

# Families first



**RAISING A SAFE DRIVER**

**FREEDOM, WITH A SAFETY NET**

**THE FACES OF PEDIATRIC CARE**

**DASH INTO FUN!**

# Teens Taking

## Preparing Your Teen for the Road Ahead

If you're looking in the rearview mirror and starting to think about how soon you'll have a teen driver behind the wheel, it's normal to wonder how you can start preparing them for that big responsibility. While it might be too soon for them to take the wheel, they are watching you and what they see you do is a big deal.

Take your role seriously as a parent or guardian and teach safe driving habits by example. Any time you are in the driver seat with your child in the car, you are setting an example that they are likely to follow.



### **Start with safety.**

Discuss and enforce the following rules before your teen gets into the driver seat. Visit [ncvisionzero.org](http://ncvisionzero.org) for more helpful tips and resources.

- **No** cell phone use.
- **No** more than one passenger with a teen driver.
- **No** speeding.
- **No** alcohol.
- **No** driving or riding without a seat belt.

Also review and sign a Parent-Teen Driving Agreement, which is available at [cdc.gov](http://cdc.gov). A Family Safe Driving Agreement is also available at [endDD.org](http://endDD.org).

### **Create a plan together.**

Start by learning together what steps are needed for a teen to become a licensed driver. Visit [ncdot.gov](http://ncdot.gov) for the latest information. Once you understand the steps needed and confirm your child is eligible, they will still need to meet specific criteria and receive a permit before they begin practicing with a supervising driver present.

When permitted to practice driving, it can be helpful to set up a Driving Practice Plan. A sample plan can be downloaded from [ncteendriver.org](http://ncteendriver.org). The website also has communication tips for parent passengers.



# The Wheel



## facts

Talk straight about the dangerous realities of driving and help teens understand why the safety rules are so important.

- Texting can take your eyes off the road for 5 seconds. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, that is like driving the length of an entire football field with your eyes closed at 55mph.\*
- Motor vehicle collisions are a leading cause of death for teens in the U.S.
- In 2023, 41% of teens (ages 15 -19) that died in car crashes on North Carolina roads were not wearing a seat belt\*\*

\* Source: nhtsa.gov

\*\* Source: NCDOT Crash Facts

## Take it easy.

Don't expect your teen to be a great driver or even comfortable with the idea of driving right away. Start them out in easy settings. An empty parking lot is great for just testing out how it feels to be behind the wheel. Initially let them drive on roads with less traffic and at less busy times of the day.

Familiarize them with the mechanics of the car and basic safety rules and tips. Always ride with them during the learning year and exercise patience.

