

10 THINGS GREAT DADS DO

STRATEGIES FOR RAISING
GREAT KIDS

RICK JOHNSON


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I dedicate this book to all the grandfathers out there who have stepped up and are parenting their grandchildren. You have a much tougher road than anyone knows. But without your presence, so many more children would fall through the cracks of life.

May God bless you
and give you the strength to persevere!
You truly are Better Dads.

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I'd also like to thank a few men who spoke some real wisdom to me while writing this book. Those men include Scott, Terry, Kenny, Darrel, and Stuart. Having friends like you guys makes me happier than getting a free pass to an all-you-can-eat pizza buffet at a ZZ Top concert. Well . . . almost.

Adversity toughens manhood, and the characteristic of the good or the great man is not that he has been exempt from the evils of life, but that he has surmounted them.

—Patrick Henry

In this life-long fight, to be waged by every one of us single-handed against a host of foes, the last requisite for a good fight, the last proof and test of our courage and manliness, must be *loyalty to truth*—the most rare and difficult of all human qualities. For such loyalty, as it grows in perfection, asks ever more and more of us, and sets before us a standard of manliness always rising higher and higher.

—Thomas Hughes, *The Manliness of Christ* (italics added)

I am the tallest oak now, exposed and vulnerable. And I'm increasingly suspicious of people. . . . All this started when I became a father, a faithful guardian of two innocent souls. And it grew worse when I lost my dad, and I realized there was no longer anyone I could run to. This is the evolution of man—from one who reaches out for comfort to one who is reached out to.

—Joe Kita, *The Father's Guide to the Meaning of Life*

In 1988 evangelical philosopher and theologian Carl Henry made a stunning prediction in his book, *Twilight of a Great Civilization* (Crossway Books). He said that as America progressively loses its Judeo-Christian heritage, paganism would grow bolder. What we saw in the last half of the 20th-century was a kind of benign humanism, but he predicted that by the start of the 21st-century, we would face a situation not unlike the first-century when the Christian faith confronted raw paganism—humanism with the pretty face ripped off, revealing the angry monster underneath. His words have come true, and are coming truer with every passing day.

—Dr. Ray Prichard

Introduction

The Bottom Line

All great dads have certain qualities that distinguish them from poor or even average fathers. Because they have these qualities, these dads give their kids a huge advantage in life. Their kids tend to be happier, healthier, and more successful in life than kids raised without these advantages. Not only that, the dads themselves garner more satisfaction out of their roles as fathers.

Of course, it's easy to *talk* about being a great dad—a better dad than we are now. But when the rubber meets the road, it's not always so easy to *be* a great dad. If we didn't have those qualities modeled for us by a father, it makes it even more difficult. Interestingly enough though, the qualities that make a great dad are easily learned and mastered by all men.

Most men *want* to be a better dad, even a great dad, but just don't know how. The problem is that many men don't

know about these qualities—we are seldom trained in them unless we are fortunate enough to observe them from a wise, healthy male role model while growing up or have a group of men who mentor and intentionally teach us the importance of these qualities as boys. However, once we understand what our families need and want from us, becoming a better dad is a lot easier. That's what this book is about.

That doesn't mean that any of us will ever be a perfect dad, just that we don't quit trying to become a *better* dad. Certainly, I've never considered myself a great dad, but one area I couldn't be faulted in was lack of trying. Even my kids have to admit I was a better dad as they got older than I was when they were young. Part of that might be attributed to maturity on my part, or experience, but certainly most of it was due to a conscious effort to learn and grow as a father. That would seem obvious to most men, and yet I've known countless fathers who somehow seemed to give up or quit along the way. By the time their kids were grown, those kids either despised their dads or were oblivious to his presence.

I've studied, interviewed, counseled, and surveyed thousands of fathers over the past thirteen years as part of the work I do with families. Prior to that, I studied men who I thought were good fathers because I wanted to understand what a good father looked like. Having been raised in an alcoholic home, I understood what I *didn't* want to be like as a father, but I had no idea what kind of qualities I *should* have in order to be an effective father. Knowing what you don't want to be like as a father doesn't help much with how you should be as a father. Just doing the opposite of what you don't want to be like doesn't help either. I knew I didn't

want to be a dad who hit my kids, but that didn't help me know how I should treat them instead.

