



CREATING AN AWESOMENESS FORM* FOR YOUR CHILD

**or whatever you'd like to call it*

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WHAT IS AN AWESOMENESS FORM?

The Awesomeness Form is an evolving document that celebrates your child as they develop in their own way and timeframe. It is a measuring stick that is actually useful and meaningful, because it is measuring your child against themselves.

It empowers a parent, the child, and your family and friends to keep celebrating the changes and growth of your child who the traditional and 'normal' milestone charts just do not apply to or work for. It helps to identify the strengths and areas of ability in your child, so that more growth can be made in these areas. It helps to create meaning, a sense of identity, purpose and joy.

HOW THE AWESOMENESS FORM CAME TO BE

At one point I was asked to fill out a Needs Assessment Form by some of Evie's specialists. The purpose of this document is to gauge the level of support a family requires for their child.

At the time - being exhausted from the weight of trauma I was carrying from the uncertainty of Evie's condition, and the overwhelming medical context surrounding us - this form broke me. I couldn't tick a single answer to the questions they were asking about our child.

I had the feeling that the people reading this form would think from the answers I gave that Evie was a child who couldn't do anything, that she had no value, and that she was costing the system a lot of money. While this might mean we would get medical or even financial support from somewhere, this was not the most important thing to me.

I really wanted the people at the other end of the form to see what made Evie unique - to know about Evie's abilities, character and personality - the things I loved about her, the things I loved doing with her, and the things she loved doing.

I wanted to be asked about the things she could do. I had become so exhausted by all the "could nots", "won't evers", and "can't dos", and how that was always the first thing people asked about or saw when they met Evie.

I was so proud of Evie and all the things she could do, because in answering my own questions about Evie, I could see how far she had come and how she was growing, all in her own unique way and time frame. This form left me with such a sense of hopelessness. So, I decided to make up my own form - the Awesomeness Form - to go alongside the official one, but with better questions.

Creating an Awesomeness Form is an antidote to the despair, grief and frustration many parents face, when filling out Needs Assessment Forms (or similar documents) that are used to measure a child against 'normal'.

Sometimes, the measuring sticks we are forced to use for our children are just not applicable.

This form that I created for Evie was a measuring stick that made sense. I was measuring her against herself, and it informed everyone so much about her growth and progress. We celebrated her changes and milestones when we could see that she had made one that was meaningful to her in her own context.

WHAT SHOULD I INCLUDE IN AN AWESOMENESS FORM?

Anything you like!!! Basically, it is a list of questions you can already answer YES to! It doesn't matter how random or small you think it is, anything that your child can do, anything they like or dislike, anything they play with or interact with, any person they love to be around, any character strength you have identified, any sound they make, any form of communication they have - it all bears including. ANYTHING and EVERYTHING about your child can go on here. Everytime your child does something new- add it to the form! Let it be an evolving document, and make it your own.

HOW DO I MAKE ONE?

Our suggestion is to watch the video, look at some examples, get a feel for the vibe, then think deeply into your child. Use this resource to help you unpack the various things about your child that you can celebrate. We may not have covered everything here too, and you will know the most about your child. So if we have left anything out that you think would be beneficial for other parents making these forms, please let us know! Then just think of a question about your child, that you can already answer YES to! Imagine your question with a tick box beside it that you get to physically tick! Then unpack it a bit to flesh it out if you want to. Add photos if you want to!

Check out our example on the next page for some ideas.

It is simply not possible to make an Awesomeness Form wrong. You will not be marked, judged or measured against with this form. This is a celebration!

CAN I MAKE THEM FOR MY 'TYPICAL' CHILD/CHILDREN TOO?

Yes! Make them for all your children. So many kids, even typical children, struggle with all sorts of things, especially at school. Maybe they are having a hard time with maths, or in social settings, or maybe they don't feel confident at sport, or maybe they are being teased about something. An Awesomeness Form can help boost their self-esteem and worth and can help give them more of an idea of their own unique strengths, value and abilities.

Sharing your child's Awesomeness Form with the people in your child's life helps them to come alongside you and support you in your journey in a way that is meaningful to you and your child.

WHY IS SHARING THIS WITH FAMILY, FRIENDS, HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS IMPORTANT?

Sharing your child's Awesomeness Form with the people in your child's life allows them to see the kind of language, attitude and values you have as a parent and family. It helps them to come alongside you and support you in your journey in a way that is meaningful to you and your child. It encourages and enhances the spirit of celebration and ability. Everyone has an opportunity to get on the same page and help you to support your child in the way that you enjoy and that is most helpful to you and your child.

IDEAS FOR AREAS YOU COULD FOCUS ON IN YOUR AWESOMENESS FORM

SOUNDS

- What sounds does your child make? It can be any little sound. Loud, energetic, soft, squeaky, twinkly, gruff...
- What do these sounds mean to you?
- What do you enjoy about them?
- What do they tell you?
- Do they communicate joy? Pain? Hunger? Contentment? Frustration?
- Do you understand what your child wants by the sounds they make?

Example Question:

- “Can your child [express whatever form of communication you’ve noticed] when you [do the thing that elicits that form of communication]?”

