

DAILY DAD

Every Dad Needs a Little Help

**20 THINGS
GREAT DADS
DO EVERY DAY**

Do you know *that* dad? The one who just seems to get everything right in the fatherhood department? Have you ever met one of those dads? Run into him at a ballpark or a dance recital or a birthday party? If you had, you'd remember, because if they are nothing else they are memorable.

Great dads come in all varieties: biological dads, stepdads, adoptive dads, foster dads or any man who steps in as a father figure to a child. It's such an important role to play that the good ones have an effect far beyond just their own child's life. Maybe you were lucky enough to have this kind of person as a role model for the kind of father you want to be. Maybe you weren't so lucky, and instead you used your experience to inform the approach *you* take with your own children, by doing some version of the opposite of what you experienced or by correcting what you know now to be wrong or not ideal. Whatever the case, you aspire to be a *great* dad. Because, as Theodore Roosevelt said:

"There are many kinds of success in life worth having. It is exceedingly interesting and attractive to be a successful businessman, or railway man, or farmer, or a successful lawyer or doctor; or a writer, or a President, or a ranchman, or the colonel of a fighting regiment, or to kill grizzly bears and lions. But for unflagging interest and enjoyment, a household of children, if things go reasonably well, certainly makes all other forms of success and achievement lose their importance by comparison."

Just as there are many roads to Mecca, there are countless paths to being a good parents. And while parenting trends come and go, it does seem that raising kids well tends to draw from a certain set of timeless behaviors and unique traits that all great parents have in common.

They establish rituals.

Pancakes on Sunday morning. Elaborate handshake routines. Nightly bath, book, and bed routines. [Kids love rituals](#) and may look forward to them more than you think. These small actions establish consistency – *and* they're just plain fun! Great dads take the time to find something to do that is natural to them and meaningful for their kids. Little traditions like these give your tribe a special identity. (Hearing your child brag to other kids that "My dad always [INSERT COOL FUN THING] is a nice bonus too.)

They accept their kids for exactly who they are.

There's probably not a dad out there who didn't look at their newborn and not have hopeful visions of a gifted athlete, a talented musician, a star student, or all of the above. Funny how kids have their own ideas! Great dads can let go of the blueprint they have drawn up for their child and let him or her follow their own path, sketch their own future, fill in their own blanks. Great dads also know how important their approval and acceptance are to their child and give these things without any strings attached. (No one said being a great dad was easy!) Let Mr. Roger's ["It's You I Like"](#) be your soundtrack:

It's you I like,
It's not the things you wear,
It's not the way you do your hair
But it's you I like
The way you are right now,
The way down deep inside you

They check-in

Dads at the top of their game know the importance of checking in with their kids regularly. A group of [researchers at MIT, Harvard and the University of Pennsylvania](#) found that one of the best things parents can do for their children is to have frequent back-and-forth exchanges with them because it helps develop, foster and improve what is perhaps one of the most important skills that contribute to success in life: Communication. Not every conversation has to be an intense heart-to-heart, or a clinical debrief of the days events, but getting beyond a superficial level is important. Chatting in the car, talking while shooting hoops, catching up while making dinner – these everyday situations provide a chance for connection. Great dads take advantage of these opportunities to take a "barometer check" of their child and follow up if something needs more attention.

They treat their child's mother (or father) with respect.

Whatever the parental relationship status, great dads know that disparaging their kids'

mother or other parent is off limits. While privately they may have negative opinions, dads who have the best interests of their children at heart know that stating these thoughts publicly is a no-no. No one wants to hear bad things about their mom or their dad. Kids shouldn't be in a position of defending someone who raised them and great dads would never put them there.

"One of the greatest things a father can do for his children is to love their mother," Howard Hunter said. It only takes a moment to do, but your kids will remember the kind words long after you said them. It will impart on them how to treat their future spouses.

They say "I love you."

Positive Psychologist Pax Tandon [says](#) that hearing the words "I love you" every day is how children form "secure attachments." "The single-most important factor in raising well-adjusted kids is secure attachment to parents...This manifests into adulthood as positive relationships and high self esteem."

There really is no substitute for these three little words and great dads get that. While our actions can certainly convey how much our kids mean to us, they still need to hear it, especially when they're young and navigating all the complicated phases of adolescence and teen years. If we didn't grow up hearing the phrase very much, it can be surprisingly hard to get out, even when we feel the sentiment deeply. But dads who bring their A-game find a way to say "I love you" to their kids as often as the feeling in their heart makes it to the synapses in their brain; which in turn makes it that much easier for their children to learn to say these words freely.

They say "I'm sorry."

Here's another phrase that great dads know is important to say. We expect our kids to "fess up" when they're wrong, and they should be able to expect the same from us. As parents we are constantly modeling behavior, and "do as I say, not as I do" never really works as a good strategy for getting the results we want. Especially as our kids get smarter and wiser to the world. A simple "Hey, I messed up and I'm sorry" will garner more respect from a child than dodging what they know was a mistake. (Kids can be surprisingly forgiving when they get a heartfelt apology, too.)

