

# september @ symbio

## 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).

### Transition to Preschool & Managing Separations

Wednesday

09 September @ 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 respond to their child's needs and behaviors related to this transition. We'll talk about how to help your child cope at school and at home, how to manage goodbyes and how to get your routine back on track. We will include time for parents to ask questions and get feedback related to individual concerns.

Please note location:

#### Peekadoodle Kidsclub

Ghirardelli Square

900 North Point Street, F100

San Francisco CA

Peekadoodle members:

\$40/person or \$60/couple

non-members:

\$45/person or \$65/couple

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



## q & a

*Last week, I flew home to California with my mother and my children. My boys (2 years and 5 ½ years) were mercifully well behaved on the trip and it gave my mother time to tell me all of the things I am doing wrong as a parent. My mother means well, she and my stepfather were good parents to my siblings and I when we were growing up, but she has very different ideas about parenting than I do. In addition, my youngest is quite a handful. He's in a difficult phase right now and my mother saw a lot of his testing during the two weeks we spent together on the East Coast, but nothing I would have thought suggested a need for a complete overhaul of my parenting strategies. I try to stay up on parenting reading and I've been to a couple of your presentations and overall, I feel like we are doing a good job as parents. Until last week I have never worried too much about the rough patches, because I know they pass. So why I am writing you? I am not sure – I think my mother just got under my skin. It's not that I am inclined to believe I ought to follow her advice, but I am suddenly worried that I have not been more worried about how we are doing. Maybe I don't have it all figured out and the idea that I could be missing something important and not know it is frightening. I am tempted to joke about suggesting you sponsor a stress management course for parents – maybe it could include wine and shopping – but really I suppose*

## 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 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.

*I am wondering if any of your other clients have the experience of suddenly feeling uncertain about the fundamentals. I feel like I need to just shake this off and get back to parenting, but I am also thinking maybe this worry is a good thing if it helps me to have more insight as a result. So this is really not a question, but I just want to talk about this in the hopes of gaining some understanding. I would appreciate your thoughts.*

On behalf of so many of our dear clients, thank you for sharing your confusion. Part of our goal in forming Symbio was to help parents demystify the emotional, as well the practical, process of parenting. Between the two of us, we've followed hundreds of families from the infancy of their first child through the school age years, and we've learned that periods of parental confusion and self-doubt seem to be almost universal. No matter how many parenting books you read, or experts you talk to, as a parent you will ultimately be left to your own best judgment as to how best prepare your children for futures that are yet undefined. That's quite a daunting reality. Perhaps the biggest difference between the current general wisdom on parenting and that of a generation ago is the modern practice of wrestling with the gravity of one's choices and actions as they related to one's children's future. If you look at parenting literature from 30 or 40 years ago, the first thing that you will notice is how little of it there is to be found. You will also probably notice how much of it reads like a Martha Stewart project guide, or perhaps Heloise's Helpful Hints: to deal with situation X, do Y. There is very little attention devoted to the emotional or psychological impact of parents' choices on children as developing people. This is not to say that our parents' generation cared any less about their children; but they may have worried less. Conventional and professional wisdom of generations past placed much more faith in parents' intuitive knowledge and in the natural course of development to deliver children to adulthood intact and equipped for success. In fact, the field of psychology only has only begun to focus on the internal experience of a child as subject of exploration in the last 50 – 60 years. It is as though we arrived at the importance of fostering healthy childhoods through a process of back-engineering the reasons why so many adults struggle with the issues that bring them into therapy. As a society, we have slowly giving up some measure confidence in intuition and routine when it comes to childrearing and developed a more circumspect approach to the questions of how best to support and guide the formative process of a young person. As this trend has progressed, the measure of parenting success has slowly moved from how children behave to how children grow up. To parent under these criteria means to focus on producing results that take nearly two decades to gauge. Of course this involves tolerating a great deal of uncertainty; and research on stress has shown that uncertainty is among the most stressful of experiences for the human psyche. So your joke about stress management is actually quite to the point. As a matter of fact, having an effective stress management strategy is one of the best predictors of success in endeavors requiring prolonged effort. So it only makes sense for parents to think about how they are managing the impact of parenting on themselves as well their children. In its most basic form, stress management has two components: increasing the resources available for dealing with a stressor and reducing the impact of the stressor on the system. Insisting on your time at the gym, keeping date night with your partner, fueling your sense of humor, and some occasional retail therapy are all solid techniques for increasing your resources – and just as important to your long term success as a parent as the time you spend reading parenting books or attending lectures. The more difficult part of the equation is how to reduce the impact of the stressor, which, in this case, is the existential uncertainty of how well you are managing the most important responsibility you have ever taken on. If we continue to look to the field of stress management, part of the answer lies in planning for contingencies, which reduces strain by providing an alternative to engaging in the impossible task of avoiding problems by creating a fail-safe system. In short, this means that part of your plan involves how you will deal with it when your plan falters. Inevitably, dealing with parenting failures is part of parenting. You will not be the parent you want to be in many ways: you will lose