## Practice, practice practice!

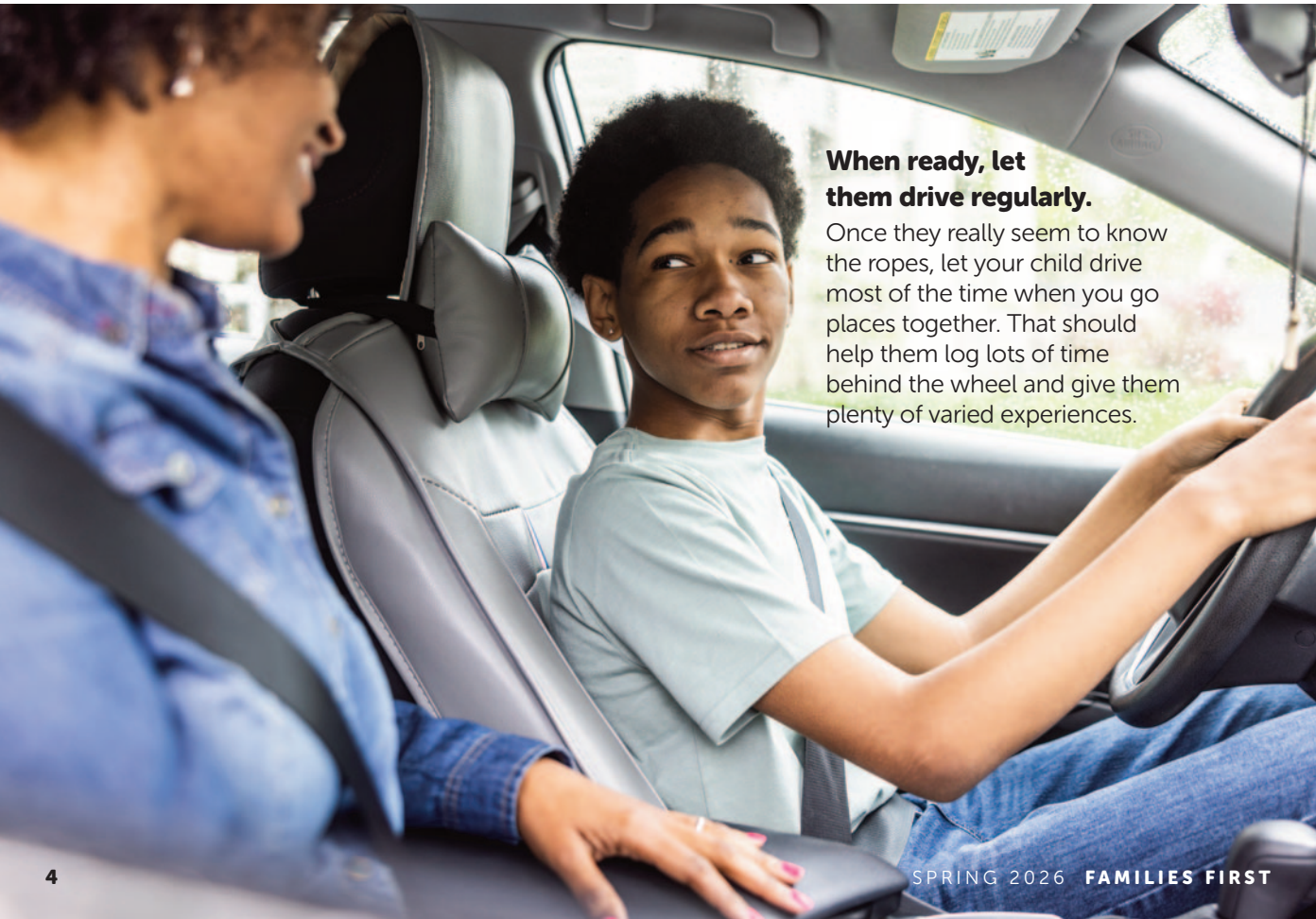
Inexperience is a big reason why teens are involved in so many accidents. That's why there is a long period of time for driving with a limited learner's permit.

Help your teen get as much practice as possible in many different scenarios. North Carolina uses a graduated driver's license (GDL) process to help teens learn to drive safely. The process is intended to help teens build skills slowly through supervised practice.



If your child has high anxiety, learning to drive is likely to be a trigger. Dr. Laura Politte, medical director of outpatient services for WakeMed Mental Health & Well-Being, recommends it's important to let them start with what they can handle. Consider beginning with short trips in familiar places and stay closer to home before suggesting they drive on longer trips.

"The more hours they can log in a car with a parent while they have their permit, the more prepared they are likely to be when they are finally on their own," said Dr. Politte. "While it may be more anxiety-inducing to log extra hours with a teen driver, you'll have a better sense of their abilities and readiness to drive on their own."



## When ready, let them drive regularly.

Once they really seem to know the ropes, let your child drive most of the time when you go places together. That should help them log lots of time behind the wheel and give them plenty of varied experiences.

### Layer in complexity.

Once your teen feels comfortable, and you are more confident about their basic driving skills, start trying new areas and build up to more complex situations. It's important for teens to get practice driving in different settings, including highways, rural roads, bridges and steep hills. Think about places that present new scenarios and challenges and talk about them beforehand. Multiple lanes, narrow roads, four-way stops, traffic circles and construction zones are areas that will likely require extra practice. Don't forget to have them practice driving under different weather conditions and at different times of the day and night.



Check the nighttime driving rules! Be sure to confirm what times of night your supervised teen driver is allowed to drive based on their level of permit and length of time as a learner.

