

Planning With Kids

Top 100 Tips

Volume 1

10 lists of 10 tips that will help make
family life simple and fun!

www.planningwithkids.com

Introduction

This e-book is the first collection of the most popular “10 Things” posts from [Planning With Kids](#). These posts appeared on the blog between January and April 2008.

For each post I received fantastic feedback from readers and also their thoughts on each topic. I have used this to improve the lists by adding some reader suggestions and removing some of my own points. To stick to only 10 points was a challenge some times, but I think you will find these lists helpful for organising yourself, managing the behavior of your children and having some fun together.

The e-book is splits into two different sections. The first gives you a one page print out of the list for that topic. I find it handy to have some of these lists strategically placed around the house for my reference.

The second section then details each point in the 10 point list and gives further tips, links and resources on that topic.

I continue to write a new “10 Things” list every Tuesday. Drop by [Planning With Kids](#) to see what the latest topics are.

I hope that you these lists are a useful tool for your family and I welcome any feedback. It can be sent to

planningqueen@bigpond.com

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Section 1 – List Only

10 Things To Make Back To School Mornings Easier.

- (1). Set bedtime.
- (2). Table set for breakfast.
- (3). Lunch box preparation.
- (4). Clothes preparation.
- (5). Key time markers.
- (6). Children take away their breakfast dishes from table.
- (7). Children make beds and tidy their room.
- (8). Children pack their bags.
- (9). Walk to school.
- (10). Keep Calm.

10 Things We Do To Make Meal Time Enjoyable.

- (1). Involve them in planning the meals.
- (2). Have a set time range for the evening meal.
- (3). Eat at the table.
- (4). Have the children to set the table.
- (5). Serve age appropriate portions.
- (6). Turn off distractions.
- (7). Role model appropriate behaviour.
- (8). Encourage conversation.
- (9). Remove the battle lines.
- (10). Focus on the big issues only.

10 Things I Like To Keep In My Everyday Bag.

- (1). Tissues.
- (2). Band aids.
- (3) Pencils and paper
- (4). A pack of cards
- (5). Anti-bacterial Gel.
- (6). A couple of matchbox cars.
- (7). Hair Ties and Clips.
- (8). Sunscreen.
- (9). Coins.
- (10). Safety Pin.

10 Circuit Breakers To Prevent Those Family Melt Down Moments!

- (1). Keep it simple.
- (2). Change the Scenery.
- (3). Music.
- (4). Hugs.
- (5). Quiet.
- (6). Mix it up - change the routine.
- (7). Get Active.
- (8). Set them tasks.
- (9). Sing.
- (10). Read a favourite story.

10 Strategies To Gain Co-Operation From A Toddler

- (1). Remove Temptation.
- (2). Repeat the Request.
- (3). Distraction.
- (4). Show and Tell
- (5). Listen.
- (6). Routine.
- (7). Choosing the right battles.
- (8). Make it fun.
- (9). Spending time with the toddler.
- (10). Allowing for choice.

10 Preschooler Early Learning Activities You Can Plan Into Your Day.

- (1). The Letter Box Game
- (2). "I went shopping and I bought....." Game
- (3). I spy
- (4). Rolling Die
- (5). Pencil Control
- (6). Cooking
- (7). [Sorting and Classifying](#)
- (8). Gatherer Game
- (9). Paying the Bills
- (10). Symbol Spotting

10 Things To Do With The Kids When It Is Hot!

- (1). Head to the water.
- (2). Make a big cubby house inside and have a picnic lunch in it.
- (3). Visit the library.
- (4). Make food together.
- (5). Make Lego stuff (or like product) together.
- (6). Set up props for imaginary play.
- (7). Have a water bomb fight.
- (8). Indoor hide and seek.
- (9). Musical statues.
- (10). Go through the family photo albums.

10 Point Children's Birthday Party Plan.

- (1). [Overall family birthday party strategy.](#)
- (2). [Party Themes.](#)
- (3). [Invitations.](#)
- (4). [Guest List.](#)
- (5). [Food and Drink List.](#)
- (6). [Games/Activities Plan.](#)
- (7). [Decorations and Party Accessories.](#)
- (8). [Party Week and Day Timetables.](#)
- (9). [Emergency Plan.](#)
- (10). [Thank You Notes.](#)

10 Children's Birthday Presents With A Difference.

- (1). A Toolbox
- (2). Black Paper and Metallic Crayons/Pencils
- (3). A Little Cook's Set
- (4). A Photo Story Book
- (5). Design your own t-shirt
- (6). Library Bag and Book
- (7). Mini Card Making Kit
- (8). Outdoor Kit
- (9). Subscriptions
- (10). Active Pack

10 Quick Ways to Feed Unexpected Lovely Visitors

- (1). Vegemite or Chutney Scrolls.
- (2). White Chocolate Chip Muffins.
- (3). [Scones.](#)
- (4). Frozen Cookie Dough
- (5). Dip, Vegetables Sticks and Crackers.
- (6). Nachos.
- (7). Sausage In Bread.
- (8). Tuna Wraps.
- (9). Pasta with Pesto.
- (10). Mini Pizzas

Section 2 – Full Post

[10 Things To Make Back To School Mornings Easier.](#)

Written on Tuesday, January 29, 2008 by PlanningQueen

These are 10 things that I do that make my life easier in the morning when I want everyone organised. Doing these things helps at any time, but even more so when we are in “back to school” mode and adjusting to new routines.

(1). Set bedtime.

Having an age appropriate bed time for the kids, means they get the sleep they need to actually wake up of their own accord and are refreshed for school. They wake up happier and are easier to manage.

(2). Table set for breakfast.

We have the table set for breakfast, including the cereal boxes on the table before we go to bed at night. Dad is usually the first to have breakfast and will put the juice and milk on the table. As the children wake at different times, this enables them to easily serve themselves.