This book looks at some of the unique characteristics or uncommon qualities that highly effective fathers possess. These behaviors turn average dads into great dads. Use these to go with the foundational attributes I discuss in some of my other fathering books, such as *Better Dads*, *Stronger Sons* and *Becoming the Dad Your Daughter Needs*. Those books are a kind of primer on what healthy fathering looks like as well as understanding your sons' and daughters' unique needs.

One way to determine what qualities we want to cultivate as a father is to start by taking some time alone (and then with your wife) to envision what kind of family you want to have. What kind of traits do you want to instill in your children? What values are most important to your family? What is the tone of your home going to be like? In my experience, those kinds of things do not just happen without some planning and then intentionality in making them come to fruition. For instance, you can't simply say, "I want to raise kids of character." There are dozens of character traits. Likely you won't be able to instill all those traits in your children no matter how great a father you are. But you can instill three or four key character traits by being aware of them and then being intentional about it. And of course we instill certain traits in our children just by modeling those traits. That's another reason for taking the time to plan what kind of family you want—it allows us to recognize what qualities we need to develop within ourselves in order to model them for our children. That way, regardless of what life throws at us, we have a game plan to fall back on. It also gives us a foundation to measure our progress against.

The truth is, dads matter. And good dads *really* matter. We are discovering after several decades of research that fathers play a very important role within the family and in the development of their children. In virtually every category that can be measured to determine success in life, children with involved fathers score significantly higher than children without fathers in their lives. Even biologically unrelated positive father figures make a difference.

An acquaintance of mine was talking about the importance of my book for fathers and daughters, *Becoming the Dad Your Daughter Needs*. She recounted the following story on the influence her husband had in a young girl's life:

One of my daughters-in-law, whom we have known since she was 13, lost her father at age 5. My husband became her “Dad” in her early teens. Her sister had no such “stand-in.” Looking at the lives of these two girls and how different they are is amazing. She is convinced her “dad” made the difference. I'd have to agree. He even walked her down the aisle when she married our son.

As a father you have been given the power to impact not only the lives of your own children but other children as well. Having power that we can use for good also means that power can be used negatively if abused or ignored. It's an awesome power that needs to be understood and used responsibly.

Being a father is hard. It may be the most difficult thing I've ever done (besides being a husband—which if not more difficult is certainly trickier). And it doesn't seem to get any easier. The older my kids get, the more difficult and complicated the issues seem to be (sorry, you guys with young children). My experiences with one child seldom seem relevant

to the next child. And what works well in one situation rarely applies to the next.

But all things that are truly meaningful and significant in life are hard. And the more significant they are, the more difficult they become. So it goes without saying that if fathering is the most difficult thing you've ever done, it's probably because it's the most important and significant role you'll ever have. Certainly as a father you are indispensable and irreplaceable in the lives of your children in ways that are unimaginable.

Here's the good news. Fathering may be difficult, but it's also the most rewarding thing you will ever do. Billions of men throughout history have navigated fatherhood—some more successfully than others—but nearly all were able to do it if they chose to. So that means you can too! Since it's so important, your goal should be to do it as best as possible—you do that in every other area of your life, right? You are, as a matter of routine, the best employee you can be, the best softball player you can be, the best gamer, the best husband, and so on. Why not be the best father you can be as well? Perhaps because men seldom get kudos or public recognition for their fathering accomplishments, we tend not to be as intentional about our performance as we are in other areas of life.

Fatherhood is a cross-country marathon with plenty of obstacles along the way. It often requires us to engage in sprints or even sprints over hurdles. Just about the time we think we've figured out the course, some trap blindsides us and knocks us on our keister. If we don't find effective ways to deal with those challenges, it can turn us into frustrated and bitter men or defeated quitters. Unfortunately, quitting

at fathering is not an option. It has huge negative ramifications in the lives of our children.

Being a grandfather has given me a whole new perspective on fathering. Without the stress and pressure of the financial responsibility of raising a family and a father's perceived obligation of being accountable for how my children turn out, I am able to sit back as a grandfather and view things a bit more objectively. I can see the bigger picture, if you will. From this perspective it's easier to see just how incredibly amazing and resilient children are. The ability to learn from scratch how to walk, speak a language (or several), become potty trained, and accumulate a vast sea of knowledge all in a few short years are some of the most stunning accomplishments on earth. We tend to take those accomplishments for granted because pretty much all human beings do them, but they are fantastic, even miraculous accomplishments nonetheless. As a parent you are "in" the trees and it is difficult to step back and see the entire forest. As a grandparent I am able to see the big picture and observe how my words, actions, and intentional modeling directly relate to the development of children.

