

the modern domestic woman

December Profile

Crochet Artist
Stephanie Longoria
of Stitched by Stephanie



December 2025 MDW MAG

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



Dear MDW Family,

Every December, I feel myself returning to the heartbeat of why MDW exists. This month's issue has always been special, but this year...it means something deeper. Maybe it's the way our community has shown up for one another in big and quiet ways. Maybe it's the magic of small businesses fighting to stay creative and rooted. Maybe it's the women, always the women, who keep showing up, doing the work, and letting us walk beside them. Whatever it is, I feel it in my bones: now more than ever, we need each other.

Curating this issue felt like gathering people around a long table. Makers, writers, therapists, caregivers, dreamers...and asking them to share their wisdom so the rest of us can breathe a little easier. I love small businesses because they're built by human hands and human stories. I love local professionals because they pour their expertise back into this community with a kind of generosity that deserves to be witnessed. And I love creating this magazine because it lets me highlight both: the creativity that keeps us inspired and the mental-health tools that help us get through our days and actually thrive.

Inside, you'll find the best of what our region offers:

- Gifts crafted with care
- Articles rooted in lived and professional experience
- Practical support for your mental health, parenting, relationships, and daily life
- Cozy inspiration to make your home feel like the sanctuary you deserve
- And, always, reminders that you're not navigating this season alone

As we close out the year, I hope this issue feels like a deep exhale, a cup of something warm, and a reminder that community care is still alive and well. We're stronger when we uplift one another. We're brighter when we buy local. We're softer and steadier when we have access to real tools, real stories, and real connections.

Thank you for being here. For reading, for supporting, for believing in this mission with me. Here's to a season of holding each other up and stepping into a new year with hope.

With so much warmth and coziness,

Elizabeth Rago
MDW Founder & Editor



Tap on the cute icons to shop instantly or learn more about the product featured.

PARTNER

A MAGAZINE WORTH SAVORING & SAVING

A 65+ page, full-color MDW magazine packed with mental health resources, local recs, and soulful lifestyle inspo. Plus a thoughtful free gift every issue.

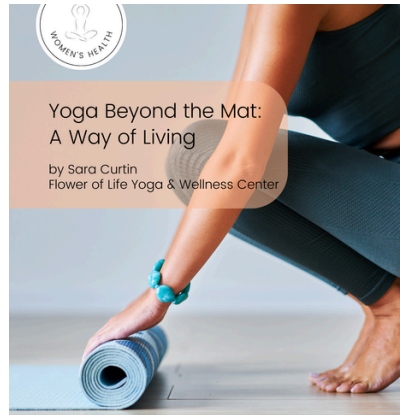
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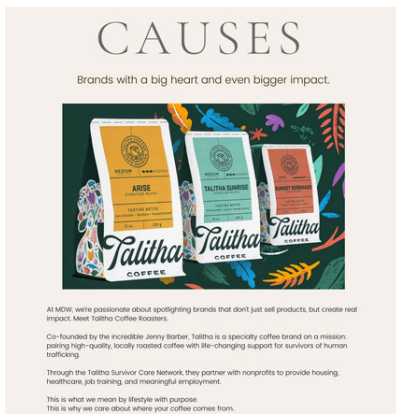
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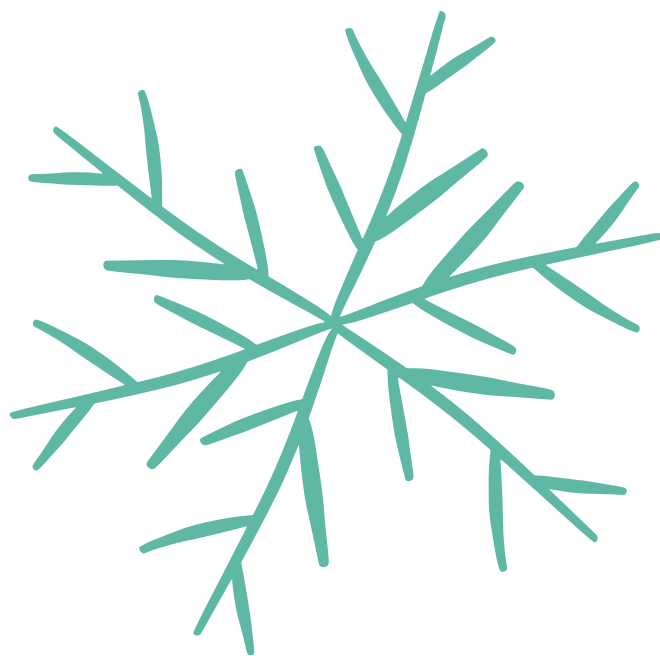
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Profile



Meet Stephanie Longoria

The first stitch in Stephanie Longoria's story began long before *Stitched by Stephanie* became a local business. It started on a summer afternoon when she was just eight years old, cartoons playing in the background, sunlight spilling through the kitchen window.



"I walked in, and my grandma was sitting by the table crocheting a doily," Stephanie recalls. "Something about the way the sun hit her hands just pulled me in."

Her grandmother spoke mostly Spanish, and though Stephanie understood, forming words was difficult. Crochet became their shared language, a way to connect without needing translation. Each loop of yarn built not just patterns, but closeness.

"Her teaching me how to crochet allowed me to learn and talk to her in a language we both knew."

Finding Peace in the Loop

As the years passed, that childhood craft evolved into something much deeper. Crochet became a lifeline for Stephanie, a form of calm, clarity, and connection to herself.

“Crocheting is part of my mental health routine,” she says. “It helps me stop overthinking and just be in the moment. There’s happiness and joy in using my hands to turn a vision into reality.”

Her favorite time to crochet is in the quiet of the afternoon or late at night, the hours when the world softens and creativity takes over. Each piece she creates is more than art; it’s a meditation.

Following the Thread Toward Purpose

Like so many creative rebirths, Stephanie’s turning point came during the pandemic.

“I started crocheting again, little plushies and animals. Soon I had over twenty of them,” Stephanie shared. “My mom encouraged me to sign up for a makers market, and once I set up my table and tent, I loved every second of it.”

That first event sparked something bigger than she expected.

“Even when markets didn’t go well, when I didn’t make sales or just covered my table fee, I didn’t stop. Every time I participated taught me something.”

Eventually, Stephanie’s consistency paid off. Selling at her local college markets, she began seeing results that validated all the late nights and rough starts. “That’s when I knew this could be real,” she says. “I had built something from the ground up.”







The Power of Plushies

Walk into Stitched by Stephanie and you'll be greeted by rows of soft, handmade plushies, each one stitched with care, color, and intention.

All our plushies are handmade with love and care and Stephanie believes what really brings a connection to people with fiber artists is the nostalgic memory of loved ones who previously crocheted, knitted, or sewed.

"They feel the soft texture of our goods and can already envision where they want to place the plush or gift it to someone they love to enjoy," said Stephanie.

"I have seen firsthand a lot of little ones picking up our creations, immediately falling in love and feeling a sense of joy and happiness once it touches their hands."

Stephanie's hope?

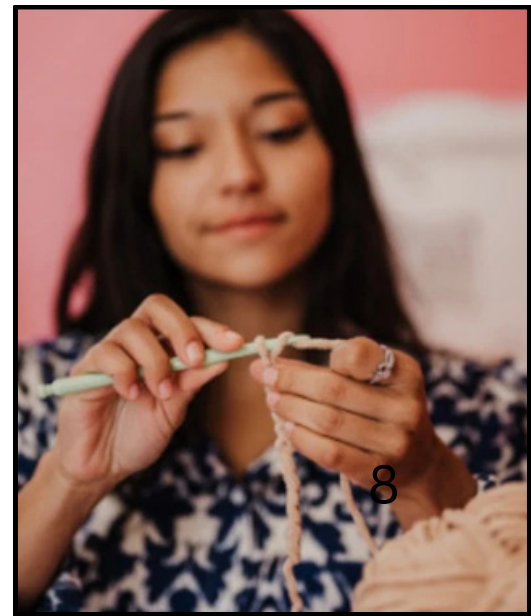
To make everyone feel that her products will bring a sense of joy and peace, and connect each person a bit with their childhood.

Building Community Through Craft

Beyond her own creations, Stephanie's passion now extends to teaching. Over the past year, she's guided others through the calming rhythm of crochet, helping students discover creativity and confidence through craft.

"They've taught me patience and understanding," she says. "It's amazing to see someone light up when they finally get it. Knowing I'm part of their creative journey is the best feeling."

For Stephanie, teaching is about paying forward what her grandmother once gave her: connection, expression, and a new way to communicate without words.



From Boardwalk to Brick & Mortar

Stephanie's business journey began at the Batavia Boardwalk Shops, a beloved launchpad for local makers and dreamers, and a location that still serves as one of her two storefronts today.

"We opened there in May 2025," she says. "That experience taught me everything, how to design layouts, connect with customers, and share my story."

The success of Batavia led to a second, larger location in downtown Geneva, giving Stitched by Stephanie room to host workshops, birthday parties, and crochet classes.

"Both Batavia and Geneva have such strong small-business communities," Stephanie says. "We wanted to be part of both. Our Batavia shop continues to thrive, and Geneva gives us the space to expand our events and connect with even more crafters."

Each space reflects her mission to offer people a peaceful, colorful place to unwind, learn, and create. "I've dreamed of having my own shop for the longest time," she says. "It shows how far we've come and how far we can still go."

Thirteen years after picking up that first hook, Stephanie sees her story as a reminder that passion is worth pursuing, even when the path is uncertain.

"When I was sixteen, I made a choice," she reflects. "I could take a chance on my passion, even if I failed, or ignore this gift and become someone I wasn't. I chose to take the chance on myself."

It wasn't always easy, but every late night, every market, and every stitch has been part of a larger picture, one of creativity, resilience, and self-belief.

"You don't have to run a full-time business to make art matter," she says. "If creating makes you happy, that's enough. Rain or shine, if you're still smiling, it's still your journey."

Where to Find Stitched by Stephanie

You can visit Stitched by Stephanie in two locations: the **Batavia Boardwalk Shops** (114 East Wilson Street), where her journey first began, downtown Geneva in the **Berry House Shops** (227 South Third Street), her newest and largest creative space, or shop online at stitchedbystephaniellc.store

Each shop is a celebration of color, comfort, and community, filled with handmade plushies, yarn, and workshops that invite everyone to slow down and create.

Stephanie's story reminds us that creativity often begins quietly with one small act of curiosity. And, when nurtured, can weave a legacy that connects generations.



Stephanie offers workshops, classes, and more at the Berry House Shops location.

Drop-in Workshop!

Stop by the beautiful Berry House Shops in Geneva and learn the basics of crochet. This beginner-friendly project is for all ages, where you can learn to crochet in just one hour.

Reach out to stitchedbystephaniellc@gmail.com for more information.

Follow SBS on social:

@stitchedbystephaniellc



FASHION



MAXI

This strapless organza floral maxi is pure romance in motion. Soft tiers that flutter with every step and a moody botanical print that turns heads without trying.

It's the kind of dress that makes you feel instantly luminous, whether you're walking a runway or slipping into something special "just because."

Effortless, feminine, and impossibly chic, it's a reminder that florals aren't just for spring, they're a whole vibe.



Image by Moments by Meli

Strapless Organza Floral Maxi

HOUSE OF 423



DREAM CLOSET BINGO



This little vintage boutique in Geneva feels like stepping straight into your own '90s and early-2000s dream closet. Babydoll tops, low-rise denim, platform wedges, and all the nostalgic pieces you forgot you loved. The curated racks from owner Marta McFadden inspired our Dream Closet Bingo card, a fun way to spotlight the iconic trends waiting inside. Find these classic pieces and more at 310 Campbell St., Suite 150, and build the throwback wardrobe of your dreams.

Babydoll Top



Low Rise Levis



Platform Wedge



Crochet Vest



Sweetness Clothing GC



Barbie Tee



Animal Print Jacket



Mickey PJ Set



Denim Midi



CAMI

The washable silk cami is your new “goes-with-everything” staple, 90% mulberry silk for that dreamy, luxe drape, with just a hint of stretch so it moves with you, not against you.

