

Au Pair of the Year Essay

The biggest lesson I have learned from my kiddos is patience. It is a virtue I employ in every action we take together. This can take a more obvious form, as in when Henrietta cries over the safety hazard I had to remove from her reluctant clutches or when Frank takes the longest time possible to put on his shoes. In these moments I must of course be patient with the children and allow them the time they need to overcome their current obstacle. But in my seven months of au pairing, I have learned to do this moment of waiting with a friendly and encouraging smile. Herein lies what I have come to recognise as true patience; when Henrietta rails against the unfairness of not being allowed to chew on an electronic gadget, I listen to her cries with the soft chuckle that means 'I hear you and I'm still on your team.' When Frank refuses to heed my advice on which straps to undo and which shoe goes on which foot, I smile as he chooses the path of most resistance. And as he rushes out the door, I take him to play on grass where, when he inevitably trips, his injuries will be negligible.

I have also learned that instead of preventing my little Ward's failures, I must provide them a safe space to fail. From their failures they learn the most, but it can be hard to find the patience, even the fortitude to watch them fail. For instance, as Henrietta and Frank's most recent wrestling bout grew increasingly rough, my first instinct was to step in to pre-empt the fast-approaching tears. However, I drew on my newfound patience and simply kept making their snack (while of course keeping a close eye on their distance from the nearest table corner). As their playing went on, Frank pushed too hard and Henrietta cried, and when she did, Frank stopped and looked up to me. As we sat down and talked together about what had happened, I saw in Frank's eyes a spark of recognition. Giving them the safe space to find their own limits in physical play allowed them to learn from each other about how to play well. He gave her a hug and a quick apology and soon they were back to playing happily. As I finished up making snacks and called them over to the table, I remember thinking that one of the hardest parts of my job was to stay out of the way and watch with a kind smile.

I love little Frank and Henrietta, and I always will. That love has forced me to learn a new patience, for their sake. But in the end, it was not so hard. After all, I'd do anything for my kiddos.