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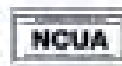
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Big holiday feelings – for kids and parents

CC PARENT | Pamela Savage

As the end of the year approaches, so do the winter holidays. As magical and wonderful as this time of year is, it can also feel chaotic and hectic. Families are dealing with a unique mixture of too much sugar and too little routine. For kids, the holidays can seem like they are filled with unfamiliar relatives, uncomfortable sweaters, weird foods, long religious services and boring travel. Add in the excitement of getting that big gift, and the letdown of not getting it

(or getting it and finding out it's not all its chalked up to be), and you have the perfect recipe for Big Holiday Feelings.

The good news is that there are some things that we can do to help. The most important thing to remember is that Big Holiday Feelings are completely normal, and totally OK.

Let kids matter

Recent research has proven that kids who feel like they matter experience

greater happiness, academic performance and overall well-being. "Mattering" is defined as not just feeling valued by your family and community, but also adding value to your family and community. Mattering can be achieved through participation in holiday toy drives or charity work in the community, and it can even happen at home. The holidays present families with tons of chores, and tons of opportunities for kids to feel like they matter. Since kids

are out of school for holiday breaks, they have plenty of time to help with regular household chores like laundry or taking out the trash. And there are special, holiday-specific chores. Young children can add bows or ribbons to packages or seal greeting cards with a glue stick. Slightly older children can take over slice-and-bake cookies or complete recipes if that is more their speed. Preteens and teens can definitely handle hanging lights or decor. Let everyone pitch in and matter.

Keep routines

The long weekend around Thanksgiving and the extended winter break seem like good chances to sleep in and lay around. Hopefully your family experiences a couple of good relaxing days this holiday season. Usually, though, the holidays have us traveling, visiting and being out and about. While it's a ton of fun to see friends and family or to enjoy holiday events and outings, it can be tiring for our kids, too. Many parents can tell you horror stories of a missed nap, bedtime or snack that have resulted in meltdowns, so as much as possible, try to keep your kids on somewhat regular routines. Be sure to include running around outside as part of your kids' routines, too. That fresh air is good for everyone.

Spend real time together

The fact of the matter is that during holidays, we parents are often swirling around, busy and not always fully present. We are hurrying about, checking relatives' flights, cleaning floors or getting out and washing the good plates. Many of us are coming face-to-face with complicated feelings of grief over a recent loss or reckoning with difficult emotions about extended family members we don't usually see. Your kids may not be able to articulate what is going on with you, but they will definitely notice the hustle and bustle and your overall vibe. Take a beat to check in with them and spend

some quality time together. It can be as simple as a walk or hike outdoors, a board game, a low-key drive around the block to check out lights or a family movie night. Younger kids may just want you to lay in bed with them at the end of a long day, and I can't think of an easier way to decompress and invest in some downtime.

Employ (metaphorical) ear muffs

Parents, it's just true. Well-meaning relatives will comment on your parenting and/or your children. They may offer advice that might not jive with you, or perhaps they will straight up undermine you. The things that they say may annoy or frustrate you. This may bring up weird feelings that are reminiscent of things you felt as a child. It will be overwhelming. Even with the best of intentions, things come out. You don't have to listen to or believe these things, and neither do your kids. Assume best intentions whenever you can, and don't take it to heart.

Take care of yourself

Perhaps the most overstated and eye-roll-inducing piece of advice straight out of the self-care industry is to "put your oxygen mask on first." Trite, but true. During November and December, it can seem as though it's a parents' job (and let's be honest, all too often a mother's job) to make the holidays perfect and lovely for everyone else, in particular for the kids. Managing everyone's emotions and expectations and experiences in order to create a Christmas-card level of perfection is a heck of a lot of pressure. Figure out ways to blow off steam. This looks different for everyone, but examples might be taking a grounding walk with a friend, listening to your favorite music, getting enough sleep, or store-buying the darn cookies. It's all OK.

Pamela Savage is a freelance writer living in Springfield. She wishes you and yours a very happy holiday season!



