

# {HOW TO BE A} chill mommy



while he has a bottle, mellow out to music

It's time to let go of the perfect-parent fantasy. We all take shortcuts to stay happy (and sane).

Real women share how they cut corners and hold the guilt.

By Rachel Rabkin Pechman

## SKIP THE TUB

Jessica Barrett, of Indianapolis, cops to quickie cleanups instead of baths. "When I don't have time to wash our youngest, I use a scented wipe on her face and head so she has that fresh-baby smell," says Barrett, whose daughters are 6 months and 3½. The dirty truth about cleaning your kid? "You shouldn't feel obligated to bathe your baby every day," says Seth Faber, M.D., a pediatrician in Detroit. "If your child's skin is healthy, then you're doing it right." A baby who has

been crawling around the backyard needs a good scrub-down; if she's been on her activity mat and in your arms for most of the day, she can go to bed without having a bath.

## END DRESSING DRAMA

Tired of battles over what outfit your toddler will wear? Remember, your goal is a happy kid—not Blackwell's best-dressed list—as many veteran moms understand. "My 2-year-old likes to wear her big sister's clothes, so sometimes we leave the house and



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she's sporting a T-shirt down to her ankles and a diaper," says Juliet Johnson, of Los Angeles. "I never would've allowed that with my older kids, but now I let it go."

Lena Kohut, also of Los Angeles, even puts her children (ages 1, 4, and 6) to bed in their clothes for the next day. "It saves time in the morning, and it's not as if they're going to a job interview or anything."

### TURN ON THE TUNES

Canyon Ranch may not be in the cards right now, but you can bliss out without booking a spa appointment. Kelly Barron Matzen, of Dewitt, Michigan, mom of 2-month-old Caleb, knows how to melt away stress: "I

listen to relaxing music, like Jack Johnson, while I give my son his bottle. That way, I get to chill too!"

Pop music also works like magic for Blair Peavy, of Garland, Texas: "Whenever Lynlee, my 17-month-old, gets fussy or I need a diversion, all I have to do is play some Justin Bieber, and she dances and sings along."

### FUSE FOOD WITH FUN

Getting wiggly babies to sit still long enough to eat a meal (let alone allow their parents to) is the Holy Grail of dining for many moms. Not Robyn Higginbotham, of Charlottesville, Virginia, who gave up and now lets her 2-year-old eat on the go. On warm days, "he'll play with the water hose—it distracts him while I sneak peas into his mouth."

Must be something in the water, because Erica Manthe, of Sherwood, Oregon, also finds that feeding her kids when they're wet works wonders. "I'll give them dinner while they're in the bath. They have a blast, and it gets two jobs done at once," says the mom of four, ages 7 months, 3, 5, and 8.

### RELAX ABOUT GERMS

As their babies get older, some moms find that they ease up about what constitutes "clean." "For the first weeks of my daughter's life, we would scrub her binky with soap and water every time it fell on our floor," says Alicia Moura, of Tucson, mom of a 9-month-old. "Then we started running it under the faucet. Eventually, we wiped it on our pants before plopping it back in her mouth."

### JUST DO YOUR THING

Even if you *wanted* to spend every waking moment entertaining baby, you'd still have other stuff to do. Relax—he's plenty jazzed to watch you go about your business. While Lisa Wolfman-Stoehr is folding laundry, she puts her 7-month-old, Chloe Jane, in a basket with a sheet and some towels. Mom then works on the basket next to Chloe Jane's. "She loves it!" Wolfman-Stoehr says.

### PRESS SNOOZE

Sleeping late may be a distant memory, but if you're crafty, sleeping *later* is still a possibility, as Kerry Fedro, of Irvine, California, has found. "When my 2-year-old wakes at 6:45 A.M., I'm not ready to get up," says Fedro, who also has a 5-year-old son. "So each night before I go to bed, I sneak a few books into his crib. The next morning, he entertains himself until 7:30, and I can sleep almost a whole extra hour. I retrieve him when he starts yelling, 'Mommy, Mommy!'"

### BRAKE FOR POOP

Call it Murphy's Law: Within about 15 minutes of going outside to play, a dirty diaper will beckon you back in. When Robyn Higginbotham hangs out in the yard with her kids, she uses the back end of her SUV as a diaper-changing zone. "I keep a bag with diapers and wipes in the trunk," says Higginbotham, whose kids are 6 months and 2 years. With this setup, "I don't have to bring both kids inside and take off their shoes." Gives new meaning to the term "oil change!" ●

## that's entertainment

It doesn't have to be a toy to keep a tot occupied. Some faves:

#### ● BROOM ●

"My son is completely obsessed with ours. While I cook dinner, he sweeps the house, including the couch, the walls, even the dogs! He's happy, I'm happy—everyone wins!"  
Carol Ann Cordell, of Haslet, Texas, mom of Preston, 20 months

#### ● CEILING FAN ●

"My little guy loves the ceiling fan. If it's on low, he'll watch it for hours and laugh. I take advantage of his rapt attention to get things done around the house."  
Nita Hampton, of Knoxville, Arkansas, mom of Samuel, 3 months

#### ● IPHONE ●

"Anything with buttons, lights, or sounds keeps my youngest busy so I can blow-dry my hair or make lunch. You do what you gotta do!"  
Amoret Kaufman, of La Crescenta, California, mom of Spencer, 2½, Henry, 6, and Alycia, 16

#### ● KITCHEN UTENSILS ●

"My kids like to play with anything plastic—a spatula, turkey baster, strainer. Cooking gear always intrigues them for a while."  
Heather Robinson, of Lebanon, New Hampshire, mom of Parker, 10 months, and Hope, 2½