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THE REAL GUIDE FOR PARENTS

Toddler + Preschooler

WHAT'S INSIDE:

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EATING · EDUCATION
TOILET TRAINING
AND TRAVEL

FREE

JULY 2016

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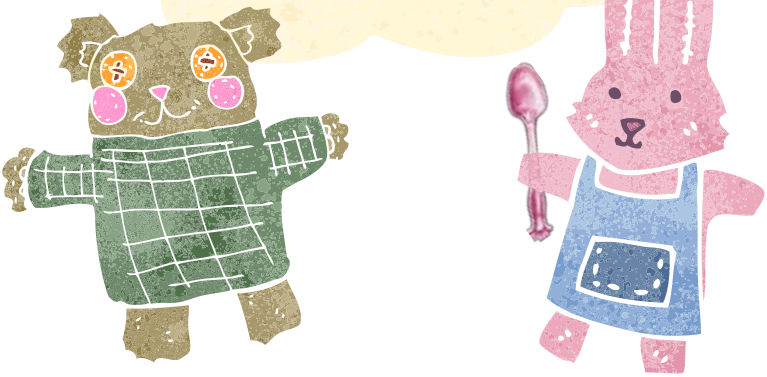
THOSE CRAZY PRESCHOOL QUIRKS



IF YOU EVER THINK YOUR LIFE ISN'T STRANGE ENOUGH, TRY HANGING OUT WITH A PRESCHOOLER, WRITES DEBBIE FARMER.

Preschoolers do plenty of normal things, such as dressing in cute costumes and laughing at unfunny knock-knock jokes. That's part of their charm. But don't let the act fool you. Most preschoolers have quirks even the Cookie Monster would find strange.

For example, take my friend Cheryl. Lately she can't get anywhere on time because she has to stand in the driveway waiting for her four-year-old daughter, an only child, to buckle all her imaginary friends into the mini-van.

"We're now up to six," she told me. "There are the two imaginary babysitters, Gia and Jenny, imaginary friends, Sarah and Michael, imaginary siblings Sally (18 months) and Merky (seven), and an imaginary rabbit, Munchie." She clutched my arm and said, "If she adds one more imaginary thing I'll have to get a bigger car."

Then there are my friends Lisa and Carol. Lisa has a four-year-old daughter who has a grudge against any type of clothing with buttons, and will only eat pink icing and French fries.

Carol has a five-year-old who isn't picky about her wardrobe or what kind of food she eats as long as the meal is served with a fuchsia plastic spoon with a smiling parrot on the handle, ironically referred to as the 'happy spoon'.

> "I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE THINKING. YOU'RE THINKING ONLY SPINELESS FOOLS LET THEIR CHILDREN GET AWAY WITH THIS KIND OF STUFF. AND YOU'RE RIGHT."

This may not sound like a crisis, however, the spoon is the only piece left from the original baby jungle-themed dinner set, thus guaranteeing there will be no replacement if it's lost or destroyed. Most parents know it's only a matter of time until this happens. And, in the child's mind, to suggest using another spoon renders your parenting inadequate.

There's no reasoning with a preschooler. Sure, you can try launching into a lecture called 'You Can't Go Around Avoiding Buttons and Living On Pink Icing Forever', but your words will be in vain. It's then you realise you've entered into a battle of wits for which you have no weapon.

I admit, hearing stories like this suddenly makes my children seem more normal. I mean, let's face it, what's carving three dozen sandwiches into the shape of a kitten compared with that?

I know what you're thinking. You're thinking only spineless fools let their children get away with this kind of stuff. And you're right. But I prefer to think of it more as choosing my battles.

And that's exactly why I helped my son pick out all the orange fruit loops from the cereal box this morning so he could carry them around the house in an old tennis shoe.

WHO'S *Teaching* WHOM?

AS PARENTS WE ARE SUPPOSED TO HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS, BUT AS EVELYN LEWIN DISCOVERS, TODDLERS CAN TEACH US A TRICK OR TWO ABOUT LIFE.

When Charles Dickens wrote, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times," he could easily have been talking about life with a toddler. For life with a toddler is all about extremes. One minute they deliver charming smiles and big hugs and life couldn't feel more wonderful. The next moment it's a trying combination of tantrums and whingeing. And yet, through it all, I have learnt many great lessons from my toddler.