(3). Lunch box preparation.

I have the lunch boxes set out on the bench and will put in any items that are non perishable in the night before. For example, I will put crackers in resealable plastic bags in to the boxes, but fruit like watermelon that I cut up and salad sandwiches I will do in the morning.

(4). Clothes preparation.

I don't lay the clothes out for the children, but do ensure that they are in the right spots for the children to access them themselves.

(5). Key time markers.

We have key times across the morning at which certain activities need to occur. At (or before) 7.30am children need to brush their teeth, put on sunscreen and then get themselves dressed. We leave the house at 8.05am, so everyone has to be completely ready by then.

As only the eldest two can read the time, I will let the preschooler know what the time is and she can work out what she needs to do. I find that this prevents me from having to nag. They are all aware of what is required for us to leave the house on time, and the responsibility also sits with them to ensure we achieve this.

(6). Children take away their breakfast dishes from table.

Each child is responsible (except for the toddler just yet) for taking their dishes from the

table to the kitchen bench. The remaining items are then cleared dishwasher stacked by the older two children.

This is then one less thing that I have to do and therefore I am not as rushed. It also helps them understand that we all have to work together to keep the house tidy. This task and the next two require the children doing things for themselves. I find it is much easier for them to concentrate on these, if there are no distractions like TV or computer to deal with.

(7). Children make beds and tidy their room.

As per above. Also since we have been doing this, I have found that the room stays tidier in the first place, as they don't enjoy spending large amounts of time doing this task.

(8). Children pack their bags.

This goes for the oldest three. It is their responsibility to ensure they have their lunchbox, hat etc, and all the things that they need for their day at school. I find this helpful in training them to keep their possessions organised. If they have left their hat at home because they left it in the bedroom, instead of putting it back in their bag, they will have to accept the consequences of this. (At our school, no hat means that they cannot play out in the sun during terms 1 and 4.)

(9). Walk to school.

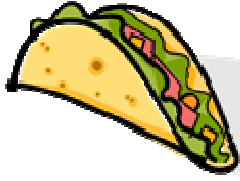
This is not possible for everyone, but I find that this is less stressful than packing all the children in the car, finding a park, getting them out etc. It also provides a lovely opportunity to chat and play games as we walk along.

(10). Keep Calm.

This is probably the hardest one of these to do sometimes, but even when they are infuriating me, I find if I try to calmly deal with the situation, (as opposed to ranting and raving at them!) that it has much less chance of escalating or snowballing into more issues.

10 Things We Do To Make Meal Time Enjoyable.

Written on Tuesday, February 19, 2008 by PlanningQueen



(1). Involve them in planning the meals.

Planning meals ahead and avoiding a hectic lead up to meal time is important for me. It means that I am much calmer and in a more jovial mood by the time I sit down to eat with them. By allowing the [kids to help me plan](#), they feel that their needs have been taken into account and there is less dissatisfaction with what I serve up.

(2). Have a set time range for the evening meal.

My children like routine and having a [set meal time](#) allows them to know when they will be fed. For us whilst we still have little ones, this means that we eat early. It is easy for the toddler and preschooler to move past their hunger and not eat a proper meal because it is too late. We aim to eat around 5.30pm.

(3). Eat at the table.

This allows the meal to be more family focused with all of us (minus dad, who is still at work on the week days) sitting around the table and it is conducive to conversation.

(4). Have the children to set the table.

It is important for them to understand the work that goes into the family meal. By each having a small job to do, they become more involved in the meal time process. As they get older, I also hope to get them contributing by cooking a meal on a weekly basis.

(5). Serve age appropriate portions.

I went to a parenting seminar run by Tweedle Child and Family Health Services, on eating and toilet training for toddlers a number of years ago. They suggested that when you served up meals for a toddler, halve what you originally put on their plate, then halve it again as this was more likely to be an age [appropriate serve](#). They also went on to explain that a toddler who is hungry will ask for more, but they can be overwhelmed by large amounts of food on their plate.

(6). Turn off distractions.

I love having music on around the house, but even that goes off at meal time, as it can easily distract the children. I also let any phone calls go through to message bank, so that I am not leaving the table and being distracted myself.

(7). Role model appropriate behaviour.

Children will follow the example set for them, so I always try to [model the behaviour](#) that

I would like them to replicate. For me, someone who is not crazy about a number of vegetables, this means eating those vegetables without complaint!

(8). Encourage conversation.

Meal time is probably my greatest source of information of what is going on at school and kinder. They have had time to unwind and relaxed a bit, so I find with a few open ended questions, like “What did you play at lunchtime?” and “Who did you play with at kinder?” they start the kids off on interesting stories about their days.

(9). Remove the battle lines.

We have modified our approach to meals over the years. Originally, we used to offer dessert after every meal and I have to admit, it often became a bargaining element, for example “Eat 3 more bites, then you can have dessert.” However as the children got older, they would ask before eating those extra spoonfuls, “What is for dessert?”, to see if it was worth eating those extra spoonfuls or not. The end of meal time could become a [battle](#) over how much needed to be eaten.

To avoid this scenario, we agreed then in our family meeting, that we would have dessert twice a week, Sunday and Wednesday and the children would get to eat it regardless of whether they ate their main meal or not. This was under the explicit understanding that once meal time finishes, there is no further option of eating food for the rest of the evening. If the children choose not to eat their meal, I do not discuss it with them, other than to explain to them that it is their decision not to eat their meal.

There are nights after not eating their meal, that one of the kids (mainly the youngest two, as the older two don't bother telling me anymore) will tell me that they are hungry. I aim to be empathetic, calm and explain to them that they can have breakfast in the morning. This does not always end quietly or without tears, however it rarely happens more than one night in a row and happens infrequently on a whole.

(10). Focus on the big issues only.

