival at Waterdrinker!
5. From playful sea lion shows to feeding stingrays, the Long Island Aquarium allows you to get up close to your favorite marine animals on over 3 acres of land along the scenic Peconic River. Explore over 40 exhibits that include insects from all over the world, reptiles, and butterflies. Visit within 7 days of your birthday, and admission is free!
6. Since 1962, Adventureland Amusement Park has been a staple for family fun on Long Island, offering a variety of games and attractions for all ages. Be sure to check out the Wave Twister, a first of its kind in the United States, taking passengers 60 feet in the air!
7. Family owned and run, Long Island Game Farm Wildlife Park serves as Long Island's first zoo and is home to many exotic and local animals. Guests are invited to learn about the inhabitants that call the zoo home and have the opportunity to feed and interact with many of them, including deer, goats, and even capybaras! The zoo also offers special events with exclusive experiences throughout the season.
8. The picturesque Bailey Arboretum offers families the opportunity to commune with nature while strolling seven acres of lush greenery surrounded by mighty trees and glorious florals. Go on a nature walk, have a picnic, take photos, and participate in special events.
9. Take your sports fans out to an old ball game and catch the Long Island Ducks. The Island's baseball team offers affordable fun, exciting games, and favorite ballpark snacks. Check their schedule for special promotions, including giveaways, fireworks shows, and the opportunity for kids to run the bases!
10. Go back in time when you visit the Center for Science Teaching and Learning for their realistic dinosaur museum, complete with animatronic dinos. Learn about the mighty tyrannosaurus rex, the flying pteranodon, the horned protoceratops, and more! Plus, don't miss out on meeting current-day animals like bunnies, snakes, lizards, birds, and even axolotls!
11. Discover how the wealthy lived in the early 20th century at The Sands Point Preserve Conservancy. Featuring the historic mansions that served as summer retreats, families can explore the 216-acre park, go on self-guided tours, participate in activities, walk through nature, and more.
12. Cold Spring Harbor Fish Hatchery and Aquarium invites families to explore the

largest living collection of New York State freshwater reptiles, fishes, and amphibians. Learn about the freshwater ecosystems while touring their two aquarium buildings and eight outdoor ponds. Plus, don't miss the opportunity to feed the trout!

13. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, Old Westbury Gardens is the former home of John S. Phipps and his family and has been preserved as a museum for guests to visit. The mansion sits on 200 acres of gardens, landscaped grounds, woodlands, ponds and lakes. Families can tour the home, take in the resplendent gardens, and participate in public events. If you visit during the first two weeks of May, you can catch the blooming of The Lilac Walk, which features more than 250 lilacs of 30 varieties.

14. Famous for offering visitors the opportunity to feed a giraffe, White Post Farms has been welcoming families since opening as an animal farm in 1989. Home to a diverse range of animals, including zebras, antelope, lemurs and rabbits, guests will learn

about these special creatures and can even feed some of them! Other animal encounter opportunities include pony rides and a beautiful aviary where you'll be surrounded by colorful birds!

15. Take a swing at Eisenhower Park's Mini Golf Course! The 18-hole course features two courses (one "Orange" and one "Blue") terraced landscaping with a waterfall, small ponds, and challenging shots.

16. Go on an adventure as you zip, climb, jump, and maneuver thrilling aerial courses at WildPlay Jones Beach!

17. Immerse yourself in nature at Sweetbriar Nature Center, home to hundreds of species of plants and animals. You can go on a nature walk, visit the reptile room, and play in the discovery area, which includes a hobbit house, see-saw, and slide.

18. Harbes Barnyard Adventure spans 8 acres of fun and includes farm animal interactions, a chick observatory, a Gnome Hedge Maze,

Jumbo Jumpers Bounce Pillows, sports zone, playgrounds, and so much more, along with pig races and musical hayride tours on weekends and holidays.

19. Bumper boats, a treetop adventure, a treasure hunt, a mystery funhouse, and an award-winning arcade are just some of the fun that you'll find at Bayville Adventure Park!

20. Make your way to the Fire Island Lighthouse before the summer crowd does. Climb to the top to explore the tallest lighthouse on Long Island, where on a clear day you can see the New York City skyline in the distance. Discover local maritime history, while enjoying breathtaking views.

21. The Adventure Park at Long Island consists of 14 treetop trails and 49 zip lines that will take you to new heights! Make it a nighttime adventure when you participate in the Glow in the Park events featuring LED lights throughout the courses, glowing trees and music!

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Our Long Island Family Day is coming this October 2026, and trust us — it's going to be bigger, better, and even more exciting. We can't wait to see you there!

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calendar

BY SHARA LEVINE

NASSAU

Milleridge Easter Village

WHEN: Saturdays and Sundays, 11 am - 6 pm, through April 4.