For instance, if my daughter falls, she cries. She is not embarrassed to show her emotions. And then, with a kiss or a bandaid, she's all better. The graze is forgotten and laughter returns. The next adventure is sought. She has an amazing ability to acknowledge that something painful has happened, dedicate a few intense moments to it and then move right along.

She also forgives and forgets with ease. She is easily upset when a friend snatches her toy, but moments later the two of them will be rolling around, hugging and giggling. The incident will not linger in her mind, nor cause her any ongoing distress. Sure, she will be vocal in her displeasure at the time, but once it's over it's quickly forgotten.

She isn't afraid to show affection either. My little girl loves kissing and hugging everyone and everything. Before leaving the house she needs to kiss and cuddle her favourite objects. "Bye Teddy," she will say, before planting a huge kiss on Teddy's head and giving him an almighty squeeze. The same ritual is repeated with her blocks, blanket, dolly, plastic tea set; pretty much anything in sight.

A lack of self-consciousness is another of their wonderful attributes. Regardless of the circumstances, my daughter happily dances because she feels like it. She bursts into song without prompting. She runs around in circles and pulls up her dress to check out her bellybutton. Engaging in play so imaginative and enjoyable, she talks to her dollies and answers for them. And she paints. I know, this is not revolutionary, but put me in front of a blank sheet of paper and I spend a good deal of time simply staring at it. I plan what I want to put down, I think through each step. My toddler simply does it.

We are always told that one of the keys to happiness is living in the now. As adults, we spend too much time dwelling on the past or planning for the future. Toddlers are masters of the 'now'. My daughter loses herself in the moment. She is not afraid of consequences, because in her immediate world, life isn't lived for the future. It's about enjoying each moment.

Of all the lessons I have learned from my toddler, the greatest is about patience. Nothing could have prepared me for the amount of patience I would need on a daily basis as the mother of a toddler. The amount needed to simply leave the house is astounding. The short walk from the door to the car can take up to 10 minutes.

Patience is needed in bucket loads: when she asks "why" for the umpteenth time, or stops walking to sit and look at the cracks in the footpath; when she decides that she doesn't want to wear her clothes any more, and starts pulling them off; when she helps clean up her toys and then, when they are neatly put away, decides to take the whole box and upend it

And then there's the need for empathy – the ability to see the world through her eyes. To see the tomato-sauce bottle, as she does, like a tube of paint. To see that she is having fun on the swings and that it would be a bad idea to leave the park. To know that it is hard for her to understand why rain means she can't go to the park.

Sometimes I need to stop, take a deep breath and remind myself that she is not, in fact, doing any of this to annoy me. She simply has a need to explore the world, to make sense of it.

After all, doesn't another one of those keys to happiness have to do with slowing down? Stopping to smell the flowers? Toddlers, it seems, in all their zany and erratic ways, have a lot of wisdom up their little sleeves. For not only does my daughter stop to smell the flowers, she also gives each one a kiss and a cuddle.

ENCOURAGING TODDLERS TO PLAY GENTLY WITH OTHERS

WORDS **NIGEL LATTA**

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS TO NOT GET TOO UPSET WHEN THEY DON'T.

Playing nicely with others is a skill we spend our lives developing. It's both simple and enormously complex, and takes a lot of practice. Most children make all kinds of mistakes along the way. They have to learn, for example, that while

shoving other people and grabbing stuff is fun, in the long run it's not a very useful strategy.

You have to see your role as a coach. They won't automatically know how to play nice; you will have to teach them. They'll learn by experiencing the consequences of their choices and actions. You have to make it very clear, in very simple language, what's okay and what's not, and then attach reasonable consequences for both. Sharing is okay, so it gets praise and fun times. Shoving is not okay, and results in missing out on time playing with other kids.

Like any coach, you have to watch them, notice their mistakes, praise them when they get it right, and model the skills they need to learn. If you show them that gentle play leads to fun and rough play leads to sitting out of the game, they will start to learn and their behaviour will change.

They may throw a tantrum if you remove them from the sandpit for throwing toys, but they will also learn that if you don't throw toys, you stay in the sandpit. It isn't complicated; it's simply how the world works. Our job as parents is to teach them that very simple truth.

Editorial Note: This article appeared in the May 2015 issue of CHILD Mags.

