

PEN PAPER DREAMS

THE MAGAZINE

Stories & Poems

WRITTEN BY YOUNG VOICES IN OUR WORKSHOPS



PenPAPER
Dreams

Interviews with Aparna Kapur (author), Simran Lekhi (Kidstack), Swati Jain (ShimmerTots) & Dr. Sumitra Meena (pediatrician) and Short-Takes with Sulata Mitra, Monaa Aashish, Surbhi Dhall & Tanya Khubchandani

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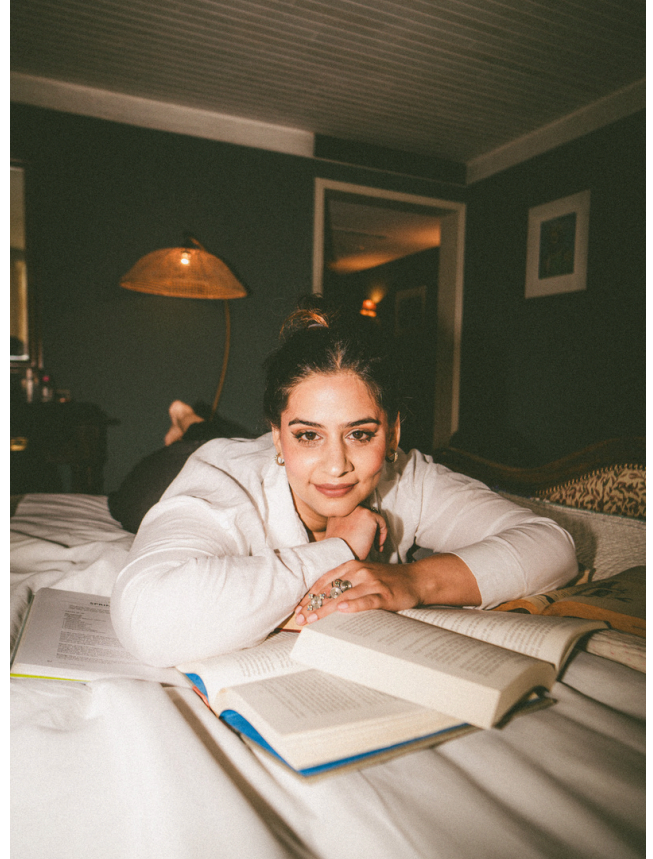
FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the first edition of Pen Paper Dreams' digital magazine! This issue brings together stories and poems written by children who participated in our creative writing workshops - not for marks, not for competitions, and not for correction. These pieces were created in spaces where imagination is encouraged, emotions are allowed, and there is no "right" way to sound.

Children naturally think in images, feelings, questions, and stories. Yet as they grow, much of their writing becomes shaped by what will get full marks and what sounds "correct." This edition is dedicated to the other side of writing - the side that builds voice, confidence and curiosity.

Inside these pages, you'll find worlds invented from scratch, poems that hold big feelings in small lines, and characters who exist simply because a child dared to imagine them. You'll also find conversations with parents, creators, and professionals who believe that nurturing creativity is not about pressure, but about permission.



Though this edition focuses on young writers, Pen Paper Dreams' magazine is not limited to one age group. Future issues will explore writing, reflection, and creative expression across different stages of life because the need to express ourselves does not end with childhood.

Thank you for making space for young voices. When we listen to how children see the world, we remember how to see it more honestly ourselves.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Amanda Sodhi'.

Amanda Sodhi
Founder, Pen Paper Dreams

WRITING BEYOND GRADES

The children whose work you see in this edition did not sit down to become professional “writers.” They weren’t trying to impress, win or be evaluated. They were given something rare – a safe space where writing didn’t have to be “correct.”

In most classrooms, writing is tied to marks, “right” and “wrong” answers, and clear outcomes. But, outside of performance, writing serves a different purpose. Writing is a tool. Much like movement can help someone process emotions or music can help someone focus, writing helps children organize thoughts, understand feelings, and discover their imagination. The words on the page are not the final product, but rather a pathway.

The pieces written by the children featured in this edition were created in our four-week online creative writing program, **Writing for Joy, Not Grades**. There was no ranking, comparison, or model answer. Instead, there was room to imagine magical worlds, create characters, write poetry about feelings, and try new forms of expression – simply for the joy of it – without any fear of “getting it wrong.”

