

Jump-start
your family's return
to vinyl!

HOW TO PLAY LIKE A DAD

Make every day Father's Day with these 20 pop-approved games, projects, and activities. Getting messy is definitely required!

BY JEFF VRABEL
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROBYN BREEN SHINN

In her job as a physician's assistant, my wife has been required to work in the E.R., get ready for 6 A.M. surgeries, and be on call—all things that have led to a rewarding career but nothing close to what our parents called a "normal work schedule." As such, it's often just our two sons and me, the three Vrabel men, waking up to a day full of endless possibility and promise. And these days tend to begin the same way: with me making breakfast and asking, "So what's on the agenda today?" and the boys responding with... well, abject silence, since they're upstairs furiously *Minecrafting* while I talk to a stack of speedily cooling Belgian waffles.

Given the opportunity, my sons would be pretty well satisfied devoting one to 48 hours of their day to *Minecraft*, Roblox, and some curious digital pastime known to me only as "Goat Simulator." (I once asked the 6-year-old how to play it, and he responded by tilting his head, looking at me as though I'd just sprouted a second head, and saying, "Uh, you simulate goats." I'd never been so shut down by such a weird sentence.)

In these cases, it falls to me to devise the plan for the day, an activity or outing that not only has enough appeal to peel them away from their 8-bit fantasyland but also accomplishes the following: 1) enriches their lives; 2) helps them grow

into wise, fulfilled adults; 3) is mentally active; 4) is physically active; 5) falls within my state's laws of personal safety; 6) doesn't cost \$20,000; 7) is something I wouldn't mind doing either. So, you know, no pressure.

Every parent wants to fill his children's hours with activities that will empower and enrich them; every parent has stared at a wall repeating, "Yeah, I have no idea what that is." To that end—and to celebrate Father's Day—here's an incomplete list of DAD THINGS TO DO WITH YOUR KIDS, as written by actual dads, prominent bloggers, musicians, and me, a humble writer-slash-Belgian-waffle aficionado.

1. Play in the street.

Sam Weinman, a New York City editor and author of *Win at Losing: How Our Biggest Setbacks Can Lead to Our Greatest Gains*, approaches parenting with this idea: "Allow them to be the conduit to your younger self. I like to remind my boys that being a kid never gets old." His go-to? Dragging out two goals, waiting for traffic to subside, and playing a little hockey in the street. He's even turned it into an annual event: a round-robin tournament with four kids and a dad on each team. Winners take home a replica of the Stanley Cup trophy—which is actually a popcorn maker. "It's arguably the highlight of the year."

2. INTRODUCE THEM TO A RECORD PLAYER.

Now, granted, this isn't for everybody: It doesn't always work to have a 2-year-old's peanut butter-covered hands around a precision device that doesn't play if you bump it. But some years ago, I ventured into the attic to retrieve my old and spider-infested collection of records, and on many nights since, we've been charmed by this relic from the past. We page through the massive art, make jokes about bizarre 1970s-era artist names ("Meat Loaf?" my eighth-grader said one night, shaking his head in bemused disbelief. "Why don't people make any sense?"), and indulge in the novel idea of listening to something straight through, instead of fast-forwarding or commanding Alexa to play something different.

3 Invent new cereals. According to my 6-year-old, I have been eating Cocoa Pebbles incorrectly for decades. He told me this while retrieving two other boxes of cereal, from which he created an innovative new breakfast called CocoaLuckyTrix. For the week after, we started breakfast by engaging in some cereal alchemy, producing such inventions as Cinnamon Toast Flakes, Rice Krispiespuffs, and my personal favorite, Marshmallow Apple Pebbles.

Treat-y cereals make breakfast extra sweet!



4. Learn which colas can explode.

Everybody knows that Diet Coke + Mentos = geysers of carbonated awesomeness. But though it's the most famous reactive liquid, Diet Coke isn't the only drink that will activate on contact with Mentos and make a mess of your kitchen! Head to the grocery store and grab a sample of other sodas. (This is for science, so the cheap bottles work just fine.) If you're feeling especially MythBuster-y, tape several pieces of poster board together, mark off heights, and see which beverage creates the greatest geyser. (Hint: Don't skimp on the diet root beer.)



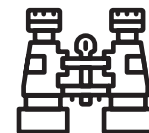
5. SEND SCREENS BACK IN TIME.

If your kids are into video games anyway, bond with and/or horrify them by showing them the ancient video games you had to deal with as a child. There are a few ways to do this: You can get an Atari simulator at Target for about \$40, and Nintendo has released new (and tiny) "Classic Edition" plug-and-play versions of its NES and Super Nintendo consoles (\$60 and \$80 respectively). The NES Classic Edition comes preloaded with 30 games, including *Super Mario Bros. 3*, *Metroid*, *The Legend of Zelda*, *Dr. Mario*, and *Castlevania*. The Super NES Classic has *Street Fighter II*, *Super Mario World*, *Super Mario Kart*, and *Super Metroid*. Best

part: Both let you save points, so hitting the power button no longer means obliterating your progress! Bonus: If your kids are into *Minecraft*, the graphics and gameplay on a Super Nintendo will seem like some impossible magic from the future. (If you're not bad with bits, build yourself a device called a Raspberry Pi, a bare-bones hockey-puck-size computer onto which you can download basically any game released between 1975 and 1996. We advocate only downloading games you paid for, of course. But for under \$100 and with a little bit of Googling, you can access an entire Ready Player One's worth of classic gaming.)