Adjustable straps ensure a flattering, stay-put fit, making it just as perfect for a night out as it is for school pickup or a coffee run.

Effortless, elevated, and quietly glamorous... basically the cami your wardrobe has been waiting for.



The Washable Silk Cami

HOUSE OF 423



CLUTCH



Handmade by refugee women in Chicago working with the non-profit org Renew, each piece created carries a story of dignity, community, and fresh beginnings.

The Ahlam Leather Clutch (modeled here by artisan Maryam) lives up to its name ("dream" in Arabic) with buttery-soft leather and textured designer fabric that make every fold uniquely gorgeous.

Just the right size for your essentials, it's an elegant little reminder that style feels even better when it supports someone's new chapter.

Ahlam Leather Clutch

Renew



BLOUSE

This front-button ruffled-neck blouse delivers pure vintage romance with its soft neckline and warm, heirloom-inspired pattern.

Light, flowy, and beautifully detailed, it brings effortless charm to denim, wide-leg trousers, or your favorite tailored skirt.

It's an easy, go-to statement piece for the days you want to feel polished, feminine, and just a little bit poetic.



Brown Multi Ruffle Blouse
JEANS AND A CUTE TOP SHOP



LIFESTYLE

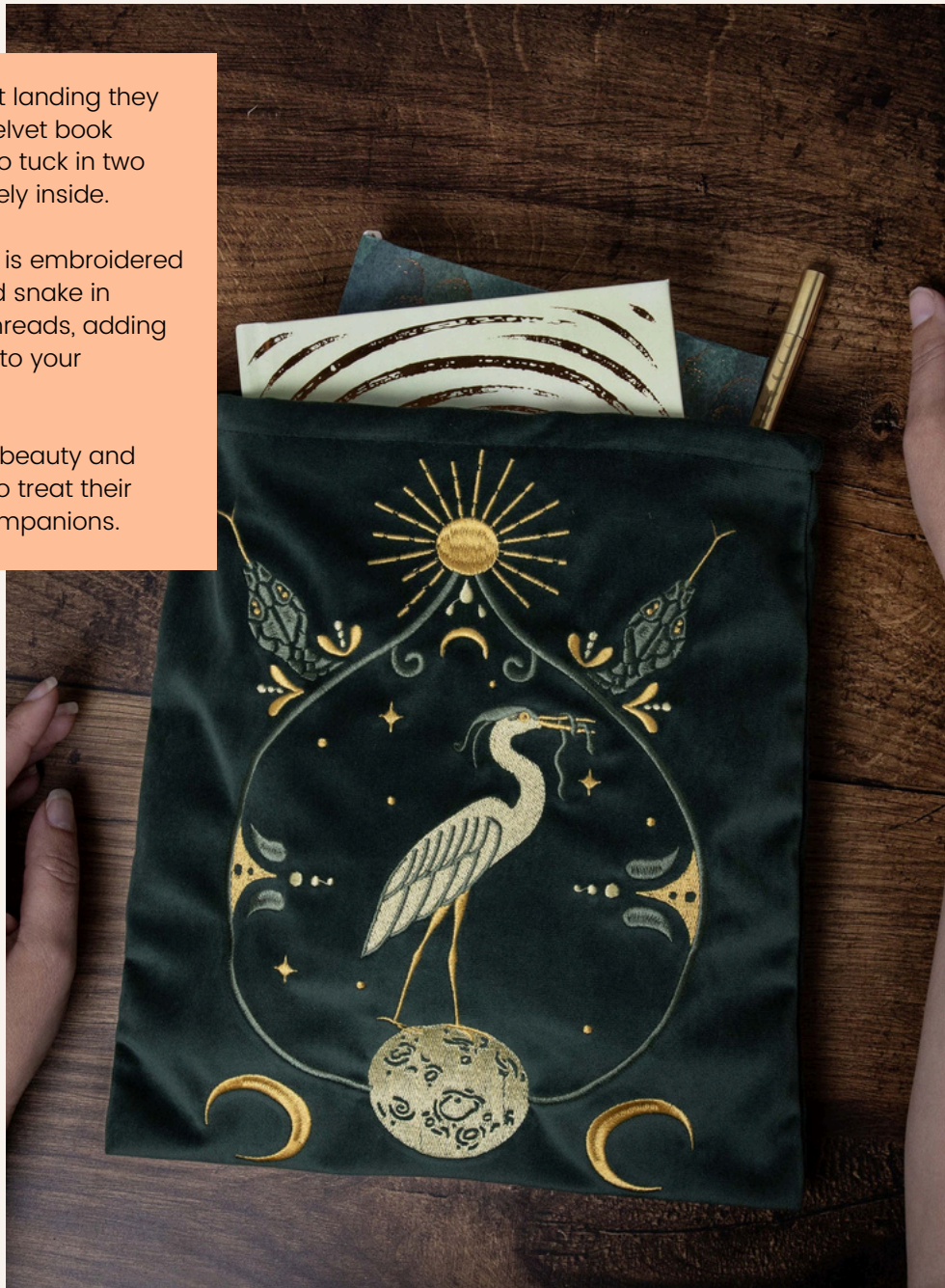


VELVET

Give your books the soft landing they deserve with this luxe velvet book sleeve, roomy enough to tuck in two reads and zip them safely inside.

The bottle-green velvet is embroidered with a heron, moon, and snake in cream, gold, and teal threads, adding a touch of quiet magic to your everyday reading ritual.

It's the perfect blend of beauty and function for readers who treat their books like cherished companions.



Heron Book Sleeve
MOON PHASE STUDIOS



TEA



Rest Well Herbal Tea is your invitation to slow down. An organic, small-batch blend of calming herbs and hemp flower crafted to help your body and mind exhale.

Caffeine-free and deeply grounding, it's perfect for nights when you're overstimulated, stressed, or simply craving a softer landing.

Sip it as part of your bedtime ritual or whenever you need a gentle reset that brings you back to center.

Organic Herbal Teas for Wellness

URBAN APOTHECARY



CARDS



Create your perfect custom card.

Choose your vibe, theme, color story, tone, and let Meli at Pretty Pages bring it to life. Each 5x7 card is printed on your choice of luster photo paper or matte card stock, includes a white envelope, and can feature 1-4 photos.

Designs start at \$1.25 per card.

Ready to order?

Email Meli at
PrettyPagesCo@gmail.com



Custom Cards

PRETTY PAGES



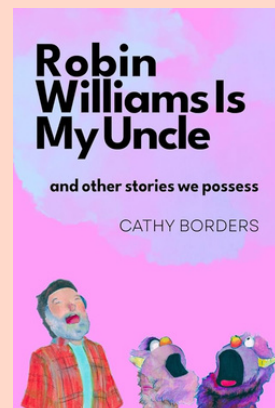
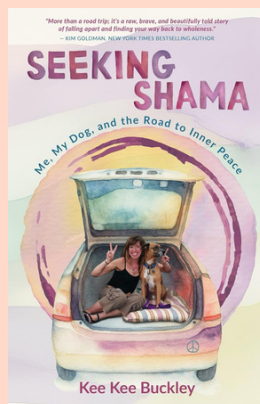
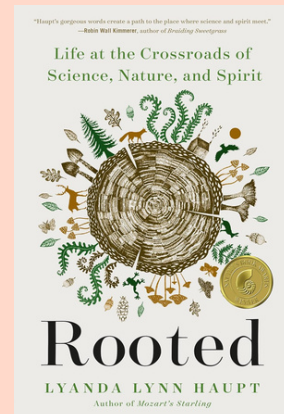
PLANNER



2026 Weekly Planner

KRISTIN HELDT ART





Becoming Baba Yaga
by Kris Spisak

Ablaze
by Tammy Helfrich

Wintering, The Power of Rest
and Retreat in Difficult Times
by Katherine May



Seeking Shama: Me, My Dog,
and the Road to Inner Peace
by KeeKee Buckley

*Discover these books at your
favorite local bookshop!*



Rooted: Life at the Crossroads of
Science, Nature, and Spirit
by Lyanda Lynn Haupt

Robin Williams Is My Uncle: And
Other Stories We Possess
by Cathy Borders

Living in Legacy: Ovarian Cancer
from Cell to Soul
by Alexia Monaco

GIFTS





Handmade Gifts for the Whimsy People in Your Life

by Blakely Kresl

Thoughtful gifts don't need to be big, expensive, or complicated. If you're in the mood for a Christmas that feels a little more creative and intentional this year, a DIY holiday might be your thing.

For the whimsical people in your life, the ones who love pretty jars, pressed flowers, and sentimental treasures, handmade gifts always stand out. Here are some of my favorite ideas...

1. Herb-Infused Salt:

Rosemary, Thyme, or Sage

Create an herb-infused salt blend by combining fresh herbs with coarse sea salt and baking it at the lowest temperature for 15 minutes. Store in an airtight container along with a handwritten tag with cooking ideas, and voilà. It's simple and feels like a little piece of your kitchen handed over with love.



2. Hand-Painted Welcome Mats

Grab a plain coir mat, some outdoor paint, and let your creativity flow. Stars, mushrooms, moons, flowers or whatever fits their vibe. A whimsical welcome mat is both practical and personal.



3. Handmade Throw Rugs

A handmade rug is a true labor of love. Rug-making kits make it easy even for beginners, and you can customize colors and patterns to match any aesthetic. (CraftClubCo.com has great DIY kits! The rug pictured to the right is called "Tulip Fever Amalfi.")





4. Pressed Flower Frames

Use flowers from a special moment, whether that be birthday flowers, a first-date bouquet, or petals from their favorite plant. Press them, frame them, and there you go: instant whimsical art.



5. Embroidered Tea Towels

A simple towel becomes a keepsake when you stitch a tiny motif: a favorite food, initials, a little mushroom, or a moon phase. It's usable art, which whimsical people love.



6. Homemade Treats: Bread, Chocolates & Cozy Kits

Fresh bread loaves, DIY Reese's-style peanut butter cups, caramel chocolates, or even a hot chocolate kit in a pretty jar. These gifts taste like comfort and feel special.



7. Beeswax Candles in Thrifted Vessels

Find vintage teacups, old mugs, or funky jars at thrift stores. Melt all natural beeswax, add essential oils, and pour your own candle. It's sustainable, customizable, and loved by anyone.



8. Homemade Herbal Tea Blend

Mix dried herbs like chamomile, peppermint, rose, lavender, or lemon balm. Package it in a thrifted jar or compostable bag with a handwritten label. Add steeping instructions to make it feel luxurious.



9. Plant Clippings

Whimsical people love a plant baby. Root a few clippings in water, pot them in a cute planter, and add a little note about its "personality" or care instructions.



10. Photo in a Frame

Simple but incredibly heartfelt. Choose a meaningful photo and pair it with a thrifted frame. Bonus if you feel like hand-painting the frame with icons, flowers, or any other aesthetic that your person will love.



11. DIY Beeswax Food Wraps

These are incredibly eco-friendly and beautiful. Use cotton or linen fabric in a cute pattern, melt beeswax, and brush to coat. Great for anyone who lunches, picnics, or loves sustainable swaps.



12. Sourdough Starter Kit

Gift your bubbling sourdough starter in a cute jar paired with a recipe card and feeding instructions. It's basically giving them a new hobby, and hopefully a plethora of future bread.



13. DIY Advent Calendar

Pick a theme: skincare minis, chocolates, makeup, tea bags, tiny thrift finds, gift cards... whatever they love. Fill 12 or 24 little bags/boxes and package them beautifully. It's a gift that lasts all month long.

14. Handmade Whipped Tallow Balm

Whipped tallow balm is nourishing yet simple. Combine organic grass-fed beef tallow with jojoba oil with a hand or stand mixer until soft and fluffy. Add some essential oils to customize the scent, or, leave it unscented for sensitive skin. Next, add the mixture to a thrifted container or repurpose a jar on hand.

Create your own label and don't forget to include scent notes!



