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Issue 32 Spring 2021



London Mums

**Rock
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**Exclusive!
Imelda May:**

**'I give my daughter
roots and wings'**

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Editor's letter



Photographer Simon Williams

Spring is in the air, the days are starting to get longer, the daffodils are opening and the lambs are leaping in the fields. What better time to talk about love and awakenings. Celebrating International Women's Day and Mother's Day this season is a hymn of womanhood.

To brighten my lockdown days, I have been talking to five talented women who have chosen not to lose themselves into motherhood to follow their passion for rock 'n' roll. Being a mother should not be a label for women who choose to give life. Chatting to these star ladies has reminded me that women have to fight much harder to get the life they desire than men. Leading this fabulous group is soft rock Goddess Imelda May, whose brand-new single *Just One Kiss* is straight down dirty rock 'n' roll. She's such a gentle and sensitive soul that I felt a great connection with her like with a long-lost friend.

Welcome to the London Mums Rock 'n' Love edition!

To bring more smiles to your face, I interviewed Britain's favourite doctor, Dr Ranj, who recently published a manual to help teenage boys grow up happy, healthy and confident.

If the lack of sunshine makes you feel blue, it's probably time to escape. So, this issue gives you ten good reasons to visit Tuscany.

Find out the latest toy trends and gifts in the London Mums' shopping wish lists.

I hope you will enjoy reading this Spring issue as much as the London Mums' team have loved making it!

Spread the word – joining London Mums is totally and utterly FREE!

Monica Costa

Editor in chief, Founder of London Mums & mum

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THE BIG INTERVIEW



IMELDA MAY

Editorial

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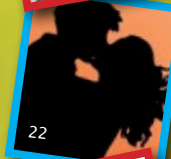
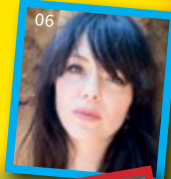
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Exclusive! ROCK STAR MUM IMELDA MAY:

‘I give my daughter roots and wings’

Globally revered soft rock Queen from Dublin, Imelda May, makes an eagerly awaited return with her new studio album ‘11 Past The Hour’ (out on Decca Records) this spring. Her brand-new single ‘Just One Kiss’ is straight down dirty rock ‘n’ roll, joined by close friends and music legends Noel Gallagher on vocals and Ronnie Wood on guitar.

Editor Monica Costa has caught up with her

When I first listened to Imelda’s new record I felt an instant connection with that music. Imelda delves into desire, both romantic and carnal with most songs – deliciously lustful low-slung blues and a mesmerising voice. *11 Past The Hour* is a record that brims with sensuality, emotional intelligence, spirituality and intuition, showcasing Imelda at her most authentic. Our frank chat bursting with energy reveals such a gentle and sensitive soul. I felt a connection like with a long-lost friend.

Imelda, what does love mean to you?

Love is not just a feeling but is action!

Once the pandemic will be over we will be so eager to hug and kiss people. Your song *Just one kiss* could not be more topical. What’s the inspiration behind it?

Just before lockdown I got a text from a friend wanting to meet up and I knew it would be trouble. He asked me out for just one kiss but I said no. He wanted me for just a hot night and I got a hot song out of it.

That little tiny moment before a kiss has so much electricity. With this song I wanted to express how many single people are feeling at the moment, missing the snogging more than ever. We need to be patient but we’ll get back to kissing. In the meantime, I’m happy to write songs to remember us that those moments are going to come again.

The lyrics about kissing really resonate with me.

“That moment you know it can go either way / The split second decision you know might change everything/with Just One Kiss/Could you resist?”

– A kiss change the course of people’s lives... We should be responsible about it, but yet it is impossible to resist that sometime. Is this album more about love or rebellion?

There’s no theme in the album, but hope that people can identify with all my emotions that I have expressed in this album. Lockdown has magnified a range of feelings.

My song *Never look back* is all about being rebellious and dangerous. It is about all the different personalities who live within us. I am a goddess, I am a freak, I am everything in myself. I need to tap into these different parts of me. Learning from the past but moving forward. The past shapes you but we need to move on.

Lockdown has taught us that whatever moves us we should do. Sometimes we leave what we love the most for the end of the day but instead we should put them forward in the list of priorities.

On the track ‘Just One Kiss’ you have joined forces with her long-time pal, Rolling Stone Ronnie Wood, and the former Oasis rocker. How did the collaboration work out during lockdown?

We recorded the album in social distancing mode but in the same room when we were allowed during the pandemic. I have great people collaborating on this album. I texted my pals Ronnie and Noel about it and they loved it. We get on well and hope it comes across in the record.

***Slip Of The Tongue*, the Poetry EP and your song ‘Home’ are all about love and are poems. Is poetry now the new way to start a revolution?**

I wonder... Are words becoming more and more important now that we have had less chances to talk to our friends out there stuck in our houses for such a long time.

Maybe. I hope people get the chance to read more and put down their phones. I have poetry books all over the house in every room. If you haven’t much time to read a whole book, a poem can be so inspirational and makes me think for the rest of the day. It can take you on a wonderful journey from beginning to end in just one page. Poetry can get under my skin. I also find it very therapeutic. My favourite poets are Rupi Kaur, Kae Tempest, Charles Bukowski, Leonard Cohen, Sylvia Plath. I have their books all over my house. They bring so much joy ▶



to me every day. I just deep into a couple of poems when I wait for my daughter to put the coat on before we go out for a walk. Scatter the poems everywhere, all over the house – in the kitchen, in the toilet. If you put them in the shelf, you'll never read them.

11 Past The Hour is an album of grit and glamour. Of poetry and power. Of love and sex and fun. How would you define your music genre?

I don't define it and I don't want to define it. I did that before and I got trapped in a category and I could not get out. Whatever I feel writing in any day, that's what I write. It doesn't matter what kind of vibe it is. I am very true to my own self. I do what I want when I want. That's how I define my album.

11 Past the Hour is my truth. I always write with meaning and from my heart as that's the reason I write, to connect with my own story at each particular moment and I hope therefore I connect with others during theirs, even if just for a while. I'd like to think I can put into words and music what we all feel sometimes. We all laugh, sing, love, cry, dance, kiss, care. We all experience lust, anger, joy, worry, sorrow and hope. Sometimes we stay silent and hold it all in and sometimes we dance and throw it all to the wind with abandon, but one thing is for sure is we are in this life together. Each song is a moment in my life. Each life is a moment in time. Every minute counts.

How's the life of a rock star's child like your daughter?

In some ways, she has a different childhood than mine. In some ways it is very similar. I come from a working-class family in Dublin – born and raised in The Liberties area of Dublin. The similarity is that I was surrounded by creativity and Violet is also surrounded by creativity. It doesn't matter whether you are a rock star or not. But creativity for me is the key. Children are really suited to that life because we are all born with that creativity and freedom, but somewhere along the line life can get in the way and make us loose that. We need to look to children to learn how we should behave so openly to art.

