

TODAY'S family

February 2026

Lake Geauga

Girl
Scout
Cookie
Season!

Patriots on the Fly

Organization provides
healing and hope—
one cast at a time

Tips to help with your
Picky eater

The history and traditions of
Valentine's Day

**That's
A-Moray**
Greater Cleveland
Aquarium event
open February 7–15

Canine Companions

Provides expertly trained
service dogs to adults,
children and veterans

Private School Guide

Tips for choosing a private
school , PLUS listings of schools

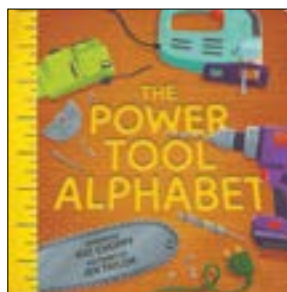
Today's Family BOOK CLUB



The Out-of-This-World Pet

Written by Adam Kargman
Illustrated by Tristan Tait

The story follows Jordy, a young boy who wants his own pet more than anything. But when an alien abducts him to be its pet, Jordy gets swept up in an imaginative intergalactic journey where he learns compassion, responsibility, and what it truly means to care for a pet.



The Power Tool Alphabet

Written by Kat Choppy
Illustrated by Jenny Taylor

This vibrant book introduces children to various power tools, inviting them to explore the fascinating world of building and creating. Each letter corresponds to a tool, such as an arc welder, drill, or yard saw, with cheerful illustrations and playful explanations. The book

encourages imagination and creativity, making it perfect for little makers and future engineers. It features a mix of common tools and unique machines, with detailed descriptions of each tool's function and types of jobs it can be used for. Ages 0-4.

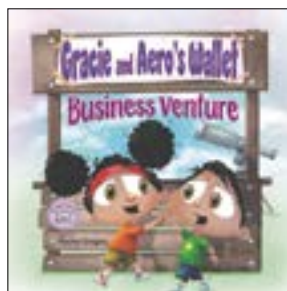


Digging for Dinosaurs: Beneath the Street

Written by June Smalls
Illustrated by Grace Habib

"Digging for Dinosaurs: Beneath the Street" is an interactive board book that invites young children to embark on a treasure-hunt for dinosaurs. The book features flaps of various sizes that toddlers can lift, leading them to

discover interesting objects, both natural and man-made, along the way. This unique approach provides a delightful introduction to paleontology, engaging young readers and building excitement as they approach the goal of finding a dinosaur. Ages 0-4.



Gracie and Aero's Wallet: Business Venture

Written by Rachel Gregory

Gracie and Aero's Wallet: Business Venture is the second book in Gregory's engaging three-part series that introduces kids to simple, practical money skills. After learning the value of saving and hard work in Book One, Gracie and Aero's Wallet, the two siblings

are ready for their next challenge: turning their beloved telescope into a small business! With big dreams and clever ideas, Gracie and Aero discover that running a business takes teamwork, creativity and a whole lot of heart. Ages 4-12.

Summer Camp Guide Coming in March!

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Today's Family Magazine is distributed free of charge for families living in and around Lake and Geauga counties.

Cover Photo
Adobe Stock / By Monkey Business



The secret life of cords

(And why they refuse to behave)

By Dan Miller

Every December, I carefully wrap our Christmas lights using what I have always believed to be the Correct and Responsible Method: one hand out, the cord looping neatly around the back of my elbow, over and over, until it forms a tidy, obedient bundle. I secure it gently, place it in a storage bin, and feel deeply satisfied with myself.

Eleven months later, I open that same bin and discover what can only be described as a hostile nest.

The lights are no longer a bundle. They are a knot. Not a simple knot—an elaborate, multi-layered tangle that appears to have required both intention and free will. I stand there, genuinely baffled, wondering how something wrapped so carefully could possibly look like it spent the year training for an escape room.

I am forced to conclude the only reasonable explanation: the cords have been moving around on their own.

This theory is reinforced under my desk, where

I plug cords into a surge protector one at a time. Each cord is placed deliberately. Calmly. Respectfully. And yet, every time I crawl back there to clean or unplug a charger, the cords appear to have reorganized themselves into a competitive version of Twister. One is looped through another. Two have switched places. Somehow, one cord I swear I never touched is now wrapped tightly around my ankle.

It's the same phenomenon everywhere. Headphone cords that tangle in an empty pocket. Phone chargers that knot themselves overnight. Extension cords that transform from straight lines into what looks like nautical ropework. No one ever remembers tangling them. They just... arrive that way.

For the record, that wrapping technique—the hand-to-elbow method—is actually called coil wrapping. It's widely used and widely trusted. And yet, it fails us all eventually.

As it turns out, science is reluctantly on our side.

Physicists have studied cord tangling (known as spontaneous knotting) and discovered that long, flexible objects naturally form knots when confined to small spaces and subjected to even tiny amounts of movement. A bag being lifted. A bin being shifted. A drawer being opened and closed. Over time, cords cross, loop, and tighten—especially if they're thin and long. The more time they have, the worse it gets.

In other words, the cords aren't trying to ruin your day. They're just obeying the laws of physics.

Still, knowing this doesn't make it any less personal when you're on the floor, untangling Christmas lights while muttering, "I wrapped you perfectly."

So this year, when you open a bin and find chaos where order once lived, take comfort. You're not careless. You're not imagining things. And you're definitely not alone.

The cords were simply busy all year—doing what cords do best.



Without Valentine's Day, February would be... well, January.

—Jim Gaffigan

Valentine's Day money-saving tip: Break up on February 13, get back together on the 15th.

—David Letterman

I love you more than coffee, but please don't make me prove it.

—Elizabeth Evans

As a man in a relationship you have two choices: you can be right or you can be happy.

—Ralphie May

All you need is love. But a little chocolate now and then doesn't hurt. —Charles M. Schulz

Today is Valentine's Day – or as men like to call it, Extortion Day. —Jay Leno



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February: A season of changes

For me, February can feel bleak after all the hustle and glitz of the holiday season is over. With mostly cold weather and gray skies and just a smattering of sunshiny days, I find myself feeling glad it's the shortest month of the year—so it can come and go more swiftly. Yet each year, it arrives right on schedule, whether we like it or not. And I've learned that a negative outlook only makes the month drag on. My goal this year is to make the most of it.

We're officially in late winter, which on the flip side means we're on the cusp of spring. Still, February is full of contrasts. A morning may start out mild and turn bitterly cold and blustery in the blink of an eye. Those sudden shifts can be hard to take. The changing calendar reminds me of another season of transition—when my daughters started in a new school district and became the new kids at school. Even knowing the change would ultimately be positive didn't make it any easier. Being the new kid is its own kind of bleak season.

When I asked my eldest how her first day went, she described it as being trapped in a room full of farts. Not exactly a ringing endorsement, but it made us all laugh—and it was surprisingly accurate. It's been noted that by refusing to laugh

at farts, you'll still encounter the same number of them; you'll just experience far less joy. It's a silly example, but it makes the point. I think the same principle applies to February. We can't skip it, but we can decide how we experience it.

That season taught me something I still forget every February: transitions are easier to manage when we name them out loud. When my girls were adjusting to a new school, we talked through what felt awkward, what felt scary, and what felt hopeful—sometimes all in the same car ride home. Winter transitions are quieter, but they stir up the same unease. Short days, long nights, and disrupted routines can leave everyone a little more frayed than usual.