At the end of the day, handmade gifts remind us that the best presents aren't about perfection. They're about intention. A little time, a little creativity, and a whole lot of heart go a long way.

Happy making, and happy gifting!



About the Author:

Blakely Kresl

Women's Wellness & Lifestyle Writer

Blakely is a contributing writer for The Modern Domestic Woman and a rising voice in women's health communication and community storytelling. With hands-on experience in marketing, PR, and brand strategy, Blakely is passionate about helping purpose-driven organizations connect with their audiences through authenticity and impact.

She has supported mission-based brands like FemPAQ, a sustainable menstrual health company focused on period equity and destigmatization, and Asami Naturals, an African tea brand rooted in tradition and wellness. From curating content and coordinating events to managing farmers market outreach and digital campaigns, Blakely brings curiosity, empathy, and creativity to every project.

Blakely's work celebrates the connection between women, brands, and communities, reminding us that meaningful change often starts with a shared story.



Gifts for CROCHETERS

Anything from Stitched By Stephanie in Geneva is guaranteed to delight the crochet lover in your life. From her whimsical flower yarn holders to charming stitch markers and irresistibly cute plushies, every piece is handmade, thoughtful, and gift-ready for your favorite maker.



GIFT SET



Give the gift of glow with this curated mini set of HoneyDrop best-sellers, perfectly sized for stocking stuffers, teacher treats, or anyone curious to try a little luxury.

Tucked inside a chic white mesh pouch, each trio includes a hydrating body oil, ultra-nourishing body butter, and our beloved Vanilla Rose lip balm.

Thoughtful, simple, and universally adored, this set makes effortless gifting feel downright delightful.

Mini Essentials Gift Set!

HONEY DROP



SOCKS



Pretty Pages in Bartlett is one of our absolute favorite shops. Thoughtful, creative, and always brimming with personality.

From “Cat Lady” to “Dog Mom” to “Rad Dad,” these cozy, character-filled socks make the perfect little dose of fun for anyone on your list.

Shop in person or online and check out book page prints, greeting cards, stickers and so much more.

Striped Ribbed Socks

PRETTY PAGES



PORTRAIT

Give a gift that's as heartfelt as it is unforgettable with a custom pet portrait by Chicagoland artist Laura Lynne.

Each hand-painted piece is created on heavyweight, 100% cotton archival watercolor paper using watercolor, gouache, and acrylic details, beautifully capturing the spirit and quirks of a beloved furry friend.

Please note: Laura is currently working through her 2025 commissions, and all new orders will be completed in 2026 in the order received; a paper gift certificate will be mailed to you upon purchase.

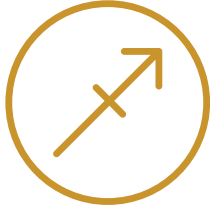


Gift Certificate for Custom Pet Portrait

LAURA LYNNE



ZODIAC



Sagittarians bring a breath of fresh air wherever they go, so it's only fitting that their signature scent feels expansive, worldly, and anything but ordinary.

This rich, wander-loving fragrance fills your space with a captivating warmth—an invitation to follow your curiosity, explore boldly, and let life feel a little bigger.



Capricorns move through the world with a grounded elegance. Steady, thoughtful, and effortlessly refined, so their ideal scent leans warm, woody, and quietly luxurious.

This spicy amber musk wraps the room in a rich, earthy glow, creating the kind of calm, elevated atmosphere where Capricorns feel most at home.



Inluro's Zodiac Candle series pairs scent with astrology, creating fragrance profiles that reflect the core characteristics of each sign. The labels are understated and modern, making them an elevated gift for anyone interested in personality, symbolism, or simply thoughtful design. Shop all the signs at inluro.com

SNACKING

Warm, toasty, and impossible to resist, these gingerbread-spiced sugared pecans are handcrafted in small batches using a regional German-inspired spice blend.

Slow-roasted to a perfect caramelized crunch, they're ideal for gifting, charcuterie boards, holiday hosting, or cozy snacking all season long.



*Hot Cocon
Bomb Gift
Set*

A circular inset with a colorful polka-dot border shows a gift set. It includes a mug with a Christmas design, a small Christmas tree, and other festive items, all wrapped in a clear bag with a white ribbon. A small shopping bag icon is next to the text.

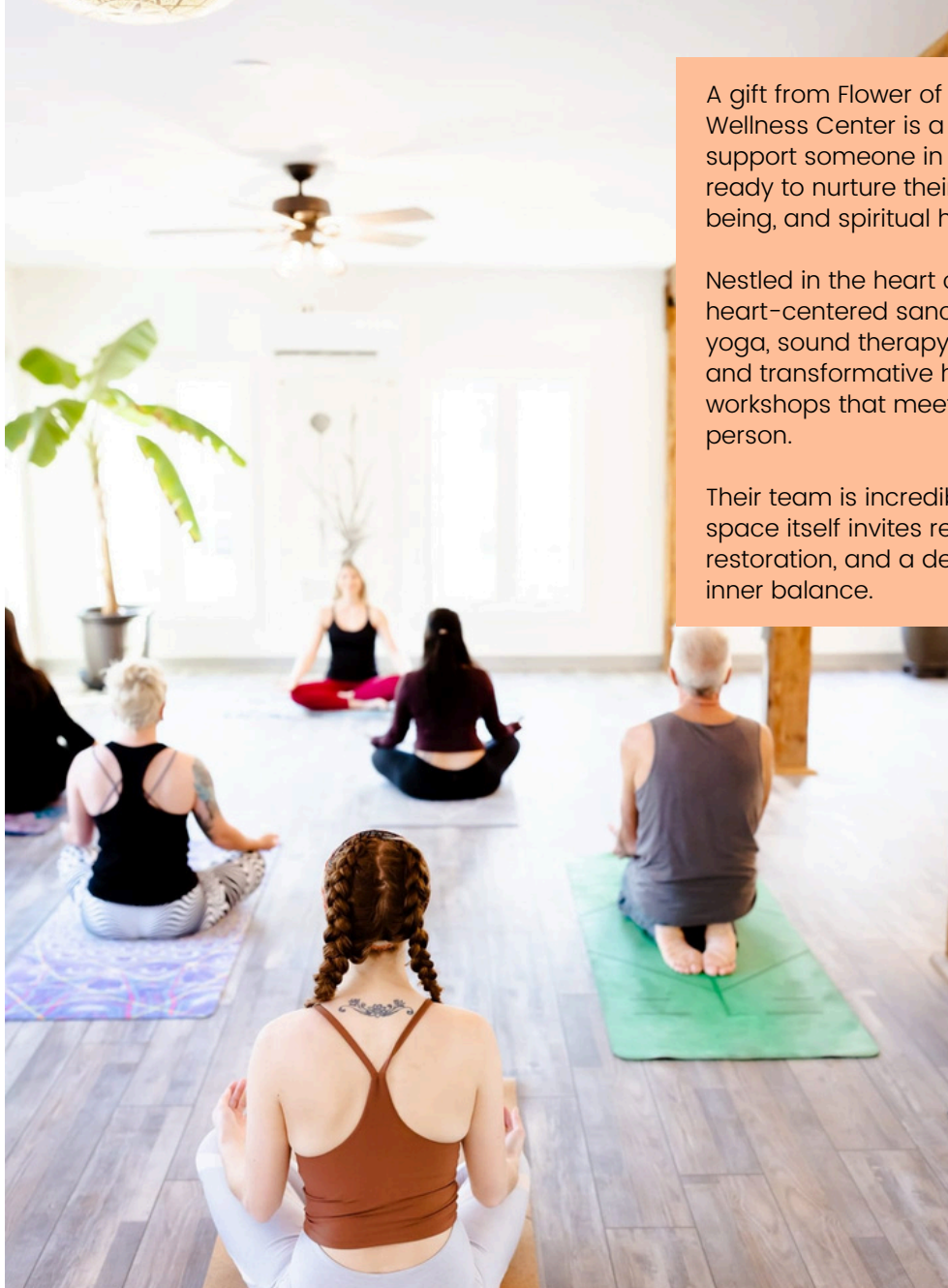


Gingerbread Sugared Pecans

THE CRUMBUMMERY



YOGA



A gift from Flower of Life Yoga & Wellness Center is a beautiful way to support someone in your life who's ready to nurture their health, well-being, and spiritual healing.

Nestled in the heart of St. Charles, this heart-centered sanctuary offers yoga, sound therapy, Reiki, massage, and transformative holistic workshops that meet the whole person.

Their team is incredibly kind, and the space itself invites reconnection, restoration, and a deeper sense of inner balance.

Yoga Membership

FLOWER OF LIFE YOGA & WELLNESS CENTER



GIFT SET

This festive Christmas bundle features "O Christmas Tree" soap, a rich body butter, and a seasonal sugar scrub, everything needed for a cozy, pampering winter ritual.

Each item is locally handcrafted in downtown St. Charles using plant-based ingredients that feel as beautiful and natural as they look.

A perfect gift for anyone who loves supporting local makers and indulging in a little holiday self-care.



Refresh Christmas Bundle
MAGNOLIA SOAP and BATH CO.





Inluro: The Candle Studio Built on Memory, Craft & Connection

Inluro, located in the heart of Geneva, offers something different from the typical candle shop experience. It's a place designed for presence: to sit, to notice, to choose, and to make. The air is bright with a soft fragrance, the shelves are neatly arranged with vessels and scent oils, and the tables are laid out for hands-on creating. There is a quiet sense of invitation here, not to perform, but simply to enjoy.

A Concept Rooted in Intention

Inluro began in 2018 when founders Susi and Rob Brucato set out to rethink what retail could feel like. Before candles, they worked in banking, structured, efficient, and predictable. Yet they were always drawn to the simple pleasure of shopping together and the memories that surrounded that experience.

They wondered if a store could offer more than a transaction.

Something participatory.
Something personal.

So they built a candle studio where every person becomes part of the process. After refining their craft and working with premium materials, they opened their doors as Scentcerely Yours, later evolving into Inluro in 2023. The name changed, the vision deepened, but the core remained the same: create an environment where scent becomes connection.

"We built Inluro to be more than a shop. It's a space for connection, creativity, and memories that linger long after the candle burns down." - Susi and Rob Brucato





A Space for Groups, Teams & Gatherings

Inluro regularly hosts team-building gatherings, private parties, and group celebrations. These can be arranged during standard hours or held as before/after-hours events. There is no room rental fee; the only requirement is a minimum spend that naturally includes everything guests create.

The experience is hands-on, calm, and rooted in collaboration. For workplaces especially, this shift into tactile creativity tends to open up conversations that don't happen around conference tables.

For Businesses: Scent as Brand Identity

Through its Scent Your Brand program, Inluro works with companies to develop custom fragrance blends that align with their aesthetic and customer experience. This may include scenting a retail environment, creating branded products, or establishing a signature scent for hospitality or wellness spaces.

Clients collaborate directly with Susi and Rob in the scent development process, exploring notes and combinations until the balance feels right. The studio also offers custom label design to ensure the final product reflects the brand's visual language.

What You'll Find Inside

Inluro specializes in luxury coconut-apricot wax candles that are clean-burning, vegan, and formulated with premium fragrance oils that deliver a steady, noticeable scent. The wicks are organic cotton, and the pour is smooth and consistent.

The signature offering is their pour-your-own candle experience. With more than 200 fragrance oils to explore, guests experiment with scent blending under the guidance of trained Scent Consultants. The process is approachable and well-structured, making it easy to create something that feels distinctive.

In-store offerings include:

- Hand-poured candles
- Reed diffusers
- Room + linen sprays
- Sand wax projects (a favorite for kids)
- Bath + body products
- The full custom scent blending experience

Reservations are encouraged to ensure a relaxed pace, though walk-ins are welcome when space allows. There are no age restrictions, and the studio is designed to be as welcoming to families and teens as it is to groups of friends or solo visitors.





