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# Learning & Enrichment

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HANDS-ON LEARNING

## Winter workshops and classes

By ELIZABETH COLOMBINI  
AND BRIAN KLUEPFEL

It's officially the mid-winter doldrums: kids back at school, the holidays done and dusted, the sun setting at dark-thirty, and spring still feeling impossibly far away. Yet buried beneath your inner couch potato is a creative soul itching to get out and do something — something that breaks the spell of doom-scrolling and replaces it with real, live human connection.

So how do you kick-start the year and perhaps discover a hobby that lasts beyond winter? We looked around northern Westchester and nearby for hands-on experiences that engage the senses and nourish curiosity.

Whether you're looking to learn a new craft, connect with nature or explore culinary creativity, there's plenty to occupy your hands, heart and mind. You might observe a bald eagle, fancy up pottery for your home or dig your hands into dough to create baked goods. Here are a few local ways to get started.

### Breadmaking at LMNOP Bakery, Katonah

There's nothing quite like the aroma of a fresh-baked loaf emerging from the oven — a warm, carbohydrate-rich wonder ready to be devoured. Being part of the breadmaking process draws participants deeper into this sensory experience of kneading, shaping, watching and waiting. At Katonah's LMNOP Bakery, that magic happens in just a couple of hours.

Participants can make sourdough or brioche in LMNOP's workshops. Founder

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## Why play matters

### Local early-childhood educators explain

By AMY SOWDER

At the Boys & Girls Club of Northern Westchester in Mount Kisco, two little girls packed sand into an orange mold. One 3-year-old's fingers dug into some kinetic sand, grabbed a handful and let it ooze from her fingertips.

"No, no more!" said the girl holding the mold. "No more?" asked the other girl. "No, no more. I want a little bit." "Little bit?" asked the other girl, and removed sand from the orange mold.

This kind of play, without adult correction or established goals, frees children to learn through experience and curiosity. It helps them hone their language, problem-solving and social skills. And there's less space for it in today's world, with the technology at our fingertips and the cultural shift from impromptu outdoor play with neighborhood kids to prearranged playdates.

"Play in early childhood is how kids learn, how they develop, how they communicate," said Nicole Crispinelli, PsyD, a school psychologist who has worked in Westchester County for the last 10 years. "It really encompasses everything they do — how to talk, interact, problem-solve. It's how humans interact with the world."

We want the child to be able to experiment with the things in front of them."

— Dr. Nicole Crispinelli, school psychologist

Emily Bly, a licensed clinical psychologist and director of Psychology Partners Group of Westchester in Chappaqua and Hartsdale, defines play as "engaged behavior that is led by the child — it is spontaneous, it is not results oriented or focused on any kind of final product."

What play is not, Bly said, is anything passive like television or screen engagement, or anything adults assign to children with predetermined outcomes.

### Building language through conversation

"Play improves language by permitting children to practice grown-up concepts and expressions," Bly said. When children play house, they use bigger words and more advanced vocabulary they've heard from their parents. "They also practice serve and return patterns which develop both receptive and expressive language."

Alana Pudalov, director of wellness at Boys & Girls Club of Northern Westchester, said play offers children who struggle with expression "an entry point, to feel like they belong, they matter and the words evolve in time."

Through imaginative play with dolls or other characters, children learn new vocabulary and develop narrative skills while describing their feelings.

### Problem-solving through trial and error

"Problem solving is one of the most fundamental aspects of play and one of its greatest developmental benefits," Bly said. When a child builds a block tower and it falls, they're experimenting and learning. "Based on their experience, the 'data,' they might try a different approach to solve the problem."

Crispinelli emphasized the importance of letting children struggle. "There's a tendency for a parent not to want their child to struggle," she said, "but they're learning." When a 2-year-old's block tower tumbles, learning cause and effect might be more valuable than a parent swooping in to explain the rules of stable construction.

"We want the child to be able to experiment with the things in front of them," Crispinelli said.

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## It's never too late: Music schools welcome adult students

By LAURA SCHILLER

For most adults, the day begins and ends the same way: busy. After work, errands and family responsibilities are handled, evening hours often slip by scrolling on a phone or watching something online before bed.

But there's another way to spend that time: making music. Whether it's learning a new guitar song, returning to the piano or singing in a group, music offers creative fulfillment, mental stimulation and stress relief. Local music schools say adults of all ages are rediscovering — or finally pursuing — their musical side.

