

Parents TOGETHER

A Newsletter for Greenwich Parents of Adolescents ©
www.parentstogetherct.org

How to Raise Your Parents

by Sarah Burningham

Editor's Note: Manhattan resident Sarah O'Leary Burningham was inspired to write her book, "How to Raise Your Parents", when she was 16 years old. Written from the perspective of a 21st century teenager, this book will help teens and parents navigate those somewhat stormy years between training bras and keys to the family car. In a voice teens will relate to and parents will appreciate, the author offers advice about negotiation, parental triggers, and a little insight about what the world looks like from a parent's point of view. What follows is an excerpt from the book adapted for Parents Together - feel free to leave out your copy of Parents Together for your teen to read once you are done.

Let's Get Together—Teens and the Art of Negotiation

Picture yourself as a big trial lawyer—a smarter, more parent-savvy version of Reese Witherspoon's character in *Legally Blond*. Whenever you ask your parents for money or to borrow the family car, you're in the courthouse. If Mom wants you to clean the attic before you go to the movies, you're on the

courtroom floor. When Dad says the two of you need to talk about your latest report card, you're standing in front of the jury giving your closing statement. One of a lawyer's main jobs is to mediate between clients and come to an agreement that satisfies both parties. In this situation, your parents are the other clients. How can you make a successful case with them on the other side of the table? It's all about negotiation, baby.

Good negotiation skills are key for dealing with parents. You don't want every discussion to turn into a fight but you can't just give in to all their demands either. How can you talk them into getting you a cell phone? What can you do if your Dad says you're not leaving the house dressed like *that*? The right negotiation tactics will save you a lot of stress and a lot of screaming. (And hey, they might even come in handy when you really are a big-shot lawyer.)

The first step to winning your case is research. Lawyers spend most of their time behind the scenes, figuring out what the other side is going to bring to the table and what they are willing to walk away with. And just like a lawyer, you have to come to the courtroom anticipating what your parents are going to say and calculating your responses. Take a few minutes to step in your parents' shoes. If you understand their perspective, you'll all start off on the right foot. And your parents will be more likely to consider your perspective if you've taken time to respect theirs.

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If you've considered the case from all angles and still feel like you have a good argument, then let the negotiations begin.

Bargaining Basics: 11 Things to Remember for Every Negotiation

1. Some Things Just Aren't Negotiable

It doesn't matter what a good bargainer you are if you're asking your parents for something ridiculous. You could negotiate for years and never convince them to buy you the MINI Cooper you've been lusting over. So remember to keep your expectations realistic. Do you know any parent who would send her teenage daughter on an all-expense paid trip to Cancun *alone* with 3 of her best friends? Didn't think so. So don't even ask.

2. Prove Yourself

Good luck trying to get your Dad to hand over the car keys if last time you borrowed his wheels you were late for curfew and left him with an empty tank. He's no fool. Why should he think this time will be any different? But say last time you borrowed the car you got home on time and left a few bucks for gas in the cup holder. (Bonus points if you actually went to the gas station and squeegied the windows while you filled up.) You'd have shown that you respect him and his car. He's going to have a hard time finding a good reason for not giving you the keys if you've earned them.

3. Timing is Everything

You are dying to get some cash for a new prom dress (hello, prom is less than a month away) and you're planning to ask your Dad when he gets home from work. When he walks through the door, he announces that he just got a speeding ticket. Hint: Now is probably not the best time to ask—for anything. Your Dad is annoyed about being pulled over and if you put one more thing on him (even if it is just a prom dress) he's probably going to totally flip. Do yourself (and your Dad) a favor and wait until the ticket trauma has worn off a little before asking for some dress dough.

4. Be Clear About What You Want and Need

It sounds obvious, but sometimes you really have to spell out what you're asking for in order for your parents to understand. Sure, they get that you want a cell phone, but do they know why? Remember, they aren't mind readers. Tell them that cell phones are how your

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generation communicates, that you feel safer if you have one when you're driving, and you think it will help them keep track of you. The more information you give your parents, the better they'll understand you.

