

# Do Not Over Act

2006 A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A FOUR YEAR OLD

My four year old son's day begins around 7 am and ends around 8 PM. It's a long day. A very long day. For both of us. My four-year-old is 'on' from the moment he opens his eyes in the morning.

- Can I come into your bed now?
- Is the little hand on 7 yet? ✓
- No but nearly.
- You can come in when the little hand is on 7, not before. Wait another 10 minutes.

Silence

- How long is 10 minutes?
- I'll tell you when.

More silence

- Can I come into your bed now Pleeeeeeease. ^
- Yes all right then but don't jump on me and use your soft morning voice please because I'm not quite awake yet.
- Good morning mumma. Can I have a story?
- I'm not awake yet.
- Did you have any dreams mumma? I had a dream about...
- I said not to jump on me, it hurts and it's not a nice to wake up in the morning with someone jumping on your...
- I had dream and...
- Not now darling, in a few minutes when I am more awake. Just get under the doona and relax for a bit and then we can both get up and have breakfast.
- I was a superhero but I was a badie and animals like the lion and the zebra from Madagascar were chasing me...
- Later love.
- It wasn't scary because it's just a dream but it was a little bit scary because they were green and had...
- Mmmm...? That's funny...
- What?

Micro  
Play  
D

Arnie's voice - minimal  
Shift

- I said that's funny.
- What's funny?
- Doesn't matter. Just rest for a bit longer and then we can both get...
- I'm hungry, did I have dinner last night or was I already full.
- You had dinner but that was a long time ago.

Silence

- Where's Skelly?
- What?
- Skelly, where is he can you find him for me?
- No not now I'm still in bed just wait...
- I left him in the car; can you go to the car and get him?
- Not now.
- Yes now pleeeese.
- ~~He~~ I said no!
- I'll go and get him then.
- No you wont it's too early and it's too cold and you won't be able to get out the back door or into the car...
- Yes I can.

Here's gone. Out of my bed. His little warm body, all angles these days. Silence. Keys and door noises.

- I can't do it.
  - Come back here at once and just wait until I am ready to get up and able to go to the car and...
  - No I want Skelly now. I need him now.
- I am out of bed struggling for slippers. (I don't actually own slippers I must get some) and a dressing gown.
- Come here please so I can get you warm, you'll freeze like that.
  - I don't need slippers. I don't need my dressing gown. I'm not cold. Will I get goose bumps?
  - Yes. So just stand still while I...
  - Do you we have any kiwis?
  - No I didn't buy any this week.

- Are bananas still too expensive?
- Yes.
- Do we have toast?
- Yes.
- I like toast.
- Me too but I need to make myself a coffee first okay.

Silence. Toys being tipped out of a basket.  
Searching through toys noise.

- Oh no!
- What's wrong?
- My Power Ranger's arm is broken. I knew this would happen. Can you fix it for me?
- Not now I haven't even had my coffee love and you are already bossing me around. I'm a grown up. Grown ups don't get started in the mornings as easily as children do. You just have to wait. And let go of my dressing gown before I drop hot coffee on you.

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There's breakfast and spilt juice and the regular table manners lecture. He's already half way off the chair, a mouthful of toast and honey fingers he's using to get the fringe out of his eyes. (He's starting to look neglected. I must remember to make that appointment with the Barber)

- Hang on, hang on what do you say when you want to leave the table?
- I already have left the table.
- Where are your manners?
- May I please leave the table mummy?
- Yes you may.

The rest of the morning is taken up with unending negotiations of one kind or another. Things like how long he's willing to play on his own before I join him in some game or other. Or when is it acceptable to watch some ABC Kids and how long is he permitted to watch

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telly before his brain turns to mush or before I start to feel like a negligent slattern of a mother who'd rather sit her 4 year old in front of the box than arrange a selection of educational and interactive activities on the lounge room floor for us to play with together. Or is the weather ok enough to go to the park or a walk or a play near the river - not too close of course! We climbed trees and played Goblins last week and I ended up with a bung knee. Or what about we have a little trip to the library and borrow some more books and videos?

- Shhh... It's a library use a soft voice please and put those back, they are grown up videos, the kids section is over there.
- Can you read me this?
- Ok.
- Can we borrow this?
- We borrowed that last week.
- I want it again.
- What about this book about the human body and this one about dinosaurs.
  