All of the chapters in this book are part of a plan you can use to determine what kind of household you want and what kind of father you want to be. For lack of a better term, they are tools you can use to develop the foundation to help you become the kind of father you want to be and the kind of father your children deserve. They are a road map that can guide you around some of the issues that can derail you in important areas of fathering and parenting. These are things you might not have previously thought of as important, but utilizing them can kick your fathering skills up a notch or

two. For purposes of clarity throughout the book we'll use the term *better dads* for men who are perhaps untrained, average, or even exceptional fathers but who are striving to be even more.

If you want to be a better dad and raise great kids, focus on the practical and easy-to-follow steps and tips outlined in this book. In addition, men can work with other dads in group settings with the accompanying Better Dads Workbook. I highly recommend that approach, as iron truly sharpens iron. And look for the opportunity to work directly with me in our father-to-father mentoring program described at the end of this book.

Good luck—I'm looking forward to seeing the difference you make in your families, communities, and the world!

1

Have Fun!

The Importance of Humor and Play

Happy families resemble one another, whereas each unhappy family is unhappy in its own tragic way.

—Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*

Dads are sort of the GPS unit of the family. As Dad goes, so goes the family. So even though fathering may be difficult and even demanding, excellent dads—or at least *better* dads—find ways to make this challenge fun and exciting. They take the attitude that even though it’s difficult, it’s worth every effort required. Then they find ways to make it fun, and not just a job. You only get one go-round with each kid—and that time goes quicker than you think possible—so you might as well make it as

memorable as possible. The satisfaction and joy you'll get in return is well worth every effort you make.

Gauging Your Household Health by the Amount of Laughter

A home with a lot of laughter in it is a healthy home. But happy families do not happen by accident. Here's my question to you: *What is your vision for your family and how are you going to accomplish that vision?*

The first part of developing a vision depends upon determining your goals. Here is a good starting goal you might want to consider. First of all, what are your (and your wife's) career goals? How will you accomplish those goals? They need to be realistic if you want to be a great dad. I can guarantee that you can't be a great dad and work ninety hours a week for twenty years. I don't care how special you are—that's not going to happen.

I've closely studied the lives of many great men throughout history. Some of those men were good fathers, and some were not. But I suspect most of their children would say that they missed their fathers and yearned to have more time with them. The history books don't often come right out and say they were absent from home too much, but if you read between the lines, you can see that they couldn't have accomplished the goals that led to their greatness without expending large amounts of time and passion in pursuit of those goals. It is extremely difficult to spend the time required to achieve great accomplishments and still have time left over to adequately nurture a family. I know a few men who have done it, but not very many.

Next, determine with your wife what you want the tone of your home to be like. Will it be spontaneous and fun or deliberate and serious? What will be the important things that you focus on in your home? Will it be education, character, spirituality, good times, or some combination of all? You'll have to be intentional in nurturing any or all of those things in your home, because likely, they will not just happen.

Why Kids Need Dad's Humor

While the topic of this chapter is the “health” of our family through the amount of laughter, perhaps we could just as easily determine the “wealth” of our family by the amount of laughter and vitality it possesses. The opposite of depression is not happiness—the opposite of depression is vitality. *Vitality* is defined as a healthy life force. A key component of developing vitality is humor. Surveys of children find the number one thing they appreciate most about Dad is his sense of humor. A dad's goofiness helps make life in the family fun and happy. Laughter is one of a dad's greatest tools.

Laughter is underrated. Laughter opens up the way for conversations and it gets people to let down their guard. Your wife was probably initially attracted to you because you made her laugh. Want to get your sullen teens to open up and share something? Get them to laugh and watch how their attitude changes. Even fickle and depressed teenagers want to be around a home that has fun and lots of laughter. Most kids (teens aside) can't wait for Dad to get home because he brings excitement and the outside world home with him. Use that eagerness to share with them funny stories and odd experiences you have throughout the day.

You can gauge the mood or temperature of your household by the amount of laughter that is present. Dads, don't take yourselves so seriously. Yes, life is hard. But it's hard for children too. Your entire family needs to laugh together to bond and grow closer.