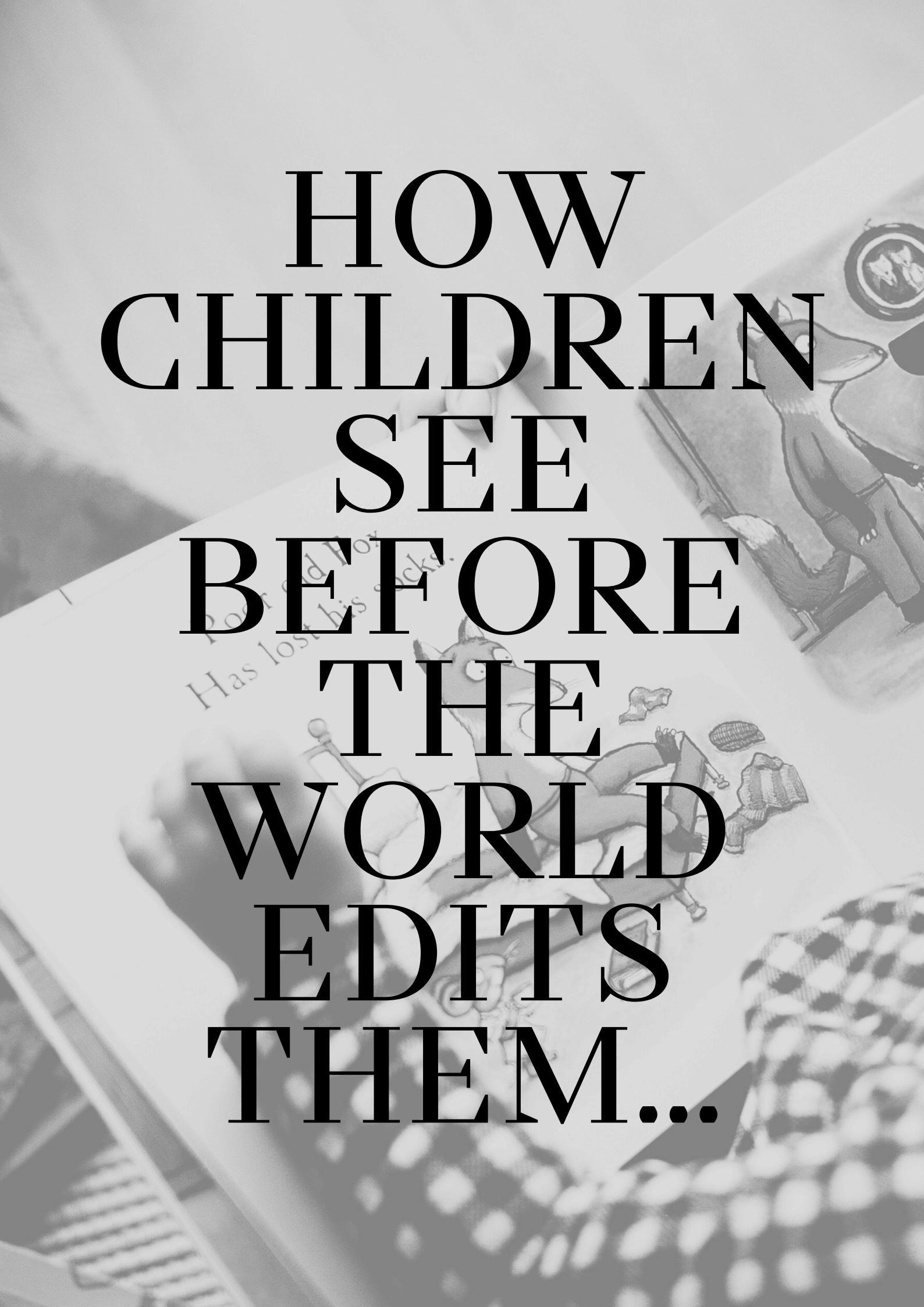
Even when authorship is not the aim, writing genuinely matters. For children, it builds confidence through creative freedom – the freedom to imagine, think independently, and trust their voice without constant judgment. For adults, writing often becomes something else – a way to slow down, make sense of inner noise, and find clarity.

The value is not in producing “polished” work – it is in what shifts internally through the act of writing itself. We write not only to create stories, but to create space – space to pause, reflect, understand ourselves a little better, and move through the world with more awareness than before.

This quiet shift is where the real work happens.



HOW
CHILDREN
SEE
BEFORE
THE
WORLD
EDITS
THEM...



Happiness is reading books
In my home’s cozy nooks.
Be it fantasy, fiction, fact, and whatnot,
Add some soft cushions - all else is forgot!
The sound of Friday’s home time bell,
As my joyous classmates and I yell.
Waking up late for the next two days,
And having fun in all sorts of ways.
Watching on TV, with bated breath -
A nail-biting match’s overs of death.
Snuggling with parents late at night,
Keeping warm and cuddling them tight.
The satisfying click of the last piece being placed -
Be it a humongous Lego or the hardest puzzle
I have faced.
The unforgettable little moments I make,
Chatting with my school friends during the break.
Playing Scrabble on a holiday with my parents
on the board -
This is the time when I never get bored.
The cool evening air rushing on my face,
When I laugh and with my friends I race.
Laughter echoing in the park,
As we run around, happy like larks.
All of this is true happiness for me -
Doing these things, I am happy - and always will be.



Shaswat Lath



Shaswat (10) is a cheerful boy who loves solving puzzles and taking maths, science, history, and geography quizzes. A voracious reader with a growing love for poetry, he enjoys both analytical challenges and creative expression.

At the Airport

We went on a trip to Meghalaya. After a 3-hour-long flight, we finally arrived at the airport and began collecting our luggage. You won't believe what happened next.

I accidentally took the wrong suitcase - it looked exactly like mine. When I opened it, I was shocked. It was full of gold! I quickly understood it was not mine. And, since my favorite writer is Geronimo Stilton, I had to put my detective hat on and investigate.

While I was waiting for two of my friends, I heard people shouting my name. It was them! But, here's the strange part - their bags also got exchanged and theirs were full of gold too! Now this was definitely a mystery. We had to investigate.

We opened the bags carefully and examined the gold coins. Each coin had the same mark. I was sure I had seen them somewhere. Was it on a flag? We quickly searched through our photos looking for clues. Finally, we found it! The same mark was on one of the flags we had seen during our trip to Meghalaya. It

belonged to one of the tribes from the region.

We decided to act immediately and took the next flight back to Meghalaya and arranged a meeting with the king of the tribe. We didn't take the whole bag of gold with us - only one gold coin - because we couldn't trust anyone with something so valuable.

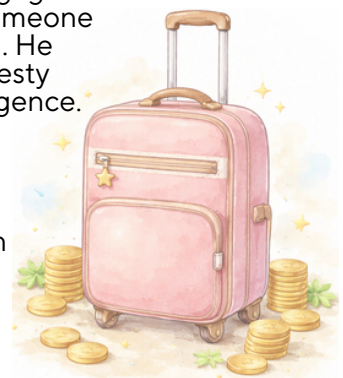
We showed the coin to the king - he jumped with surprise.