They read for themselves and their kids

Reading a book to your child as you tuck them into bed is much more important than you may realize. In the longest ever conducted study on human development, British researchers followed the lives of over 70,000 kids for 70 years and found that the biggest factor in a child's success was how warm and engaged the parents were. Known as [the British cohort study](#), the research shows that one of the best ways to engage with your child is by reading to, or with, them. And The number one indicator of academic success in life [can be attributed to how early the child is reading on their own](#). And what is the easiest way to help teach your child how to read? Read a story with them every night before bed. Make sure they can see the pages. Quiz them for fun. Point to the words and see if they can remember them or sound them out. They will be reading in no time!

Reading doesn't stop with the children, however. Great dads continue reading for their own development and personal growth. Pick up a book every day. Even for just a few minutes, even if you can only do a few pages. As Emerson says, every book is a quotation — of other books, of experience, of the humans and civilizations that came before it. How could you not expose yourself to this? All of these will widen your perspective, give you inspiration, and deepen your reservoir of accumulated wisdom and knowledge that will help you be the best dad you can be.

They workout

Sure, there is such a thing as "dad bod" but the truth is that scientists consider exercise to be the ['single thing that comes close to a magic bullet, in terms of its strong and universal benefits'](#), it might be time to sit up and listen. Don't put it off. Do it. Be in shape and be healthy. We need exercise — far more than you think.

By showing your children how to exercise every single day, you are going to improve their quality of life significantly. You will not just be extending your life by years, possibly by decades, but theirs as well. All of you will be able to participate in things that perhaps you have previously had to sit out. By leading a healthy lifestyle, you will be making more space to create more memories with your children. Exercise with them daily and you will start to see the benefits for all of you!

They give themselves credit.

Our culture has a way of downplaying how competent dads can be when it comes to caring for their children. Mothers are often portrayed as the parent who instinctively knows what to do, with father's just kind of bumbling around waiting for instruction, entrusted with tasks like holding things which only sometimes includes the children themselves.

Of course, there's more than one way to give a baby a bath, help with homework, or make a school lunch, and your method can be just as effective as your partner's. Great dads don't abdicate their role, they get right in there and figure it out. (Here's a newsflash: Moms don't always feel that confident with what they're doing either!)

They laugh

Great dads know the importance of introducing laughter into their homes. There's a reason 'dad jokes' are so prevalent. Laughter triggers the release of endorphins, relaxes the body, and has even been shown to make people live longer. A [study](#) published in the *Cognition and Emotion Journal* found that laughter enhances certain cognitive capacities such as attention, motivation, perception and memory, all of which in turn help enhance their learning. Beyond [the health benefits](#), laughter signals to children not to take life too seriously. Stressors will grow as your children age and establishing from an early age that it's OK to laugh things away will set them up to better manage life's trials.

They ask for help

"Don't be ashamed of needing help," Marcus Aurelius said. "You have a duty to fulfill just like a soldier on the wall of battle. So what if you are injured and can't climb up without another soldier's help?" From sleepless nights with your newborn to practicing parallel parking with your teen, it's one challenge after the next. The list of questions and concerns that parents have regarding their children is endless. Fortunately, others have been down this path before and can relate. (Does anyone else understand your trepidation about your daughter's first date better than another father?) Whether it's to get some sound advice or just to commiserate, there is a "band of brothers" out there who can be an invaluable resource when accessed. Great dads know that reaching out to others for support is a sign of strength, not weakness.

They know they are their child's greatest teacher.

"Be careful to leave your sons well instructed rather than rich," Epictetus said, "for the hopes of the instructed are better than the wealth of the ignorant." Kids see everything we do – even when we're sure they're not watching! Great dads know that they are setting the example for just about everything in their child's life. How to handle adversity. How to be a friend. How to treat those less fortunate. How to succeed with humility. How to care for the people you love. How to be a good parent. Fathers who get it right understand that actions speak louder than words and strive to show their kids this by how they approach life every day. As Charles Kettering put it, "Every father should remember that one day his son will follow his example instead of his advice."

They never stop learning

Great dads know they can always be greater dads. Studying parenting never ends. "Being a great father is like shaving," author and educator Reed Markham said. "No matter how good you shaved today, you have to do it again tomorrow."

Just when you got the baby game down, sure enough you have a toddler on your hands. As soon as you felt on top of all the drama that junior high brings, you're dealing with a kid going off to college. With each stage of development comes new territory to navigate. Great dads never rest on their laurels because they know that just around the corner something new (and possibly terrifying) awaits them.

Remembers What It Is Like to Be a Kid

There are times when you run into someone and they seem so out of touch with life that you have to wonder if they were ever a kid. Being a great father means being able to recall the important moments of your childhood and being able to relate it to your own children's lives.

