

BABY TALK

Son Shine

Actor Taye Diggs opens up about how fatherhood has changed him and inspired him to write a kids' book

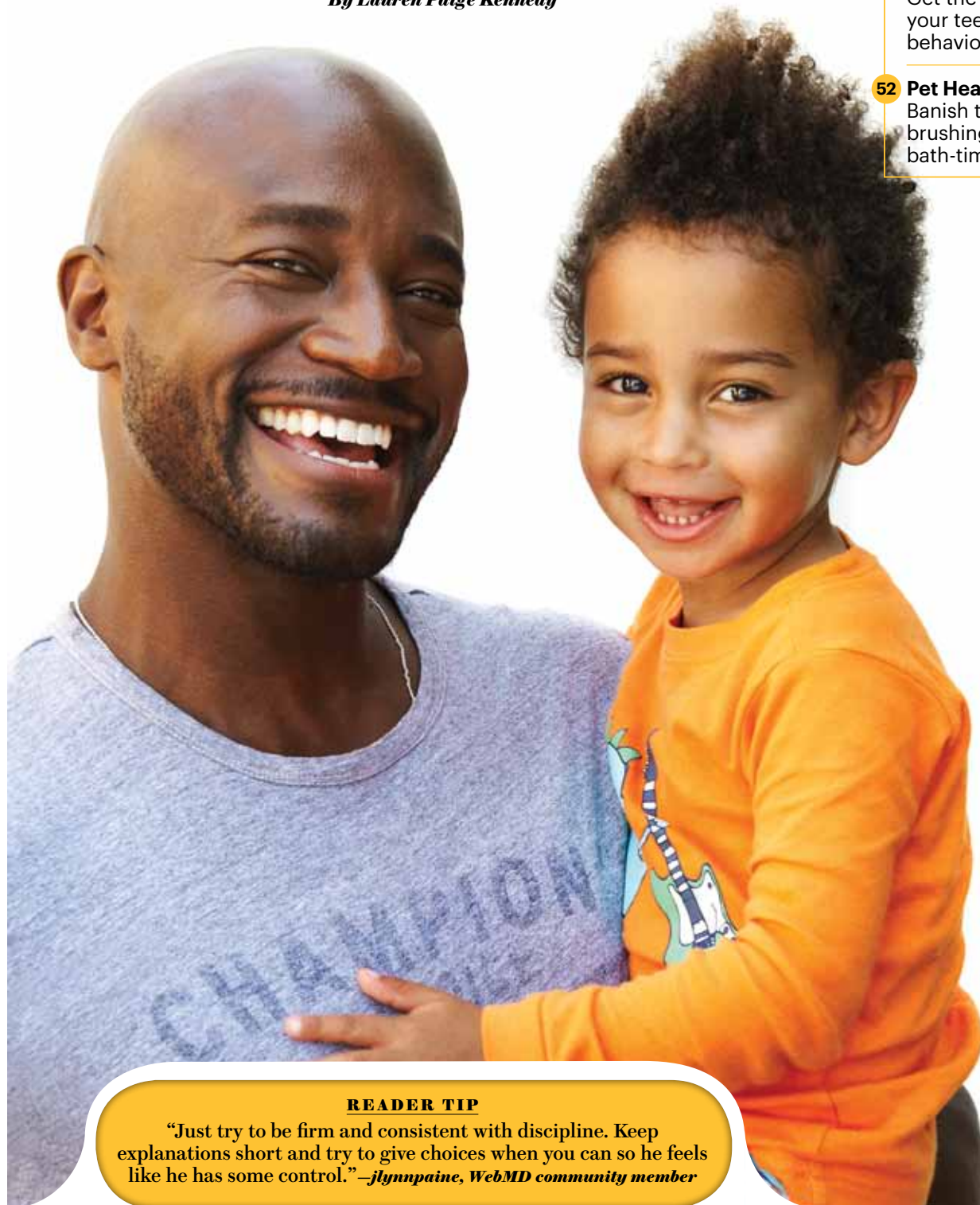
By Lauren Paige Kennedy

FAMILY & PARENTING



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52 Pet Health
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READER TIP

"Just try to be firm and consistent with discipline. Keep explanations short and try to give choices when you can so he feels like he has some control."—*jlynnpaine, WebMD community member*



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BABY TALK

Proud Papa

You're a father to a 3-year-old son. What words of wisdom can you offer parents struggling with the "terrible twos"?

We're just coming off a night where Walker woke up at 5 a.m. and wouldn't go back to sleep. It's not for the faint of heart! I'd say *sleep* before you have any young ones. But it's a wonderful project in life, trying to raise this other person. He can be a buddy, then we're mentoring him, then he's teaching us.