5. Give a Little, Get a Little

Parents don't like ultimatums, and they probably won't stand for one. "If you don't let me stay over at Emily's, I'm never babysitting for you again," isn't the most effective way to get your butt to Emily's. Instead, try giving your parents a few options: If they let you stay at Emily's tonight, you'll baby-sit for them on Saturday. Or, since they won't let you stay at Emily's tonight, what about letting you spend the night next weekend? The more options you give, the more reasonable you sound, and the better chance you have at actually ending up at Emily's.

6. Tune in

It seems like the easiest thing in the world, but sometimes just listening to what your parents have to say is the trick to keeping a discussion from turning into a yelling match. You want your parents to listen to you so in return you owe them the respect of listening to their side of things. They might actually have some good points but you'll never know if you tune them out.

7. Keep Your Cool

Sounds simple enough but when you're in the throes of a major argument, spouting off about how lame your parents are, is like kissing your later curfew good-bye. Instead, focus on telling them how you feel and don't insult them personally. It sounds like Dr. Phil, but the more you say things like, "This makes me feel angry," or "I feel confused," the more you sound

like you're willing to accept responsibility for yourself and the less defensive your parents will be. You'll never see a top lawyer sobbing or screaming in front of the jury. So when it's time to talk it out with Mom and Dad, check your emotions at the door.

8. Give Credit Where Credit is Due

If you really want your parents to hear you, you have to treat them like real people. I know. I know. Sometimes they seem like they're from another planet. But if you treat your parents like you want them to treat you, you might be surprised. Respect is a two-way street.

9. Don't Think of Your Negotiation as a Win / Lose Situation

After a two-hour talk about whether you can take the car to the beach or up the canyon for a bonfire, your parents decide you can go only if someone else drives. Don't totally despair. You might not be taking your sweet ride, but at least you can still go to the party. If you make every situation all or nothing, you're never going to be happy. When your parents do give in, say thanks and make the best of it.

10. Breathe

People don't suggest counting to ten for nothing. Even if you've got a great comeback, take a few deep breaths and consider your response before shouting something out. The more in control you are, the more rational and mature you'll seem, and the more likely your parents are to listen to you.

11. The Write Way to Keep from Losing Your Cool

If you tend to get flustered when negotiating but want your parents to understand where you're coming from, call on the power of the pen and write a letter. You're guaranteed to get your point across, and you won't risk losing the fight because you got all worked up. Not only that, but sometimes when things are written down they seem more serious. Your parents will probably really think about your side of the issue because you've taken so much time to put your feelings out there. And maybe they'll take a cue from you and consider their response before making a decision.

Writing can be a total stress reliever, too. Think of all those times your parents wouldn't let you go out with your friends and you wanted to tell someone how unfair it was. That's when journaling comes in handy. Whether it's on your MySpace blog or in the notebook you keep under your bed, sometimes writing down your feelings is all you need to get over losing an argument.



Sarah will be the featured speaker at the Parents Together program in May and at a mother/daughter evening at Just Books. See back cover for details.

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relies on contributions from individuals in the community to fund our programs and newsletters. We will be mailing our Annual Appeal in March and hope that you will consider a donation as we celebrate 30 years of parenting support.

Keeping Connected

Start with Family Meals

With the hectic pace of life today, family meals are becoming a lost ritual. Since their benefits are extensive, it's important to bring them back. The menu in family meals may not be varied but the shared time, even if it doesn't happen every night, is invaluable.

As family members take off in different directions, sharing meals can be a time to regroup. Family meals provide a safe place where everyone can talk about their day, listen to each other, and try out ideas. Mealtime is not only about food; it's a time when family stories and jokes are told, when a sense of family values is instilled. Family meals can serve also as an emotional clearing-house and support system when someone's down or excited or angry or in a quandary.

Family meal times pay off in numerous benefits:

- ◆ **Better nutrition** is one plus.
- ◆ **Parent-child connectedness** has many other plusses, one of which is the pleasure of spending non-pressured time together, not focused solely on academic, sports, or any other kind of achievement.
- ◆ Children who eat with their families are **less likely to snack** on unhealthy foods and more likely to eat healthy foods such as fruits, vegetables and whole grains.
- ◆ Studies have shown that when family meals are prioritized, structured, and positive in

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A Weighty Issue

What to Deal With First – Depression or Obesity?

by Molly Carmel, MSW

IN HER FRESHMAN YEAR of high school, Cheryl was a happy, smiling, high-achieving girl who loved to go to the movies with her friends and spend time with her family. Within the last year, a lot has changed. Cheryl has withdrawn from her social life. She likes to stay home in her room and play on the Internet. She rarely talks to her parents and her grades have slipped dramatically. Cheryl has also gained 40 pounds and her eating and exercise habits have become very unhealthy.

