

extra fingers

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Just lease a horse

AMELIE, just after she'd returned home from a double sleepover, where, amongst a whole raft of adventurous things she did with her friend Olivia, she got a chance to pat a horse: "I want to go horse-riding again, Dad. Every week."

DAD, prevaricating: "Well—"

AMELIE, reading the delay in the response perfectly: "Why does it always have to be about the cost? (*Referring to her friend,*

Olivia) She gets to go horse-riding every single weekend. Just lease a horse, Dad. That's what they do."

DAD: "Now listen here. You get cello lessons, you went to London this year; goodness me, when I was your age I hadn't done anything like that. I didn't even go overseas until I was fourteen."

ISABELLA, derisively and in an energy-sapped voice: "Olden days."

Charades

AMELIE, making the shape of a fin above her head and bobbing her head up and down during a game of charades: "Mum, what am I?"

KARIN: "Oh, that's easy. You're a shark."

AMELIE: "Nope. A pyramid floating on water."

How people should divide things after a breakup

AMELIE: "I want to talk about police officers."

DAD: "Okay. What do you want to say about them?"

AMELIE: "Well . . . their job is to get people under arrest. And . . . to help people to find places if they are lost and they don't know the country."

DAD: "Right. Yep."

AMELIE: "Or they can help people to investigate. Or they can help if, say, someone wanted to break up."

DAD: "A break up. What do you mean a 'break up'?"

AMELIE: "Like who has what."

DAD: "Who has what? What are you talking about? I don't understand."

AMELIE, frustrated: "Fine. I won't say it. So, anyway, that's what they do."

DAD: "Well, no, I think I do know what you mean by a break up. Do you think the police help people who no longer want to be married anymore?"

AMELIE: "Yeah."

DAD: "Right. And what do you think they help them with?"

AMELIE: "Like, um, doing the half and half."

DAD: "Oh, okay. Well, that should be pretty easy then. To just divide things up into halves, don't you think?"

AMELIE: "And a law does that as well."

DAD: "Oh, okay. As well."

AMELIE: "I'm not sure about the policeman but I'm sure about the law."

DAD: "Hmm."

AMELIE: "It's quite a hard job."

DAD: "Is it? Why's it hard?"

AMELIE: "Because some people can disagree and some people can go 'yeah, yeah' but the other person goes, 'No!'"

DAD: "Right."

AMELIE: "'I want this and you can have that. And I don't want this.'"

DAD: "Well, how would you divide things up? Let's say you were in charge of that and you had two people come in."

AMELIE: "Well, okay, if somebody had bought the house . . ."

DAD: "Yep."

AMELIE: "Say someone bought the house but their husband didn't."

DAD: "Yes."

AMELIE: "Then I would say [to the woman] you can keep that house. You can have it. You bought the whole house and the whole garden and stuff so you can keep that, but, um, [to the husband presumably] you can go and find your own place if you want to break up."

DAD: "Just one more time explain that. Because it's quite a difficult one. Now you're saying, if a woman has bought a house . . ."

AMELIE: "Yeah."

DAD: "She's married to a man, right?"

AMELIE: "Yeah."

DAD: "But they're breaking up and she bought the whole house?"

AMELIE: "Yep."

DAD: "Okay. What should happen to the house again?"

AMELIE: "She should keep the house."

DAD: "Right. So where does the man live?"

AMELIE: "He has to go and find his own house."

DAD: "Right. But what with?"

AMELIE: "Money."

DAD: "But where will the money come from?"

AMELIE: "Well, the law will give him money."

DAD: "Where from? Where does the law get its money from?"

AMELIE: "I don't know."

DAD: "Okay."

AMELIE: "Dad, I don't have to know everything!"

Feelings made easy

DAD: "How can we make the feeling of being happy just stay all the time? Because it's hard, isn't it, to get it to stay."

AMELIE: "What's that?"

DAD: "The feeling of being happy. You know when you feel happy? Say you're opening presents for your birthday or Christmas – you know how happy you feel then?"

AMELIE: "Yeah."

DAD: "Well how do you get that feeling to stay with you all the time? What should we do?"

AMELIE: "I don't know. I don't really get what you're trying to say to me."

DAD: "Well, you know what it feels like to feel really happy, right? Or even just happy."

AMELIE: "Yeah."

DAD: "You know that feeling? Alright? But you can't feel that all the time, can you? Or, do you feel that all the time?"

AMELIE: "Ah, not all the time."

DAD: "Yeah. What—"

AMELIE: "You don't."

DAD: "What are the other feelings you feel?"

AMELIE: "Sad."

DAD: "Yeah."

AMELIE: "Angry."

DAD: "Yes. I saw that plenty of times today."

AMELIE: "Shhh! Bored."

DAD: "Yeah."

AMELIE: "Um . . . yeah."

DAD: “Okay. Do you like feeling bored, sad and angry?”

AMELIE: “No. I want to feel happy.”

DAD: “Right. So how can you get to be happy all the time?”

AMELIE: “I don’t know.”

DAD: “Hmm. Is it the most important thing to try and be happy?”