To keep the tone of the evening meal light, I try to not comment on every single thing each child does that is not ideal (otherwise that could be the only conversation going on some evenings). I have core behaviours that I expect the children to meet and will monitor those, but if they accidentally slurp their spaghetti, or if the younger ones use their hands occasionally when trying to cut up their food, I let these go. Too much negativity can bring the mood down and close off conversation.

All families are different, but I have found that by doing the above, it means that I actually look forward to meal time with the kids, as opposed to dreading it.

[10 Things I Like To Keep In My Everyday Bag.](#)

Written on Tuesday, March 4, 2008 by PlanningQueen



I use a [Crumpler bag](#) as my everyday/nappy bag and I have to say I love this bag. I have had it for about 3 years now, and after trying out all sorts of nappy bags, this one has worked the best for me and it looks good as well.

My lovely children's ages span from nearly 2 to 9.5, so I need this bag to be ready to go all the time. Besides the essential items of nappies, nappy wipes and change of clothes for Babagansouki, there are some stock items that I like to have in the bag and replenish on a regular basis.

These are what I find useful and that might help me keep the children entertained if we get held up, or are at an adult focused activity. In no particular order they are:

(1). Tissues.

I use a combination of this little travel packs and great big handfuls from the box at home. You can never have too many.

(2). Band aids.

The healing power of a band aid is truly amazing! This particular item was actually the inspiration of this post. We were out and about lots over the weekend, fitting in activities [before the warm weather fades for good](#), and I actually ran out of band aids. We had a particular accident prone week and I wished greatly that I had some in the bag yesterday when we were out. The crying time is dramatically reduced with my kids if I can place a band aid on the injury.

(3) Pencils and paper.

I like to have a small pencil case, complete with pencils, rubber, pencil sharpener and some homemade recycled note pads, in my bag at all times. I find this a particularly useful, if I am catching up at a cafe with someone for morning tea. The two smaller children will draw quietly (for a while at least), so I can enjoy some uninterrupted conversation time.

(4). A pack of cards

I currently have a Playschool pack of cards in my bag, because I can play the memory game with all the children (except for the toddler). It is great to be able to pull the pack out and have a game if we are stuck waiting somewhere. Although this is a 36 pack of cards, we can reduce the pack to 22 cards and play a smaller game if we have less room.

(5). Anti-bacterial Gel.

Fantastic for those situations when you have to change a nappy and there is nowhere to wash your hands afterwards

(6). A couple of matchbox cars.

Babaganouski is in love with cars, so I like to have some in the bag which can be used in emergencies for entertainment or distraction purposes.

(7). Hair Ties and Clips.

I only have one daughter and her hair is just starting to get quite long. Possum doesn't always like to have her hair tied up, but sometimes when we are out, her hair starts falling into her face and distracting her, so it is handy to have a couple stashed in the bag.

(8). Sunscreen.

The children put on sunscreen in the morning, but with the hot Australian sun, it often needs to be reapplied regularly. I like to keep a small tube (contained within a zip-lock bag, in case of leakage) in a pocket of the bag. We are a very fair skinned family, so it doesn't even have to be that hot for us to burn.

(9). Coins.

After too many experiences of not having change for parking meters, I now stash away some coins in a very old film canister. I always look to my wallet first for coins, but it is great to have back up supplies if I find that there is none in the wallet.

(10). Safety Pin.

A very simple but helpful tool in many situations. I have used it to hold together a dress strap (my own actually) and to rethread and hold together broken elastic in shorts.

10 Circuit Breakers To Prevent Those Family Melt Down Moments!

Written on Tuesday, March 11, 2008 by PlanningQueen



We had a pretty busy week last week and by the time Friday evening came around, I have to admit to being tired and a little on the cranky side.

I looked at the [menu plan](#) and I was supposed to be cooking Jambalaya, which I had very much been looking forward to trying. But with a toddler who could not be removed from my hip, two older boys niggling at each other and Possum due to be picked up from a party at 6pm, I thought I just can't do this!

No matter how well planned I have things, there are always moments where I need to stop and insert what I have dubbed a "circuit breaker" to change the momentum of the situation or; to prevent myself from a screaming banshee outburst or; to change the behaviour of the children.

I have found that the children feed directly from my energy. If I am tired or feeling agitated, they sense this and it creeps into their behaviour. Some days this does feel like a lot of pressure to wear, but I have developed some circuit breakers that I have used with success in these types of situations.

There are times when I have had to try more than one of the below to get the desired effect, but the important thing I have worked out is that at these moments, just doing the same thing leads to further deterioration in the situation. It requires me to step up out of my emotions and think about what can I do that will change our moods and the behaviour of the children.

(1). Keep it simple.

Jambalaya would have been beautiful to have for dinner, but as it was a new meal for me to cook, it would have required a lengthy preparation time and concentration. Instead I decided to boil some water and myself and the children would have pasta with cheese for dinner (Mr. Infrastructure would eat a BBQ after football training). My children actually love this plain meal, and given for lunch we had a platter with fresh

veggie sticks, cheese, [homemade relish](#) and fruit to follow, they would certainly survive this evening meal without any vegetables.

(2). Change the Scenery.

Sometimes if we have been cooped up in the house all day, when it gets to around 5pm, the squabbling, whining can raise its head. Getting out of the house to run a small errand, like a walk to the mailbox to post a letter can do wonders for the mood of everyone, including me.

(3). Music.

I love music and my children do too. They have a very clear set of favourite songs from contemporary music that they like to listen to. Putting on some music they like and having a dance or a game of musical statues, breaks the cycle of complaints and releases some energy for the kids.

Even having their favourite music in the background can be enough to change their mood sometimes.

(4). Hugs.

When I am in the kitchen at the end of "one of those days" and it is the 10th time someone had come to complain/whine about something, I often find that by stopping what I am doing and bending down and given them a big hug and just sitting with them for a few minutes, is enough to recharge their little batteries.

