

# I know where I'd put the toilet brush . . .

*There's smarties and Smarties in this housemum's world, writes Suzanne Leal.*

THE inspirational Fred Pawle ("Just what worn-out women need, a housedad who really performs", *Herald*, May 24) has provided those charged with the task of managing the house and looking after the children with a much appreciated precis of the demands of the job.

The first task of a such a carer is to "hang out in the playground". The question is, of course, which playground? Perhaps the open-plan, unsecured playground, backing onto the main street, towards which the three-year-old is running while carer attempts to disentangle one-year-old's legs which have somehow become twisted around the slippery dip ladder. Or the sculpted playland of Darling Harbour, where

open-plan, unsecured playground meets artificial lake, its dark and apparently deep water beguiling a paddling three-year-old while carer attempts to disentangle one-year-old's legs from the circular climbing bars.

Home to task No 2, a bit of housecleaning - "a doddle, given the dazzling array of cleaning products and aid available these days".

Like Pawle, the children are also impressed by the dazzling array. The one-year-old runs off with the toilet brush, which carer cannot later locate, while the three-year-old pours two litres of pine-fresh disinfectant down the toilet and into his potry.

The one-year-old, having been coaxed outside to enable carer to wash kitchen floor, has returned, via the side door, landing on his back on the wet floor and bumping his head on the side of a cupboard. The registrar thinks concussion unlikely.

Third task, a spot of supermarket shopping. After three aisles and the location of nine products (going from memory, the shopping list having been left on the kitchen bench ready to go in wallet but forgotten when argument erupts between one-year-old and three-year-old), all is well until three-year-old needs the toilet. Which is outside the supermarket, up the escalator and to the left. The trolley is left in aisle three as carer, three-year-old and one-year-old push past those queuing in checkout 11. Carer is stopped by security on the way to the escalator, "Excuse me, can I check your bag, please?" Somehow, a packet of Smarties has made it into carer's bag rather than the trolley. Three-year-old wets his pants while carer endeavours to explain first to the security officer, then to the checkout supervisor and finally to the store manager why she shouldn't be prosecuted for larceny.

"I'll give you the benefit of the doubt this time. But we'll be watching you very closely," says the manager, nose wrinkling at the stench of urine and perhaps something else from the one-year-old. Carer decides not to return to supermarket, abandoning the trolley in aisle three.

Home to task four "one of life's great pleasures" (Pawle, May 24) - preparing the family dinner. Spaghetti bolognese. From scratch, except for the tinned tomatoes. Three-year-old and one-year-old are encouraged to help. One-year-old takes a mouthful of raw mince and spits it on the floor. While carer cleans up, three-year-old pours juice for himself and his brother, part of which lands in the bowl of mince. Once the sauce is simmering on the one hotplate that still works, carer adds more than the usual amount of seasoning to disguise the faint taste of apple and blackcurrant.



The table is set and all is ready for an early and happy family dinner. Except that partner (and father of three-year-old and one-year-old) has missed the bus. Undeterred and determined to have a happy family dinner, carer and three-year-old and one-year-old dance to Fat Boy Slim ("But I want Wiggies") at first calmly and then, as

hunger and growing fatigue set in, with increased frenzy until the three-year-old trips over, scattering 136 pieces of neatly packed away duplo, bruising his left eye and turning to cry to his - just walked in the door - father.

Fettuccine having been one of the nine articles left in aisle three, the bolognese sauce is served with couscous, part of which the one-year-old throws on the floor and at his father. Three-year-old finds his sibling's actions hysterical, encouraging a duly performed repeat performance, which results in time out for the three-year-old and no dessert.

Bath. Bed. Enough time to perform task five on partner returning "nightly from the coalface in need of physical and emotional rejuvenation" (Pawle, May 24).

Things are progressing nicely when, to the surprise of returning partner, carer pulls from under the sheets a toilet brush.