"How do you have this coin?" he asked. "It is only entrusted with three people from the tribe - the Queen, our General and me."

We told him the entire story about what happened with our luggage. The king quickly realized someone had been cheating him. He thanked us for our honesty and admired our intelligence.

As a reward, he invited us to stay at his royal villa anytime we were in Meghalaya again. And, believe me, it was the best stay ever!

Once again, the three friends rocked and had lots of fun!



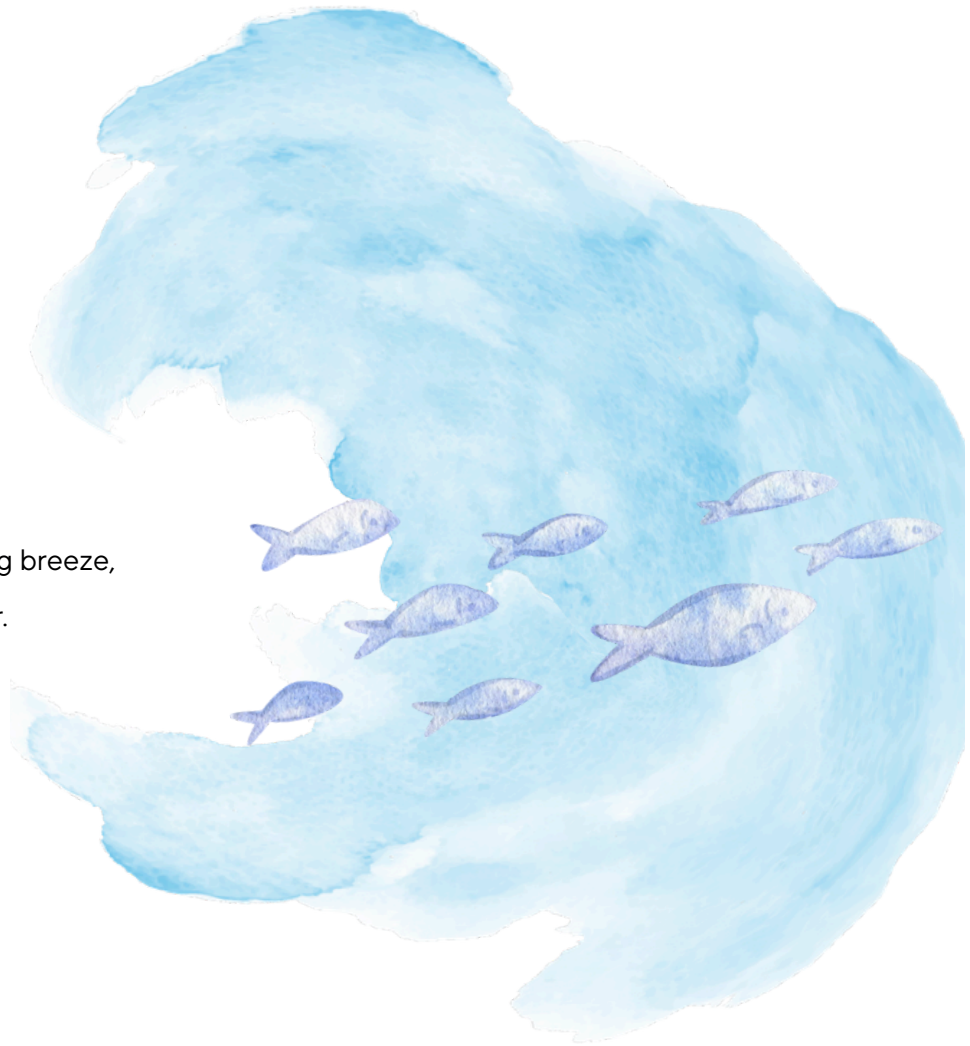
Ira Gawde



Ira (7) loves pets and has a playful imagination. She enjoys painting, dancing, reading detective novels, and pranking her mom and dad. When she grows up, she wants to be both a teacher and a mom.

Water

Blue like the sky,
Yet salty to the tongue,
Smelling like the morning breeze,
Slippery to the touch,
Soft like waves to the ear.



Sresht B. Kadiyala



Sresht (13) is curious and loves learning new things. Along with his studies, he enjoys activities that challenge his mind and body - playing the drums, video games, football, and chess. An avid reader, he loves fantasy fiction, especially Rick Riordan's books, and enjoys spending time with friends and family.

The Windmaster's Invention

Once upon a time, there was a man named Mr. Windboggler. A jolly man, he was mostly found with a smile on his face. He was young for a windmaster - only 25 years old - but wise beyond his years.

Ever since he was a little kid, Mr. Windboggler had wanted to make the world a better place by purifying the air. He believed that since air helped human beings live, purifying it would make them live longer. He had everything - power tools, research, all the necessary calculations, and the best spirit. But, even after spending day and night trying new methods and using huge power tools, he had not yet succeeded.

Each time he thought he had done it, he failed again. Despite being unsuccessful, he never gave up. But, at this point, he was a little tired, so he went to bed because he felt sleep was the best way to fix a bad mood.

One day, when he was starting to lose hope, he bumped into a man at a bus station who turned out to be a very experienced windmaster. Mr. Windman, a 52-year-old, tall, thin scientist, had the same dream as Mr. Windboggler. It was fascinating to learn that he had over 36 years of experience!

They had seats next to each other on the bus and began talking. At first, they discussed boring things like politics. But then they began sharing their dreams - that's when the real conversation began.

Soon, they became best friends. Mr. Windboggler became Mr. Windman's disciple and they worked hard day and night, using new materials and discovering new chemicals of all kinds in different colors - some icky and gooey, others powdery or liquid in consistency.

They travelled from country to country, finding new materials to create non-pollution-causing sources of energy their machine could use.