Laughter releases chemicals that are mentally and physically healthy. A good hearty belly laugh releases endorphins, the brain's feel-good chemical. Endorphins allow us to ignore pain and relax.¹ Additionally, chemicals such as serotonin and dopamine, which produce the feeling of well-being and contentment, are released in the body by laughter.

As a father, you set the tone of the home for your family. There are times when you will need to be serious and even stern. But I would encourage you to promote laughter in your home as often as possible.

Finding Humor in Life

If you want to have fun with your family, you are going to have to make a conscious decision to do so. Why? Because having fun together takes time. That means you will have to take time away from something else in your life—probably work, but maybe your golf or basketball games. As mentioned earlier, the truth is you probably cannot be *highly* successful both as a father and at work. I know a few men with remarkable talent who work from home and are able to spend enough quality time with their kids. But most guys have to find a balance in their work and home life. Having dinner together every night, going to ball games and recitals, watching a movie and eating popcorn at night together are all things that kids need and cherish on a consistent basis. It's not that you *can't* do both work and home successfully,

Ideas for Creating Fun at Various Ages

- Infants: play peekaboo, make faces or funny noises, “raspberry” their belly, tickle them, put things on your head, or “steal” their nose.
- Toddlers: do most of the stuff you do with babies plus play horsey (either on the floor or with your knee), chase them, play “Where’d so-and-so go?” give them “airplane” rides, or throw them in the air and catch them.
- Grade-school age: tickle (still), wrestle on the floor, perform magic tricks; practical jokes go over well; knock-knock jokes are good.
- Teens: probably don’t want to play much with Dad but you can still occasionally engage them in water fights, basketball games like HORSE, or video game competitions. For teen girls try things like taking them to lunch, going on a date, taking them shopping—find things *they* like to do.
- And if you are a grandpa, you can always play the classic “pull my finger” game, which is good for a laugh no matter how old they get (at least it is for boys—it’s only fun for girls until they get old enough to tell on you to Mom and Grandma). Or maybe that game is only fun for grandpas.

it’s just that most men need to be aware of the sacrifices necessary.

Find fun places to go together—even . . . especially . . . if they are hokey or silly. We go to miniature golf courses, county fairs, renaissance fairs, air shows, arcades, concerts, car shows, gun shows, antique shows, and amusement parks. We also enjoy plenty of physical activities like hiking, camping, rafting, biking, walking, hunting, and fishing.

As dads we make a conscious choice every day to either spend our time and energy nurturing our wives and children

or let that energy get directed into work, hobbies, television, or other endeavors. If we use our natural creativity and channel our inner “boy,” we can come up with plenty of fun stuff our whole family will enjoy.

Most of all it is attitude. Do you enjoy life? Having a good attitude means finding things to be thankful for. I’m in my midfifties and I’m thankful that I still have some hair on my head—even though a good portion of it has slid from my forehead down my back. Seriously though, I’m very thankful that I’m married to a *good* woman and wife and that my kids have grown into compassionate adults with a strong moral foundation. Recognizing that makes me appreciate my life and have a more enthusiastic outlook and demeanor.

Even if your personality tends to be a little more reserved, you can still find things to joke about or amuse your family with. Always try to find something to laugh about with your kids (but not at their expense). If your personality is such that you are not naturally a joker, find some humorous books or articles to read with your children. Relate experiences where you goofed up as a kid. Tell them stories of things that happened at work or while running errands. Even if you work as an accountant, funny things happen.

Better dads look for ways to make their children laugh. Besides, women seem to get turned on by a man who makes them laugh. Your wife is watching.

What Life Lessons Do Humor and Fun Teach?

When a dad can laugh at himself, then he’s worth following. The world is hard, but laughter makes it easier. To laugh in the face of adversity takes courage and even a good bit of bravado. To persevere with a good attitude through

Six Things All Happy Families Have in Common²

- (1) **A Family Mission Statement**—Happy families know what their defining values and goals are.
- (2) **Family History**—Researchers say that kids who know their family history believe they control their world and have a greater degree of self-confidence.
- (3) **Weekly Family Meetings**—Family meetings give kids a foundation on how things are going and encourage open communication (even arguing), which is healthy.
- (4) **How to Fight Right**—Teach your kids how to negotiate to get their needs met and to resolve problems. It works in business and in families.
- (5) **Family Dinner Together**—Recent research shows that children who eat dinner with their families are less likely to drink, smoke, do drugs, get pregnant, commit suicide, and develop eating disorders. Additional research found that children who enjoy family meals have larger vocabularies, better manners, healthier diets, and higher self-esteem. Enough said.
- (6) **Just Try**—Of course we all want happy families, but how many of us actually invest many hours in that goal? Encourage all family members to take conscious steps to try to make each member of the family happier. Effort matters.

life's hardships takes resiliency. Having fun, despite life's difficulties, rallies and inspires followers to admire and respect the leader.

