

Being the BABYSITTER

SALMA MOHAMMAD ALI

A few years ago I found the idea of babysitting fascinating and used to wish that it was a common part-time job here, like it is in the West. But I ate my words when I was one day asked to keep an eye on my three-year-old cousin. Also, I didn't get paid for it. In case you're ever asked to watch a younger sibling/cousin for a while and since I have more of those little cousins than I can count, I shall give you some tips.

First things first: be prepared for emergencies. Make sure you have contact numbers of the parents. If something goes wrong, don't panic, call them and act accordingly. In case of a fire, call the fire brigade immediately, the emergency hotline for our fire service is 199. Ask about the child's allergies beforehand and remember don't give them any medicine unless the parents have instructed you to do so.

Children need to be fed. If you're lucky there will be food already prepared. But if not – don't try to cook something if you can't cook or if it means you're leaving the child unattended. Look for snacks such as cookies, chips or just make a sandwich. If your cooking skills are like mine (can cook stuff if they come in frozen packets) then fry up some chicken nuggets but make sure the kid doesn't go near the stove! Also don't let the kid use forks, because sharp objects.

Settle down for a movie that the child will enjoy – Toy Story, Finding Nemo,

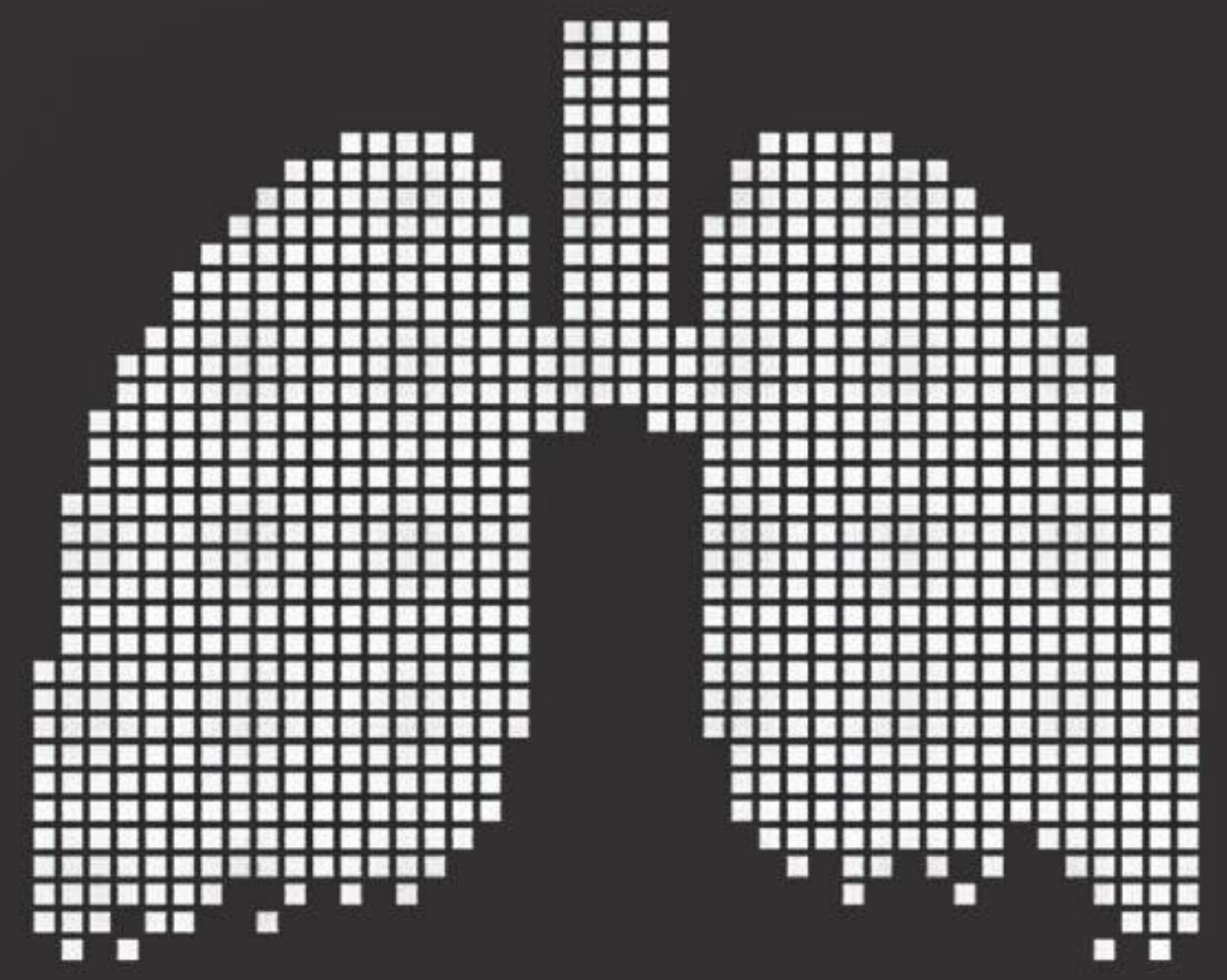
E.T., Cars, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory are most suitable for children aged 3- 7; if the child is a bit older – Frozen, Despicable Me or How to Train your Dragon are better choices. If the movies aren't available you can always opt for a few Dora or Spongebob episodes (thank God for YouTube) but please no Doraemon.

