

Child of the Day

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By: Holly Bowne

As my children clambered into the van, I peeked in the rearview mirror to witness my 6-year-old son, Wyatt, scoot amiably over to the inside seat, letting 5-year-old Zoe have the spot nearest the open door. We pulled out of the driveway, and Wyatt handed his sister the CD case allowing her to pick out her favorite children's CD for me to pop in. As the cheerful rhythms rolled out the windows, I took a deep breath and sighed, reveling in the peace.

We ran multiple errands, with our last stop being the grocery store. As we cruised down the breakfast food aisle, Wyatt carefully held two cereal boxes up for Zoe to choose between, then easily stepped aside to allow her to continue pushing the cart through the store. While I finished up in the checkout line, Zoe took two pennies from my hand, and walked with Wyatt over to the coveted purple dinosaur ride. He cheerfully helped her into the seat for the first ride, smiling and waving at her before taking his own turn.

Upon returning home, the two children bounced their way into the family room where Zoe snatched up the remote, tuning into one of her favorite television shows. Even though Wyatt's own favorite show was on at the same time, he uttered not a peep of protest, but smiled serenely and pulled out his Legos, quietly immersing himself in the construction of a new mega structure. Once again, I sighed blissfully.

I know what you're thinking, and no, it's not Zoe's birthday. And no, this is not a dream. Well, not exactly. You're reading a re-creation of events as they happened (and continue to happen) in the home of a friend of mine. My children are now 15 and 13; and I wish I had discovered this little gem of an idea when my own two kids were younger. My friend, Debi, a much more creative problem-solver than myself, calls her idea "Child of the Day."

Many parents of more than one child can relate to that frustrating concept of sibling rivalry. You know how it is. Siblings can start a fight over almost anything: who gets to brush their teeth first, who gets to hug the dog first in the morning, which T.V. show to watch, even who gets to take their bath first! (Note: This last one reverses when they get older.) The constant bickering wears on a parent's nerves. I often found myself speaking more sharply than I intended simply because I couldn't stand the arguing anymore.

Well, this Child of the Day concept eliminates all of that. Debi took two magnetic picture frames, and put one child's picture inside each of them. Sitting her children down, she explained to Wyatt and Zoe that she'd noticed them arguing over little things every day. She let them know that the constant bickering was frustrating, and often made her lose her temper, which was something she did not want to do. So she had come up with a solution. Each child would have a turn at being the Child of the Day. Because there were two of them, they would each get to be Child of the Day three times in a week.

Wyatt would receive Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, while Zoe would receive Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. Sundays would be Parent's Day. To help them remember whose special day it was, Debi placed The Child of the Day's picture on the front of the refrigerator.

Each morning, the two kids would scamper into the kitchen to see whose smiling face was looking back at them from the picture frame. For the delighted children (and mom), the plan worked like a charm. The Child of the Day would get first dibs on doing all those coveted things siblings fight over. Sitting in the "best" chair, getting the last cookie, and helping set the table 'cause it's the coolest to help mom with chores, (Second note: This also changes when they get older!) all became effortless decisions. Fighting over these inconsequential things became nonexistent. In any circumstance where there is a "first" or "second," both children know the Child of the Day gets to "go first." And both defer cheerfully, because each child knows they only have to wait a day, and then it will be their own turn.

Child of the Day has worked out so wonderfully that--even at this late stage in the parenting game--there are times I consider implementing Debi's idea myself. My only dilemma would be, is the Child of the Day the one who "gets" to take out the trash, or the one who "has" to?