



## Shaking Things Up in the New Year!



*Rituals can be comforting, but what do you do when the "same old same old" gets, um, old? **Jordan D. Brown** discovers it's time to try something new and different.*

### Ah, Those Rituals and Routines

In the darkness of my bedroom, I awaken to my daughter Olivia tap-tap-tapping on my arm. "Daddy, daddy," she whispers in her cute 5-year-old voice, "Time to get up!" Bleary-eyed, I glance at the clock. It's 6:10 AM.

"Honey, could I snooze for a just a few more minutes?" I ask.

"No, Daddy, it's storytime!" Olivia insists. With a devilish smile she adds, "C'mon. You know you want it!" (In my half-sleep, I wondered where she learned that phrase, then I realize the source--ME; earlier that week, I said it as I coaxed her to try a new food.)

At this early hour, part of me yearns for more sleep, but mostly I'm looking forward to my special morning time with Olivia. Reading books with her is one of my favorite ways to start the day. In addition to enjoying books together, it's a time for Olivia to share what's on her mind, tell me her wishes for the day, as well as her worries. And, of course there's the thrill of insisting that I absolutely, positively, WON'T tickle her until after breakfast... but then of course I do.

"You're right," I say as I drag myself out of bed. "It IS storytime!" Olivia grabs my hand, leads me to the "reading chair" in her room, and pulls a Dr. Seuss book off her shelf. Our daily ritual begins...

By savoring these little rituals, I find I am better able to handle the more hectic, stressful aspects of being a parent. Olivia, too, finds the predictability of our morning routine comforting. No matter what else happens in the day, Olivia knows she can count on certain favorite activities every day.

There are times, however, when NOT doing the "same old same old" can be a fun and valuable experience for the whole family. I've found that shaking things up also helps combat boredom. But change doesn't always come easily, especially when strong-willed children, like my own, are involved.

### Shaking Up Is Hard to Do

On the first day of kindergarten last fall, Olivia was bursting with confidence. Her only concern was about riding the school bus. My wife Ellen and I reassured Olivia that she'd be able to do it, and reminded her that her big brother Finian would be sitting right next to her on the trip. We reminded her that many kids feel scared the first time they try something new. We explained that she'd probably meet some fun, new friends. Olivia heard none of this... from her tears and jitters, it was obvious that she was way out of her comfort zone. She was worried about the noise, and concerned that she would somehow get lost. Nevertheless, she got on the bus, we blew her kisses, and said, "Love you! See you this afternoon!"

I received a phone call about an hour later from Olivia's teacher, Mrs. Wallace. Apparently,

Pull an eBook off our shelf!



READ

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Olivia had cried the whole trip, and was frightened about getting back on the bus later that day. Mrs. Wallace asked if I could pick up Olivia in the afternoon. I said, "Of course." Recognizing that the adjustment to kindergarten was a big one, Ellen and I decided that I'd drive Olivia to school for a while until she was ready to tackle the bus again. Finian, who LOVES riding the bus, continued to go to school by bus in the morning, while I drove Olivia.

Months went by, and Olivia expressed no interest in trying the bus again. In October, she did ride a bus on a school field trip, but this was different as her teacher was aboard, greatly reducing the noise level.

Then, in early November, Olivia watched Finian board the bus one morning, and announced, "I want to ride the bus tomorrow!" And she did, without the slightest tantrum. In fact, she had a big smile as she boldly walked on. She was ready at last.

## And Now For Something Completely Different...

Breaking out of a routine, or starting some new activity can be tricky. As a creature of habit, I cling to the familiar. This morning, while the kids were in school, I sipped a cup of coffee (another ritual!), and started reading an interesting new parenting book a friend had recommended: *Free-Range Kids: Giving Our Children the Freedom We Had Without Going Nuts with Worry* by Lenore Skenazy. In it, the author urges parents to trust their instincts, to avoid being overly protective, and to not be swayed by sensational media stories about potential dangers to our children. She suggests a more sensible approach in which we make sure to use seat belts and bike helmets but not feel the need to buy the latest safety gizmo for our child. I chuckled at her reminder, for example, that humans somehow survived for many millennia without the benefit of kneepads for crawling tots.

Inspired by this book, I brainstormed steps I might take in the coming months to "shake things up" and make life more interesting and rewarding for my kids, and myself. Here are some simple ideas I may try. (I'm avoiding calling them my "resolutions" because once I give them that label, they tend to implode in a matter of days.)

So, in 2010, in the spirit of experimentation and "shaking it up," I'm going to:

\* **Tolerate more of my kids' messes.** Cleaning up is a drag... but remembering the sheer joy on Olivia's face when she makes an elaborate chaotic "concoction" of uncooked rice, salt, bits of scrap paper, sprinkles, green food coloring, vinegar, baking soda, the mess is well worth it!

\* **Lose my temper less, choose my battles more.** I need to remember that my children have much higher energy levels and shorter attention spans than I do. So, rather than getting upset when Finian and Olivia use their "outside voices" inside, or forget to do things like flushing the toilet, I need to focus on the positive, and consider it my creative challenge to dream up fun ways to divert (or hold) their attention.

\* **Figure out new routines to give my kids more responsibility.** In an effort to hurry things along, I sometimes do simple tasks for my children, when they could actually learn to do more things themselves. By relocating the cups to a lower shelf, for example, my daughter could easily get drinks for herself--and her brother. Shifting responsibility to them could boost their esteem and make my days less stressful. A win-win.

Wishing you and your family a new year filled with new experiences, new friends, and new fun!

Jordan D. Brown  
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