### Be observant and thoughtful.

Don't be a distracted passenger when your teenager is learning to drive. Pay attention to what they are doing and to what the drivers around them are doing. Parents and all supervising drivers have an important role to help them see where the dangers lurk and to mentally put on the brakes when they are out of their comfort zone. Always remain calm.

Take breaks and deep breaths, and talk about anything that is giving them or you anxiety.



### Don't rush the process.

You should never hurry or push your teen into the driving lane just because they are turning the legal age for driving. If they are not ready or you have any concerns, slow things down and delay getting a license until sufficient, additional practice strengthens their skills and comfort level on the road. "Remember, every kid is going to be different – two kids at the same age may not be ready for the same thing when it comes to driving and many other things," said Dr. Politte. "Your job is to stay focused on developing a safe driver who is ready and willing to be responsible and react appropriately in unpredictable driving situations." Even if your child has checked all the boxes to be a licensed driver, they may not be ready to drive on their own.



## The Dangers of Distracted Driving

The facts about distracted driving are startling. Take a minute to stop and really think about all the little, distracting things you and the drivers around you are doing while behind the wheel. Now, ask yourself if any of those activities are worth the risk of causing a death or life-threatening injuries. The answer is clear and yet research shows that people's behaviors frequently contradict what they believe is safe.

"One moment of carelessness can change or end a life," said Ashley Hink, MD, MPH, WakeMed Surgical Critical Care & Trauma. "Motor vehicle collisions are a leading cause of death for teens, and many times these are preventable." Texts, emails, phone chats, snacks, makeup application, music selections and passenger distractions all take a driver's attention away from the road and hands off the steering wheel.

"Lives can be shattered in a matter of seconds, but it is completely preventable," said Dr. Hink. "As a surgeon working in a Level I Trauma Center, we see the consequences of distracted driving, and it is devastating."

You can save lives and avoid causing serious injuries by simply staying focused and in control of the wheel.

### Types of Distraction



#### VISUAL

Eyes off the road.



#### MANUAL

Hands off the wheel.



#### COGNITIVE

Mind off driving.

#### Take a Pledge

Commit to distraction-free driving. You have a choice. Delay distracting activities and focus on driving safely – it can be a life-saving decision! Make it today. Put the phone away and ignore the temptation to deal with anything other than driving when you're behind the wheel.

#### Set the Example

Remember, if you don't take that call or answer that text, that's one less distracted driver on the road and maybe even two if the person calling you is also driving. Children watch what others do and model their behaviors after the parents and other trusted adults in their lives.

#### Tips:

- Turn off your ringer; silence your phone altogether.
- Place your phone out of sight.
- Activate autoreplies to let others know you are not responding to calls or texts because you are driving. This sets a great example.

In 2023, **3,275 people** were killed in motor vehicle crashes involving distracted drivers.\*

\* Source: nhtsa.gov



# Parenting the **Independent** Years

## DEVELOPMENTAL TIPS FOR PARENTS

When teens start to drive and rapidly approach adulthood, parents can feel out of sorts with a mix of emotions and concerns. It frequently feels like the little kids who needed them almost constantly before are suddenly gone all the time and way more independent. The reality of teens and their growing independence is something that Dr. Laura Politte, medical director of outpatient services for WakeMed Mental Health & Well-Being, and mother of three kids, says families can prepare for long before their kids are behind the wheel or moving out of the house.



“Believe it or not, teen independence doesn’t just happen all at once, but it can feel that way if parents don’t think ahead, mentally prep, build trust and embrace the big milestones,” said Dr. Politte. “The best thing parents can do is to support a child’s growth as independently minded individuals while clearly showing them that they still have their parents as a home base – reassure them that they can always come back to you for guidance or just to be in a safe space.”

Dr. Politte says kids discover the idea of more freedom and independence as early as the toddler years. “When they first start to walk away from you, they usually don’t go too far and tend to come back quickly seeking safety, but over time they go a little

further,” she explains. “They want to know you are there, but they also want to explore their independence.” Dr. Politte explains that growing independence is a natural, developmental process for kids that evolves over time and is best supported by allowing children to try, struggle a little, and try again. “For parents of teens, it may be helpful to try to remember those years when their kids started to wander away, began to express their independence with the word ‘No,’ and tested their abilities by insisting on doing things themselves,” said Dr. Politte. “You basically see that repeat through childhood and is a healthy part of the teen years – venturing further and further away from home; gaining more independence.”