Fundraising Designed to Feel Good

Inluro's Scent Your Fundraiser program offers nonprofits, schools, sports teams, and community groups a meaningful alternative to traditional fundraising. Groups can either:

- Create a signature candle and sell it through an online storefront
- Or host an in-store fundraising event and receive a percentage of sales

The result is something people are truly glad to purchase, a product with longevity, beauty, and sentiment.

A candle can be a memory, a moment, or a marker in time. At Inluro, you get to decide which.

Explore the studio, book a session, or begin your custom scent project at inluro.com.

UPCOMING EVENTS AT INLURO

CANDLE & ORNAMENT WORKSHOP

DEC. 11, 2025 6:00 PM
211 W. State Street, Geneva, IL

RSVP

GOLD & GLOW

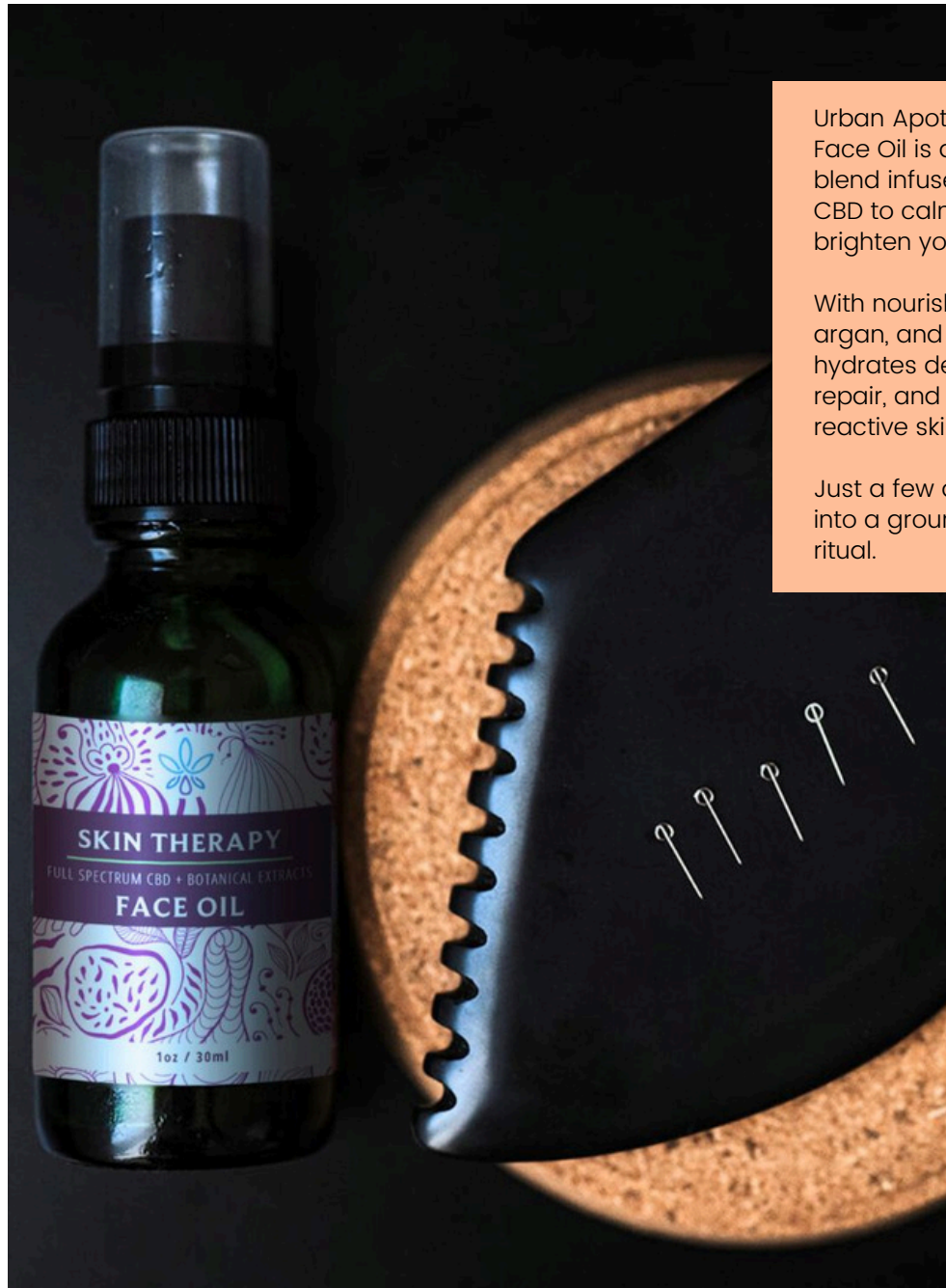
DEC. 12, 2025 6:15 PM
211 W. State Street, Geneva, IL

RSVP

WOMEN'S HEALTH



SKIN



Urban Apothecary's Skin Therapy Face Oil is a lush, plant-powered blend infused with full-spectrum CBD to calm inflammation and brighten your natural glow.

With nourishing oils like jojoba, argan, and evening primrose, it hydrates deeply, supports barrier repair, and soothes sensitive or reactive skin.

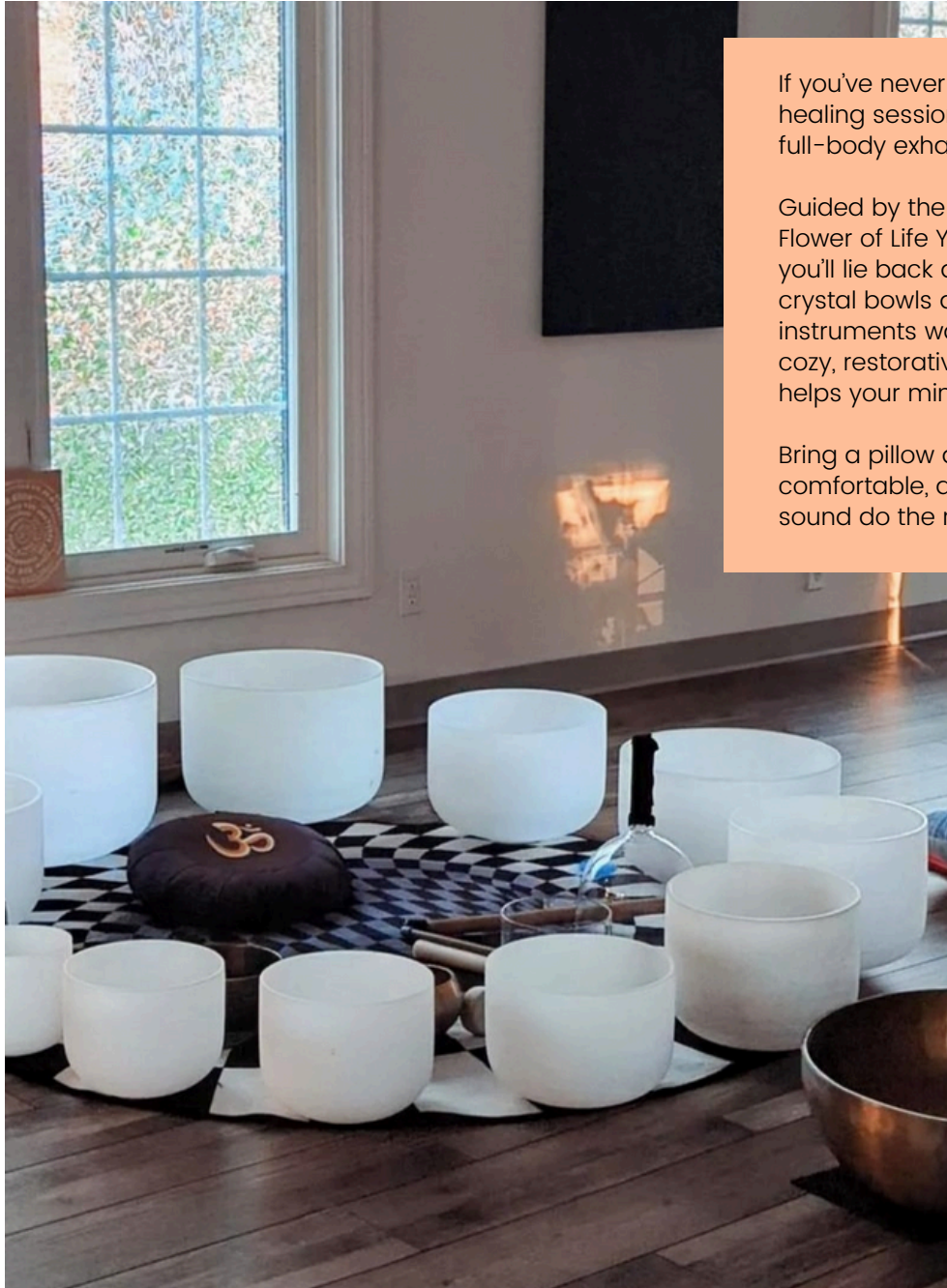
Just a few drops turn your routine into a grounding, glow-boosting ritual.

Botanical Skin Therapy for Gua Sha

URBAN APOTHECARY



SOUND



If you've never experienced a sound healing session, think of it as a gentle, full-body exhale.

Guided by the amazing teachers at Flower of Life Yoga & Wellness Center, you'll lie back and let the vibrations of crystal bowls and other calming instruments wash over you, creating a cozy, restorative atmosphere that helps your mind and body unwind.

Bring a pillow and blanket, get comfortable, and let the soft waves of sound do the rest.

Sound Healing Meditation
FLOWER OF LIFE YOGA & WELLNESS CENTER



Why Pelvic Health? And Why Now?

Pelvic health impacts some of the most intimate parts of our lives: how we move, how we parent, how we age, how we feel in our bodies, and how confidently we move through the world. And yet, so many women carry pain, discomfort, or dysfunction silently, unsure where to turn or whether their concerns even “count.”

Dr. Natalia Avelar, DPT, understands this deeply, and she built Peace Pelvic Health to change that narrative. With over a decade of experience in pelvic floor and orthopedic physical therapy, Natalia’s approach is rooted in something rare in many medical settings: time, listening, and true collaboration.

From the very first visit, Natalia prioritizes understanding your whole story, not just your symptoms. Her care is grounded in evidence-based practice, but guided by genuine connection; the kind that makes you feel validated and safe enough to share what’s going on.

Her background includes specialty certifications in both Pelvic Rehabilitation (PRPC) and Mechanical Diagnosis and Treatment (MDT), which gives her a deep and nuanced understanding of how the pelvic floor, spine, core, and musculoskeletal system work together.

Whether you’re navigating pelvic pain, postpartum recovery, hernias, sexual pain, bladder changes, menopausal shifts, or orthopedic concerns like back and joint pain, Natalia looks for the root cause, not a quick fix.



Care That Moves at Your Pace, Not a Clinic’s Schedule

Peace Pelvic Health was founded intentionally as a low-volume, high-attention space.

That means:

- Timely appointments
- One-on-one sessions with Natalia
- Transparent pricing with no surprise bills
- Education you can actually understand and use
- A supportive environment where your concerns aren’t minimized

This space is built on the belief that healing happens best when patients have room to breathe – physically, emotionally, and mentally.

A Partner on Your Wellness Journey

Patients often describe Natalia as compassionate, steady, and incredibly thorough, the kind of provider who sticks with you, celebrates your wins, and helps you understand and trust your body again.

And when she's not in the clinic? She's outdoors with her family, gardening, paddle boarding, or enjoying live music, grounding activities that mirror the calm, intentional energy she brings into her work.

Your Body Has a Story. Peace Pelvic Health Helps You Rewrite It.

Pelvic health isn't just about recovering from injury or childbirth. It's about reclaiming comfort, confidence, strength, and connection to yourself. It's about saying: I deserve care that honors my whole self.

If you've been living with pain, uncertainty, or symptoms that don't feel "normal," Peace Pelvic Health is the kind of space that meets you exactly where you are, with a plan to help you get where you want to be.



