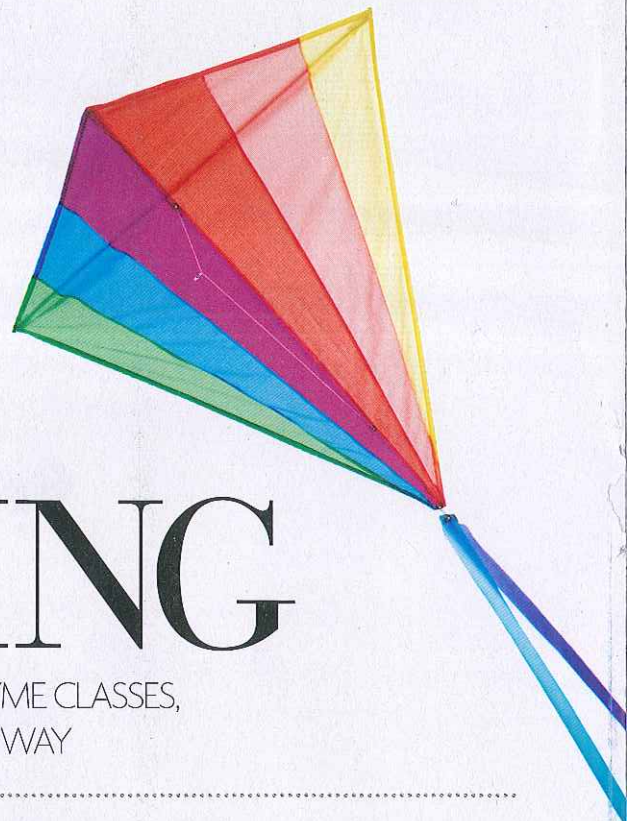


THE RISE OF

RETRO PARENTING



INSTEAD OF DASHING FROM BABY BALLET TO SING 'N' RHYME CLASSES, GO BACK TO BASICS AND HAVE FUN THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY

From elaborate baby showers to £10-a-time baby yoga classes, modern day parenting has never been so busy.

Whether it's playing classical music to your bump or signing up to every baby group going, it seems we've forgotten that babies are perfectly happy with the simple things in life.

'Parenting has become a frenetic, costly activity in recent years,' says child psychologist Sandra Wheatley. 'But children don't need non-stop entertainment. Some of the most cherished memories you'll create will involve simply jumping in puddles, not shuttling him to and from baby classes.'

Here's how to get back-to-basic time with your baby.

Do the washing

Don't feel guilty next time you stay home with your child to tackle the washing.

'Babies and toddlers love tasks we find boring,' says Sandra. 'He'll get as much stimulation from watching you load the dishwasher as he will from a toddler group. Toddlers can help you sort clothes into piles and you can even make the supermarket shop fun by telling him what you need to buy and asking him to point things out or help you reach stuff.'

Just keep trips short and don't go when he's tired or hungry.

Splash in puddles

Yes, Peppa Pig was right – there really is nothing more fun than slipping on waterproofs and wellies and going jumping in puddles.

'Children love going out and getting messy,' says family exercise practitioner Maggie Hackney*. 'Parents often don't like their kids getting dirty, but it's better for them to be physically active outside than sitting indoors when it's raining. That's what being a child is all about.'

Michelle King, 28, from Hampshire, mum to Stella, two, couldn't agree

more. 'I bought some waterproofs and as soon as it rains, we go splashing,' she says. 'The look of glee on Stella's face as she does it is a picture.'

Fly a kite

Put your baby in a sling, take your toddler by the hand and go fly a kite. You can pick up a starter kite online (try a Mini Butterfly Kite, from £6.49, amazon.co.uk), then, when it's slightly windy, head to a large green space where there are few trees, throw the kite up into the air and watch it go. Let your little one hold onto the strings, but get ready to grab it quickly if he loses his grip.

'I used to find flying kites magical when I was a little girl,' says Rachel Heath, 32, from Kent, mum to Dylan, two. 'So I bought Dylan a cheap kite and it's now his favourite thing to do.'

Feed the ducks

Babies don't need constant stimulation or socialising – simple pleasures, like feeding the ducks, are just as beneficial. 'Mums often misunderstand that a baby's development and quality time with you is just as important as going to a baby group,' says Sandra. Even better, it's free and you can do it anytime.

'I signed Martha, now two, up to baby yoga, massage, and ballet in her first year,' says 34-year-old Jenna Wood from London. 'I spent a fortune and would stress about getting to classes on time. She barely paid attention and would crawl off. Yet when I took her to feed the ducks, we'd chat away together and she loved it.'

