

LIFE IN THE XPRESS LANE..

Sunday morning fun for exhausting toddlers

Elizabeth McMahon's musings on a life where you're always in a rush, have to serve yourself and are frequently let down by technology



It usually starts at 5:17am with a request for milk and a need for a particular vehicle. After a book marathon, we're dragged downstairs for more puzzle time and a complex building site game involving skip trucks, diggers and lego. Then the bundling starts; climbing on shoulders, jumping off sofas, building dens and mad running around the house. "LOOK AT ME MUMMY!" Repeat until 7:30pm when we all collapse in a heap and are driven to wine.

I'm sure many parents of two year old boys will be amazed by their extraordinary energy – especially that this energy seems to multiply and spiral out of control the less sleep they have. I've learned in 2 years and 9 months that my son needs a good walk outside everyday and a good "go" at the park, come rain or shine, to expend some of his incredible vigour. Despite a healthy diet, avoiding all sorts of stimulants, e numbers, additives (mostly . . .) I'm all too aware that lack of "runaroundtime" as we call it, results in a behaviour decline.

And so we sought to channel this energy, to bring some focus and structure to exercise and encourage an already

healthy interest in sport. We found it in Rugbytots – a class that has been specifically designed to develop physical and social skills around rugby.

Rugby Tots run several classes near us (Coleford, Cheltenham and Stroud) and we chose the one in Stroud Leisure Centre. I can't deny that knowing this would mainly be a "Dad" activity, the fact that it was 9am on a Sunday morning and ergo I would be guaranteed at least one lie in a weekend was a huge factor in the positive decision.

So we signed up, paid our money and received a (hugely cute) small person rugby kit in the post with instructions to join. Following the requisite breakfast of two bowls of rice krispies plus toast, I sent my son on his way, certain that this was the start of something big. (Maybe this is how Johnny Wilkinson's Mum felt?) Of course it was the start of something big. Our son returned extremely proud of himself – group activities that include throwing balls, high fiving with Daddy and stickers will do that to a small person.

So what of the class itself? It was a small team of 2 – 4 year olds, girls and boys of mixed interest and aptitude, led by two young rugby players of extreme handsomeness, I mean aptitude. Seriously though, the coaches were great. RFU qualified, CRB checked and seemingly picked for their calmness with children. They were patient when the small people were distracted, encouraging of success and confident in dealing with parents. At all times parents are involved but the kids are given enough of a free range to feel they've achieved their own thing. The activities involved movement, play, identifying shapes and colours and lots and lots of fun.

The Rugbytots classes demonstrate all the things that are excellent about sport – feelings of inclusion that come with being part of team, pride at having achieved and the natural endorphins that come from running around, a lot. Feeling part of something is important for human beings, even when you're two years old. It was clear that our son loved that feeling of inclusion and was proud of his weekly sticker – frequently stopping random strangers in the street with the declaration of "I a RUGBYTOT!"

It's lots of fun but with structure so they're learning about following instructions, taking turns, stopping for the whistle etc. Even the principle of taking time to have a little stretch before exercise and making time to have a drink are included. The group leaders are great role models and it's always good to have a Dad activity without a Mummy butting in about blowing noses and keeping warm – even if our son did let the cat out of the bag about his Dad's post class bacon sandwich. That's not to say that at the several classes I attended too I was uncomfortable – it wasn't about the parents you see, it's all about the rugbytots.

All in all, an excellent activity which often results in a lovely long afternoon nap . . .

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