Learn more or
schedule a visit:

2 W. Talcott Rd. #5
Park Ridge, IL 60068
natalia@peacepelvichealth.org

peacepelvichealth.org



Services include:

Pelvic Floor Physical Therapy
Orthopedic Physical Therapy
Pelvic Floor Birth Preparation
Dry Needling



NATURAL



Ursula Naturals brings together crystal energy, botanicals, and fine ingredients in a trio designed to refresh, nourish, and restore.

From the hydrating Cucumber Water Toner + Mist to the radiance-boosting Happy Face Oil and the soothing essential-oil roller, each handcrafted product supports your skin and spirit with intentional, holistic care.

A simple daily ritual that leaves you glowing, grounded, and beautifully renewed.

Botanical Skin Therapy for Gua Sha

URSULA NATURALS



MINIS

Pure Haven's Mini Body Butter and Sugar Body Scrub in seasonal holiday scents make it easy to swap in toxin-free products without sacrificing luxury. Crafted in small batches with clean, consciously chosen ingredients, these festive treats deliver soft, glowing skin, minus anything artificial.

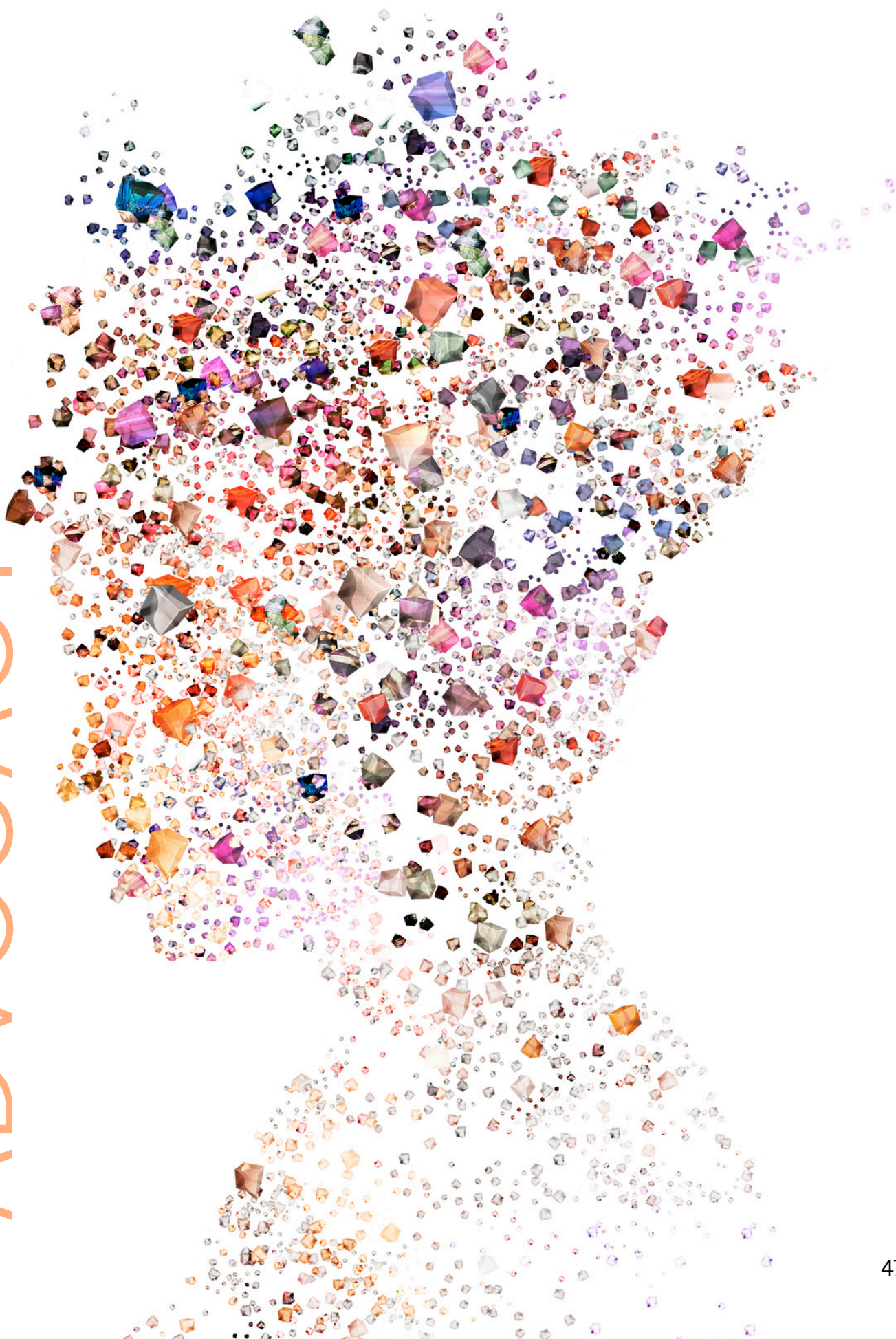


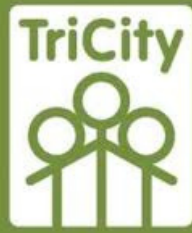
Mini Body Butter + Sugar Body Scrub
in Holiday Scents
PURE HAVEN

*Our local rep,
Jeann Hicks*



ADVOCACY





Community Care, Decades in the Making

If you've ever felt like you're carrying more than you should alone, more stress than feels fair, more worry than you can shake, you're not alone. And that's exactly where TriCity Family Services steps in.

Here's a grounded look at what they offer and why it might just make a difference for you or someone you care about.

Who They Are

TriCity Family Services (TCFS) has been rooted in the heart of central and southern Kane County since 1967. Their mission is simple but powerful: to make quality mental-health services accessible and affordable for people of all ages and income levels.

They're not just a clinic, they're a community resource with heart. Their team offers comprehensive care through counseling, psychiatric care, workshops, and support groups that remind you that you don't have to carry it all by yourself.



How They Help

Whether you're managing anxiety, navigating family conflict, supporting a teen through big emotions, or feeling like your emotional load has gotten too heavy, TCFS covers a wide spectrum. From individual sessions to family and group therapy, their programs meet people where they are. Two offerings that stand out:

Family-Based Treatment for Eating Disorders

This practical, evidence-based outpatient approach centers parents as the most powerful allies in their child's recovery. TCFS uses a collaborative team model that includes the therapist, family physician, family members, and other partners to help young people heal and thrive at home.

It's a model grounded in empowerment and long-term success rather than shame or blame.

Emotional Wellness Workshops & Support Groups

For children and teens, workshops focus on everyday emotional skills: anger management, conflict resolution, positive decision-making, and self-esteem building.

For adults and seniors, a variety of support groups meet regularly, providing space for connection, understanding, and practical coping strategies. All workshops and support groups are offered for a minimal fee or for free.

Why They're a Great Option

You don't have to wait until you "fall through the cracks" to seek help. TCFS is built to catch those who feel squeezed out by cost or insurance limitations.



TCFS accepts most PPO insurance plans, Medicaid, and Medicare.



Self-pay is available. TCFS applies a sliding-fee scale based on income & family size.



TCFS does not deny services based on inability to pay.

What to Expect When You Call

Reaching out for support can feel intimidating, but TCFS works hard to make that first call as smooth and welcoming as possible.

They're proud to offer therapy services in both English and Spanish, and your call will be directed to their bilingual Intake Coordinator. This conversation usually lasts 20-30 minutes and covers the basics: your contact and insurance information (if applicable), the needs you have, services you're seeking, relevant family or medical history, and your availability for sessions.

This step ensures you're matched with the therapist best suited to your needs. Afterward, you'll receive an invitation to their secure Patient Portal, where you'll complete your client packet within three business days. It's thorough, but it's also the first step toward genuine support.

Tips for Success

1

Be sure to call early.

Don't wait until things feel unmanageable. The sooner you connect, the sooner relief begins.

2

Ask Qs about the sliding scale.

Be upfront about your budget; they'll walk you through your options.

3

Gather your info.

Have insurance info and a summary of what's going on before you call.

4

This is self-care, not a last resort.

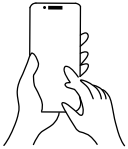
You deserve to feel better, not just to get by.

A Local Lifeline for Every Stage of Life

If you're in Kane County and you've ever thought, "I can't afford therapy," TriCity Family Services wants you to know that you can.

They're a local, community-centered resource built on compassion, accessibility, and the belief that mental health care should never be out of reach.

Ready to take the first step?



630-232-1070
tricityfamilyservices.org
1120 Randall Court, Geneva, Illinois

You deserve professional support. Your wellness matters. And there's a place built for that, right here in your own community.



Be the Reason Someone
Gets the Help They Need



Your donation directly ensures that local families can access affordable, compassionate mental health care when they need it most. Every contribution, big or small, helps TriCity Family Services meet rising community needs and continue offering vital counseling, support groups, and emotional wellness programs.



ADVOCACY

Sip Generosity This Season with Talitha Coffee's
“Winter Sleigh” Roast



A holiday collaboration that warms more than your mug.

Morning rituals matter, and during the rush of the holiday season, even a few quiet minutes with a good cup of coffee can feel grounding. This year, Talitha Coffee is giving that moment an extra layer of meaning with their limited-edition “Winter Sleigh” roast and an exclusive season of gratitude offer for the MDW community.

Talitha Coffee transforms a daily necessity into an opportunity to support survivors of human trafficking. Each bag fuels their ongoing work, and this holiday season, they're extending a generous thank you by making it easier than ever to brew with purpose.

A Holiday Offer Worth Waking Up For

Talitha Coffee's subscription is the kind of holiday gift that checks every box. Thoughtful, delicious, and rooted in real impact. Here's why we love it:

- Your first bag is free
- Enjoy 10% off every future delivery
- Fresh, specialty coffee delivered right to your door
- Pause, edit, or cancel anytime—zero commitment
- Every purchase supports survivors of human trafficking

It's a cozy upgrade to your morning ritual and a meaningful way to give back. Brew Joy. Give Back. Get Cozy.



Now through December 31, 2025, enjoy your first 12 oz. bag of coffee free when you start a Talitha subscription.

Choose any roast, including the festive, cozy "Winter Sleigh," and gift it to someone you love or brighten your own mornings.

Just use code GRATITUDE25 at checkout via this Talitha link.

Meet Talitha Coffee

At MDW, we're passionate about spotlighting brands that don't just sell products, but create real impact.

Meet Talitha Coffee Roasters. Co-founded by the incredible Jenny Barber, Talitha is a specialty coffee brand on a mission: pairing high-quality, locally roasted coffee with life-changing support for survivors of human trafficking.

Through the Talitha Survivor Care Network, they partner with nonprofits to provide housing, healthcare, job training, and meaningful employment. Discover more at talitha.com



MENTAL HEALTH



WINTERING

by Elizabeth Rago
MDW Founder & Editor

Wintering isn't a new idea, but the way we talk about it today carries layers of history, meaning, and healing that feel especially relevant in a world that asks us to move faster than we were ever meant to.

Before "wintering" became a modern touchstone for navigating life's harder seasons, it lived quietly in older languages, agricultural cycles, and the rhythms of communities who understood instinctively that winter wasn't just a time of survival, it was a time of preparation.

A Brief History of "Wintering"

The word wintering has Old English roots, drawn from "wintra", meaning "of the winter season." Historically, it described the practical act of making it through the cold months. Storing food, sheltering livestock, and slowing work. In medieval and early agrarian life, winter was never an afterthought; it was a season with its own assignments:

- Repairing tools instead of harvesting
- Reflecting instead of rushing
- Gathering around the hearth instead of the fields
- Tending to inner life as much as outer responsibilities

To "winter" wasn't passive. It was purposeful. It meant turning inward, conserving energy, and respecting nature's natural pause.

In many cultures, from Scandinavian hygge to Japanese fuyu no nenmatsu (the restful close of the year), winter has always been understood as a time for softening, retreating, and sitting closer together.

Modern usage of wintering has resurfaced thanks to writers like Katherine May, whose book "Wintering" reframed the word not just as a season on the calendar, but as a metaphor for the difficult periods in our lives. Times when the world feels colder, heavier, slower, and when we need gentler care.