“Regardless of age, children need a secure place to come back to again and again. It just looks different when they are older. They’ll be gone for longer stretches, and they’re likely further away and completely out of sight, but you are still very important to them so maintain your core connection and stay available to be their trusted person – from near or far.”

**Dr. Laura Politte**  
**WakeMed Mental Health**  
**& Well-Being**

Dr. Politte warns that sometimes parents get their feelings hurt as their teens gain independence, and she says it’s important to check in with yourself and explore the positive aspects of your evolving role.

Some big changes are going on as kids transition between childhood and adulthood. To understand more about the physical, cognitive, social and emotional changes of adolescence (ages 10 to 18), visit [healthychildren.org](http://healthychildren.org)

## SMART STRATEGIES

Dr. Politte recommends the following tips to help parents navigate the teen years long before their kids are driving.

- Remember, teenage brains are not fully developed until their mid-20s.
- Know and accept that they are going to make mistakes.
- Reassure them that they can come to you with problems.
- Support them in times of trouble; help them find a path forward.
- Establish realistic expectations for checking in; build mutual respect.
- Help them build awareness of you as a person (not just their parent).
- Keep two-way lines of communication open; be a listener.
- Allow more decision-making, but don’t leave them totally alone to their own devices..
- Give teens space – realize that too much parent contact can feel overbearing.
- Accept that teens naturally want to spend more time with their peers.

“Allowing teens to practice more independent decision-making and make some mistakes is all part of helping them build skills to manage life when they are truly on their own,” said Dr. Politte. “Just be mindful of what your kid is ready for, which isn’t always what their best friend is ready for, and be sure to build in accountability with additional freedoms.”

Dr. Politte says it’s important to consider different aspects of a teen’s personality when making big independence-related decisions. She recommends taking into account how impulsive they are, if they are doing well academically, and if they are making good decisions with their bodies. You know your child, so address concerns when they exist and ease into new scenarios with clear expectations.

Parents naturally want their kids to be safe and successful, but it’s important to let them be human and explore interests that may not align with your ambitions for them. “It’s a delicate balance of letting them do their own thing while keeping some rules in place for their well-being” said Dr. Politte. “Just make sure they know that boundaries are put in place out of love; present them in a manner of mutual respect.”



## GET TO KNOW



# WakeMed Children's

In the following pages, meet three of our WakeMed Children's physicians who provide outstanding care to our young patients – and hear their perspectives as both doctors and parents.





## Parent & Physician Perspectives

What makes WakeMed Children's stand out in our community is our team of specially trained health care professionals who provide medical care for children of all ages – from newborn to 17-years-old.

Our pediatric team cares for hospitalized patients in Wake County's only Children's Hospital and Pediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU), providing treatment for a variety of diagnoses, including but not limited to, respiratory and gastrointestinal disorders, orthopaedic issues, jaundice, and prematurity.

WakeMed Children's offers a wide range of pediatric specialties and services, including:

- Neonatology & Special Infant Care
- Pediatric Critical Care Medicine & Pediatric Hospitalist Physicians
- Children's Emergency Department
- Pediatric Urgent Care
- WakeMed Physician Practices
  - ENT, Head & Neck Surgery
  - Pediatric Cardiology
  - Pediatric Endocrinology
  - Pediatric Gastroenterology
  - Pediatric Inpatient Rehab
  - Pediatric Pulmonology
  - Pediatric Primary Care
  - Pediatric Surgery
  - Pediatric Weight Management
  - Pediatric Urology
  - Wake Orthopaedics



## Meet Cherise Brackett, MD

WakeMed Neonatology

Mother of two boys, ages 5 and 2



Dr. Cherise Brackett's approach to patient care stems from her personal experience of having children in the NICU. Dr. Brackett knows firsthand the vulnerability, fear and uncertainty that parents feel when their hopes for a smooth transition to parenthood are disrupted. When not seeing patients, Dr. Brackett enjoys exploring parks and museums and doing fun activities around Raleigh with her husband and two sons.

