Making Beautiful Music
Boost Your Child’s Confidence and Brain Power

by Christine Plummer

The violin in her hands may sound a bit squeaky at times, but when she gets the music right, her smile says she is as proud as any symphony professional. Emily Beauchamp is a bright fifth grade student at Bodkin Elementary in Pasadena, but she could be any of the thousands of boys and girls in Maryland who participate in music classes, who are learning an instrument, singing in the chorus or marching in a school band. Children of all ages and all learning abilities can gain confidence and academic success from music education.

“All children have music inside of them; the idea is to let it out,” says Laura Johnson, associate executive director of the American Music Conference. Studies show that making music helps young children perform better on standardized tests, and teens benefit academically and socially from active participation in music.

Music and the Brain

In her article Wired for Sound: The Essential Connection Between Music and Development, Cynthia Ensign Baney explains that a young child’s brain is made up of millions of unconnected neurons. Each time he is stimulated to think, neural connections, or “bridges,” are made or strengthened, and learning is enabled.

Learning to sing or play an instrument is a right and left brain activity involving many physical and cognitive activities that must be performed simultaneously—exactly the challenge the brain needs to grow and learn!

Dr. John Ratey, author of A User’s Guide to the Brain, explains that the musician is constantly adjusting decisions on tempo, tone, style, rhythm, phrasing, and feeling—training the brain to become incredibly good at organizing and conducting numerous activities at once. Making music pays off in lifelong attention skills, intelligence, self-knowledge and expression.

Music in Schools

“Maryland is a very forward thinking state when it comes to supporting fine arts education,” says Jay Tucker, fine arts coordinator for the Maryland State Department of Education.

“In our school, everyone from 3rd to 5th grade is invited to join,” says Marianne Ferguson, band teacher at Bodkin Elementary. “Those who do get involved in band or chorus tend to be self-motivated and responsible. They are the leaders of their groups, and their grades usually reflect those strengths.” Bodkin’s band is 222 members strong.

Janet Gross of Mt. Harmony and Sunderland elementary schools in Calvert County says, “I can take kids who can’t read and teach them the language of music. Learning to read something as abstract as musical notes absolutely carries over into success in reading and math.”

Learning how to read music not only enhances reading and math but listening, anticipating, memorizing, recall and...
Welcome to the first issue of FamilyStyle! Maryland families come in all shapes and sizes; some very different from what might be called the “traditional” family. No matter what form your family takes, we know that you work hard everyday to build a home life that supports open communication, creates opportunities for family learning and fun, and allows for growth and independence for your children. We hope that you will look to FamilyStyle each week for creative and useful information to help you with these everyday family challenges. We have formatted our publication to fit your busy lifestyle: straightforward, easy to understand articles, tips and briefs that are current to your family’s needs. As editor, I encourage you to contact me with your current concerns, so that we can better serve your needs each week.

I am proud of my family — as you are proud of yours — and our children deserve every opportunity to grow, learn and become successful, productive citizens. Take a look at how business and our public schools are reinforcing positive character lessons in the classroom.

As I am putting this issue together the holiday season is looming. I feel the stress and I can tell that my children’s attitudes are changing with my mood. In this issue, Dr. Robert Falk, a licensed clinical psychologist with expertise in the treatment of anxiety disorders, provides tips for keeping your children in the holiday spirit and stress-free. Be sure to read our road trip tip. Cutting your own tree can be a fun-filled family tradition that you and your family will look forward to each year. Are you prepared to answer the question “Mom, is there really a Santa?”? A helpful brief on page 8 will help you answer those questions.

As we look forward to the new year, each of us will take stock of our goals and accomplishments. As parents, our children should be uppermost in our plans for a fruitful new year. Our mid-December and early January issues will be all about teaching our children to set goals and to reach for the stars. We can motivate our kids to be the superstars that we know they are. Upcoming issues will also focus on when to let kids just be kids. What are the signs of an over-scheduled, stressed child? Just because your neighbor’s child can handle it all, it doesn’t mean your child has to.

With so much information on parenting being offered up by so many different media, we attempt to offer only the most timely, practical information possible. We hope that you fit us into your hectic schedule and read just a few of the articles that may benefit your family. You, and your children, will be glad you did!