What Wintering Means Today

Today, wintering describes a conscious choice to move differently during challenging seasons of life. Instead of powering through, pushing harder, or pretending everything is fine, wintering gives us permission to:

- Rest without guilt
- Reflect without rushing
- Snuggle into comfort without feeling indulgent
- Honor emotional and physical needs
- Allow ourselves to be quieter, slower, softer

Wintering is not giving up, it's gearing up. It's the art of nurturing your inner world while the outer world feels harsh, frantic, or unpredictable.

How to Practice Wintering

As the temperatures drop and the days shorten, this is your invitation to winter. Intentionally, tenderly, unapologetically. Winter gives you a built-in excuse to pause, recalibrate, and take cues from nature. Here's how to practice Wintering in the coming months:

1

Honor the Natural Slowdown

Let your pace match the season. Shorter days are not a moral failing; they're biology. Give yourself permission to do less, schedule lighter, and soften the "shoulds."

Ask yourself: Where can I release pressure?
Where can I exchange urgency for ease?

2

Create Micro-Rituals of Warmth

Think candles, blankets, warm drinks, nourishing food. These aren't luxuries, they're comfort cues that tell your nervous system: "You're safe. You can soften."

Ritual is grounding. Warmth is medicine.

3

Retreat Without Disappearing

Sometimes we need space, but not isolation. Wintering invites you to be selective about where your energy goes. Spend time with the people who feel like soft sweaters, warm scarves, quiet company.

Bow out of what drains you.

4

Tend to Your Inner Landscape

Journaling, therapy, long conversations, quiet mornings, craft projects... whatever helps you hear yourself again.

Wintering is not just about rest; it's about reconnection.

5

Prepare for What's Next (Gently)

Just like farmers mend fences and sharpen tools in winter, you can use this season to prepare for the life you're building, slowly, steadily, in bite-sized ways.

Let yourself dream, plan, and imagine... without urgency.

6

Listen to Your Body's Calls for Rest

Winter is the season when even nature goes quiet. Animals hibernate, trees conserve, and rivers slow. You are not exempt from the laws of nature. You are allowed to rest. You are meant to.

Wintering is an act of self-preservation, but it's also an act of self-trust. It says: I don't have to bloom right now. I can gather myself first.

JOURNAL



This handbound journal is where earthly beauty meets cosmic wonder, crafted by Barrovian Books in collaboration with artist Kristin Heldt.

Its botanical-flecked handmade cover, celestial accents, and deep forest-green spine create a one-of-a-kind keepsake that feels equal parts grounded and enchanted.

Thoughtful variations in color and texture celebrate true small-batch craftsmanship, making each journal its own little universe.

Celestial Blooms Handmade Journal

KRISTIN HELDT ART



GUMMIES



Meet your new clarity companion: a non-intoxicating blend of CBD and CBG, the “mother cannabinoid,” working together to support calm focus, balanced mood, and a steadier stress response.

This duo gently lifts mental fog without drowsiness, making it perfect for workdays, parenting, errands, or anytime you need to stay clear-headed and grounded.

No high, no haze, just a little more ease woven into your day.

Organic gummies for stress, relaxation, and sleep

URBAN APOTHECARY





MDW Cares

MDW Cares is a mutual aid network for women navigating life's many transitions, from motherhood to career shifts to divorce and beyond. We connect you with trusted local resources and community support so you don't have to walk the journey alone.

The following pages highlight support groups and therapists with immediate openings to help you find care when you need it most.

RESOURCE

the modern
domestic
woman



From Burnout to Breakthrough: Your Guide to Changing Careers

Changing careers can feel like stepping off the edge of a cliff—and let's be real, it does feel a bit daunting. The uncertainty, the fear of failure, the "what the heck am I even doing?" thoughts that pop into your head are all completely normal.

But here's the thing: You can do this. You don't have to make some giant, blind leap into the unknown. Instead, you can break it down, take one manageable step at a time, and ease your way into a career that truly lights you up.

In this guide, you'll dive into exercises that help you reflect on your values, set achievable goals, and figure out what you really want from your next job. We'll also explore practical tips for networking, job searching, and leveraging your existing resources—like your therapist—so that you can make this transition with confidence. So, grab a beverage and let's get to work on making that career breakthrough happen, one step at a time. Ready? Let's go!

Thinking about changing careers but feeling stuck or overwhelmed? You're not alone, and you're in the right place. Get your free guide [here](#).



MDW FREE DOWNLOAD





Therapists with Immediate Openings



Tiana Santisteven, Ph.D., LCPC, CRC – St. Charles, IL

As a licensed clinical professional counselor, Tiana works with adults throughout Illinois, holding space for healing in both in-person and telehealth sessions. She nurtures clients through substance dependency, trauma, PTSD, career pressure, and big life shifts with a calm, steady presence and a deeply human approach.

Evolve Family Therapy

333 N. Randall Road, Suite 105B, St. Charles, IL

hello@wellnessevolve.com

847-857-7840

wellnessevolve.com



Danielle Jenkins, LSW – Geneva, IL

Danielle Jenkins works with adolescents, adults, and couples, creating a deeply safe and non-judgmental space for honest connection and growth. Drawing from CBT, DBT, and Emotion-Focused approaches with Level 1 Gottman training, she helps partners strengthen communication, regulate their nervous systems, and rebuild the intimacy that feels steady and real.

Anchor Counseling

2700 Keslinger Road, Suite B, Geneva, IL

angel@anchorcounseling.org

630-765-3214

anchorcounseling.org



Madison Drake, Social Work Intern – Geneva, IL

Madison Drake is a social work intern completing her MSW, offering \$30 self-pay sessions and a flexible, deeply human approach to care. She loves working with neurodivergent adults navigating anxiety, depression, trauma, or ADHD, using humor, warmth, coping-skill building, and clear education to help clients better understand their diagnosis and soothe their nervous systems. Madison also provides Equine Therapy at Stable Minds in Elburn, blending her background in Human-Animal Studies with grounded, compassionate support.

Anchor Counseling

2700 Keslinger Road, Suite B, Geneva, IL

angel@anchorcounseling.org

630-765-3214

anchorcounseling.org



Divorced Moms Support Circle

Single motherhood isn't about perfection, but about learning to trust the quiet strength you carry.



Join us virtually!

When: Saturdays 2x monthly

Date: Starting 12/13 (and every other Saturday)

Time: 8 AM- 9 AM

Where: Virtual Zoom (link provided after sign up)

Cost: FREE



A safe space for...

- Divorced moms rebuilding their lives.
- Moms feeling overwhelmed, isolated, or emotionally drained.
- Single moms seeking connection and support.
- Moms navigating co-parenting with a difficult or high-conflict ex.
- Moms currently going through a divorce.
- Moms wanting a community that gets what they're carrying.

Please pre-register here to receive your link:

Call/text: 630-474-5275 or E-mail: carrie@noreilahealing.com

MDW Dec/Jan Events



MOMS SUPPORT GROUP

DEC. 10, 2025 7:15 PM

Batavia Library, Batavie, IL

Text 630-946-9102 to RSVP

DIVORCED MOMS SUPPORT GROUP

DEC. 13, 2025 8:00 AM

Virtual Bi-Weekly Meet Up

Text 630-474-5275 to RSVP



VISION BOARD WORKSHOP

JAN 11, 2026 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM

Flower of Life Yoga & Wellness Center
102 N 5th Ave, St. Charles, IL

[RSVP](#)

INVESTED IN HER (FINANCIAL LITERACY)

JAN 24, 2026 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM

Fox Valley Realtors Association
406 Surrey Woods Dr., St. Charles, IL

[RSVP](#)

PARENTING



PLUSHIE



Crochet Plushies
Stitched by Stephanie





Navigating the Scary Stuff: Recognizing Eating Disorders in Teens & Getting Them Help

by Maddy Tomlinson, LCSW, PEL
TriCity Family Services



The Teen Years Are Tender. Here's What Parents Should Know.



As children journey through the stages of development, we know there are a lot of changes, learning, and a giant quest for identity. Our kids are trying to navigate their complicated lives and are grasping to understand themselves and the world around them.

Consequently, this can actually make kids and teens susceptible to developing eating disorders.

While there is not one single or specific cause for eating disorders, we do know that there are certain vulnerability factors that can increase the likelihood of an eating disorder occurring. Simply being an adolescent, going through puberty, or living in a society that idealizes beauty or food in a certain way can pave the way for an eating disorder to take hold.

The greatest thing that you can do as a parent, active adult, or role model in a young person's life is to take eating disorder warning signs seriously and get help for your child. Eating disorders can be life-threatening and habit-forming in the brain. If treatment is delayed, symptoms can worsen, and the body can take major medical hits.

But with proper interventions, recovery is possible. Research has shown that the earlier an eating disorder is treated, the greater the chances of resolving it. Here are some of the potential warning signs:

Changes in Eating Patterns

- Eating less than usual, refusal to eat, or skipping meals
- Cutting out food groups or previously enjoyed foods
- Going on a diet to lose weight
- Small list of "safe foods" they're willing to eat
- Distress when meals are presented that aren't "safe" foods or on their "diet"

Behaviors Around Food

- Hiding food or wanting to eat alone due to embarrassment
- Difficulties at mealtimes or rigid rules around food
- Weight loss (in any size body) or failure to gain expected weight based on their growth curve
- Eating rapidly, feeling out of control around food, or having binge episodes

Concerning Physical Behaviors

- Vomiting after meals
- Using diet pills or laxatives
- Increase in exercise, over-exercising, or exercising with the intent to change body shape

Anxiety and Fear Related to Eating

- Fear of choking, vomiting, or stomach discomfort from eating
- Avoidance driven by fear rather than preference (common in ARFID)

Physical Red Flags

- Loss of menstruation or delayed first period
- Fatigue, dehydration, or other medical symptoms
- GI issues, heart rate changes, low blood pressure, or concerns around bone density

Your Role Is Powerful and it Makes a Difference

There are numerous medical symptoms as well that a health care provider will be able to detect, such as changes in heart rate, blood pressure, GI issues, dehydration, fatigue, and bone density loss. If you see the warning signs in your child, please schedule an appointment with their primary health care provider and request a physical exam for a potential eating disorder.

Additionally, seek out support from a mental health clinician, as eating disorders are both medical and mental health conditions. Your medical and mental health provider can team together with you to eradicate the illness.

TriCity Family Services in Geneva and St. Charles is a community mental health agency that offers Family-Based Treatment for children and adolescents experiencing an eating disorder. We treat Anorexia, Bulimia, Binge Eating Disorder, and Avoidant/Restrictive Food Intake Disorder (ARFID). Family-Based Treatment (FBT) is an evidence-based approach, shown to be one of the most successful ways to achieve recovery.

Parents and family members play a critical role in the therapy process, which leads to sustained recovery and an increase in parent knowledge and skills. It can be quite common for a kid with an eating disorder to not want help or to dismiss the severity of what is happening. That is actually the eating disorder talking through them. Don't let that sway you from getting treatment. You truly are doing the "right thing" by taking charge and restoring your child's health.

Find more resources at tricityfamilyservices.org or call our office to schedule an appointment with a therapist at 630-232-1070.



When You're Worried About Your Teen

Noticing shifts in your teen's eating, mood, or body image can feel overwhelming. Here's how to stay steady, supportive, and proactive.

Start with Connection

- Stay curious, not confrontational. "I've noticed <insert concern> and wanted to check in with you."
- Listen before problem-solving. Teens open up when they don't feel rushed or judged.
- Affirm feelings. "It makes sense you're stressed. This stage of life is a lot."

Take Action Early

- Call their doctor. Even small changes in eating or weight can have a medical impact during adolescence.
- Seek mental health support. Family-Based Treatment programs (like the one offered at the one offered at TCFS) center parents as a healing force to help their child.
- Expect resistance. Denial is common, and it's often the disorder talking. Stay steady and compassionate.
- Educate yourself. Websites like F.E.A.S.T. or NEDA provide resources to get you started
- Develop an alliance with your partner or co-parent. Get on the same page with the other important adults in your child's life, so that you can be a united front.
- Protect meals. Shared meals given on a routine schedule help regulate appetite and emotions.