AMELIE: “Yes.”

DAD: “Hmm. *(After a long pause)* What if you only felt happy though? Would you be happy if you just felt happy?”

AMELIE: “Well, sometimes you need the angry thoughts. Sometimes you need bored thoughts and sad thoughts.”

DAD: “Really?”

AMELIE: “Because you can’t be happy at someone’s funeral.”

DAD: “True.”

AMELIE, adopting a joyful demeanour: “You can’t be, like, ‘oh yay, yay, yay, yay!’ I mean, it’s not really a happy time.”

DAD: “No, that’s right.”

AMELIE: “And, say, pretend someone took all of your toys away and they threw them in the bin. You wouldn’t be, like, *(adopts a joyful demeanour again)* ‘oh yay, I’m really happy!’ You have to be angry at them. And you have to be angry at other times too. If you disagree with somebody, you say, ‘I don’t agree with this!’ You can’t say, *(jubilantly)* ‘I don’t agree with this!’ and really be happy.”

DAD: “Sure. So, the whole idea of being happy all the time doesn’t work, does it?”

AMELIE: “Well, Dad, we can just have the feeling we need when we need to have that feeling.”

Your silly little dictionary’s gotten you in trouble this time

ISABELLA, after a day out bike-riding: “Dad, what does ‘clenched your hunger’ mean?”

DAD: “Well, I think you’ll find it’s not ‘clench your hunger’. I think you’re meaning ‘quench’, aren’t you?”

ISABELLA: “Maybe.”

DAD: “Right. But it isn’t even that. It’s not even ‘quench your hunger’. It should be ‘quench your thirst’. Because it’s to do with drinking. You know, satisfying thirst.”

ISABELLA: “But why can’t it be ‘quench your hunger’? What’s wrong with saying that?”

DAD: “Well, let’s look it up.”

ISABELLA, rolling her eyes: “Oh no!”

DAD, dictionary in hand: “Here, under ‘quench’. Under ‘quench’ it says, well the first definition of that word says, ‘satisfy thirst by drinking’ and the word ‘thirst’ is in brackets. Although, the second definition of the word says, ‘satisfy a desire’.”

ISABELLA: “Alright then. It’s a desire. Happy now? So, ‘quenching your hunger’ was right all along, wasn’t it? Your silly little dictionary’s gotten you in trouble this time, Dad. At last!”

I don’t know what Jews are

AMELIE, during a snuggle-cuddle chat where the subject of Hitler and Jewish people came up: “I don’t know what Jews are.”

DAD: “Oh, they’re just people Hitler didn’t like. They’re a little bit like how you’ve got people with different coloured skins and how they’re different. Well, sometimes people have different ideas, or they’re born into different groups of people . . .”

AMELIE: “Do Jews have different types of skin?”

DAD: “The Jews don’t, no.”

AMELIE: “Well, what was wrong with them that Hitler didn’t like?”

DAD: “Well, he thought that they were the reason why his country wasn’t doing well at all. He thought they were trying to bring Germany down.”

AMELIE: “But how did he know? He needs to know first.”

DAD: “Well he didn’t know at first. He just—”

AMELIE: “He can’t go and kill them and don’t know. He has to find it out.”

DAD: “Well he didn’t really go and find it out. He just—”

AMELIE: “That was stupid.”

What if they started punching you?

ISABELLA: “Dad, how do you meet housemates? Where do you get them from?”

DAD: “Well, sometimes they are just people who you were friends with. You just decided you wanted to live with them. That can happen.”

ISABELLA: “But, what if you don’t get on? Have you ever had any mean housemates?”

DAD: “Well, I’ve had difficult ones.”

ISABELLA: “What does difficult mean?”

DAD: “Oh, well, it can just mean something quite simple-sounding like the way a person or people want things done in a bathroom or how they want a kitchen organised. It can be as simple as that sometimes. People can get very strict about things being done in a very particular way. There are all kinds of ways

people want to live, and it can be very difficult sometimes getting people that you are able to get along with who’ll allow you to feel and be who you want to be.”

ISABELLA: “Oh.”

DAD: “This is the best way I can describe it to you. Say you are sharing a house with three people and two people want something done a particular way and you don’t want it done that way. What do you think happens when that occurs?”

ISABELLA: “The two people will get their way.”

DAD: “Yes, that’s right. If you’re the odd one out you have to conform.”

ISABELLA: “What if you want to get rid of someone? Kick someone out. Would you go to the police?”

DAD: “No, not the police. You just get rid of them without involving the police. If they’re in the minority then they have to go. That’s how shared households have to operate I’m afraid.”

ISABELLA: “Oh. What if they started punching you? Really hard in the head. Punch, punch, punch!”

DAD: “Well, that’s assault.”

ISABELLA: “Yeah, so?”

DAD: “Well then you have to get the police. You don’t have a choice then.”

ISABELLA: “Good. Finally. I knew I could get you to go to the police. I always try and get it to be the baddest situation I can. I love it when I can do that. It’s really fun. Because then I know the sirens will be on.”