5 memory-making events this spring

VISIT WOODLANDTRUST.ORG.UK You'll find local organised walks in your area just for kids, plus they can join its Nature Detectives Club.

GET MOVING Barnardos has organised The Big Toddler, a short sponsored walk for 0-5 year olds. Visit barnardos.org.uk/bigtoddler.

HEAD TO THE BEACH English Heritage is inviting families to build a sandcastle and share a photo of it on its Facebook page to win prizes. See english-heritage.org.uk.

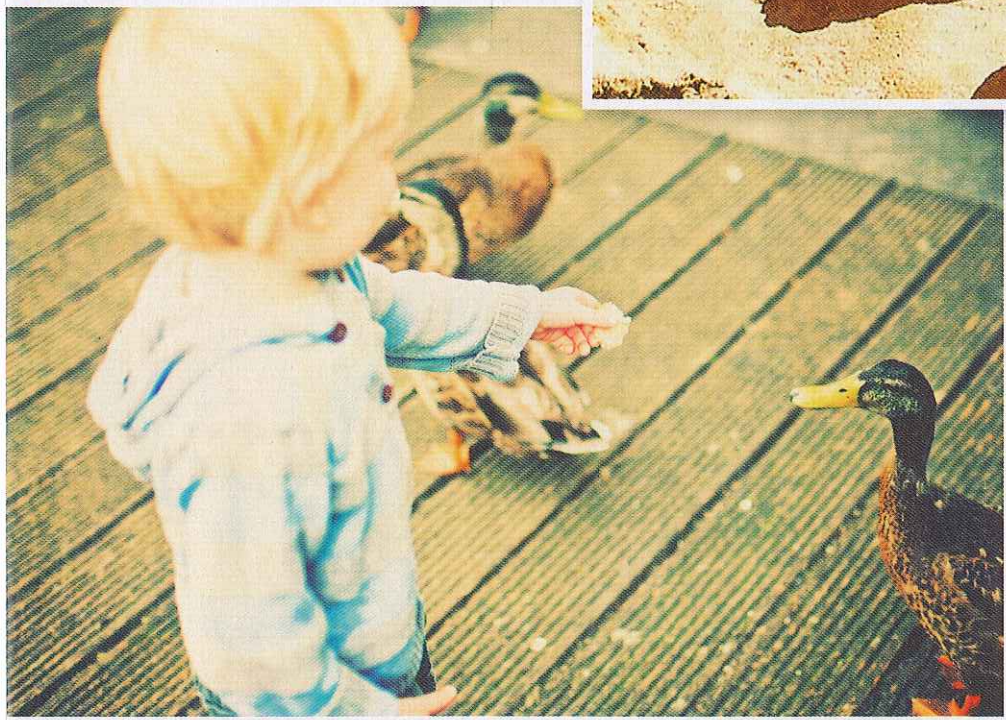
GO EGG-HUNTING From 29 March-1 April, Cadburys and the National Trust are offering Easter Egg hunts at 250 National Trust properties nationwide. Visit eastereggtrail.com for more.

CHECK OUT THE KITES See kitecalendar.co.uk for national kite-flying events. You can turn up with your own and pick up a few tricks or just watch the displays.

Build a sandcastle

There's nothing more likely to build your child's confidence than creating something from scratch. 'Building sandcastles with your child is a great bonding experience, but try to take a back seat and let him do most of it,' says child psychologist Karen Majors. You can do it at a local beach or with shop-bought sand and a washing-up bowl.

'My little girl Evie, one, loves making sandcastles so I bought her a small sandpit at an NCT nearly-new sale,' says Claire Ferguson, 30, from Kent. 'We keep it outside the kitchen door and decorate the castles with things we find in the garden. She never tires of it.'



Do nothing

We're so hard-wired into keeping our children and ourselves busy, this might be the hardest 'task' of all. But doing nothing and just pottering around the house teaches your little one important life skills.

'This gives him some downtime and fires his imagination, too,' says Sandra. 'If you leave your toddler be, he'll eventually pick up a book or play quietly. Many young children are never given the chance because parents rush to entertain them.' ■

Go on a treasure hunt

This is a great way to allow children to explore their environment.

'Kids love searching for, and collecting, random items,' says Sandra. 'If it's raining, place objects like a whisk, bunch of keys or coasters around the house and ask your child to find them. If you're outside, tell him to look for seasonal objects such as a leaf, pine cone or pebble. Give him three or four objects to find, then put them into a special treasure box and talk about each item, what it does and where it comes from.'

