

How to be prepared to be with your kids

Ten simple, practical tips on being prepared so that you can make the most of the time you spend with your children

By Chris Barnardo

The time you spend with your children is precious. Depending how much you see your kids it is likely that both you and your child or children will be excited to see each other. Paradoxically this can end up being a stressful situation. You'll both put a lot of stock by this valuable time, and over excitement can lead to headaches and other minor upsets, which are a physical way of expressing the emotional

stresses and strains of seeing someone you love when you haven't seen them for a while. If you are not prepared for this situation then you can waste time trying to get stuff at the last minute or have a spoiled weekend. If despite all the best preparation, things start to go wrong, take a deep breath and don't panic. If it's just a minor upset, then don't let it get to you, remember you are in this for the long game, and

there'll be another weekend soon. If it's something major seek help from a neighbour or friend before things get out of control.

Some of these tips might seem a bit simple, but for me taken together, they have been about the most useful things that I have done to be prepared.

Keep some simple emergency medicines in your house or flat

Be prepared to manage minor illness and headaches. There is nothing worse than a poorly child during the night, when you can't go out or the shops are shut. You may as well get the stuff next time you are at the supermarket. Don't buy branded medicines, if you shop at a reputable supermarket, buy their own-label brand, it's very much cheaper and it is exactly the same medicine.



To be prepared for the most common, rapid onset minor children's complaints, such as mild headaches, toothache, tummy upset, cuts and grazes, or a slight fever (high temperature), you will need:

- 1 bottle Children's Paracetamol (Acetaminophen, US) syrup
- 1 bottle Children's Ibuprofen syrup
- 1 bottle Milk of Magnesia
- 1 tube of antiseptic cream
- 1 packet of assorted size sticking plasters

Very important notes and tips on medicines for children that visit or stay with dad:

- Always read the label before giving medicines to a child.
- Make sure that your child isn't allergic to the medicine or any of its ingredients. Never give more paracetamol (acetaminophen, US) than the recommended dose, more is not better. Ibuprofen and Paracetamol (Acetaminophen, US) may be taken at the same time. If you are worried about the health of your child when they are visiting or staying with you, you can

look online for help, talk to a pharmacist for advice, or contact your doctor.

- If your child comes to visit you or stay with you and they are taking a course of medicines, such as antibiotics, make sure you understand the regime (take notes if necessary) and follow it exactly. Failing to finish a course of medicine at the very least will considerably reduce its efficacy and can seriously harm your child.
- If your child comes to stay with you while ill, and has been given any over-the-counter (OTC) medicines that day, (like Ibuprofen or Paracetamol (Acetaminophen, US)), make sure you know when the last dose was given. Ask if you are not certain; write the time down, if you think you might forget. Pain killers are dangerous if given more frequently than every four hours, so when a child is moving from one parent to the other it is important to establish when the last dose was given. If you are bringing your child back, and you have given them any medicines while they have been at your house, it is important that you tell the mother (or adult into whose care you are passing the child) exactly what you have given them and when. Write it down for them so that it won't be confused later. Do not rely on your child to 'tell mummy', children get this sort of thing mixed up and have a different perception of time.

Keep some simple emergency medicines in your car

Kids of parents who have separated often spend a reasonable amount of time in the car travelling between homes and then on to see grandparents and extended family. Be prepared to manage minor illness and headaches wherever you are.



Having a few things handy can save the day on that special outing, or just when you don't want

the time you spend with your kid spoilt by a headache or a cut knee. The car is an easy thing to stock up. Buy wet wipes, some plastic cutlery and a roll of toilet tissue, put them in a carrier bag and keep them in the boot (trunk).

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- 1 packet Children's Paracetamol (Acetaminophen, US) syrup sachets
- 1 packet Children's Ibuprofen syrup sachets
- 1 packet of Children's chewable antacid tablets
- 1 tube of antiseptic cream
- 1 packet of assorted size sticking plasters

Buy a set of coloured felt pens, paper small scissors and sticky tape

Kids love colouring and drawing and whether just sitting at home or going somewhere by car or train, having colouring pens and plain paper handy for them to use is a lifesaver. You don't have to get expensive felt pens, but washable ones and bright colours are a must. Also check them regularly or watch while your children use them and when they start running out, replace them, they're not expensive, and most supermarkets sell them. Remember how you used to love new felt pens when you were a kid, and how boring it was, when every pen you picked up was on the way out.

Keep a stock of UHT (long life, sterilised) milk

My children call it Emergency Milk. They don't really like it, because they're used to fresh pasteurised milk, but on the occasion that we run out and the shops are closed, Emergency Milk for cereal does come in handy.

Freeze sliced bread

When you are living on your own, food like bread can easily become stale before you have had a chance to eat it. If you freeze sliced bread, it keeps indefinitely.

You can toast frozen bread straight from the freezer and you can make great packed lunch or picnic sandwiches from it while it is still frozen, because you can spread hard butter straight from the fridge onto the slices. When you've made your sandwiches, wrap them immediately in cling film and then within about 10 minutes or less the

bread will be defrosted and lovely and fresh. Plus if you wrap the sandwiches and put them in your insulated lunch box, they help keep the rest of the food cool.

Take small bottles of tap water with you when you go out

Kids get thirsty and you should always make sure



that they have enough water to drink, especially on hot days, so save a few single dose bottles and fill them with tap water and take them with you when you go on an outing. This will save you filling up on canned fizzy drinks and sodas just to quench your thirst, and it's loads cheaper. Keep a full one in the car.

Buy a simple tool and mending kit

It's not the sort of thing you pack up as you go to move out of your home, but in your new flat or house a small tool and mending kit will be very useful. Superglue and two part resin are not much good for making things with your kids (for that you need a glue gun) but they are perfect for mending broken toys, and so are useful things for a dad to have around. Children should never be allowed to use superglue. Ideally you will need:

- Small screw driver set
- Small torch
- A pair of strong kitchen scissors
- A roll of sticky tape
- 1 tube cyanoacrylate glue (superglue)
- 1 pair of tubes of two part resin glue

(note: never let the children use super glue, it permanently glues skin in seconds)

Freeze single serving juice cartons

They're great for packed lunches and picnics; the frozen drink slowly defrosts in the cooler bag, keeping everything nice and cool, and then by lunch time will be ready to drink but still nice and cold.

Buy some small Tupperware boxes so that you can freeze extra food you cook

When you cook for your kids, always cook more than you need, save and freeze the spare. Use either cheap Tupperware boxes or any small plastic packaging pots, which are ideal for freezing the extra food in single serving portions, perfect for you to microwave another day, when you don't feel like cooking.



Buy a basic making kit

This site is about how you can do things with your kids. One of the most rewarding things you can do, for both you and your kids is to make stuff with them. You don't need any equipment to start because some of the projects only need a piece of paper (fold-up shirts and paper planes), but for about £20 (\$25) you can set yourself up with some basic equipment that will enable you to make the most fantastic toys and models from just about any old junk that you would normally throw away.

