

The Book of the Dad

By: Mark Anders, Steve Calechman, Ben Hewitt, Greg Melville, and T. Edward Nickens
Mar 10, 2007 - 10:01:38 PM

Thirty-five simple rules for surviving the toughest 18 years of your life

Ages 0 to 2: The Doodie Years

1 REDUCE SIDS ANXIETY. SIDS deaths have declined more than 50 percent since the American Academy of Pediatrics started its Back to Sleep campaign, which recommends always putting your baby to sleep on his back in a crib with no blankets or toys. This approach is equally important for daytime naps, according to a new study in the *International Journal of Epidemiology*. If you have a helicopter wife, one who constantly hovers over the crib, consider a Halo SleepSack, a sleeveless blanket/swaddle that takes the place of loose clothing that can bunch up around the baby's nose and mouth. It is the first product endorsed by the SIDS Alliance (\$33; halosleep.com). After six months, you can ease up on the worry. SIDS isn't a concern at that point.

2 INDUCE FASTER SLEEP. It has long been suspected that a consistent bedtime routine helps babies fall asleep better, and a study supported by Johnson's presented at the 2007 Pediatric Sleep Medicine Conference confirmed it. Babies treated to a soothing regimen—a bath and a massage, followed by quiet activities—fell asleep 37 percent faster, stayed asleep 23 percent longer, and spent 50 percent less time awake during the night.

3 LEARN LIFESAVING SKILLS. Six hours of classes sounds bad, but in about the same amount of time you would burn watching a baseball double-header or racing a half Ironman, you could learn CPR and first aid—skills that can save a life—at your local American Red Cross. Prioritize to make it happen. It's worth paying the \$75 to get your favorite babysitter certified as well.

4 AVOID SYMPATHY FLAB. Up to 65 percent of expectant fathers exhibit some of their pregnant wives' symptoms, whether it's weight gain, nausea, or headaches, according to various studies. New evidence indicates that this tubbing up isn't psychosomatic—it has ancestral roots. Expectant male monkeys show significant weight gain during their mates' pregnancies, suggesting that they're preparing for the rigors of fatherhood in the jungle, reported *Biology Letters*. Since the missus will be tired a lot, use her naptime to become reacquainted with the rowing machine in the basement.

5 TRAIN HER MEMORY. Changing just one component of your baby's over-crib mobile every week exercises her memory by forcing her to compare what's there now to what was

there before.

6 SERVE HIM BRAIN FOOD. Just as visual cues nurture your toddler's intellect, so can nutritional stimuli. Babies who are breast-fed for at least six months have a significant IQ advantage over babies who are weaned early, according to neurologist David Perlmutter, MD, author of *Raise a Smarter Child By Kindergarten*. That's because human breast milk is the world's best source of DHA, a fat that triggers the brain to produce brain growth hormone and build cells. Not possible? Other DHA-rich foods: fish (in limited amounts), cod liver oil, and formula mixes that include algae-derived DHA supplements, such as Enfamil Lipil and Similac Advance.

7 PLAN FOR COLLEGE PAYMENTS. As dizzying as the tax codes have become, it's now easier to figure out how to best save for your child's college tuition: Invest in a state 529 plan. Last August, Congress made permanent a law that allows qualified withdrawals from a 529 to be free from federal income tax. Plus, the savings you have in a 529 don't count against federal financial-aid calculations when it's in the name of the dependent student. Each 529 plan is different, so do some comparison shopping at morningstar.com. The Chicago-based mutual fund rating service has a 529 section that lets you compare all 50 plans. Check what benefits exist for in-state residents and look for plans that offer low fees and index funds.

8 GET MORE SEX (PART ONE). First step: Don't try. She already has one person pawing her. Expect a three-month postpartum window in which to seduce her all over again, says Greg Bishop, author of *Hit the Ground Crawling: Lessons From 150,000 New Fathers*. Your best move? Bathe the baby. It gives your wife back some time and makes a good visual—you washing the baby's hair, wrapping her in a towel, dressing her. "That's the guy she'll be in love with again," he says. Your second big job? Stop any crying. Treat it like any troubleshooting problem and run through a checklist of possible causes: empty stomach, wet diaper, too hot, too cold. When all else fails, go for a walk or drive. Motion is soothing, and new visuals are engaging. At the very least, you're getting the bawling out of the house and giving Mom some peace—and a chance to save up some energy that might possibly be redirected at you.