So instead of grumbling my way through cold, gray days, I'm trying to focus on what this in-between season offers. I'm leaning into comfort and coziness—candles glowing in the evenings, warm sweaters, familiar comfort foods, and mugs filled with something hot. Valentine's Day provides a welcome mid-month pause, complete with cards, flowers, and chocolate. And winter evenings at home offer something we often rush past the rest of the year: time. Time for quiet hobbies, shared games, and conversations that don't need to be squeezed between activities.

Little by little, signs of change begin to appear.

Mommy CHRONICLES

By Stacy Turner



Photo credit: Adobe Stock / By Zoran Jesic

Each day brings a few more minutes of light. Ice and snow slowly give way. Retailers roll out garden displays, offering hopeful glimpses of flowers, herbs, and fresh vegetables waiting just around the corner. Spring isn't here yet—but it's closer than it was yesterday.

Before we know it, late winter will end, just as it always does. By choosing a better mindset—by laughing when we can and leaning into what this season offers—we can weather the changes, no matter the weather.

join our team!

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Service dogs are trained to support their partners with every day tasks by helping retrieve dropped items, opening doors, turning on lights and much more, to enhance independence for people with disabilities. *Photo courtesy of Canine Companions.*

Puppies With a Purpose

How Canine Companions is changing lives in Northeast Ohio

By Dan Miller

Imagine a puppy learning how to fetch a dropped cellphone, turn off a light switch, or gently calm a veteran during a panic attack. For Canine Companions, these skills aren't tricks—they're life-changing tools that help people with disabilities live with greater independence, dignity, and confidence.

Founded in 1975, Canine Companions is the oldest and largest service dog organization in the United States. Headquartered in Santa Rosa, California, the nonprofit provides expertly trained service dogs to adults, children, and veterans with disabilities, as well as facility dogs to professionals working in healthcare, criminal justice, rehabilitation, and education. Remarkably, the dogs—and all follow-up services—are provided completely free of charge.

Every Canine Companions dog begins its journey as a puppy, specially bred at the organization's California campus. At just eight weeks old, the puppies are sent across the country to volunteer puppy raisers who open their homes—and hearts—to them. Over the next 18 months, these volunteers teach the dogs approximately 30 basic commands and help them develop the social skills

they'll need to succeed.

Right here in Northeast Ohio, about 30 puppies are currently in training with local volunteer raisers. After that phase, the dogs move on to professional training at one of Canine Companions' regional centers. For Ohio, that center is located in New Albany, where the dogs are trained to perform advanced tasks such as opening doors and drawers, retrieving dropped items like credit cards, and assisting people who use wheelchairs with everyday activities.

Some dogs receive specialized training to support veterans living with PTSD. These dogs can recognize signs of nightmares or panic attacks and respond by turning on lights, removing blankets, or applying gentle pressure to help calm their handler. Graduates in Northeast Ohio report significantly increased independence—and peace of mind—in their daily lives.

Today, Canine Companions serves individuals with more than 65 different types of disabilities. The organization places approximately 500 service dogs each year and supports more than 2,800 active service dog teams nationwide. Since its founding, more than 8,300 teams have been placed.

One of the most inspiring recent developments in the region is the launch of Ohio's only active Canine Companions prison puppy-raising program at the Southeast Correctional Institution in Lancaster. Within the past year, incarcerated individuals began raising and training puppies as part of the program. The first two puppies raised there advanced to professional training in November, and four puppies are currently being raised at SCI. Canine Companions service dogs raised through prison programs graduate at a 10% higher rate than those raised in traditional homes, while the recidivism rate for incarcerated puppy raisers is less than 5%, demonstrating the meaningful, positive effects on all involved beyond a sense of purpose - offering responsibility, purpose, and a chance to contribute to something deeply meaningful.

From volunteer homes to prisons to professional training centers, Canine Companions is proving that when a community comes together, even a puppy can help change a life.

Visit <https://canine.org/location/north-central> to learn about ways to get involved with Canine Companions.

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Greater Cleveland Aquarium's That's A-Moray event returns February 7–15

Spend time with the animals you adore and the people you care about Saturday, February 7 – Sunday, February 15 at Greater Cleveland Aquarium.

During That's A-Moray, complete a love-themed activity sheet, discover quirky courtship rituals, strike a pose with punny animal valentines and enjoy mood music as you wander through the galleries.

"When it comes to finding a mate, musk turtles nip, red hook silver dollars chase, mossy frogs chirp and damselfish jump, so I guess there's always a splash of romance here," says Aquarium General Manager Stephanie White, adding, "Even our Valentine's celebration's namesake—the moray eel—performs a graceful dance during courtship."

For those who want to heat things up, the Aquarium is staying open until 8 p.m. on Friday & Saturday, February 13 & 14, with optional adult beverages available for purchase. "It can be a cozy date night or a fun escape from the winter chill



with family and friends," says White.

That's A-Moray kicks off with We Love Our Passholders Morning on Saturday, February 7, 8:30–10 a.m. The exclusive event is a lovely opportunity for members to craft original Valentine's Day cards, enjoy sweet treats and snap photos with sign-holding scuba divers.

For more information call (216) 862-8803 or visit greaterclevelandaquarium.com.

Great Big Home + Garden Show

The Great Big Home + Garden Show returns to Cleveland's I-X Center from Friday, January 30 through Sunday, February 8, 2026. More than 500 exhibitors will fill the show floor, showcasing the latest in kitchens, baths, landscaping, décor, flooring, windows, outdoor living, and home technology. It's a one-stop opportunity to compare products, gather ideas, and talk directly with professionals before starting your next project.

In addition to special guests, fam-

ilies will find plenty to enjoy including a KidsZone with play structures, a Zoo Animal Floral Selfie Station, and live demonstrations throughout the show. One highlight is the SkillsUSA live competition, where regional trade students build a home feature on site.

Tickets range from \$13–\$15 for adults, with discounts for seniors, groups, and special community days. Parking is \$12 per vehicle.

For more information please visit greatbighomeandgarden.com.

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with Rebecca Fellenbaum

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Feeling blah

Dear Rebecca: On the outside, things are fine. I'm managing life, kids, and work. But it feels like something is off. I'm blah and disconnected. I'm not really sad, but I'm not happy either. I keep telling myself to be grateful, but it falls flat. How can I feel better?

~ Lauren, Solon

Dear Lauren: Thank you for reaching out. I appreciate your honesty, and I know many readers will relate.

It sounds like you're in what I call autopilot living. You're going through the motions, but somewhere along the way, you stopped feeling fully present. That can be exhausting.

Let's start with curiosity. When did you notice something was off? Did something happen, or was it a slow slide into your current state? Do you feel this way all the time or is it seasonal? Your answers to these questions can help you better understand how you got here.

From there, let's go deeper. When you say "blah" or "disconnected," what does that feel like? There is likely a feeling or need that hasn't been acknowledged. Can you imagine what the opposite would look like? If you were "on" and happy and grateful, how would you feel? What would you be doing? What would you think?

Once you've answered those questions, write down what you might need to get there. Let yourself dream big (a live-in nanny would be nice) and then move into reality (a babysitter once a week, perhaps). Do this for all areas of your life that feel off.

To shift out of autopilot, we need small ways to move into our conscious mind, in the present moment, and live with fact and truth. When you find yourself going through the motions, try grounding yourself with a deep breath, a hand on your heart, or by repeating "I'm here," or "I'm okay."

Finally, I admire your instinct

to practice gratitude. When we are grateful, we move from seeing the world through our mind and drop into viewing the world from our heart. Can you find three things per day to appreciate and allow to land in your heart? Gratitude is like a snowball rolling down a hill. The more you are grateful, the more things you find to be grateful for.

