

## Create Ritual Dad Time

\*This interactive activity is adapted by The Fatherhood Project from *The Modern Dad's Dilemma* (New World Library, 2010) by John Badalament, TFP Director of Programs

### Guidelines

1. **Get together as father/child at least once a month.** Minimally for at least one to two hours and with only one child at a time (this may be difficult for larger families, but it is essential for building a one-on-one relationship).
2. **Choose an activity you both agree on.** You may allow your child to choose or alternate who decides. We don't recommend executive decisions, except in cases of extreme resistance (more on that below).
3. **Make sure you talk during your time together.** Going to a movie or a game is fine. Using what William Pollack (author of *Real Boys*) calls "action talk" (i.e., shooting baskets or playing video games while talking) is great, but men also need to model face-to-face dialogue for children of all ages. You don't always need a distraction! Every three to four months, use your Ritual Dad Time to do the [Relationship Checkup](#).
4. **Be consistent.** The ritual does not have to be on the same day each month, but make sure it happens so your child can count on it. Try scheduling your next ritual time at the end of each time together.

*Examples include:* Going for a meal, taking a walk, visiting another town, going for a bike ride, cooking a meal from a foreign country, working on a building/fix-it project, taking a drive, going to a sporting event, playing a game, doing an art project, etc.

*For live-away dads:* Depending on how often you see your child, either your ritual may be done less frequently (every three, six, or twelve months) or you could do a long-distance ritual, such as a monthly letter or ongoing project.

*For dads with infants or newborns:* Think about visiting different environments that may stimulate your child's different senses, such as a park with a lot of birds, the beach, a crowded playground, a quiet forest, live or recorded music, etc.

## **Make the Pitch to Your Child**

Make the pitch to your child and expect some resistance. Express that you would like to try this once a month for six months. Make this a request on your part, something you are asking of your child. For example, a father of a high school child could say he wants to have time with her before she goes to college; on the face of it, she would be doing this for him. Also, make it clear that you have no other agenda than to have fun and spend time doing things they want to do on a regular basis.

If met with total resistance, make it mandatory. That's right, mandatory. The resentment and resistance will almost certainly fade. For a father and child who are constantly in conflict with each other, part of the problem may be that they have too few positive experiences together. Younger kids will be far less likely to resist.

Finally, it's important to let your child's mother know what you're doing up front. This will reduce the likelihood of her having any resistance. Explain what you're doing and why this ritual time is so important. Also, listen to and take her concerns seriously. On the positive side, she may offer some good suggestions or tips as well. Keep your child's mother in the loop.

### **Brainstorm some possible rituals:**

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## Keep a Log of Your Ritual Dad Time

The idea is to reflect on the experience each time, if only briefly. Think about what went well, things you discussed, what didn't go well, etc. Plan on doing your ritual for at least six consecutive months. If after the first or second month your ritual time is not going well, consider the following:

- Are you giving your child a choice about how the time is spent?
- Are you totally present during your time together (not talking on the cell phone, not stopping to run errands, not having the TV on)?
- Talk with your child's mother or a friend about what is happening and ask for their suggestions.
- Talk with your child about ideas for what you could do to improve your time together.

Since you are initiating the ritual it's important to first look at your own behavior and see what you could change.

Example Ritual Log:

Date:

What we did:

My reflections:

Next ritual time (what/when):