This direct attention makes them feel better about themselves and the hug tends to diffuse my agitation as well. As I give a little kiss the top of the head and I can feel their little heart beat against mine it is hard to hold on to the agitation.

I have been doing this for a while now and there are times when either Little Rascal or Possum, will say to me "I need a hug", when I ask them how can I help them with their problem. I give it to them and it makes us both feel better.

(5). Quiet.

I realise that this is the opposite of number (2), but each particular circumstance has their own contributing factors. Sometimes there can just be too much going on in the house: music on, loud toys being played/banged, washing machine going, and mum vacuuming.

To decrease the stress levels of all in the house, I turn of all possible noise and close doors/windows, if the noise is coming from outside and quieten everything right down. Hopefully this also quietens down the stress levels of us as well.

(6). Mix it up - change the routine.

As you may have noticed, I love to plan and as a family, we have our daily routines that we go through for the different stages of the day. The children normally have their TV/PC 30 minute session at the very end of their day. We have dinner, bath, tidy up and then move on to the TV/PC session.

If I am feeling over tired and lacking in patience, I will swap this routine around and have the PC/TV time whilst I am doing the dinner preparation. This gives me some moments to regain my composure and speed through the meal preparation without interruption. As this is a change from the routine, it also redirects the children's attention to a new focus.

(7). Get Active.

One way to increase flagging energy levels is to expend some energy. If I think we are all a little flat, I will invite them all outside with me to jump on the trampoline. Or if the weather does not permit us going outside, I will start a game of tiggy hide and seek. The layout of our house allows for a circuit run, where you can hide behind corners and pop out and catch some one as they run around.

The kids adore this game and it I think they love it because they are free to break the "walking only" policy that is usually enforced in the house. There is always lots of squealing and laughter in this game and I always feel so much better after playing it. If we played this all the time, I think it might lose some of its value, so it is nice to have a favourite rare game like this in reserve, to use as a circuit breaker when the going is a little tough.

(8). Set them tasks.

My children like most, want to be involved and it is often the times when I am busy trying to complete tasks that disruptive behaviour will surface. By allocating a part of the task to each child, they can start working with me, not against me!

I only allocate tasks to those who want to, I don't force them on to the children, but I generally find that once one becomes involved the others will follow. If I am folding washing, I can get Babaganouski to take items to the relevant rooms, the older children can help with the folding itself and Thinker can even put a new load of washing on for me.

(9). Sing.

This doesn't mean me belting out a couple of tunes to entertain the kids, but using my singing voice rather than a frustrated (or angry!) voice when asking the children to do things.

At the end of each day, certain tasks have to be completed, and I have found the tone and attitude with which I ask the children to do these, makes a massive difference to how they react.

If I am grumpy and grump at them to "pick up their shoes" or "move away from your younger brother", I am much more likely to get a negative reaction and perpetuate the cycle of negative energy.

This does make sense, as I know that I don't like to be grumped at either. If I ask for these tasks to be completed via a rhyming little song, firstly they tend to laugh at my

horrendous singing voice, but they will often move to the task, singing some response about how lame my rhyme was. It breaks the cycle of grumpy begetting grumpy.

(10). Read a favourite story.

Often when we are all feeling tired, agitated, and grumpy; we are often looking for a bit of attention. I can often think I don't have time to sit with the kids, but if I stop for 15-20 minutes, and sit down on the couch with them and read a couple of funny favourites stories, it breaks the feeling for the kids that I am unavailable.

This usually then credits with me with some uninterrupted time afterwards as well, as I have changed their patterns of behaviour and they will go back to more purposeful and independent play.

All of these circuit breakers I use at times when either I, the children or all of us are feeling and showing signs of stress, agitation and being overwhelmed. The sooner I realise that some of us are feeling this way and insert a circuit breaker the less disruption there is in the house. This also means that there is less tears and anger - and that is always a positive scenario.

[10 Strategies To Gain Co-Operation From A Toddler](#)

Written on Tuesday, April 15, 2008 by PlanningQueen



My beautiful Babaganouski turns two at the end of this month. As such trying to gain his co-operation sometimes can be quite a challenge. I have had to give my memory a bit of a jolt, to recall what strategies I have previously used to gain co-operation from a toddler.

I have listed ten strategies that I have found effective to gain the co-operation from a toddler:

(1). Remove Temptation.

I have our house set up, so that the children can roam freely, but respectfully around the house. I have removed any major temptations, so as to eliminate the need for my constant nagging. For example, we have moved the Thinkers iPod dock (which is where he stores his iPod while at school) to higher ground. Babaganouski just could not keep away from its bright lights and I did not want to see it broken.

(2). Repeat The Request.

This is my most used strategy when trying to extract a recalcitrant toddler from the car. Why is it that they never want to get out of the car?

We have a people mover, so he has plenty of room to run around in there and loves nothing more than me making an attempt to grab him and running the other way, squealing with laughter. I now wait at the door of the car and request Babaganouski to hop out of the car. I don't enter his game and just repeat the request calmly again (and again and again and again sometimes), at spaced intervals. He eventually then gets out of the car by himself.

This is not a quick solution, so cannot always be used in every situation. I prefer it though when I do have time, compared to picking up a toddler against their will with all the associated screaming and crying that goes along with it.

(3). Distraction.

This is strategy can be hit and miss with Babaganouski, but is always worth a try. If I need him to stop touching something/move away from an area, I will try and create interest in another item that I think will appeal to him, which will then hopefully make him forget about what he was doing previously.

(4). Show and Tell

To gain co-operation from a toddler, I like them to understand the request as much as possible. This means that sometimes words are not enough and I need to find a way of showing Babaganouski what I mean. For example if he started asking for a banana just before dinner, I will pick him up and show him that dinner is almost ready and explain that he needs to wait for it to be ready.