Before school she was with me all the time. I was breastfeeding on the tour bus and before going on stage. While on stage my breast would change size and look like I had a boob job. Then I had to run off stage and feed her. Tours are now sporadic. So, I try to bring her with me when I can.

Once we were at the Guggenheim Museum for a gig. Violet was 4 when she run into a room where a Mark Rothko's contemporary painting was and started screaming for joy. She did a dance all around and security told me off and asked me to keep her quiet. I refused categorically and I almost got kicked out. No way I would have done that. If Mark Rothko had been there, he would have been very happy to see that raw, simple and pure reaction. She was so happy to see a painting she was familiar with. For many rock stars' children, it's not much different than for Violet.

I am glad I can pay my bills with my music now, as I have had many years where I couldn't do it. I still have

to work hard. I am lucky because I can do what I love. I encourage my daughter to do the right things but also follow her dreams.

What kind of mum are you?

My mum has always been rebellious and always did her own things. My parents gave me roots and wings. I never heard them say anything bad about anybody. They taught me to accept individuals for who they are. I was brought up without fear. Fear of change makes people react badly and violently. I am bringing up Violet in the same way.

Where would you like to go on holiday once the pandemic is over?

I'll be happy to go back home to Ireland to visit my family. I need people more than a beach right now.

What are you up to next?

I am promoting the album but later on I'll publish my poetry book, beautifully illustrated by my friends and myself.

I love Italy! I remember when Jack Savoretti and his band once 'kidnapped' me in Venice after a gig. I had booked a couple of days of holiday in Italy but instead they took me to Genova for a gig. We had the best time in Italy and would love to go back there soon.

11 Past The Hour is out on Decca Records on 23rd April 2021



WORKING OUT THE BEST USE OF SPACE IN LOCKDOWN



The last year has been difficult for everyone and the gym and fitness industry has been one of the hardest hit. Even the most seasoned athletes have struggled to find the motivation to train on their own, in cold, dark lockdown 3.0. Gyms are not just for working out in, they are a community, a hub, a place where you can shut yourself off from the outside world for a few hours to take some time to yourself, to work on you. While many have found that they are able to workout at home and some have even preferred it, we know that there are still a vast amount of gym users, desperate to get back to their gyms and classes to find that old comfort in the iron paradise, to be able to share their fitness journey with other like-minded people and to be able to push themselves to new levels of strength and fitness that isn't necessarily available to everyone at home.

We at Mill Hill School Enterprises are no exception. To make matters worse, we have had an empty gym sitting below us while we do our work, just staring at us through the CCTV! Thankfully, we have had a very exciting new venture to keep our mind busy while we wait for gyms to reopen. When the Foundation's Operations Director gave the green light for the old changing rooms to be demolished to create a bigger space for our gym equipment, we couldn't help but dream big. After a few months of research, proposals and tenders, we have come up with a design that will be well worth the wait.



Proudly introducing "The Mill" a top of the range boutique gym and studio fit for every fitness journey, whether you are starting at the very beginning or are picking up from where you left off last year.

The Mill is divided into 3 sections: The first is a strength and conditioning studio with racks, bars and dumbbells as well as self-powered cardio equipment like HIIT bikes, Ski Ergs and curved runways. The second is a HIIT studio with treadmills, prowler sleds, punch bags and much more. Both of these spaces can be used together or separately, and we will utilise the incredible talent we have in our teams to provide top quality classes alongside general gym entry. The third space is a studio with 15 bikes for spin classes, floor space for yoga, pilates, dance classes, weights and kettlebells for body pump and HIIT classes and much more.

Work is due to be completed by the 8th March ready to open as soon as permitted. With 3 times the space, we felt it only made sense to increase our opening hours as well. Once we are allowed, we will be opening for morning sessions and classes in addition to our evening and weekend times and hopefully in the near future, we will open for lunchtime classes too. Before then, we will be hosting Zoom and Instagram live classes to show off our new spaces and classes. All of this will be available from our new Instagram profile @themillatmillhill.

We will run competitions for free memberships and merchandise and promote early bird offers on Instagram in the run up to opening so make sure you are following us!



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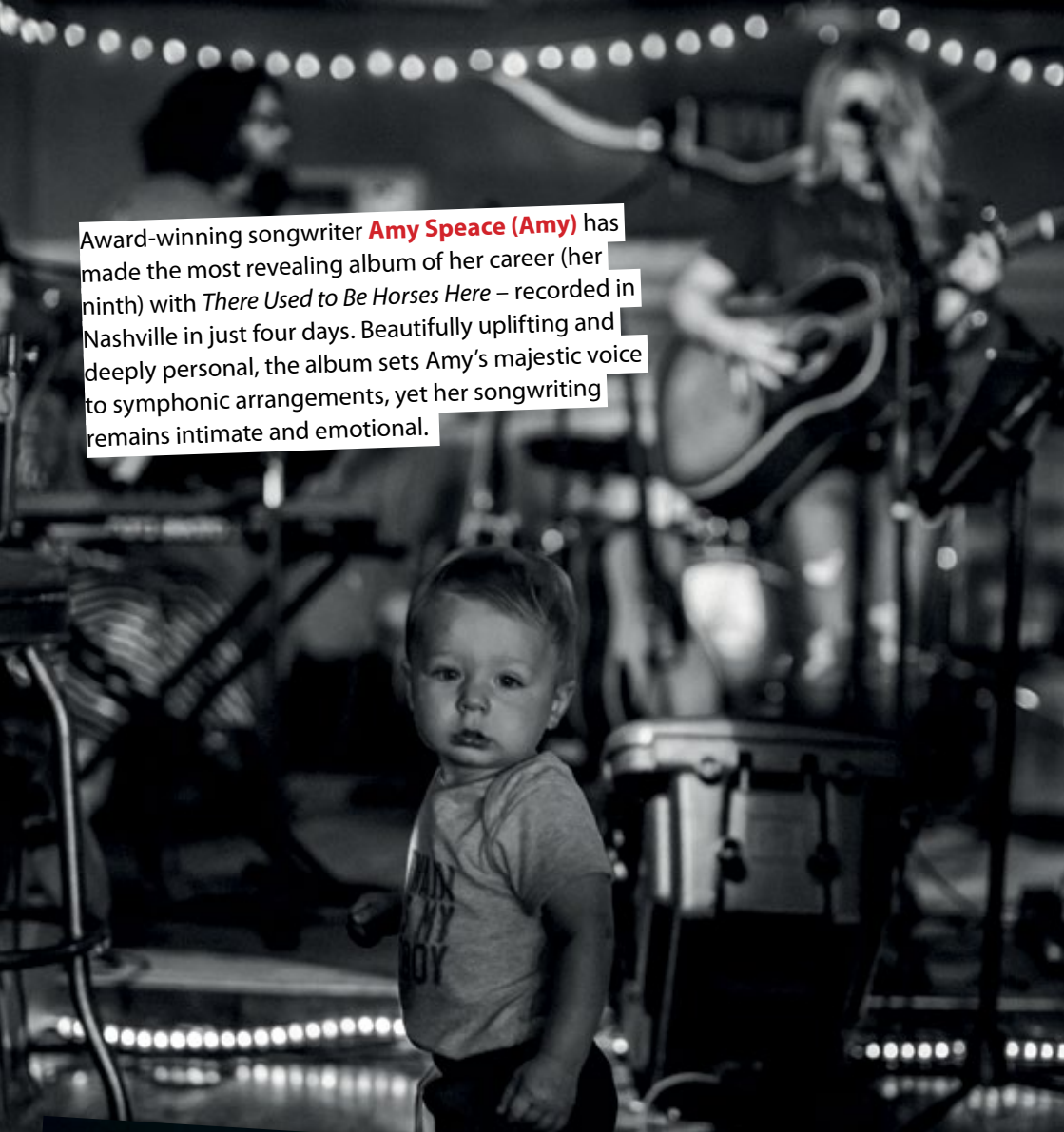
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My mum is a rock star