Helpful Phrases

"I'm bringing this up because I care about you."

"You're not alone, we'll face this together."

"You deserve support, and I'm here."

"Your health is so crucial, let's make sure your mind and body are safe."



About the Author:

Maddy Tomlinson, LCSW, PEL TriCity Family Services, Geneva

Maddy Tomlinson joined TriCity Family Services as a therapist in April 2022. She previously worked as a school social worker for nine years, providing services for children in grades K-12, with a primary focus on high school-age adolescents. Tomlinson received her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Northern Illinois University in 2010. She then received her Master of Social Work degree from Aurora University in 2013 and earned a professional educator license and specialization in school social work.

Tomlinson stepped into the role of FBT Program Supervisor for the agency in November 2023. FBT (Family-Based Treatment) is an evidence-based practice that guides and empowers families to treat an eating disorder that has developed in their child.

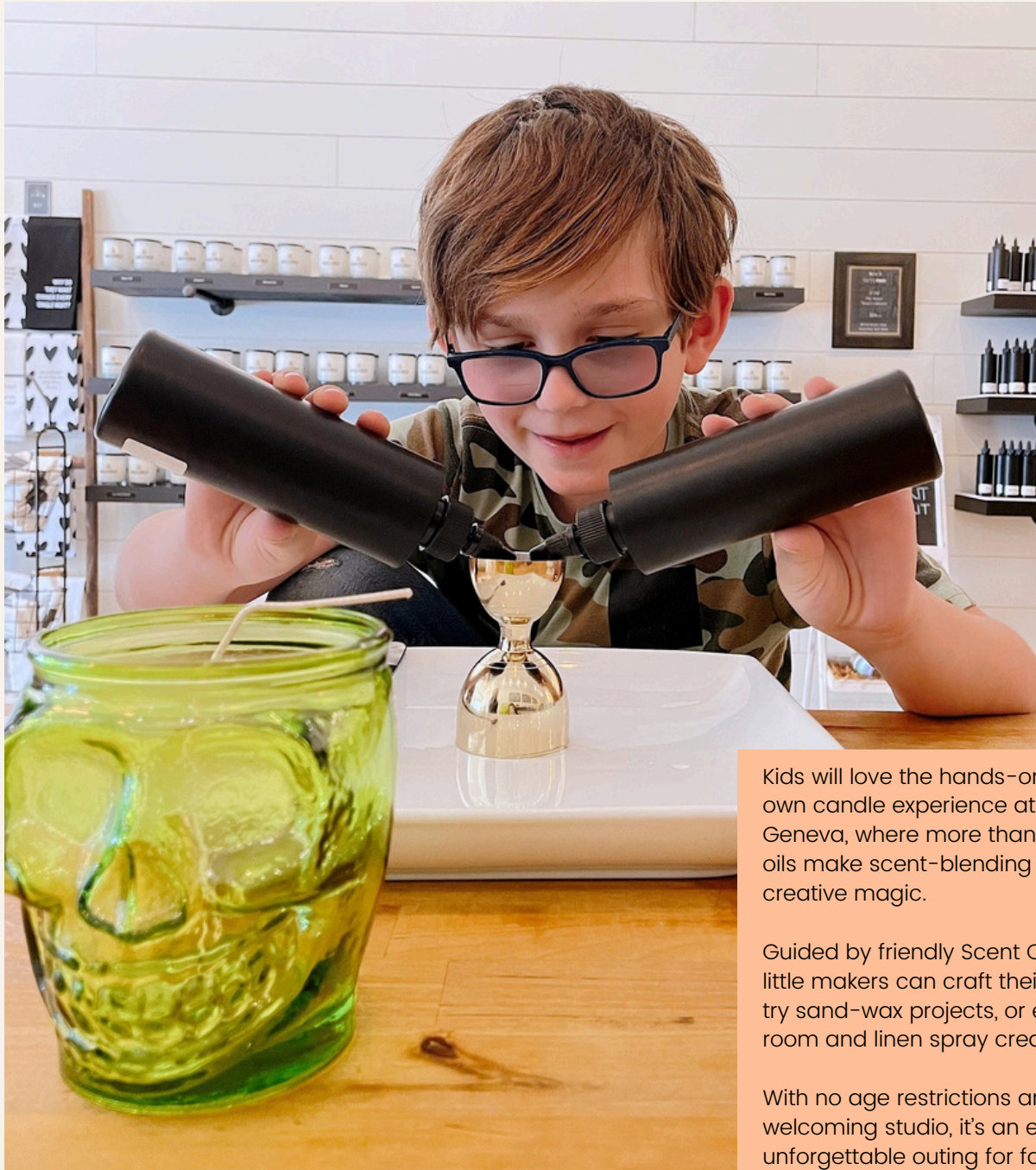
Tomlinson has a strong devotion to FBT and has found this therapy to be life changing work that provides real results. FBT has taught Tomlinson that families can use their strength and skills to feed their child and reach recovery.

Outside of FBT, Tomlinson loves working with clients of all ages in both individual and family therapy sessions. She incorporates cognitive behavioral therapy, mindfulness, somatic therapy techniques, nervous system regulation strategies, and exposure therapy to help clients with anxiety, depression, trauma, loss, and family conflict. When working with young children, Tomlinson uses play and expressive therapy strategies and feels strongly about incorporating a child's family as part of therapy.

Tomlinson likes to provide a safe space for clients to share their stories and achieve their desired goals. She likes creating meaningful relationships so clients can feel supported, heard, and empowered to make changes. In addition, she enjoys being an advocate for others and teaching others how to advocate for themselves.



MAKE



Kids will love the hands-on pour-your-own candle experience at Inluro in Geneva, where more than 200 fragrance oils make scent-blending feel like pure creative magic.

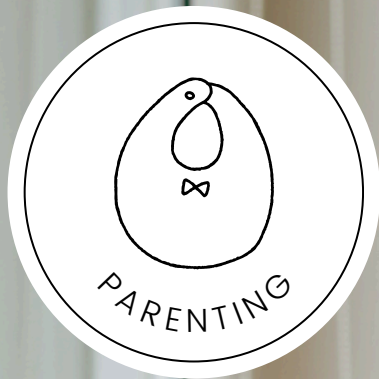
Guided by friendly Scent Consultants, little makers can craft their own candle, try sand-wax projects, or explore fun room and linen spray creations.

With no age restrictions and a warm, welcoming studio, it's an easy, unforgettable outing for families looking to spark creativity.

Pour-Your-Own Candle Experience

INLURO in GENEVA





The Power of Pretend: How Role Playing Sleep Helps Toddlers

by Laura Van Zandt
Pediatric Occupational Therapist &
Certified Sleep Consultant



THE POWER OF PRETEND

If you've ever watched your toddler cuddle a stuffed animal and whisper, "Time for bed, bunny," you've witnessed something powerful: role play. It's more than cute; it's a valuable developmental tool. For toddlers who resist bedtime, role-playing sleep routines can help them feel more in control, safe, and ready for rest.

Let's explore how this simple strategy can work wonders in your home.

Why Toddlers Struggle with Sleep

By toddlerhood, your child is developing:

- A strong sense of autonomy ("I do it myself!")
- Big feelings that they're still learning to manage
- Imaginative thinking that helps them process their world

This is also the age where common sleep challenges arise: bedtime protests, stalling, fears, and trouble with transitions. Many toddlers simply don't want the day to end, or they may feel anxious about separating from you.

That's where role play comes in.

What Is Sleep Role Play?

Sleep role play means acting out bedtime routines or sleep situations using toys, dolls, or pretend scenarios. It can include:

- Putting a stuffed animal to bed
- Playing "bedtime" with a doll or action figure
- Pretending to be the baby while you play the caregiver
- Acting out routines like brushing teeth, reading books, turning on a sound machine, and saying goodnight

The goal is to make sleep feel predictable, safe, and even fun—all through play.

Why It Works: The Science Behind It

- Play is how toddlers learn. When children act out daily routines, they begin to understand and internalize them.
- It creates emotional distance. Playing with a doll or stuffed animal gives your toddler a safe way to explore feelings like fear, separation, or control.
- It boosts confidence. When toddlers “teach” their toys how to sleep, they reinforce those same behaviors in themselves.
- It builds routines. Repetitive role play makes bedtime steps more familiar and less overwhelming.

Let's Try It: Simple Role Play Ideas

Stuffed Animal Bedtime

Let your toddler choose a toy and go through a full bedtime routine:

“Let’s put bears’ pajamas on.”
“Oh! Bear forgot to brush his teeth!”
“Time for bear to snuggle under the covers.”

Make it silly or soothing, depending on your child’s style.

Switch Roles

Have your child be the parent and you (or the toy) be the child:

“Can you help Baby Dino get ready for bed?”

You pretend to be scared or resist bedtime so your child can “help.” This flips the script and empowers your toddler.

Daytime Dress Rehearsal

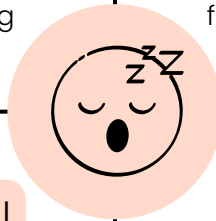
Play out the bedtime routine during the day when your child is well-regulated.

Practicing while calm makes it easier to access those skills at night.

Act Out Sleep Troubles

If your child is struggling with something specific (like being afraid of the dark), use role play to explore it:

“Let’s show Bunny how to use the night light.”
“Teddy feels nervous at bedtime. What can we do to help him feel brave?”



Bonus Benefit: Connection

Role play also gives you time to connect positively with your toddler around sleep, rather than making bedtime feel like a battle. When you follow their lead in pretend play, they feel seen and supported, which is exactly what they need to settle to sleep.

Sleep role play is a powerful tool that turns resistance into engagement and anxiety into confidence. With just a few minutes a day, you can use pretend play to help your toddler understand, practice, and even enjoy the bedtime routine.

So next time your toddler lines up their toys and announces, "They're going to bed," lean in. You might be laying the foundation for better sleep for both of you.

About the Author



Laura Van Zandt Pediatric Sleep Consultant Nurtured Nights

Laura is a pediatric occupational therapist with over 15 years of experience, advanced training in sensory integration, NDT, and DIR/Floortime, and a deep commitment to understanding each child's unique profile.

Her lived experience as a mom, combined with her professional background, shapes her compassionate, relationship-centered approach with families. She is also a certified pediatric sleep consultant and brings the same clinical reasoning, accessibility, and dedication to making support both sustainable and financially approachable.

At the core of Laura's work, whether in OT or sleep consulting, is a belief in empathy, collaboration, and empowering parents to feel confident and connected.

Connect with Laura to craft your custom sleep plan at nurturednightsleep@gmail.com or visit nurturednightsleep.com



HOME



ORNAMENT



Orange Slice ornament

SUNLIT FOLK



CANDLE



IN-STORE HOLIDAY SCENTS

INLURO





What It Really Feels Like to Move During a Season of Big Feelings

by Zoe Sherwin

MOVING DURING THE HOLIDAYS

The holidays seem to magnify everything. The joy feels brighter. The memories feel deeper. The exhaustion feels heavier. And if you're selling your home in the middle of all that? The emotional load can feel like a lot.

I get it, because I walk with clients through this every day.

A home is never just drywall and rooflines. It's where your babies took their first steps, where you learned to bake bread, where you cried, laughed, healed, hosted, collapsed after a long day, and built your life.

Letting go of a home is a transition, one that hits differently when the world is wrapped in twinkle lights and heightened expectations.

And if you're a woman trying to navigate this? You're likely carrying most of the emotional labor and the logistics.



Living Between Two Versions of Yourself

When you've got a "For Sale" sign in the yard in December, you start living in two worlds:

The one you're still in, trying to soak up the season, make memories, and keep everything running, and the one you're moving toward, full of unknowns, decisions, and a thousand tiny tasks.

- You're decorating, but not as much as you typically would.
- You're baking cookies, but checking your phone for showing requests.
- You're wrapping gifts, but also mentally labeling boxes.