(5). Listen.

In Babaganouski's case this is generally listen and watch as he has a limited vocabulary. By taking the time to listen/watch and work out what he is trying to communicate to me, I can then determine the best way to handle his behaviour.

For example one morning when I asked him to go outside to the pram and get ready for the walk to school, he said "no" and was agitated about something. I asked him what was wrong and he said "ball". I told him to go and get it then and he made a hand gesture, signaling that he didn't know where it was. "Look under your cot." I told him and he trotted off and happily came back with the ball and went straight outside to the pram.

(6). Routine.

All my children (and me) have loved routine and I have found that by knowing roughly what is coming up in their day, it helps gain the co-operation of a toddler. Over the holidays, we were out of our standard routine, which is always great for a change, but I found that when it then came to trying to get Babaganouski to have his afternoon sleep it was much harder than usual. There were days when we were out and about and he didn't have a sleep or we had friends over so he went down much later.

Last week, with school going back I found it took me a few days to get him back in the habit of lunch, cleaning hands and face, story and going to sleep quietly. He protested strongly about going to sleep for the first couple of days, but thankfully he has settled down now.

(7). Choosing the right battles.

With four kids, I have days where I stop and think "When was the last time I said something that wasn't nagging to my kids?" I really don't like feeling like a nag. This doesn't mean that I let the kids do whatever they want, but that I try (some days better than others) to choose the big issues to focus on, rather than commenting on every single thing that is going on.

I find this effective in gaining co-operation because if I have been tightly monitoring all day, I find they end up ignoring me. By keeping to the big issues, I haven't watered down my authority by over doing it.

(8). Make it fun.

After bath Babaganouski loves to run around nude. When I say it is time to get dressed, he is quite likely to run to the other end of the house! One option is to use my strength

and struggle with the toddler to get him dressed - there is generally crying and screaming involved with this option.

As an alternative I can try and make it more fun by singing his favourite nursery rhymes and making it a little game. When I put his pajama top over his head, I keep his head covered and say "Where's Babaganouski?" He loves then to pull the top down and say "me". We then do the same thing for hands and feet - and then he is dressed for bed without the tears.

(9). Spending time with the toddler.

On those days where I have had lots of running around to do, there is generally a significant drop in the co-operation quota from Babaganouski. I have found that by stopping and taking short bursts of time, 15 minutes or so throughout one of those busy days, to sit with him on the floor doing something he wants to do, he is far more likely to cooperate when I ask him to do something. It is important that he feel some of his needs have been met during the day as well as me completing my tasks.

(10). Allowing for choice.

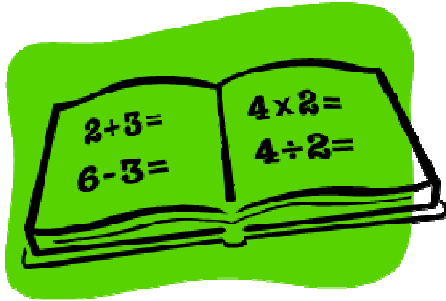
As adults we like to have control over what is going on in our life and find it disempowering if choice is taken from us. With this in mind, if I can allow for there to be some degree of choice to be made for the toddler, I find it is helpful in gaining their co-operation.

Toddlers can be easily overwhelmed by choice, so it needs to be easily understood and limited. For example if Babaganouski is starting to baulk at bed time, I will say to him "Do you want dad to read the story or mum?" His choice is not about whether or not he wants to go to bed (because he is!), but about a discrete part of the going to bed process.

As with most areas of children's behaviour, there is no one size fits all strategy for getting a toddler to do what you want them to do. However, knowing that I have a range of strategies to draw upon when faced with an uncooperative toddler, I find it takes some of the intensity out of this situation and gives me the confidence to handle it in a calmer manner.

10 Preschooler Early Learning Activities You Can Plan Into Your Day.

Written on Tuesday, February 5, 2008 by PlanningQueen



My preschooler Possum has started showing lots of interest in the early steps of numeracy and literacy. That is, she wants to know lots about numbers and is constantly "writing" letters to her friends and family. I like to take the lead from the kids as to when they need additional stimuli in the key developmental areas, so I have given quite a bit of thought lately as to how I can satisfy her needs in this area.

I also like to keep learning at this age informal - it should not feel like a lesson, just something fun to do with mum. Finding the time to fit in learning opportunities can be tricky, so where possible I try and format the activities so that they fit into part of our daily life. Below I have listed 10 activities that Possum and I can do together, which will help stimulate and support her interest in early numeracy and literacy. I am probably doing about two thirds of these activities with her already. The remainder is ones which I did with her brothers at a similar age so will try them with Possum and see how we go.

ON THE WALK TO SCHOOL

(1). The Letter Box Game

As we walk along we take turns in reading aloud the numbers on the letter boxes of the houses we pass.

AIM: Number recognition.

(2). "I went shopping and I bought....." Game

Modified version of the traditional game that I play with the older children. We play that one of us says "I went shopping and I bought four things.....". For example I bought an apple, a carrot, juice and bread. The other player has to remember the four items.

AIM: Memory and counting up to four.

AT AFTER SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

As noted in a previous post, we can spend a lot of time hanging out at Possum's brothers [after school activities](#). This can actually provide us with opportunities for short session of fun.

(3). I spy

Again this is a modified version of the original game. I will choose three objects to have in front of us, whose names start with a different sound, for example a car, a ball and a snake (obviously all of the toy variety!). I will get Possum to name all the objects. This just clarifies that we have the same name in mind for each object, for example it ball and not football. We then have a short discussion on the starting sound of each object and then we start to play. "I spy with my little eye, something starting with c." Always using the phonetic sound of the starting letter.

AIM: Start awareness of phonetic sounds of the alphabet.