By Monica Costa

Musicians are my favourite people to interview and to be around. Here I give you four incredible mums who have fulfilled their dream to become rock stars. Glasgow singer (now London-based mum) **Melanie Masson (Mel)** shot to fame on ITV talent show The X Factor back in 2012, after a heart-rending, roof-raising performance of Janis Joplin's Cry Baby. This is when I first contacted her. She has had a solo career and toured all over the world ever since.



Award-winning songwriter **Amy Speace (Amy)** has made the most revealing album of her career (her ninth) with *There Used to Be Horses Here* – recorded in Nashville in just four days. Beautifully uplifting and deeply personal, the album sets Amy's majestic voice to symphonic arrangements, yet her songwriting remains intimate and emotional.



Nini Matessi Schou (Nini) is a vocal coach, a songwriter and punk rock performer based in Denmark.

You might not know their names yet, but watch this space as they are absolutely fabulous. ▶

What first got you into music?

Amy: The family rumour is that when I was 3 I sat down at my grandmother's piano and plunked out Mary Had A Little Lamb. I studied piano until I was 16. In junior high I was given a solo in a Choir Musical as I had innate musical ability. After a summer programme for the arts during high school I decided to be a professional singer. I wrote my first song when I was 25, then I started playing NYC folk clubs and was bit by the bug.

Who inspired you to make music?

Amy: My grandmother and my teachers from high school through my adult life. Judy Collins who discovered me in 2006 and signed me to her record label inspired me to be the best songwriter I could be.

Lulu: I have always loved to sing. My father was an award-winning choirboy in Ireland and sang at home, so I went to a musical school. When my mother died, a few years ago, I struggled to find ways to deal with it. As she had been a visual artist, I began with that, doing a 2-year diploma in Art & Design. I then started to take guitar lessons (by accident really, to try and understand music better in order to help my children with their music lessons) and realised that music connected to something inside me that nothing else seemed able to reach.

Lulu: My guitar teacher, Norbert Schek. He encouraged me to sing along to the pieces I was playing. I had to stop the guitar because of joint problems but carried on singing in choirs and bands. Later, Norbert & I worked together as an Acoustic Duo, gigging and writing songs together. This then started me on my own song-writing journey, something I love and have found to be wonderfully cathartic.

Mel: I was always surrounded by music from an early age and my family was in showbusiness so music has travelled down the blood line! My musical education encompassed everything from Stax, Motown, Blues, Rock, Musical Theatre, Jazz, Classical, Pop.

Nini: I also grew up in a home with a lot of love for music. My father was a drummer for a love of jazz music. I was on stage for the first time at the age of 4 with my father's good friend, a Danish folk singer. I sang in the school and then church choirs. Later, in my teens, I started playing drums in high school but then swapped to vocals, and at the age of 17 I formed an all-girls punk rock band.

Mel: I feel connected to classic soul, rock and blues. Aretha Franklin blew my mind and really informed my musical preferences and passion. After school, I gained a degree in Dramatic Art but music was always my first and only love.

Nini: My family as well as Iggy Pop and Patti Smith along with all the wonderful people I have played with. ▶



How would you describe the music that you typically create?

Amy: When I started writing, I was listening to a lot of Kate Bush, Matthew Sweet, Tori Amos. Lately, I've been devouring Randy Newman. Because of my voice, I've been described as Contemporary Folk, but I also exist in that space between Folk and Americana.

Lulu: "Cinematic soundscapes, written from the heart". My inspiration comes from real life (either my own or people I know of or hear of on the news), so it is key to me that my songs are emotionally relatable. But I am also a spiritual person, and I want to bring that into the sound I create. My producer, Niko Tsonev, totally gets this. He & I work together creating the harmonies and multi-layered instrumentation that give my music a full, slightly ethereal feel, allowing it to transport the listener to another time and place.

Mel: My music is raw, passionate and soulful and is influenced by Northern Soul and Classic soul by Aretha Franklin, Otis Redding, Etta James, Marvin Gaye, The Rolling Stones, James Brown, Jimi Hendrix, Dusty Springfield, Tina Turner.

Nini: My love of punk rock is the main ingredient in my songs. Over time that has mixed with electronic popish stuff, experimental noise, garage, but there is always a bit of Velvet Underground somewhere in it.

Would your child say 'my mum is a rock star'?

Amy: My kid is almost 3. Whenever I sing around him he puts his hand on his mouth and says, "Mummy, no" and then he sings "Twinkle Twinkle" on his own in perfect pitch, so I know I'm in big trouble. But my 21-year-old niece thinks I'm a big

star, only because I'm on YouTube.

Lulu: Absolutely not! However, they are really proud of me.

Mel: Both my children have grown up in a very musical and theatrical family. My husband, their dad, Forbes Masson is an actor, writer, director so the kids have been to festivals and on tour with me, spent lots of time in the studio when when I was recording, also backstage with me when I was been in a musical. My son took one of his first steps onstage at The Royal Shakespeare Company when my husband was performing there. Although at home I'm just mumma, they're really proud when they watch me perform. They'd say I was a performer. My daughter did a school project recently and made me the subject, saying I was her hero. I did shed a tear or two!

Nini: No! My 15-year old son Salvo knows enough hardworking studio musicians or great musicians in independent music, to not see it as necessarily connected to stardom. He knows that my day job is teaching voice, speech and dialects to actors. But Salvo also knows that I need to make music to be happy. He has a poster of me in his room, and he explains that that is his mum as a singer.

Tell me a curious anecdote about being a 'rock star mum'?

Amy: I have had to bring my son to music conferences. In 2018, I had a showcase at the Americana Music Association Conference/Festival and had a new record about to release, so I had to go to a few schmoozy events with my manager and label, but since my husband works full time, I had to bring my 6-month-old. I put him in a sling and carried the guitar on my back and headed to my Proper Records showcase. My nanny almost didn't show up, so I was desperately looking for

baby headphones, thinking I'd have to keep him fasted to my body on my back while I played my show with my band. Ps. She showed up. He still wore the headphones.

Lulu: I was very touched when my eldest son, who was into "Grime" music at the time, asked to learn my first song "Everything You Are" on the guitar. He loves my music and that really means the world to me.