Thank you for reaching out. I wish you success and happiness!

Exhausted manager of everything

Dear Rebecca: I manage everything for our family. My husband helps, but sometimes it's more work to ask him to help, and the whole cycle leaves me exhausted. I get resentful about being underappreciated, and when I try to talk about it, it usually turns into an argument. How do I bring this up without it blowing up?

~ Amanda, Willowick

Dear Amanda: That is a common and relatable struggle. Thank you for naming it so clearly.

Before I offer solutions, let's reflect for a moment. Has it always been this way, or has it changed since having kids or perhaps other changes? Understanding how you got here can ease the conversation and remind you it didn't happen overnight.

Before bringing this to your husband, I suggest doing a brain dump. Write out everything you do, the tasks and your mental energy behind them. Seeing them on paper gets them out of your head, and that's validating. Once you have your list, you can start to sort it into three columns: keep, ditch, and distribute.

The keep list includes responsibilities you don't mind owning. You might want some help sometimes, but these are reasonable for you. By manage, I mean the entire mental load of, say, grocery shopping or laundry.

The ditch column is things you're ready to let go of altogether. Maybe

they're up for grabs for someone else in your household, but you're done. This could be things like signing up for the bake sale, hosting the holidays every year, or painting your kids' bedroom. In reality, you might not be able to ditch everything on this list all at once, but it goes here if you'd like to talk about ditching it.

Finally, the distribute list. These are tasks you think should still get done, but you're no longer willing to carry the entire mental load. This might be managing summer camp sign-ups, coordinating sports schedules, or planning dinners for the week. Can you outsource some of this? Can you ask your husband to own things from this list? The caveat here is that if he does, you have to

let go of control so you don't get to micromanage how he does it.

You might not have much off your plate right away, but with everything laid out for you and your husband to see, you can continue the discussion. The best way to view the list is as a partnership where you are a team, and the list is the issue. It's you and your husband vs. the list!

And Amanda, if anyone can handle this, it's you. You've already proven yourself as the manager of everything.

Rebecca Fellenbaum is a certified life coach, writer, and Cleveland area mom who helps parents enjoy this time in their lives. You can find her at rebeccafellenbaum.com.



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Patriots On The Fly

Organization offers healing, community, and hope—one cast at a time

By Dan Miller

For many veterans, the transition back to civilian life comes with challenges that aren't always visible. Physical injuries, service-connected disabilities, and the loss of military camaraderie can leave veterans searching for both healing and connection. In Northeast Ohio, Patriots On The Fly is meeting that need in an unexpected—and powerful—way: through fly fishing.

Based in Willoughby, Patriots On The Fly is a volunteer-driven, nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization and a charter club of Fly Fishers International. Its mission is simple yet profound: to provide disabled, service-connected veterans with a rehabilitative process and a supportive community through fly tying, fly casting, and hands-on fly fishing education. The program is open to veterans across Ohio and offered

entirely at no cost to participants.

What sets Patriots On The Fly apart is its emphasis on both skill-building and belonging. Veterans who join the program are known as Patriots and take part in a free, two-year, continuous curriculum designed to build confidence, patience, and mastery—on and off the water. Monthly classes cover a wide range of topics, including reading the water, fly selection, knots, rod rigging, leader and tippet use, and wading safety. As participants gain experience, they're invited to take part in guided, on-the-water fishing opportunities that put classroom learning into practice.

Behind the scenes is a dedicated group of volunteers with decades of collective fly fishing experience. Their backgrounds are as diverse as their talents. Some are seasoned anglers with stories from freshwater



—Photo courtesy of Patriots on the Fly

streams, saltwater flats, wading rivers, and float trips. Others contribute in less obvious but equally important ways—handling IT needs, organizing logistics, or even baking cookies for meetings. That diversity keeps the organization strong, prevents volunteer burnout, and ensures everyone feels valued.

After completing the one-year curriculum, veterans have the option to remain Patriots or advance to the organization's Ambassador level. Ambassadors are veterans who take on leadership roles, mentor fellow participants, and earn access to more advanced fly fishing experiences, including overnight trips to regional fisheries—all provided at no cost. This peer-to-peer model strengthens trust, builds confidence, and allows veterans to continue growing while giving back.

Patriots On The Fly currently serves more than 50 participants and meets monthly on the third Thursday at VFW Post 1500 in Willoughby. The organization operates entirely

through donations, with 100 percent of funding directed toward veteran programming. No volunteers are paid, and every contribution—monetary or in-kind—directly supports those served.

In-kind donations are especially valuable and may include fly rod components, waders, boots, vests, packs, fly boxes, tying tools and materials, and fly fishing books. Monetary donations of any size are also welcome, and arrangements can be made to pick up donated items locally.

At its heart, Patriots On The Fly is about more than fishing. It's about creating a calm space to learn, a steady rhythm to focus the mind, and a community that understands shared experience. With every fly tied and every cast made, veterans rediscover patience, purpose, and connection—proving that sometimes, the path to healing begins right at the water's edge.

Visit www.patriotsonthefly.org for more information.

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Girl Scout Cookie season adds new ExploreMores™ cookie to its lineup

Girl Scouts of North East Ohio (GSNEO) kicked off the 2026 Girl Scout Cookie season on January 12. The Girl Scout Cookie Program® provides invaluable entrepreneurial skills for Girl Scouts across the country and funds experiences such as service projects, troop travel, and summer camp. From a curious kindergarten learning about STEM for the first time, to a middle schooler finding the courage to go on her first overnight trip with her troop, Girl Scouts know the road to discovery starts with exploration.

Each cookie season, Girl Scouts develop important life skills like goal setting, decision making, money management, people skills and business ethics through the Girl Scout Cookie Program. All proceeds from cookie sales stay local to power Northeast Ohio Girl Scouts' amazing experiences year-round.

ExploreMores™, a rocky road ice cream-inspired sandwich cookie, will join the legendary lineup for the 2026 Girl Scout Cookie season. Filled with delicious flavors of chocolate, marshmallow and toasted almond-flavored crème, ExploreMores reflect the spirit of exploration at the heart of every Girl Scout. In addition to the exciting new cookie,

the 2026 cookie lineup will include fan favorites such as Thin Mints®, Samoas®, Tagalongs®, and more.

In 2025, more than 12,000 Girl Scouts participated in the Girl Scout Cookie Program in Northeast Ohio, with over two million boxes sold. "The Girl Scout Cookie Program is more than selling cookies. It's a program that teaches important and vital skills and creates opportunities for Girl Scouts to learn, grow, and build confidence," said Jane Christyson, CEO of GSNEO. "Every year I am so impressed with our local troops and love watching them interact with their community and show off their entrepreneurial skills."

How to purchase Girl Scout Cookies this year

- If you know a registered Girl Scout, reach out to her to find out how she's selling cookies.
- Enter your zip code into the Girl Scout Cookie Finder at www.gsneo.org/findcookies to purchase cookies online from a local troop for direct shipment.
- From March 6–29, enter your zip code into the Girl Scout Cookie Finder at www.gsneo.org/findcookies to find a local cookie booth occurring in your community.

Winter Wonder Weekends return to Cleveland Metroparks Zoo

The Winter Wonder Weekends experience returns to the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo with heated shuttle service through the Zoo, free carousel rides and special programming and keeper chats each weekend. The event takes place Fridays through Sundays, now through March 8. The added amenities are designed to enhance the guest experience through the colder months.

