

My kids, my inspiration

Most of us dream of spending more time with our children. Two parents who've made families their business tell us how it's done...

photography by andree hages-watkins

'I GET TO WATCH MY KIDS AND MY BUSINESS GROW'

Annemarie Harmon, from Kent, is mum to Molly, 6, Harry, 5, and Joseph, 4, and runs AA Party Play

'If you'd told me 10 years ago that I'd now be running my own children's party entertainment business, I wouldn't have believed you. Working in recruitment, I left home at 7.30am and was rarely back by 7.30pm. I earned good money and spent it on holidays and lots of fab clothes.

'But after having three kids in quick succession, something had to give. Much as I loved work, my job wasn't one that could be done part time and there was no way I could juggle kids around those hours. But neither did I want to give up work altogether. I could see a day when I'd need to be occupied in school hours, so I had to find something new to do.

'As a mum, I started to realise that I was good at keeping kids entertained. Party games and dancing always kept my three happy, so my initial business idea was a party-games themed playgroup. It wasn't much of a money-spinner, but when mums started asking me to provide the entertainment for their kids' birthday parties, my idea for a children's party business was born.

'It's a dream job for me. I'm at home all week with my children while my husband, David, is at work, using the time they're



Annemarie's knack for keeping her children happy led to her own party business

'I realised that I was good at entertaining kids'

at school or nursery to plan my parties,

wrap pass-the-parcels and shop for goody bags. Then, when David is at home at weekends, the kids spend

quality time with him while I'm hosting and entertaining at my parties. I might be earning less, but I wouldn't swap spending time with my kids and seeing my business grow for anything.'

'MY SONS HELP ME WITH ALL MY BEST IDEAS'

Jonathan Gold, 39, from London, is dad to Max, 8, and Sam, 5, and the founder of Brother Max

'I had no experience of babies or baby products when my wife, Sharon, now 40, and I had Max. Although a designer by trade - I made cars and washing machines - feeding cups and bath toys were a whole new world to me.

'Yet so much of it seemed overly complicated or not built to last, that I was always moaning about the design quality. One day, after one gripe too many, my wife told me to design my own if I thought I could do better - so that's what I did!

'It was August 2005 and I gave myself six months to come up with six baby products that could form the basis of my own business. The obvious benefit of

a baby-inspired venture was that the two key areas of my life - work and my family - could become one. It's not until you have kids that you realise how much time your job takes up.

'Not only was the business a way round that for me - spending time with Max could legitimately be called "research" - but if I could create products to save

'My benchmark was, "if it's good enough for Max..."'

other parents time, it wasn't just my family who would benefit. 'As Max is autistic, lots of the things most parents only use for a few months need to last us a lot longer, as well as be super-easy to use. So quality and simplicity became my aims, with a benchmark of, "if it's good enough for Max..." As both my inspiration and driving force, naming the business after him seemed obvious.

'I asked the parents of the other children at Max's nursery to help in my research, by telling me what products

would make their lives easier. Once I was confident that I was onto something, I took the plunge and gave up my job.

'Fortunately, my wife had faith in me, but it wasn't easy. It involved a lot of late, sleepless nights, but somehow I made it work. I had to - I had a family to look after. Whenever possible, I worked from home: if anything needed testing, my kids were the guinea



Jonathan's sons, Sam and Max (left), inspired his baby products

pigs. But getting the work/life balance. 'Our break could have been produced they'd stock the products world. 'I love never myself for a day off to go to a school assembly and, recently, I saw Sam feeding himself breakfast for the first time from a Brother Max bowl. It felt incredible.

'I can't wait to see what else my boys inspire me to do as they grow and enter new phases of their lives. Becoming their dad has been the making of me.'

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Clever mum 'n' dad designs...

1 Brother Max Extra Hand Bath Sponge, £4.49/449 points. Designed to grip slippery babies more easily in the bath.



2 BabyBjörn Original Carrier, £55/5,500 points. The baby carrier brand is a family-owned company started in Sweden 49 years ago by dad Björn Jakobson.



3 Tots Bots FlexiTot Maxi Pack Size 1, £172/17,200 points. The brains behind these popular, reusable nappies is mum-and-dad team Fiona King and Magnus Smyth.



Don't miss Boots' new children's party range in store this month!