Why do you think two of the fourteen character traits in the Boy Scout Law are “friendly” and “cheerful”? Both traits make other people around us feel better about themselves and create a relaxed and welcoming environment. I'd much rather be around happy people than unhappy people, wouldn't you? Plus, your home should be your favorite place

to be. A happy home is one that your kids and their friends want to be at as well.

Our home must be over-the-top happy; we're having a hard time getting rid of kids—they keep coming back.

Being able to laugh about life when things are falling apart around us gives your children confidence and hope in our fallen world (and in an imperfect dad). Laughter and happiness help create a positive attitude in children. And a positive attitude is one of the key components to living a good life.

Dad, the way you face life is the way your children will grow up believing they should face life. Life has a way of knocking us down. When that happens, always try to show your children your good face.

Physical Fun

When my kids were little, I remember getting into monster “rassling” matches in the evening with them. I would be in the middle of the living room on my knees and they would come flying as fast as they could before launching themselves headfirst at me. The consequence of a child being captured by the “bear” was a whisker rub on a soft cheek or a strenuous “noogie.” They would scream with peals of laughter as the bear chased them on hands and knees while they careened around corners and accidentally ran into furniture because they were looking back, not watching where they were going. Mom often had to leave the room, as it got to be too much for her. We all suffered minor bumps and bruises, but we would all admit it was worth it.

Dads who engage in roughhousing with their kids teach them a number of very important skills in life. Kids who

wrestle around on the floor with Dad develop portions of their brain, muscles, and reflexes; they also gain psychological benefits. Roughhousing actually rewires a child's brain in a variety of ways. It develops neural pathways within the brain that help a child be flexible in their thinking and adapt to unexpected situations—which happen frequently in life. Next, wrestling releases chemicals within the brain that help develop memory, logic, and higher learning functions. Roughhousing also increases a child's social intelligence. It helps them differentiate between play and real aggression, a distinction with which many children struggle. It teaches kids to deal with pain and discomfort. The inadvertent bumps and scrapes they get while wrestling with Dad help them deal with those types of stresses when they are in school. It also teaches the development of morals, cooperation, and boundaries in children. It teaches kids rules—if you kick Dad “there,” serious repercussions occur.

Dads also contribute significantly to the physical condition of their children. A dad who is in good shape tends to have children who are physically fit as well. A father's level of activity directly contributes to his child's level of activity. So wrestling with your children helps them be in good physical condition. Roughhousing is a great bonding mechanism as well. Hopefully it includes a great deal of physical affection, which is healthy to a child's self-esteem and well-being. It also builds trust. When you throw your child up in the air (provided you catch him), it teaches your child that they can trust you. Last, it teaches them the rewards that come from taking risks—which is a big part of being successful in life.

Kids not only need and love wrestling and horseplaying with Dad, but it gives them confidence and security. Getting

close to and touching Dad gives them access to your masculine “essence” that children need. A man’s physicality provides calmness and security to children. At our single moms’ family camps, many of the young boys show up the first day angry and acting out. By the next evening around the campfire many will crawl up onto the laps of the male volunteers (some of the boys sucking their thumbs in contentment) and you can literally watch them nuzzle into the chests of the men, absorbing the masculine essence that they have been craving. They are calm, contented, and happy.

All children need the touch of a father or father figure. It’s just sometimes easier to see it by how it affects children when it is absent from their lives.

Physical Affection

Roughhousing with your kids is a great opportunity for laughter, but it also provides you a chance to show physical affection. All children crave healthy masculine affection. They need it so much that their lives are blessed if they have it. But it’s such a strong need that if they don’t have healthy masculine affection in their lives they will accept unhealthy masculine affection in its place. So young girls who do not get healthy affection from their fathers will confuse sex for love in the backseats of cars, and young men with no father to guide them will join gangs of other fatherless boys searching for the affirmation, validation, and affection they need from older males.

