

The 5 Things Your Kids Need From You

That nobody told us

BetterDads — Book 6 · For every dad

Most dads grow up believing the job is to provide.

Earn the money. Keep them safe. Be the one who can fix things. That's the script most of us inherited, and it's not entirely wrong. But it's incomplete. And it's the part nobody told us about that ends up mattering most.

The five things below aren't more work on top of what you're already doing. They're a different kind of work. Not harder. Just less obvious. They cost no money, no extra hours, no equipment. Most dads have never been shown them clearly — which is why most dads spend a long time feeling like something's missing without being able to name it.

This is what your kids actually need.

1. Presence

Not time. Presence.

There's a difference between being in the same room as your kid and being with them. Phone in your hand, half-watching the TV, half-listening — that's not presence. That's proximity. Children feel the difference. Always. Even when they can't say so.

Presence means turning toward them when they speak. Eye contact during the boring story about the lego ship. The two-minute conversation at the school gate where you actually wait for the answer. It doesn't take more time than what you already have. It just takes attention.

Twenty minutes of real attention will outweigh four hours of half-attention every time. That's not parenting philosophy. That's how children's nervous systems work.

2. Steadiness

Children don't need a perfect father. They need a predictable one.

The dad who is calm on Tuesday and explosive on Wednesday and absent on Thursday teaches his kids to walk on eggshells. They learn to read his moods before they trust their own feelings. That's not what we want for them.

Steadiness isn't about never being upset. It's about being the same person whether things are easy or hard. Kids need to know what version of you is coming through the door. When that's consistent, they relax. When it's not, they're managing you instead of growing up freely.

3. Self-Knowledge

You can't give what you don't have.

Most men have never been asked to look at their own patterns honestly. The way they handle frustration. What sets them off. What they're avoiding. The script they inherited from their own father — the one running underneath their behaviour without them realising.

Self-knowledge isn't therapy speak. It's just paying attention. Noticing when you're reactive. Asking what's actually going on underneath. Being honest with yourself before you have to be honest with anyone else. That awareness is what stops you from passing on the things you wished hadn't been passed on to you.

4. Repair

Every dad loses it sometimes. What matters is what comes next.

The yelling, the impatience, the moment you said something you shouldn't have — those things happen. The damage isn't done in those moments. The damage is done when nothing happens after. When you pretend it didn't, or you brush it off, or you double down because admitting fault feels like weakness.

Repair sounds simple because it is. You go back. You say: *"Mate, I shouldn't have spoken to you like that. I was tired and I took it out on you. I'm sorry."* That's it. It's not a long speech. It's not begging. It's a man owning what he did.

Kids don't lose respect for fathers who repair. They lose it for fathers who never do.

5. Modelling

Your kids are not learning fatherhood from what you tell them. They're learning it from what you do.

What does a man do when something goes wrong? How does he treat people who can't help him? What happens when he's tired and someone needs him? Does he ask for help? Does he say sorry? Does he look after his body? Does he keep his word?

You are the most influential lesson in your child's life on what being a man means. Not because you intend to be. Because they watch. Endlessly. They build their internal model of "what a man is" almost entirely from you in the early years.

The good news: you don't have to be a perfect example. You just have to be a conscious one.

You don't need to be perfect.

You need to be present, steady, self-aware, willing to repair, and conscious of what you're showing them.

That's the whole job.

It's enough.

This is Book 6 of the BetterDads series. The full series is at betterdads.com.