

Things to do in May • Make time for Mom • Tips for confident kids • Camp Guide

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You go, Girl!

A GUIDE TO RAISING
DAUGHTERS

Closet conundrum

When clothes grow up
faster than your daughter

MEAN GIRLS

Sugar and spice
but not always nice





My daughter hates dolls

My daughter, Finn, has always hated dolls. As soon as she gained control of her little limbs, she would recoil at the sight of baby dolls. If you pushed the issue she would scream and cry. BY DANA AILER

My mom, dreaming of a granddaughter she could spoil with lovely dollies in frilly dresses, tried again and again. She gave Finn baby dolls with practically no facial features, baby dolls dressed as animals, dolls of young girls rather than babies. Finn quickly dismissed each one.

What Finn loves are rocks. Also sticks and leaves, but mostly rocks. Obviously the initial fun of playing with rocks is finding them. This requires exploring and digging, dirty fingernails and grimy creases in pudgy hands. But beyond the initial discovery, Finn enjoys playing with rocks and sticks. She displays them in a row or assembles in primitive statuary. She also assigns them personalities and gives them jobs to do.

For a long time, Finn didn't enjoy any form of snuggling. I think she just didn't have time for it. I could rarely hold her on my lap long enough to tie her shoes. Anyone who came toward Finn poised for a hug and kiss was likely to be left squatting, open-armed and alone as Finn fled.

Her room is an avalanche of books, train tracks, plastic spiders and snakes, Lego, costumes and horses of every description. I guess I'm secretly proud of the fact that she's stuck to her guns regarding dolls. I admire that, despite dozens of playdates to the homes of little friends whose rooms are filled with Barbies and princesses, Finn has enjoyed herself but remained true to her internal guide, returning home to build pirate ships with her Lego and fill them with rocks.

What bothered me was Finn's lack of interest in playing the roll of caregiver. It worried me. Was the fact that Finn didn't want to imitate a mommy, a red flag? Was there something wrong with her development? Or was I doing something wrong? Was she not getting what she needed from me? Did she want to distance herself from the whole enterprise of motherhood

because I was making it seem so unattractive?

As a single mom, I worry constantly that I'm not providing Finn with all the love and attention she needs to develop into a normal, happy, well-adjusted kid. I'm the only person at home with her, so if I'm messing something up, there's no one to point it out to me. This absence of checks and balances causes many sleepless hours spent worrying, and many phone calls to friends looking for a second opinion. My friends do their best to reassure me, telling stories of their own children's quirks to prove things could be worse and that everything will work out fine. But I still worry.

Finn was 5 and I had long ago resigned myself to a world of sticks and rocks and plastic snakes, when one day she piped up from the backseat, "Mom, can I get an outfit for my Ugly Doll?" I'll admit I went overboard. Within two hours, the stuffed monster had diapers, a T-shirt and a beaded bracelet. It was as if a dam had broken. I don't know what inspired her, but ever since that day she has accumulated outfits, bottles and even a stroller. These she uses to lavish maternal care on a motley crew of stuffed and plastic animals, reptiles and inanimate objects. She's even taken to wrapping her rocks in baby blankets.

Finn has also become extremely affectionate with the human world. The cork has popped on her affection, and it's pouring out in every direction. These days, anyone who comes at Finn expecting a hug and a kiss is likely to get a wet sticky kiss and a hug which could well cost the recipient a trip to the chiropractor.

I don't think Finn will ever like dolls, and that's OK. But I no longer worry that her nurturing instinct is stunted. Last weekend I made an outfit for a plastic snake.

Apparently, he was getting married and Finn wanted him to look nice.