There were a couple of great TV fathers that did exactly this if you need some help in this department. Danny Tanner on the Full House was able to relate to the circumstances that his daughters Michelle, Stephanie, and DJ were experiencing in childhood. It might have been about dealing with a bully or struggling with low

grades in school, but whatever it was, he always could empathize and give his son good advice. Ward Cleaver was another great tv dad that many of us should aspire to be like. He had his hands full with the Beaver, but no matter what crazy circumstance his sons got into, he could connect it with his own childhood. The dust-busting, hug-giving, dad-joking Danny Tanner on *Full House* certainly had his hands full as the widowed father of three girls, but episode after episode turns chaos into order. As he put it, “Just remember, when children seem the least loveable, it means they need love the most.”

Shows Unconditional Love

There will be times when your kids are beyond frustrating and seem to want to antagonize you until you slowly drift into insanity, but don't take it personally. This is how almost all kids are at some point. Over 60 years ago, the [psychologist Carl Rogers suggested](#) that simply loving our children wasn't enough. We have to love them *unconditionally*, he said — for who they are, not for what they do. Children who feel that they have to “earn” their parents love have lower self-esteem and increased feelings of unworthiness, while those with a stable sense of self have greater confidence and an increased ability to cope more effectively with life's challenges. The best fathers will not only give their unconditional love to their children, but they will show it frequently. This often means being able to forgive at the drop of a hat. When your teenager gets into their first fender bender and is the one at fault, you may be ready to explode, but let them know you are just happy that no one is hurt. And then take the car away for a couple of months, because your love is unconditional, but their privileges are not.

They Do Something Fun

According to The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) clinical report, [The Power of Play: A Pediatric Role in Enhancing Development in Young Children](#), research shows play promotes the social-emotional, cognitive, language, and self-regulation skills in children. The report explains that playing adds value not only for children but also for parents, who “reexperience or reawaken the joy of their own childhood and rejuvenate themselves.” One study documented resulted in decreases in of stress and an enhancement in the parent–child relationship.

Whether it is the movies, the carnival, a family trip to some faraway place, it doesn't really matter. Your kids just want to spend some fun time with their dad when the weight of the world isn't holding you down. Letting them see the real you, the one who is fun and enjoys a good time, will open up their eyes and create some real memories they will share with their own kids someday about their grandpa.

They work

A great dad will provide for their family to the best of their ability. This means maybe working overtime now and then or even taking on a second job as many fathers and mothers do. While it can often be difficult to balance home and work life, it is a tightrope that you will have to learn how to walk. Providing a stable home for your kids to grow up in is essential for raising a family. Your kids may not need the latest hi-tech gadgets that cost an arm and a leg, but they do need a roof over their heads, clothes on their backs, and food on their plates.

There's that great scene in *Breaking Bad* where Walter is lamenting the decisions he's made and Gus tells him that no decision a man makes for the good of his family is shameful. "When you have children, you always have family, they will always be your priority, your responsibility. And a man...a man provides. And he does it even when he's not appreciated, or respected, or even loved, he simply bears up, and he does it, because he's a man." No one is saying you have to go that far. But it's true. You provide what your kids need—period.

They walk with their children

You should go for a walk with your kids every single day, not only for exercise but for the philosophical and psychological benefits of getting out of doors and moving. Of experiencing nature. Experiencing the quiet of the world around you. Studies have shown that walking [deepens relationships](#), releases endorphins that [reduces stress hormones and combats depression](#), and [lowers the risk of cardiovascular disease and all-cause mortality](#).

Going for a walk in the woods or even just around the block will create memories that will last a lifetime, as well. Think about your childhood and how the simple pleasures

like walking down to the ice cream shop with your parents was a huge deal to you at the time. Being able to put a smile on their face by doing something so little should make you want to walk with them daily. So take a break and head out the door.

They put the day up for review

The best way to improve is to review. So, each evening you should, like [Seneca](#) did, examine your day and your actions. As he put it, “When the light has been removed and my wife has fallen silent, aware of this habit that’s now mine, I examine my entire day and go back over what I’ve done and said, hiding nothing from myself, passing nothing by.” The question should be: Did I follow my plans for the day? Was I the best dad I could be? What could I do better? What have I learned that will help me tomorrow?

They sleep

“Sleep when you’re dead,” we say. Like it’s some badge of honor how little time we allot to it. Bullshit. The body needs its rest. Schopenhauer said that sleep is the interest we pay on the loan of life. Be glad to pay it. It’s what keeps us alive. Guard your sleep carefully, it’s an obligation. In [Why We Sleep](#), Matthew Walker describes, through decades of research, how the overtired brain and body makes us vulnerable to cancer, Alzheimer’s, depression, anxiety, obesity, stroke, chronic pain, diabetes and heart attacks, among other medical conditions. Conversely, seven to nine hours of sleep a night serves functions beyond belief—improved memory, information retention, decision-making, emotional processing and stress management. All the other habits and practices listed here become irrelevant if you don’t have the energy and clarity to do them.

Children test our patience. They push every button. They make us proud. They make us worry. They make our hearts burst with love. They drive us absolutely nuts. Usually all in the same day. But if we let it, our kids make us better people – more accepting, more forgiving, more caring towards *all* children, not just our own. What makes a dad great? He recognizes what a privilege it is to be someone’s father. And he remembers it every day.

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