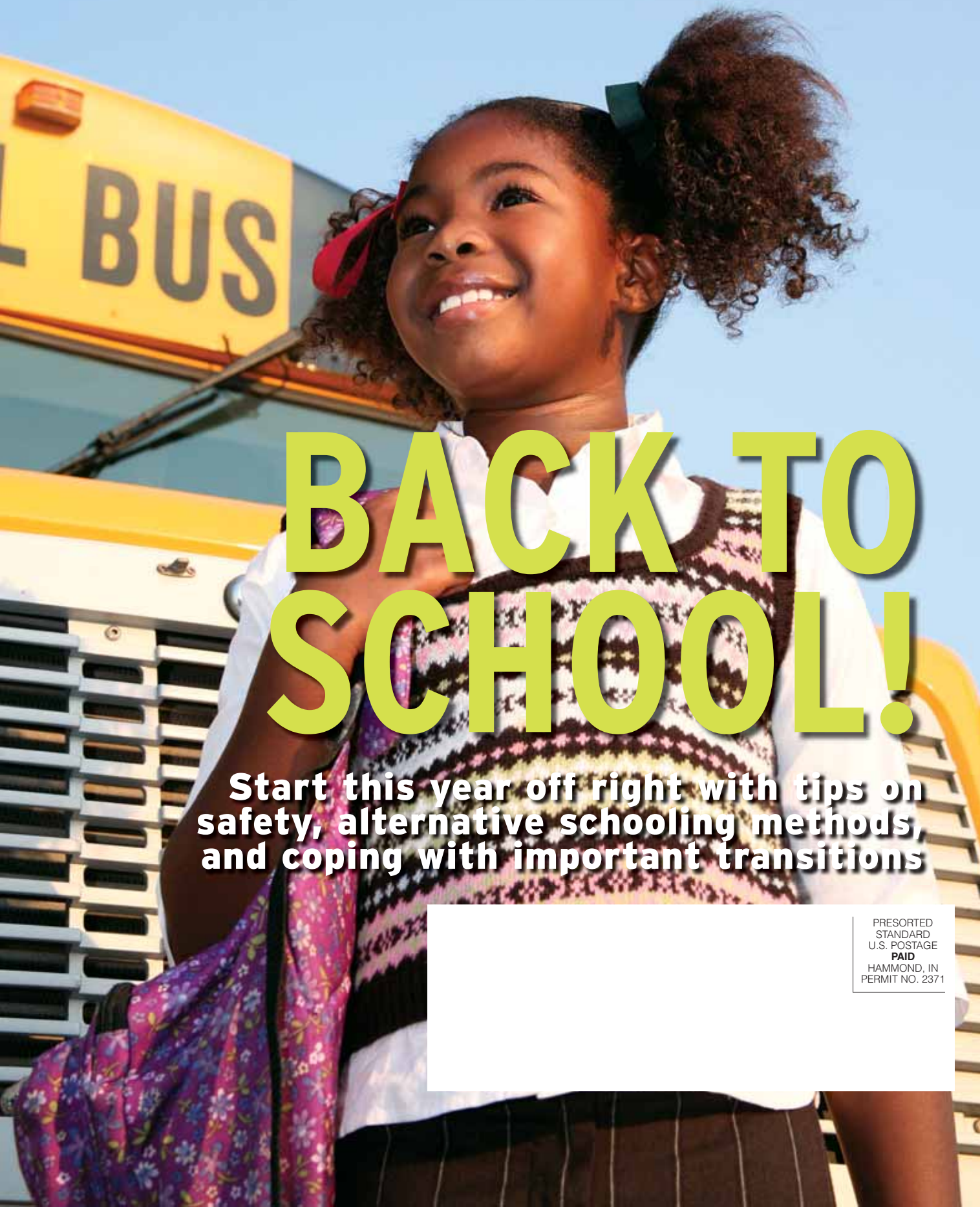


JULY/AUGUST 2008

NWIparent

Real Solutions for Real Families



BACK TO SCHOOL!

Start this year off right with tips on safety, alternative schooling methods, and coping with important transitions

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Dealing with aggression



FIT FAMILY
Backpack syndrome

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footnotes

Myths and false information about children's shoes, and the footwear industry and even some pediatricians are not much help. The good news is that once you understand what makes children's feet unique, finding the right shoes—often inexpensively—is easy.

At birth, the newborn's foot is soft and flexible, and is loaded with fat. That fat cushions and protects our feet, but when we start to walk, the fat begins to disintegrate. In the coming decades, due to everyday walking—not to mention, perhaps tight-fitting shoes—that fat will wear away, allowing our foot bones and their rough edges to dig into our skin, often causing corns, calluses, blisters and other painful conditions. Ironically, the foot is the only body part that loses fat as we age, yet it's the one place we need it. I've often mused that perhaps some day we'll go for a tummy tuck and walk out with plump, happy feet.

Besides fat, a newborn's bones, muscles and ligaments are incredibly soft and pliable. This is good and bad. It's good because a baby that has a deformed foot often doesn't need surgery. A brace or a cast can "push" the foot into its correct position. The downside of such a flexible foot is that if parents

choose the wrong shoes for their children, they could create a deformity.

Don't be in a hurry to buy shoes for your baby; wait until your child begins to walk, usually at 11 to 15 months of age. Even then, keep shoes off the child as much as possible. Allowing children to walk barefoot on various surfaces—especially mildly uneven ones like you find in most backyards—fosters development of their foot's muscles, ligaments and balance.

To see the effect shoes have on feet, scientists compared American feet to those of African natives who had never worn shoes. Most natives had a straight big toe, whereas the Americans' big toe tilted toward the second toe, often causing a bunion—a bump on the inside of the foot. This deformed big toe is due, in part, to shoes curving inward at the toes, presumably to give feet a slender, pointed appearance.

Am I saying shoes are bad for your child's feet? They can be. We need them, though, to prevent injuries; just make sure children only wear them when necessary.

Socks can be a deforming force as well, limiting a baby or toddler's ability to spread and wiggle their toes, and develop their toe muscles. Young children should only wear socks when in shoes. If you need to keep your child's feet warm, use soft, loose-fitting

booties.

When shopping for shoes, choose a shoe with ample room for the child's toes to move. I recommend a finger's width of space at the tips of the toes, and to help your child avoid developing bunions, the shoe should have as little curvature as possible at the big toe. Look for shoes made of natural, breathable fabrics such as leather or canvas that are soft and pliable—just like your child's feet. You want the foot protected, but it should also "feel" the ground. The traditional baby shoe with its stiff upper and hard sole is the worst thing for young feet.

Parents notice when their child outgrows a shirt, but not always when their shoes are too small. Children's feet grow at different rates, so the time to buy new shoes varies greatly. I've seen kids grow an entire shoe size in a month. If your child starts pulling off their shoes, it could mean they've outgrown them.

Lastly, consider shopping at a shoe store that specializes in children's feet and has the expertise to ensure a proper fit.

Dr. Michael Nirenberg is a Crown Point podiatrist. To learn more, visit friendlyfootcare.com or call his office at 219.663.2273.