To help connect guests to indoor areas and experiences across the Zoo, the "Zoo Loop" is again operating with heated shuttle service and added weekend stops across Zoo grounds, including at the Welcome Plaza, African Elephant Crossing, African Savanna, Wilderness Trek, Circle of Wildlife Carousel, Primate, Cat & Aquatics and Australian Adventure.

Ahead of each weekend throughout Winter Wonder Weekends, Cleveland Metroparks Zoo will announce a new series of exclusive opportunities including guided walks in Wilderness Trek, elephant baths at African Elephant Cross-



ing, scavenger hunts and more.

Each weekend will also have special keeper chats where guests can learn more about what it takes to care for wildlife around the world including tigers, koalas, primates and pinnipeds. The weekend experience also includes discounts on hot chocolate and pretzels, and free rides on the heated Circle of Wildlife Carousel.

Winter Wonder Weekends will also include family-friendly crafts and activities, including a Stuffed Animal Clinic presented by MetroHealth, story time at Wolf Lodge and more.

For more information on each weekend's activities, visit clevelandmetroparks.com/winterwonderweekends and stay connected to Cleveland Metroparks Zoo on Facebook, Instagram and X.



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We're always looking to share inspiring, heartwarming stories — whether it's a young entrepreneur chasing a dream, a child who's overcome challenges, a teacher making a lasting impact, or someone quietly spreading kindness in their community.

If you know someone whose story would inspire or uplift Today's Family readers, send us an email and tell us about them! Please include a few details about who they are and what makes their story special. If your idea is a good fit, one of our writers will reach out to learn more and craft an article.

As a thank you for helping us find great stories, we'll send you four tickets to Atlas Cinemas plus \$20 in concession vouchers!

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Picky eaters

What's typical, what's tricky, and what actually helps

By Gina Schumann, MA, CCC-SLP



Now that the holidays are over and lots of us are attempting to return to “normal” meals (instead of travel snacks, cookies and party food), your child's picky eating might be standing out even more. If you're wondering how your child is able to subsist on three goldfish crackers and an applesauce pouch or if you've noticed only two bites have been taken from the meal you spent hours preparing, you're in good company.

As a speech pathologist who specializes in feeding and a mom of two, I can confidently say that picky eating is one of the most perplexing and frustrating parts of raising young children. One moment, your 1-year-old is happily devouring whatever you put in front of them. Then, seemingly overnight, your now 2-year-old is suddenly greeting every meal with a firm and dramatic “No!” It's enough to make any parent feel defeated and exhausted.

The good news? This phase is incredibly common and for the most part, developmentally normal. Here are some tips and strategies to help you navigate picky eating with confidence.

Remember: there's a reason behind the refusal

From birth to around age two, children grow at a rapid rate. Their bodies and brains are developing so fast that sometimes we look at pictures from just two weeks ago and notice physical changes. Babies triple their birth weight by one year of age and quadruple it by 2 years. All of this growth and development requires tons of calories and nutrition.

Around the age of 2, that rapid growth naturally begins to slow, so it makes sense that appetites slow down too. A toddler who once ate everything that was put on their high chair tray may suddenly seem uninterested in foods they previously loved. This shift is biological, not behavioral, and that simple understanding can ease a lot of frustration at the dinner table.

Sit down and eat together

This strategy sounds simple, but busy family life with hectic schedules can make it challenging

to consistently pull off. That's okay, but whenever possible, make attempts to come together for family meals where phones and devices are put away. Have a designated place in the house for mealtimes and try to be consistent with timing of meals. When kids have opportunities to connect with family members while sharing in back and forth exchanges, the meal becomes less about how many bites must be taken and more about family bonding and connection.

Modeling and exposure matter more than you think

Toddlers learn what's “safe” and acceptable by watching the people they trust most: you! Even if your child has never taken a single bite of broccoli, simply having it on the plate regularly and having familiar people around the table enjoying it can have an impact. Comment on the way things taste or the differences in the way food was prepared as you eat it without expectation. Consistent, low-pressure exposure builds familiarity, which can eventually lead to trying and eventually liking. Continue modeling and exposing your child to foods that they say they don't like without forcing.

Give kids age-appropriate control

Two- and three-year-olds are discovering autonomy. One of the very few things they have control over at this age is what they choose to put in their mouth. So it's no surprise that toddlers often assert themselves through food refusal.

One of my favorite guiding principles is: “The parent decides what, when, and where food is served.

The child decides if and how much they eat.”

This structure gives you as the parent the power to provide nutritious variety while allowing your child to listen to their internal cues. It keeps mealtimes calmer, more predictable, and less stressful for everyone.

Another way to help a child feel a bit more in control is to simply load a utensil for them and leave it on their plate. This way, the food is loaded and ready to go but the child feels in control of when they put it in their mouths.

Get kids involved in the kitchen

Children are naturally curious, and they are much more likely to try foods they've helped prepare.

In my own home, kid-safe kitchen knives have been a game changer. Toddlers and preschoolers can chop soft fruits, rinse vegetables, sprinkle seasonings, or stir ingredients. These small jobs build confidence and give kids a sense of ownership over what ends up on their plate. And when they help make it, they're often more willing to taste it.

Let them play with their food

Let me be the first to admit that this one can be tough, especially for parents like me who don't love dealing with messes. But research shows that the more opportunities a child has to interact with food, like “drawing” with applesauce on a tray or stacking blueberries, the more comfortable they become with it. These playful moments provide valuable sensory experiences: smelling, touching, squishing, and exploring the food without pressure. All of this helps their brains build familiarity and reduces the “unknown,” making them much more likely to eventually eat and enjoy the food.

A final word of encouragement

Picky eating tests the patience of even the most seasoned parents. But remember: it's a developmental phase, not a reflection of your parenting. By offering variety, keeping mealtimes low-pressure, modeling good habits, and giving your child age-appropriate control, you're building a foundation of trust, and that matters far more than how many bites they take.

Some meals will feel like victories. Others will feel like negotiations with a tiny food critic.

Both are normal. You're doing a great job!

Gina Schumann, MA-CCC/SLP is a licensed pediatric speech-language pathologist. She is the founder of Small Talk Speech Therapy, LLC, specializing in customized in-home speech therapy for children. Learn more at www.smalltalkst.com.

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10 tips for choosing a summer day camp

Choosing the perfect summer day camp for your child can feel overwhelming with so many options available. A well-chosen camp provides children with a safe environment to learn, grow, and have fun, while also giving parents peace of mind. Here are some essential tips to help you navigate this decision and find the best fit for your family.

1. Identify your goals and priorities

Before diving into camp brochures or websites, take time to identify what you and your child hope to gain from the experience. Are you looking for a camp that focuses on academics, sports, arts, or outdoor adventures? Does your child want to make new friends or improve a specific skill? Clarifying these priorities will help narrow down your options and ensure you choose a camp that aligns with your expectations.

2. Consider your child's interests and personality

Each child is unique, and their preferences and personality should play a significant role in selecting a camp. For example, an introverted child might thrive in a smaller, quieter setting, while an extroverted child may enjoy a bustling camp with diverse group activities. Engaging your child in the decision-making process can also help them feel excited and invested in the experience.



3. Research camp options

Begin your search by gathering recommendations from friends, family, and online reviews. Many camps have websites or social media pages where you can find detailed information about their programs, schedules, and staff. Look for camps accredited by organizations like the American Camp Association (ACA), which ensures they meet high safety and quality standards.

4. Assess safety and supervision

Safety is paramount when choosing a day camp. Check the camper-to-staff ratio and ensure it aligns with industry standards. Ask about staff qualifications, including background checks, certifications in first aid and CPR, and relevant training. Inquire

about the camp's protocols for handling emergencies, illnesses, and injuries.