Are you and your wife, Idina Menzel, who stars on Fox's *Glee*, big on bed- and bath-time routines for Walker, or do you favor a more relaxed approach?

We're both. We like to set up parameters, then every once in a while stray from them. Everything in moderation. That's what's most natural and what makes the most sense for us.

At 41, how has fatherhood changed you? Do you approach your work or your life differently now?

Before Walker was born, my heart belonged to Idina. I thought I knew what love was. After he was born, it felt as if I grew another heart. It's a type of love I had no idea I was capable of, and there are times when it's unsettling because it's made me feel more vulnerable than ever before. If anything happened to this little guy...I literally can't even [allow] the thought to enter my head. I tailspin. I'm a lot nicer to my mom now. If my son treats me the same way I treated my mother in the past, I'll be heartbroken! At some point he's not going to want to hang out with me—and it just kills me.

Diggs stars in ABC's *Private Practice*.



How did your mom instill self-esteem in you and lay the groundwork for your new children's book, *Chocolate Me!*?

I wouldn't be performing if not for her, or have written the book. She made it known to me at a very early age that I needed to have a strong sense of self, regardless of what others might think. Kids at school, they tell you how

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you should be, dress, talk—it never felt right. Mom would say, “You stick to what you do—you’re going to be great.” Both of my parents instilled that in me. And already we’re starting that with Walker.

The book, which focuses on celebrating diversity, is inspired by a poem you wrote in college, right?

It was a poem based upon an event that happened when I was 5 or 6 years old. I wrote it during a very reflective stage. Then I put it away for years. My best friend from childhood, illustrator Shane W. Evans, remembered me writing that poem and thought it would make a great children's book. He was already an established illustrator, so working with him involved going into the deal with publishers, contracts, and all that.

DID YOU KNOW?

NEWBORNS HAVE IMMATURE NERVOUS SYSTEMS, SO THEY SLEEP A LOT—BUT

ONLY FOR ONE OR TWO HOURS AT A TIME, DAY OR NIGHT.

On Private Practice, you play Dr. Sam Bennett, who's authored a best-seller about the mind-body connection. In real life, do you believe in this approach?

I do, 100%. Everything in moderation. I never approach anything in the extreme, because that makes things rigid. I have a sensible, logical perspective. You've got to think positive,

and things will be positive. Whatever you put into your body is what you get back. That said, I love a burger. And I love my sweets!

When the stress levels are dialed up, how do you reset and unwind?

The gym. I'm addicted to the gym, and I love to stay active. Everybody in the family, from Idina to the nanny, understands that it's a part of my life I need. Nobody tries to mess with it!

What's your go-to healthy snack?

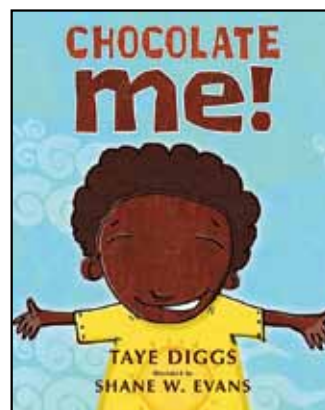
Nuts. We grew up with no money whatsoever. We couldn't afford the junk food, and we ate very healthy—nuts, salads, grains. It's my version of comfort food.

What's your workout regimen?

I'm always playing basketball or at the gym, or right now I'm working on a show that I'm choreographing. And whenever it's just Walker and me, we're always out. I gotta leave the house. I gotta keep moving.

What do you like best about your fitness routine?

Getting old is what I like the least. And what I like the best is the feel-



What's your greatest wish for your children's book and for the kids who read it?

We want to build upon *Chocolate Me!* with T-shirts, children's hair products, and skin care. At its core, it's about self-appreciation and a healthy sense of self. From there it expands and becomes more universal. The title suggests it's directed more toward African-Americans, but we're all in this together.

ing I get. Being raised in the arts, the feeling that sports gives you is completely different. Performing, for me, has a lot to do with the audience, their response, and the high you get when you're on stage. But I could shoot hoops for hours all by myself.

What does a perfect day look like for you, when you have no place to be and no calls to return?

Basketball and gym in the morning, then a great family day with my wife and Walker, going somewhere outside, just watching him, relishing the outdoors. Then putting him down and having the evening for just my wife and me—a great dinner and seeing a show in New York City. That's perfection.

Reviewed by Louise Chang, MD
WebMD Senior Medical Editor