## Peninsula Presentation: Dealing with Eating & Food Issues

Tuesday  
06 October @ 7:00 pm

Getting kids to eat healthily, on time, neatly, or at all can be a challenge for a surprising number of parents. Success depends on having developmentally appropriate expectations, an understanding of the way your child's temperament contributes to his or her relationship to food and a knack for avoiding power struggles. In this discussion, we will present general guidelines for handling food issues based on age and temperament; and will address questions on a case-by-case basis.

Please note location:

### Whole Child Wellness

1601 El Camino Real, Suite 101  
Belmont CA

\$45/person or \$65/couple.  
RSVP to [symbio@symbiosf.com](mailto:symbio@symbiosf.com).

## Temperament-Based Potty Training

Wednesday  
14 October @ 7:00 pm

Using the lens of temperament we will address how to approach getting your child out of diapers and into the bathroom. We will suggest guidelines for timing and choosing a technique, explore some of the strengths and drawbacks of common approaches and provide tools for how to determine what strategies will work best for your particular, unique child. We will also present how temperamentally specific approaches to unexpected setbacks and discuss how to get things on back on track with kids who have stalled-out in the process.

## 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).

your temper, you will miss your child's subtle cues, you will fail to anticipate the trouble lurking around the corner and your child will run smack into it. Today we have an abundance of parenting literature to help avoid these mistakes and miscalculations. Modern parents-to-be can face parenthood equipped with the latest anecdotal and researched-based strategies for optimizing a child's physical-emotional-cognitive-social developmental experience. The truth is we are fortunate to have this ever-expanding body of knowledge about what shapes a childhood. The unfortunate by product of this wealth of knowledge is the common expectation among parents that they will be able create a fail-safe system. It doesn't help that much of the popular literature preaches developmental doom if you don't follow the author's recommended approach. So you, like many of our clients, are parenting in a culture of fear – which, of course, is not the best environment in which to raise a child. Fortunately, from our point of view, things are not nearly so grave – parents are not really living one tactical error away from damaging their children's future. Our professional experience bears out the predications of copious research in child development: that children are highly resilient. Furthermore, they will offer you plenty of clues to let you know if your parenting is running off track. You won't need to wait twenty years to know, you will see it in your children's behavior (we are talking about persistent patterns, not an occasional meltdown), and you will have plenty of time to make course corrections before the causes of behavioral problems leave lasting imprints on your children's psyches. And, to return to stress management science, the systems (be they individuals, families or organizations) that are most effective in resolving problems are those in which problems are expected and, thus, noticed more readily. A system controlled by anxiety is not well equipped in this way. Fear and worry may produce vigilance, but they actually preclude insight. All of this to say, that you may find more relief in the notion that, even if you have made some miscalculations, the careful attention you pay to your children will give you the feedback you need to make corrections than in the hope that you have it all figured out. And your openness to mistakes will make those corrections easier. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, remember that your children need your occasional mistakes as much they need your overall success. The way you experience and respond to your own mistakes will be your most powerful message to your children about how they should experience their own bumbles and shortcomings. Children are learning new skills and trying out new roles so constantly that failure is an unavoidably common occurrence for them. They will need a good model for how to regroup and recover. And they will need to learn how to tolerate periods of doubt and confusion. Our guess is you are doing just what you would want them to do when those periods occur: talking about it in the hopes of understanding.

## Another cool app (why we love iPhones):



Created by two Bay Area moms, Mom Maps is a new iPhone application that helps you find kid friendly locations when you are on the go. It contains an extensive list of parks, playgrounds, restaurants, museums and indoor play areas that are kid friendly and fun. Using GPS you'll see results which are close to you, plus a map to get you there.