Cheryl's parents, teachers and peers are worried. When her parents confront her about these differences, Cheryl becomes a mixture of sad and argumentative. She tells her parents that she doesn't care about school or her future and that nothing matters anyway.

Overweight teenagers commonly struggle with depression: a recent study suggests that obese people are 25% more likely to experience mood or anxiety disorders such as depression. In most cases – like Cheryl's – well-intended parents and professionals focus on the emotional, behavioral or academic issues that Cheryl is presenting before considering her rapid weight gain.

The argument is sometimes: If Cheryl's depression lifts, if she can start to see better results in school, if she can re-engage with her friends then her weight and lifestyle will become more of a priority. This approach indirectly suggests that Cheryl's weight problem is secondary to her psychological distress and decline in other areas of her life.

Parents and clinicians might argue that mental health, social and aca-

demical issues are more pressing and more likely to correspond with the "real" damage. But adolescent obesity is concurrently linked with mental health issues. Studies have correlated obesity with being less likely to graduate high school or attend and complete college, and more likely to occupy a lower socio-economic status. If not just for these statistics, less the ones that link obesity to health conditions that run the entire body, addressing this issue is necessary and maybe even life saving.

Although psychological distress can contribute to developing a weight problem, being an obese adolescent presents many problems. A significant weight gain or a long-standing weight issue can contribute to feelings of inferiority, helplessness, shame and failure, all in a developmental period in which social acceptance and development are paramount. The prejudice and rejection inherent in "weightism" will challenge any overweight person; imagine how it feels for a child who already experiences deep sadness and anxiety.

Focusing on weight loss and weight control as the primary issue gives immediate success to a struggling person. Successful weight management requires life skills, including systematic observation, problem-solving, consequential thinking, delayed gratification and planning that often act as a catalyst for improving all other areas of an adolescent's life.

From a clinical perspective, dealing with weight can lend itself to improving all aspects of life, including understanding greater and deeper issues like depression and anxiety.

The issue of obesity lives in the here and now for almost every teen, and it promotes real-life discussions in almost every aspect of an adolescent's life. Talking specifically about everyday or recent problems (like failing grades or fighting with parents) involves abstract reasoning and an ability to label these issues as "no big deal" or "over". Promoting perspective and limiting self-destructive behaviors can't be wrong!

Through addressing a relationship with weight success, people can see parallels to other areas of their lives, like self-worth, honoring commitment, and body image. With weight struggles, issues like self-like vs. self-sabotage can be dealt with in proactive and healthy ways, and positive behaviors and positive results can be utilized and obtained in all areas of life.

Although traditional therapeutic beliefs may suggest that dealing with depression will help an adolescent to be ready to focus on their weight issues, the rising number of obese adolescents is calling for a different treatment paradigm. Dealing with the obesity as the primary issue inherently decreases an adolescent's risk for heart disease, Type 2 diabetes and cancer, among others. The hidden gift is that it can also be the catalyst for emotional growth and a far improved quality of life.

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Molly Carmel, MSW, is the director of Greenlight at the Wilkins Center (www.greenlightwc.com) which specializes in weight loss and weight management for adolescents and adults. She can be reached at mollycarmel@greenlightwc.com.

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atmosphere, **fewer weight control problems** and disordered eating patterns were observed.

The following are some tips on making family meals special:

- ◆ Communication starts before meal time and continues afterward. Have children help in preparations and in clearing and cleanup, not presented as a chore but as part of a group effort. Their participation makes them feel valued and respected.
- ◆ Avoid criticism, and passing judgment. Meal time is not a time for complaints or for too many questions.
- ◆ Specific, non-judgmental remarks or questions can get children started. They'll learn to take turns and listen to others, valuable social skills in many situations.
- ◆ Parents too can share something interesting about their day. When parents talk about their experiences, they're providing models of behavior and sharing of values.
- ◆ Meal time is a good time to learn manners—setting the table, taking turns, passing food and other customs can become habits.
- ◆ Family meals don't always have to be in the same place or at the same time; lunch or brunch or picnics work just as well.