9 GET MORE SEX (PART TWO). You've shown yourself to be the baby-washing, noise-diffusing superdad—now you're ready to re-engage in what made you parents to begin with. What will follow is foreplay that will rival the Godfather trilogy. Think exquisitely slow plot development. Be patient. When the moment finally arrives, remember that her body has changed and your tried-and-tested techniques may no longer be what she likes. Embark on a voyage of rediscovery. Be sure to have lubrication handy and consider encouraging her to be on top: It gives her more control—something Don Michael Corleone would appreciate.

Ages 3 to 5: The Tantrum Years

10 RAISE A JUNIOR SHAKESPEARE. Your kids will ignore your advice for most of their lives, but right now they're at their most attentive. Indeed, in families with two working parents, fathers had greater impact than mothers on their children's language development between the ages of 2 and 3, according to a new study published in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*. The researchers advise dads to use a diverse vocabulary when speaking, but that doesn't mean you should start reciting Herodotus. Instead, provide creative and dramatic play-by-play, which describes both the activities you are doing and the surroundings, giving your child an aural context for what he or she is seeing.

11 WIN OVER A PICKY EATER. Be persistent. It takes longer than previously thought—eight to 15 exposures—for a kid to accept a new food, says a study in the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*. So if your tot tries something and spits it out, don't push, but don't give up either.

12 CEMENT YOUR AUTHORITY. Admitting mistakes not only feels good—it is good. “The way to gain true, lasting authority with your child is by being truthful and emotionally honest—not by hiding your screw-ups,” says Marc Zimmerman, professor of public health and psychology at the University of Michigan. If you yell at your kid and later wish you hadn't, say so. If you forget your daughter's soccer game and feel bad about it, tell her. Your emotional honesty is a bridge to your child. Cross it often.

13 CALCULATE THE APPROPRIATE PUNISHMENT. Base your penal code around privilege withdrawal, and calculate your sentences depending on age, advises Larry J. Koenig, PhD, author of *Smart Discipline: Fast, Lasting Solutions for Your Child's Self-Esteem and Your Peace of Mind*.

Ages 3 to 5: Measure in minutes. It might be as short as a few minutes (for instance, if the infraction happens during a car ride, you might take away a privilege for the duration of the trip) or as long as 180 minutes.

Privilege withdrawal: Take away what is logical. If a toy is being used as a weapon, confiscate it.

Ages 6 to 12: Measure in hours. It might be until “after lunch” or “bedtime” or “tomorrow.”

Privilege withdrawal: Toys or watching TV.

Ages 13 to 18: Measure in days, but don't go over a week. Your kid may lose sight of the end date and try to break free.

Privilege withdrawal: Cell phone, computer, socializing with friends.

14 QUELL A TANTRUM. Don't try reasoning, bribes, or threats. If your child is having a meltdown in a grocery store, he has no capacity to hear you. Your best bet is to scoop him up and let him purge outside, says psychologist Lawrence Cohen, author of *Playful Parenting*. Cohen also advises taking preventative measures: Schedule 30 minutes of

playtime before running errands—it gives him quality time with you and will tire him out. Lock eyes before leaving for the store. If your connection is strong, he won't feel the need to erupt in the cookie aisle.

15 RAISE THEIR EQ. Emotional quotient (EQ), the social intelligence marker that corporate headhunters value so highly, can be nurtured in your children, says Dr. Perlmutter. Here's how:

Name feelings. Kids have a hard time giving names to their feelings (e.g., fear, anger, jealousy). By helping them identify their feelings, you're helping them gain control of them and recognize them in others.

Endorse emotions. It's almost intuitive to soothe our kids by denying their feelings ("There's nothing to be scared of"). Instead, validate their feelings ("I can see that you're scared—what are you afraid of?").

16 PRAISE WITHOUT SPOILING. Rampant, unearned praise is not only ineffective, but also detrimental—your kid can become addicted to praise and measure her self-worth accordingly. The key, says Koenig, is to follow a three-part script that points out exactly what your child did to earn your praise ("I see you're helping your little brother with his homework"), labels the action with a positive characteristic ("That shows me you really care about your brother and want him to succeed"), and expresses your approval ("I like that about you").

