



Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma - which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition.

Steve Jobs



Nappy Changes As Respectful & Reciprocal Interaction

By Elena Marouchos

While waiting in a public facility, I could not help but glance at a mother briskly and efficiently changing her toddler's nappy. Not a word was uttered. The mother completely focused on the task at hand while her child's gaze wandered between the passers-by and the flickering fluorescents. As I absorbed the scene, I wondered if this was a typical interaction between mother and child. My heart wavered and I hoped instead it was the very public nature of this location on a busy Saturday morning that made exchanged what should be such an intimate interaction with such a passive act.

On the way home I could not help but reflect on a recent experience with one of our toddlers. As a primary caregiver I know that nappy changes are built for intimacy. Rather than see them as a chore to be done I look forward to spending quality time with each of the children in my care. During our engagement I learn many wonderful things. It starts with simple things like observing how much they are able to and enjoy participating in the routine, whether they are they able to understand and follow simple instructions

like "can you lift your leg" or "your other arm please". Depending on their response I may gently touch the body part in question and in this way the toddler learns not only the words associated with each action but is also able to anticipate them the next time. Consistency and repetition are key to ensuring that toddlers become familiar with routines. Success? A smile when I see a toddler lift his/her leg as I begin to scrunch up the legs of their pants to step into as this is an indication that they know what follows. I might confirm this by saying "I like how you lift your leg as this shows me you understand what happens next / what I am asking". In this way nappy changes are not a chore but a mutually gratifying experience.

Over time our exchanges evolve to including counting steps as opposed to asking them to climb up or down. Asking them to help remove or put on items of clothing and a whole host of general topics depending on their interests. Sometimes it's the sounds of vehicles passing by, a bird or a noise in the kitchen that attracts their attention while at others it may be nearby items that catch their eye such as

switching the lights on and off or wanting to know which bag belongs to whom. *Yes, sometimes it does require a bit of negotiation and it becomes a dance between bringing the child back to the task at hand and indulging in their need to explore the world around them.*

After experiencing idyllic moments such as these, with the toddler in question for nearly 6 months, imagine my surprise when after a bout of illness and a few days away the minute he heard the words “nappy change”, “no” was substituted for his previous eagerness to run to the nappy change table. Participation was exchanged with tantrums and our exchanges seemed more like reminders of what needed to be done e.g. “I can see you are upset but I do need to change your nappy as your bottom might get sore.” At first I thought it may be because he was still feeling unwell or unsettled because of a recent move and or his mum was away or if there was a new caregiver at home. After a few days and no signs of improvement I discussed the matter with colleagues and his parents in an attempt to understand if similar experiences were being had or if this child’s perception was changing because of something I was doing differently. I was particularly concerned that this child could sense my increasing anxiety. I just could not understand how in the space of a few weeks our wonderful moments were replaced by anticipated anxiety. Eventually by understanding what was happening at home we were able to establish that it was particularly the nappy changes after naptimes that were troublesome for the toddler. Instead of taking my cues from this child, I assumed that what worked before should work today but I had forgotten what a how powerful the will of a toddler is in ensuring successful participation particularly while still learning to self-regulate his/her emotions. Toddler will is a crucial part of identity formation. It also does not mean that none of the factors mentioned earlier did not play a role in but rather that this change in attitude was directly related to him having a better understanding of what his preferences were and the confidence to ‘voice’ his dissatisfaction. It seems that this toddler was trying to tell us is that he does not particularly enjoy having his nappy changed immediately upon waking up but prefers to “chill out” for a while and have a glass of milk or two instead. In the process we also learned that warning him of an impending nappy change yields in greater co-operation.

Aside from the reminder lesson on toddler identity formation and the development of will, I was also forced to reflect on how we can turn difficult and dreaded moments into mutually gratifying experiences that change our perception and foster partnerships. I sought the wisdom of a RIE guru – Janet Lansbury whose words often serve as a reminder of respectful and reciprocal interactions with children.

In order to transform a mundane task into a time of mutual enrichment we need to:

Set the tone with a respectful beginning. It starts with us warning the child that we want to check their nappy rather than just pull down their pants to check or use negative words like “stinky”, “dirty” or “smelly”. You wouldn’t walk up behind an adult and pull on their pants commenting on the odour so therefore why do these to a child? *For similar reasons during we prefer to say we would like to put on a “fresh nappy” as opposed to a “clean” one.*

Peace begins on the change table.

