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Diaper Duty: Parental Skills 101

My beautiful son arrived into the world, and with the elation that only a parent can know, I held him for the first time. These first surreal hours still lay untouched in my mind until the boisterous Swedish nurse insisted I re-diaper him. Having a two-year-old daughter, I had been exposed to the chore and did not hesitate to remove the miniature diaper from his wee frame, but as the cool air hit his naked body, *wee* became the operative word as a ghastly stream of pee hit me directly between the eyes. I have since become far more ingenious in my pursuits to change the kids, and it could be said that I am some type of aficionado in the art of "poopie pants." In sharing the wisdom obtained through countless days of trial and error, I offer my apologies to anyone who has a similar routine that is disrupted from disclosing their hidden practices. But I believe that "diaper duty" should be executed with precision and a well thought out plan, so I intend to tell all. For those who desire perfection in this medium, follow the six D's of diapering: detect, defer, detain, denude, deploy, and dispose.

A parent must assume a liberal mind set when figuring out what actually constitutes a dirty diaper. This should not include neglect or abuse, but all else is fair game. The first rule when changing messy britches is that the activity itself should be avoided at all costs. So at the first faint whiff, don't jump to a rash decision and begin investigating. Such are the rookie mistakes that can only lead to bad things, like work. All have seen the doting parent who pulls at the side or back of a diaper to "take a peek." Don't risk embarrassment by condescending to such mortifying behavior, and do not engage in the aggravating "patting on the bum" to feel for an unclean diaper. The correct way to detect a dirty diaper is by letting the child's pants ripen to the distinct confirmation of a diaper that is foul. It should begin with a curious arousal of the olfactory nerves, but again be patient in issuing judgment. When a spouse is at home, wait for their recognition before moving under your own volition. If left long enough, the child will grow from a slight fragrance to an indistinguishable trail of a pungent effluvium that is beyond interrogation. Like a hot bath, the tolerability threshold is different for every parent, so determining when to move to the defer stage can be difficult. Just be calm and wait for the perfect moment to develop. If caught rushing the issue, a spouse may sense the squeamish discomfort, and this will diminish the chances of success.

At the appropriate time maintain stalwart confidence by following three simple phases to prevent the perilous excursion into the undesirable realm of diapering. First, begin with an avoidance phase. When the question is posed "Is she stinky?" or "Do you smell that?" Dogmatically reply "Is who stinky?" and "I don't smell anything?" Prove to be a dullard by stating "I think it's the dog," even when he is chained outside. There is room for some latitude, so don't be concerned if the responses given sound ridiculous. Just keep in mind that it is of utmost importance to stay focused! Do not be caught off guard by a distracting moment in the Laker's game or lulled away by NASCAR, where unexpectedly the child may be handed over. Simply persist with these repetitive incidents until the accumulating effect wears down the other parent, and out of sheer frustration or by realizing the elevated immaturity, they change the infant themselves. If they are having "one of those days", the first phase is going to prove highly ineffective (if you value your life), so swiftly move to the next, negotiation. However a word of caution: a poorly selected task may result in a pyrrhic victory. The delivery is given in the form of a plea bargain, like "Dear—I'll mow the lawn if you will change her." This can be any activity, but ideally should stay with those that are never going to get done anyway, like cleaning out the garage. The final phase is to gamble, only assay this final phase when nothing else has worked and exhaustion is setting in. A suggestion might be to try the classic rock-paper-scissors, where a skilled player can gain the added advantage of cheating. Unfortunately, once defeated we must move quickly, for the duty that lay ahead must be performed in thrift.

The short straw has been drawn and the time has come for testing our cat like reflexes through detaining the prey. Assume a linebacker stance and wait for the child to make his move. Intuitively a child will sense the change in phase, or it may be that he is just startled by the first movement from the La-Z-Boy all night. Either way, prepare for the high velocity revolutions of their little legs as they gain speed, and in one or two rectilinear steps extend a forcible straight-arm. If they nimbly duck or leap, be prepared to make a reverse dive to sweep the legs and cause a crash, but remember it is of the utmost importance that they do not fall on their hind parts. Pounce on the lifeless stunned child, and establish a good restraint hold to use while stripping him down. The trick here is realizing that a thick leg is larger than a squirming chest. Place the child on his back, keep his head pointed away, and then throw your leg over his midsection. Take both of his feet in one hand to get the child under complete control. Now consider giving an insolent, authoritative stare—the kind used on a teenager before saying, “Be home by eleven.” This should calm him down before removing the clothing. (Rarely does this actually work, but as a teenager it may cause him to think twice before violating curfew.)

Every departure into a diapering battle should begin with the same organized plan where each step is articulated into a complete process. Begin, shoes then socks. Toss them, but not too far. Pants are pulled directly from the cuff, so as not to run into any possible leakage. Unsnap the onesie, and pull it directly over the T-shirt from the bottom. If done properly, the child’s arm should extend and both T-shirt and onesie should remain together, locking the reaching arms into place. Do not expose the child’s entire forehead, because they look funny trapped (avoid the temptation to stop and laugh), and it also makes it easier to put the shirt back on when finished. The child is now ready to lose the diaper, so readjust position and carefully remove the Velcro from both sides. This is the critical point in every changing, for if not well prepared, backup must be called-in. Ask the question, “Where is the diaper bag?” If the answer is “right here,” then hoist the child and frantically use wet-ones until he is clean. If the answer is “I don’t know,” then from this vulnerable position, call to the other parent and hope she’s forgotten the childish acts of the defer stage. With the child clean, it is safe to continue, but do not become complacent for the aromatic package is still lying in reach, and this will not be the first child to put its hand in it. So stay on task!

Next, with the naked child in hand, redressing is no more than a blurb. Simply lift him and put under a new diaper. Peel and secure the Velcro straps, and give a quick snap to the elastic around the legs. The clothing is reapplied in the reverse order. First, free the child’s limp arms and reattach the onesie. Next, put the legs through the top hole and with compelling force hoist the child off the ground, then allow for gravity to drive them into the pants. Place the child on a knee to redress the feet with shoes and socks. Finally, set the child free with a parental swat on the butt.

To be rid of the vile diaper for good, it must be turned into a more easily manageable bundle. Roll it up from front to back, and secure the round shape by applying the Velcro straps to the diaper itself. Get a plastic grocery sack and kick the diaper and its terrible odor into the bag. Give the bag several good spins and tie a tight knot with the handle. The entire thing must be immediately removed from the house. Once it is outside in the garbage can your conquest is complete.

Do not be discouraged if the process isn’t immediately effective, for over time the talent will come. And through practice, one can move from a level of inadvertent procrastination to high state of deliberate avoidance. As these skills are honed the nerve required to apply the ability to a wide range of household tasks will evolve. Soon, the kitchen trash will have taken on its own rank life form and the dog will have grown lethargic from never having been walked. Unclean laundry will be flowing down the stairs and the children will go to school without having endured a bath. And in the meantime, the parent will develop a greater body of knowledge under the tutelage of *ESPN Sports Center* and *America’s Funniest Home Videos*. So it is clear, that the individual well trained in “diaper duty”, has more than mastered a model. He has developed a tool to enrich his existence.