#6 Climb your city.

Troy Carpenter, dad and Instagram star @redblueox, has an altitude-themed go-to for his oldest: visiting monuments and ascending to urban heights. He'll take his kids to Indianapolis's downtown Soldiers & Sailors monument or figure out which days of the week he can visit the top floor of other skyscrapers. If you're in a city with older kids, finding the highest heights can be a perfect mix of urban adventuring and making sure they get enough exercise to sleep well that night.



7. CREATE A SPY NETWORK.

Few concepts capture a kid's imagination more than secret messages, which is what compelled Coy Bowles, guitarist with the Zac Brown Band, to fashion a game out of a quirk in his house's design. "We have a 4-inch-tall pipe that connects one recording-studio room to another," he says. "Its purpose is to pass cables through the wall, but my daughter and I now use it for fun." Bowles and his budding spy swap messages and toys through it. "It's cute to see her so curious about what's happening on the other side of the wall." No pipe? Hide messages anywhere: in drawers, behind bookshelves, in the vegetable crisper, inside a favorite book.

8.

Invent stories (with a little help).

Take a few sheets of paper, cut them into squares, and write a single and possibly hilarious word on each. *Biscuits*. *Alien*. *Rhinoceros*. *Havarti cheese*. Then ask your kids to make up a tale, occasionally flipping a square over and adding the word on it to the story. It's 100 percent free, 102 percent imaginative, and customizable to you and your family. (Translated: "You can use whichever ridiculous words you want.") It's this strategy that once made my 6-year-old spin a fantastic yarn about a space pirate who uses lightning to fight a volcano inside an evil toilet. (Full disclosure: His stories always seem to include a toilet.)



"But I was only going 507 miles an hour, officer!"



10 Bust the kids.

Mike Spohr is the editor of *BuzzFeed Parents*, coauthor of *The Toddler Survival Guide*, and inventor of the Police Officer game. "My kids ride their bikes until I (the police officer) pull them over—for speeding, to ask if they've seen an on-the-run thief, or any of a thousand other scenarios. They want me to differentiate it every time, which gets really hard!" His son is usually apologetic; his daughter sometimes gets sassy. But all parties go home happy.

11. Fail to walk a straight line.

Block out your senses by closing your eyes and plugging your ears, and try to walk 100 steps in a straight line. It will not work. You will end up 50 yards to the left, or back where you started, or in the middle of a mud puddle—but never ever straight ahead.

12. Work on a farm.

You don't actually have to "work" on a farm—we've seen people do that, and frankly it looks difficult. But you probably live near a destination for "agritourism," the term for seeing what farming means now, which often involves not just animals and dirt but drones and robots and other things from the future. Near where I live is the Fair Oaks Farms, in Indiana, one of the country's largest. Often described as an "agricultural Disney," it offers tours of the Pig Adventure (which is 1,000 percent more adorable than you'd think, even if it smells 0 percent better than you'd think), a corn maze, climbing walls, amazing grilled cheeses, and a Cow Adventure, in which you can witness a cow giving birth, a stirring wonder of nature about which your kids will have an awful lot of questions.

13 Mod your sports. When he lived in Manhattan—a part of the world not especially known for its expanse of baseball diamonds—blogger and Dad 2.0 Summit cofounder Doug French simply adjusted his ballpark perspective. "We invented a two-person baseball game called Dingerball," he says. "It was a pretty binary approach: If you hit the ball past me, it's a home run." For a good while, one of his sons struggled to connect, but after a time, French saw that the game was teaching his sons the importance of sticking with something until you see some light break through.

14 Prep for a zombie apocalypse.

James Breakwell, a father of four girls under 7 who tweets under the handle @XplodingUnicorn, has one simple go-to activity: zombie training. "My kids and I pretend to fight off the undead with foam darts or whatever else is handy and safe." It's loud, messy, goofy, and totally make-believe. "It's great fun," he says. "And it's real preparation for the greatest threat of our time."



Batter up! Who says you need a whole team for a game?



15. PLAY GRANDMA'S FAVORITE GAME.

Chase McFadden, a blogger who runs the site StuffKidsWrite.com, connects the generations in his family via cribbage, an old-timey card game taught to him by his own grandfather. "I played with my grandpa, our kids play with their grandparents, and they are fortunate enough to have a great-grandmother to play with as well." The game teaches math, sorta, and strategy, kinda, but mostly it's a way to bridge the generations—even if those generations aren't messing around. "Don't harbor any thoughts of a sweet old lady patiently and gently teaching her great-grandchildren the ways of the game," McFadden says. "She plays for keeps."

+ 5 more fun ideas! ➡➡➡

- 16. Take an overnight road trip with just one kid.
- 17. Go hiking or simply walk in the woods.
- 18. Enjoy a staycation at a local hotel with a pool.
- 19. Go plane-spotting at a small, regional airport.
- 20. Paint things that do not need to be painted, like boards, rocks, pieces of wood, or old appliances.