Christine

Christine Plummer, Editor
concentration as well. And in those all-important middle-school years, when self-image and self-esteem are so fragile, children can use music to help them express themselves or, in many cases, simply allow them to be a part of the group.

Music education is not just for the school classroom. Private music educators are available for any talent or age. Marion Elley, a private piano teacher, teaches children ranging in age from 6 to 16. “My kids come to me with little or no experience” she says. “But, I really challenge them, and when I see the learning begin, it’s exciting for them and for me. You can see a difference in children when they are excited about something.” An excellent resource for parents interested in private music lessons for their children can be found at www.MusicStaff.com.

**Music For Special Needs**

When a child has extraordinary needs—because of a physical, emotional or learning disability—professionals use music as therapy. Teachers, psychologists, occupational therapists and nurses work as a team to determine what can be done to help. Music therapy can be used to address non-musical issues like learning the alphabet, controlling behaviors, communicating, reversing paralysis or increasing attention span. Nadine Wobus, a certified music therapist in Bowie, has been in private practice since the 1980s. Over the years, she has helped students deal with disabilities that range from respiratory ailments to severe autism and paralysis.

“Music can help disabled kids deal with stress, learn to communicate or learn just about anything,” she says. “For example, autistic children do not have the ability to filter out extraneous noise or information. Music provides the structure so that they can organize their worlds.”

The Norbel School, a private school in Elkridge, has personalized their music curriculum to meet the needs of students with learning differences. Thanks in part to a grant from Ronald McDonald House Charities, Norbel students are now participating in multisensory lessons that combine sight, sound and touch to engage children in learning.

“Because of this new program, our kids have an opportunity to use the latest keyboard and recording technology to learn to read music, to play the piano, to play back what they have created, and to experiment with music while learning at their own pace,” says Terry Kemp, music teacher at Norbel.

“Whether or not they desire to become great pianists, children with focus problems or other learning differences have an opportunity to create and learn. Terry describes her class participants this year as happy and enthusiastic. “I’m sure as the year unfolds we will see even more significant improvements.”

Music is part of our daily lives. It is part of our culture and can have such a positive effect on our children’s character and intelligence. By getting your child excited about music, on any level, you can help create a future for them that is certain to be filled with success in school and beyond.

---

*Sarah Parker (l) and Jill Ruiz practice 5th grade violins at Bodkin Elementary in Pasadena. Both are “A” students and leaders in their class.*

---

**Freedom of Expression**

When it comes to music, Mike Blakeslee of the National Association for Music Education (MENC) advises parents to let children’s fancy run free: “Music making isn’t and shouldn’t be perceived as drudgery—it’s a discipline, but it’s also a source of joy.”

The American Music Conference offers these fun gift ideas for your young musician:

* a week at band camp
* tickets to a concert
* sheet music
* MENC’s *Student’s Guide to College Music Programs*
* a digital metronome or tuner
* a mini-recorder to play back all those hours of practicing
* a bow restrung with neon-colored hairs
* a trip to themusicedge.com, a site specifically designed for teens to explore the latest trends in music and to get tips on music making.

But the greatest gift, they say, that a parent can give their child is to continue to encourage his or her love of music.
For the next three years students in twelve Anne Arundel County public elementary schools will help schools across our nation by participating in a study of the effectiveness of character education programs that are currently being used in our schools. These programs teach character skills such as empathy, impulse control, anger management and problem solving, which can lead our nation’s children to success in our demanding, and sometimes violent, world.

Implementing character education in schools helps students develop ethically, socially, and academically and helps them better understand their personal and community responsibility. According to Dr. Thomas Lickona, author of *Raising Good Children*, “character education is a systematic approach of teaching children to know the good, be the good, and do the good.”

The national study, funded by the Institute of Educational Sciences (US Department of Education,) is being conducted in seven different jurisdictions across America, and compares the effectiveness of seven currently available and widely used character education programs. The study is being done in accordance with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The Act requires that any educational program used in public schools must have adequate scientific study to prove its effectiveness.