Finally, the moment of victory - their reward for never giving up - had arrived. They did it! They created a tool so powerful it could purify all the air in the world with just the touch of a simple button.

It was a heavy, but laptop-sized technological mechanism with chains and belts to keep everything in place. Bolts and nuts secured the most important parts. It had red, green, blue and yellow lights, each flashing 0.57 milliseconds apart. If you held it, you might think that it was scrap metal, but you were actually holding the world's most powerful wind purifier. They named it THE WINDMASTER 3000.

But, there was one slight problem - they had not tested it yet.



"Umm, perhaps we should run a few tests," said Mr. Windboggler.



"Yes, we should run a few tests just to be sure," Mr. Windman agreed.

They ran eight tests, each one coming out perfectly fine. Feeling confident, they finally did what they wanted to do for years - they pressed the big red button.

Soon, the room became more transparent. The machine was working. But, they stepped outside to be sure - and the air was actually clean! People were taking huge breaths, as if they had never breathed clean air before.

The machine was so powerful that nobody could ever pollute the air again. Over time, the Earth became clean once again, and everybody lived long, healthy lives - all thanks to two like-minded people who shared the same vision and never gave up.

Neev Motwani



Neev (10) has a natural love for numbers and stories. Math is his playground - logic and problem-solving come effortlessly to him. Beyond numbers, his creativity shines through his love for humorous books, where imagination and intellect come together.

Yay Phuket

The island was covered in blue ocean and land,
With beaches, palm trees, and resorts all around.
I could hear myna birds happily whistling,
And the gentle, soft sound of waves lapping the shore.

Tropical scents mixed with exotic spices and grilled meat -
The smell was ambrosial!
The warm sand cushioned my fall,
And the ice-cold water slipped through my toes, then withdrew again.

Phuket was filled with exotic foods,
Spices blending together.
Each taste was a delicious surprise;
The meat was soft,
As my teeth ripped through it.



Ayesha Syal



Ayesha (10) loves writing and reading. She received a Gold Award in the junior category of The Queen’s Commonwealth Essay Competition 2025 - a prestigious global contest with over 53,000 entries. Her poems and articles have also appeared in national youth publications such as The Hindu Young World and The Junior Age.

The Talking Cactus

Once upon a time, a girl named Grace lived in a bungalow. She only had two friends, and one of them was Ron. They were besties who had a great time together - until one day Ron left the city to settle somewhere else.

Sad, Grace locked herself in her room. But she was soon surprised to see her cactus waking up with a yawn.

"Such a nice sleep," the cactus said. "Oh, hi! Nice to meet you, Grace!"

Grace started taking two steps. "Who are you?"

"Oh, me? I am a talking cactus; I have come here to meet you - and maybe visit your school!"

"Ok, but this is a miracle. I have never seen a plant talk."

"I understand. But don't worry - I won't harm you."

"Fine," Grace said. "You look cute!"

"Thanks! Now let's enjoy."

They became friends and happily played board games. But, the next day was Monday - a school day.

"Come on, cactus! Let's visit my school," Grace said that morning.

"Ugh. Is this the time to wake up?"

"Yeah, I wake up at this time every day."

"Oh, so unlucky. We plants wake up whenever we want and just sway in the wind."

"Ok," Grace laughed. "Right now, rather than differentiating between your life and mine, we need to rush to school."

Grace quickly hid her cactus in her backpack while her mom drove her to school. When they reached, she said goodbye with a sigh of relief, thankful her mom didn't catch them though she looked suspicious. Of course she doubts every teeny-tiny thing - that's just how her parents were.

When they were walking in the corridor, Grace's friend Tina walked up.

"Hey! Who are you talking to?"

"Oh, me... I can't tell," Grace hesitantly replied.

"Why? Aren't we friends?"

"Ok... I am talking to a cactus."

"A cactus?" Tina was in disbelief. "Who talks to a non-living thing?" She walked away smiling. She didn't believe Grace.

Grace checked her bag and was relieved the cactus was still inside.



"Thank God you were in my bag. If you were outside, I can't imagine what would have happened."

"I know," the cactus agreed.

Grace was sweating as she entered the classroom, but somehow she managed to keep the cactus a secret all day.

When she reached home, Grace's mother said, "Come on - it's your sleep time."

"Hey, it is my afternoon sleepy time," Grace told the cactus. "Make sure you are hidden. Good night, cactus."

"Good night, Grace."

Grace thought the cactus was safe in her backpack and fell sound asleep. But the backpack was kept on her study table near a humongous window. A cat jumped in and mistakenly knocked the backpack to the floor.

Grace woke up at a loud thud and quickly checked her backpack. The pot was completely cracked.

"I think I can't live anymore," the cactus said weakly. "I am dying."

"You can't die," Grace panicked. "You are my only friend. Let me think..."

Then she had an idea.

"I'll plant you in my garden!" She rushed outside and gently planted the cactus in the soil, where there was sunlight, water and fresh air.

"Thank you, Grace," the cactus said. "You saved my life."

"Oh, it is nothing," Grace smiled. "Don't worry."

Ever since then, Grace visited the garden every day to talk to her cactus. And, their friendship never ended!



Inaya Bindra



Inaya (8) loves sketching, writing stories, singing, and discovering new things. An energetic and imaginative child, she believes every day should be filled with fun and creativity. When she isn't playing, she's dreaming up new stories and bringing them to life through words and drawings.

Dear Ancestors, Please Forgive Me

It was half past eleven on a Saturday morning. I was wandering aimlessly through the busy streets of the city, alone and still a newcomer to this strange new planet of a place. I was simply looking for ways to spend time with myself.

That’s when the smell hit me.

It rushed in with a strong wave of nostalgia and instantly made my mouth water. The aroma was uncannily familiar - just like my grandmother’s special chicken casserole. That single thought carried me forward, following the mouth-watering trail until I finally realized where it was coming from.

