



MOMMY CAMP

GOLDIE GROSSBAUM

Mommy camp.

It's like being a walking, talking Pinterest board.

There's at least 273 easy and creative things to do with your kids – without having to leave your house!

It seemed so simple!

We'll do home-made play dough and cake pops and then colored gel sensory something or other. And then collect empty toilet paper roll thingies and make the 76 easy and no-mess things that are so simple and foolproof.

We'll cut sandwiches into cool shapes and everyone will gobble them up because of the cool shapes.

We'll slice watermelon and kiwis and avocado and spinach and make ices that will fool the kids and they'll lick every last drop, asking for more.

We'll cut pool noodles and use ice cube trays to make the greatest water toys ever.

I'll make all those colorful and bright signs and charts and the kids will follow all my marching orders, tucking all their stuff in the right places.

Another day of mommy camp passes and I fall onto the couch, too tired to even read.

I mentally go through my

Pinterest-board-mommy-camp-day...

I manage to start the day off with a quick shower, I put on some clean clothes and I'm the last one to join the breakfast crew.

I crack, beat, flip and scramble eggs, while I scramble from counter to counter giving everyone breakfast. Make that their second breakfast. My husband had already given them breakfast when he started the first shift. I was lucky to have the late shift at 8 a.m.

Three bowls of Cinnamon Life, one bowl maple brown instant oatmeal... oh no, that was supposed to be two bowls Cinnamon... pour contents back in box, get another box. Soy milk, almond milk, regular milk, spoons and I have breakfast under control. I sneak over to make a coffee while everyone is immersed in their food, which I know could last for up to 90 seconds.

I clean up two floor spills, one table spill, one ice-maker flood, dump some things in the sink and join my kids at the door to wave good-bye to my husband like he's leaving on some long journey, while truthfully he's going all of a mile to the Chabad House and only until 5 p.m. *Not that many hours until then*, I try to convince myself.

I direct everyone to get dressed, wipe up another spill, dump in a load of laundry and say a little prayer that I should remember to get it into the dryer before tomorrow.

Feed the baby, dress the baby, change two diapers.

Trip over some cars and referee a Lego battle.

Remind everyone we are leaving to the park in 12 minutes, so we can get there before the heat does.

Balancing the baby in one arm and trying to keep him from grabbing my marker, I scribble some pictures on our makeshift daily schedule so the kids know what's happening.

They're not totally decipherable, but good enough for our mommy camp.

Put on socks, Velcro shoes (once again validating my no-shoes-with-laces policy) and strap in car seats.

Diapers, wipes, snacks, drinks, sunscreen.

Shlep out bikes from the trunk, distribute helmets, lug out the scooters.

Get to the park where I sit in the shade and do nothing, relishing every moment of the shade and the nothing.

I give out water bottles, and guard them as told.

Push the toddler on the swing, feed the baby.

Answer some questions by random strangers...

Yes, they are all mine.

Don't worry, they're not ALL boys, there is a girl in there somewhere.

Yes, I do have cleaning help.

Yes, I do home-school.

And I leave the rest for them to discuss when I'm out of earshot.

Time to leave and pile in the bikes and scooters and helmets and we are back home... just in time for lunch.

With the baby in one hand, I get the food going: grill

cheese sandwiches, yesterday's pasta... No cookie cutter sandwiches, no cutesy nothing.

One thing is for sure, in mommy camp we do a lot of eating.

Baby and toddler go for a nap and now we can start activities.

Set up a paint project – outside. Nothing from the list of 101 creative ideas. It's called freestyle. They can paint whatever they want. We focus on the process, not the result (read: they're busy, that's good enough for me).

I direct cleanup and then clean up the rest. And two spills.

Baby is up. Feed and diaper again.

Ooh and aah over paint projects and listen to elaborate descriptions of what it's supposed to be.

Wash a few dishes.

Sweep the floor, minimally.

Referee another Lego battle.

Clean a spill.

The kids get into bathing suits and I spend the next hour contemplating if I should make a chart to keep track of who splashed who in our tiny kiddie pool that's really too small for so many kids and telling the kids to close the back door and not get water in the house. No fancy water toys in sight, only good old fashioned cups (and some other things that someone sneaked out of my kitchen and that I pretend not to see).

No avocado spinach trick-your-kids ices.

Strawberry mango smoothies, some liked it and some didn't, and cleaned more spills, only these were sticky.

Change another diaper.

Somewhere along the way, I'm not quite sure when or how, put together food for dinner.

Referee computer time.

Wipe up a spill.

Join my kids at the door to greet my husband, giving him a hero's welcome.

Supper, showers, baths, brushing teeth, *Shema*, and kids in bed.

Sit with each kid a few minutes and chat about their day.

Nothing about my day was Pinterest-worthy. Definitely not the pile of wet towels at the back door, the scraps of paper and crumbs and scissors and glue sticks that litter the kitchen floor.

Mommy camp is exhausting, grueling, draining and challenging.

But mommy camp is also spending every moment of my day with my biggest fan club, and that makes it all worth it.

They make me feel important.

After all, I'm changing the world, one diaper at a time. ■

Goldie Grossbaum and her husband Rabbi Yossi, together with their rambunctious children, direct Chabad in Folsom, California. To read more of Goldie's musings on kids, motherhood and life in general, visit her blog at www.littleyellownotepad.com.