



Dad's Playbook: 0 to 25

Often, father-child bonding is portrayed through a very narrow lens (like just playing catch). These "out-of-the-box" activities are designed to build attachment, critical thinking, and life skills while keeping the "fun" factor high.

Ages 0-5: The "Discovery" Phase

1. The "Living Obstacle Course"

Instead of using pillows, Dad is the obstacle course.

- **Instructions:** Dad lies on the floor. The child has to climb over "Mountain Dad" (his back), crawl through the "Tunnel" (under his legs), and balance on the "Log" (his arm).
- **Learning:** Physical coordination, spatial awareness, and trust in Dad's physical presence.
- **Variations:** * The Floor is Lava: Dad holds the child and "rescues" them from furniture to furniture.
 - Animal Walk: Dad and child must complete the course moving only like crabs or bears.

2. The "Big Stomp" Paint Session

- **Instructions:** Tape a large roll of butcher paper or several flattened cardboard boxes to the floor. Put on old socks, dip them in trays of washable tempera paint, and stomp, slide, and dance across the paper together.
- **Learning:** Proprioception (understanding where their body is in space) and sensory processing. It teaches that "messy" is okay in the right context.
- **Variations:**
 - The "Car Track": Use the wheels of toy trucks instead of feet to create "roads."
 - Bubble Wrap Stomp: Tape bubble wrap over the paint for added sound and texture.

3. Shadow Puppets 2.0

- **Instructions:** Set up a single lamp facing a blank wall in a dark room. Use your hands to create animals. Have the "Dad Animal" and the "Child Animal" interact.
- **Learning:** Narrative development and hand-eye coordination. It builds a sense of security in the dark.



- **Variations:**

- Prop Play: Cut shapes out of cardboard and tape them to popsicle sticks for more complex "theatre."
- The "Searchlight": Use a flashlight to "find" hidden stuffed animals around the room.

4. Water Works Car Wash

- **Instructions:** Take plastic ride-on toys, tricycles, or even Dad's real car tires outside. Provide buckets of soapy water, sponges, and a low-pressure hose. Scrub everything down together.

- **Learning:** Responsibility and Gross Motor Skills. It introduces the concept of caring for our belongings.

- **Variations:**

- Indoor Doll Wash: Use the kitchen sink or a plastic bin for smaller toys on a rainy day.
- The "Bubblesmith": See who can create the biggest "suds mountain" on the driveway.

Category 2: The Competence Phase (Ages 6–12)

Goal: Developing patience and technical logic.

1. The Backyard "Olympic" Draft

- **Instructions:** Create 3 "silly" athletic events (e.g., The Laundry Basket Free-Throw, The Slow-Motion Race, The Spoon-and-Egg Balance).
- **Learning:** Sportsmanship and Rule-Making. It allows the child to see Dad as a "competitor" who can also be a "good loser."
- **Variations:**
 - The "Handicap": The child gets to "level the playing field" by making Dad do his events while wearing a heavy backpack or hopping on one foot.
 - The Medal Ceremony: Use old ribbons or aluminum foil to make medals for the "closing ceremony."

2. The "Chef De Cuisine" Challenge

- **Instructions:** Dad and child pick 3 random, safe ingredients from the pantry (e.g., crackers, peanut butter, and raisins). You have 20 minutes to work together to create a "Signature Snack" using all three.
- **Learning:** Creative Problem Solving. It removes the "fear of failure" in the kitchen.



- **Variations:**

- The Blind Taste Test: One person is blindfolded and has to guess what the other person "cooked."
- The Menu Design: Create a formal "Menu" for the rest of the family to order from.

3. Stop-Motion Movie Studio

- **Instructions:** Download a free stop-motion app. Set up a phone on a steady surface. Use Legos or action figures. The child moves the figure a tiny bit, and Dad hits the "capture" button.
- **Learning:** Persistence and Sequence. They learn that "Big" projects are made of many "Little" steps.
- **Variations:**
 - Clay-mation: Use play-dough to create "morphing" shapes.
 - The Soundstage: After the video is done, record your own sound effects (crunching chips for footsteps, etc.).

Category 3: The Identity Phase (Ages 13-18)

Goal: Critical thinking and real-world preparation.

1. The "Fantasy Life" Draft

- **Instructions:** Pick a city they want to live in. Research the average rent for a 1-bedroom apartment, the cost of a bus pass, and a week of groceries. Use a "Draft Board" to tally the costs.
- **Learning:** Financial Literacy. It grounds "adulting" in reality without being a lecture.
- **Variations:**
 - The "Side Hustle" Brainstorm: If the budget is short, brainstorm 3 ways to make the extra \$200 needed.
 - The "Dream" vs. "Reality": Compare a "starter" budget with a "luxury" budget.

2. Podcast Partnership

- **Instructions:** Find a podcast episode about a "gray area" topic (history, tech ethics, or true crime). Listen separately during the week, then meet for "Wings and Wisdom" (or any meal) to discuss.
- **Learning:** Communication and Nuance. It teaches them how to have an adult conversation about differing opinions.



- **Variations:**

- The Devil's Advocate: Dad and teen take opposite sides of the podcaster's argument, even if they agree, just to practice debating.
- The "Next Episode" Pitch: Discuss what they would ask the guest if they **were the host.**

3. The Strategy Board Game Night

- **Instructions:** Skip the luck-based games. Pick a strategy game like Catan, Ticket to Ride, or Chess. Play with the "open hand" rule for the first few rounds to discuss strategy.

- **Learning:** Strategic Foresight. Thinking 3 moves ahead is a vital life skill for teenagers.

- **Variations:**

- The Tournament: Keep a running "win-loss" tally on the fridge for a month.
- Cooperative Mode: Play a game like Pandemic where Dad and Teen must work together against the board.

Category 4: The Partnership Phase (Ages 19–25)

Goal: Peer-to-peer respect and legacy building.

1. The Philanthropy Project

- **Instructions:** Set aside a small amount of money (\$50–\$100). You and your adult child must agree on one local organization to donate it to. You both have to "pitch" your choice and find common ground.

- **Learning:** Value Alignment. It clarifies what the family stands for.

- **Variations:**

- The "Giving Tuesday" Challenge: Do the research online together and make the donation live.
- Direct Action: Instead of money, spend 3 hours volunteering together at a food bank.

2. The "Ancestry" Road Trip

- **Instructions:** Drive to a location significant to your family history—a childhood home, a cemetery, or an old workplace. Tell the "unfiltered" stories of the "Bumps" you faced at their age.

- **Learning:** Legacy and Resilience. It humanizes Dad and gives the adult child a sense of where they came from.



BUMPS TO BIGS

LEARN.LOVE.GROW.

- **Variations:**

- The Digital Map: Use Google Earth to "visit" these places if travel isn't possible, sharing stories as you go.
- The "Photo Scan" Session: Sit with a box of old photos and an app like PhotoScan to digitize the family history.

3. Professional Mock Interview

- **Instructions:** Have your adult child send you a job description they are interested in. Dress up, sit across from each other, and conduct a 20-minute formal interview.

- **Learning:** Career Mentorship. Provides a safe space to fail and refine their professional voice.

- **Variations:**

- The "Salary Negotiation" Roleplay: Practice the specific words used to ask for more money or better hours.
- Role Reversal: Let them interview you about your hardest day at work and how you handled it.