Mel: The word multi-tasking is often applied to women to right. When my son was a baby, I'd perform a set, come offstage, breastfeed him then go back on again! Also, when my daughter was 7 and my son was 5, they came on tour with me. I was, and still am, never apart from them. My husband was in a West End show and couldn't come. It ended up being just me and the kids on this brilliant road trip. We drove all over the country, literally from one end to the other and it was such an adventure. I'd be onstage and they'd sit in the wings, just a few feet away from me so I could keep an eye on them while I was performing. I'd do the show, do a meet and greet with the audience after the gig, then I'd get food for the kids, take them to the amusement park then back to the hotel. I'd often be doing interviews on the phone while feeding the kids or learning and writing songs while doing the ironing or recording while helping with homework. All mums are experts at juggling!

Nini: I remember playing Gay Pride in Copenhagen. My son was 3 and was there in the audience with his sound protection on, wanting to know where his juice box was. Between every song, he asked about the juice box, I just couldn't see what the fuss was about. He was getting frustrated that I couldn't find that juice box. In the end he got his juice box, and kept dancing. I messed up lyrics, singing "Juice" a lot, because I had that on my mind. The band was called Jukebox baby...

If you could go open a show for any artist who would it be?

Amy: Brandi Carlile. My 'pinch me' moment was opening for Guy Clark on a Texas run. As a songwriter, to sit backstage and watch Guy was my 'hit me by a bus now' gig.

Lulu: I have huge admiration for female musicians, as I think that it is a lot harder to break through as a woman in music. I would be over the moon to open for Annie Lennox, Kate Bush, Imelda May and Bonnie Raitt.

Mel: Lady Gaga, she's the real deal.

Nini: In 2004 I played a gig with my teen dream musicians, Finnish band 22 Pistepirkko, so that's done. Well, now I want Iggy Pop!

What would you be doing right now, if it wasn't for your music career?

Amy: I'd be a full-time writer and a college professor of English as well as a novelist, essayist, poet.

Lulu: I'd probably write books to help children with their mental health. I have two in skeletal form but haven't got around to finishing them.

Mel: I've never had a plan B. As crazy as that sounds, I just always knew I wanted to perform and I've been so lucky to be able to have made my living from what I love doing.

Nini: I still make music, but I don't have a music career anymore. It got pushed back by my other passion for vocal coaching. It had to make a big decision, after being told by a major record label that by contract I couldn't have kids for the next 5 years. We released the album independently and a year later my son was born.

What is the best advice you've been given?

Amy: Judy Collins once told me to just stay true to my writer's voice (and my voice). Mary Gauthier a long time ago told me that because I have my singing voice, if I came off stage and the first compliments were about my voice, then I have failed as a songwriter.

Lulu: Be authentic in everything you do. Whether it be song writing, giving a performance or even marketing yourself, always be yourself and honour your values.

Mel: Trust your instincts and don't take advice from someone you don't respect. ►

Nini: When I was 20 my wise aunt wrote to me: "Look at yourself right now. See that 50% empathy and 50% badass. Make sure to keep that as you grow older."

What advice would you have for your child wanting to follow in your footsteps?

Amy: I'd tell him first to go to college not music school. So that he can experience broader knowledge and conversations than just how to make it in the music industry. It makes for a better writer and a more resilient human. It also gives you an education and intelligence that gives you a backup plan. I'd also say, if you're going to do this, don't have a real back up plan. Just go for it. But also, be realistic. The music business these days is so crowded and it's almost impossible to cut through the noise.

Lulu: To a child I would say, if you want to be a songwriter then learn at least one instrument and try to perform wherever you can – school, open mics, anything. It will help you gauge your music with an audience and provide invaluable experience. But I also want to say to all the mums out there, now is YOUR time too. It is never too late to do something you have always wanted to do, but which you might have felt was outside your comfort zone. You have nothing to lose. DO IT!

Mel: My 11 and 13-year-old have been in films, musicals, TV and recording since they were tiny. It's a wonderful industry but a tough one so naturally we were concerned about them getting into it so young. They love performing and I'm happy for them to continue as long as it remains a fun activity. I encourage them to have other skills they can enjoy and earn a living from if and when they need to. Most importantly, they need to love every minute of it. It's a hard and precarious profession. Always be respectful and treat everyone the same. The crew, the ushers, the people who sell merchandise and programmes

are every bit as important as the director or the headliner. Trust your instincts!

Nini: Stay safe and have fun. And remember: 50% empathy and 50% badass. But that goes for life in general. No matter what he chooses to do in life.

What's next for you?

Amy: My new record *There Used To Be Horses* Here comes out on 30th April and a follow up record *Tucson* will release in October 2021. I wrote a memoir about the spiritual journey of being a mother and artist at 50 and I'm in the process of pitching it to agents. I've continued writing, maybe more than I ever have before, because I'm off the road, and I'm waiting to see what touring will be like in late 2021 and 2022. The pandemic has changed so much, but I'm still making music and releasing records.

Lulu: The video for *Circles*, and then prepping for my next release *The Bell Jar*, due out in March.

Mel: My single *SEASONS* is out now and available on all digital platforms. I have some more singles coming out followed by an album and I've just filmed a pilot for a new TV show. My kids are home-schooling at the moment so I'm helping them with that and having lots of family time. And hopefully a few date nights with my husband!

Nini: I just started writing new songs with one of my guitarists. We seem to always return to each other. But it's been slow during the pandemic, so right now I am working on lyrics.



Get ready for your next chapter...

Y'earn is a parent-to-parent marketplace to rent Baby & Kids items from people and small businesses in your community or make some cash if you have items you don't need right now.

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Coming soon: musical instruments and toys.



The Community

EARNERS (people that make money from items) Whether they need the money, space or want to help others less fortunate, they can rent items for as long as they like, and then decide to sell, donate to charity, or have them returned before their next child needs them.

YEARNERS (people that want items) Can focus on creating important memories with their children without spending endless hours researching and shopping for everything that they need. Whether they rent short-term or long-term they can save cash and help Mother Nature.

COORDINATORS (the parent version of an Uber driver) Pick up, disinfect and drop off between each parent. They help families while creating a side income.

Y'earn is on a mission to help parents create lasting memories and positive impact through convenient, sustainable, and affordable rentals. For every rental we plant trees and adopt bees, we have also partnered with charities like Great Ormond Street Hospital, Baby Basics baby bank and the Child Rescue Coalition.

Email: hello@yearn.club
Website: www.yearn.club

Read the full article on the London Mums magazine online.



ARE 'ONLINE SCHOOLS' THE FUTURE?

A New £6,000 per year Private Online School is Attracting Top Teachers and sees Sharp Rise in Admissions Amidst School Closures

January marked the start of the first term at one of the UK's first 'online only' private senior schools, costing parents just £6,000 per year in fees. Minerva's Virtual Academy has been created to combine the benefits of a private education with 21st century digital home learning. The online school has experienced a sharp rise in new admissions and enquiries with many parents taking their children out of traditional schools in a bid to avoid further disruption to their education and to benefit from state of the art remote learning.