### Music making is a skill, not a gift

Eugene Song, founder of the Mount Kisco-based community studio Green Room Music, said he frequently meets adults who doubt their musical ability before they ever touch an instrument. "I'm not musical" or "I don't have a musical bone in my body," he noted, are common refrains, examples of the negative self-talk that keeps many from even trying.

"People have this idea that the ability to play music is some mystical gift granted by the universe," Song said. "Sure, there are some Stevie Wonders



in the world, but for most people it's a craft, something you practice and learn."

Adult lessons at Green Room Music are designed to fit real life, with flexible scheduling and realistic expectations. Still, beginning anew (or again) can feel uncomfortable.

"Being reduced to an absolute be-

ginner can be hard," Song said. "Adults forget what it feels like to start from scratch, and how much patience that takes."

When adults push past that discomfort, the rewards can be deeply personal. Song recalled a woman in her mid-60s who returned to the piano after not playing since early childhood, motivated

by the idea of surprising her grown children.

"During the holidays, she quietly walked over to the piano and started playing 'White Christmas' and 'Silent Night,'" he said. "Everyone reacted with, 'Wait, since when do you play piano?' It became this beautiful moment she could share with her family."

In addition to private lessons, Green Room Music offers a pop-up chorus for adults, bringing singers together to perform familiar pop songs in four-part harmony. No auditions — you're in.

For more information, visit [greenroommusic.com](http://greenroommusic.com).

### Music for body and mind

At the Mount Kisco House of Music, Director Eric Legato said adult students are a vital part of the school's community, ranging from former childhood musicians to complete beginners. Piano, he noted, is especially popular, and you don't need a grand Steinway taking up your living room to get started. Compact, space-saving keyboards make it easy for anyone to begin playing.

"Piano offers the most instant gratification," Legato said. "A lot of adults still remember how to read music, and that helps them rebuild their skills fairly quickly."

But progress isn't only musical. Legato described working with a guitar student in his 70s who is rebuilding hand strength and dexterity after surgery.

"Music is physical," he said. "Sometimes we're helping with motor skills and confidence, too."

Adults come to the school for many reasons: to jam casually, to feel more

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# Play matters

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**Social skills in action**

That kinetic sand negotiation — “I want a little bit” — demonstrates how social skills are embedded in play.

“Sometimes it can get messy and sometimes feelings can get hurt when our friend doesn’t share the crayons, but this is where kids learn to adjust, to practice flexibility,” Bly said. Children learn the impact of kind words versus harsh words, and through experience, they learn to compromise.

Pudalov said play creates opportunities for asking for help and negotiating roles and expectations. Devin Pucci, wellness supervisor at the club, added that adults don’t need to over-teach. “They will learn through experiencing it — explore, experiment, curiosity.”

**The screen time challenge**

“There is no thief of joyful play more powerful than being watched and corrected,” Bly said. “What most inhibits play is criticism or goal orientation.” Screens are another enemy — kids engaging passively with algorithmic content that doesn’t challenge their exploration.

Bly’s practice advocates a “wait until 8th” approach for smartphones and recommends establishing well-defined time windows when screens are available.

Crispinelli, also a mother of three young children, noted the importance of boredom. “When I make a conscious effort to say we have no plans today and we’re staying home, I find they come up with new things to do,” she said. “When you think about creativity, generating ideas and resiliency, finding ways to occupy yourself is an important skill to learn.”

Christopher Beaudreault, director of programming at the Boys & Girls Club, observed the cultural shift that has reduced impromptu outdoor play. “Gone are the days of kids roaming the streets on their bikes, playing ball outside. I don’t see kids playing outside in my neighborhood like I played growing up.”

When it comes to toys, Crispinelli said the best ones allow interaction across ages. These include blocks, magnetic tiles, dolls, dress-up clothes, creative art supplies. “Look for toys that are vaguer, that can be used across many ages and genders.”

Pudalov notes that parents often join activities at pickup at the Boys & Girls Club, learning from observing how staff model play. “Parents love being a part of it,” Pudalov said. “They can get materials and bring it home.”

“It happens organically,” she added. “We’re planting the seeds.”



NATALIA DEGIULIO PHOTO  
Nicole Crispinelli says unstructured play is crucial for learning and development.



KAZ SHEEKEY PHOTO  
Play should be spontaneous and not designed for specific outcomes, according to Emily Bly.