5. Evaluate the schedule and activities

Review the daily schedule and activity options to ensure they align with your child's interests and energy levels. A good camp will offer a balance of structured activities and free time, catering to various age groups and skill levels. If your child has special interests, such as coding, dance, or swimming, look for camps with specialized programs in those areas.

6. Consider the location and hours

Logistics are an essential factor in choosing a summer day camp. Consider the camp's proximity to your home or workplace and whether the hours fit your family's schedule. Some camps offer extended care options, which can be a lifesaver for working parents.

7. Visit the camp in person

If possible, arrange a visit to the camp before enrolling your child. A tour allows you to see the facilities, meet the staff, and observe the environment. Pay attention to cleanliness, the condition of equipment, and whether the atmosphere feels welcoming and inclusive. This firsthand experience can provide valuable insights that you won't get from websites.



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8. Review costs and budget

Day camp fees can vary widely, so it's essential to understand the costs upfront. Ask about what the tuition covers and whether there are additional fees for meals, field trips, or supplies. Some camps offer discounts for early registration or multiple children, as well as financial aid for families in need.

9. Seek feedback from other parents

Talking to other parents who have experience with the camp can provide honest insights. Ask about their child's experience, the camp's strengths and weaknesses, and whether they would recommend it. Online parenting forums and local community groups can also be valuable resources for reviews and recommendations.

10. Trust your instincts

Finally, trust your gut feeling. If something about a camp doesn't feel right, keep looking. The right camp should give you confidence in its ability to provide a safe, enriching, and enjoyable experience for your child.

Choosing a summer day camp is an important decision that requires careful consideration. By identifying your goals, understanding your child's needs, and thoroughly researching your options, you can find a camp that offers a rewarding and memorable summer experience. With the right preparation, summer day camp can become a highlight of your child's year, fostering growth, learning, and lifelong memories.

Why summer day camp is more than childcare

For many families, summer day camp is a practical solution when school is out. But beyond keeping kids busy, a well-run day camp offers meaningful benefits that can last long after summer ends. From social growth to confidence building, day camps give children a chance to learn, play, and thrive in ways that feel fun—not forced.

Key benefits of summer day camp include:

Social skills and friendship building

Camp places children in a new social setting where they learn to make friends, collaborate, and resolve small conflicts. These everyday interactions help build communication skills and emotional intelligence.

Independence and confidence

Spending the day away from home encourages kids to try new things, make choices, and



solve problems on their own—all within a safe, supportive environment.

Physical activity and healthy routines

Many camps emphasize outdoor play, sports, swimming, and movement-based activities, helping kids stay active and burn energy in a healthy way.

Exposure to new interests

From art and science to music, nature, or sports, camp often introduces children to activities they might not encounter during the school year. A single week can spark a lifelong interest.

Structured days with flexibility

Camps balance routine with creativity, giving kids structure while still allowing freedom to explore, play, and relax.

Reduced screen time

With hands-on activities and face-to-face interaction, camp offers a welcome break from screens and digital distractions.

Support for working families

Day camps provide reliable supervision during work hours, offering peace of mind while children are engaged and cared for.

Ultimately, summer day camp helps children grow socially, emotionally, and physically—all while having fun. It's an investment in experiences that build confidence, resilience, and memories that last well beyond the final day of camp.

~Articles by Jeannine Todd

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SUMMER CAMP PREVIEW

Camp Fitch YMCA

www.campfitchymca.org

Camp Fitch YMCA is a great camp on a great lake, with over 100 years of transforming young lives. Located on 425 scenic acres along the shores of Lake Erie, their programs serve kids ages 6–17, helping them grow into confident, independent learners while connecting with nature.

Guided by carefully selected, caring staff, campers build Friendships, Achieve new skills, and experience a strong sense of Belonging (FAB). These moments foster resilience, self-confidence, and independence. Camper surveys consistently show that friendships, counselor connections, and engaging activities are top reasons families return.

Their traditional camp offers classic experiences like rock climbing, archery, canoeing, crafts, and mountain biking, plus exclusive access to Lake Erie's beach and additional waterfronts. Specialized programs, including Adventure Trips, Computer Camp, Diabetic Camp, Farm, and Equestrian

experiences, ensure something for everyone.

Overnight sessions run weekly from June 14 – August 1. Register today and give your child the opportunity of a lifetime!

Gilmour Day Camps

34001 Cedar Road, Gates Mills
(440) 473-8000 ext. 2267
www.gilmour.org/summercamp

Camp Gilmour offers an exciting mix of day and specialty camps for Summer 2026, designed to help kids explore interests, build skills and create lasting memories. With small group sizes and exceptional instructors, campers enjoy hands-on learning in a supportive environment.

Programs span STEM, mechanics, culinary arts, performing arts, entrepreneurship and sports, ensuring something for every age and passion. Campers can pilot drones in Fun with Drones, design and sew in Adventure in Threads, or tackle real-world engineering in Motogo Engine Builders. Food enthusiasts can choose from a wide variety of chef-led cooking camps,

from TikTok Test Kitchen to Fresh From the Farm: Gilmour Grown.

Adventure seekers can climb, zip and conquer challenges in Sky High Adventure, while younger campers learn safety basics at Gates Mills Village Safety Town. Add in CSI investigations, performing arts, business programs and sports camps, and Camp Gilmour delivers a summer packed with opportunity. Early registration is encouraged, as many camps fill quickly.

Lake County YMCA

(440) 354-5656
www.lakecountyyymca.org

The Lake County YMCA Day Camp is designed for kids of all ages. Their day camp offers a fun, safe, and nurturing environment where children can explore their interests, build confidence, and create lifelong friendships.

Every child deserves a summer filled with exciting activities and personal growth. From arts and crafts to swimming, and nature exploration, there's something for everyone. Their experienced staff

are dedicated to fostering a sense of belonging and ensuring each camper has a positive and enriching experience.

Conveniently located in Painesville, Madison and Willoughby along with flexible scheduling options, the Lake County YMCA Day Camp is the perfect solution for busy families. Their affordable rates and financial assistance programs make summer camp accessible to everyone. Join the Lake County YMCA Day Camp today by visiting lakecountyyymca.org.

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One Hour HVAC stand behind their work with an in-house two-year warranty on all parts and workmanship (some restrictions apply) — a rare commitment in today's service industry.

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Parents considering private school for their children have an overwhelming number of choices. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, there are over 34,500 private schools in the USA. Some major metropolitan areas have well over 1,000! These schools belong to dozens of different associations, religious and nonreligious. Each association has its own feel or flavor, and the schools within them do, too.

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Things to consider when choosing a private school

Choosing a private school is one of the most personal decisions a family makes. It's about academics, of course, but also about values, environment, friendships, logistics, and the kind of childhood you hope your son or daughter will experience. With so many strong options—public, private, parochial, charter, and specialized programs—the process can feel overwhelming. Asking the right questions at the start can make the path much clearer.

Start with your child, not the reputation

It's easy to begin with rankings or what friends recommend, but the best starting point is your own child. How does your child learn best—through structure or flexibility, hands-on projects or traditional instruction? Is your child outgoing or reserved? Thriving in small groups or energized by a busy environment?

A school can have an excellent reputation and still be the wrong fit for a particular student. Parents who are happiest with their decision often say they chose the place that “felt like my child” rather than the one that sounded most impressive on paper.

Look beyond test scores

Academics matter, but they aren't the whole story. Ask how the school approaches learning, not just what it teaches. Do teachers have the freedom to be creative? How is progress measured? What support exists if a student struggles—or needs more challenge?

