



8 Lessons All Dads Should Teach

YES, THERE WILL BE A TEST AT THE END. IT'S CALLED LIFE. HERE'S HOW TO MAKE SURE YOUR KIDS ACE IT

1 Words are valuable

Speak up: Your kid is listening. In families with two working parents, fathers have a greater impact on their children's language development by age 3 than mothers do, according to a study in the *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*. Provide a creative, dramatic play-by-play of the activities you're engaged in and your surroundings. Use big words, even if they're unfamiliar to your kid. Children learn a lot by context.

2 Tantrums earn you nothing

"When your anxiety visibly rises, you add fuel to the fire," says Hal Edward Runkel, a family therapist and the author of *ScreamFree Parenting*. And if you simply hand over a piece of candy, you encourage more bad behavior. Instead, when your kid starts shouting, be calm and attentive. Don't ignore it. This signals that you will not be rattled and the child won't win—ever. It may not work for the first tantrum, warns Runkel, but it's magic by the fifth.

3 Competition leads to confidence

Children as young as 4 start to compete with their parents—sprinting to the car, wrestling on the sofa, stuff like that. Roll with it. Let them win a lot, and then slowly ramp it up so they have to work harder for their victories. "It's a way for kids to develop a sense of strength and to let them test their muscles," says Justin Richardson, M.D., who teaches psychiatry at Columbia University. They'll start to walk more confidently and be less of a mark for bullies.

4 Quitting is hard

When his son wanted to quit baseball at age 8, Runkel said to him, "Sure, but you have to tell your teammates and coach." The boy couldn't do it. He's played for 7 years since. Show kids the pain of quitting, and they won't make those kind of decisions lightly, Runkel says. "If your kid says a school project is too hard and that he wants to give up, that's okay," says Runkel. "But say, 'Tell your teacher you're quitting and that you'll take whatever grade is appropriate.' Trust me, he'll stick it out."

5 Other people's feelings matter

It's easier to connect with others if you understand their perspective, so nurture that instinct in your child. Start with the child's own feelings. "Say, 'Man, it must be hard being 8 years old. What's the hardest part?'" suggests Runkel. Then mention people your kid knows who are having a hard time—say, a friend whose dad lost his job. Ask what he thinks it's like for that friend. "They won't always have an answer, but they're thinking about it," Runkel says.

6 Fights can be resolved

Unless one kid is dangling the other out the window, don't say a word. "As soon as you become involved, they no longer care about a solution. They'll only try drafting you to their side," says child psychologist Anthony Wolf, Ph.D., the author of *Mom, Jason's Breathing on Me! The Solution to Sibling Bickering*. If they pester you, say your solution will be bad for both of them. They'll learn that pleading is fruitless. More important, they'll learn quickly to compromise.

7 Independence is earned

When your kids ask to stay later at a friend's house, ask what time would work for them. Then ask why. If you don't hear a good answer, it's okay to say no. If you do, try it, says Pennsylvania-based psychologist Janet Edgette, Psy.D. When parents give children freedom and responsibility, studies show, the children develop stronger morals more quickly.

8 Success requires focus

Maybe you don't wish for a prodigy, but our competitive society suggests otherwise. That's why so many kids have trouble focusing, says C. Andrew Ramsey, M.D., a psychiatry professor at Columbia University. Make sure your kids know your expectations. Celebrate improvement first. And explain the value of slow mastery. "Whether your kids love Tom Brady or Beyoncé, let them know that these people succeeded because they mastered one skill," says Dr. Ramsey. "Learn to go through one door and many others will open for you; try to go through five doors at once and you'll go nowhere."

For more ways to raise great kids, pick up a copy of *Children's Health*, on newsstands now, and check out childrenshealthmag.com.

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