

Trust Me Mom: McCandless mother provides parents with expert-supported resource



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Ekaterina Konovalova of McCandless is the founder of Trust Me Mom, an online resource for parents.

Skepticism, meet reality.

McCandless resident Ekaterina Konovalova once was dubious of a certain piece of conventional wisdom.

“When I heard things like, ‘Oh, parenting is the hardest job in the world,’ I’m like, yeah, yeah. How did we do it for generations for thousands of years?” she questioned.

Then she became a mother. And a believer:

“The amount of knowledge you need to raise a child is almost like several PhD programs. Every day you learn something new, and your child evolves with each season of life.”

Perhaps she thought the effect on her own life would be minimal with the arrival of Lisa Hupp, the daughter of Konovalova and her husband, Andrew Hupp. At the time, she was focused primarily on being a highly achieving professional in marketing and advertising, after having earned multiple graduate degrees in the United States and her native Russia.

Eventually, the double duty of work and parenthood caught up with her.

“A lot of young women are told that they can do it all: They can build a fabulous career, and then they can start a family and somehow miraculously juggle all the responsibilities and be a superstar, and look gorgeous and rested and amazing,” she said. “And that’s not true.”

So she recalibrated, toning down her career responsibilities, and relocated, moving last year from Texas to the Pittsburgh area. And this year, she launched an online project to help parents — herself included, “to satisfy my own curiosity” — navigate today’s challenges.

Konovalova calls Trust Me Mom “your resource for practical tips, expert interviews and evidence-based strategies.” She backs up the claim by providing a series of well-written and diligently researched articles, along with top-notch videos, covering a variety of topics with which plenty of parents can identify.

An example is “What to Do If Your Child Sees School as Prison,” featuring “unexpected advice” from a school psychologist with more than two decades of experience. Ninth-degree black belt Robert Zang provides insight for “How Taekwondo Can Help Kids with Dyslexia and ADHD.”

‘I had to find a lot of help’

Regarding the latter, Trust Me Mom focuses to a large degree on children who have special needs. Konovalova has delved deeply into such considerations, as her daughter was diagnosed with dyslexia — which makes it difficult to read, write and spell — and a related condition, dysgraphia.

“We at first really struggled because she couldn’t keep up with the traditional educational system. I had to find a lot of help: support, tutors,” Konovalova recalled. “And we chose to move to Pittsburgh because of the amazing Provident Charter School for Children.”

She reports that Lisa, almost 9, is thriving at the school in Troy Hill, which is designed for students with language-based learning differences.

“We’re one of the lucky families who got accepted, and within a year my daughter reset her grade level and is not afraid to write,” Konovalova said. “Every single teacher is amazing. They’re absolute angels.”

As such, Provident often is featured in Trust Me Mom entries. A particularly compelling article, “Understanding Through Simulation: The Impact of Dyslexia on School-Aged Children and How Parents Can Gain Insight,” includes a video in which Konovalova reports on her experience.

“When I was in the simulation with other parents, I heard reactions such as, ‘Oh, my gosh, I didn’t know it was so hard for my child,’ ‘I felt stupid’ or ‘I just wanted to give up. I could not keep up with the assignment.’”

She counters such reactions with a sense of positivity:

“Typically, they have other gifts and skills, so their brain will overcompensate for lack of certain connection. And often, dyslexic kids may see a bigger picture, have a very nonstandard solution to a problem. That’s why so many successful people and geniuses and famous people are dyslexic, because they’re able to step out of the standard thinking and zoom out and see a different solution to a problem.”

‘Unfortunately a very common story’

Konovalova has her own history of thinking outside the proverbial box, displaying especially creative artistic talents from an early age. She flourished scholastically, as well, earning a combined bachelor’s and master’s degree at Kuban State University, Kubansky gosudarstvenny universitet, in southern Russia.

“I worked for a couple of years out of college. I was promoted quickly to the director of advertising and public relations, and I worked for a company similar to Crate & Barrel here,” she said about the furniture retailer. “But I barely had days off, traveled all the time. So I thought, I’ll come to America and earn a better living.”

She received another master’s, in community social psychology, at the University of Massachusetts at Lowell, and later studied at schools including the University of Texas, where she met Lone Star State native Andrew Hupp.

Meanwhile, she was making her way up the career ladder.

“When I had my daughter, I also led the mentoring program at the American Marketing Association,” she recalled. “I paired marketing executives with junior professionals, and a lot of them are Fortune 500 companies. I hosted 10 events per year for them, organized all their meetups, paired the groups, in addition to my main job.”

Something had to give.

“About six years in, I just collapsed. My health gave up,” Konovalova said. “And it’s unfortunately a very common story for many other executive women.”

A Trust Me Mom entry, “How Moms Can Regain Their Worth, Get Unstuck and Live Their Best Lives,” supplies some reassurance by way of an interview with Karin Freeland, author of the autobiographical “Grab Life by the Dreams: The Essential Guide to Getting Unstuck and Living Your Purpose.”

The subject matter corresponds with what Konovalova wants to achieve through Trust Me Mom.

“It’s really enriching,” she said. “It’s helpful for me and hopefully for other parents, because I know I’m not alone.”

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