Find time other than meals to be together. Even small moments in the course of a day—such as before bedtime, sharing reactions to a television program, shopping together—can encourage conversation.

Mealtime is only one way for families to stay connected and know what's going on in your child's life. Be involved in his/her school, sports and/or other activities; know your kid's friends and their teachers; go to games and other events to show support and pride. Sharing experiences provide opportunities to talk about successes, disappointments and alternative ways of solving problems. Celebrate old and new family traditions; mark birthdays and graduations, and also create new reasons to celebrate — a good grade, a musical performance, etc.

In addition to pleasure and emotional support, staying connected pays off in other significant ways. Research has shown that parent involvement is a protective factor against adolescent tobacco use, depression, eating disorders and academic failure. By staying connected with their children and teenagers, parents can be a source of support, create a climate for discussing tough issues, and serve as a role model for responsible behavior.



Summer Employment for Teens

The **Greenwich Youth Council** invites teens age 14 and 15 to apply for the **Conservation Project** this summer. Four consecutive nine day sessions are available, starting on June 30. Interested teens will work outdoors, learn about conservation and community resources, and be reimbursed for their time. For more information, call Christina Nappi at the Greenwich Department of Social Services in Town Hall at 622-7792.

ACT

Advantages and Disadvantages

by Sharon Denunzio

ADVANTAGES of the ACT:

1. The ACT has a reputation for being more straightforward with fewer tricks and traps versus the SAT. It is more "student-friendly".
2. The test is slightly shorter (by 20 minutes) than the SAT, totaling 3 hours and 25 minutes. There is no extra 25-minute experimental section as on the SAT.
3. Each module is presented once only; a student does not "bounce" back-and-forth from Math-Reading-Grammar in multiple 25-minute segments, as in the SAT.
4. There is no wrong answer penalty, so guessing is encouraged. All sections (except Math) have 4 answer choices rather than 5 choices presented on the SAT.
5. A student has the option of sending only those test date scores which she wants to report to colleges, rather than being required to send every test date score.
6. *Reading* module: There is no vocabulary component; the ACT tests pure reading comprehension using four long passages of similar length with ten questions each. Reading is 35 minutes, vs. two 25-minute and one 20-minute module in the SAT.
7. *Math* module: The math questions are generally more straightforward. Math is 60 minutes, versus three 25-minute modules in the SAT.
8. *Essay*: The Essay is optional. A student receives 30 minutes of time to complete the essay; this is 20% longer than the 25-minute time limit given on the SAT. The topic/question for the

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essay is “easier” than the topic for the SAT as it presents a high school age-appropriate dilemma and does not require a student to find real-life examples from literature, current events, history, etc., for support.

9. *English:* The English module (which tests written grammar rules) is more straightforward than the Writing MP of the SAT as the grammar errors are presented in the context of passages rather than individual sentences. The Combined English/ Essay score is *not* used in the Composite; only the multiple choice English score is used.

DISADVANTAGES of the ACT:

1. The score which colleges focus on for the ACT is the Composite score. The Composite is an average of the four ACT modules: English, Math, Reading and Science. If even one module is weak, the weakness will be reflected in the Composite. This is different from the SAT, which does not combine or average individual modules of Math, CR and Writing.
2. The Science section is the “Wild Card”; there is nothing comparable to this section on the SAT. It requires pattern recognition skills and the ability to quickly decipher trends in charts and diagrams; these are math-oriented skills. A student has the potential to score higher on the ACT as long as her math skills are strong since the ACT contains two out of four modules which rely on math skills.
3. *Math:* The Math section of the ACT covers several categories of higher-level math concepts: basic trigonometry (4 questions), basic logarithms (1 question), imaginary numbers (1 question), matrix algebra (possibly 1 question). All formulas must be memorized as none are provided upfront as in the SAT.

SAT and ACT Considerations for Students with Special Needs

by Sharon DeNunzio

Students with special needs present with a variety of processing or attention issues which can detract from performance on standardized tests without appropriate accommodations. The most common accommodation requested is for extended time.