17 SHOW THE LOVE. Studies show that kids who receive physical contact and one-on-one attention grow up to be more secure, says Kyle Pruett, professor of child psychiatry at the Yale School of Medicine. To make it happen, schedule a weekly slot in your calendar and surprise your kid with "spontaneous" playtime. There should be no distractions; shut off the BlackBerry, the TV, heck, even your landline—this is damn hard. Submit. Follow your child's lead and show him you're interested in what he wants to do. Pruett also advises dads to get in the habit of whatever physical-intimacy rituals they're comfortable with, whether it's European-style cheek kisses or personalized handshakes.

18 FUEL HIS COMPETITIVE STREAK. Boys as young as 4 years old start to compete with their fathers, whether it's sprinting to the car or wrestling on the sofa. Nurture that spirit. Let him win a lot and slowly ramp it up, so that he has to work harder for the victory. "It's a way for a kid to develop a sense of being strong, and it lets him test his muscles," says Justin Richardson, assistant professor of psychiatry at Columbia University. He'll start to walk more confidently and be less of an easy mark for bullies. This might also bridge a philosophical difference with your wife: You're not teaching fighting, but you're satisfying your need to help him stand up for himself.

19 STAY CONNECTED EVEN WHEN YOU'RE ON THE ROAD. Some tasks of fatherhood are tough; this one is easy. Skip the extravagant gifts, which only put you in the impossible position of outdoing it on your next trip. More important is to make a habit of touching base once a day. "You don't have to say a lot," says psychologist Anthony Wolf. "Just describe your day and ask what your child is doing. It's the feeling of connectedness that matters."

20 TEACH THEM TO RESIST PEER PRESSURE. Think of role-playing as character-building karaoke—perfect for helping teach your children strategies for resisting harmful peer pressure. Make a family night of it: Order pizza, get all the siblings in on the game, and hand out the parts. 1 Let your kids be the bad guys. Have them offer you drugs or an invitation to an underage kegger. 2 Teach them to "know their no's." Answer their invitation in four different ways. Aggressively: "No way! Are you nuts?" Passively: "Uh, I dunno. Not really." Judgmentally: "No, and you shouldn't either." Assertively: "No. I don't want to do that." 3 Ask the follow-up: "Which of these would work best?" The answer is the assertive response, because it puts an end to the pressure. If your child responds, "I don't think I could say that," ask what he or she could say or do. 4 Have them model you. Prop up a full-length mirror. Present the bad habit and have them watch themselves say no. Encourage them to stand up straight, make eye contact, say it quickly, and end with a disarmingly positive spin. "No. But I'll see you at the game, right?" 5 Suggest a follow-up. Teach them to follow "no" with creative alternate activities.

21 TEACH THEM PERSONAL FINANCE. The best way to learn about money is to gain experience with the real thing. For most kids, that means an allowance. Instead of simply forking over the Friday cash, turn it into a teaching tool. Set a time and place for the transaction, say, Friday, 6 p.m. sharp, at the kitchen table. An appointment underscores that this isn't a frivolous matter. Give a specific amount every week, and ask for a weekly accounting of your kids' finances. How much is in the piggy bank? How much was spent over the last week? Where did the money go? The point is to teach your children how a firm grasp of personal finances, no matter the scale, can increase purchasing power. Have them set savings goals for down-the-road purchases—a new iPod, a wakeboard—and keep written accounts of how much is saved and how much more is needed. Consider setting aside a weekly percentage for charitable giving—to a church, a soup kitchen, an environmental group, perhaps. Steer the results—you shouldn't let an empathetic child earmark half the allowance for the local animal shelter—but give them plenty of real decision power over their personal finances.

22 CORRECT WITHOUT CRITICIZING. If your kid is blowing off her math homework, it might be because she's lazy. But don't tell her that. "Criticism can destroy relationships," says Koenig. "When you're trying to correct a behavior, you need to stick to the facts and

keep your emotional judgment in check.” With that in mind, your script might sound something like this: “I notice you haven’t done your homework. Is there a reason? Can you help me think of a way that you can get your homework done?” Rather than alienate your child, you’ve shown her that you are paying attention and care.

