



MAKING THE EVERYDAY SPECIAL

There's a common thought about parenting: that it settles you down, forces you to be practical and grounds you in the everyday. And while all of that is true, it is far from the whole story. Less often articulated, but no less real, is the way that being with young children opens us up to the wonders that lie around us. When we see the world through a child's eyes, we see something extraordinary. More importantly, when we enter into a small child's way of seeing, we become more present with and connected to them. Sharing in their imagination, their perceptiveness, their warmth and wonder is what makes life with children enlivening even on the most ordinary of days.

What is it like to be a small child? What do the days seem like?

As parents of small children, we live lives filled with routine. Wake-up times and bedtimes, meals to make, errands to run, getting to school and to work, going to the park, and around and around we go.

But however mundane these days may sometimes seem to us, they are anything but to our little ones. For them, each new day, however similar in structure to the one that came before, is full of newness and exploration. There are new sounds, new sights, new faces, and new stories to take in; there is the taste of a new meal or play with a new friend to discover, and so on. As we go about our everyday routines with them, it takes only a bit of imagination and effort to transform the mundane into the magical.

The best ideas for turning the same-old-same-old into something special generally come from our kids. They know how to play and can make anything into a game. Here are a few of their ideas that have livened up our days to great effect.

Yes Days! When you find yourself saying "no" more often than you'd like, when, indeed, you start to feel like a broken record that keeps skipping back and forth between "no, no, no" and "stop," then the whole family may be ready for a "yes day." Pick a day that has no other big agenda, and within the bounds of safety and reason, start saying yes. You'd like to do finger paints and play dough and beading all in the same morning? Okay. You want to have pancakes and ice cream for lunch? Sure. You'd like us to linger in the playground until the sun goes down? Yes, we can, this time. Surrendering to your child's whims may be exhausting but there is also something exhilarating about letting go of some of the usual rules and schedules and just saying yes.

Pajama Days are another way to turn a regular day into a special and especially silly day. A fun twist on the idea is to have a pajama play date with a few friends. Ask them to bring a doll or stuffed animal dressed in pj's too, put on bedtime music, and have warm milk and honey for snack. The kiddos find it hilarious to compare pajamas—and, we always get a laugh out of it too.

One of my kids' favorite days is **Backwards Day**. We have dinner, then lunch then breakfast on backwards day and of course, dessert is first in each meal. We wear our clothes backwards and even walk backwards when it's safe. One of my children can talk backwards with ease and we all have to figure out what he is saying. About the only thing that isn't backwards are all the giggles.

Putting on music is the quickest way to change the mood of any moment. It may come in especially handy during one of the more trying times of the day: clean up time. When it's the end of the day and the kids' room is a mess, it is easy to for everyone to feel discouraged. Put on some upbeat music though, and everything gets a whole lot easier. **Musical chore time** may morph into a dance party, and, who knows, it might just become the best moment of your day.

So take a tip from your kids and turn the ordinary into the extraordinary. You might find that you get as much out of it – or maybe even more – than the kids.