Equally important are the less measurable qualities: How do students treat one another? Do teachers seem to know the children as individuals? Is there joy in the building?

A short visit during arrival or dismissal can reveal as much as a formal tour.

Community and values

Every school has a personality. Some emphasize faith, service, or character development. Others highlight innovation, arts, or global awareness. Think about the values that matter most to your family and whether the school genuinely lives them out.

Talk with current parents if you can. Ask what surprised them after enrolling and what keeps them there. Strong communities tend to be welcoming, not exclusive.

Practical realities

Even the perfect school must fit real life. Consider schedules, before- and after-care, transportation, and family routines. Will homework expectations work with your evenings? Are there additional costs for uniforms, technology, or activities? A school that fits philosophically but strains daily life can become stressful over time and cause unexpected problems.

Considering a school farther from home

Many families assume the best choice is the closest one, but more parents are looking beyond neighborhood boundaries. A longer drive can open doors to specialized programs, smaller class sizes, or a philosophy that better matches a child's needs.

Before choosing distance, weigh the trade-offs honestly. How will the commute affect mornings, after-school activities, and friendships? Will your child be able to attend playdates or evening events easily? Some schools help by organizing carpools or providing transportation options.

Distance can also bring benefits. Children often gain independence, and families become part of a wider community. If a school truly fits your child, the extra miles may feel small compared with the confidence, engagement, and opportunities it provides. **CONTINUED→**



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Extracurricular life

For many children, the moments that shape them most happen outside the classroom. Explore opportunities in arts, athletics, service, and clubs. Are beginners welcome, or is everything highly competitive? Can a child try several interests, or must they specialize early?

These experiences often build confidence and friendships that last long after report cards are forgotten.

Inclusion and support

Ask how the school supports different kinds of learners. What resources exist for reading help, enrichment, or social-emotional needs? How are parents involved when challenges arise?

The best schools talk openly about how they help children grow—not just how they perform when everything goes smoothly.

Visit with fresh eyes

Tours can blur together, so notice small details. Do students make eye contact? Are hallways

covered with identical projects or individual expressions? How do adults speak to children? Try to imagine your son or daughter walking those halls each day.

If possible, let your child visit. Their comfort level matters. Children often sense where they will flourish even before they can explain why.

Affordability and transparency

For private schools, cost is a significant factor. Ask about tuition, fees, and financial aid early so there are no surprises. Many schools work hard to make education accessible and are happy to explain options.

Think about value as well as price. A school that supports your child's growth, confidence, and curiosity can be an investment that pays dividends for years.

The role of faith and values in religious schools

For many families, a religious education is about more than weekly Mass or theology class—it's about a school culture shaped by shared

beliefs. Catholic and other faith-based schools often emphasize character formation, service to others, and the idea that education involves the whole child: mind, heart, and spirit.

Parents considering a religious school may want to ask how faith is woven into daily life. Is it present only in religion class, or does it guide how students treat one another, handle conflict, and engage with the wider community? Many Catholic schools, for example, build service projects, social justice lessons, and community outreach into every grade level, helping children see learning as connected to responsibility.

Another consideration is family involvement. Faith-based schools frequently offer a strong sense of community through parish events, volunteer opportunities, and traditions that connect generations. For some families, this becomes an anchor that supports children well beyond the classroom.

It's also worth asking how welcoming the school is to families from different backgrounds. Many

religious schools serve students of various faiths and focus on universal values—kindness, integrity, respect—while remaining true to their spiritual identity.

Trust the long view

No school is perfect, and children change as they grow. The goal isn't to predict every future need but to choose a place that feels stable, caring, and aligned with your family's priorities right now.

Parents who approach the decision thoughtfully—asking questions, visiting, and listening to their instincts—usually find a school where their child is not only educated but truly known.

Selecting a school is less about finding “the best” in an abstract sense and more about finding the best match. When a child feels safe, challenged, and valued, learning follows naturally. And that, in the end, is what every parent is hoping to choose.

—Article by Jeannine Todd

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PRIVATE SCHOOL GUIDE

All Saints of

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www.allsaintssjv.org

All Saints of St. John Vianney School in Wickliffe is a vibrant elementary and middle school attracting students from Mentor, Willoughby, Willoughby Hills, Wickliffe, Willowick, Eastlake, Euclid and various other communities in the area. With a history of academic excellence, All Saints develops independent leaders and thinkers who are academically prepared and effective communicators.

Located on the campus of the Center for Pastoral Leadership in Wickliffe, the school offers a faith-based, technology-enriched learning environment for students in preschool through eighth grade.

Their core curriculum includes religion, math, language arts, social studies, science and computer science. Spanish, STREAM, music, art, and physical education are also offered, in addition to middle school supplemental courses, all day pre-K and extracurricular CYO sports and activities. The school's highly experienced teachers and staff are dedicated to helping students achieve their fullest potential and meet the diverse educational needs of students and their families.

All Saints School is committed to preparing 21st-century thinkers and learners, as well as good stewards of the Catholic church, empowering students to thrive in high school, college and beyond.

Benedictine High School

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Gilmour Academy

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Gilmour Academy is home to students from 18 months to 18 years. Founded by the Brothers of Holy Cross, the school welcomes all faiths, encouraging critical thinking, tough questions and spiritual growth. With small class sizes and real-world learning, Gilmour delivers a personalized education that develops the whole person through rigorous academics, experiential learning, leadership and service.

The Montessori program fosters curiosity and independence, while Lower School students engage in hands-on learning through nature-based instruction, energy research, robotics, music and more. Middle Schoolers test new passions, access advanced coursework and join Upper School clubs for a seamless transition.

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Grades 2-6 Broadview Heights

Grades 7-12 Sagamore Hills

St. Mary
CHARDON
Faith, Family, Future

**Proudly the only
STEM designated
school in Geauga
County!**

**Scan for more
info!**

**For more information please email
info@stmaryschoolchardon.org
or call (440) 286 - 3590**

www.stmaryschoolchardon.org

Hawken School

www.hawken.edu
Lyndhurst Campus
(Toddler–Grade 8)
5000 Clubside Road
(440) 423-2950
Gates Mills Campus
(Grades 9–12)

Mayfield and County Line Roads
in Gates Mills
(440) 423-2955

The Birchwood School of Hawken
(Preschool–Grade 8)

4400 West 140th Street, Cleveland
(216) 251-2321

The Mastery School of Hawken
(Grades 9–12)

11025 Magnolia Drive, Cleveland
(440) 423-8801

Hawken School is an independent, coed day school of 1,600 students, toddler through grade 12, located on two campuses in the eastern suburbs of Cleveland, a campus on Cleveland's west side, and a campus in University Circle that is home to the Mastery School of Hawken, which takes the school's problem-based programming to scale.

Hawken was founded in 1915 as an educationally progressive school, and they remain academically progressive—because that's what it takes to prepare students to thrive in a changing world. From recognizing the value of a coeducational environment to designing programs, learning spaces, and innovative schedules that support learning by doing, Hawken boldly adapts to prepare students for a promising future.

Hawken's nationally-recognized programming and nontraditional schedules support partnerships with world-renowned institutions that provide real-world learning opportunities, including interdisciplinary honors-level courses and STEMM internships. These experiences instill in students the skills needed to thrive in an increasingly complex and dynamic world.