AMY SOWDER PHOTO  
Free play, according to childhood development experts, fosters curiosity and learning through experience.



AMY SOWDER PHOTO  
Morning play is an important activity at the Boys & Girls Club of Northern Westchester.



AMY SOWDER PHOTO  
A table filled with materials for play at the Boys & Girls Club.

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## 2026 SUMMER CAMP GUIDE

# From canoeing to coding, local options abound

By AMY SOWDER

While barreling through their children’s activities amid the wintry mix, many parents are already looking to fill the hotter times ahead — and that means finding the right summer day camp for their children.

Most local camps open their doors June 29 and run through mid-August, with registration for many programs already underway or opening soon. Parents should start their search early. Several camps already have closed registration for multiple age ranges, and popular specialty programs like circus and hockey camps typically fill within weeks of opening registration. Also, early bird pricing can offer significant savings.

### Check safety records

Parents should ask the right questions when evaluating camps, said Vinny Alexander, arts director and director of summer programs at The Harvey School in Katonah. “Summer camp should be fun, but safety has to be a major contributor to the camp day,” Alexander said.

Ask camp operators about their yearly evaluations and inspections by the New York State Department of Health. Inquire about staff qualifications and camper-to-counselor ratios.

“Our camp has small groups of up to 12, with at least two counselors for each group,” said Rina Slavin, the head of the camp committee for Goldens Bridge Day Camp.

Don’t stop at safety checks. “It sounds silly to say, but parents should read all emails and communications from their camp’s office,” Alexander said. “Also, meet the staff. If you are sending your child to a new program, meet the people who will be there overseeing the program.”

Parents should also gather required documents early, as most camps need current immunization records signed by a doctor, and some require proof of school enrollment.

When you dig into all the options, you may find a camp offers more than you think. Even traditional camps offer less traditional activities, like at the Boys & Girls Club of Northern Westchester in Mount Kisco. “Besides swimming, arts and other physical activities and games, we offer continuous learning with our summer enrichment program, STEM, trip options and summer homework time,” said Chris Beaudreault, director of programming.

### Traditional day camps

#### Kiwi Country Day Camp, Carmel

Activities: American Red Cross swim instruction, 25-foot rock climbing wall, 450-foot Skyryder dual zipline, archery, arts and crafts, ceramics, jewelry making, boating and water slide. Special features: Express bus transportation avail-



able; extended morning and afternoon programs.

For more information, visit [kiwicountrydaycamp.com](http://kiwicountrydaycamp.com).

#### Breezemont Day Camp, Armonk

Activities: Swimming, creative arts, adventure, athletics, nature, science, sports. Special features: Lunch and round-trip transportation included; free early care from 7:30 a.m. (includes breakfast) and aftercare until 6 p.m.; half-day program available.

For more information, visit [breezemontdaycamp.com](http://breezemontdaycamp.com).

#### Goldens Bridge Day Camp

Ages: Pre-K to 8th grade. Fees: \$1,870-\$3,300 depending on age group and session length. Registration: One of the earliest sign-ups, which opened Dec. 1; registration has already closed for the upcoming summer session. To register for 2027 summer camp, look for upcoming dates on [goldensbridgedaycamp.com](http://goldensbridgedaycamp.com).

### Specialty camps

#### Harvey Summer Camp, Katonah

Location: Katonah. Dates: June 29-Aug. 7 (closed July 3). Ages/Grades: grades 1-9 for day camp; specialty camps vary Hours: 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Registration: Rolling admission when space available. Programs: 14 different options including Day Camp (grades 2-4 and 5-8), Art Camp (grades 5-8), Circus Camp (ages 7-16), AI Camp (grades 6-12), Robotics Camp (grades 8-10), NY Film Academy (ages 10-15), Basketball, Volleyball, Hockey, Cross Country, Girls Flag Football and Baseball Skills camps. Special features: Camps run by professional educators. Contact: (914) 232-3161 ext. 161; [harveyschool.org/harvey-summer-camp](http://harveyschool.org/harvey-summer-camp).

#### The Grit Ninja Summer Camp

Location: Pleasantville. Dates: Weekly camps from June 29 to Sept. 4 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.; preschool camp for almost 2 weeks in June. Includes: obstacle courses, Lego challenges, art projects and high-energy games like Gaga, daily snack, Friday pizza parties. Fees: \$380-\$695/week plus tax. Contact: (914) 747-1115; [thegritninja.com](http://thegritninja.com).

