Cloudmat

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Grow with you.
Focusing on sleep

Using play as opportunity to solve the problem

How might we put toddlers to rest?
Imagine going home to a toddler, so hyped up to tell her story from A to Z after you had a long day at work. She is jumping up and down, makes a huge stain on the wall, and refuses to calm down. It is past her bedtime.

She already had a long list of activities every single day as you have planned for her, which includes swimming lessons, Montessori, gymnastics, and yet she’s still wildly active and not wanting to rest? She looked at you in the eye, and said: “Why now?”

That baby girl was me.
Back in college, I worked as a gymnastics coach for toddlers in that very gym I attended when I was 2. At first I was doing it for extra cash, in fact, for extra gym classes so that I can exercise next door.

Little did I know, this journey has taken me a lot further.

As I happily stretched and jumped around with the kids, I realised two very important things: Parents are tired and so are the children! This makes a reinforcing toxic loop. Baby is tired the next day because the parents couldn’t put them to rest, and the parents are tired because they both can’t sleep right on time.
Sleep is a salient feature of health and wellbeing that impacts multiple aspects of early childhood development. Early childhood sleep problems are associated with a number of poor developmental outcomes across neurocognitive, social–emotional, physical health, and often mess up with family functions.

Sleep plays a crucial role in the development of young minds and in addition to that, sleep has a direct effect on happiness. Research shows that sleep very much impacts alertness and attention, cognitive performance, mood, resiliency, vocabulary acquisition, and learning and memory. In toddlers, napping appears to be necessary for memory consolidation, executive attention, and motor skill development.
It is advised to maintain a daily sleep schedule and consistent bedtime routine, as well as making the bedroom environment the same every night and throughout the night. The concept of a bedtime routine is a key factor in the promotion of not only healthy sleep, but also of broad development and wellbeing in early childhood.

A bedtime routine, in and of itself, embodies the characteristics of nurturing care and early child stimulation. For a toddler, the routine might be 5–30 minutes long and include calming activities such as reading a story, bathing, and listening to soft music. Security items such as a blanket or stuffed animal are often important at this age.
When I was nine years old, I went overseas for the first time. I was as excited as I can be, carrying my own bag and luggage. I was daydreaming about how fun it is to fly. Now as I grow up, I have the opportunity to travel through the airport on a regular basis so much that I think I have somehow done it autonomously, without even thinking about it. It all begins as soon as I arrive at the terminal, which in my case is usually three hours before departure.

From a terminal’s colours to the security queue, airports are designed to keep travelers calm and comfortable. Reassuring passengers about this subconscious fear, not to mention about the stress caused by delayed flights, lost luggage or even the mere idea of airplane travel, is important.
The goal of airport designers is to encourage people to follow the rules and heed authority. To accomplish both of these tasks, airport designers around the world use subtle and not so subtle cues. The colours and shapes of signs often differ from terminal to terminal, the carpeting patterns change, and large art pieces serve as distinctive place markers for orientation. If ever you’re walking through an airport and suddenly sense that you are going the wrong way, you’re probably responding to subconscious wayfinding cues.

Another thing that matters is airport ambience that calms us down before we really fly. Those low-key boarding announcements and music set to a soundtrack of footsteps, crowd voices, keyboard-tapping fingers, rolling suitcases, planes taking off and landing, and some background music to accompany your wait.
Now looking at the problem I brought up in the beginning about how important it is for toddler’s to have enough sleep and connecting it with how airports overcome their strict security problems, I figure that both systems have the same goal. They are trying to make people do things they have to do even if they don’t want to. The goal is to make the experience as comfortable as possible, and make people not feel too forced to do so. People might be a little bit tense when they are going to fly, but there is some excitement to window-shop some souvenirs, or even listen to some music.
The feelings that airport designers want to combat is fear, and the feelings they want to build is comfort. As they put more and more forms of entertainment inside airports as an addition of the routine, passengers are becoming more happy and relaxed upon flight. It works the same as putting toddlers to rest.

Making toddlers choose their own book to read and tucking them inside a fluffy blanket that produces soothing music will actually make them feel safer and more ready to sleep. Instead of forcing toddlers to go to bed right away, take an extra 5-30 minutes to spend time with them before bed.
I always wanted to make products for kids.

I found the blanket incubator idea when a Professor in GW told me about Little Lotus, where they sell baby swaddles for babies who need incubators in remote areas. I feel like it’s very age specific, used not more than 1 year, and there’s only a little room to develop.

The Singing Car-seat was another idea inspired by my oh-so-comfy grandpa massage chair, improved with some built-in speaker for utmost comfort. I didn’t go with this idea mainly because the child will grow out of it so soon.

Then I had an Aha moment and decided to go on with the last idea of a bubble blanket.
As I went through the prototyping stage, I came across this idea about bubble quilts; something so dear to my heart because my grandma kept on making them since I was little. It was a quilted blanket that I used as a surface to lay down on and or as a blanket when I nap or go to bed. As I worked on this project from GW, I called her to ask about how to use the sewing machine, not to mention getting a long lecture of how a 22-year-old girl should have been able to sew.

From threading to finally making my first very own prototype, I didn’t stop iterating and ask people around to give me feedback. I sent videos and pitched my product to anyone I know that has toddlers around in the house.
The very first prototype was made out of used cotton sheets that I recycled from my dorm mate who moved out a few months earlier than me. Due to the safety and cleanliness issue, all bedsheets or any fabric that is used in the dorm whether it was a short or long stay, should be thrown away. I had a mixed feeling about it, but then I thought of it as an opportunity to recycle. First, cotton bedsheets are the perfect material to start with to make a blanket. Second, is that it was an effort to reduce waste in general, but also to prevent me from spending too much time in my thoughts if I fail. I wanted to focus on the functionality and testing of the product before really beautifying the overall look of it.

I remember dismantling some buttons and speaker modules from the back of a singing Christmas card that was on sale, then stitching it onto a used blanket that I tucked inside the quilted cover. I submitted it for one of my classes during my time here doing my MA, and afterwards determined to improve it if I have more time.
When there comes a time when I would have my own child and if he or she will start nagging when they are supposed to be sleeping, makes an unapologetically huge stain on the wall, refusing to go rest; take a deep breath, and instead of going on a full-blown lecture about the importance of sleep which will definitely become a waste of time since they are not capable to comprehend almost 80% of what you're talking about, take time to be present for them. Listen to their stories while discreetly tucking them inside and play the soothing lullaby.

Then you can properly take your well-needed rest, too.