That is the story of how I ended up standing outside Kentucky Fried Chicken for the very first time.

I stared at the enormous red eatery with suspicion. I noticed the air vents installed all around the building - clearly responsible for luring innocent passers-by like me. To be honest, I felt slightly disappointed in myself. Had the big city really degraded my taste buds to this?

As I stood there, I imagined my grandmother throwing her heavy wooden slipper straight at my face.

Whispering a silent apology to my ancestors, I walked inside to grab brunch.



Shambhavi Das



Shambhavi (17) is deeply connected to nature, curious about science, and drawn to art and literature in equal measure. She enjoys writing short stories and poetry that blend observation, humor, and reflection.

Make Your Own Magic

I’ve had insomnia for the past two years, and tonight, something unbelievable happened.

Unable to sleep, as usual, I called my friends - Shinjini and Meher - at around 10 PM. We all live in Bhopal, India. I told them to meet me near the side wall of the Main Mall, the one that always looks a little spooky at night.

When I reached the mall, the streetlights were flickering, making strange shadows dance on the ground. My heart thumped louder with every flicker.

My friends arrived, half-asleep and extremely irritated.

“Why did you call us here at this hour?” they groaned.

I pointed at the wall.

Before they came, I had noticed something shimmering on it - written in gold glitter:

“Make your own magic.”

I read it out loud. And suddenly - swoosh!

Three golden, aeroplane-shaped tickets dropped from the sky as if the universe had tossed them down. They were made of real 24-carat gold and sparkled like tiny suns!

My friends stared at each other. I heard them whisper, “Should we... try them?”

We held the tickets together and said the phrase: “Make your own magic!”

POOF!

We were sucked straight into a hurricane.

Wind roared around us. I felt dizzy, nauseous, and weightless. Inside the swirling storm, I spotted a watch floating mid-air. On its screen, glowing letters appeared:

You have 2 hours left before your parents wake up.

Two hours of unlimited magic! And yet, such little time to explore what this magic can do.

My friends and I looked at each other and blurted out the one place we had always dreamed of - “PARIS!”

And just like that, we were standing beneath the Eiffel Tower.

My friend Shinjini exclaimed, “Wow - the Eiffel Tower is as big as 10 giraffes standing on top of each other!”

Behind us stretched a huge garden. The heavenly smell of fresh croissants and strawberry macarons drifted from a nearby bakery.

We walked through the glamorous streets, passing some of the most luxurious brands in the world - Gucci and even Louis Vuitton. Little cafés glowed with warm light. Paris was even more magical than what they showed in the movies.





On the road to the Palace of Versailles, cherry blossom trees lined the sidewalks like pink clouds. Mime artists performed, pretending to be trapped inside invisible cages. We giggled as we walked past.

At Versailles, we wandered through grand halls filled with glittering chandeliers and enormous paintings of ancient kings and queens.

After that, we went to the Louvre Museum. It was extremely crowded, but we pushed our way through until finally, there she was - the Mona Lisa.

Meher whispered, “Wow. We’re actually seeing the Mona Lisa in real life.” After a slight pause, she added, “But, it isn’t that

extraordinary like how people describe it.”

By afternoon, hunger hit us. We ate creamy, delicious quiches at a nearby restaurant. Then, we treated ourselves to warm, chocolaty macarons from a bakery. They melted in our mouths. It was the exact treat I was craving at that moment!

Suddenly, I heard a faint voice calling from far, far away:

“Swara... wake up! It’s time for school!”

My eyes flew open.

I was back in my bed.

It had all been a dream. But, goodness, what a dream!

I’m suddenly craving macarons. I sure hope my mom makes them for breakfast.

Swara Vats



Swara (10) is a joyful, fun-loving girl with a warm, caring, and empathetic nature. She loves travelling and exploring new places. In her free time, Swara immerses herself in books, expresses herself through singing and dancing, and stays active on the badminton court. She brings positivity wherever she goes with her vibrant energy and kind heart.



CHILDHOOD
IS SHAPED
BY THE
VOICES
AROUND IT -
AT HOME,
IN STORIES,
IN PLAY, AND
IN CARE.

In Conversation with APARNA KAPUR

What's a story someone told you as a child that you have fond memories of?

I was fortunate that my childhood was filled with storytellers. My grandmother would tell us stories as she fed my cousins and me from the same plate, rotis disappearing because we were too engrossed to realize how much we were eating and didn't want her to stop. My parents both effortlessly wove tales whenever we wanted them. My sister would make up stories about what our parents were doing whenever I felt scared. My cousin would tell us stories of her favorite films in great detail. When I look back at my childhood, it seems inevitable that I would become someone who uses stories to make sense of the world.

What's the earliest story you remember writing or inventing? When did you realise you have the gift of storytelling?

Calling it a gift makes writing sound more mystical than it is. I enjoy making things up and am very fortunate I get to do it as a job. Maybe the earliest stories I invented were during games I played as a child. My sister and I would pretend our bed was a ship, or the cupboard a cave, or the swing a horse - and it would suddenly transform the whole world into something fantastic. I also wrote a lot of letters as a child, and that was definitely a low-key way of telling stories by writing them down.

What do you say to a child who thinks they're "bad" at writing?

I really believe that children cannot be bad at writing. If they think that, it's probably because they have been made to feel so by adults who care more about spellings and capital letters, or those who think a monster who talks in colors is too outlandish. As a child, an imagination is far more important than the actual ability to write things down - if you don't like writing, that's ok.



How can parents help kids who are more math and science inclined also create time for reading and writing?