The school's cutting-edge virtual learning platform will deliver high-quality digital education to pupils, who will benefit from interactive group lessons with a teacher and can interact and work together just as they would in a traditional classroom. The online school is also rolling out a wide range of after school clubs and co-curricular activities including art, film production and debating.

Children will enjoy the community spirit, traditions and benefits of being part of a first class private school, including whole-school online assemblies every week and one to one mentoring, which is also built into every child's day, all in a bid to bring greater consistency and continuity to what has been a disruptive year for education. The school has already enrolled its first wave of new pupils who will complete the entire GCSE and A level curriculum online, with many more set to follow as more parents look towards alternative options.

Lawrence Tubb, ex-Wycombe Abbey, is Deputy Headmaster at Minerva's Virtual Academy, and draws on more than 16 years' experience in teaching and pastoral care at leading UK boarding schools, he explained, "Combining the affordability and academic rigour of private schooling with the flexibility and accessibility of online learning, is something I am hugely passionate about. This last year has demonstrated the fundamental value of reliable, fit-for-purpose remote learning, which ensures continuity of education for children. With that all-important school community at its heart, our school encourages pupils to thrive both emotionally and academically alongside their peers, while furnishing them with the skills and resilience they need to succeed in the modern world."

The online school has focused on harnessing the latest technology to provide the services of a top private school and with a focus on community and real relationships. Fostering the development of self-study skills, pupils are empowered to work at their own pace and schedule, nurturing a culture of independence and self-reliance. The Academy also provides the traditional routines expected from a private school including regular wellbeing sessions, in-person meet ups and school trips.

www.minervavirtual.com



GUILT-FREE AND FLEXIBLE CHILD CARE

When parents are expected to homeschool, work and carry their families through a pandemic, undoubtedly, emotions run high. Léa Henry and Corinna Bordoli are on a mission to reduce that burden through guilt-free and flexible child care arrangements while supporting the creative sector which is among the most affected in the current crisis.

As many artistic projects have been halted during this time, CocoRio are doing their part to provide job opportunities in the sector. They vet, train and match amazing creatives with families to provide a smarter child care solution. "Creative sitters" as CocoRio calls them perform child care duties and share their craft with the children they care for. Think your favourite creative class, tailored to your child and in your living room (or online), your choice.

Creativity is an incredible tool to take care of the mental and physical health of children (and adults' too), and in a challenging time like this, when more time is spent indoors and less time spent socialising with peers, it can be life changing.

CocoRio cater for toddlers to teens (and babies too!) and their sitters and creative facilitators have experience with different age groups, many also speak foreign languages and have all sorts of expertise's: from acting, dance, music, to pottery, embroidery, puppetry... and more! Many of their sitters can also offer tutoring and homework support.



Although child care is exempt from all tiers and lockdown rules, we observe strict COVID-19 health and safety procedures to ensure both sitters and families are safe, while doing our part to limit the spread of the virus. We've even gone a step further by matching families with sitters local to them wherever possible to limit travel time on public transport and encourage traveling by foot, bike or car.

CocoRio is offering a smart solution for families and meaningful work for freelancers in the creative industries. If you're interested, the fastest way to book a creative sitter is to register on their website at www.cocorio.co.uk/register. You will then be able to book your chosen sitter. Alternatively, a member of their team will be in touch shortly after you register to find you your perfect match, but in the meantime, you can browse the exciting range of talents they have on their books!





The virtual global conference on Authentic Love this Spring will sort out relationships the pandemic has messed up

The coronavirus pandemic has created an enormous strain on relationships and family lawyers are predicting a post-lockdown divorce boom for 2021 across the world. To remedy the dramatic rise in separation cases as well as support singles' dating, the Authentic Love Conference aims to bring practical resources from the world's leaders in relationship neuroscience, counselling, therapy and psychology on Zoom on 10-11th April 2021.

This event is the brainchild of Thomas Westenholz, founder of Zensensa, the Institute for Relationship Intimacy, and experienced Love Coach who has supported hundreds of people looking for authentic love throughout the pandemic. During this tough year, relationships have been tested more than ever as couples got stuck together in small spaces and singles have suffered unprecedented levels of depression caused by loneliness.

The reality is 42% of marriages now end in divorce, and the average cost of a divorce in the UK stands at £14,561 in legal fees and lifestyle costs. It's certainly worth trying to make a relationship work before ending it.

Westenholz's utilises his Love-Map™ methodology based on mind-maps to visualise & declutter the mess of love into a structured and learnable skill and revolutionise our lives.

"An 80+ year Harvard study on human happiness found that the quality of our relationships is the biggest factor on our well-being and life-long happiness", commented Westenholz.

"When we are young, we might want to jump into a car and just drive but after several car crashes, we might realise that we need a driving licence. My Love-Map™ is the driving licence of relationships", added Westenholz.

The Authentic Love conference is the accumulative knowledge of relationship research over the last 30 years into Emotionally Focused Therapy, neurobiology and neuroscience.

Leading experts including Dr Silvina Irwin & Dr Krista Jordan will present components of the love-map and will showcase why some relationships fail and others succeed.

The Authentic Love conference gives us a clear, easy and practical way to learn the skills of intimacy.



Booking details: Upon registration at www.zensensa.com, attendees will be sent a zoom link by email.



A MAGICAL BEDTIME SAFARI



As your little one snuggles down for bed, let "A Magical Bedtime Safari" poem ease them gently into sleep. Quietly creeping through the trees, they will discover lots of sleepy animals along the way – crocodiles, giraffes, hippos, zebras and lions – but shhh!... Be careful not to wake them up!

The journey would be even more fun if your little one could find the animals from the book on their very own Slumbersac sleeping bag! If you like this idea of not only reading the poem from "A Magical Bedtime Safari" but also exploring it on the sleeping bag, you can order the sleeping bags with feet or the standard sleeping bags in SAFARI design to go with it here: www.slumbersac.co.uk

Our SAFARI Summer Sleeping Bag with Feet are innovative designed:

- Feet covers with a non-slip sole so children can walk around safely on slippery surfaces. They also keep children's toes warm and toasty
- Sizes 70cm and 80cm feature poppers for quick nappy changes

All our summer sleeping bags in 1 Tog are slightly padded – suitable for warmer weather & room temperatures between 18 – 24 degrees.

Our sleeping bags come in four different togs/weights. The tog or weight of a baby sleeping bag determines how thick it is and therefore how warm it will keep your kids during the night. The higher the tog rating (weight) the warmer the sleeping bag and the lower the tog rating, the cooler the sleeping bag.

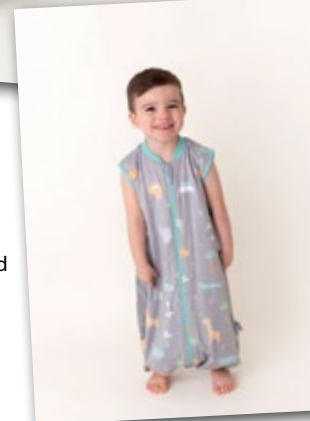
Slumbersac's award-winning sleeping bags with feet are fantastic for active toddlers as they start learning to crawl and walk. The design offers them the freedom to move around, reducing the risk of them falling over, while still enjoying the comfort of their sleeping bag at bedtime.