(4). Rolling Die

My kids love die, so this is always easy to get even the older children to play along (I just add more die for the older children; get them to work on their addition). We take turns in rolling the die and work out what number each has rolled. We then work out who won by having the highest/lowest number.

AIM: Start building one to one matching numeracy and an understanding of the relativity of numbers.

(5). Pencil Control

I pack a clipboard and pencils to take with us to the after school activity. I put together a pack of activities for her to do, all based around gaining adequate control of the pencil. Before a preschooler can write letters, they need to be able to have control of the pencil. I am focusing on two types of sheets at the moment - tracing over [patterns](#) and [mazes](#). (Both these links have free printables.)

AIM: Increase pencil control

AROUND THE HOME

(6). Cooking

Cooking with a preschooler provides many opportunities for them to learn early numeracy skills. Discussing amounts in numerical terms, time values, number recognition on measuring cups, in the recipe etc. I just need to remember to talk about all these things as we do it!

AIM: [General numeracy awareness](#).

(7). [Sorting and Classifying](#)

These are both essential learning paths on the road of maths! There are also many opportunities in the daily activities of home life that I can let Possum practice on like: putting the cutlery (no sharp knives though!) away; sorting out the dirty washing and; putting waste in the right bin - rubbish, compost, recyclables.

AIM: Introduction to mathematical vocabulary and concepts.

SHOPPING

(8). Gatherer Game

When we are at the market or the supermarket, Possum is my Gatherer. I tell her how many of each item we need and she gathers the right amount and puts them in the trolley.

AIM: Practice counting, [one to one matching](#)

(9). Paying the Bills

Allowing Possum where possible to have a turn at paying for the goods we purchase. We talk about the numbers on the money and how there are dollars and cents. Talk about whether or not we will get change.

Also this provides an opportunity for social interaction with shopkeepers. Children can really develop their self-confidence here and work on their interpersonal skills, e.g. greeting people, making eye contact, and in the case of my kids, overcoming shyness when it comes to strangers. Furthermore, it fosters that sense of community & friendliness when they see Mum or Dad chatting with shopkeepers

AIM: Introduction to currency, social skills.

(10). Symbol Spotting

Point out to Possum symbols around the shops and in the car, so she can gain an understanding of what these things mean. For example on exit signs, the icon of the man running - that's where we can exit the building, the S symbol of non standing signs - mum can't park there because it is not allowed and she would get a fine.

AIM: Introduction to symbolism.

Planning these early learning activities into part of our everyday life means that:

- We will actually do them.
- They are fun and not overly structured.
- Allows Possum to become more aware of the environment around her and how it is filled with numbers and words.

[10 Things To Do With The Kids When It Is Hot!](#)

Written on Wednesday, January 9, 2008 by PlanningQueen



We went into Federation Square (Melbourne) yesterday to see the [Animated kids' classics at ACMI](#). The cartoons were very different change of pace for the kids. Felix the cat was a silent cartoon, but seemed to be the favourite amongst the kids. One of the things that I love about Federation Square (Melbourne) is that whenever I go during the school holidays for kids' activities, I always end up getting more than what I expected.

We had planned to just see the cartoons and have lunch in the park, but after we had lunch in the park, we went back into a drop-in workshop where the kids made their own animation. They had a choice of making a flip book or zoetrope with little penguins. My little ones all chose to make the flip books which then kept them amused on the train trip home. As we were leaving Federation Square we also came across a street performer who was juggling fire, much to the awe of my eldest son who received juggling balls from Auntie J for Christmas and knows how tricky it is to juggle. Watching this guy kept us enthralled for some time.

The one thing I dislike about Federation Square is how difficult it is to get around with a pram. Thankfully I had my sister with me and we just lifted the pram down some of the stairs to prevent us from having to go so far out of way from where we wanted to go, just to get to a ramp or elevator. Although, I really don't think I have anything to complain about as it makes me think just how difficult it must be for someone if they are in a wheel chair or have restricted mobility.

Being the massive planning nerd that I am, I frequently check out the [Bureau of Meteorology](#) for their 7 day forecast. When I did this morning I was glad that we had gone to Federation Square yesterday as it is going to be extremely hot for the next few days. It started me thinking about what are the best sorts of school holiday activities to do when it is hot? I also dearly love a list and came up with 10 things to do on the school holidays when it is hot. This is by no means a comprehensive list, nor even the best 10 things to do when it is hot, so I would love to hear what you get up to when it is hot and then I can make this list a bit more definitive.

(1). Head to the water.

We don't have a beach house or close relatives that do, so we don't tend to do this one as much as I would probably like, but we did go to Point Leo the other week end and had a great time. When the Surf Life Saving Club run their Nippers program (see the Calendar link on the [Point Leo SLSC](#) site for dates) they have a BBQ going where for a few dollars you can get a sausage in bread and a drink, the beach is patrolled, and there are shower and toilet facilities close by.

(2). Make a big cubby house inside and have a picnic lunch in it.

(3). Visit the library.

The air conditioning is generally good and it works in a couple of ways for us. It gives the children something to do before we go - I hand the children the library borrowing receipt and a pen and they have to go and find all the books we have to return. We generally have out 20 or so at a time so it can take some time to do this! Then the kids have a great time choosing some new ones when we are there. Often there is school holiday sessions as well, but you do have to book so check out the library's website ([Boroondara](#), [Yarra Plenty](#), [Yarra](#), [Melbourne](#), [Mildura](#)) and once we get home they can chill out and read the new stuff.

(4). Cook together.

Of course this needs to be something which of course does not require heat. My kids love chocolate balls and they can actually make them by themselves now. I just have to be prepared to clean up a large mess though. Slices, jelly, squeeze oranges and make fruit juice ice blocks for later.

(5). Make Lego stuff (or like product) together.