### **Favorite Family Activities**

I like taking my kids to indoor play parks such as Happy Feet Planet or Sky Zone. We do sports through the YMCA – enjoying basketball, soccer and swimming. I enjoy watching them learn a new skill, even if they just run around without ever touching the ball.

### **Favorite, Local Outdoor Spot**

Along the theme of play areas, our family enjoys Pleasant Park in Apex. There is fun for all ages and a variety of smaller play areas and outdoor fields. We find somewhere new to explore every time we go!

### **As a physician and parent, what piece of advice do you want to share?**

The number one piece of advice I have is something I'm sure many have heard a lot and something I remind myself of daily: "If you want to go fast, go alone. But if you want to go far, go together." As parents, especially mothers, we have an innate instinct about our children and what may be in their best interest. We try to do all we can for our children and we have an idea of exactly how we want that done. It can be frustrating when those around us aren't doing things "our way." I suggest taking a step back to appreciate that someone (be it a spouse, family member, or friend) was trying to do something they thought would be helpful. Even if things are in the wrong place, take a minute to appreciate what was done – like maybe the floor is vacuumed, and you didn't have to do it.

Along those lines, keep these things in mind:

- Take those small wins and rest in everything not being "perfect" because tomorrow will bring its own challenges and opportunities for burn out.
- Parenting is not a solo sport, or even a 2 or 3-person sport. The more the merrier!
- For those who don't have the pleasure of living close to relatives or in-laws, you may be able to find support from other parents in your area – seek and accept help from colleagues, church friends, and community support groups.

### **My Safety Tip**

Pool safety is always a hot topic, especially as the weather begins to get warmer. All children, even those in swim lessons, should be directly observed in and around the pool to prevent pool-related injuries.

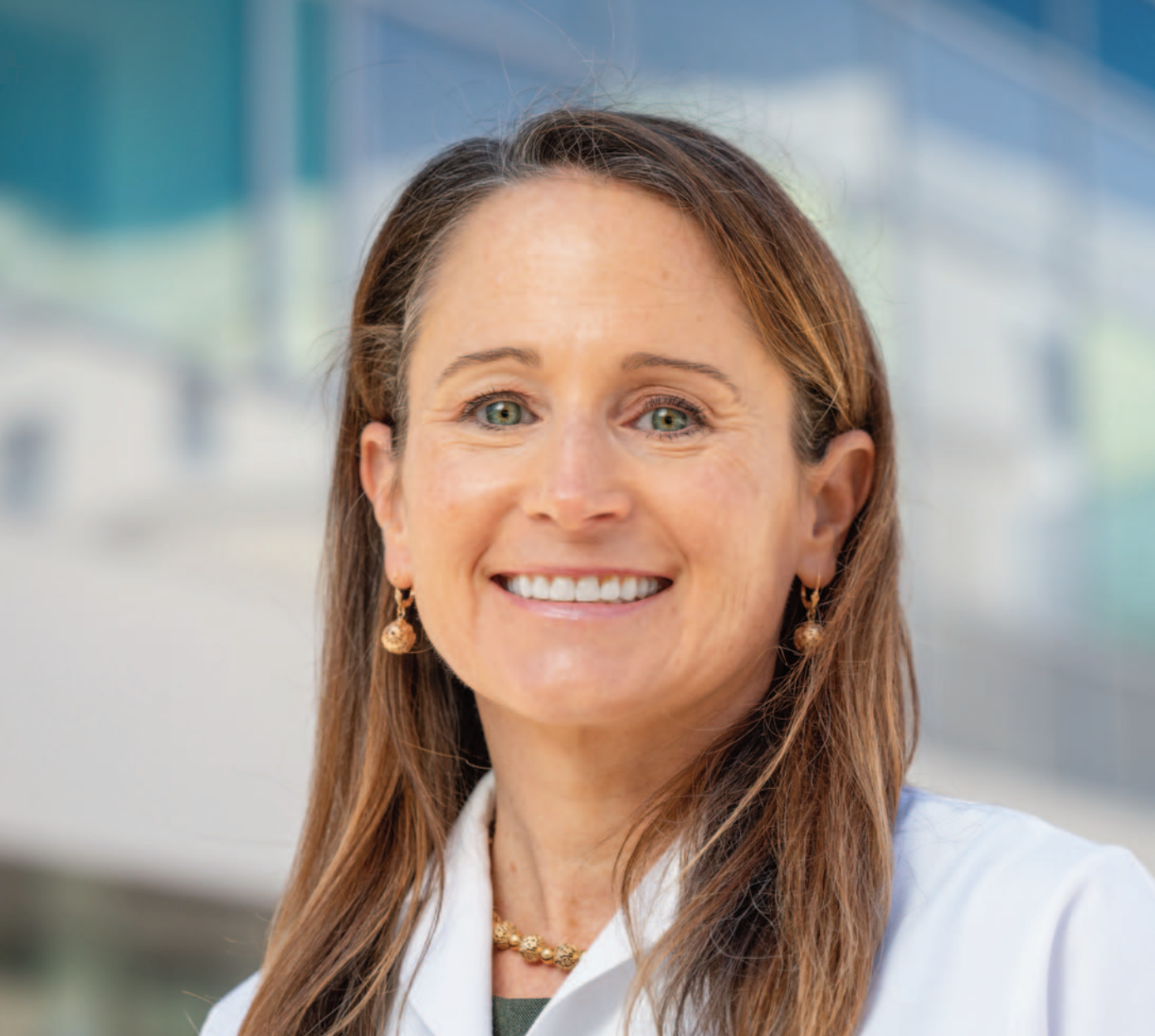
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Dr. Brackett is a board-certified neonatologist who specializes in caring for premature and critically ill newborns. Her work focuses on improving the long-term development of extremely premature babies and using medical data to improve care in the NICU and after babies go home.

