

On Father's Day, learning to 'live in the now'

A few helpful tips for all new dads

By David Rattigan | June 15, 2008

Two and a half years ago, when my daughter was born, the wife and I convinced ourselves that this was one child who was not going to watch any television.

These days, we have a strict limit: no more than seven hours a day.

Likewise, I didn't envision myself as one of those parents who went to every single one of their child's youth sports events. Now I know that I will, because if a call ever goes against my daughter, someone's going to have to be there to pull my wife off of the referee.

Today is Father's Day, and perhaps it is your first. If this is the case, congratulations. You are blessed and lucky, even if all you think about is sleep and poop.

Perhaps you're still awaiting the birth of a baby, and congratulations to you as well. That "sleep and poop" line will be a lot funnier to you in a few months.

I'm more zealot than expert, but have learned that when you don't know what you're doing, there's no substitute for experience. Like other dilettantes, I have a lot of advice to share. These are not just my ideas, but are culled from the extensive research of talking to four or five other people during the course of my day.

In honor of Father's Day, here are 10 tips for new dads:

1. You know who can raise your child better than you? Everybody: your relatives, your coworkers, your neighbors, your bookie, that guy who collects bottles from your recycling bin, and everyone else. Get used to hearing about your failings.

"We weren't that permissive with Tammy," says an acquaintance of mine, criticizing our bedtime routine. "We would just let her cry for three or four hours, and she'd fall right to sleep."

Don't fight it. Just accept it and move on.

2. Keep your tender side to yourself. It is fine to call your baby "Daddy's magic little sugar pumpkin," but don't share, especially not with other guys.

If it's easier for you, think of these precious moments as you would Fight Club. The first rule of Fight Club is you do not talk about Fight Club.

3. Be a Buddhist. Remember those two weeks in college when you were developing your spiritual side? Well, that training comes in handy. When supervising young children, it's important to "live in the now." Don't plan to balance your checkbook, catch up on your housework, or have an adult thought. Don't think about the past or the future, no matter how much college is going to cost in 18 years. Just be.

4. Activity is important. Keep your young child active, and it will stimulate both body and brain. Most important, it will exhaust the child, which is your new goal, for each and every day.

5. Remember the five-minute rule. That is, when you're trying to do something and your little one is vying for attention, give them five minutes of your time. They'll soon realize how boring you are, and you can complete your project.

6. Remember the five-second rule. If food drops on the floor, you can still eat it if you pick it up within five seconds. For some parents, this is the five-minute rule.

7. Don't question. Yes, the temperature is 90 degrees and yes, your kid has just pulled out her stuffed Frosty the Snowman. What about it?

8. Watch what you say, because kids will repeat only what you don't want them to. You may narrate the action as you wrestle with your 18-month-old on the living room rug, but be sure not to use the phrase "Daddy's giving her a beating . . ." It will make things easier later, during your interview with DSS.

Also, find new phrases to replace the ones you don't want her to repeat.

"Daddy's boss was a silly goose today," you can say. "Daddy's boss isn't bad. Daddy's boss's actions are bad!"

9. Take an active role in your child's life. Remember Harry Chapin's "Cat's in the Hat"? Everybody does, and that's the reason men have to work so much harder these days than they did when we were kids. Because nobody wants to invite their adult son to dinner, get blown off, and have to listen to those lyrics in their head.

10. Listen to Roseanne Barr, who gave the sagest piece of parenting advice ever: "I figure that if the children are alive when I get home, I've done my job."

So, enjoy Father's Day. Live in the now, and get some sleep.

Dave Rattigan is a writer and comedian. Like all writers with young kids, he thinks he's writing a book about his experience, but will never find the time to finish it. ■