#### Katonah Art Center Camp

Ages/Grades: Art & Imagination Camp for 3 1/2-5 years old, Kids Camp



PHOTOS COURTESY BOYS & GIRLS CLUB OF NORTHERN WESTCHESTER

for grades 1-5, Teen Camps grades 6-12. Dates: Vary and weekly options are available between June 29 and Aug. 28. Hours: Morning, afternoon and full-day options available. Bonus: On Wednesdays the ice cream truck comes! Contact: (914) 232-4843; [katonahartcenter.com/summer-camps](http://katonahartcenter.com/summer-camps).

### Town Camps

— Mount Kisco Recreation Day Camp. Location: Leonard Park Dates: June 29-Aug. 7 (no camp July 3) Hours: 8:30 a.m.-3 p.m.; extended day until 5:30 p.m. Registration: Early bird opens March 3 at 9 a.m. in person; no online registration. Requirements: Must purchase pool pass; proof of kindergarten enrollment required. Contact: (914) 666-3059; [camp@mountkisco.ny.gov](http://camp@mountkisco.ny.gov).

— Bedford Recreation and Parks day camps. Locations: Parks and pools in each hamlet of Katonah, Bedford Hills and Bedford Village. Programs: Tiny Tots (ages 3-5, half-day), School-Aged Day Camp (entering K-grade 6), Teen Get-A-Way travel camp (completing grades 6-8, Monday-Thursday for 5 weeks). Registration: Early registration with discount through March 25; regular registration begins April 24. Contact: [bedfordny.gov/257/Summer-Camps](http://bedfordny.gov/257/Summer-Camps).

— Lewisboro Parks & Recreation day camps. Dates: June 29-Aug. 7 (no camp July 3). Locations: Lewisboro Town Park for Main Event and 6th Grade Hybrid campers, and John Jay High School; various locations for Teen Treks; to be de-



termined for Little Explorers. Registration: Begins March 2 for Little Explorers and Main Event campers. Programs: For Little Explorers, ages are pre-K (must be 3 before June 30), entering kindergarten or entering 1st grade in fall 2026; Main Event ages are entering grades 2-5 in fall 2026; 6th Grade Hybrid; and Teen Trek entering grades 7-10. Contact: (914) 232-6162, email: [parks@lewisborony.gov](mailto:parks@lewisborony.gov).

— Pound Ridge Recreation Department day camps. Location: Town Park Programs: Tots Camp Ages 3-4, must be 3 by the start of camp and potty trained; Day Camp, for grades K-6. Dates: Tots Camp, 9 a.m. to noon Monday-Thursday for four weeks, July 6-30; Day Camp, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. June 29-Aug. 7, for six weeks (no camp July 3). Registration: early bird pricing and resident registration begins Feb. 2-April 30; early bird pricing and non-resident registration begins March 2 and continues through April 30. Contact: email: [poundridgecamp@gmail.com](mailto:poundridgecamp@gmail.com) and [townofpoundridge.gov/recreation/springsummer-information](http://townofpoundridge.gov/recreation/springsummer-information).

### Summer Adventure Camp

Location: Boys & Girls Club Northern Westchester, Mount Kisco. Grades: preschool through 9th grade. Dates: seven weeks from June 29-Aug. 14. Includes: snacks and lunch prepared by Ladle of Love, with early care from 7:30

a.m. and extended care until 6:30 p.m. Activities: swimming, sports, arts and crafts, digital arts, and field trips to water parks and museum visits.. Registration: Check website, email newsletter or social media in early March for details. Contact: (914) 666-8069; [bgcnw.com/summer-adventure](http://bgcnw.com/summer-adventure).

### Mount Kisco Child Care Center

Duration: eight-week summer program. Grades: Children who have completed kindergarten through 5th grade. Highlights: Campers harvest crops and hold weekly farmers markets, swimming at Leonard Park Memorial Pool and field trips every Wednesday.. Includes: breakfast, hot lunches, and snacks with free early morning drop-off and extended day pickup. Contact: [mkccc.org](http://mkccc.org).

### North East Westchester Special Recreation

Description: A six-week day camp program for children with developmental disabilities, ages 4 through 20 at St. Theresa School, Briarcliff Manor. Includes: swimming, field trips and other activities with at least a 1-to-3 camper-to-staff ratio. Note: Bring lunch; bus transportation is at central pickup points. Registration: New campers must do an intake interview between March and May. Contact: (914) 347-4409 or [northeastpecialrec.org](http://northeastpecialrec.org).