Summer Baby Sleeping Bag in 0.5 Tog are the safest way for babies to sleep – no additional blankets or covers required. Our baby sleeping bags are designed in a way to allow lots of room for leg movement and do not restrict or straighten baby's legs. At the same time, they keep babies calm and safe and limit the risk of overheating.

- High quality zip fastening with protective zip cover for easy nappy changing
- Size 18-36 months is adjustable (110cm when extended/90cm when folded)
- 0.5 Tog, completely unpadded – suitable for hot summer months & room temperatures 24+ degrees

Our baby sleeping bags and sleeping bags with feet are made of 100% jersey cotton outer fabric and inner lining. They are rigorously tested and certified according to Oeko-Tex Standard 100.

We hope our products help your little one, and you, have a better and more relaxing night's sleep!



10 REASONS TO VISIT TUSCANY

By Rita Kobrak, London Mum now living in Tuscany, Villa Radicata

If lockdown has given you and your family cabin fever and you long to be out and about with your children, book your dream family-friendly Villa and head out to the Tuscan sunshine. Here are 10 reasons to visit Tuscany.



CHILDREN

For Tuscans, children are VIPs and will always be adored, cherished and fussed over, whether snotty-nosed, having a tantrum or crying.

I remember being in a restaurant when my son was crying and the next minute the owner had taken him out of my arms and whisked him off to the kitchen to count potatoes so that we could enjoy our meal. Children are given extra bread in the bakeries and sweets in the supermarket.

FOOD AND WINE

If being cooped up in lockdown has made you adamant to try out new things, how about Truffle-filled pasta, Chestnut cake (Castagnaccio), Savoury chickpea flour cake, Panzanella Tuscan bread salad, Cantucci almond biscuits dipped in Vin Santo sweet wine, Pecorino cheese

and a variety of hams and salamis to name but a few. Most of the famous Italian wines hail from Tuscany – the reds such as Brunello di Montalcino, Morellino di Scansano, Chianti and the whites such as Vernaccia and Vermentino.

ADVENTURE

The latest craze Sup Yoga (Yoga on a Paddle Board) was demonstrated on ITV's Bradley and Barney Walsh: Breaking Dad, and can be done in magical Canyon Park, complete with kids' forest and ziplines. Hike in the Tuscan hills, paraglide in Garfagnana, windsurf on the Versilia waves, kayak on the Arno, horse ride across the spectacular Tuscan countryside.

CULTURE

In Florence, the Leonardo Da Vinci Museum has interactive inventions you'll be able to explain to your little ones, or in my case which my children explained to me! Try out the Multimedia Time machine experience or visit the Galileo Science Museum. Ride the Carrousel at Piazza della Repubblica and taste the best ice cream in Cafe Vivoli.

GROTTOES & CAVES

Hiding within Tuscany's mountains are stunning cave systems, with stalactites and stalagmites. Seek out the grottoes in the Garfagnana area. Visit the Carrara



Marble quarries, famous for a very prestigious customer... Michelangelo! He got the marble here for his famous Statue of David in Florence.

KNIGHTS AND CASTLES

Visit magical Anghiari, the whole town looks like a castle. Come in October

for the Medieval Festival and mingle with locals in medieval costumes! Nearby San Sepolcro has its own Palio horse race. Hunt out the ghost of Countess Matilda in Poppi castle, close to Arezzo. She is said to haunt the castle after she was buried alive in the tower.



BEACHES

My favourite beach is Castiglione della Pescaia, dotted with many campsites with child-friendly facilities. However, be warned, Italians all flock to the beaches in July and August, which become crowded, and they book their deckchairs and umbrellas well in advance.

SHOPPING

From designer brands to local products, don't forget to leave room in your suitcase for Tuscan specialities like leather, ceramics, marbled paper and wooden toys.



VALUE FOR MONEY

Food, shopping and entertainment are at a fraction of UK prices and without the crowds. For example, The Poppi Wildlife Park near Arezzo is only 8 euros/adult, 6.50 euros/child.

FAMILY FRIENDLY VILLAS

Family-friendly villas such as Villa Radicata in Caprese Michelangelo near Arezzo could be your perfect home-from-home experience. Great for families as you can do day trips to various attractions and then relish coming back to your private villa, to sip an aperitif whilst watching the fire flies flitting across the garden and have a mouth-watering Tuscan dinner cooked for you by our local chef. Villa Radicata is a restored farmhouse with stunning lake and mountain views in the tranquillity of the Tuscan hills, within easy reach of sightseeing attractions. 5 bedrooms, 4 bathrooms, 2 outside dining areas, private fenced pool, garden with jungle gym and table football, plenty of games to keep kids entertained and your very own pizza oven. Catered meals, wine tasting, pizza/pasta making lessons, yoga, massages, Italian lessons and babysitting can be arranged. Self-catering weeks or Yoga and Cooking Retreats available.