**Board Certifications:** American Board of Pediatrics

**Medical School:** University of Virginia Health System, Charlottesville, VA

**Undergraduate:** University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill



## Meet Kimberly Erickson, MD

WakeMed Pediatric Surgery

**Mother of a teenage girl**

*Kimberly Erickson, MD*

*Physician Practices  
Pediatric Surgery*

A native of Princeton, New Jersey, Dr. Kimberly M. Erickson lives in Raleigh with her husband Dr. John Erickson, who is also a surgeon, and her teenage daughter. Outside of work, Dr. Erickson says she enjoys hiking, biking, traveling, and spending time outdoors in this beautiful state with her family and their 'middle-aged' rescue dog.

### **Favorite Family Activities**

We love visiting new cities, states, and countries and learning about the history of the region, the customs, and of course, the food. Since we also like outside adventures, we try to include activities like hiking, biking, zip lining, kayaking, sailing, climbing, fly fishing and white-water rafting on our trips.

### **Favorite, Local Outdoor Spot**

We most often find ourselves hiking with our sweet dog or mountain biking in Umstead State Park, which is very close to our home. My daughter has been hiking there since we moved to the area when she was a young toddler. We also love to do weekend campouts in the amazing NC state parks.

### **As a physician and parent, what piece of advice do you want to share?**

As a pediatric surgeon with extensive trauma experience, I would ask parents to do all that they can to protect their children from accidental injury, which is the number one cause of death in children in the United States.

While some things may seem like a hassle or even an unnecessary abundance of caution, the tried-and-true injury prevention measures consistently recommended to parents are the very things that actually save lives. Two great resources for families to pay attention to are [safekids.org](http://safekids.org) and [healthychildren.org](http://healthychildren.org).

### **My Safety Tips**

- Always follow the established guidelines for securing children in car seats and boosters.
- Make sure kids always wear a helmet when on wheels (bikes, roller skates, hoverboards, skateboards).
- Keep children off motorized bikes and ATVs.
- Lock up any firearms appropriately and talk to friends and family to make sure theirs are secure and inaccessible.
- Make sure all button batteries in the home are out of reach from young children, as these can cause life-threatening injuries to the esophagus and airway.

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Dr. Erickson is a board-certified general and pediatric surgeon. Before joining the WakeMed Children's team, she served as medical director of pediatric trauma and was a clinical associate professor at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill.