They should not! Reading and writing - and maths and science, for that matter - are all enjoyable and enriching in different ways, but all the joy and riches are to be pursued willingly. If kids are interested in maths and science, or dance, or sport, that's differently but equally valuable. The only way parents can help kids is to enable them to find that which excites and challenges them. As long as they are curious and interested, they will be able to think independently.

Do you believe stories can make children kinder or braver?

Stories are a place where we can encounter ideas that are unfamiliar, radical, rebellious, and unconventional. Readers are able to inhabit multiple lives and explore so many ways of being, finding themselves and others in the process. Stories give us an imagination - if we can imagine what it is like to live on an alien planet, or live in a world where we can talk to trees, then we can also imagine a world that is just and a society that operates on love. And once we imagine it, maybe we can begin to work towards it.

While there are several Indian authors who write fiction for children and teens, it's still

quite a small number. Why do you think this is the case?

I think the reasons range from affordability of books, the hegemony of English-language books and major city markets, and the perception among wealthy elite adults that international literature is superior. But the hugest cause, in my mind, is that writing books is unfortunately not a sustainable source of income, which means being able to do it is a luxury - and that is an invisible barrier that keeps a lot of people out.



Tell us a bit about the inspiration for some of your books.

Although their stories are very different, both Divya (*I Won't Wash My Hair*) and Katli (*An Absence of Squirrels*) are irreverent, independent, and push back against the expectations placed on them. I like to explore what children's inner lives look like - what goes on in their minds, how they process the grown-up world around them, what makes them unique, and how they hold on to their individuality while society continuously tells them to conform.

Lastly, what are you working on at the moment?

I'm working on four manuscripts at various stages of completion, and I am working on becoming a more disciplined writer.

Aparna Kapur is an author and editor. Her recent release is *An Absence of Squirrels*. Follow her on IG at [@aparna_k](https://www.instagram.com/aparna_k).

In Conversation with DR. SUMITRA MEENA

Many parents worry their child is “lazy” or “unmotivated.” What are non-obvious reasons a child might lose interest in studies or hobbies?

"Laziness" is almost always a symptom, not a character flaw. In my experience, no child wants to fail or disappoint their parents. When they stop trying, it's usually for one of these hidden reasons:

It sounds contradictory, but many “lazy” kids are actually terrified perfectionists. They feel that if they can't do it perfectly, they shouldn't do it at all. Procrastination is their shield against the fear of failure.

Sometimes, the child wants to do the work but cannot organize the steps in their brain. They see a messy room or a math chapter as one giant, insurmountable mountain instead of small, climbable steps. They freeze, not because they won't, but because they don't know where to start.

Other times, a child has missed a foundational concept three years ago. Now, sitting in class feels like watching a movie in a foreign language. They check out to protect their self-esteem. They don't know how to treat the situation, so they retreat.

What's a daily 10-minute habit that supports emotional regulation and confidence?

I would recommend the "High, Low,



Buffalo" dinner table ritual or bedtime chat. Ask, "What was the best part of your day?" - this teaches gratitude. Asking what was the hard part validates negative emotions. Lastly, asking anything random or funny encourages humor and storytelling. This takes 10 minutes, requires no equipment, and teaches a child that their voice matters, and that it's okay to have "lows" alongside the "highs."

What are early signs of overstimulation in kids that parents mistake as “bad” behavior?

I call this "restraint collapse." Your child holds it together all day - following rules at school, sitting still at tuition - and the moment they see you, they explode. Parents think, "Why do you behave for



everyone else but act out with me?" It's actually a compliment; they feel safe enough with you to let go. Look for these signs of an over-full brain, not a "bad" kid -

The "**zoned out**" stare is when they don't respond when you call their name and look glazed over. **Hyperactivity** or **maniac laughter** is when they become loud, run into walls, or laugh hysterically, instead of being tired - their body is trying to wake up their exhausted brain with adrenaline. **Irritability** over tiny things is when their sensory "bucket" is overflowing - a sock seam feels like a knife, or a sibling humming makes them scream. Lastly, **increased need for touch** is when they seek more physical contact, rubbing their body to yours, hugging you, touching your tummy and feeling your skin.

Many parents think creativity is "extra."

Creativity is not the dessert - it is the nutrition." In the future job market, AI will do the coding and calculating. The human advantage will be creative problem-solving and empathy. A child who paints understands perspective; a child who writes stories understands people. These aren't "hobbies" - these are cognitive exercises. If you cut out creativity to make room for more tuition, you are training a robot, not a future leader.

Creativity is the gym for emotional resilience. When a child doodles or writes a story, they often process feelings they don't yet have the vocabulary to express. A child who creates learns mistakes are just drafts - this builds confidence. If they can fix a drawing, they learn they can fix a bad day. It moves them from a consumer mindset - watching content - to a creator mindset - building ideas - crucial for self-esteem.

If a child struggles with focus or restlessness, what small lifestyle shifts help?

Before we look for a diagnosis, we must look at biology. You cannot drive a car with the wrong fuel. For example, Indian breakfasts are often carb-heavy - poha, paratha, toast - causing a sugar spike and a crash right when school starts. A "**protein first**" breakfast - adding eggs, nuts, or paneer in the morning - stabilizes blood sugar and sustains focus. Nagging creates "parent-deafness."

Visual schedules like a simple whiteboard checklist help the child see what comes next. It outsources the memory work so their brain can focus on tasks.

Sunlight sets circadian rhythms. Even 20 minutes of outdoor play before homework can reset their dopamine levels better than any medication.

Lastly, what does a realistic bedtime routine look like in Indian homes?

Suggesting a 7 PM bedtime isn't realistic for Indian homes where parents return from work late and dinner is often at 9 PM.

A realistic routine includes dimming the overhead lights 45 minutes before sleep. Use warm lamps. Melatonin won't come out if the house is bright like a cricket stadium.