WHERE: The Milleridge Village, 585 N Broadway, Jericho

AGES: All

WHAT: Take photos with the Easter Bunny, try to egg-scape the Rabbit Hole, explore the inflatables bounces and games, take a ride on the Easter Train, and make some crafts!

WANT TO GO?: Free admission; fees for photos and activities. milleridgeinn.com

The Magic of Alexo

WHEN: Friday, April 10, 11 am - noon

WHERE: Bellmore Movies and Showplace, 222 Pettit Ave., Bellmore

AGES: All

WHAT: Expect the unexpected in this show of thrills, laughter, audience participation, and amazement!

WANT TO GO?: \$14. sunrisetheatreli.com

A Beauty and the Beast Family Movie Night

WHEN: Friday, April 10, 6 - 9 pm

WHERE: Cradle of Aviation Museum, Charles Lindbergh Blvd., Garden City

AGES: All

WHAT: This special movie night celebrates the magic of Beauty and the Beast, featuring themed activities and interactive experiences for the whole family.

WANT TO GO?: \$25; \$23 ages 2-12 and seniors 62 and older. (516) 572-4066, cradleofaviation.org

A Dream Is A Wish Princess Concert

WHEN: April 11-12, Saturday and Sunday, 11 am & 3 pm



Dinosaur Daze at Garvies Point Museum

WHERE: The Madison Theatre, 1000 Hempstead Ave., Rockville Centre

AGES: All

WHAT: Come sing along to all your favorite Disney songs such as Let It Go, A Dream is a Wish Your Heart Makes, and Part of That World, then meet your favorite princess!

WANT TO GO?: Tickets start at \$30. madisontheatre.org

Celebrate Holi

WHEN: Sunday, April 12, 11 am - 4 pm

WHERE: Long Island Children's Museum, 11 Davis Ave., Garden City

AGES: 3 - 8

WHAT: During this joyous celebration, families will eat sweets, dance to traditional folk music and throw colorful powder made from flowers called gulal.

WANT TO GO?: Included with \$18 admission. (516) 224-5800, licm.org

Dinosaur Daze

WHEN: April 18 -19, Saturday and Sunday, 10 am - 4 pm

WHERE: Garvies Point Museum, 50 Barry Drive, Glen Cove

AGES: All

WHAT: Go back in time to discover genuine fossils & remarkable replicas, a "fossil" dig, crafts, dino dress-up, play activities & games, photo-ops with Coelophysis, dino nest & more.

WANT TO GO?: \$15; \$10 ages 3-12. (516) 571-8010, garviespointmuseum.com

29th Annual Kid Fest

WHEN: Friday, April 24, 6 - 10 pm; Saturday, April 25, 11 am - 9 pm; Sunday, April 26, 11 am

- 7 pm.

WHERE: Merrick LIRR Station, Merrick Ave N & Sunrise Hwy., Merrick

AGES: All

WHAT: This carnival is for kids, teens of all ages and adults young at heart filled with plenty of rides, games, and more.

WANT TO GO?: Admission is free; ride tickets available for purchase. newtonshows.com

Creatures of the Night: Family Night Hike

WHEN: Friday, April 24, 7:30 - 8:30 pm.

WHERE: The Center for Science Teaching and Learning, 1450 Tanglewood Road, Rockville Centre

AGES: All

WHAT: What lives in the woods at night? Bring a flashlight and see what creatures of the night

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live at Tanglewood Preserve!
WANT TO GO?: \$15. (516) 764-0045, cstl.org

**Branches in Bloom:
 A Spring Festival
 Celebrating Arbor Day**

WHEN: April 25 - 26, Saturday and Sunday, 11 am - 4 pm

WHERE: Planting Fields, 1395 Planting Fields Road, Oyster Bay

AGES: All

WHAT: This spring festival centers around the spectacular collections of magnolias and flowering cherries and features guided tours, demonstrations, live music & performances.

WANT TO GO?: \$30 per car. (516) 922-9210, plantingfields.org

**Super Family Saturday:
 Artful Earth**

WHEN: Saturday, April 25, 1 - 4 pm

WHERE: Nassau County Museum of Art, One Museum Drive, Roslyn Harbor

AGES: All

WHAT: Immerse yourself in the wonders of spring with an afternoon of creativity, discovery, and connection with nature including interactive outdoor art projects, STEAM activities, and more.

WANT TO GO?: \$20; \$10 child. (516) 484-9338, nassaumuseum.org

SUFFOLK

“Video Games: The Great Connector”

WHEN: Thursdays - Sundays, noon - 5 pm, through May 24.

WHERE: The Long Island Museum, 1200 Route 25A, Stony Brook

AGES: 9 and up

WHAT: Learn how video games are more than a mode of entertainment, and the important role digital games are playing in the lives of today's youth in this interactive exhibit.

