

Small Challenges Big Achievements

By Darryn White

I guess all those with children have experienced the agonising task of repeatedly asking or telling the kids, to them it's nagging, to "clean up that mess", "your not leaving the table till it's all gone", and the big one "hurry up".



All children respond differently to 'direction' and it is for this reason I feel many parents struggle with this period of their developing lives as there seems to sometimes be a

continuous battle within the family unit. We all have these little battles with our children, as our parents did with us and this is a story about one such conflict.



I was 'challenged' with the younger of my two sons with 'getting ready for school'. He wouldn't get out of bed when called and when he did he spent ages in the bathroom with me constantly yelling at him to "hurry up". Consistently, after many calls, I would find him wrapped in a towel standing by the heater, basically not moving. Well at least not in the direction of getting dressed. What could I do?



My first reaction was to continually shout every time there was no sound from the bathroom, this evolved into a knock on the door at the ap-

propriate moment with a persuasive reminder of the time.

Every time though when he didn't 'tow the party line' someone else, me, had to get involved. I don't see any value in the continued yelling day after day and the negative feeling that puts both of us under for the rest of that day. I chose to develop a different approach.



As most people like a challenge and everyone loves a reward, I offered my younger son both. The challenge I set was to be ready for school within 45 minutes, from the time he woke up to

the time he walked out the door for the bus. This would consist of him being showered, dressed, fed and school gear packed.

I didn't want to make the challenge too big so I thought about how I could break it down. I offered him three ten minute challenges. All noticeably different from each other, with recovery time in between. The first to get out of bed, have a shower and get dressed.



The second challenge was to have his breakfast and the third was to have his bag packed, teeth brushed and my son ready to walk out the door to head to the bus.



As each challenge was 10 minutes, that left my son 5 minutes between each as a rest period and more importantly a 'safety net'.

As my son was only 8 at the time we came up with a scoring system that he could use himself and a suitable reward for his success. As we know, all kids love pocket money so a simple reward was 1 dollar for every minute he 'beat the clock' (rounded down for fairness) and he would lose 50 cents for every minute he was over. The 5 minutes between challenges ended up being used to record his score and calculate his reward or deficit.



though) and our father/son relationship, I believe, is so much stronger, not because of this simple challenge but maybe because of my assistance with his development rather than the parent pressure of constant hounding and nagging.



Reflecting back on that now I see how my son has developed and how more focused he has become. Maybe it is a direct result

At first my son wasn't happy with being placed under this sort of pressure, this was nothing he had done or had to do before and now he was being challenged to perform. I persuaded him to have a go, at least as a trial. So with the stopwatch at the ready he was off on the first of three challenges.



of the habit he formed all those years ago, maybe not. Either way I am so grateful to have had a part in his development and was able to assist with some guidance rather than forceful direction.

I remember for the first morning of this new challenge my son had 'a real crack at the title'. He earned himself \$4.00, was early for the bus and I hadn't nagged him once. What a fantastic and encouraging result. As the weeks wore on we had mixed results. The stop watch was being worn into the shower and the score cards were being filled. We continued with this reward system for some months and it became standard routine. Some might even say a habit had been formed.



We don't do the challenges any more for there is no need. My son, who is somewhat older now is generally up before his alarm and gets himself off to school with very little assistance from me (he prefers the sandwiches I make for some reason