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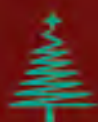
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Take your infant to work

CC PARENT | Cinda Ackerman Klickna

We know about “Take Your Daughter/Son to Work” days, but what if you could take your infant to work every day? That is what is happening at the Illinois Educators’ Credit Union here in Springfield, and many companies across the U.S. have implemented a program known as Infant at Work. According to the Parenting in Workplace Institute, which researches and provides resources for the implementation of formal infant to work programs, 200 businesses across the U.S. offered the program prior to COVID. However, since the pandemic, tracking the number still in existence has been difficult.

In Washington, the State Department of Health plus 19 other state agencies offer the program, as does the Kansas State Department of Agriculture and other Kansas agencies. The Illinois Department of Public Health previously offered the program until COVID-19 hit.

The IECU, with a staff of 25, has had three employees participate, two women and one man. The Washington State Department of Health, a much larger employer, has had 107 participating employees.

The program is set up for a working parent to bring an infant to work (usually age 6 weeks to 6 months). In most cases, the employee must find another employee who will agree to provide back-up care for the infant for short periods of time, such as during meetings or restroom breaks for the parent.

Rules are established for storage of diapers and supplies and appropriate areas for diaper changing and breastfeeding. Some companies provide training in infant first aid.

The benefits for the employer, the employee and the child have been positive. In fact, no one interviewed could identify any negative. Studies show that during the first six months of life the strongest bonding occurs, so more time spent with the



Jared Joslin participated in the Infant at Work program through his employer, Illinois Educators’ Credit Union. His son, JP, “graduated” to day care at age 6 months.

PHOTO COURTESY IECU

parents leads to better overall health both physically and mentally for the child and the parent. The infant at work program has shown to lead to higher rates of breastfeeding, which results in healthier children. The infants receive increased physical contact and social interaction with the parent as well as coworkers.

Employers have benefited from higher employee morale, increased employee retention and increased teamwork. In fact, the program is often seen as a recruitment tool when seeking new employees. Employees

are absent less often to take children to doctor appointments.

For the employee, the program reduces day care costs and stress from daily logistics of travel/day care.

Jared Joslin participated in the program at IECU. “It was awesome, and it helped in several ways,” he says. “Finding day care is difficult; my wife stayed home three months and then I had the opportunity to bond with my son for the next three months. We saved money on day care and had time to find a good place for him.”

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Raechel Sims, public information officer for the Washington Department of Health, says, "When we first implemented the program, we weren't sure if it would be successful and anticipated receiving concerns from co-workers; however, one of our biggest overall surprises was the general success of the program and realizing that co-workers came to appreciate having infants in the workplace."

Jody Dabrowski, the CEO of the IECU, adds, "Other employees feel joy in seeing a baby; it brings a sense of calming. There's nothing like seeing a baby in your weekly staff meeting as they grow week by week."

Joslin shares, "My co-workers loved having my son around. They would come into the office and hang out with him for a while; they stepped in when I needed to meet with a client. Now, they are asking when my wife and I will have our next child."

Kelsey Senn, the HR Director with the Kansas Department of Agriculture, says, "We want to be family-based and show the importance of the interaction and bonding period for both the parent and child."

It's important for the employer to recognize and embrace the benefits of the program, according to Dabrowski. "If a new parent/employee stays home, the employer gets 0% productivity; if the employee takes a child to day care, it is estimated the employer gets 80% productivity since often the employee has to leave for doctor appointments or stay home with a sick child. With the infant at work, the productivity may drop to 70%. To me, that's OK," she says. "I want the employee to save money on day care and have the important time to bond with a child. And the difference of less than an hour of productivity a day is made up in a happier and more dedicated employee. For the Illinois Educators' Credit Union, this is a no-cost benefit that we love to offer."

Cinda Ackerman Klickna serves on the board of IECU and is proud that the Infant to Work program is offered. She wishes state agencies would offer the same.