A predictable bedtime routine helps calm a child's body down to fall asleep fast. The biggest mistake is thinking a child has an "off switch." You cannot go from solving complex math problems or watching a fast-paced reel straight to sleep. The brain needs a "cooling down" period like a car engine. Reading or listening to a quiet story bridges that gap.

Dr. Sumitra Meena is a seasoned MD Pediatrician, baby sleep expert, and the founder of Babynama. Follow her on IG at [@holisticpediatrician](https://www.instagram.com/holisticpediatrician).

In Conversation with SIMRAN LEKHI

What's a playtime memory you'll never forget?

Growing up in the 90's meant not having access to a whole lot of toys, so we created things from limited resources around us. I remember making paper boats during the monsoon and having boat competitions where your skill of making paper boats was tested. I also remember jumping from one terrace to the other in my colony and mostly being outdoors.

What's one thing a child learns through play that school doesn't teach well?

I think schools nowadays are fully educated and prepared on how to handle children and play. They make sure not to over-provide toys - that ensures children are not distracted easily.

What's the difference between "busy play" and truly imaginative play?

Let's take a simple wooden stacker with different sized circular discs stacked above each other. Busy play will look like arranging them from small to big, then big to small, then perhaps sorting by primary colors only or least to most favorite color. Imaginative play, on the other hand, is open-ended - there is no right or wrong. A child can make eyes from the circular shapes, or maybe build four wheels of a car, or even a tree. It is about creating something totally opposite and unique from what that stacker was originally meant for.





What is unique about your toys that helps foster critical thinking and creativity? Could you share must-have gender-neutral picks?

All the toys at Kidstack are first tested and approved by my own children, which makes the brand much-trusted. I encourage toys that can be used again and again, not “one and done” toys. I follow a basic thumb-rule - is the child playing with the toy, or is the toy playing with the child? Think of push button toys and you will get your answer.

One of my all-time favorites is the wooden rainbow stacker + planks combo - the child can make several variations based on their creativity and imagination. Second would be a Montessori-inspired wooden engaging board.

What do you wish parents would stop saying about toys or play?

Firstly, I wish parents would stop saying, “show us a toy for a boy / girl.” All toys are gender neutral. A boy can play with a kitchen set and a girl can play with cars. Secondly, when parents are shown a pretend play set - a wooden coffee set or a cement mixer - they are disappointed that it can’t make noise, operate itself, or do the

actual thing. This is when we kill the creativity of a young mind. Thirdly, they over-provide for their children. While great for my business, children should be given limited toys at one time so they are able to fully play and utilize its potential. A child will get bored too easily - this is why most kids are easily distracted nowadays.

What's a 5-minute play idea a parent can try without buying anything?

Give a child some steel spoons and glasses - let them create some banter! Transfer some rajma or channa seeds from one bowl to the other. Or, hide a coin in a bowl of uncooked rice and have them find it within 10 seconds. Older kids can be given matchsticks to make shapes, do tricks and create formations. So many possibilities of simple play!

Lastly, although parenting is evolving in India, one often sees child-focussed brands targeting moms more than of dads. How can brands help reshape this narrative?

This is an age old concept where mothers are the primary care takers of a child. It will take generations to change this thought process. Having said that, powerful media campaigns to create awareness is a great tool. Encouraging dad influencers might also be a great way of getting traction on this subject.



Simran Lekhi is the founder of Kidstack (IG: [@kidstack.in](https://www.instagram.com/kidstack.in)), a brand offering plastic-free, safe toys and games that inspire creativity, critical thinking, and open-ended play.

In Conversation with SWATI JAIN

What do you think "sparkle" represents for kids - play, personality, confidence?

For children, sparkle isn't just about shine - it's about expression. Today's kids are more curious, more confident, and more self-aware from a very young age. They are drawn to jewelry as a way to express their personality early on. When a child chooses something that sparkles, they're often choosing joy, imagination, or a small way to say, "this feels like me." At ShimmerTots, sparkle is meant to celebrate individuality, creativity and endless imagination.

What's a design choice you make that adults may not notice but kids always do?

Children's jewelry has to be designed thoughtfully - it cannot simply be a smaller version of adult jewelry. Children are constantly moving, playing, and exploring. Their skin is delicate, and they immediately feel how a piece sits, moves, or restricts them.

That's why we pay close attention to construction, weight, smooth edges, and secure closures. For instance, our earrings feature a specially designed closed-back screw - an uncommon detail in children's jewelry. It protects young, sensitive skin from poking and irritation while ensuring the earring stays secure through play, movement, and daily activities.





How do you keep your products fun while also making them parent-approved?

Our designs are deeply rooted in a child's perspective - many are inspired by my eight-year-old daughter and her natural instinct for play and self-expression. These ideas are then brought to life through precise craftsmanship at our manufacturing unit. By combining sterling silver, responsible processes, and child-safe finishes, we ensure all necessary quality and safety tests are conducted before a product ever reaches a parent. This allows us to create jewelry that feels joyful to wear, while giving parents complete confidence in its safety and durability.

What's your favorite piece and the story behind it?

The glow-in-the-dark snowman. The concept came from my daughter's boundless creativity - she loves when things feel magical and come alive in unexpected ways. The snowman was designed around her favorite online character, turning it into something truly meaningful. For me, this piece reflects how jewelry can preserve the small, precious moments of childhood in a way that lasts.

If a parent is hesitant about introducing their child to jewelry or fashion, what would you say?

It's completely natural for parents to feel hesitant. Safety, comfort, and responsibility are

valid concerns. And I always say, there's no rush and no rulebook. Jewelry doesn't have to begin as fashion; it can start as something symbolic. An appropriate progression is to introduce a small, lightweight piece for special occasions, allowing the child to simply get used to wearing and caring for it. It can gradually become something the child chooses and connects with. The progression should always follow the child's comfort, interest, and sense of responsibility - not trends or expectations.

