

Oh baby doll

For a long time, all my toddler daughter's toys received equal attention and equal lack of concern. But one day, Melise picked up her baby doll and decided it was special. She carried it into the bathroom where I was running her a bath. Melise threw the doll into the tub with a big smile.

The smile faded immediately when I pulled the dripping doll out of the tub. Melise started crying and motioning for the baby to go back in. It seemed very important to her that the baby take a bath. I couldn't put the cloth-bodied doll back into the water, so I had to think quick.

"Baby is all clean!" I told her. "Time to dry her off!" I grabbed up a hand towel and wrapped the doll up. I handed her to Melise whose cries changed to coos as she patted her baby dry. The bath went much more smoothly after that.

The very next day, the baby doll came outside with us to do our chores. It was the only way I could even interest Melise in stepping outside. She held baby while I slipped shoes on her feet and hat on her head. I took Melise's hand and tugged her toward the door, but she wouldn't budge.

"What's wrong?" I asked Melise. She pouted, pointed toward the baby's bare feet and said, "Shoes." I hadn't anticipated that problem. Of course, Melise knows that we all have to wear shoes when we go out because it's part of our daily routine. I should have known that baby would need shoes, but I couldn't think of anything that would remotely resemble shoes for the doll. So I had to reason with a toddler.

Can you imagine explaining organic chemistry to a toddler? That's about how difficult it was to explain that the doll didn't need shoes. To everything I said, Melise demanded "Shoes!" Finally, I made the promise that we would hold baby so her feet would be safe. It seemed to make sense to Melise as she smiled and nodded. Then we walked out the door.

The Laughing Mom: humorous tales of motherhood

Written by Susan Pfaltzgraff

At first, Melise found it hard to do her normal exploring with a doll in her arms. Every time she dropped it, she would get upset, so eventually I carried the baby. I carried her while we fed the cats, played with kittens, checked the garden and collected eggs. But then came the moment I needed a free arm to wrangle Melise who kept wandering off the wrong direction.

I said to Melise, “You need to hold your baby while I hold you.” She seemed to accept this easily as she threw baby over her shoulder and I lifted her onto my hip. I started walking back to our house. I paused to peek through the window of the chicken house to check on a broody hen.

Almost as soon as my face was pressed up to the window, there was a baby doll’s head beside mine. I turned just enough to see Melise using both hands to reach the doll up to the window. To the doll she said, “See?”

How sweet, I thought!

As tedious as this obsession can be, I’m proud of my daughter for her new behaviors. It may be just a doll to us, but she’s showing that she cares about someone else and wants to look after their needs. It’s the beginning of empathy, one of the best emotional qualities anyone can possess—at least in my book!