Hershey Montessori School

(440) 357-0918

www.Hershey-Montessori.org
Concord Campus
10229 Prouty Road
Huntsburg Campus
11530 Madison Road

Hershey Montessori School offers a deeply nurturing, whole child experience across two thoughtfully designed campuses—Concord for infants through sixth grade, and Huntsburg for adolescents in grades 7–12.

At Hershey students feel safe, seen, heard, and genuinely known. Across a combined 110 acres of welcoming indoor and outdoor environments, children grow with confidence, belong to a caring community, and discover their strengths and who they are with the guidance of dedicated educators.

Their approach allows each child to learn at their natural pace, driven by curiosity and meaningful choice. Students engage in hands on exploration, collaborate respectfully, and develop inde-

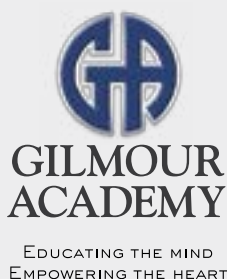
pendence, focus, and emotional resilience—skills that prepare them for lifelong success. Academic lessons are integrated with real world experiences that build deep understanding and adaptability.

Multi-age communities foster leadership, empathy, and strong communication skills, helping students feel connected and valued. By adolescence, learners take ownership of their education, explore personal interests, and receive individualized support as they prepare for college, career, and life. Transportation, financial aid, boarding options, and Ohio EdChoice make Hershey accessible to families.



**We teach the child.
We reach the heart.**

**Gilmour empowers students to achieve
their goals and discover their passions.**



As Northeast Ohio's only independent, Catholic, coed school, Gilmour creates endless possibilities for students to not only learn about the real world, but how to positively impact it.



◀ **LEARN MORE**
gilmour.org/inquire

Gilmour Academy is an independent, Catholic, coed school in the Holy Cross tradition. Grades K-12 and Montessori (18 months – PreK)



Julie Billiart Schools

www.juliebilliartschool.org
Lyndhurst: 4982 Clubside Road
 (216) 381-1191
Akron: 380 Mineola Avenue
 (234) 206-0941
Brecksville: 8611 Wiese Road
 (440) 630-1711
Westlake: 3600 Crocker Road
 (440) 471-4150

Julie Billiart Schools is a K–8 network serving children with mild-to-moderate social and learning differences. JB offers a supportive place for students to learn, grow, and build confidence through small class sizes, individualized instruction, and wraparound services. Students are nurtured in an environment where they feel loved, seen, and accepted, helping them thrive academically and socially.

JB focuses on the whole-child experience for students with ADHD, anxiety, autism, dyslexia, and executive functioning needs, recognizing that emotional, social, and academic growth are deeply connected. The JB Way includes a

maximum 8:1 student-to-staff ratio, intervention specialists in every class, onsite speech, occupational, music, and art therapy, school counselors, and literacy specialists, as well as behavior support from registered behavior technicians and board-certified behavior analysts.

Life skills and real-world application are built into every school day, helping students develop independence beyond the classroom.

Lawrence School

www.lawrenceschool.org
 admissions@lawrenceschool.org

Lower School Campus

(Grades 2–6)

1551 E. Wallings Road
 Broadview Heights
 (440) 526-0003

Upper School Campus

(Grades 7–12)

10036 Olde Eight Road
 Sagamore Hills
 (330) 908-6800

Lawrence School is among the best schools in the United States for students with dyslexia

and language-based learning differences. Lawrence provides a comprehensive elementary lower school program and an upper school program serving students in grades 7–12, which features specialized and personalized attention, organizational strategies, mutual accountability, encouraged self-advocacy, and an engaged faculty of learners.

Every child learns differently, and the right school environment can make all the difference. If you’ve ever wondered whether your child’s school understands how they learn best, you’re not alone. Students are at their best when learning differences are understood and accepted, appropriate accommodations are made available, and, most importantly, when their strengths as learners are defined, affirmed, and cultivated.

For more than 50 years, Lawrence School has been opening doors and changing lives by delivering academic excellence to Northeast Ohio students with dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, and ADHD.

Mater Dei Academy

29840 Euclid Avenue, Wickliffe
 (440) 585-0800
 www.materdeiacademy.us

Mater Dei Academy, an ODE STEM designated school, is committed to providing an excellent education in a safe, loving, faith-filled environment. Students aged 3 years through grade eight are given the opportunity to discover and achieve while building on their Catholic moral values.

The well-rounded, innovative and challenging curriculum provides students the opportunity to discover their own unique talents in a nurturing environment. With the help of dedicated educators, students are prepared spiritually, intellectually, and socially to achieve in the classroom and in the community. The middle school students are offered the opportunity for advanced classes, which can earn high school credit. Their curriculum also includes supplemental classes in art, religion, economics, literature, and health. Mater Dei students learn leadership skills



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- Take a tour of our beautiful school located on campus of the Center for Pastoral Leadership in Wickliffe, OH
- Get information on our various scholarship opportunities including EdChoice
- Meet our teachers and learn about our curriculum and the many family-friendly activities we offer to our families



28702 Euclid Ave, Wickliffe, OH 44092

www.AllSaintsSJV.org

(440) 943-1395

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Plan your Open House visit this spring!

**Early Childhood, Lower,
and Middle School**

Saturday, 4/11/26, 10:00 am, OPEN HOUSE
Toddler – Grade 8 | Lyndhurst Campus

Upper School

Saturday, 4/18/26, 1:00 pm, OPEN HOUSE
Grades 9 – 12 | Gates Mills Campus

Birchwood School

Sunday, 4/26/26, 2:00 pm, OPEN HOUSE
Preschool – Grade 8 | Cleveland-West Campus

Mastery School

Saturday, 4/25/26, 1:00 pm, OPEN HOUSE
Grades 9 – 12 | University Circle Campus

HAWKEN
SCHOOL



COEDUCATIONAL,
TODDLER – GRADE 12

hawken.edu

Lyndhurst Cleveland-West Gates Mills University Circle

St. Mary of the Assumption Early Education Readiness Program



Ohio licensed preschool, pre-K, and
junior kindergarten programs

Our Philosophy

Children in the St. Mary of the Assumption Early Education Readiness Program will explore their world through a variety of quality curriculum and center-based learning experiences.

We strive to provide a warm, safe, nurturing, Christ-centered learning environment to promote the spiritual, emotional, social, physical, and intellectual growth of children.

Faculty & Staff

The staff in our program hold master's degrees, bachelor's degrees, and licenses from the state of Ohio.

Curriculum & Programming

- Phonics in Motion®
- Creative Curriculum®
- Use of technology (ActivPanels)
- Library, music, STEM and physical education classes
- Social-emotional lessons/activities
- Community service projects
- Community visitors
- Daily prayer and spirituality
- Daily snack provided for all classes
- Junior kindergarten students experience a hybrid curriculum to prepare them for kindergarten
- Full-day students enjoy recess, lunch, rest time, and enrichment activities

Questions? Please contact Elizabeth Looman at
elizabeth.looman@stmarysmentor.org.

8540 Mentor Avenue, Mentor | 440.255.9781
stmarymentorschool.org

Mater Dei Academy cont'd

while caring for others and demonstrating responsibility for the world around them.

Mater Dei Academy also offers after-school activities to help students further develop their interests. Mater Dei is proud to partner with Our Lady of Mount Carmel for CYO sports and a variety of other activities.

Campus tours can be scheduled by calling (440) 585-0800.

Saint Gabriel Learning Loft Preschool & St. Gabriel School

9935 Johnnycake Ridge Road
Concord Township
(440) 352-6169
www.St-GabrielSchool.org

St. Gabriel School and Learning Loft Preschool have been shaping young minds in Lake County through faith, learning, and love for decades. Both are award-earning schools, led by teachers who truly make a difference in their students' lives. Their compassion, dedication, and expertise inspire independent thinking and ignite a lifelong love of learning.