“The sad thing is,” says Gary Gottfredson, professor for the Department of Counseling and Personnel Services at the University of Maryland College Park, “that much of what is done in today’s schools is not scientifically proven to be effective. We don’t know if it is working.” When complete, this study will provide educators with the scientific data that will enable them to choose the most effective programs. Anne Arundel County students are being offered the Second Step Program, a nationally known program created by The Committee For Children. If the Second Step program is successful, the data from the study will show that children in the targeted schools are less aggressive, more helpful, and more civil to each other.

First year results of the study will be published by the Institute of Educational Sciences in November 2005.

Professor Gottfredson, as the principle investigator for the Maryland portion of the study, played a large role in identifying Anne Arundel County as an appropriate study location. The seven national locations were not necessarily chosen for their demographic similarities; they were chosen because of their size and their willingness to participate in the study.

“It is very exciting to be a part of something that will guide the future of education.” says Lucia Martin, Acting Coordinator for Guidance and Counseling in Anne Arundel County. “There has not been solid research done in the area of character education. We began implementing Second Step in many of our schools in 1998, so our gut feeling is that it is a good thing. It will be great to have real data that proves that it makes a difference for our kids.”

The Second Step program teaches social and emotional skills for violence prevention by using poster sized photographs and pre-scripted teacher lessons that take about 30 minutes per week. The program includes instructions for how the teacher can continue to model the lessons taught by the program throughout the week and parent education components.

“Our teachers work very hard, and we don’t need to give them even more work,” explains Ms. Martin, “but, Second Step is pre-scripted and it’s easy for them to teach.”

While preparing the study, Professor Gottfredson had to obtain permission from parents in the twelve targeted schools to include their children. As early as last April, letters were being sent home explaining the importance of the study.

“Only 89 percent of parents replied and only 74 percent of those parents said that their child could be part of the study,” explains Professor Gottfredson. The reason for such a low response may have been that parents did not understand the letter.

“People are not use to getting a letter about research studies involving their kids,” says Gottfredson. Some parents who called to ask questions later agreed, yet, many expressed concerns that too much testing already occurs in school. Some were concerned that their child was being singled out. And others, explains Gottfredson, may not believe in the value of research.

“Why participate in a scientific study?” challenges Professor Gottfredson. “The answer is it is a form of public service. The probability that you personally will benefit from the research is small, but if really effective education is implemented as a result of the study, it could benefit millions of kids. And, the only way to find out if it is effective is to carefully research it.”

Learn more about the Second Step program at cfchildren.org.
by Chris Plummer

My first grader came home from school one day and asked me to make an “initiative list” for him. Too busy to question, I wrote the words on a sticky note and went back to fixing dinner. The next morning he brought me the list and showed me that he had made his bed without being asked. “That’s called initiative, mom.” he beamed. I happily agreed, thanked him with a hug and a kiss, and with a raised eyebrow decided to find who had taught my six year old such big words and such life guiding principles. I was grateful, but, wasn’t that my job?

Every parent attempts to guide their child through life lessons that teach principles like initiative, uniqueness or kindness. Sixty-Nine schools across Maryland are bringing these skills to the front of the class and putting these principles into action with the help of Atlanta based, chicken nugget king, Chick-Fil-A, and the Core Essentials Program.

The Core Essential Program provides curriculum, classroom tools, dinner table discussion cards and student incentives to help parents and children learn valuable life lessons. Each month a new “Value of the Month” is promoted in school lessons. Teachers model the behavior and recognize students with free Chick-Fil-A kid’s meals when they are caught being “Value-Able” in school. At home, parents are encouraged to discuss the month’s value at the dinner table. The table card contains suggestions for conversation starters, activities and discussion ideas similar to those used in the classroom that encourage children to share their thoughts and questions with their parents.

“Parents and teachers are more eager than ever to explore ways to incorporate character education in their curriculums,” says Steve Robinson, Chick-fil-A’s senior vice president of marketing. “We’re thrilled to be a part of a program that not only meets a vital need in the school system, but also creates such a positive influence on countless young lives.”

Five hundred and Seventy students at Henry Ferguson Elementary in Accokeek, Prince George’s County, are involved in Core Essentials. “We present the lesson and then incorporate related activities – we made respect chains, we role played, and my personal favorite, was the uniqueness vest we made from a paper bag,” says Sharron Rouse, guidance counselor for Henry Ferguson. “I have seen a difference in our kids.” she added “They have a goal to work toward and they get rewards for good character. It’s a really positive thing.”