## Preschool prep: how to find the perfect fit for your child

By KAYLA GARRITANO

From a child’s first steps to their first words, there are many milestones they take as you watch them grow. But at times, especially for new parents, there can be a lot of stress that comes with it. Take schooling, for example. You want to make sure that your child gets the best care, and that starts at early education.

With so many options, choosing a preschool can get overwhelming. How do you know which one is right for your family? The Recorder asked local experts for their help.

### Get a close-up look

First and foremost, it’s essential to determine what you need from a preschool.

“If you are looking to enroll your child for the first time in a preschool, start by making a list of the things you are looking for in a program and decide which things may be flexible and which are nonnegotiable,” said Vera Correa, director of Bright Beginnings Preschool in Yorktown Heights.

After you’ve completed your list, it’s essential to get a sense of the school and base your decision on direct observation and gut feeling.

“Go see the school, you need to walk in the door,” said Jeannine DiBart co-owner and director of Katonah Playcare Early Learning Center. “You can ask your friends, go on Facebook, but it’s important to go in and see how you feel. Your gut is the best measure.”

Erika Glick, owner and director of Katonah Village Kids, shared a similar thought: “Parents should pay attention to how a program feels when on their tour. Are the children engaged and happy? Look for a school where teachers understand child development, respect each child’s individual development and create an environment that is both nurturing and challenging.”

You also want to make sure the school practices its philosophy.

“Philosophy and mission statement should be articulated,” said Gail Porter, co-owner



and director of Katonah Playcare. “Preschool is a very specific time in a child’s life, so it’s important to know how to educate young preschool-aged kids.”

Equally as important is a shared philosophy among staff.

“When the adults are supported, respected and aligned in their approach, classrooms feel purposeful and joyful,” said Glick. “Children thrive in environments such as these.”

“Children will always benefit from the socialization preschool offers, as well as learning to trust and be cared for by adults other than their parents,” said Correa

### Ask the right questions

Getting answers to important questions are vital as they illustrate a shared respect for how young children develop and build skills they’ll take with them long after preschool.

Some of the most important factors to research are the school’s teacher-to-child ratio and compliance with New York state guidelines.

“You should inquire about accreditation or licensing, such as OCFS and NAEYC,” advised Correa. “Some other things to consider include curriculum; there are many different types of programs, and your child may thrive in one type of preschool or another. Are you looking for a child-led, play-based program or something more academic? Are you partial to Montessori?”

However, experience also plays a big role, and it’s not always about looking good on paper.

“Sometimes parents get stuck on the qualifications of the teacher. But really, the experience is important,” said DiBart. “Also, how they interact with their children. There’s a balance between background and whether this person is the right fit to be a preschool educator. They can have the right degrees, but don’t know how to relate to children.”

Parents should also ask the “hows” and “whys” preschools do things, not just “what” they do. Ask questions like, “Why do you ap-

proach learning this way?” “How do you support social-emotional development?” “How do you handle challenging behaviors?”

Another important question to ask, according to preschool directors, is what steps do they take to vet hiring. Also, ask about staff turnover; a low number should indicate that the school is a place the teachers want to be.

“Love what you do; it comes across to parents, kids and staff,” said Porter. “Do it because it’s something meaningful.”

### Get the bigger picture

While every school is different, it’s important to understand their core values. More so, it’s important to find a place that means something to you and your family.

“Find a place that you feel connected to,” said Dibart, “Especially when it’s a first child, it’s a family experience.”

Not only will your child be making friends and connections during their time at preschool, but so will you as parents.

“Look at it as a bigger decision than where you’re just leaving your child,” said Porter. “It makes for an experience that you can’t replicate.”

Added Glick. “Find a preschool that feels aligned with your values, and remember that the right environment isn’t about pushing children ahead. It’s about giving them a strong, confident foundation to grow from.”

Be on the lookout for schools that involve you as parents in their community and how they communicate. For example, some may have newsletters talking about what’s going on during the day, or send photos home with brief descriptions. These are things that can help start conversations with your child at the end of the school day and spark home-to-school connections.

Correa added, “Finding the right preschool for your child can be overwhelming, but with a bit of research and the right resources, it doesn’t have to be a painstaking process.”