Ute Strub

Below, Tully races to get to the change table



Children don’t like having their play interrupted and most nappy changes can be postponed for a few moments. Instead wait for a break in their play and then discreetly say, “I’d like to check your nappy now please” Then, “I need to change your nappy now please.” If the child balks, you might give the option, “would you like to walk to the changing table or shall I carry you?” If he resists, you may be able to give him the choice of a bit more time. “I see you’re still playing. In five minutes we will change your diaper.” *BUT please remember to adhere to limits and boundaries if set otherwise you are in essence providing a loophole which your toddlers are very adept at discovering!* Toddlers crave autonomy and are therefore more amenable to cooperation if we respect their need to make some decisions.

Give your undivided attention. Slow down; embrace this time together by including the child. Ask for assistance instead of distracting them. Focus on the moment and use gentle “asking hands” instead of busy, efficient ones. It is these gentle and unhurried moments that breed trust and makes them willing participants as opposed to resistant ones.

Look out for cues – verbal and non-verbal. If the child seems distracted, acknowledge it and wait. “You hear that loud noise. I hear it, too. It was the... Are you ready for me to unsnap your pants?” Or, “You’re crying. Did I take it off too quickly? Do you need me to hold you for a moment before

we continue?

Ask for assistance. Remind yourself to pay attention to the whole person, not just his lower half. Don't do anything without telling him first. In this way we are not only treating him with respect but we are encouraging him to absorb language with all his senses. (Cold wipes, the snaps of vests etc.) It was only when I thought about how it must feel to have a cold wet wipe on a warm bottom that I thought to ask toddlers if they would prefer a warm one. "Warm", is now a popular choice on wintry days, although sometimes I wonder if it not the thrill of seeing the tap being turned on that is the draw card?

There is such pleasure to be found in their responsiveness and they soon show you what they are capable of. How they can lift their arms up, open their legs hold the tube of cream and nappy. By announcing what you are going to do next you are also giving them time to prepare themselves. Remember, that as adults we take for granted what is conscious thought but infants and toddler need time to think about which part of their bodies to use and how to use them. In essence, when asking an infant to lift his/her bottom or a toddler to lift a limb you are essentially asking them to contract or extend different muscles. The words we use and the way we touch are all messages that need to be interpreted. Once the nappy change is finished, I may ask "would you like to climb down or would you like me to pick you up?" I then wait to see whether his arms are extended or if he moves his body as if preparing to climb down the stairs.

Be flexible. Stay open to new possibilities. When infants become mobile, they need us to adjust to their needs as best we can. A baby might wish to roll to his tummy to be wiped, or be in an all fours crawling position. In my experience most toddlers prefer to stand. After all their view of the world is no longer from lying flat on their backs and rolling around but from standing upright albeit if still holding onto objects for support. *Holding onto a bathtub at home is a wonderful alternative to the rails we have on our nappy change tables at TLC if wanting to do this at home.* The 'dance' however, is between continuing to ask for cooperation, but to compromise and allow the child to do things his way if you can make it work. By inviting the toddler to participate in different ways such as holding onto items, and taking their nappy off we are enabling and trust them to start taking responsibility for themselves whenever possible.

Remember, your goal is partnership. And no, as I was so aptly reminded, not all nappy changes are plain sailing! A toddler who is secure in his sense of belonging, well-being and therefore attachment WILL and DOES test... OFTEN. We are not robots after all and sometimes we start off on the wrong foot or the toddler is too tired (or we are) and the whole thing goes a bit pear shaped. As one mother aptly put it "Forget about feeling connected — we may not even *like* our baby in that moment." The reality is that to be in an authentic partnership we need to acknowledge these moments even if it is only to say "I can see you didn't enjoy this nappy change" or "the next time perhaps I can do better and find other ways of...".

Ruth Anne Hammond in her book, *Respecting Babies: A New Look At Magda Gerber's RIE Approach*, reminds us "if [a parent] is usually slow, gentle, and attentive, an occasional lapse is emotionally manageable for the child, and may even

When you use physical care as time to be really present with the baby, it's easier and more natural and, in the long run, less time consuming because the baby's needs have been met on several development levels (physical, emotional, and social). Once you make the commitment to spend quality time with each diapering, you guarantee that each baby has individual time while in group care.

Being With Babies, by Beverly Kovach & Denise Da Ros-Voseles



be helpful in the process of learning that her parent is human."

In witnessing that public nappy change I was forced to reflect on my own practice and reminded that nappy changes should never be a passive act — it is not just about getting the job done and having a "clean" nappy. We have to remember that "our hands are a baby's introduction to the world. If they touch slowly, gently, and "ask" a child for cooperation rather than demand it, we are rewarded with a relationship bound in trust, respect and the inexorable knowledge of our importance to each other."

I would like to thank Starex for designing and building our new Toddler stand up change table. We, and the toddlers, love it.

Marie Hindle