The Core Essentials program is available by contacting your local Chick-Fil-A Restaurant or by visiting the web at www.coreessentials.org.
Create A Holiday Tradition: Cut Your Perfect Tree

Buying a Christmas tree was a day long tradition when I was a child. Mom and Dad would bundle us up against the early December wind. Armed with hot chocolate and extra gloves, (inevitably one of us would lose a glove along the way) we would drive from one roadside stand to the next looking for the perfect tree: not too fat, not too tall, no bald spots, just right for its place of honor in front of the living room window. This all day adventure became one of the most memorable of my family’s holiday traditions.

My husband and I also have created a Christmas tree tradition with our two sons; we go down on the farm and cut our own. Cutting your own tree ensures a tree that will stay fresh until New Year’s Day and provides families with the opportunity to share nature and the goodness of the holiday season.

While on the Christmas tree hunt my family has encountered wildlife, nests, animal tracks, beautiful Maryland vistas, sunsets and the occasional opportunity to create snow angels and build snowmen. Most tree farms are like holiday amusement parks. Some farms offer hot drinks, food, handmade crafts and other Christmas decorations. All will offer the Christmas spirit and good cheer in abundance.

Ready? Here are a few tips to get your newest tradition started off on the right foot.

• Many tree growers provide saws; call ahead or take your own to be sure.
• Be sure to get the farm map before you head for the fields.
• Take along a wagon, sled or tarp to help transport the tree back to your car. Dragging it can damage the branches.
• Most farms bundle the tree for you, but take ropes to secure the tree to your car.
• Remember to take your camera!

Maryland’s Choose and Cut Christmas Tree Farms

BALTIMORE COUNTY
ALL TIMBER HILL FARM
(410) 357-0510 or (410) 357-8266
FEEZERS FARM, LLC
(410) 461-5654
www.freezersfarm.com
FROSTEE TREE FARM
410-687-3344; 410-256-5560
JONES CHRISTMAS TREE PLANTATION
(410) 771-4346
MT.CARMEL TREE FARM
(410) 329-8032 Parkton, MD 21120
RUHLS’ TREE FARM
(410) 666-2531

CECIL COUNTY
PUSEY TREE PLANTATION
(410) 658-6277
TNT TREES AT MAPLE SPRINGS
(410) 392-0339

FREDERICK COUNTY
CLEMSONVILLE CHRISTMAS TREE FARM
(410) 848-6083
www.clemsonville.com
FRANZ TREE FARM
(301) 831-6840
GAVER TREE FARM
(301) 865-3515 or 301-865-0747
HARDEE FARMS
(301) 384-6576 or (301) 384-9455
MAYNE'S TREE FARM
(301) 662-4320, (301) 874-2665
UNIONVILLE TREE FARM
(301) 829-0604

GARRETT COUNTY
MOUNTAIN TOP TREE FARM
(301) 334-9506

HARFORD COUNTY
APPLEWOOD FARM
(410) 836-1140
DEER CREEK VALLEY
(410) 692-9793
ENVIRONMENTAL EVERGREENS TREE FARM
410-457-4842 or 410-457-4766
chancetreefarm@aol.com
HICKORY HILL TREE FARM
Phone: (410)383-8733 & (410)879-8733
JARRETTSVILLE NURSERIES
(410) 557-9677, (410) 557-9630

HOWARD COUNTY
TLV TREE FARM
410-489-4460

KENT COUNTY
SIMMONS' CHRISTMAS TREES
(410) 778-0451 or (410) 348-5407

MONTGOMERY COUNTY
BUTLER’S ORCHARD
(301) 972-3299
www.butlersorchard.com
PRINCE GEORGES COUNTY
TANNER’S ENCHANTED FOREST
(301) 579-2238

ST. MARY’S COUNTY
EVERGREEN ACRES
(301) 862-1597
CHRISTMAS TREE FARM
301-475-5258

TALBOT COUNTY
HUTCHISON’S CHRISTMAS FOREST
(410) 820-2062

WASHINGTON COUNTY
MOUNT HOPE FARMS
(301) 620-8094
WICOMICO COUNTY
TRIPLE E FARM
410-543-9484
RAINBOW FARM
410-749-6236
My Kid’s Are All Stressed Out!!
Nine Tips To Help Children Cope With Holiday Stress

by Robert Falk, Ph.D.