ENJOYMENT

- Can you make your child laugh? Giggle? Smile? Interact?
- What makes your child laugh, giggle, smile?
- How does your child let you know they enjoy doing something?
- What is something your child does regularly that they enjoy? For example, are there any habits or routines around everyday things like sleeping, bathtime, naptime, story time or cuddle time that they light up about?
- When do you know your child is happy? For example, what time of day? Around what kinds of people? In a particular position, or in some form of movement?

Example Question:

- “Does your child laugh when objects fall near her face?” YES! Evie loves when we drop cushions or toys beside her and laughs when we move or tip the couch. She loves surprise loud noises.
- “Does your child let you know they are happy by _____?”

BODY AND MOVEMENT

- What physical features do you enjoy most about your child?
- How does your child move their toes, feet, legs?
- How does your child move their fingers, hands, arms?
- How does your child move around?

Example Question:

- “Can your child play with your hair, face and earrings?” YES! Evie will reach out to touch my face, and pull my hair or earrings- she pulls very gently
- “Can your child hold her legs and nearly her toes?” YES! Evie plays with her knees when she is contented and can almost reach her toes.

Does your child play possum and pretend to be asleep when he doesn't like a therapist or doctor?
YES!

Does your child belt out Frozen songs while being considered non-verbal by most? YES!

SOME EXAMPLES FROM OTHER PARENTS' AWESOMENESS FORMS

Does your child laugh when their brother gets in trouble? YES!

Does your child's whole body smile when the cat walks by close enough to touch?
YES!

Does your child light up the room and brighten everyone's day when she smiles?
Absolutely!

Does everyone fall in love with your child when they meet her?
Without a doubt!

CHARACTER AND PERSONALITY

- What characteristics are you seeing in your child? Determination? Stubbornness? Bravery? Curiosity? Empathy? Joy? Perseverance? Kindness? Tenacity? Inquisitiveness? Creativity? Cheekiness?

Example Question:

- “Does your child exhibit bravery, stubbornness and determination?” YES! my child teaches me _____

INTERESTS AND HOBBIES

OBJECTS:

- What stuff does your child enjoy? Like a toy, an object, an element (sand, water, light, playdough), a texture, a tactile thing (fabric, clothing, fur, spikes).
- How do they interact with it? Hitting, stroking, flapping, rolling, etc.

INTERESTS:

- Does your child have any interests? Like pelicans, colossal squid, crafting, water, Lego, planes etc.

ACTIVITIES:

- What does your child enjoy doing? Alone, with you, or with others?

Example Question:

- “Can your child play sleeping tiger, and other great games?” YES! Evie loves games and interacts by laughing, kicking, flapping and moving close to us.

FOOD AND DRINK

- What foods, drinks or flavours does your child enjoy?
- How do they interact with/respond to their medical equipment around food/drink/pills?

YOU AND YOUR CHILD

- Is there anything that you do with your child that only you do?
- Do you and your child have a secret language?



EXAMPLE AWESOMENESS FORM

EVIE'S AWESOMENESS

Can your child play sleeping tiger and other great games?

- ☑ **YES!** Evie loves games and interacts by laughing, kicking, flapping and moving close to us.

Does your child laugh when objects fall near her face?

- ☑ **YES!** Evie loves when we drop cushions or soft toys beside her. She laughs when we move or tip the couch and enjoys loud noises.

Can your child play for over 30 minutes in an Excer-saucer?

- ☑ **YES!** Evie loves being in her saucer and plays with the objects really well.

Can your child play with your hair, face and earrings?

- ☑ **YES!** Evie will reach out to touch my face, and pull my hair or earrings. She pulls very gently.

Can your child hold her legs and nearly her toes?

- ☑ **YES!** Evie plays with her knees when she is contented and can almost reach her toes

Can your child hold a spoon and feed herself yoghurt?

- ☑ **YES!** Evie can feed herself half a teaspoon at a time when she is in the right mood, and she can feed herself from her bottle.

Can your child roll competently?

- ☑ **YES!** Evie is a pro roller! She even commando rolls in stealth mode for extra sneakiness. She will roll to get places really quickly.

Can your child do assisted pull-ups, holding her head up?

- ☑ **YES!** Evie does this very well, using her dad to help her. Her record is thirteen in a row!



RACHEL CALLANDER IS AN AWARD-WINNING SPEAKER, TRAINER, AUTHOR AND PHOTOGRAPHER.

Together with Nathan Maddigan (photographer, author, designer, trainer), Rachel delivers unique training experiences that are honest, illuminating and compelling.

She draws from a range of perspectives, that include:

1. Her motherhood to her late daughter Evie, and the years of experience as a parent in the health system.
2. Her perspective as an artist, applying right-brained emotional strength to a conversation often filled with left-brained statistics and facts.
3. The Thought Leadership Business School, where she learned to assimilate ideas and values into actionable strategies.
4. Stories gathered from hundreds of hours of interviews with families of children with rare conditions across Australia and New Zealand.
5. Relationships with health professionals and industry leaders internationally.