It is amazing how long the kids will make stuff for. We generally end up with a bit of a theme going amongst us, like space craft, cars, or houses. We then put them up on display for a while on a shelf.

(6). Set up props for imaginary play.

With a well set up space even the older children will join in on this one. Possum like to set up an office. We place an old keyboard and telephone on a table to be the desk. We then gather all the required stationery: notepads, stapler, pencils, hole punch, envelopes and even make a post office box for the mail. Then we are set to play!

(7). Have a water bomb fight.

You can pick up water bomb balloons at the supermarket these days that come with a little squirter bottle to fill the balloons up with. Just save some bath water from the night before and use that to fill them up. You can also use a funnel and jug as that can be easier for the little ones. It is fun to build up a stash of 10-15 each and then declare "war" and run around the backyard and get wet!

(8). Indoor hide and seek.

I always tire of this game well before the kids do.

(9). Musical statues.

As above.

(10). Go through the family photo albums.

My kids love looking at themselves and hearing the stories behind the photos.

As you can probably tell, I try to keep to a budget, so I like school holiday activities that are free or are cheap!

10 Point Children's Birthday Party Plan

Written on Tuesday, April 1, 2008 by PlanningQueen

Two of my four children have birthdays within 10 days of each other in April. Little Rascal will turn 7 on the 20th and Babaganouski (my baby!) will turn 2 on the 30th.

It has been jibed at me that for someone who loves to plan that I didn't do such a great job of planning my kids' arrival in this world. We have the April cluster then, Thinker will have his 10th birthday on 27th Nov and less than two weeks later Possum will be 5 on 10th Dec. There are just some things (like conception) that you just can't plan!

So when it comes to children's birthday parties, I have quite a few checklists and spreadsheets that I like to use to help me through these busy periods. I have listed below, my main checklist. This list works like a to do list for me and allows for a methodical approach to planning the parties for the children.

- (1). [Overall family birthday party strategy.](#)
- (2). [Party Themes.](#)
- (3). [Invitations.](#)
- (4). [Guest List.](#)
- (5). [Food and Drink List.](#)
- (6). [Games/Activities Plan.](#)
- (7). [Decorations and Party Accessories.](#)
- (8). [Party Week and Day Timetables.](#)
- (9). [Emergency Plan.](#)
- (10). [Thank You Notes.](#)

Each of these points has a detailed explanation in the associated post. Simply click through to read more.

[10 Children's Birthday Presents With A Difference.](#)

Written on Tuesday, April 8, 2008 by PlanningQueen



Continuing with the birthday themed posts so far this month, I have put together a list of birthday presents for children that are bit different from a traditional toy/book/game.

They are some things that I like to buy or make as a present as they are a little different from the standard gift and they all come under \$20 (Australian).

(1). A Toolbox

Age: 3 - 6

Gender: Both

I buy a [small tool box](#) and then purchase small tools like a hammer and screw driver to put in the tool box. Most hardware stores or discount stores stock these mini sized tools.

I also buy nails (clouts to be specific as they have a large head and makes it easier for the kids to hit it), screws, nuts and bolts. The nuts and bolts provide a great fine motor activity as they screw the bolt on and off.

To give the children something to hammer and screw into, I provide to the parent a section of an old tree stump (which has been weathered from sitting in our wood pile). This makes a soft wood surface for the kids to work with.

All my children have had a toolbox of their own at some stage; Babaganouski has actually started hammering some nails into the stump already. The idea of young children with nails etc may seem a little scary, but as a supervised activity and being taught safety lessons first, we have not had any accidents (other than a few sore thumbs).

(2). Black Paper and Metallic Crayons/Pencils

Age: 3 - 6

Gender: Both

This is a home style packaged gift as well. I buy a notepad/s of black paper and then buy [Crayola Metallic Crayons](#) and Pencils [Crayola metallic coloured pencils](#)

I then purchase a decorative tin to place all the items in. The metallic colours on the black paper make for gorgeous creations.

(3). A Little Cook's Set

Age: 1 -3

Gender: Both

You can buy these types of things already put together, but you usually just get an apron and maybe two other items. By pulling it together myself, I think the child gets a much better gift for the same price.

I generally purchase these items from a large retail chain's kitchen utensil section and buy:

- a small grater
- pair of small tongs
- small whisk
- small ladle
- small sifter

I then wrap them up in a colourful children's apron and have a little cooks set to give away. Having their own right sized utensils is a great way to get kids helping in the kitchen.

(4). A Photo Story Book

Age: 0 - 6

Gender: Both

This one takes some prior planning, and it something that I like to do for my nephews and very close children's friends who I see frequently.

In the few months leading up to their birthday, I inconspicuously take photos of the child on their own, with my kids, with their mum/dad/siblings, doing their favourite things and of any other important things in their life.

I then choose the best 10 - 12 photos and compile them into a photo book. I get my children to help write a little story connecting the photos and then create a cardboard front and back page. The birthday child is then the star of their very own story.

(5). Design your own t-shirt

Age: 3 - 8

Gender: Both

This is very simple to put together, but my kids love designing their own t-shirts. I purchase a plain white t-shirt to fit that child and then some [Crayola Fabric Crayons](#).

To design their own t-shirt, the child simply draws on the t-shirt and then mum/dad irons the print with a cloth over the top and the design becomes permanent.

(6). Library Bag and Book

Age: 4 - 6

Gender: Both

If you were clever and crafty like some of my friends, you could easily make a library

bag out of some gorgeous vintage fabric and then place an age appropriate book in side and you don't even have to wrap the gift.

If however like me you would prefer to buy a library bag, you can check out [etsy](#) or [eBay](#).