Learning to show affection was initially difficult for me. I grew up in a home where neither my mother nor father gave out much physical affection. But it was something I

intuitively knew I missed. So when my children were born, I was determined to give them the physical affection I had desired. This was uncomfortable at first, as I had never had those behaviors modeled (yeah, I know—kissing and hugging ain't rocket science). But I forced myself to try as often as possible to give my kids a lot of hugs and kisses. I'm really glad I did. It has opened doors in the relationships with my children now as adults that probably would have been closed had I not. Additionally, those actions on my part spoke "words" of love to my children that I might not have been capable of articulating.

Guys, if you don't give your son the physical affection he needs, it will be difficult to develop a deeper relationship with him. With boys this might mean hugs and kisses, but often a simple arm around the shoulders, a pat on the back, or a head "noogie" works just as well.

If your daughter doesn't get healthy physical affection from her father while growing up, she *will* eventually seek that masculine affection she craves from other sources—usually ones you don't want giving her physical affection. We have to walk a bit of a tightrope in this area, as when our daughters reach puberty, it becomes more difficult to understand how to meet their needs for healthy affection. Typically this is the time when dads and daughters' relationships often drift apart or become uncomfortable (if not downright adversarial). Dad tends to get a little freaked out by his baby girl's impending sexuality, and with hormones and other chemicals flowing through her newly maturing body, your daughter may not want Dad touching her either. Even just giving her a hug becomes awkward. It's important to respect her wishes in this area but also that she know you are available for a hug

whenever she needs or wants one. Oftentimes words of affirmation, life wisdom, and encouragement to a daughter during this time period serve as well as physical affection. Regardless, men, don't allow your awkwardness with her approaching womanhood to deter you from keeping a close relationship. This is the time she needs you most! She will need you now more than ever before as she navigates through the treacherous waters of adolescence. This is a time (especially for girls) when her choices can become a blessing to her or have painful lifelong consequences. Don't be absent when she needs you to fight for her most.

Better dads give their kids plenty of hugs and kisses—even if they are uncomfortable giving physical affection.

Playing

This past Christmas my son gave me the best present any middle-aged man could ever want. He gave me a Nerf N-Strike Vulcan EBF-25 Dart Cannon. It looks and operates like an orange and yellow 50-caliber machine gun. It even has an ammo box that you load the belt into and it feeds out the other side as the darts are fired by an internal piston-powered launching system. The Vulcan fires up to three Nerf sonic micro darts per second (although not confirmed by my testing) and has a 25-round ammo belt. In fully auto mode it can fire all twenty-five rounds in under ten seconds. Very, very cool indeed! My son was wise enough to get me a second ammo belt to go along with it.

After running out to get the required six C cell batteries, I played “war” with my son until he got tired and went home. I spent the rest of the day “hunting” the cats. They were fast

but not fast enough to outrun a determined middle-aged man with a machine gun. The dog is no fun, as he just stands there and lets me shoot him. I am working on building a pill box with pillows to create a machine gun nest using the tripod stand that came with it. I started saving to buy the Tactical Rail accessories that go with it, including a laser sight and flashlight so I can hunt our cats throughout the house in the dark.

I was also coveting the other N-Strike arsenal weapons, including the giant pistol Maverick with 6-dart rotating barrel that looks like it came from a *Terminator* movie and the N-Strike Recon CS-6 Blaster, which as near as I can tell is a Nerf assault shotgun. Lo and behold, the next morning I found out the little guys next door had gotten those very items for Christmas! Oh, what great battles we had in the cul-de-sac that day. If we would have had toys like this when I was a kid, I would have never come home.

The best thing about dads is that we are men, and men are really just big boys—we never get tired of playing. Find some cool stuff to play with your kids. They have so many cool toys that we never even dreamed of when I was growing up. Remote control helicopters! You heard me—remote control helicopters! Need I say anything more? The boys next door have a battery-powered Jeep they ride around the neighborhood in—and it goes pretty fast. On his birthday last month one of the boys got a motorized skateboard. If that's not about the coolest thing I've ever seen, I don't know what is. Unfortunately, it isn't powerful enough to motor my fat behind around the cul-de-sac (the mom was frowning at me out the window for almost breaking her kid's toy).

I don't know what kind of cool toys are out there now for girls because I only peruse the boys' section of the toy aisles in the store. But they must have some things now that would even impress a dad.

Spend some time playing with your kids. Not only will you bond with them, it will lower your stress level and blood pressure.