



# pointers for spending 24-hours with a *five-year-old*

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If you get the opportunity to hang out with a five-year-old for 24-hours a week during not only a blazing Phoenix summer but a pandemic, rejoice!

**Y**ou won't have a moment of privacy (think sock puppet shoved under the bathroom door and "Grandma, Grandma!" while you're sitting on the toilet), but you'll be so busy spinning in the wake of a happy tornado, you'll never even have time to think about the apocalypse, not to mention your long-term relationship in crisis or the loss of your beloved dog. The dog that was kept by the man who said you do not "meet his safety guidelines" due to your watching

this young dervish while your state's COVID numbers shoot through the roof. No worries. You and the little girl can have the time of your lives if you just:

### **Let Her Cook**

Each week, plan something (anything) she can cook. When you were a Montessori teacher back in the day, the once-a-week cooking projects were the kids' all-time favorites. Let her squeeze lemons to make

lemonade, press cookie-cutter hearts into pie crust, bake cupcakes, crisscross peanut-butter cookies with a fork, slice bananas, top pizza with shredded mozzarella, and crack an egg. Listen to her say, "This tastes like joy!" when she bites into the cupcake or, "Oh, my goodness, look at all this egg jelly!" as the yellow and clear goop oozes into the bowl like slime.

#### Let Her Make Art

All you have to do is provide a large cardboard box, pom poms, googly eyes, magic markers, tacky glue, water paints, pipe cleaners, popsicle sticks, socks, child-friendly scissors, buttons, paper, and watch the magic unfold. She will turn the cardboard box into, first, a playhouse graffitied with hearts and flowers, and then into a puppet theater. With the creation of stick and sock puppets, she will perform shows in the living room for you and the old dog, Sylvia—not the young one, James, who you wake up dreaming about, now in Flagstaff with the guy who's afraid of your germs. Over the weeks and months, watch your walls, doors, and fridge be covered with portraits and collages of love.

#### Let Her Swim

Every Thursday, drive her across town to your oldest son's house—your only kid without a drug problem, the one you got pregnant with in high school the year abortion became legal, the one you wanted to keep more than the guy whose sperm made you a mother, the kid who turned

you from bratty selfish teen into protective would-do-anything-for-this-kid Mommy. On the way to his house, play "I Spy" with the little girl, taking turns spying street signs, skyscrapers, flags, inflatable dancing men, and brilliant orange umbrellas over a road crew. When you arrive, park and let yourselves into his backyard, because that is the deal. He unlocks the gate, but stays inside due to the virus, because everyone knows that you and your little charge could be packing their death. For weeks, slather her with sunscreen, push inflated floaties up over her biceps so she won't drown, and jump in. In the early weeks, before the sun warmed the pool to bathwater, the water had seemed freezing. You, who'd inched in one frozen millimeter at a time, had admired the child who'd flop into the cold without hesitation, while saying to you, "C'mon, you can do it; you've got this!"

One Thursday, you arrive at the pool and are notified by text that your Sunday drive to Flagstaff is canceled by he-who-texts: "I've been looking at this pandemic and must take adequate precautions considering changing situation. I will be keeping company with James for the time being." You feel daggers and tears roiling inside you, but you hold them in and jerk back to reality because—Splash!—your granddaughter has jumped into the pool. Her eyes twinkle as she says, "Oops, I took off my floaties." You gasp and hotfoot it into the pool and then, suddenly, she is gliding past you underwater, feet swishing like a mermaid's tail, coming up laughing, "I can

swim!" and your heart that just broke with the text is now illuminated like Leonard Cohen's *there's-a-crack-in-everything-that's-how-the-light-gets-in* song lyrics and you can't believe she is swimming and she looks like the seals back in Tacoma bobbing in the Sound along the walking path where you and that dog-hoarding dude used to stroll. By the next week, she dives right in, swimming underwater across the pool over and over, surfacing each time to shriek, "THIS is my life!" Only once does she choke, because she opened her mouth underwater to say, "Weeeeeeeeeee!"

#### Let Her Sleep with You

The guy's not there anymore, so you and she can take the bed. You were sleeping on the floor next to her in sleeping bags back before the virus, when he was still in town, before you and the little girl became lepers, back when she was scared to sleep alone. Set up a routine: Run the bath, stripe the toothbrushes with toothpaste, let her take a side of the

bed, have her pick three books for you to read. Never drink or take medicine or even ibuprofen in front of her, because she may associate it with her earlier years living in a nest of addicts. Once, when you forget and take the vial of estrogen from the cabinet, her eyes will widen as she asks, "What's that? Your little midnight helpers?" And you wonder where in the world she heard that or if she's been reading *Valley of the Dolls*.

After the three storybooks, turn off the lights, lie down next to her, tickle her back for two minutes and say, "Good night. I love you," and some nights she will say, "Let's snuggle," and she'll nestle against your side and some nights she'll roll around tossing the blanket in the air with her feet like a horizontal soccer player and some nights she'll say, "You're my favorite grandma" or, "I love you times a million," and you will always reply with the same magnitude. And for the last few weeks, she'll also say, "I wish I lived with you" and your heart will clench, and you'll say, "You do, you live with me one day each week." 🐾



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