<p>Baby and Me – Music & Movement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Date: Tue, Jan. 16-Feb. 20 • Time: 9-10 a.m. • Age: babies 2-15 months and one adult caregiver • Cost: \$50 <p>Lego Club Builders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Date: Sat, 1/13, 2/20, 3/23, 4/13 • Time: 1-2 p.m. • Grades: 1-3 • Cost: \$50 <p>Lego Club Engineers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Date: Sat, 1/13, 2/20, 3/23, 4/13 • Time: 2:30-3:30 p.m. • Grades: 4-6 • Cost: \$50 <p>Dungeons and Dragons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Date: Sat, 1/13, 2/20, 3/23, 4/13 • Time: 9 a.m.-noon • Grades: 6-8 • Cost: \$100 	<p>Mastering Money – Financial Literacy Mini Conference</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Date: Mon., Feb. 19 • Time: 9 a.m.-12:30 p.m. • Grades: 4-9 • Cost: \$30 <p>Be Your Own Boss – Entrepreneurship Mini Conference</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Date: Mon., April 1 • Time: 9 a.m.-12:30 p.m. • Grades: High School • Cost: \$30 <p>Youth Activism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Date: Tue., 1/16, 2/13, 3/19, 4/9 • Time: 6-7:30 p.m. • Room: 2203 • Grades: 8-12 • Cost: \$25 <p>STEAM Series</p> <p>Chemistry Matters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Date: Sat., March 23 • Time: 1-3 p.m. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grades: 4-6 • Cost: \$30 <p>Inventioning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Date: Sat., April 13 • Time: 1-3 p.m. • Grades: 4-6 • Cost: \$30 <p>Culinary Classes</p> <p>Doughnut Dunkers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Date: Sat., Feb. 17 • Time: 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. <p>Colorful Pasta</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Date: Sat., March 30 • Time: 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
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New books for the holiday season

CC PARENT | Deana Metzke

One of my favorite children's book authors is Mac Barnett, who has authored numerous picture books and middle-school chapter books. Each book I've read that he has written brings a smile to my face, and often also a chuckle. The likelihood that my kids and I laughed while reading one of his books is at least doubled when Barnett partners with author and illustrator Jon Klassen. So, when I recently went to the local library and discovered that they had written a book together for the holidays, I was overjoyed. Their book, *How Does Santa Go Down the Chimney?*, tries to answer the question that has been asked by children for generations, including me when I was a child.

While Klassen and Barnett do not give us a definitive answer as to how the jolly old man gets down the chimney, they do give us a ton of questions and/or suggestions of how he might do it. They include Santa getting covered in soot on his way down, so he does some laundry before he leaves, or he comes through the sink for people who do not have a chimney for Santa to go down. The creative authors even dedicate some pages to the skills Santa has to exhibit in order to keep dogs from waking up families in the middle of the night when he's dropping off gifts.

I'll admit, I was a little apprehensive to open the book, worried that Klassen and Barnett were going to spoil the magic of Mr. Claus. However, the fact that *How Does Santa Go Down the Chimney?* continues to ask more questions than actually give answers relieved my apprehension. This is a cute story to share with your kiddos this holiday season. And if you are not familiar with Barnett's other books, I strongly suggest checking some of them out, too.

With the holiday season upon us, some find this to be a prime opportunity



to give the gift of books, and it's nice to choose ones that help to remind your favorite young reader that they are worthy and special, regardless of any differences they may have. While Barnett is one of my favorite children's book authors, Vashti Harrison quickly became one of my favorite illustrators, and I am so excited that she is also authoring books as well. Her latest title is *Big*, and is a perfect book for any child dealing with, "...being big in a world that prizes small," as the summary states.

We meet our main character as a baby, and she grows into a young girl who is full of love and energy. However, she wants to

participate in dance, but since she does not have the typical dancer's body, things start to get complicated for her. Since Harrison is such a beautiful artist, this book does not have a lot of text, but still does a great job of telling the story. As the reader, I could feel the pain the main character was feeling and wanted so very badly to give her the confidence she needed to continue. Luckily, Harrison does give us a positive ending for her main character.