It is imperative that students and parents are aware that the SAT and the ACT differ in the ways that extended time is allotted.

First, Collegeboard has recently become much more selective about granting extended time. Parent feedback reveals a perception that Collegeboard has observed “too many” students from competitive northeastern school districts applying for this accommodation. The ACT appears to me more “student friendly” in the manner in which extended time is applied for and granted.

Second, and more important, is the difference in the way that extended time is executed for the SAT versus the ACT. If a student receives time-and-a-half, for example, on the SAT, this means taking the test on a standard Saturday national test date, in a separate room with other students who receive the same time extensions. The test will be taken in one long sitting of approximately 5-1/2 hours (with no experimental section). Since the SAT is comprised of 10 sections, each section is allotted the time-and-a-half extension. Thus, the first six sections of 25 minutes standard time would each be given 37.5 minutes instead. Students continue to adhere to the section-by-section requirement, with each section given a specific time allotment.

For the ACT, a student who is granted time-and-a-half is allowed to take the test over several school days,

with a teacher-monitor supervising, and is given a 5-hour time period in which to complete the test. There are no time requirements for individual sections. This means that a student who is “slower” in math may use more of his extended time on the math section of the test as long as he is able to “make up” some of that time on another section of the test. This flexibility provided by the ACT is clearly to the student’s advantage. First, a student is not required to complete the test in one long sitting. And second, the student can control his pacing so that he allots more of the extra time to those sections for which he really requires it.

Families with special needs should invest some time in understanding the differences between the content and questions presented by the SAT and ACT, as well as understanding the differences in the execution of extended time. Given the many differences, the ACT may be more attractive to the majority of students with special needs.



ACT/SAT tutor Sharon Denunzio is the parent of two teenagers and lives in Riverside. She can be reached at 344-1339 or skd1705@optonline.net.

**Greenwich Coalition
to Combat Underage Drinking
PROGRAMS**

April 5: “How to Develop Better Communications with Teens”, Part 2
Fathers Forum
8 AM
YMCA, Greenwich

May 3: “Becoming a Better Dad”
Father’s Forum
8 AM
YMCA, Greenwich

gccud@yahoo.com

The Supergirl Dilemma

Managing Expectations

by Jennafer Kannengeiser

IN 2006, Girls Incorporated® published a study conducted by Harris Interactive® that reported astonishing results. “The Supergirl Dilemma” summarizes the findings of girls grappling with the mounting pressures of expectations. Below is a summary of the findings

Girls today experience intense pressure, at ever younger ages, to be everything to everyone all of the time. While stereotypes about girls’ leadership capabilities and math and science abilities appear to have diminished in the past six years, as compared to a similar study conducted by Girls Inc. in 2000, expectations about physical perfection, including dressing “right” and being thin, seem to be on the rise. Stereotypes about girls needing to speak softly, to not brag, and to play caretaker roles seem to persist. Society appears to be making some room for girls to transcend traditional expectations about abilities and aspirations, just as long as they also conform to conventional notions of femininity.

There are remarkable similarities between the attitudes, experiences and aspirations of girls and boys. However, there are some critical gender-based differences: girls and boys believe that girls are supposed to be kind and caring, while boys are supposed to protect themselves and others. Girls are more worried than boys about their appearance and social pressures. Boys are more concerned about doing well in sports and the possibility of having to fight in a war.

Girls can do anything. To encourage girls to challenge themselves, Girls Inc. provides innovative programs to help girls confront subtle societal messages about their value and potential, and

prepare them to lead successful, independent, and fulfilling lives.

Girls Inc. has made it their mission to inspire all girls to be strong, smart and bold®. It seems that as a society we have moved to the point where girls are getting the message that they have to do everything, all at the same time. Girls are under pressure to be everything to everyone in their lives - parents, siblings, friends, boys and teachers. These unrealistic expectations create intense pressure in girls’ lives.

We need to address the challenges and limitations girls encounter earlier. Girls grow up to be women - citizens, employees, mothers - among many roles and *their* success is *our* collective success. We must help girls to be super in the ways that feel right to them, rather than perpetuating the idea that they must be “supergirls” in order to meet social expectations.