23 TEACH HIM THE ULTIMATE SKILL. Next to a shoelace bow, there’s no more useful knot than a trucker’s hitch. Its applications evolve with your child’s age: It will truss a scout troop’s worth of skis into a tidy bundle, bind a large box for shipping personal goods to a distant college, and secure a prize Persian rug to a car’s luggage rack. First, tie a quick-release loop above any tie-down point, such as a luggage rack or a loop in the other end of the line if you’re cinching down a shipping carton. Then run the end of the line around the tie-down and back through the quick-release loop. Cinch it down tight, and finish with two half hitches and pull tight. (Use a knot board as a teaching tool for any knot. Drill a quarter-inch hole through each end of a spare board. Hammer a large nail into the wood above each hole. Thread a 24-inch length of rope through each hole, and tie an overhand stopper knot so they won’t pull out.) Tie a trucker’s hitch on a knot board five times in a row, and your child will be able to do it with eyes closed.

24 TEACH HIM HOW TO AVOID A FIGHT. Role-playing gives your child the tools—and the words—to lower the boiling point of playground bullying. Find a time when you and your kid can act out a few ugly situations. Here’s a checklist: Crack a joke. Humor defuses many bullying situations, but you’ll need to work through the lingo gap that exists between you and your kid’s peers. Suggest a few funny comebacks and let him translate to kid-speak. Fine-tune body language. Getting upset fans a bully’s fire, but you can’t simply admonish a tenderhearted preteen to buck up. Show your kid how to deep breathe; it blunts an emotional response to aggression. If your kid doesn’t crumble at a taunt, it can make a bully rethink an in-your-face strategy. Make a statement. An assertive verbal response can turn down the heat. Work up a few ways to tell a bully that you don’t want to fight. If nothing else, witnesses can attest to who was the aggressor. “One of us is going to be suspended. I am not going to fight you.” Dissect conflict. Talk about past times when your child has been taunted. Listen to the stories from the beginning, without interrupting. Then help your child see where these tools could have been applied.

25 ENSURE YOUR DAUGHTER DATES A GOOD GUY. Coach Little League: You’ll get to know the kids, and the neighborhood boys will see what a real man is like: reliable, honest, involved with family, and respectful to everyone. They’ll then know how to behave when they come knocking on the door, says Joe Kelly, president of Dads & Daughters and author of *The Dads & Daughters Togetherness Guide: 54 Fun Activities to Help Build a Great Relationship*. Since you also behave this way at home, your maturing girl will know what to expect from a suitor and won’t settle for less than your standard.

26 SKILL: SLIDE INTO BASE. Perfect a bent-leg slide, and your kid will bask in glory. Screw it up, and you could incur hefty emergency-room charges. Pick a dewy morning or

sprinkle the lawn, and line up beside your child. Working together will build confidence, which will help your kid relax. And a relaxed slider is less prone to injury.

Step one: Sit down, extend one leg straight out and tuck the other under it. Point toes up. Get a feel for form by pushing off with your hands behind you to slide forward.

Step two: Practice dropping into the bent-leg form from a crouched position. Land on your butt, not your side, with the bent leg under the straight leg.

Step three: Start from a running position, two body lengths from a baseball glove or an unanchored base. Take three long steps, then slide with the upper body extended backward, arms thrown overhead to prevent injury to fingers and wrists. Check proper form by analyzing grass stains. The more dirt on the butt and calf of the bent leg, the better. Extend running distance by three steps and repeat.

27 GET YOUR KIDS TO WORK OUT THEIR OWN PROBLEMS. You look right down at your 8-year-old who is complaining about how his mean older brother is dangling his robot dog out the window and say, “Wow, that sounds like a problem for the both of you.” And then walk away. You’re not listening to any sides, and you’re not acting as moderator. Unless one of your kids is being dangled out the window, you’re not saying a word, because as soon as you become involved, they’re no longer interested in finding a solution, they’re interested in getting you on their side, says Anthony Wolf, child psychologist and author of *Mom, Jason’s Breathing on Me! The Solution to Sibling Bickering*. If they keep pestering you, tell them if it gets out of hand, you’ll step in and they might not like what you decide. Stick with your vicious neutrality and they’ll soon learn that pleading their case is fruitless. One disclaimer: This approach will not end the fighting within your home. You’re stuck with that. Stay strong and you’ll just reduce the stress of being stuck in the middle of the throw-down.