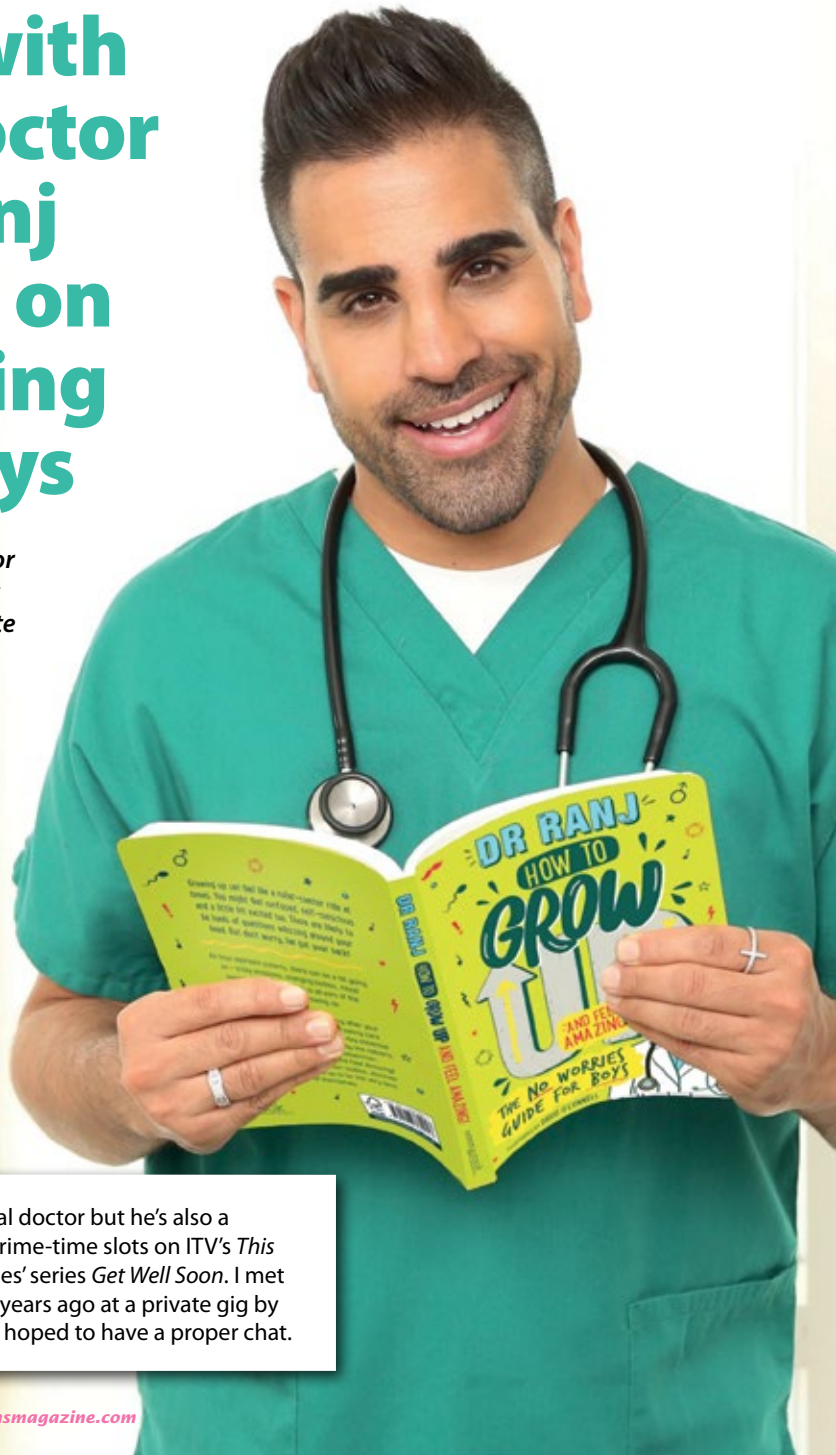
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0044 7983821282 (WhatsApp) or 0039 3495018679
10% discount for LondonMums
Follow us on Instagram: @tuscanfamilyholidays or
FaceBook: Holiday in Tuscany – Villa Radicata**



10 minutes chat with TV Doctor Dr Ranj Singh on bringing up boys

London Mums' editor Monica Costa meets the nation's favourite doctor, Dr Ranj, to discuss how parents can help teenage boys grow up happy, healthy and confident

Dr Ranj Singh is a real doctor but he's also a medical expert on prime-time slots on ITV's *This Morning* and CBeebies' series *Get Well Soon*. I met him in person a few years ago at a private gig by Collabro and always hoped to have a proper chat.



I love your book *How to Grow Up (and Feel Amazing!): The No Worries Guide for Boys*. I live with a hormonal male teenager and this is the perfect book to leave in his bedroom hoping to fill the gaps left by my education particularly sex education.

I completely understand how some conversations are tricky for parents and carers. I've tried to make things a bit easier for you! It's so important to encourage children to talk but there are always going to be gaps in those conversations so if my book helps fill those gaps then I'm delighted.

We've all been teenagers but now that we are parents we struggle to understand them. In the book you help boys understand the world around them and their changing bodies. How can parents cope with hormonal teenagers and their ups and downs? It's a very difficult time for us mums and dads out there and we would need one of your manuals too.

Ha, maybe a complete guide for parents needs to be on my list to write! I wrote this book to educate and empower any young person that picks it up. I want it to be the companion that you can turn to for reassurance about anything that is happening in your life, and that helps you learn how to deal with it. It's like a non-judgemental friend who can allay your fears and advise you on how to make things better. I want the reader to feel happier, more hopeful and inspired to dream and be better. I make a specific point of echoing my own life mantra in it: dream big, work hard and be kind. Those are words I have lived my own life by and they have helped me immensely, so I hope others will find them valuable too.

I've also tried to make it as relevant to as many people as possible. I don't want anyone to feel like it doesn't consider, understand or mention them. That's why we talk about sexuality and identity as well as biology, puberty and everything else. And you'll see from the illustrations by David O'Connell that there are people of every background, body shape and culture in there. This book is for everyone.

My advice to parents is that they too should read the book. As adults we can forget what it feels like to be a young teen and we need to try and throw ourselves back to the feelings we experienced. That's easier said than done though and the best advice I can give any parent is to create an atmosphere where your children can talk if they need to. Try and answer their questions and above all else, support them. Growing up is such a confusing time for young people and even more so at the moment when they are unable to do "normal" things like seeing their friends at school.

During childhood parents go through ups and downs. While very young children are very attached

to them but then as soon as they reach the age of 13, they don't want their parents anymore. And mums and dads are suddenly devastated by this. What would you recommend parents to do to learn how to bond with their teenagers in this phase of their development?

It's so important we do our best to understand our children and the easiest way to do this is to talk and spend time together. I know that's easier said than done sometimes but a chat over your evening meal, watching a film together and taking an interest in what your child is doing can make all the difference. It's also important to remember that your child is developing into an adult and you need to respect their personal space. It's only natural that you want to know what they are up to all the time, but you have to remember they are growing up and need time on their own just like you do.

You are such a great role model for children out there for so many reasons. How were your teenage years?

I'm quite honest about my growing up in the book – about the highs and the lows. It wasn't always easy, and I wish I had a resource like this to turn to when I felt like no-one understood what I was feeling.

There is nothing in this book that I haven't either gone through myself or dealt with in my professional career, so in that sense it's all first-hand and coming straight from the horse's mouth! I want the reader to feel like they can trust me and the information I'm giving them. I've been there. I've seen it or felt it. I've come through it. And I'm here to help you do the same.

Authenticity was really important to me. That means you'll also hear about my own experiences and struggles growing up: my mental health challenges, how I discovered and accepted my sexuality, the ups and down of my relationships with my brothers, my struggles with my weight and self-confidence, and also how I got better at studying and learning to achieve my dream of becoming a doctor.

***How to Grow Up and Feel Amazing* by Dr Ranj Singh, illustrated by David O'Connell and published by Wren & Rook is out now.**



Vital First Aid tips for parents!

Keeping your loved one safe

Unfortunately, children are extremely likely to become injured from some form of accident at home.

One of the most distressing elements is that most of these accidents could have been prevented.

We would never advocate wrapping your child in cotton wool. However, basic safety precautions, plus skills to help, will make a difference. Although most injuries are minor, it's critical to know what to do if an accident or injury is more serious.

1/3 of parents have had to rush their child to hospital at some point.

- Every day, more than 30 babies and toddlers are treated in hospital because of a scald from a hot drink.
- 15 young children are admitted to hospital daily because of poisoning
- Each year, around 27,000 children aged 5-14 are admitted to hospital after a fall.

Why are first aid skills so important?

Prompt and appropriate first aid saves lives, prevents minor injuries becoming major ones and can reduce the amount of pain and scarring a child suffers. It can also give you peace of mind that you would be competent helping in those first vital minutes.

3 of the most common medical emergencies

Choking

For a baby:



For a child:



Burns and scalds

Prompt first aid can dramatically reduce pain and scarring.