(7). Mini Card Making Kit

Age: 6 - 10

Gender: Girl (could fit a boy depending on what you bought, I have only ever made a girl kit)

I buy a cheap colourful cardboard box and place in it a [Paper Shapers Butterfly Punch](#), an assortment of pastel card, a small set of gel pens and some [double sided tape](#). Everything a girl would need to begin making her own cards!

(8). Outdoor Kit

Age: 4 - 8

Gender: Both

These are great ideas for kids whose family are active outdoors. I combine a [child size resort chair](#) with a small hand held torch. Even if the family doesn't venture too far from their own backyard, kids love having their "own" things that they can use at a BBQ or party.

A different type of outdoor kit for those kids who love nature, could include a bug catcher, magnifying glass, butterfly net and a neat little box to put it all in.

(9). Subscriptions

Age: 6 - 10

Gender: Both

There are a number of great magazines around that you can buy as a gift subscription, like:

[Kids National Geographic](#)

[The Helix](#) – CSIRO Science Magazine

[Time for Kids](#)

If you are willing to spend a lot more than \$20, subscriptions or memberships to Zoos, Art Galleries and Museums are also fantastic gifts.

(10). Active Pack

Age: 6 - 10

Gender: Both

This gift is perfect for those kids who don't like to sit still. I put together a hula hoop, skipping rope and Frisbee or ball, and because I am bit obsessive I like to have a similar colour of each, so it looks like a set.

10 Quick Ways to Feed Unexpected Lovely Visitors

Written on Tuesday, April 22, by PlanningQueen



As you may have noticed, I do love to plan and have things very much ordered and organised. However too much of this can make life a little dull, so I do also appreciate and value the unexpected as well.

I love the “pop in” visit and always find it so enjoyable when friends drop by and we have a chance to catch up. I am not sure if it is my country upbringing, but I always feel the need to feed my visitors, regardless of the time that they visit.

I have to admit to being a bit freaked out about the pop in no so long ago. What will they think of the state of my house??? I don't have anything decent serve them with their cup of tea!!

But I have learnt from some very smart women around me, that the state of the house doesn't matter, the company is the most important thing about the visit. I have also worked out that I can feed visitors easily just by making sure I always have a few food items in the cupboards/fridge, so I can put something together when friends do pop in.

These items also come in very handy when you have had an arranged catch up, where the children are all playing so well that you have just kept talking and now it is time for dinner!

MORNING OR AFTERNOON TEA

(1). Vegemite or Chutney Scrolls.

A light snack needing only puff pastry, Vegemite or chutney and cheese. See recipe attached below.

(2). White Chocolate Chip Muffins.

Take only 10 minutes to prepare with standard baking items and are delicious warm. See recipe attached below.

(3). Scones.

Minimal ingredients and so easy to make. I often forget how tasty a warm scone is!

(4). Frozen Cookie Dough

Until I wrote this post, I was unaware that you could [freeze homemade cookie dough](#). Apparently you roll the dough into a log and cover tightly with plastic wrap. The instructions on this link, say to defrost the dough first, however many of my lovely readers said that they just slice off frozen sections of the dough and cook the cookies like that. That's what I am going to try.

(5). Dip, Vegetables Sticks and Crackers.

I often just have a dip in the fridge, but two other stand by options are:

- (i). Combine a packet of French onion soup mix and a tub of sour cream, to make your own French onion dip.
- (ii). Salsa - finely chop an onion, fry in some oil, add minced chilli to taste, 2 tsps cumin and a can of diced tomatoes. Simmer until it is dipping thickness and you have some tasty homemade salsa!

LIGHT LUNCH OR DINNER

(6). Nachos.

I keep a packet of plain corn chips in the cupboard and we always have cheese. Add some of the above salsa and sour cream and you have a plate of nachos to share.

(7). Sausage In Bread.

I keep a dozen sausages in the freezer. (Sausages are not really my thing, but this is really more to feed the kids on those days where the afternoon catch up, has extended into the territory of dinner). I will defrost the sausages and throw them on the barbie, wrap them in some bread and ta-dah a quick meal for the kids!

(8). Tuna Wraps.

I keep a packet of wraps (bought from the supermarket) in the cupboards and just keep an eye on the use by date. They usually last for a couple of weeks. (If I haven't used them prior to this, I will use them for the kids' lunches). By also having some flavoured canned tuna on hand too, you can then make a tasty wrap with the tuna and any other salad you may have lurking in the fridge.

(9). Pasta with Pesto.

A packet of pasta, a jar of good quality pesto, cracked pepper and some Parmesan cheese and you can whip up a quick meal that will feed a small crowd.

(10). Mini Pizzas

I stock in the freezer a packet of 10 five inch pizza bases. Using staples of tomato paste and cheese and then any other interesting items that are on offer, you can make up individual pizzas for your guests.

About the Author

Who is PlanningQueen?

My real name is Nicole and I have a beautiful husband and four gorgeous children. I love my family. I love nothing more than to whip up a quick spreadsheet, to make life easier and more enjoyable for us. I passionately believe in equality and peace and try to teach my children this through life experiences.

I love music, mainly of the non main stream variety. Genres I love include pop indie, country, folk, and electronica. I also love politics and the process of democracy. When I have the time, I volunteer with an organisation which gets me closer to the action.

What did I do before I had kids?

I went to University and completed a Bachelor of Business (Finance). For the majority of my adult life I worked for a large Australian Telecommunications Company. I held a number of different roles within the organization, including but not limited to: Regional Performance Manager, Call Centre Manager and Project Manager. I went back to work between son number one and son number two. After number two was born, I decided the corporate gig was no longer for me and have been at home ever since.

Why do I blog about this stuff?

Planning has helped keep our life harmonious and enjoyable. This my attempt to share some of the things we do in our daily life. Hopefully these posts provide some ideas to other families or stimulus for reflection on what you are doing in your life. I am always interested to see how other families cope with the everyday, so please leave a comment or email me at the below address and share what works for you.

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