28 ENGENDER RESPECT FOR TRADITION. Teaching your child to respect the possessions you give him can engender trust and help seed family pride. The best tool: a collection of stamps, coins, or baseball cards. Start small and make it fun. Try to collect the quarters of all 50 states, or cards for the players on your kid’s favorite baseball team. Show him how to store and care for the items in his collection, and explain that they can grow in value over time. Allow him to add more precious items, until you almost feel as if you could trust him with that prized Jackie Robinson autographed card your dad gave you, or that 1899 Liberty Head silver dollar on your bookshelf from your granddad. Almost.

29 DEMYSTIFY DEATH. When it comes to an unknown like death, your kids are going to take their cues from you. “Don’t make it this big, tragic mystery,” says counselor Naomi Aldort, author of *Raising Our Children, Raising Ourselves*. “Keep it open and honest and benign.” That doesn’t mean you shouldn’t grieve, but you might also try holding a celebratory ritual to honor the life of the departed, whether it’s Grandpa or Gregory Goldfish.

Ages 13 to 18: The Nightmare Years

30 RAISE A GRACIOUS WINNER. With all of today's made-for-TV trash talking and score whoring (cue Terrell Owens), winning with class seems like a lost art. Teach it with a combination of old-fashioned conversation and intentional example setting.

- Don't assume your child athlete knows how to win with humility. Give a play-by-play of appropriate behavior after scoring points or winning the big game.
- Explain the difference between a good-natured celebration and taunting an opponent.
- Make a verbal "sportsmanship contract" prior to each season, detailing the behavior you expect. "I will not dance after scoring." "I will not jeer my opponent."

31 NEGOTIATE A SMART CURFEW. To decide the rules of the night, start by comparing notes with other parents to gauge the current curfew landscape. Then ask your child what time works for her. Then ask what she would be doing that late. If she doesn't have a good answer, say no. You're finding out about her life and not blindly reacting. Then give your decision with the offer to revisit it in a month to maintain collaboration, says psychologist Janet Edgette. Be flexible and willing to budge when special circumstances arise. Studies show that when parents loosen up and give their children a bit more freedom and responsibility, the kids actually do better in terms of moral development.

32 HOOK HIM ON THE MAGIC OF COMPOUND INTEREST. As soon as your kid is earning income, show him how to open a Roth IRA and suggest he channel a certain percentage of his cash into the account. Hook him on the magic of compound interest: If he can set aside \$2,000 by age 17, assuming a 6 percent return, he will have almost \$33,000 by the time he's 65. To provide an incentive, offer to match his contributions. Schedule a time each month to go over his statements so that you can make sure he's saving and he can ask questions about the investing process.

33 SILENCE BACKTALK. Calmly say, "I have no problem with disagreements, but I have a problem with you talking like that." If you feel you've let too much slide in the past to take a stand now, man up, acknowledge that you haven't been as strict as you should have been, and then institute your new policy. Let your kids know that talking in an unacceptable way is a choice with a consequence, says Edgette. Make the punishment one-time, for a limited period, and something that matters, so he or she will think before pulling the next punch.

34 NORMALIZE CONVERSATIONS ABOUT SEXUALITY. Talking with your son about safe sex will probably elicit secret pride in both of you. Hell, you fondly remember your first furtive fumbings as you transitioned from boy to man. Your daughter, however, is another matter. You imagine her being a virgin forever. "The key is to make conversations about sexuality as common as other topics," says Amy Levine, a certified sexuality educator. She advises fathers to seek teachable moments when they can ask their daughters how they feel about various sexual subjects, based on television plot lines, news stories, and

especially, experiences their friends are going through. Then dads can share their values and give facts or correct misconceptions where relevant. For instance, on the topic of becoming sexually active: While a dad might want to discourage it by stating his values, he can also explain the importance of using condoms. “It’s important that daughters know their fathers will always be there to support and guide them, no matter what,” says Levine.

35 TRUST YOUR GUT. As Benjamin Spock, MD, wrote in his 1946 baby bible, *Dr. Spock’s Baby and Child Care*, “All parents do their best job when they have a natural, easy confidence in themselves. Better to make a few mistakes from being natural, than to try to do everything letter-perfect out of a feeling of worry.”