So whether you're looking for a holiday book to share with your children or a book that can boost your child's self-esteem, there are new options out there for you.



Kidzeum hosted a week-long pollinator camp at Southwind Park over the summer.
PHOTO COURTESY KIDZEUM

Kidzeum and the STEAM experience

CC PARENT | Carey Smith

Kidzeum occupies a unique niche in Springfield. As a science museum, children of all ages enjoy the exhibits centered around learning about a healthy body, healthy earth and healthy community. Kidzeum also offers many STEAM programs (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math).

Its flagship program, STEAM Residency, began as “we were looking for a way to

become more essential to education in the community and to serve as an informal learning space where students can do things and learn content that they don’t necessarily get to in a classroom,” explained executive director Leah Wilson. STEAM Residency is offered to second graders throughout Springfield School District 186.

Every second-grade class and teacher

spend a week at Kidzeum, working part of the time together and part of the time with Kidzeum’s educators doing hands-on science in the form of exhibit building in one of three topic areas: human body, pollinators or solar energy.

“They will do research; they will go through the exhibits; they choose objects they want to place in their own exhibits;

and they write their own text panels and facts that they think people should know. Then they present that exhibit to their classmates,” said Wilson. The partnership with District 186 provides transportation for students and teachers.

A different program open to kids from first to fifth grade is Kidzeum’s STEAM Academy, an after-school program that operates four days per week, an expansion of a successful pilot program that was funded in 2019 by the Community Foundation for the Land of Lincoln’s Young Philanthropists Fund. “We were ready to kick it off the very week we closed for COVID,” lamented Wilson. However, the program launched in 2022 with transportation and meals provided, thanks to the delayed grant. It continues to be offered in 2023, with each month’s activities revolving around a different topic. However, there is no current grant funding to pay for transportation or meals.

“Transportation is a huge barrier, unfortunately,” stated Wilson, “which is why we were hoping to get a grant so we could ease those transportation burdens for the after-school program. We’re still seeking to do that, but in the meantime, it’s exciting that we are now a stop on the Graham School bus route,” reducing the barrier for students at that elementary school.

STEAM summer camps are also offered, and for the past two years a partnership with District 186 utilized COVID-relief funds to pay for any student from the school district to attend camp. “It was great for us since we were just launching the camps and not well-known in the community for having summer camps,” said Wilson.

While most summer camp activities take place at Kidzeum, last summer one week was spent at Southwind Park for a pollinator camp. Another featured a two-week flight school, with time divided between Southwind and Kidzeum, and one day at Abraham Lincoln Capital Airport, a partner for this program. “They opened up the facility in an amazing way,” said Wilson. “When I went to see where

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the kids were going to be at the airport, I was quite surprised that they had the kind of access that they did. It was a wonderful experience for the students and the airport was fantastic to host them. We're hoping that continues next year as well."

Like many kid-friendly destinations, the staff at Kidzeum strives to make the museum accessible to all children. Continual training ensures that staff are able to provide sensory-friendly accommodations for autistic children and other kids with sensory needs.

The first Sunday of each month from 9-11 a.m., Kidzeum offers sensory-friendly

times where noise is reduced or stopped and lights are lowered. "Those times have been popular, and the demand has been increasing for those. We try not just to be aware and accommodating on those days and those specific hours, but we make resources available to anyone at any time they come into the museum," said Wilson. A bin of sensory aids is available at the front desk and includes headphones, sunglasses and fidget toys.

Another program that allows for more access is the Impact Program, offering a discounted yearly membership for anyone enrolled in EBT (formerly known as LINK or

food stamps) or WIC for a yearly fee of \$30. In addition, anyone with an EBT card or WIC documentation can receive a reduced daily admission fee of \$3.

Wilson advised parents to keep an eye out for a video to be released soon by Hip Hop MD containing pointers that will help families enjoy the Kidzeum even more. We can all enjoy Kidzeum, a unique treasure in our community.

Carey Smith is a homeschooling parent to a child who has attended Kidzeum's STEAM Academy for the last two months and highly recommends it for learning, playing and socializing.

