

## upcoming events

Except as noted, all events are held in our San Francisco office. Fees for these presentations are \$40/person or \$60/couple. For more information visit our website: [www.symbiosf.com](http://www.symbiosf.com).

### Preparing for Preschool

Wednesday  
05 August @ 7:00 pm

As kids head off to preschool issues around separations, transitions, social interactions and adaptability can surface in new or familiar ways. This presentation will help parents anticipate their child's needs and behaviors around this transition and have a plan in place for how to respond. We will include time for parents to ask questions and get feedback related to individual concerns.

### Discipline with Toddlers and Preschoolers

Thursday  
06 August @ 7:00 pm

Discipline is an omnipresent topic for parents trying to guide young minds and protect young bodies. This presentation will consider common approaches to discipline from a psychological perspective. We'll discuss how to tailor tactics and techniques to your child's particular personality and temperament; how to balance setting limits and sharing control; and how to use discipline to lay a foundation for self-esteem, emotional regulation and healthy communication.

Please note location:

#### Peekadoodle Kidsclub

Ghirardelli Square  
900 North Point Street, F100

Peekadoodle members:

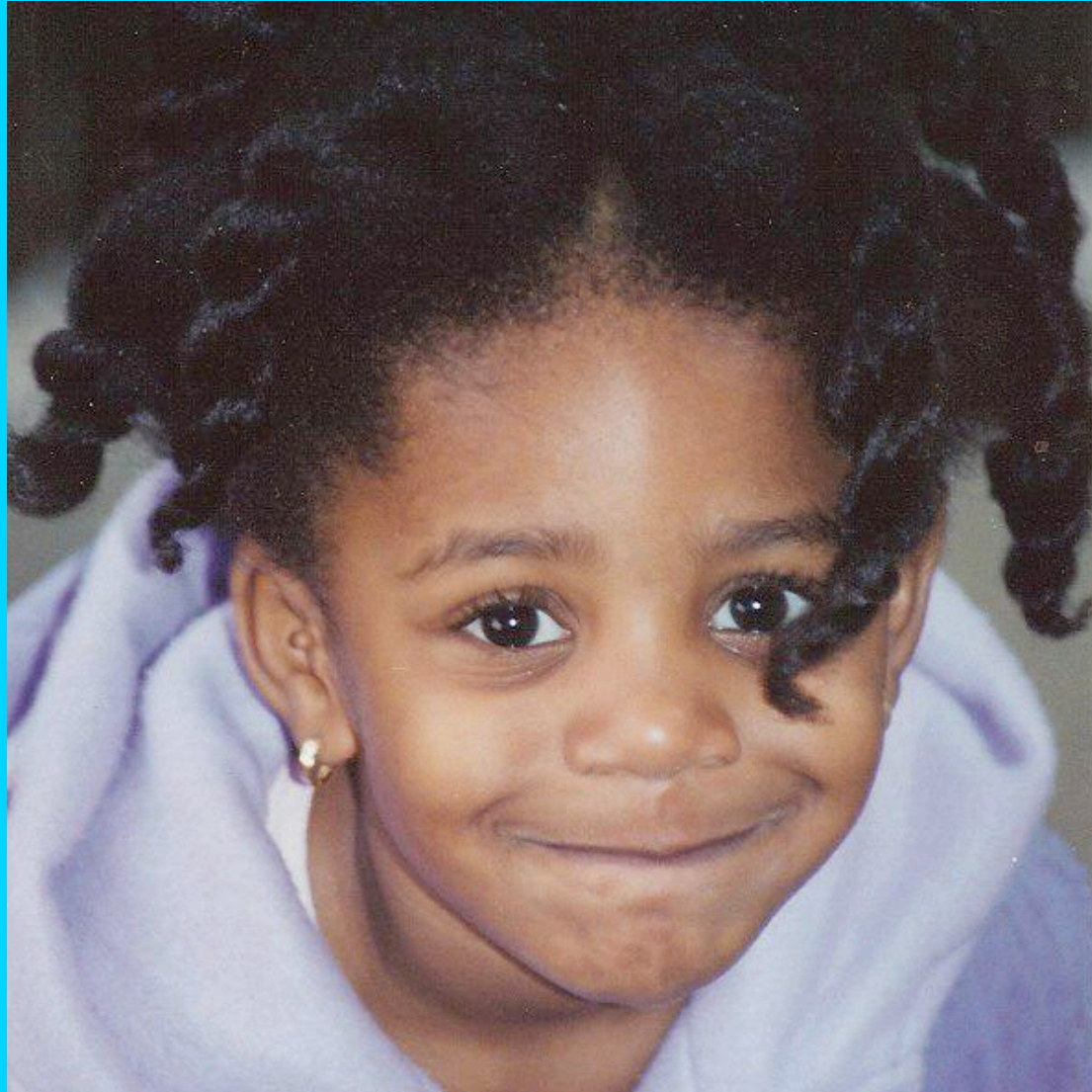
\$40/person or \$60/couple

non-members:

\$45/person or \$65/couple

RSVP to [info@thepkc.com](mailto:info@thepkc.com).

