

DAILY LIVING

The
Crumb
Factory
Blog

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A Date Night?
For Free?

Do you remember when it used to be fun to go out on a *motzai Shabbat*? Yeah, me neither.

But I'm trying to remember. The thing is, if we pay a babysitter, we can't afford to go anywhere further than the driveway. And unless someone has turned my backyard into a drive-in movie theater (which, by the way, sounds fabulous), sitting in the car is not really much of a date.

So what's a mommy with a bunch of kids and not a bunch of money to do?

You ready? Start a babysitting exchange.

Before you roll your eyes at this very (admittedly) hippie-dippie suggestion, just hear me out. I'm not asking you to move to a commune and, you know, commune with things. I'm asking you to take a half hour and have coffee with your three (local) best friends – because chances are good that they are in the same boat – and figure this out together. I'll help you.

The first step is to focus, which is very hard when you are having coffee with your close friends. Don't discuss anything else until you've figured out how you're each going to have two date nights with your respective spouses every month until *Shabbat* starts ending too late (read: any time after 8pm; don't be embarrassed if you can't leave your house after 7:45pm – it's not just you, we're all completely asleep in the rocking chair in the kids' room by then).

The second step is to explain to your friends how this works. It goes something like this: Each Saturday night will be a date night for two couples. Resist

the urge to just leave all the kids with the husbands and go out yourselves. We're here to look after our marriages; maybe one Sunday night a month can be girls' night out, but that's between you and your hubby and we're getting off topic here.

The couples rotate so that on any given Saturday night, two couples are out and the other two couples stay in with the kids in one family's house and babysit. The rules are pretty simple – the kids have to be fed dinner before they come and you need to come back on time to pick your kids up. Bonus points for families who all agree to bring their kids in pajamas.

The hosting families entertain the kids by playing board games, offering an art project, making popcorn and showing a movie that's geared for varied ages or by just hanging out with the big group of kids and playing charades. If there are babies involved who need to sleep in their own cribs so that they actually sleep, the best thing to do is host in that family's house, even if those homeowners are the lucky ones who are out that night.

It might sound slightly insane to have 10 or even 16 or 17 (or more) kids together in a house for the evening, but with four adults, the odds are in the grownups' favor. And if the ages are really varied, the kids can always be split up into bunks, with one adult acting as the counselor for each group of kids, offering different activities in different rooms.

Making a commitment like this can be hard. To be on the safe side, you might want to make a mommy-pact that you

will try this for four weeks and see how it goes. Then you either decide to tweak the idea or disband altogether. Or you might find that this is the absolute best idea you guys have had in a very long time and you're going to stick this out even though you may have to forfeit your date night once in a while if one of your children has a bad cold or if your *shul* dinner is on a Saturday night.

Once everyone is on board, it's time for you to come up with a few activities to roll with when it's your night to host the whole group of kids. You might want to consider not sharing this list with the rest of the parents in the group; that way your ideas stay your ideas and the kids don't get bored of them quickly.

A few ideas to keep under wraps might be:

Bingo night. The younger kids can play bingo – even if they need a little adult help. Bingo can go on for hours and a piece of chocolate makes a great prize at the end of each round.

Play Pictionary. We played this with our kids one time and I really cannot remember ever laughing so hard. They couldn't understand the rules and were terrible at it, but they loved that each team had a parent and they fell off the couch laughing when they had to look at our drawings and guess.

Paint things. Specifically, paint by number kits. Do you remember those? You can pick up a bunch of them at the

dollar store. My kids can sit for hours painting these canvases, the mess is self-contained because the brushes are tiny and the pots of paint are even tinier, and they're great when you need a quiet activity to help the kids wind down before their parents arrive to take them home.

Play a new game. Buy a new board game and only take it out when it's your turn to host. One that we love – and my kids love saying the game's name – is Farkle. Farkle. Say it again, you'll

laugh too. Or at least your husband will.

Farkle. It's a very smart dice game, it costs about \$6 in Target and you can play on teams, which is always helpful when the group consists of different aged kids. And it's slightly addictive. We play it without the kids all the time.

Let's be clear. Taking care of other people's kids is definitely

extra work. You need to be present – mentally and physically. You will need to put down your cell phone and most likely not answer your house phone, and you will need to interact and play with these kids for an extended amount of time. If you can psyche yourself up for it, this can be a lot of fun. But you do need to mentally prepare for it – and one way to do that is to envision what fun you will have when it's your turn for a night out. Channel your inner camp counselor and go for it.

Now, the only thing left to do is decide where you and your husband are going to go on your fun night out. And maybe what you're going to wear, but that's a whole other conversation.