St. Gabriel School recently celebrated 60 years as a leader in Catholic education in Lake County, while Learning Loft Preschool proudly marks its 25th anniversary. United in their mission to educate the whole child, both schools are committed to serving all students and meeting each child where they are. Learning Loft Preschool, voted Best of Mentor six years in a row, provides a warm, nurturing environment for children beginning their educational journey.

Discover these award-earning

schools and how they can enrich your child's future. For My Buddy & Me (age 2) and part-time preschool (ages 3–5), call (440) 354-7574. For full-day preschool (ages 4–5) and grades K–8, call (440) 354-7858 or visit St-GabrielSchool.org.

Saint Mary School Chardon

401 North Street, Chardon
(440) 286-3590
www.stmaryschoolchardon.org

St. Mary School students learn and thrive beyond a traditional Catholic school education. Inspired by a vision of academic excellence rooted in a foundation of faith, and as the first and only Ohio Designated STEM School in Geauga County, their students from preschool through junior high are exceedingly prepared both academically and spiritually for their futures. They strive to develop each student's unique potential through an environment of faith, in cooperation with the family, and with a vision for the future.

Saint Mary of the Assumption School & Early Education Readiness Program

8540 Mentor Avenue, Mentor
(440) 255-9781
www.stmarymentorschool.org

St. Mary of the Assumption School in Mentor has been a model of excellence and virtue to the children of Northeast Ohio since 1952. St. Mary's provides a warm, safe, supportive, and nurturing Christ-centered environment. They provide opportunities for children to learn and grow in their faith both academically and socially.

Their curriculum provides



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HIGH SCHOOL
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SPIRIT!

JOIN US AT OUR SPRING
OPEN HOUSE:

Thursday, March 26
6-7:30 PM

VASJ.COM/ADMISSIONS

Saint Mary's (Mentor) cont'd
students with an education that challenges them to live faith-filled lives and succeed in high school and beyond. Students have access to the latest technology including a STEM class for students in grades K–8, iPads, Chromebooks, 3-D printers, and Google Classroom.

Students can begin their education with preschool at the Early Education Readiness Program and continue to their fully accredited, coed Catholic school for grades K–8. Tuition assistance and scholarship opportunities are available.

Please call to schedule a tour of the Early Education Readiness Program, K–8 classrooms and to meet the administration, faculty and staff.



Villa Angela-St. Joseph High School

18491 Lakeshore Blvd., Cleveland
(216) 481-8414
www.vasj.com

When you become a student at Villa Angela-St. Joseph High School, you become a member of a family where everyone knows you. It's a place where you can grow in your faith, be challenged academically, follow your passions, and create high school memories and friendships that will last a lifetime.

As the only school in the world that's cosponsored by the Ursuline Sisters and Marianist Brothers, a VASJ education is uniquely different. Their students proudly embrace diversity, and it shows in their school pride and the family spirit that makes the Viking Village something truly special.

Learn more about VASJ by attending their upcoming open house on March 26, 2026.

A brief history of private schools—and why they still matter

Private schools, often called independent schools, have a long history rooted in family choice, shared values, and educational flexibility. Long before public education systems existed, families sought learning environments that reflected their beliefs, priorities, and aspirations for their children.

The earliest forms of private education date back to ancient civilizations, where wealthy families hired tutors to educate children in subjects such as philosophy, mathematics, and rhetoric. Education was personal, values-driven, and tailored—principles that still define many private schools today.

During the Middle Ages, education became closely tied to religion. Monastic and church-run schools, particularly within the Catholic tradition, preserved learning and laid the foundation for structured schooling in Europe. These institutions emphasized discipline, moral development, and academic rigor—hallmarks that continue in many faith-based schools.

The Renaissance brought broader curricula and renewed interest in science, literature, and the arts. Independent academies emerged



across Europe, expanding education beyond the nobility and influencing modern private school models. In England, schools like Eton and Harrow—despite being called “public”—were privately run and focused on character formation as well as academics.

In the United States, private schools developed alongside public education, often serving religious, cultural, or educational missions not addressed elsewhere. Catholic schools, in particular, became central to educating generations of families while maintaining strong academic and moral foundations.

Today's private schools reflect centuries of evolution. They vary widely in size, philosophy, and focus—from faith-based and college-prep schools to Montessori, classical, and experiential models. What unites them is the ability to adapt, innovate, and offer families meaningful choices in how their children are educated.

Valentine's Day

How it began and why we celebrate the way we do

Hearts, chocolate, classroom cards, and candlelit dinners—Valentine's Day looks cheerful and simple today. But the holiday's roots are a mix of legend, ancient festivals, and a few clever businesspeople who knew a good idea when they saw one.

Who was Valentine?

The holiday is named for St. Valentine, though historians can't agree exactly which Valentine he was. Several early Christian martyrs shared the name. The most popular story tells of a Roman priest who secretly performed weddings after Emperor Claudius II banned marriage for young soldiers. When the priest was discovered, he was executed on February 14 around the year 270.

Another legend says Valentine befriended the jailer's daughter and left her a note signed, “from your Valentine”—a phrase that has survived nearly 2,000 years.

A little help from ancient Rome

The timing of the holiday may come from an even older celebration. In mid-February, Romans held a festival called Lupercalia to welcome spring and encourage fertility. It was lively, loud, and not very kid-friendly by today's standards. As Christianity spread, church leaders gradually replaced the pagan festival with a day honoring St. Valentine, keeping the date but changing the tone.

When romance entered the picture

Valentine's Day didn't become a day for sweethearts until the Middle Ages. The poet Geoffrey Chaucer helped plant that idea when he wrote that birds chose their mates on “Seynt Valentynes day.” Across Europe, people began exchanging handwritten notes, ribbons, and small gifts as symbols of affection. By the 1600s, giving valentines was a well-established tradition.

The birth of the Valentine Card craze

Modern Valentine's Day really took off in the 1840s thanks to an American named Esther Howland. She began producing beautiful paper cards decorated with lace and flowers, selling thousands through bookstores and catalogs. Her success launched an entire greeting-card industry and made February 14 a major mailing day—second only to Christmas.

Why chocolate and roses?

Candy makers were quick to join the fun. In the 1800s, they began packaging chocolates in heart-shaped boxes, turning sweets into a symbol of romance. Red roses became the flower of choice because they were linked to Venus, the Roman goddess of love. Even conversation hearts trace back to tiny candy lozenges printed with messages during the Civil War era.

Valentine's Day, family-style

Today the holiday belongs to more than just couples. Kids decorate shoe boxes for classroom exchanges, friends celebrate “Galentine's Day,” and families use the excuse to make heart-shaped pancakes or leave little notes at the breakfast table. What began with ancient legends has turned into a simple reminder to show kindness to the people around us.

The real tradition

Through all its twists and changes, Valentine's Day has carried the same theme: connection. Whether it's a crayon-signed card from a first grader, a text to an old friend, or a box of chocolates shared on the couch, the holiday nudges us to say what we sometimes forget—“You matter to me.”

And that's a tradition worth keeping, no matter how it started.

~Article by Dan Miller

~Image: Adobe Stock/ by preto_perola

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Contact the LCDJFS to learn more about becoming a foster parent.



Call the Foster Care line at:

(440) 350-4218

or email:

Eugene.Tetrick@jfs.ohio.gov

Lake County Department of Job and Family Services