It's a strange emotional split, part nostalgia, part nervous anticipation, and it can feel like being stretched thin in every direction.

When the Holidays Make Your Truth Impossible to Ignore

The holidays have a way of shining a light on what's working and what isn't. Sometimes, selling your home wasn't part of the grand plan, but the season makes the next step undeniable.

- A home that once fit perfectly now feels tight.
- The long commute feels heavier when the days get shorter.
- The desire to be closer to family hits harder at the dinner table.
- The need for a quieter, simpler life becomes clearer with each gathering.

I've seen women reach powerful clarity this time of year, not because everything is calm, but because everything is heightened. The noise brings the truth forward.

Finding Your Footing When Emotions Run High

There's a reason people joke that selling a home is right up there with divorce and job changes in terms of stress. And add the holiday season on top? It's a whole different level.

Here's what I tell my clients (and what I remind myself):

- You are allowed to feel everything. The grief, the excitement, the anxiety, the relief.
- None of it means you're doing it wrong. It means you're human.
- You don't have to pretend you're fine when you're staring at a pile of packing tape and wondering how you'll get through it all.
- You don't have to feel guilty for wanting the move to be over already.
- You don't have to force joy when you're processing change.

Transitions are emotional, especially when they coincide with a season marked by high expectations.





If You're Selling During the Holidays, Here's What I Want You to Remember

You're not behind. You're not messy. You're not failing.

You're navigating a major life change during the busiest, most sentimental time of the year.

You can:

- Keep the holiday décor that sparks joy
- Set boundaries around showings
- Ask as many questions as you need
- Cry when you're overwhelmed
- Celebrate tiny wins

You deserve support, not just with contracts and timelines, but with the emotional reality of what you're doing.



A New Home, A New Season, A New You

When the last ornament comes off the tree and the new year begins, something powerful happens: you start to see the possibility in front of you.

- New walls.
- New routines.
- New morning light.
- New memories.

Selling during the holidays might feel chaotic now, but it's also an act of courage, choosing a future that feels more aligned with who you're becoming.

You're not just moving homes. You're moving into a new chapter of your life.

And you deserve to do that with clarity, compassion, and a deep sense of being held by your people, by your community, and yes, by the professionals guiding you through it.



Home isn't just a place. Home is where you can breathe. And you deserve that in every season.

About the Author:



Zoe Sherwin
Realtor with Keller Williams Inspire
Geneva, IL

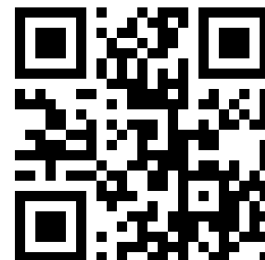
Zoe is a Kane County-based realtor who supports both buyers and sellers through some of life's biggest transitions with empathy, clarity, and a calm, steady presence.

Known for her ability to balance strategy with heart, Zoe helps clients navigate not just the logistics of a move but the emotional weight that often comes with it.

She believes a home is more than a property; it's a place layered with memories, meaning, and possibility, and she approaches every client relationship with that truth at the center.

Whether preparing a home for market, guiding a family toward their next space, or offering grounded support during times of change, Zoe is dedicated to helping people move forward with confidence and care.

Need support for buying or selling? Reach out to Zoe at 331-425-1181 or email her zoe.sherwin@kw.com



Zoe's website is here!

STOCKING



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INSENSE



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MATZO TOFFEE

By Katie McCall

My Dad's side of the family is Jewish, and Passover has always been one of my favorite holidays. As a kid, I loved all of the special foods we ate during the Seder; how fun it was to dip the parsley into the salt water, taste the red wine in the Charoset, and my personal favorite - the hard-boiled eggs. I was always hungry in anticipation of the main meal, so I would load up on the eggs and matzo crackers, taking seconds and thirds.

But the BEST part? Dessert, of course. And not just any dessert; it had to be this matzo toffee - a.k.a. matzo crack.

My mom used to make a big batch of this and now I enjoy making it for my family, too. It's the perfect balance of flavors and textures with the crunchy, slightly salty matzo on the bottom, layered with the sweet, chewy caramel in the middle and snap of bitter, dark chocolate on top.

Nuts and dried fruit are welcome additions, but I prefer a classic sprinkle of sea (or Kosher) salt. This stuff is **seriously** addicting and makes lovely gifts during the holiday season.

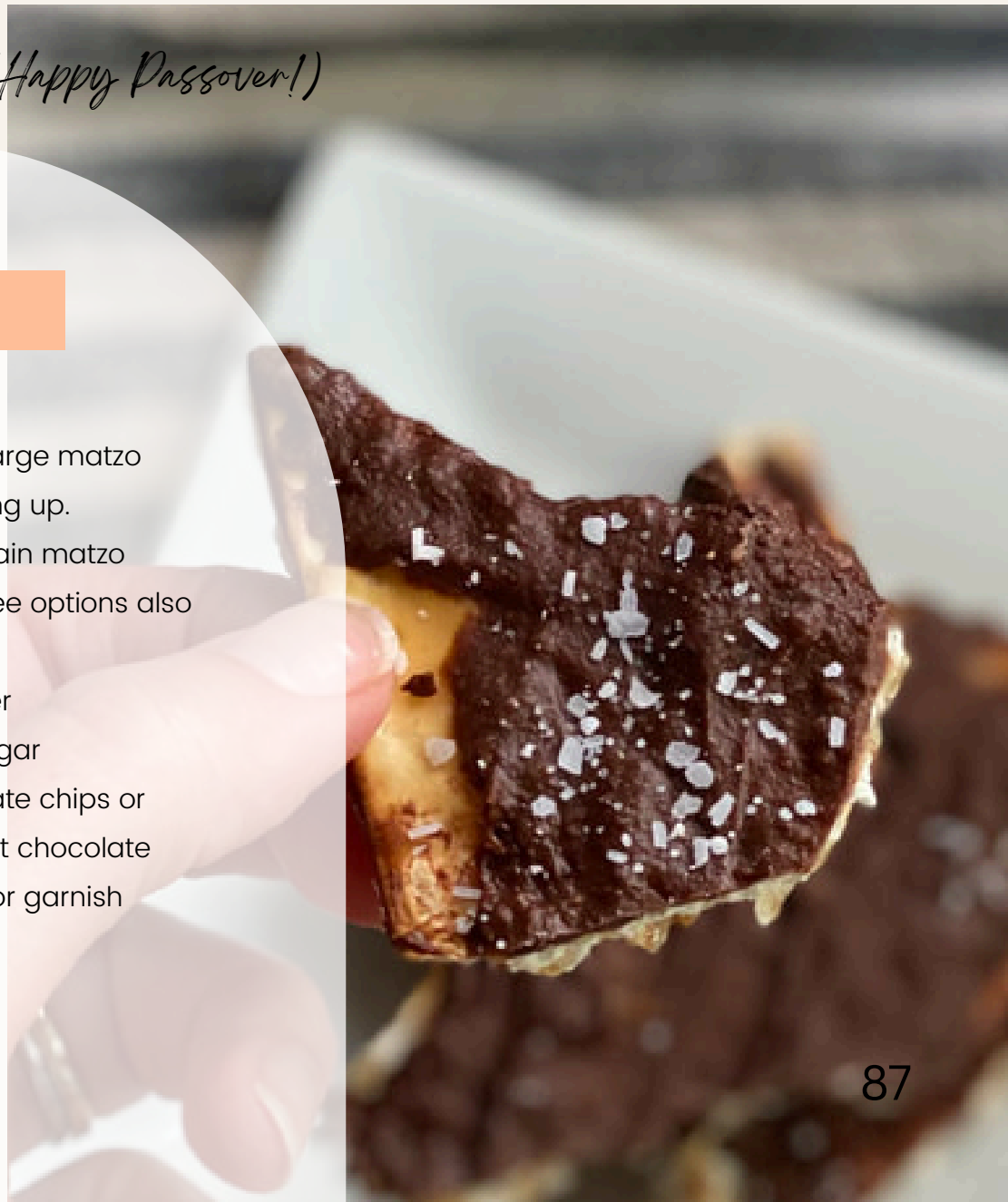
Chag Sameach! (Happy Passover!)

- Katie

INGREDIENTS

Recipe yields about 4 large matzo squares prior to breaking up.

- 4 lightly salted or plain matzo crackers (gluten-free options also available)
- 1 cup unsalted butter
- 1 cup light brown sugar
- 2 cups dark chocolate chips or chopped bittersweet chocolate
- Sea or Kosher salt for garnish



METHOD

- Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. and line a baking sheet with foil, ensuring it comes up over all of the sides for easy cleanup.
- Layer the matzo on the baking sheet, breaking into smaller pieces to fit, as needed. Set aside.
- [CARAMEL]: First, add the butter and sugar to a medium saucepan. Over medium-high heat, bring to a boil, then cook about 3 minutes - whisking constantly - until smooth and thickened.
- Remove from heat and pour over the matzo crackers, spreading until evenly coated. Be careful while pouring to avoid burns - this is very hot!
- Bake 10-15 minutes until bubbly.
- Remove from oven and while the toffee is still hot, put the chocolate directly onto the matzo and allow it to melt. Then spread out smoothly with a small spatula.
- Sprinkle with salt (or any other toppings), chill in the refrigerator for at least 30 minutes and then cut or break into pieces prior to serving.
- Leftover toffee can be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator up to 10 days or frozen up to 3 months.

About the Author:

Katie McCall is a Midwestern girl with a deep love for nature, food, and family. Raised in the rural suburbs of Chicago, she spent her childhood foraging for morel mushrooms, picking green beans, and exploring the outdoors. This connection to nature continues to inspire her work and lifestyle.

After earning a B.S. in Journalism from the University of Illinois, Katie moved to Chicago to pursue food writing. She later attended Le Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts to further her culinary skills, and eventually co-founded Two Wild Seeds, a gluten-free bakery she ran with her mom in St. Charles, Illinois. Though the bakery closed in 2021, Katie continues to freelance and share her passion for food.



Outside of writing and cooking, Katie enjoys living a self-sustaining lifestyle, gardening, decorating her 1905 farmhouse, and discovering new treasures at local farmers' markets and antique shops. Always in search of new ways to create, Katie is passionate about making life as delicious and fulfilling as possible.

about **the modern domestic woman**

Supporting women from all walks of life.

At The Modern Domestic Woman (MDW), we are committed to addressing the holistic needs of women and recognizing the challenges they face in various aspects of life. Our vision is to create a nurturing environment where every woman feels supported and encouraged to thrive, regardless of their circumstances. Through our workshops and resource-sharing initiatives, MDW equips women with the tools and knowledge they need to overcome challenges and pursue their goals with confidence. We believe in providing practical resources tailored to women's needs, ensuring that they have access to essential support services.

MDW focuses on 3 pillars of living:

MENTAL HEALTH - MDW Cares is our support community of women rooted in making mental health a priority instead of an afterthought. Because nobody can pour from an empty cup.

LIFESTYLE - MDW loves creating safe spaces; at home and in the body you call home. We encourage a healthy lifestyle that meets you where you're at. Not where someone else wants you to be. We also love pretty things at MDW and celebrate style and the artistry of creatives.

ADVOCACY - At MDW, we go out into our communities and support women in crisis. We actively partner with organizations that support the rights, recovery, and well-being of women.

Beyond referrals, MDW has free support groups and community education workshops, and an informative and fun blog with free downloadable resources.

For more information, visit mdwcares.com or follow MDW on your favorite social platform @themoderndomesticwoman

Have a question or need a referral? Email us at themoderndomesticwoman@gmail.com



From One Woman's Story to a Shared Mission

At its heart, MDW Cares is about turning lived experience into lasting impact.

"What started as survival has become service," says founder Elizabeth Rago. "MDW Cares is the tangible extension of what The Modern Domestic Woman has always stood for, showing up for each other with compassion, courage, and care."

From workshops and magazine stories to one-on-one support and community partnerships, MDW Cares is growing into a movement of women helping women, right here, right now.

Get Involved

Follow along as MDW Cares continues to grow and connect women across our community.

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