**Board Certifications:** General Surgery and Pediatric Surgery

**Medical School:** Columbia College of Physicians and Surgeons

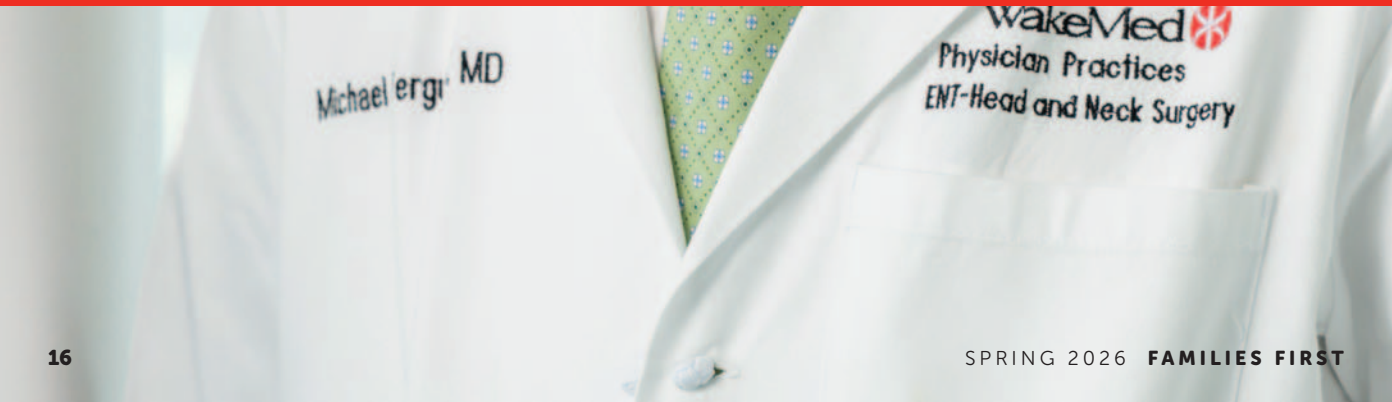
**Undergraduate:** Princeton University



## Meet Michael Ferguson, MD

Director of WakeMed Physician Practices' Ear, Nose, Throat – Head and Neck Surgery

**Father of two teenage girls**



Dr. Michael Ferguson is a "nearly" Raleigh native and former soccer player. Dr. Ferguson and his wife have two teenage daughters – one in college and one fast approaching high school graduation. He enjoys sports, playing music with friends, backyard grilling and spending time with family.

### **Favorite Family Activities**

Traveling to see the other beautiful parts of the United States and the world is by far the activity that we've enjoyed the most as a family. Whether walking the beaches of Maine in search of elusive sea glass, hiking in Colorado, or wandering big city streets to soak up all the sights, it all goes back to an experiential life together.

### **Favorite Local, Outdoor Spot**

Our favorite local spot for my children growing up was our own backyard. Our family grew up with other neighborhood families, and we spent immense amounts of time breaking bread together and entertaining our kids. It built lifelong relationships and brought us great joy. Trampolines, soccer games and grill outs were staples that allowed time for kids to be kids and adults to have their own controlled adult fun all at the same time. Some of our favorite memories were around "Family Dinner."

### **As a physician and parent, what piece of advice do you want to share?**

As the father of two teens, my advice is very simple – the very best gift you can give your children is your time. That is not a cliché because time will fly by, and your most precious commodities will be on to their next phases in life. They won't remember the episodes of Paw Patrol or what they got for Christmas three years ago. They will remember the memories you made with them and the lessons they took from them.

Being present is your greatest gift, so make time for the simple but invaluable moments you can share together – taking walks, going on adventures, playing in the park, and taking trips. Even quiet moments, like sitting together in church or watching the sunset, can become meaningful memories.

### **My Safety Tip**

As my children have grown, my safety tips are far beyond electrical outlets and crossing the streets. Instead, my advice is to always be mindful of surroundings and don't trust strangers, regardless of age.

