

Summer time at the daycare

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Things are heating up at work. Apparently, spring didn't get the memo that it's her season, and us here in Hawkes Bay have gone straight to summer. It's not a major complaint, though, six months of summer sounds amazing, and it's even better because our Christmas and New Year's are in the summer. Because things are heating up and it's getting hotter, we leave a note for all the parents that they should start packing sun hats and caps for their children, as well as togs because we will now have water play at the daycare. (Side note, we call swimsuits, swimmers, trunks, etc. , togs in New Zealand.) So now, not only is my whole work day essentially asking 'who is crying now?' but also telling the children to put their hats on, not only in English but in Maori which is the native language of New Zealand as all children are taught the basics of the language in schools. Everyone in NZ has a basic command of the language. We give the children two options where their hats are concerned; either find your hat so you can play outside or you go indoors. Those are the two option, and there is little room for negotiation although I think we all know that kids will argue and it is very hard to win an argument with a pre-schooler. One very fair skinned girl was playing outside, and she had a short sleeved hooded top type thing on, so I asked her to go and get her hat, giving her the two options and leaving her to make the choice. Thinking that she had outsmarted me, she put her hood over her head and exclaimed with a clear defiant tone in her voice "I have a hood, I am good." Then she ran off to join her little friend and continue their game. Despite the rhyme in her statement and the clear comedic undertone, she still had to get a hat. She continued to argue with me when I re-established the two choices she had so I ended up getting a hat and putting it on her head myself seen as she wanted to be outdoors rather than in. Boy did she give me a dirty look at first, until she forgot the whole debacle and discussion we had, and soon she was my friend again and was telling me about

her dog. Unlike adults, children don't hold grudges. I am very hands-on in my job. Some of the other teachers watch from the sidelines and bark out orders; I prefer to get in there with the children, have fun and do the practical learning with them. As soon as I get to work in the morning, I take off my shoes and leave them in the cloak bay/staff room area, roll up the legs of my pants, although that has not been necessary these past two weeks as I have worn shorts and blinded people with my pale legs in the process, and I have gone out there and got in the sandpit with the kids and splashed in the water. I like to do all that; I think it's important to interact with children at their level and have fun while learning. Also, some kids are very sneaky, and it's another way for me to watch them. I spend equal amounts of time on both sides at the daycare. As I mentioned before, we have the pre-school side and then the under twos side. Earlier in the week I was with the babies, and because it was warm enough, I set up water play for them. The two eldest boys on that side followed me and helped out in setting up the equipment. I handed them plastic water toys from the shed, and they put them in the water trough. Turning the hose onto a fairly low setting, I filled up the plastic trough and also wet down the sand pit in the process. I bet the parents loved me that day, sending their kids home with wet and sandy clothing in plastic bags for them to wash! I gave the hose to one of the boys and explained to them that they could take turns with the water and have control of the hose. Children understand far better than we think they do, we definitely do not give kids enough credit. They understand. As soon as I gave the hose to the nearly two-year-old boy, I could see the look in his eyes, and I knew his thought process. I just knew he was thinking 'yes, power!' So what was the first thing he did? Turn the hose on me. I had purposely turned the water pressure on a low setting because I knew the kids would want in on the action, but boy do I regret teaching the kids that if you put your finger partially over the end of the hose, you can make a spray effect with the water and it's good for getting long distances. Any annoyance or anger at being sprayed with the hose soon disappeared when I saw the two boys in fits of laughter, clearly enjoying having the hose and wetting their teacher. Those two boys are very close, they're in cahoots, constantly working together and causing trouble as only two-year-old boys can. Both boys are in the habit of stripping down to nothing and running around naked, laughing as we try to catch them so we can get them dressed again. Let's just hope they grow out of that habit as they get older. It always amazes me that children have a way of communicating and understanding each other, with little language skills. They can babble away for hours and play their little games, and understand each other perfectly. One little girl had very good language skills for her age, but I think that was because she was usually always in the presence of adults and older children and so had picked up those skills from listening in on adults speak. I was sitting on the edge of the sandpit one day, watching the children play and interacting with the girls who were 'baking.' The girl with the amazing language skills, who had not long turned 3, announced that she was going to make me a birthday cake despite the fact that it was not my birthday. "What flavour will the cake be?" I asked, thinking that the question was perfectly acceptable. She looked at me as if I were an idiot and replied with "birthday cake flavour." As if it were the most obvious thing in the world. That was not the first time I had made that mistake. I had helped children 'cook' in the sandpit before after wetting down the sand, and one of the kids said they were going to make a

hamburger. I asked what type of hamburger, thinking of something along the lines of cheeseburger or chicken burger, etc. The reply I got was simply 'hamburger' with a look that again questioned my intelligence. Of course, a hamburger type hamburger and birthday cake flavoured birthday cake. Why did it not occur to me?