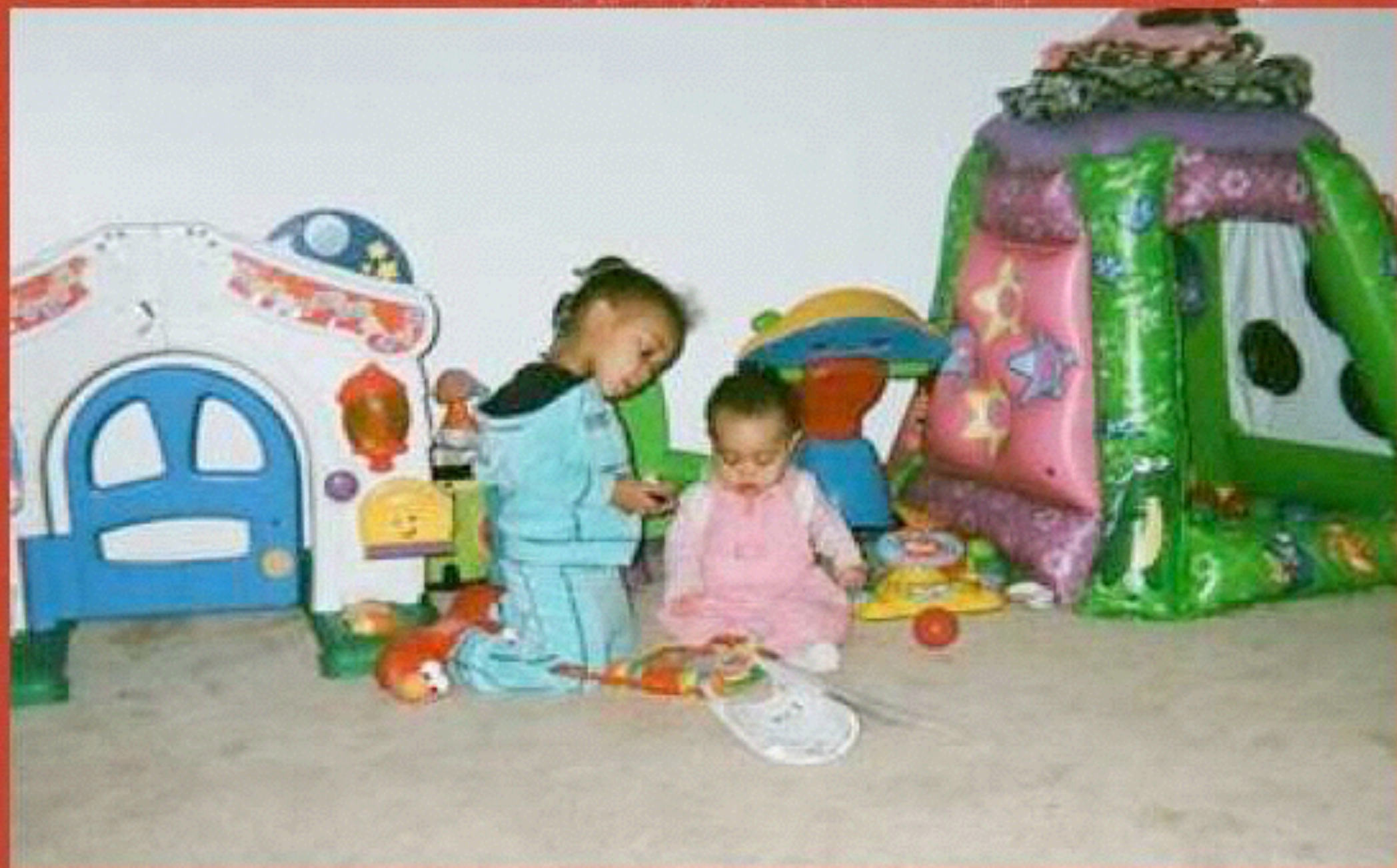


Playing Responsively
with
Children

Illustrated and Produced by:

YOLANDA JACKSON



I love playing with my children, which is why I designated an entire room in my house for the freedom of their play.

Their playroom has one rule, and one rule only, which is that the playroom closes at 7:30pm. By closed I mean that the toys are organized and put away, the floor is vacuumed, and the room uninhabited by precious little children!

However, when Daddy is in charge this isn't always enforced.

One night after class I came strolling up to the front door of my home, only to see a shinning light in a room that is supposed to be unoccupied. I opened the door to find children laughing and playing...**IN THE PLAYROOM!** What was going on?

What was going on? My watch showed 7:40pm! Toys were thrown all over, there was marker on the wall, and the children were wide awake and giddy. Normally this would be very frustrating for me, but that night I decided to try something new.

I wanted my children out of the room.

I wanted it cleaned up.

I didn't want to do the work.

I bellowed "ALRIGHT GIRLS...IT'S CLE-E-E-E-
EAN UP TI-I-IME!" My kids began picking up
toys and randomly tossing them all over the
place in protest to my demands.

The next time Alani threw one of her smaller stuffed animals, I grabbed the art bin and caught it in mid air.

She gasped and said "Mom...what are you doing, that's not where it goes!" She grabbed it out of the bin, and placed it with her other stuffed animals.

We spent about 10 minutes tossing objects to each other. I would get the bins, while they searched endlessly to find all of the objects that went in it! We pretended to do a ring toss. I had them stand back and toss the toys until all were put away in their proper bin.

Last but not least was their matchbox cars. These are the only toy in the house that doesn't have a real box, so I always store them in the trunk of my children's Winnie the Pooh push train.

I grabbed the train and said "OK, girls. Moving target. I wonder if the cars can find a way in before the train stops." My children chased me trying to get the cars in before I pulled it into its rest station.

They were laughing and grabbing my legs, trying to get me to slow down so that they could sneak the cars into the caboose!

Finally...we had done it. We managed to get the room clean, with no fussing, while enjoying our last few minutes before bedtime! This has become a fun ritual for my children, on the nights that they are still awake when I return from night school.



To me, playing responsively with children isn't about making them change by forcing our own opinions onto them, but showing them an option that they can choose for themselves.

I enjoyed this project because it kept me focused on the objective of not "leading" the activities of the children, but to step in, playfully follow their idea at first, and together we can find fun ways that work. It not only teaches children how to problem solve, but how to self-regulate, and take responsibility for their actions, feelings, and the way that they interact with others. To me that is a powerful switch into positive communication.