With the coming of the winter holidays, magazines, newspapers and television shows will pour forth advice on “managing holiday stress,” “beating the holiday blues,” and other catchy titles, all with the goal of helping adults cope with the stress of the holidays. Frequently, the notion of children’s stress gets lost in the shuffle.

How can children experience holiday stress? After all, isn’t a large part of the holiday season devoted to children? Yes, but think back to your own childhood: can you recall the “anticipatory anxiety” surrounding a hoped for present? Disappointment about a gift not received? Envy of your friends’ or siblings’ toys? Tension reflecting family stress, exacerbated by family get-togethers under strained conditions? Anxiety and worry about the return to school after a long holiday break?

The holidays can be an especially difficult time of year for children, particularly if they have a predisposition toward heightened levels of anxiety. If we, as parents, work to manage our stress and tension during this time of year, we will go a long way toward helping our children experience the joys and wonder of the season with a minimum of distress. Here are nine tips to keep in mind as you prepare for the holidays:

• Think about how you handle stress.

Your children are expert observers of your behavior and learn from what they observe. Do you fall apart if your holiday shopping isn’t finished on time? If the rolls burn when you are readying dinner for guests, do you lose control? Model good coping skills for your children.

• Encourage thinking of others and perspective taking.

Help children make presents for friends and special relatives. Encourage their participation in programs in your house of worship and charitable activities that emphasize giving to others to keep the season in perspective. Talk about the gifts and blessings that your family enjoys and the importance of sharing with those less fortunate.

• Teach them to turn negative thoughts into positive ones.

When you look at things positively, you see options. If you see things negatively, you feel trapped. If your child is upset because he or she didn’t get a hoped-for toy, teach him or her to replace “I never get what I want” with “I got a lot of nice presents that I can have fun with. Maybe I can save my money to get the other toy later.”

• Provide structure and routine.

The change in schedule around the holidays can be a stressor in itself. Help reduce the impact of this by discussing routines and the sequence of events that will occur. A holiday calendar can be a fun way to do this. Turning holiday routine into traditions and passing on the responsibility for traditions to children can be a great way of creating a sense of purpose and calm during the holidays. Although it is tempting, try not to stray too far from regular bedtime and morning routines.

• Set appropriate boundaries and limits for children.

Although children may resist and test your limit setting, the provision of clear boundaries makes their life more predictable and reduces feelings of insecurity. This is particularly important during the holidays. By setting and keeping limits at home, during shopping trips, and while visiting others, you actually reduce stress within the family.

• Carve out quiet time with each child.

Individual time spent talking with children while working on something can be very special. Ask how they are feeling and how they are enjoying preparations for the holidays. Listen carefully and respect their comments.

• Teach simple relaxation techniques.

Simple breathing exercises, muscle relaxation, and imagery exercises are ways in which your children can gain control over their stress. There are a number of books and tapes on these subjects which might make nice stocking stuffers.

• Tune in to the signs of stress.

Rare is the child who says, “Hey, listen mom. I think I’m having difficulty coping with the demands of the holiday season.” Parents have to pick up on cues from other sources. Keep in mind that certain physical symptoms may be signs of stress: unexplained aching muscles, neck aches or backaches, pounding heart, restlessness, difficulty sleeping, early-morning awakening (with the exception of Christmas morning!) and, conversely, trouble staying awake. Other signs include chronic irritability and nervous habits such as nail biting and hair pulling. If the child begins to withdraw from activities they used to enjoy this also may be a red flag. Of course, suicidal thoughts or attempts should be treated as psychological emergencies. Seek a mental health professional’s care immediately. For other signs of stress, talk to your child and seek help from a medical or mental health practitioner if needed.

• Review your parenting style in general.

You will most likely be spending more time with your children during the holidays. What you say to your child and HOW you say it affects his or her ability to handle stress. A demanding, critical parent can give the child the indirect message that he or she is not really capable of solving problems for him or her self. On the other hand the overprotective parent may prevent the child from having the kinds of experiences that lead to the development of effective coping skills. Reading a good book on parenting, talking with other parents, or attending a parenting course may help you strike a healthy balance, and may be the best gift you give your child this holiday season.

