

8 places to run away with the circus



The Actors Gymnasium

Run away with the circus without leaving Chicago! If your child prefers to hang upside down while swinging from the monkey bars or tries to jump off a kitchen cabinet to reach the kitchen fan, he belongs in the circus. He'll be able to squeeze out every last ounce of that energy, and it's the one place where jumping, swinging, swirling and balancing on one foot is encouraged.

Here are some fabulous places where your child can juggle, balance and hang upside down.

MSA & Circus Arts

1934 N. Campbell Ave., Chicago; (773) 687-8840

Ages: 3 and up

What it offers: Learn skills such as juggling, clowning, rolling globe, sports acrobatics, trampoline, stilts, unicycle

and stage presentation. The founder of the circus arts program, Nourbol Meirmanov, is a graduate of the Moscow State Circus school, and has recruited trained circus performers and teachers to work here.

Price starts: \$210 for an eight-week class.

The Actors Gymnasium

927 Noyes St., Evanston; (847) 328-2795

Ages: 3 through adult (their oldest student at the moment is 76)

What it offers: Kids can try everything from gymnastics-based circus classes to the real thing: stilt walking, juggling, trapeze, Spanish web, lyra, contortion and silk knot. Classes are taught by teachers who graduated from theater, musical theater and circus schools. They also offer programs for kids with disabilities and special needs.

Price starts: \$165 for an 8-10 week class.

Park District of Oak Park

21 Lake St., Oak Park; (708) 725-2200

Ages: 6-13

What it offers: They have everything from one-day introductory classes to full courses and circus camps, covering the aerial arts plus various ground circus acts including spinning plates, juggling and unicycling.

Price starts: \$39 for non-residents for a two-hour circus workshop.

TSNY Chicago

3158 Lakefront Trail, Chicago; (773) 484-8861

Ages: 6 and up

What it offers: This is the only flying trapeze school in Chicago (others teach trapeze, but this one offers the same experience you'd see in the actual circus). Fly through the air on the flying trapeze, or do something a little tamer like the tight wire or the silks. They have beginner to advanced circus classes.

Price starts: \$35 for a one-hour specialty class.

Triton Troupers Circus

2000 5th Ave., River Grove; (708) 456-0300

Ages: 16 and up

What it offers: This real circus invites anyone to join and practice twice a week from 7-10 p.m., and then perform in a real show (with cotton candy and popcorn and paying audience members!). This is a volunteer-based program, but the circus is extraordinary, and they have music, lighting and costumes. Acts include juggling, globes, clowns, trapeze, web and cradle.

Price starts: \$97 for a lifetime membership.

CircEsteem

4730 N. Sheridan Road, Chicago; (312) 731-3568

Ages: 3-18

What it offers: Circus classes and camps for kids ranging from silks to trapeze to a general circus buffet. Their mission is to unite youth from diverse racial, social and economic backgrounds in order to raise their self-esteem. Sixty percent of the students attend free of charge.

Price starts: \$300 for a 15-week session. Families can apply for a scholarship through the website.

The Runaway Circus

(773) 704-1946

Ages: 2 and up (the average age is 3-10)

What it offers: It's a traveling enrichment program. Bring the circus to your child's school or hire them for a birthday party. They'll come anywhere in Chicago or the surrounding suburbs for school, parties, special events, workshops or camp.

Price starts: \$250 for birthday parties.

Aloft Loft Circus Arts

2000 W. Fulton, Chicago; (773) 782-6662

Ages: Adults

What it offers: You can step out of mommy mode—and clown around for a few hours in an adult-only space. Take trapeze, aerial skills, rope or aerial conditioning and technique. Not sure if you'll like it? Take a two-hour drop-in beginner class to try aerial conditioning, beginning stretching or flexibility. Once you're taking classes and have an instructor's permission, you can pop in for open gym.

Price starts: \$240 for an eight-week session.

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See more of Danielle's stories [here](#).