WANT TO GO?: \$5-\$15; free for children younger than 6. longislandmuseum.org

A Royal Princess Party

WHEN: April 2-11, Weekdays, 1 pm, Saturdays, 2 pm



“Video Games: The Great Connector” at The Long Island Museum

WHERE: Smittstown Performing Arts Center, 2 East Main St., Smittstown

AGES: All

WHAT: Join Royal Historians as they guide you through meeting each of the princesses, teaching the morals behind each of their stories and singing along to their favorite songs.

WANT TO GO?: \$17.50. smittstownpac.org

Rodgers & Hammerstein’s Cinderella

WHEN: Saturdays and Sundays, 10 am, through April 26; except April 5.

WHERE: John W. Engeman Theater, 250 Main St., Northport

AGES: All

WHAT: This performance puts a new spin on the beloved fairytale that continues to enchant audiences with the timeless themes of kindness, love, and the power of dreams.

WANT TO GO?: \$25. engemantheater.com

Spy Through Parks

WHEN: Wednesday, April 8, 1 - 2:30 pm

WHERE: Caleb Smith State Park Preserve, 581 W Jericho Turnpike, Smittstown

AGES: All

WHAT: Become a code breaker like Washington’s spies! Learn

how the Culper Spy Ring used codes during the American Revolution, then try to crack the secret codes for real!

WANT TO GO?: Free. parks.ny.gov

Parsons Dance Company

WHEN: Saturday, April 11, 8 pm

WHERE: Staller Center For the Arts, 100 Nicolls Road, Stony Brook

AGES: All

WHAT: Parsons Dance returns with a program of top-tier technique, exuberance, and emotional range featuring their signature blend of athleticism and artistry.

WANT TO GO?: \$52-\$64. (631) 632-2787, stallercenter.com

Princess Tea Party

WHEN: Sunday, April 12, 10 am & 12:30 pm

WHERE: Long Island Aquarium, 431 East Main St., Riverhead

AGES: All

WHAT: Bring your little royal to dance and sing with all of their favorite Princesses, enjoy formal white glove tea service, and take plenty of photos!

WANT TO GO?: \$55; \$49 ages 3-12; \$10.35 ages 2 and younger. longislandaquarium.com

Long Island Tulip Festival at Waterdrinker

WHEN: April 18-May 3,

Saturdays and Sundays, 9 am - 6 pm, Weekdays, 10 am - 6 pm

WHERE: Waterdrinker Manorville, 663 Wading River Road, Manorville

AGES: All

WHAT: Get ready to tiptoe through the tulips at this beloved festival featuring plenty of fun, including mini golf, adorable barnyard animals, and more!

WANT TO GO?: \$25 weekends; \$20 weekdays. water-drinker.com

Don’t Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus! The Musical!

WHEN: April 18-May 3, Saturdays, 11 am

WHERE: Cm Performing Arts Center, 931 Montauk Hwy, Oakdale

AGES: All

WHAT: Based on the award winning book by Mo Willems, this musical features an innovative mix of songs, and feathers, that is sure to get everyone’s wings flapping!

WANT TO GO?: Tickets start at \$21. (631) 218-2810, cmpac.com

Superheroes of the Sky

WHEN: Saturday, April 18, 11 am - noon

WHERE: Sweetbriar Nature Center, 62 Eckernkamp Drive, Smittstown

AGES: All

WHAT: Take a walking tour while learning about the Birds of Prey that call the center home including a bald eagle, turkey vultures, owls, hawks and many more.

WANT TO GO?: \$10; \$5 kids younger than 12. (631) 979-6344, sweetbriarnc.org

Earth Day Barnyard Bash

WHEN: Saturday, April 25, 1 - 3 pm

WHERE: Tanger Outlets Deer Park, 152 The Arches Cir., Deer Park

AGES: All

WHAT: Enjoy a day of learning, adventure, and hands-on nature fun with a honeybee workshop, petting zoo, face painting, scavenger hunt, and more.

WANT TO GO?: Free. tanger.com

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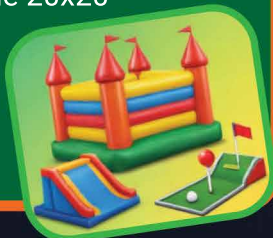
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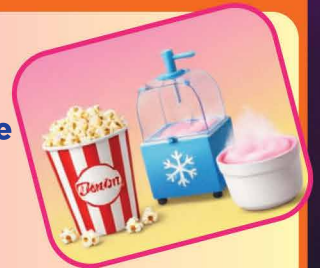
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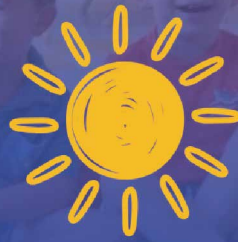
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6 August 3rd - August 7th

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