# august @ symbio



## q & a

*I am the proud and sometimes pained parent of a very self-assured/stubborn 3 ½-year-old daughter. As I write this my husband is in our children's bedrooms, which unfortunately are connected by a common bathroom, sorting out the chaos that erupted about a half-hour ago after what we thought was a blissfully easy bedtime putdown. Suspicious noises prompted us to return to our son's room where we discovered that our daughter had convinced her older brother to move onto the dog's bed (with the dog) so that her imaginary friend, who is a monster that eats Play-doh, would have a place to sleep. Thirty minutes later, my daughter is still refusing to sleep due to the lack of proper accommodations for her imaginary friend. From the time she was born our daughter has had very strong opinions about almost everything: what she will eat, what she will wear ... you name it, she knows best. It's clear to me that this is just how she is. We have raised her in the same way that we raised her brother, who is now almost 6; and he is as agreeable and easy-going as she is headstrong. I've been to one of your talks before and recognize that temperament plays a huge role in this. I know that I can't, nor do I want to, change her temperament, but sometimes I do wish I could soften the edges. Lately we are in a particularly difficult period. She opposes everything just for the fun of it. She thinks following the rules is for losers*

## Open Forum on Parenting Toddlers and Preschoolers

Wednesday

16 September @ 7:00 pm

This evening will be an open discussion rather than a presentation. Come and go as best suits your schedule. If you've got questions or quandaries regarding anything related to guiding young minds, nurturing young hearts and preserving your own sanity in the process, drop-in for awhile to chat with us, compare notes with other parents or simply reassure yourself that other people go through this too. Any topic is fair game, whether it's sleep, discipline, separations, potty-training, pre-schools, siblings, or any other item on that ever-expanding menu of character-building exercises.

## Dealing with Opposition & Defiance

Wednesday

30 September @ 7:00 pm

"I don't want to crush his spirit, but I need him to listen to me." "I feel like she says goes against me just to make me mad." Parents often ask how to maintain boundaries and structure with kids who seem intent on undermining every plan that is not their own. In this presentation we will discuss how to protect order and maintain your authority in ways that support your child mentally and emotionally. We'll talk about discipline tactics, how to decide when to be firm and when to let go, and developmentally appropriate expectations and techniques for children of various ages.

## Private Presentations

Presentations on any topic for groups of eight or more can be arranged by appointment. These presentations can be done at your home or another space of your choice, or at our San Francisco or Marin locations. For more details, email us at: [symbio@symbiosf.com](mailto:symbio@symbiosf.com).

*and she's got a glare that could back Dirty Harry down. She is constantly demanding and nothing seems to satisfy. I feel like the more I try to limit her, the more defiant she becomes. I've tried reasoning, bargaining, reminding her that if she continues to misbehave she'll have a consequence, but there seems to be no way of convincing her to follow the rules. I don't mean to sound overly negative. I am really glad that my daughter is so confident, and I love her strength. When she is happy, my daughter is a joy and she can be just as sunny as she is stormy. But the storms are wearing on us all. These days she's not even happy when she gets her way, so I know she is suffering too. I am not sure how to get out of this cycle, but it's clear to me that it's not right that three people and one very patient old Labrador should all live in fear of getting crosswise of a 3-year-old.*

Clearly your daughter has been gifted with an extraordinary will – and no small amount of creativity to back it up. We can't wait to vote for her for president. But in the meantime, we can certainly see why you feel like you are walking on eggshells. We would guess that you are also quite accurate in your assessment that your daughter is suffering too. Kids that are very strong-willed, and who are temperamentally predisposed to opposition, tend to cut a wide swath as they move through the toddler and preschool years. It takes extra work for them to learn to pilot their large personalities and their mishaps will be widely felt. When mishaps start to pile up, it quickly starts to feel like things are out of control. And, as a general rule, the more out of control kids feel, the more they will resist authority or any form of external control. This is why boundaries are so important with strong-willed kids. It's the feeling of being contained that allows a child to learn how to contain herself. You can think of your daughter's force of will as a fire hose. Every once in a while development will turn up the water pressure in the hose and she will experience an expansion in cognitive capacity, emotional complexity or social awareness. This will increase her already formidable sphere of influence. Before she learns how to operate her new abilities skillfully, she will struggle to manage the power she can wield. It's as though she needs you to help her hold the hose for awhile until she learns how to use it properly with the increased volume. If that doesn't happen, her aim will be controlled by her moment-to-moment impulses. Because, appropriately for a 3-year-old, she lacks the emotional maturity to limit her impulses, without your help aiming the hose, she will often use her power in ways that are destructive and inspire negative reactions from those around her. The feedback loop this sets up can leave a strong-willed child feeling a bit like Godzilla. Once that happens, her only emotionally tolerable option will be to make friends with her inner monster and stomp through Tokyo. In this way, the stormy power-struggles that are wearing you down are taking their toll on your daughter too. And the more worn down she is, the more she will defy and oppose. So, breaking the cycle will depend on creating boundaries that hold well enough to give her that feeling of containment.