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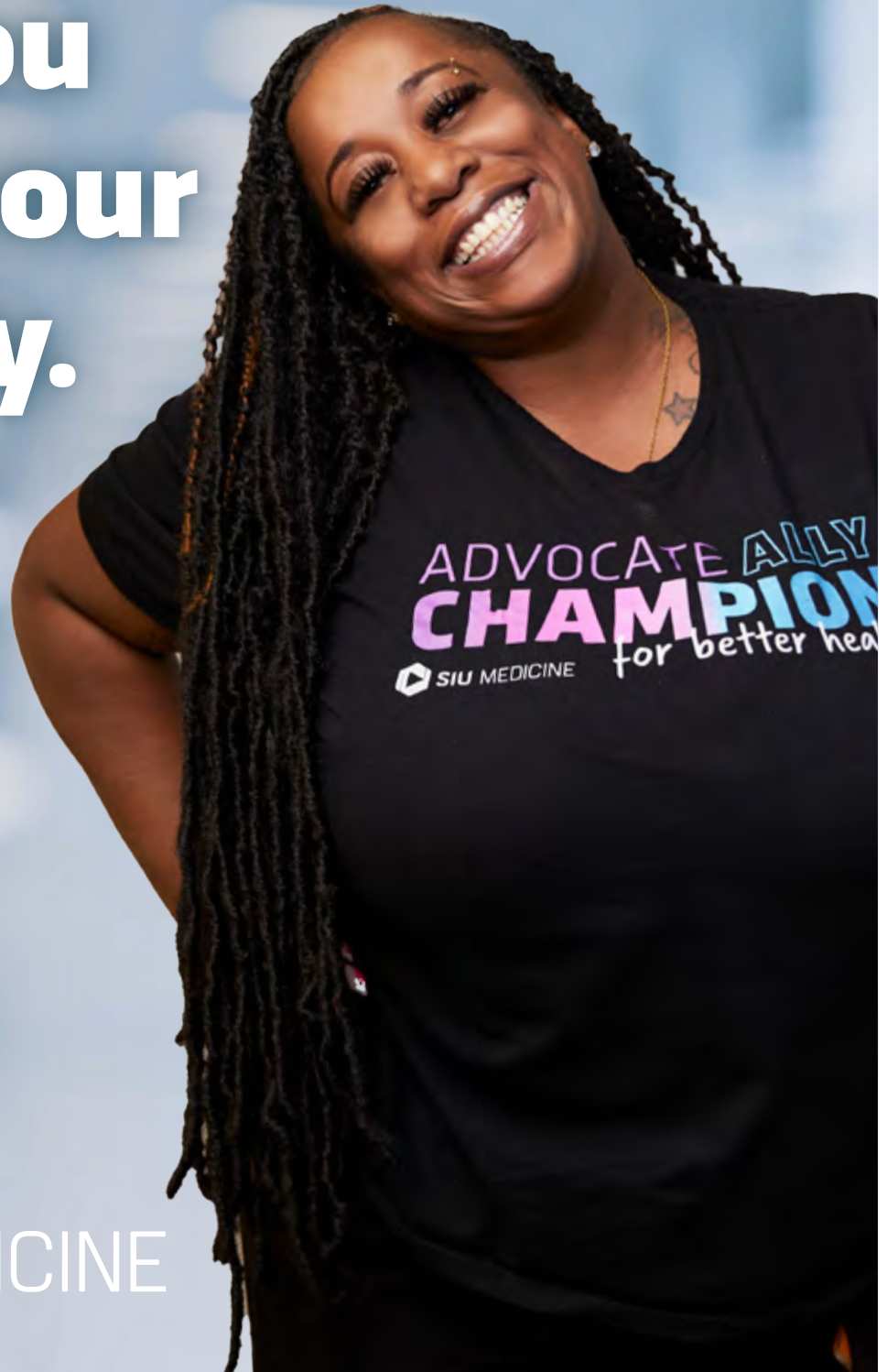
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