

Grooming a Pill Popper

by Patrick Lacey

Three-year old Will has been exhibiting his quest for independence and this is helping a lot as it relates to the fact that he has to take a lot of drugs. He started asking to help 'push' the syringe on his meds and has progressed to the point where now I give him the syringe (today with 12.5ml of Zofran) and he sticks the syringe in his mouth and pushes in the plunger.

I'm sure there are plenty of parents out there who secretly push their kids to excel at some unusual task for their age for various reasons. Perhaps they are competing with their neighbors kids, or they want little Johnny to appear to be the smartest 2 year old on earth, or maybe they just love their kids and want to give them every opportunity to succeed. In any event I have been secretly working on a skill with Will and I'm very proud of his progress. The skill we have been working on?

The art of swallowing a pill.

While it's not exactly reading a book or conducting a stuffed animal orchestra it is important in our world.

Will has been taking countless medications for the past 3 years and all his medication has been oral liquid or via IV. While he currently does not have an issue with any of his current oral meds (most likely due to the fact that he probably has no taste buds) there are treatment options that are pill only. It has been my goal to get him to be an Olympic quality pill swallower so that his next treatment option will not be restricted to clinical trials that don't require pills.

To do this I have started by buying a bottle of Motrin Jr. pills that are fairly small. While on ABT he takes Tylenol in the morning and at night to prevent any neuropathy related pain. I decided to replace his liquid or meltaway Tylenol with two of these pills in the morning and two at night. The first time I gave him one he promptly began to chew the pill....not the most auspicious of beginnings.....however we kept at.

My first attempt was to engage the 'cannonball' approach to pill taking. I would have Will pop in a pill and then start shouting "Cannonball!" as Will would pick up his milk and begin chugging it to launch the pills into his belly like cannonball.

This was going pretty well.

Will then stepped it up to a whole new level one day by simply tossing a pill in his mouth and dry swallowing it. Perhaps he was growing tired of my cannonball antics.

My reaction was completely over the top...and bordered on insanity...I acted as completely shocked and astonished as if a UFO had landed in our backyard. I actually employed the "there is NO way you did that!!!" approach. I basically started calling him a liar and demanded to look under his tongue. I told him to stop using his fancy magic tricks and to give me the pill because there was NO way on God's green earth that any 3 year old in recorded human history could have possibly swallowed a pill.

Tell a 3 year old he can't do something, especially a determined one, and you simply know that it is

going to get done.

So this morning before his breakfast I brought out a paper plate with his Zofran syringe, multivitamin, and Motrin. He picked up the two Motrin off his plate popped them in his mouth and dry swallowed them both. I of course carried on, gave him a high five, and basically told him how amazed I was that he was doing things like a really big kid and at this rate he'd be driving a car pretty soon. He thought that was funny. Now I need to identify a bigger pill to start practicing on in the event one of these trials comes along with those giant horse pills that even us adults have a hard time gagging down. Perhaps I'll start a non-profit where we can have a Pediatric Cancer Olympics where the kids can compete in such events as pill swallowing, self injection, how to pause an infusion pump, who can flush their Broviac line the fastest, and projectile vomiting into a bucket.

These are all thing that, while not playing the piano, are skills and talents that are beyond these kids years and truly reflect just how normal our kids are even though they are forced to grow up in a very abnormal world. It's kind of hard to brag on your son at the playground about how incredible it is that your 2 year old wakes up at night and pukes into a bucket...there is no quantifying what an incredible thing that is... (So take THAT all of you preschool aged pilots, musicians, scientist, astronauts, and college grads.....Cancer kids kick your butt!)

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