- I've seen those ones. I want a book about a character with boots on.
  
- Right... you mean Puss in Boots or something?
  
- No, a real person, a human like Superman or Spiderman or a pirate wearing black boots. Where are my boots?
  
- You left them at dad's house.
  
- No I didn't, I didn't. I want them now. I want to wear my boots today.
  
- Daddy lives in the country I don't think we can do that. You will just have to try and

remember to bring things back that you want when we're together.

- Is it a daddy day or a mummy day or a kinda day tomorrow?
- You go to daddy's house on Mondays like always, tomorrow is a kinda day.
- I don't want to go to daddy's.
- Why not?
- I don't like Germans.
- Right... but you're half-German, you speak German, all your relatives in Germany are German.
- I like German children but not the grown up Germans.
- Okay, now you're being hilarious and this is just nonsense.

It's times like this I feel terrible. What a complex life my little boy has been forced to live because when he was 5 months old his stupid father walked out. Is he showing signs of insecurity? Is he happy? Is he acting out? Does he know who I am? Does he understand that I am his real mother and his father's wife is his stepmother? He needs a treat. We both need a treat. But I don't want to appease him with food. Who cares!

- It's ok to eat donuts before lunch isn't it mummy?
- Not really but this is a bit of a treat so it's all right.
- Daddy says that donuts have got chemicals in them.
- Ok home now for rest time, come on.

- 6.
- I don't need a rest; I don't want quiet time. I want my black boots.

We've well and truly given up on the afternoon nap by this stage so rest time usually means him lying on the bed with a book or a video and trying hard to leave me to be on my own - sort of - for a bit too. Without a nap in the early afternoon he's usually nuts with fatigue by about 5 but it's not quite reasonable to expect him to go to bed then so we lurch through our afternoons together visiting a playmate,

- He's not my friend anymore actually.
- Why not I thought you loved him and his toys and his giant waterpistol and his pirate ship made from enough wood to fuel Canada for a year?
- No I don't because Sam can whistle and I can't whistle.
- But you can do things Sam can't and he can do things you can't. That's the way the world is.
- I don't like Sam.

Or going to the Museum,

- Can I be a skeleton when I grow up Mummy?
- Yes, maybe.

Or visiting his grandmother who lives around the corner. He loves it there. It's all soft and comfortable and it always smells good and his grandmother's toys are better than the ones he has at home and he's sometimes allowed to eat dinner in front of the television and she teaches him how to read and make robots with magnets.

Or we simply hang out at home together trying to live side by side and not on top of each other. We argue a lot. But it's those side by side times when we are actually just two people who love each other simply being together not doing anything special but content to do things

separately for a bit and then to check in with each other every so often. It's then that things are at their most harmonious during our days, our precious and sometimes tough days together.

Sometimes I catch him singing a little German children's song under his breath as he ponders a Power Ranger's severed arm or a difficult Lego maneuver. Sometimes I catch him out of the corner of my eye just looking at me not saying anything. Sometimes he looks like someone I have just met.

- Can you put this mask on me?
- Okay, who are you?
- I don't know, who do you think I am?

Then we do the dinner, bath, books and bed routine and he is begging for a third story,

- Just one more story please.
- Okay just one. Once upon a time there was a robot named Bill who lived in ....
- Not about Robots, about a group of boys who play together and sometimes do naughty things and they find a space ship with aliens and one of them, Hugo, gets taken by the aliens and then the other boys go and rescue him and..
- Ok, ok, now close your eyes and try to go to sleep as I am telling you the story and don't interrupt me again ok.
- Okay. Just one more thing?
- What?
- The alien's name is Harry and he has antennas.
- Good night darling.
- Good night. Don't ever go away will you. Just to go to work or when I go to daddy's or kinda that's ok.
- Goodnight darling.

Bed. I am flat. Damn the dishes. Forget about that basket of toys all over the lounge room floor. The washing can wait; he's got plenty of

clean clothes to wear tomorrow. Have I had a shower today? Who cares? I really should call her back. I'll do it tomorrow.

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- Mumma!
- Yes?
- ~~Did they have pyamas in the olden days?~~

Children slept with their parents in the older days.

- Did they?
- Did they have pyamas?
- Probably ... I don't know... not like the ones we wear ....
- What and?
- Ernie! Sleep! Good Night.