



Stop knocking the dads

Men are often much criticised for not being able to multi-task as effectively as women.

We hear about it in conversation, we see it in advertisements on TV.

And yet, when it comes to certain aspects of parenting, the ability to focus on one thing at a time can be an invaluable tool because you are able to be truly present when you spend time with your children.

Mothers wear so many different hats that they really battle to be fully present when they are with their kids.

Even if they are not physically multi-tasking they are often doing so in their minds (just ask me) – all the big and little things that must be remembered from the lost school shoe, to the groceries that are running out, to the birthday party invitations that must be answered, let alone all our own stuff around our careers or the voluntary



21st Century Parenting
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work that we do.

Dads, on the other hand (as long as they are not glued to sport on TV), are very quickly able to establish a deep degree of presence.

This makes the time they spend with their children highly memorable, even if they only spend a fraction of the amount of time with the children than that which their mothers do.

And this is what is so irritating for efficient, multi-tasking mothers.

The impact that dads

can have in a short space of time blows our minds. We try so hard to do it all right, plotting, planning and scheming, while dads just have to show up and they are the heroes!

You see, when dad arrives home after work and drops his computer bag off at the door, announcing, 'I'm home,' he really is.

I guess competing with, or trying to be the same as each other, or as good as each other at everything we do, would be a pointless exercise, so let's just celebrate our unique differences and the complementary benefits they bring to family life.

Kids really do love and need us both. Creative parenting expert, inspirational speaker and co-author of *Future-proof Your Child* (Penguin, 2008), and *Easy Answers to Awkward Questions* (Metz Press,

2009) - nikki@brightideasoutfit.co.za, www.brightideasoutfit.com.

Reflect on this

A woman with a voice is by definition a strong woman. But the search to find that voice can be remarkably difficult

- Melinda Gates

Melinda French Gates is an American businesswoman and philanthropist. She is the co-founder of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the wife of Bill Gates.

She worked at Microsoft where she

was Project Manager for Microsoft Bob, Microsoft Encarta and Expedia. Gates was appointed an honorary Dame of the British Empire in 2013 for her services to philanthropy and international development.

Local pursuing linguistics excellence abroad

AMY JENKINS

PASSION for linguistics and a deep commitment to gender related issues have been the driving force behind former Mtunzini resident Amy Sutherland to pursue her studies at the University of Sussex in the United Kingdom.

Amy matriculated from Felixton College in 2008 with seven distinctions, as well as reaching her finals in classic ballet during the time.

She then spread her roots to Rhodes University for her undergraduate and

honours degree and was awarded several scholarships and prizes, as well as academic colours.

Amy also grabbed a spot on the Dean's list of achievements and was included on the Investec Top 100 students roll at Rhodes.

This was all before graduating with ten firsts and a triple major in linguistics, psychology and classical life and thought.

Her passion was then exemplified through her dissertation which focused on the rhetoric of Women's Day speeches, drawing a comparison between the

official party line of support for women, and the reality of abuse and violence against women.

Languages

Her choice to study linguistics came as no surprise as Amy has always loved languages and even braved studying Latin I and Latin II at Rhodes. Japanese, Russian and South African sign language were also touched on during her studies.

Having completed a Teaching English as Second Language (TESOL) course, she began teach-

ing at a language centre in Brighton before enrolling for a Masters degree in applied linguistics in September.

Her studies in the United Kingdom were made possible by winning the prestigious Patrick and Margaret Flanagan Scholarship for postgraduate study.

Upon application she was also awarded the Chancellor of the University of Sussex's International Award.

Personal time

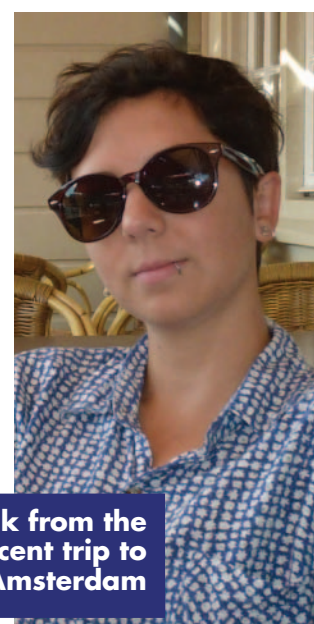
When straying away from studies, Amy is usually found socialising with

her friends in Brighton or spending time at the popular Roller Derby. Scouring the many vintage shops and flea markets in Brighton is another interest.

She is also an ardent animal rights activist and proponent of gender equality.

Amy does nothing in small measures, but she takes one bite of life at a time and is only committed to her wish to travel extensively and the desire to progress to a doctorate.

Profile



Amy taking a break from the books during her recent trip to Amsterdam

Toys encouraging child development



Choosing the right toy

MEALANG VAN HEERDEN

Toy shopping can be daunting for anyone let alone choosing the right one.

When choosing toys for your child it is important to consider four factors: safety, versatility, age-appropriateness and longevity.

Safety

Children do not always use the toy as it was intended to be used. So take cognizance of warning labels and disclaimers concerning the small, moving parts and materials on the toy. Limit the use of over-stimulating toys for young children. Toys with flashing lights and loud noises can cause anxiety and over-stimulation.

Beware that some masks and figurines that may seem fun to adults may be scary to children.

Children intrinsically need to feel emotionally safe and secure and the toy you choose should foster this need.

Versatility

When choosing a toy, evaluate its ability to enhance the toys your child already has in his/her toy collection. For example, if you are going to purchase the latest toy micro-

wave, ensure your child already has a few plastic accessories like a tea set that he/she plays with on a regular basis.

Playdough is a great accessory to most toys as it encourages experimental play.

Appropriate

By appropriate – in this context – it means toys that take into consideration a child's developmental maturity, their environment as well as their personality as introverts or extroverts.

When choosing developmentally appropriate toys, consider what skills the child will be developing in the next few months or what skills they need to develop.

Toys should not encourage gender stereotypes. When shopping for gifts we often, let our own biased beliefs get in the way and exclude certain toys because we consider them to be inappropriate for boys or girls.

However, these may be the very toys your child needs to develop holistically.

Children, who live in environments with limited outdoor play areas such as flats and townhouse complexes, seldom receive outdoor toys as gifts. This only exacerbates problems such as childhood obesity.

There are many toys that promote gross motor skills development that do not necessarily require a lot of outdoor space, for example, a swing ball.

Like adults, children have preferences, so choose toys your child has shown an interest in.

Worthwhile

Regardless of our financial standing we should consider the price tag before we buy toys. Often branded or even trendy toys are overpriced and a fairly priced substitute can be found if we spend some time looking.

A simple game such as Twister offers multiple learning opportunities.

You can teach your child colour differentiation, listening skills, learning left from right, taking turns, and it's a wonderful way to strengthen core muscles that will help children sit up straight and concentrate at school.

Mealang is the Programme Development Manager at Cotlands. Cotlands is a non-profit early childhood development organisation addressing the education and social crisis by establishing early learning playgroups and toy libraries in poor communities to serve vulnerable children aged birth to six. To donate to Cotlands visit www.cotlands.org.