- 1 Remove loose clothing covering the burn.
- 2 Treat the burn immediately under cool running water for a full 20 minutes.

- 3 Reassure your child and keep the rest of them warm and dry
- 4 Phone an ambulance if the burnt area is large, the skin is broken or blistered, or if the child shows signs of shock

Never touch the burn, pop blisters or put on any creams.

Head injuries

Babies and children often bang their heads and it can be hard to assess how seriously they are hurt.

If your child becomes unconscious or won't stop crying, complains of head or neck pain and isn't walking normally following a head injury you should call 999 or 112 immediately.

If it is a minor head injury:

- 1 Apply a wrapped ice pack or instant cold pack to the injured area for 10 minutes.
- 2 Observe your child carefully for the next 24 hours. If you notice any worrying signs get medical help immediately.
- 3 It is perfectly ok for your child to go to sleep (so long as they are not showing any signs of concussion and there is no risk of confusing tiredness with losing consciousness) Check repeatedly for anything unusual (twitching limbs or disturbances in colour or breathing)

Trust your instincts and always seek medical advice if you are worried

Written by Emma Hammett for First Aid for Life. Award-winning Covid-secure first aid training tailored to your needs and importantly. It is strongly advised that you attend a fully regulated Practical or Online First Aid course to understand what to do in a medical emergency. Please visit <https://firstaidforlife.org.uk> or call 0208 675 4036 for more information about our courses. First Aid for life provides this information for guidance and it is not in any way a substitute for medical advice. First Aid for Life is not responsible or liable for any diagnosis made, or actions taken based on this information.



Spring Gifts



Great Rivers of the World book
Spend hours navigating Great Rivers of the World, a vibrant, fact-filled illustrated book that blends geography, history and culture.
RRP £14.99
Available from www.prestel.com



A Magical Bedtime Safari book and sleeping bag combo by Slumbersac
A beautiful jungle poem that comes in handy at bedtime. The journey is made even more fun and interactive when children find the animals from the book on their very own SAFARI Summer Sleeping Bag with Feet. The practical pyjama includes a non-slip sole so children can walk around safely on slippery surfaces. Each bag features poppers for quick nappy changes.
Available at www.slumbersac.co.uk



Sleep, Cat, Sleep! book
Make going to bed fun for everyone with this charming, interactive book that sees a disgruntled Cat just trying to sleep!
RRP £6.99
Available from www.prestel.com



Hippychick Cellular Baby Blanket
Made from 100% cotton, handpicked and crafted in India, the open weave cell construction of the blanket traps air which helps keep your baby warm in winter and cool in the summer.
RRP £15.95 – Free Delivery over £35
Available from www.hippychick.com



Nixplay Smart Photo Frame 10.1 inch (Wi-Fi)
Nixplay's smart digital photo frames can connect you with your friends and family by sharing photos of your most memorable experiences in the best possible digital photo displays. The memories we capture in our photos and videos are a large part of what lets us connect. This digital photo frame is the perfect gift especially during periods of isolation. While style and functionality take the forefront thanks to the frames' elegant designs, the security is just as innovative and robust.
RRP £169.99
Available at nixplay.co.uk – Nixplay frames are sold both directly from localised country websites, as well as on Amazon, with regular deals and discounts available to customers.

Toy Trends

WHEN SCHOOL AND HOME TURNED INTO ONE SPACE

Every January, London Mums look forward to visiting Toy Fair, the biggest and most important event on the toy calendar where thousands of toys makers, retailers and media gather together at Olympia in London to decide what's hot and what's not in the toy market.



This year, as with so many other events, Toy Fair was sadly cancelled. So we asked Julia Minchin, Founder of Hippychick.com, a toy and gift distributor and retailer for the 0-5 age group to give us her predictions for 2021.

'Lockdown as had a significant effect on our sector, and it look like it will do for some months to come as parents across the world battle to juggle home schooling with home life. Throughout the Pandemic, we've noticed that parents have been looking for toys that fulfil several different criteria. Not only must they offer educational benefits for the user, but they also need to satisfy particular requirements for carers, too. What we are seeing is high demand for toys that encourage free play, without the need for too much intervention from an adult who is almost certainly having to multi-task. But they also need to be toys that don't invoke parental guilt. Sitting a child in front of the telly may keep them quiet for a period of time, but a toy that encourages them to interact with it and use their imagination and creativity is far more likely to aid healthy development in their children.

When you're stuck in doors in an urban environment, in a block of flats with little outside space, it's difficult to find ways to encourage children to burn off excess energy. Toys that will help provide children achieve their daily exercise goals inside as well as out, but which won't damage furniture, or your little one, in a tight space area will be big business. Our Happy Hopperz range which are lightweight and inflatable offer an ideal solution, and they won't cause tears and tantrums – even if they happen to be ridden over a sibling's foot!

Toys that can be folded up when not in use we predict will also be in demand, as parents become less willing to compromise on the style of their home in order to accommodate their children's playthings. Toys that arrive in minimal packaging, can be folded up easily and tucked away out of sight when not in use are going to be big sellers going forward.

The Scandi look continues to be a popular theme in interior design. And we see this as a continuing trend in the toy sector. Toys that are sustainable, well-designed, stylish and crafted from natural materials not only look appealing against the backdrop of a Scandi designed room but are also infinitely 'instagrammable' – an increasingly important element affecting a parent's purchasing decision.

To find out more about Hippychick toys, visit www.hippychick.com

Happy Hopperz will help children burn off excess energy in small spaces.

Well designed, sustainable toys with a Scandi look will be a continuing theme for 2021.



Toy Wish list



Ozbozz Light Up Unicorn Scooter

Magical creatures still abound this year and this award-winning scooter from Ozbozz has light up wheels and folds flat for easy storage. All Ozbozz products for the outdoors can be seen on www.ozbozz.co.uk

RRP £24.99

Available from Amazon and other toy retailers www.amazon.co.uk



Ozbozz Unicorn Pogo stick

Spring into Spring with this fabulous Unicorn pogo. All Ozbozz products for the outdoors can be seen on www.ozbozz.co.uk

RRP £24.99

Available from Amazon www.amazon.co.uk



Hunny Bunny Stacker

The perfect toy for little ones 9 months and over. The captivating, beautifully designed stacker rings teach babies problem solving skills, while the friendly bunny character can develop emotional intelligence and motor skills.

SRP £12.99

Available from Jojo Maman Bebe www.jojomamanbebe.co.uk/



Ozbozz Neon Plastic Skateboard

This satchel skateboard is 57cms long and available in multi coloured bright neons. Skateboarding is now an Olympic sport which is all the excuse they need to practise! All Ozbozz products for the outdoors can be seen on www.ozbozz.co.uk

RRP £14.99

Available from www.thetoyshop.com

20 Dreams Card Game
Encourage your family to talk about their feelings by playing 20 Dreams. A card game that inspires creativity and increases emotional intelligence with hilarious storytelling. Give your dreams an airing and get to know each other better, play today.

RRP £14.99

Available at www.play20dreams.com





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