"Yeah, great", you're probably thinking, "but how do I do that without a being in a constant power struggle?" Remember, a power struggle requires that parents and children actually struggle for control over an outcome. It's not a power struggle if you set a limit, she protests, and the limit stays firm. In this situation there is no question over who has the power, because her protests have no power to change the boundary. It sounds as though you may be losing ground in these situations by trying too hard to convince your daughter to decide to stay inside the boundaries. If she can stand up to Clint Eastwood, convincing her to sign on to your agenda is likely to be a losing battle. But if you are willingly to hold a boundary without her agreeing to comply peacefully you can accomplish your goals. In practice, this means you have to be equally willing to let your daughter experience a consequence for breaking a rule as you are to help her understand where the boundaries lie. This might look like saying "no" to something she is requesting and responding to her complaints with empathy for her disappointment rather than by attempting to cajole her out of her protest. It will certainly mean drawing a clear boundary around acceptable behaviors and then enforcing a consequence if she transgresses the boundary. Keep in mind that the goal is not

## Cover kids wanted!

We love photos of our young clients. If you have photos you are willing to share on our website or in this newsletter, please email them to us.

## Questions

If you have a question you'd like us to answer here, email us at: [symbio@symbiosf.com](mailto:symbio@symbiosf.com).

# symbio

psychological services for families with young children

[www.symbiosf.com](http://www.symbiosf.com)

noelle cochran, psyd  
lele diamond, mft license # 40325

to make your daughter mind the rules; the goal is for the boundary to hold. This can happen either by your daughter obeying your instructions, or by you imposing a consequence when she fails to do so. The consequence you enforce may be ending the activity she's involved in, removing a toy or some other privilege, time outs, etc. The method you use is up to you, but it must be used consistently, and you have to pick a consequence you know you can enforce. So, if you cannot get your daughter to stay in a time out, you will actually undermine your own authority by attempting to initiate one and then having a struggle to keep her in it. If your daughter is used to you bargaining, negotiation and reasoning with her, you are likely to face some strong objection if you quit doing so. You'll have to make it through a testing period before your daughter believes that the boundaries are real and settles down to learning to deal with them. Keep in mind that her protests and struggles are her process of learning to control her own power, and this is just what you want her to be doing now. Development has designed it so that children have the period of the toddler and preschool years to practice working the mighty struggle between personal will and external demands through to some resolution often enough that they gain control over the process. If the progression of the developmental timeline works as it should, they will have time to complete this sometimes-messy battle before they reach an age where their own welfare, or that of others, really depends on their ability to balance the pursuit of a personal agenda with prudence and responsibility. In order to accomplish this, young children need to have abundant opportunities to deal with frustration, disappointment and reticence. That will be your gift to your daughter as you hold a boundary firm. Those boundaries are your hands around hers on the fire hose ready to loosen when you know she can guide herself effectively and appropriately.

Simply being consistent with boundaries will create a sense of structure and security for your daughter, but she needs more than just a firm boundary to learn control on her own. She needs your help linking her intellectual understanding of cause and effect (I broke a rule and then I incurred a consequence) with the emotions and feelings that occur in the struggle. This means going back and talking about good times and hard times later. In general, think of the times when your daughter is testing boundaries as time for more action and less talking: she breaks a rule and you calmly (as much possible) enforce a consequence without trying to talk her into complying. Once the moment of struggle has passed and the boundaries have held, come back together and regroup. Review the emotional experience of the conflict with the same "glad we survived that one" tone you would use if you were recalling a natural disaster. Then you can put a point on the fact that, unlike the weather, there is much she can do to prevent the next behavioral hurricane from coming ashore. These moments of coming together to review will provide emotionally connection and a sense of hope as well – both of which are sorely needed in trying times. In order to preserve your own sanity, as you form your expectations following these re-grouping sessions keep this in mind: learning is about practice and, despite her best intentions during these calm moments, your strong-willed daughter will need plenty of practice to learn to comply before she internalizes the process.

Finally, life can't be all struggle. If you are spending the majority of everyday holding boundaries and imposing consequences while your daughter protests, things will start to feel pretty dreary for you all. So pick one or two areas to work on at a time and cut her some slack elsewhere. Because it's so important that you maintain your authority each time you assert it, be conservative in the battles you pick. One way of avoiding a power struggle is not pick a battle in the first place. You will want to use this approach liberally. It will help if you make this explicit. For example, let her know that you think she's working so hard on figuring out how to go to bed in the right way that you are not going to make her clean up all by herself. Not only will this keep her from wondering if she is experiencing a guilty victory as you bend to help her sort out Play-doh and puzzle pieces, it will model the concept of pacing and discretion. Both of which likely be revolutionary ideas for any 3-year-old who pals around with monsters.