A message you'd give to children about owning their personality?

You don't have to be louder, brighter, or different to belong. Who you are already has value. The things you like, the colors you choose, the way you express yourself are all parts of your story. Owning your personality means trusting it, even when it's quiet.

Lastly, what's your favorite children's book or teen-friendly book?

I'm drawn to books that respect a child's emotional intelligence - stories that don't talk down to them or try too hard to teach a lesson. That's why I've always loved Enid Blyton's books. They allow children to get lost in adventure, form their own connections with characters, and let their imagination lead the way. Stories like these stay with children far longer because they trust them to think and feel freely.



Swati Jain is the founder of ShimmerTots (IG: [@shimmertots](https://www.instagram.com/shimmertots)), a premium kids' jewelry brand crafting hypoallergenic pieces in 925 silver and 14kt & 18kt hallmarked gold.

A grayscale photograph of a woman holding a baby, with the text overlaid. The woman is seen from the side, holding the baby against her chest. The text is in a large, bold, serif font, centered over the image.

THERE IS NO
PERFECT
WAY TO
RAISE A
CHILD -
ONLY REAL
MOMENTS,
REPEATED
WITH LOVE.

SHORT-TAKES WITH MOMFLUENCERS WE LOVE

For this round-up, we spoke with four inspiring mothers from the digital space who have built strong communities through their lived experiences of motherhood - Tanya Khubchandani Vatsa (author, wellness advocate, entrepreneur, and founder of ElixirWell), Surbhi Dhall (parenting and lifestyle creator known for mindful motherhood content), Sulata Mitra (parenting, sustainability, and lifestyle influencer), and Monaa Aashish (parenting and lifestyle creator exploring products, events, brands, and parenting stories) - to offer honest, funny, and real slices of mom life.

Most unhinged thing your child has said in public - and what you did?

Tanya Khubchandani: "Mama tells us to eat protein and then hides and has sugar." Not really - mama has the protein too, but I definitely allow myself more stress-related indulgence. I laughed it off and explained.

Surbhi Dhall: My daughter once loudly asked why a stranger had a big tummy and if a baby was inside. I apologized, smiled awkwardly, and later explained kindness and privacy to her.

Sulata Mitra: My child has always been calm and observant. He never says anything unhinged in public - instead, he quietly notices everything around him. Later, he shares his observations with me, especially if something didn't feel right to him.

Monaa Aashish: My daughter suddenly asked me when we were eating in the mall, "Mumma do you have baby in your tummy?" It felt awkward and funny at the same time. I politely told her, "No beta, I love you and you are enough for me for now," and explained it wasn't the time for a sibling.



Surbhi Dhall, IG: [@surbhi.dhall](https://www.instagram.com/surbhi.dhall)

One thing you're still figuring out as a mom?

Tanya Khubchandani: There's so much I'm still figuring out as a mom - even more so as a single mom and an entrepreneur, and small business owner. Most of all, I'm learning how to find a balance so I don't get lost in the midst of it all.

Surbhi Dhall: How to balance being emotionally available for my kids while still protecting my own energy and identity.

Sulata Mitra: Finding a little more time to balance work life and mom life. I'm still figuring out how to give more quality time to my little one.

Monaa Aashish: There are multiple things I am figuring out as a mom - my child's eating and sleeping routine, potty training. We moms stress over everything - we understand it better only when we raise the second one.



Monaa Aashish, IG: [@monaa_aashish66](https://www.instagram.com/monaa_aashish66)

SHORT-TAKES WITH MOMFLUENCERS WE LOVE

What you wish more people told moms...

Tanya Khubchandani: That they don't always have to feel like they have all their ducks in a row.

Surbhi Dhall: That it is okay to feel overwhelmed even when you love your children deeply.

Sulata Mitra: That it's okay to rest and not feel guilty for choosing themselves sometimes. Prioritizing your own joy matters - a happy, fulfilled mother is the greatest gift you can give your children.

Monaa Aashish: Moms need support - your body needs rest, and your mental health matters too.

One mom-life product you swear by - and why?

Tanya Khubchandani: My iCal - I spend more time on that than any app, just scheduling everyone's days and coordinating!

Surbhi Dhall: A good water bottle. Staying hydrated genuinely helps my mood, energy, and patience.



Sulata Mitra, IG: @thesulatamitra



Tanya Khubchandani, IG: @mommydiaries

Sulata Mitra: A high-quality insulated travel water bottle. It may sound simple, but staying hydrated throughout the day feels like a small luxury and it makes a huge difference.

Monaa Aashish: Calcium and magnesium supplements - trust me, these are game changers post-pregnancy.

A quick ritual that brings you back to yourself on hectic days.

Tanya Khubchandani: A 10-minute ritual - I stand on a vibrating plate in front of a red-light panel - lymphatic drainage with supercharged mitochondrial repair.

Surbhi Dhall: Standing quietly on the balcony, taking deep breaths, and reminding myself that I am doing my best right now.

Sulata Mitra: Stepping outside, sometimes for a short drive, sometimes simply to look at the sky. Sunrise, sunset, stars, fresh air - that brief connection with nature resets my soul.

Monaa Aashish: I like to sit and meditate.



Thank you for reading the first edition of Pen Paper Dreams' magazine.

This publication marks an exciting milestone - alongside this magazine, we're also launching the Pen Paper Dreams website, a space where you will find digital self-paced writing kits, thought-provoking articles, creative resources, and booking information for both workshops (online and offline) and bespoke coaching sessions suitable for all age groups.

Pen Paper Dreams creates meaningful writing spaces for both children and adults. If something you read here resonated with you, we'd love to stay connected.

Explore more at
<http://www.penpaperdreams.com>
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