

PlaySense

by Barbara Sher, MA, OTR,
The Games Lady

Mary Poppins-oid Tasks



Like it or not, there are things to be done to keep the house functioning, even if it is not quite humming along. Expecting even the sweetest kids to do their chores often takes, to put it nicely, many verbal cues. In my everlasting quest to keep myself in a happy place and be less like the Wicked Witch, I have come up with yet more Mary Poppins-oid games.

The Honorable Head Garbage Taker-Outer

Here's a way to get a job done while making everyone feel important, necessary, and appreciated. I discovered it

one day when I was trying to get my kids and their visitors to help me with a garden project of planting peas. I thought for sure they'd enjoy it and was surprised when they seemed reluctant to join me in poking holes in the earth, dropping in the little round pea seeds, covering them, and pressing the soil down over them.

Then I thought about how people at work were starting to get new titles. The custodian was now the Maintenance Engineer, and secretaries were now Assistant Managers. Same work, different titles, yet the new titles were more respectful of the labor done. Janitors *do* maintain, and secretaries *do* manage.

I announced the positions available: “Let’s see ... for this work, I need an Honorable Hole Putter-Inner, a Gracious Seed Depositor, a Superior Soil Cover-Upper, and a Princely Press-It-Downer.” I was delighted—and astonished—to see everyone claim a title and burst into activity.

Now, instead of asking someone, “Would you grate the potatoes?” I say, “You can be the Great Grater.”

Race Against the Clock

The intent of this game may be obvious to kids, but as a fun challenge and a way of getting something done, it works almost every time. It goes like this:

Say my daughter needs to go upstairs and get her sweater before we can all leave the house, but she’s feeling too lazy to make the effort quickly. If I say, “Can you run upstairs, get your sweater, and be out in the car before I can count to eight and three-quarters?” I then start counting, and she takes off up the stairs. She’s up for this challenge of speed and agility—to do something in a fun way that has to be done anyway. If she’s especially quick, I’ll say, “Wow! You did it by seven and a half!”

Counting loudly keeps my kids from getting distracted, but if the count goes high, I admit that sometimes, during moments when they’re out of earshot, I’ll do something else, and then resume counting loudly when I hear them coming: “... 16 ... 16½ ... 16¾ ... 17 ...”

I’ve had the tables turned on me. Once, my youngest said, “Can you run downstairs and bring me a glass of water before I count to ten and a half? One ... two ...” I took off. It was fun to meet the challenge, and I noticed that it raised my energy level.

Once, my daughter used it on me in a new way. We were driving home from a trip, but I’d waited too long to get started, and with four more hours still to go, I was already tired. The kids, too, were fussy, and at one point I blew up and started yelling at them.

My then-five-year-old said calmly and sincerely, “Mom, let’s see if you can calm down

by the time I count to seven. One ... two ...” When she saw my face relax and my mouth curl up in amusement, she said, “Good, Mom! You did it by six!”

So sweeten up that potentially sour moment by doing something a little out of the ordinary and play a game. When everyone is having fun *and* doing the work, you’ll feel that bubble of joyous satisfaction and know why Mary Poppins always wears that happy grin. ♦

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