Dr. Falk is a licensed clinical psychologist with expertise in the treatment of anxiety disorders. He practices with Dominion Behavioral Healthcare in Richmond, Virginia, and holds professional membership with ABIL. This article was reprinted with permission from the website anxietysupport.org.
DECEMBER

American Music Festival – thru January 9 at Port Discovery in Baltimore. 410-864-2716

Holiday Festival of Trains – thru January 2, B & O Railroad Museum, Baltimore. 410-752-2490

Holiday Sharing – Get the entire family involved in the spirit of giving. Donate holiday gifts, food and clothing thru December 25. Anne Arundel County Social Services, 410-269-4462

17 Friday

Family Campfire – 6:30p.m.– 8 p.m, Nature tales and marshmallows, 2 and up, $3, Clearwater Nature Center, Clinton, 301-297-4575

Winter Nature Hike – 10 am, registration required, Lake Waterford, Pasadena, 410-222-6248

18 Saturday

Jingle Bell Hayride – 10 a.m., hayride and hot chocolate. Kinder Farm Park, Millersville, $2, 410-222-6115.

Nature Club for Kids – 10 a.m. craft, hike and learning. $2, Bladensburg Waterfront Park, Bladensburg 301-779-0871

Kwanzaa Celebration - 2 p.m., performances, story telling, African American Museum, Lothian 410-277-1711

19 Saturday

Brunch With Santa – 9:30 a.m., ages 2-10, reservations by December 13, Lake Arbor Comm. Center, Mitchelville, 301-333-6561

19 Sunday

Drum Circle – 5 p.m., all ages. Bring your own instruments or use ours. Chesapeake Children’s Museum, Annapolis, 410-990-1193.

Nicolo Whimsey Show - 7-8p.m., variety show, for all ages, FREE, Deerfield Community center, South Laurel, 301-776-2805

26 Sunday


27 Sunday

Hispanic New Year – 10a.m. – noon, Latin America New Year’s celebration Chesapeake Children's Museum, 410-990-1193.

31 Friday

First Night For Families – Entertainment, food, IMAX, exhibits, planetarium, 8p.m.-12:30p.m., Maryland Science Center, 410-685-5225.

First Night Annapolis – Family oriented celebration, fireworks finale, 3p.m.-midnight. downtown Annapolis, 410-268-8553.

“Mom, Is There Really a Santa?”

Be prepared for this question

He’s coming! It is the season for Santa Claus to appear at every shopping mall, Christmas party and community event. Some will look convincingly authentic; some will not. Movies will depict the “Jolly One” in a dozen forms. Should you combat these external forces to keep your child believing in Santa for one more year? How do you know when it's time to let your children in on the big secret?

The important thing is to take your cues from your child, and not try to prolong the fantasy for your own enjoyment when they may be ready to give it up. There’s really no one right time to tell kids that there’s no Santa Claus because every child is different.

“As a parent, you need to handle the situation in whatever manner is comfortable,” explains Elaine M. Gibson, psychologist, educator and parent. “Think through your own feelings, be aware of your child’s needs, and then act accordingly. The right thing is what is right for your family.”

Many experts agree that parents should wait for their children to give them signs that they’re ready to give up believing in Santa. For instance, your daughter might start getting suspicious about the three different Santas she sees during the course of a day of shopping. Or your son might ask questions about how Santa can get to every house in the world in one night, or how he gets into houses with no chimneys.

“A friend of my son’s spilled the beans about Santa last year,” recalls Lori Edwards of Laurel, Maryland, mother of nine-year-old Dustin. “He came asking if we are really the ones who buy his Christmas presents. We made a joke of it and said, ‘You know we’re too cheap to buy you presents!’ But we also asked him about what he thinks. What it came down to is that Dustin knows there's no Santa, but he really doesn't want to take the chance and ruin his holiday fantasy.”

Just as kids give you signals when they’re ready to give up Santa, they also will let you know when they’re not. If your child isn’t ready to hear the truth, they simply won’t accept it -- or if they’re very young, they may truly not even comprehend what is being told to them.

The key issue is not so much when to break the news to your child -- his peers will probably take care of that -- but how to convert the belief in Santa into other expressions of the holiday spirit such as love, kindness, and family sharing.