DO EARLY LEARNING TOOLS WORK?

WORDS **DR ALANNA HORADAM**

SOME OF MY MUM FRIENDS ARE VERY INTO BABY FLASHCARDS AND OTHER EARLY-LEARNING TOOLS WITH THEIR ONE-YEAR-OLD-+ CHILDREN – DO THEY REALLY WORK?

Wouldn't it be great if there was a proven way to help our children learn things early? Or would it? What is our aim with this? Is it to give our child a headstart at school, to make us feel we have done all we could, or to give children more time to learn other things later?

Starting a child early, especially if not done appropriately, may not give them an advantage that they can maintain. This may lead to negative feelings in the parent about their child not achieving goals at the rate anticipated by their impressive early start.

Starting a toddler with flashcards is very time-consuming. It certainly can be entertaining, but there may be an alternative to early learning tools. Early Childhood sources tell me that the current thought is still that reading aloud to your child is the best preparation for starting to read at school. Studies show that there is a huge difference in adjusting to school between those children who had few books at home and those who had a home library and were read to regularly. It appears to be fine to use flashcards, but it's also important to engage the child in reading – for example going to the library, choosing a book, learning how to turn the pages and to read from left to right. Regarding other types of learning tools, could the child achieve a similar outcome with a real-world experience, such as visiting the zoo (rather than using animal flashcards)?

Don't expect anything more than modest results in most instances. Using the flashcards may help with the child's education, but only to a small degree.

Dr. Alanna Horadam – principal, Cremorne Medical Practice

Editorial Note: This article featured in The Ticket in the October 2015 issue of CHILD Mags

SO YOU HAVE A Fussy Eater

WORDS **JUSTINE HAWKE**

FOR PARENTS IN THE MIDDLE OF A DIFFICULT FEEDING STAGE WITH THEIR CHILDREN, JUSTINE HAWKE HAS SOME IDEAS TO OPTIMISE HEALTHY EATING.

Nurturing, loving and caring for our children is driven by powerful parental instincts. One of the key aspects of this fundamental role is ensuring our children are eating well, which can be very challenging when a fussy-eating cycle strikes. Some parents spend hours preparing gourmet meals of every description, only to have their little ones refuse to put it to their lips, while other parents stick to a shortlist of known favourites (which are not always the most nutritious) just to fill their stomachs. The end result is frustrated parents and an unbalanced diet.

Fussy eating often develops at about the age of 12 months, as this is a time when growth rates slow, resulting in a decrease in appetite. It is typically problematic between 18 and 24 months

when children are learning to take control of their behaviour, and demonstrate independence and choice.

In most cases, fussy eating is transient. There is an array of advice available on how to improve your child's diet, and it is important to investigate strategies that suit your family. Modifying fussy-eating behaviours can take about six to 12 months of patience and persistence, and small steps are required.

During this time, it is important to know you are maximising your child's nutritional intake so you can relax as the process of improving their eating behaviours begins. There are several tricks and tips I use in my clinic to help boost the nutritional intake of even the most restricted diets. A great place to start is building on foods and food types your child currently enjoys eating.

If your child has a limited vegetable intake try:

- Using your food processor to finely process a range of vegetables to use as a base for dishes, such as bolognaise sauces, meatballs and patties. Remember to always add some salad or vegetables on the side so they learn to eat 'unhidden' vegetables, too.
- Adding vegetables to baked foods such as savoury muffins and scones. Mini muffins make fantastic, quick snacks and can be jam-packed with nutrition. Try substituting a quarter of the flour in baked goods with wholemeal flour to boost the fibre content.
- Offering vegetable fritters, pancakes or pikelets. Corn, carrot and zucchini work well in fritters, while pureed pumpkin or roasted peppers are great in pancakes and pikelets.
- Offering a choice of salads to add to meals such as homemade wraps and tacos.

If your child has a limited fruit intake try:

- Making fruit smoothies with frozen berries or banana, blended with milk and yoghurt. Smoothies can also be poured into ice-block moulds and served frozen.
- Making nutrient-packed 'ice-cream' that is high in fibre, by blitzing frozen berries with yoghurt (thanks for the idea, Jamie Oliver).
- Adding stewed fruits to cereals or as a 'topper' on yoghurt.
- Freezing fruits, such as grapes and diced mango, for a cool, sweet treat.
- Using fruit purees in baked goods such as muffins and scones.
- Adding pureed and grated fruit to savoury products to add a subtle sweetness. Grated apple works well in chicken patties, and apricot or plum-based sauces work well with grilled or baked chicken.