What girls want adults to know:

- ◆ “Girls want their ideas respected. Girls want their future open to any dream they might have for themselves.” -3rd grade girl

- ◆ “There are a lot of pressures and stereotypes we have to deal with to be who we want to be and at the same time live up to who you want us to be.” -6th grade girl

- ◆ “We are our own person and if given the right information will make the right choices” -9th grade girl

- ◆ “Even today, society values beauty in girls over intelligence and talent.” -10th grade girl

- ◆ “I want them [adults] to realize that there’s an insane amount of media and peer pressure on girls: to be thin, to be beautiful, to be air-headed and only care about shopping, to always be wearing the latest trends, to not care about grades

or school, etcetera. They need to encourage girls to be themselves and find what they’re passionate about because otherwise, without adult support, most girls won’t have the courage to go against the media and do what they love, be it considered appropriately ‘feminine’ or not.”
-12th grade girl

Girls Inc. recommends that you:

- ◆ Listen to what girls have to say. Whether you are a parent or another caring adult, ask girls about what is on their mind and really listen without being judgmental.
- ◆ Empower girls to set priorities and make smart choices. Support girls in learning how to say “no” and in establishing boundaries.
- ◆ Provide role models. Introduce girls to a variety of career options. Share profiles of women who have overcome obstacles to achieve success.
- ◆ Redefine notions of femininity, masculinity and what it means to be kind and caring. Help girls overcome the pressure to please everyone.
- ◆ Nurture the individual. Tell a girl it’s okay to brag about something she is good at.
- ◆ Avoid rescuing girls. Encourage them to take healthy risks, make mistakes, and get dirty or disheveled in pursuit of a goal.
- ◆ Address issues of body image. Help girls develop a healthy body image. Teach them that beauty comes in different sizes, shapes, colors and abilities. Encourage girls to focus on health, flexibility and strength.
- ◆ Educate yourself and raise awareness of stereotypes and their consequences. Be aware of the signals and messages you are sending young children.

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Jennafer Kannengeiser is the Program Director of the Greenwich Chapter of Girls Inc. For more information call (203)536-3322.

Who We Are

Parents Together is an independent, nonprofit organization in Greenwich, CT, that offers ongoing opportunities for parents to communicate, share, support and learn together. We work in cooperation with the Parent Teacher Associations of the public, private and parochial schools in town. The *Parents Together* organization and delegates from Greenwich schools plan programs for parents in grades K-12. We also publish two quarterly newsletters: *Parents Together Primer*, for parents of children from birth through fifth grade, and *Parents Together*, for parents of adolescents.

Distribution: *Parents Together Primer* is distributed to parents through their children's preschools and elementary schools. *Parents Together* is sent to parents of children in grades 6 through 12 in all Greenwich public and independent schools.

Newsletter Subscriptions and Correspondence: We invite parents and all other readers interested in local parenting issues to subscribe to either or both newsletters. For an **annual subscription**, please indicate which newsletter you wish to receive, and send your name, address and \$12 for each subscription in a check payable to *Parents Together*, to P. O. Box 4843, Greenwich, CT 06831-0417. Correspondence may be mailed to the same address.

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Upcoming Programs

March 3, 2008: Dr. Diane Mickley, founder and Director of the Wilkins Center, will present "Underweight, Overweight and Body Image". The program will focus on obesity, eating disorders, body image in girls and boys of all ages.

April 7, 2008: Sonya Rencivitz, MSW, LCSW, psychotherapist specializing in adolescents, presents "Essence of Adolescence". This program will delve into the physical, intellectual, social and academic aspects of adolescence.

May 12, 2008: Sarah Burningham, author and speaker, presents "How to Raise your Parents . . . A Teen Girl's Survival Guide". Sarah will give us tips on communicating with our children of all ages, boys and girls.

May 12, 7:30 PM at Arcadia Coffee, Old Greenwich: Mother/Daughter event with Sarah Burningham. Co-sponsored with Just Books.

Unless otherwise noted, all programs begin at 9:15 AM in the Cone Room at Greenwich Town Hall and are free and open to the public. Call 329-2241 if you have questions.

Heartfelt Thanks

Your donations are continuously needed to fund the newsletters we publish each school year. Sincere thanks to our recent contributors:

Speakers - \$100 or more

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