Never Doraemon.

Children get bored easily so they're likely to look up at you in the middle of a movie with a demanding look that says "I'm bored/This sucks." This is where you switch to games. Tic-tac-toe or thumb war will keep them occupied for a short time. Most kids love colouring stuff (sometimes freshly painted walls). Give them a pack of colours and a colouring book; if you don't have those, resort to technology – 'Kids Colouring Fun', an app on the Android Play Store, is a good replacement if the child is old enough to use the family tab. It offers dozens of images that you colour by just touching the screen. It doesn't take long to download either and of course no mess is created.

Try not to swear in the presence of the child. And just so you're prepared, kids often spit at you without warning or reason... or maybe that just happens with me.

Pro-tip: make sure you have candy (edible ones). Kid is biting into your arm and refuses to let go? Calmly tell them they'll get M&M's if they stop. Works like a charm.



So, Smoking Makes You Cool?



KIDWA ARIF

Reasons behind smoking aren't exactly diverse. Occasionally, it is curiosity. But curiosity usually doesn't lead to addiction because the first try is usually horrid. Some start smoking after seeing a role model – father, older brother etc. – do it for years, and then decide to follow their footsteps. My own father has two master's degrees and still thinks smoking can't hurt you if you have an otherwise healthy lifestyle. Right.

The most common reason, however, is the influence of peers. Most people start smoking in their teens. And people, especially teenagers, like to be "cool". They don't want to be the "goody two shoes". Raisa Islam, 17, says, "When we had barbeque parties on our rooftops, all my cousins would smoke together. When I asked, they gladly handed me cigarettes too. I smoke at least once every day now."

Many start smoking to fit in. When someone moves to a new locality or shifts to a new school, they find themselves friendless. It's very difficult for a teenager to fit in a new environment because young adults tend to stay within their own group. New people are not usually welcomed. So, if *cha-biri* at the *tong er dokan* makes a guy feel like he belongs, he gives in. Sreejoy Halder, 18, says, "When I visited my village home, all my friends there would tease me by calling me a snob, 'the guy from Dhaka', and some unprintable stuff. But when I joined in their little 'smoking club', I fit in easily. Now I have occasionally started smoking when I'm home as well."

Sometimes, they tend to force you. Some smokers consider making someone else join them an achievement. Saadman Ahmed, 19, says, "It was definitely bad company. Terrible cousins. They started smoking in a circle around me until I gave it a try." And he's right. Your parents, as annoying as you might find it, actually have a point when they fuss over who you're hanging out with or who your friend circle consists of.

But in some cases, you can't choose who your company is going to be. Raisa or Saadman can't get rid of their cousins even if they wanted to. They're family. The only thing Sreejoy could've done to avoid the situation was to not have friends at all. So in their cases, getting rid of the bad company wasn't an option.

In these cases, you have no choice other than being strong mentally. Learn to say 'no'. Anything that wastes your money and health all at once is not cool. Also, it makes your breath stink.

Smoking is an addiction. Most smokers I know have managed to convince themselves that it is a harmless habit like drinking tea or chewing *paan* but it isn't. Smoking harms the environment and the people around you as well and you have no right to do that. Smoking kills 1 in 5 in the US every year; no similar survey has been conducted in Bangladesh, but we can say for sure it isn't any better.

Don't be that one guy.

*Names have been changed to ensure privacy.