If your child has limited meat, chicken or fish intake try:

- Dipping bread in eggs to make French toast to boost protein.
- Adding red lentils to pasta sauces. These integrate well and boost protein, fibre and low-GI carbohydrates.
- Adding milk powder to mornay sauces, vegetable mashes and baked goods as a protein and calcium booster.
- Adding iron-fortified baby rice cereal to scones, muffins, vegetable mashes and crumbles to boost iron.

Rather than joining the fast-food bandwagon, try:

- Making homemade versions of chicken nuggets, fish fingers and chips by crumbing lean chicken breast or firm fish pieces, and thinly cutting potato, sweet potato, carrot and even beetroot into chips, and baking in the oven with a little oil spray.
- Topping pita bread or sandwich thins with pizza sauce, lean ham or chicken and a little cheese, and letting your child

pick at least one vegie or fruit topping. Pineapple, mushroom, capsicum and tomato all work well.
- Making mini burgers with wholemeal buns and homemade patties loaded with vegies. Again let your child pick at least one extra filling to add to their burger – finely shredded lettuce and carrot are a good place to start.

All of the above strategies will help build the nutritional profile of your child's diet and expose their developing tastebuds to subtle flavours, helping them move towards a more balanced diet.

For some children, it can be difficult to boost their dietary intake enough to meet their requirements. If you are concerned about your child's growth, development or general health as a result of their compromised diet, it is important you seek professional advice. Your GP can assess your situation and help rule out any medical causes for food refusal, and they may refer you to a specialist paediatrician, dietitian or nutritionist. An accredited practising dietitian can analyse your child's diet and advise you on specific strategies to meet their needs.

Justine Hawke is an accredited practising dietitian and nutritionist at Fresh Solution Dietetics.

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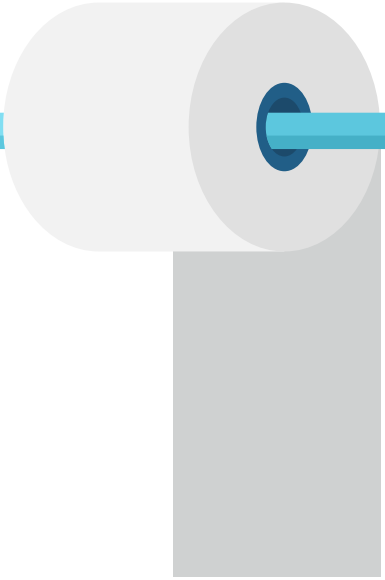

TOILET TRAINING

TAKING TOO LONG

WORDS **DR ALANNA HORADAM**

WHY CAN TOILET TRAINING BE QUICK FOR SOME KIDS AND TAKE SO MUCH LONGER FOR OTHERS?

Most children are toilet trained around the age of two, though often it's prudent to start boys later. This is because the connection between the brain, which recognises that the bladder is full, and the muscles that cause the bladder to contract, is related to the child's developmental stage. It has nothing to do with parenting or intellect. Boys are sometimes a bit more relaxed about reaching this milestone, so don't be tempted to compare them to their older sisters.

It's much more significant if the child is already toilet trained and then starts to wet or soil themselves. This could be due to a medical problem, like constipation or a urinary tract infection. It could also be due to an emotional problem, like anxiety. Anxiety could arise from the act of elimination itself, for instance if the child has an 'accident' and the parent reacts with

anger, or if the child develops a fear of the toilet. It could also arise from something relatively benign, like the arrival of a new sibling, or something much more worrying like sexual abuse.

If the child is bedwetting after the age of six, this can still be normal. It can help for the child to know, for instance, that their Uncle Matt had the same problem but grew out of it, as it tends to be familial. Quite a number of children wet the bed until age fifteen and even later. Your GP can help with this if it becomes a problem for the child. Most advice about toilet training is given with the idea of patience and calmness on the part of the parent, as frustration and anger over the child's slow progress is unhelpful and will tend to exacerbate the problem.

