



What Dads Are Good For: A Pediatrician-Dad's Perspective

By: David L. Hill, MD, FAAP

"Dad, what are you good for?"

If you were to get all your information from greeting cards or commercials ([/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Adverse-Effects-of-Television-Commercials.aspx](#)), you'd think we fathers are mainly around to hog remote controls, collect socket wrenches, and consume beer and chicken wings. Sitcom fans, on the other hand, know that dads leave up toilet seats, burn simple breakfast ([/English/healthy-living/nutrition/Pages/The-Case-for-Eating-Breakfast.aspx](#)) foods, and tell little white lies that spin wildly out of control, leading to a series of embarrassing but not life-threatening physical injuries ([/english/health-issues/injuries-emergencies/pages/default.aspx](#)). None of these stereotypes apply to real fathers, except maybe the one about the toilet seats.



Sharing your unique gifts

Of course in reality, there are as many answers to the question of what dads are good for as there are fathers. I love a lot of things about practicing pediatrics, but I especially enjoy seeing how different dads nurture their kids. I meet some real drill sergeants...I mean, they wear uniforms and train military recruits. They also love to cradle their babies. I know a chef who makes his own baby food ([/English/ages-stages/baby/feeding-nutrition/Pages/Switching-To-Solid-Foods.aspx](#)) using vegetables whose names I can't spell. I see a jaded tech writer who can't wait to share new gadgets ([/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Healthy-Children-Radio-Kids-Tech.aspx](#)) with his teenaged daughter. In fatherhood, as in the rest of life, each of us has our own unique gifts to share.

Seeking out good information

Despite recent demographic changes, many people still have low expectations for fathers' general competence; it's always fun to surprise these people. There is no formula to guarantee any child won't end up doing poorly in school ([/English/ages-stages/teen/school/Pages/Poor-School-Performance-How-Parents-Can-Help.aspx](#)), experimenting with drugs and alcohol ([/English/ages-stages/teen/substance-abuse/Pages/Talking-to-Teens-About-Drugs-and-Alcohol.aspx](#)), or taking unwise sexual risks ([/English/ages-stages/teen/dating-sex/Pages/Adolescent-Sexuality-Talk-the-Talk-Before-They-Walk-the-Walk.aspx](#)), but you should have a good tool kit to better protect your child from falling into these traps. Seek out good information (*like from this website or from this book* (<http://shop.aap.org/Dad-to-Dad-Paperback>)) to help you get even better at certain things, from treating diaper rash ([/English/ages-stages/baby/diapers-clothing/Pages/Diaper-Rash-Solution.aspx](#)), to knowing when a cough might represent pneumonia ([/English/health-issues/conditions/chest-lungs/Pages/Pneumonia.aspx](#)), to buying your adolescent daughter sanitary napkins ([/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/puberty/Pages/Concerns-Girls-Have-About-Puberty.aspx](#)) (*remember, stand up straight and look the checkout lady in the eye; she knows they're not for you*).

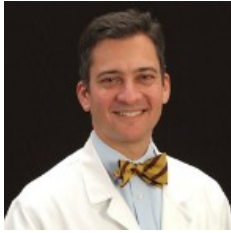
Enjoying the job of a lifetime

I used to think that if I could just get my kids past certain dangers, I might stop worrying about them. Once my son turned 1 year old, or my daughter got to kindergarten ([/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/school/Pages/Checklist-for-the-First-Day-of-School.aspx](#)), or my youngest made it into college ([/English/ages-stages/young-adult/Pages/Letting-Go-for-College.aspx](#)), I could relax. I now realize that the moment I became a dad I bought a lifetime of concern. Fatherhood is not a job from which one retires. But really, who would want to? Nothing motivates me to work harder, run faster, or think quicker than my kids. If you hoped for a life of excitement and adventure, you can stop dreaming. This is it. What are you good for as a father? Plenty today, but tomorrow you're guaranteed to add something else ([sh/family-life/work-play/Pages/A-Message-for-Grandparents-Who-Provide-Childcare.aspx](#)) to the list.

Congratulations! You're a dad.

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Pediatrician David Hill, MD, FAAP, is Vice President of Cape Fear Pediatrics in Wilmington, NC, and Adjunct Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at UNC Medical School. He serves on the executive committees of the North Carolina Pediatric Society and the American Academy of Pediatrics Council on Communications and the Media. Dr. Hill won the Independent Book Publishers Association Benjamin Franklin Award in 2013 for *Dad To Dad: Parenting Like A Pro* (<http://shop.aap.org/Dad-to-Dad-Paperback>). He serves as a consultant on child care issues for local and national radio, television, and internet-based media. He lives in Wilmington, North Carolina with his wife, three children, and two step children.

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