

Reflections – The Incredible Years

(Permission has been given from this amazing parent to let us share her reflections)

My first reaction was not to tell the boys about the 'special time' as I was concerned it would be come another 'to do' which would not be achievable and then lead to them being upset and me feeling bad and beating myself up about it.

So the first week I didn't tell them but tried to fit in it myself and realized that it was tough to do ...

I have been analyzing why it's so hard and thinking that it shouldn't be. 10 minutes with each child is only 20 minutes a day, actually a pitiful short time to spend with one of the people you love most in the world.

The 2nd week I started by offering Bailey 10 minutes of special time the Wednesday after the course. He'd woken up early, come to my bed for a cuddle and then we'd both got up and I started doing 'jobs'. As I hung the laundry out I watched him play and when I'd finished I approached him and explained that I was doing this course and that 10 minutes special time is something I'd like to do with them every day. He picked up and questioned the every day in a very hopeful and positive way and then decided he'd like me to do Lego with him. We then spent longer than 10 minutes playing with Lego, talking about our creations a bit but mostly being together in companionable silence. When the time came to an end we both said how much we'd enjoyed it and would like to do it again.

Walking to school that morning Bailey asked me if I was going to tell Blake about the course. This is the exchange:

Me: yes of course, Blake, you know how mummy is doing a course at the moment,

Blake: no

Me: well, remember you saw my folder in the car with the stickers on it and you asked me what they were for

Blake: oh, yes, well but I didn't know what the course was for

Me: it's to help mummy be the best mummy she can be

Blake: that's a good course then, looking at me and smiling, that's a GREAT course for you mummy ...!

Me: it is. What would you like me to learn on it?

Blake: for you not to shout at me when you're angry

Me: yes, that would be a great thing to learn, I could work on that ... and perhaps you could go on a course to work on not doing some of the naughty things you do which make me angry and then shout?

Blake: laughing, yes, but that course would have to be in my head

So that week, with all of us knowing about 'Special Time' we still only managed to fit it in 3 times. Looking through the week, it seems I'm not concentrating enough on opportunities to fit it in and am being distracted by 'jobs' that need doing to keep daily life going. On top of this the boys have activities of one kind or another 3 days a week after school, tennis, Beavers and swimming, and Bailey also has Gymnastics 1 day a week.

During this week, to fit it in we've been having special time in the morning or before bedtime. It often feels hard to fit it in before we do it but whilst we're doing it and afterwards it felt like it was no time at all.

The boys have chosen a variety of things for special time:

For Bailey Lego is the most popular where we build alongside each other.
Blake likes to play games – board or card games the most. He also really likes brushing my hair!
Football in the garden – goal scoring.
Being on the trampoline.

Reactions during and immediately after special time:

It's very invigorating (even when the activity involves sitting down), we feel very connected and there's often lots of cuddles, kisses when sitting down. When the activity is more physically active we laugh a lot and it's amazing to see their skills and hear them marvel at mine! They comment on how nice it is to be doing the activity and Blake has described how special time is 'even better than X-box because time with mummy, and daddy and Bailey is actually nicer'. At the end of one 10 minutes, when we were pushing bedtime, Bailey said 'time flies when you're having fun' – he'd just taught me a new card game and I agreed wholeheartedly so we talked about being able to make more time.

What I notice when we've had special time:

- I'm calmer and more balanced – like I've remembered to focus on what's really important and it's helped shape our future interactions
- The boys appear happier, we talk a lot and are able to negotiate doing jobs more effectively, like tidying their room up, getting ready for bed or for going out.
- There's more praise going both ways
- They often want to do 'special time' together but I've had to say we'll do it separately as it erupts into arguments between them half the time so if we do it it's bonus special time
- Blake is usually the one who plays up during bonus special time and we've all become more effective at ignoring his behaviour which works – he's apologizing more and sooner than before – but his tantrums are still bad at times and he physically lashes out at his brother, biting and hitting.
- Blake appears to feel that 'we love Bailey more than him' and frequently verbalizes this view
- They're still very competitive with each other on many levels but especially for my time but it seems easier to manage when we have special time alone.

Other challenges to work on:

- Filling in the special time diary – a good way of creating the habits – doing it electronically would help me.
- How daddy fits in Special Time – he has so little time at home that we have to work hard at ‘labelling’ his time with the boys special time or they discount time they’ve had with him because it wasn’t positioned as ‘ST’.
- Regularising bedtime – more especially going to sleep early enough! The routine is there it’s timing that’s an issue and challenges with dinner time seem to spill over – particularly them saying they’re still hungry...
- Setting boundaries for expected behaviour
- Managing their desire to spend time on the screen playing games (we’ve blocked the facility for them to reload games onto the iPad / phone as Blake was sneaking the devices off, reloading the games and playing them without us knowing)
- Rewarding great / expected behaviour – I had bought them two scooters and hidden them but they found them and wanted them – I said they had to be earned and the course would help me and them work out what that looked like. After a bit of nagging they seem to have accepted this and kept asking me when I was going back to see Anna (the incredible Years group leader)!!