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Dr. Ferguson is an ear, nose, and throat (ENT) specialist who treats patients of all ages. His work covers pediatric ENT, sinus problems, thyroid surgery, and cancers of the head and neck. He is also an award-winning teacher, having received the Kaiser Permanente Excellence in Teaching Award. A Morehead Scholar at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Dr. Ferguson continues to contribute his expertise there as an associate professor and associate director in the UNC School of Medicine Department of Otolaryngology/Head and Neck Surgery.

**Board Certifications:** Diplomate, American Board of Otolaryngology - Head and Neck Surgery

**Undergraduate & Medical School:** University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill



# WakeMed Children's **TWINKLE DASH**

**Saturday, June 6  
8:30 am to 10 am  
Downtown Fuquay-Varina**

Don't miss the WakeMed Children's Twinkle Dash at the 2026 Run The Quay! This star-studded run is perfect for kids ages 10 and under. Led by the team from WakeMed Children's and its mascot, Twinkle, this 50-yard and 100-yard run gives younger family members an opportunity to get involved with a dose of healthy fun.

\$10 per child with all proceeds going to WakeMed Children's. Sign up today!



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## GIVE YOUNG ATHLETES A HEALTHY START

Sports participation has a positive effect on bone and muscle health and social development. When it comes to choosing a sport, parents should start by exposing their children to a variety of activities with realistic expectations. Early on, the most important thing is to help children enjoy and appreciate the benefits of exercise. Family-friendly runs like WakeMed Children's Twinkle Dash are a great way to introduce the basics of healthy sports habits that will keep them moving and benefit them for a lifetime.

### Twinkle's Top Tips for Race Day

- Eat a healthy dinner and breakfast.
- Get a good night of rest before the run.
- Warm up with light exercise like jumping jacks.
- Stay hydrated and enjoy the run.
- Enjoy a healthy snack at the end; drink plenty of water.

### Healthy Snacks for Runners

Try these simple, easy post-race options, or let your kids get creative with their own ideas. Just keep in mind that the best post-workout snacks contain both carbohydrates and protein.

- Yogurt & fruit
- Cheese & crackers
- Peanut butter sandwich
- Trail mix
- Granola bars



### Advisory Panel for Families First

Jerry Bernstein, MD, retired

Karen Chilton, MD, Chief Medical Officer, WakeMed Children's & Senior Vice President & Chief Quality Officer

Bridget Donell, MD, Medical Director, WakeMed Physician Practices – Pediatric Critical Care and Hospital Medicine

Amy Griffin, MD, Assistant Medical Director, WakeMed Children's Emergency Department

Andy Jakubowicz, MD, Wake Emergency Physicians

Damilola Joseph, MD, Medical Director, WakeMed Children's Emergency Department

Jeff Langdon, Executive Director, WakeMed Women's & Children's

Bill Lagarde, MD, Executive Medical Director, PreciselyYou

Debra Laughery, retired

J. Duncan Phillips, MD, Surgeon-in-Chief/Director, WakeMed Children's - Pediatric Surgery

Luanne Lane, Editor

Leesa Brinkley, Design



# NATIONAL Child ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH

WakeMed  
Children's

3000 New Bern Avenue  
Raleigh NC 27610  
wakemed.org

Nonprofit  
Organization  
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Raleigh, NC  
Permit NO. 1307

The month of April is a time for child advocates to build awareness and shine a light on the importance of protecting children and creating safe, nurturing communities.

Visit [safekidnc.org](http://safekidnc.org) for reading resources and information about prevention programs in Wake County.

TWINKLE'S GETTING THINGS READY!

## A New Ambulance Adventure Arriving at Marbles

**Saturday, June 13**

**10 am to 5 pm**

**Marbles Kids Museum**

**201 E. Hargett Street, Downtown Raleigh**

Marbles Kids Museum and WakeMed are gearing up for a brand-new, hands-on health care exhibit! Kids can climb aboard the ambulance, practice newborn care in the nursery, and triage patients in a hospital exam room— learning how first responders care for our community every day. The grand opening celebration will feature special guests and plenty of family-friendly fun throughout the day.

Join us for a grand opening celebration to explore this one-of-a-kind ambulance play, included with Marbles' museum admission! Tickets and more information will be available late May at [marbleskidsmuseum.org](http://marbleskidsmuseum.org).