Dr Alanna Horadam, Principal, Cremorne Medical Practice

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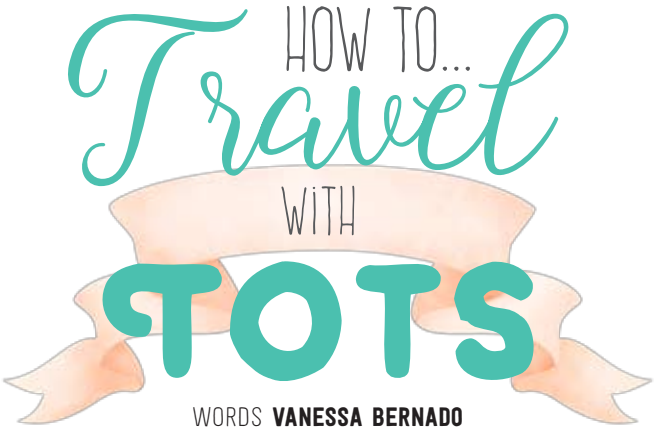

WORDS **VANESSA BERNADO**

VANESSA BERNARDO SUGGESTS WAYS TO AVOID BUCKLING UNDER WHILE TRAVELLING WITH YOUNG CHILDREN.

When you have a baby even simple things such as getting petrol require precision planning. Something as complex as international travel can become more of a high-stress distraction than a fun-filled escape. Here are some ways you can reclaim your holiday while travelling with infants and babies.

Passport

Gone are the days when babies travelled under mum's ID. All children now require a passport. Here are some suggestions for making the process easier:

• Your baby's birth certificate is required for the passport. If you're travelling soon after the birth, consider contacting your local registry of births, deaths and marriages to request a priority-posted certificate.

• Have your baby's passport photo taken at an Australia Post office, where the photographer's expertise and experience could help avoid a rejected passport application. Your little one needs to be awake, looking at the camera and not crying.

Flights

While you can, of course, book flights when you're pregnant, you'll need to inform the airline if you will be bringing a baby. Advise the airline of your baby's name and passport number as soon as possible.

• Most airlines classify an infant as a child under the age of two. Qantas Airlines says healthy newborns may travel from seven days old without medical clearance, with costs starting at 10 per cent of adult fares on international flights for infants who don't occupy a separate seat, and free of charge on domestic flights.

• Bassinettes on flights are limited and in high demand, so request one when booking. This still may not guarantee one, so check in early and reiterate your request.

• Most airlines offer child-friendly meals, so mention your requirements when booking. Prepared bottle formula and expressed breastmilk are generally excluded from carry-aboard-liquid restrictions, but always confirm. Consider taking powdered formula to mix with bottled water.

Transfers

When focusing on the end goal of relaxing, it's easy to overlook the in-between bits. Think about how you are going to get to the airport, from the airport to your hotel and the reverse journey. Many taxi companies provide child and baby restraints, but it can depend on your destination and availability. Research local child-restraint laws, as they differ by country and even by State, with changes to NSW laws making

taxi drivers responsible for passengers under 16 years of age being properly restrained in a seatbelt or an approved child restraint (infants under 12 months must be restrained in an approved child restraint).

Investigate public transport, but it might be simpler to hire a car with an installed restraint, or bring your own seat from home, presuming you know how to fit it correctly.

Luggage

Check your baggage allowance, since this can differ between carriers for checked-in luggage, prams, car seats or capsules, plus extra carry-on bags. You will need to allow for baby clothes and items in your luggage, within the carrier's restrictions.

Packing

Request as many extras as possible from your hotel to help lighten your load. Common free inclusions include travel cots, microwaves for bottles and food, high-chairs and bedding.

Packing suggestions include:

- Nappies: although you can buy nappies at almost any destination, you won't always know the quality, availability or price.
- Pain relief: knowing exactly what medication you have and the correct dose will avoid any lost-in-translation situations.
- Dummies: whether you use a dummy or not, it could save the day in a waiting lounge or plane. The sucking motion can comfort your baby in unusual environments and unblock their ears during landing and take-off.
- Baby carrier: this is a great option for sightseeing if you're short on space.

There are so many tips and tricks for travelling with littlies, and this is just a starting point. Researching each trip thoroughly will help ensure a happy bonding experience for your family, minus the stress.

Vanessa Bernardo is a freelance writer and mum to Lucas (who loves to travel).

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