

For next week's special day, an author shares learned knowledge with a new generation of fathers.

BY PHILIP LERMAN

WHEN YOU'RE 50 and the father of a toddler, like me, you realize there are lots of reasons for having kids at a much younger age. The stamina to chase a screaming, naked toddler around the house for two hours, for starters. And a younger man's heartfelt (if overly optimistic) belief that you can control the world around you.

But knowing there are forces beyond your control — at the office, in the universe and especially around a toddler's feeding time — is just one advantage of being an older dad.

There are lots more of us than there used to be. Since 1980, the number of men in their 40s having children has increased nearly 30%. For Father's Day, we whose homes are littered with both pacifiers and reading glasses have decided to pass along to you younger dads a few things it has taken us years to learn.

Here's the typical younger dad's view of the world today — tempered with an older dad's perspective.

You may love tech toys, but don't lose your kid in the iPod shuffle.

Younger dad: It's not that big a deal if my cellphone is stuck to my hip more than my child is.

Older dad: Today's younger dads are armed with more com devices than Jack Bauer — but between your e-mail, IMs, ringing cellphone, incessant checks of the BlackBerry and updating your MySpace page, you can lose your kid in the iPod shuffle. Your job now has access to you 24/7; your kid needs the same. Don't be so distracted by the chatter of your life that you can't hear the chatter of your children.

Younger dad: I know I should spend more time at home, but if I don't get this promotion, we're doomed.

Older dad: According to a 2004 CareerBuilder.com sur-

What YOUNGER DADS can learn from OLDER DADS



vey, more than two-thirds of working fathers are spending in excess of 40 hours a week at work, and 25% work more than 50 hours each week. In trying to be more involved at home and get ahead at the job, working dads these days face a dilemma that working moms have struggled with for years: How do you juggle the increasing demands of the office with your desire to be a better father? Balance — it's not just for mothers anymore. At our age, we've seen too many friends spend their kids' wonder years clawing their

way up the corporate ladder, working late hours and missing the whole thing. Vow to be home for dinner at least three days a week. Or tell the boss you have to leave early tomorrow because you have "a thing" you have to do. Then go pick up your kids from school.

Younger dad: I've got a digital camera, tunes and coffee maker; Junior will love this stuff later!

Older dad: Younger dads love digital toys. If they could digitally change diapers, they would. Don't pass that on to your kids: Experts say toys without batteries are essential for a child's development. They may scream, "We want a Wii!" — literally, all you have to do is log on to YouTube these days and you can find toddlers playing video tennis — but blocks and balls and paints and dolls are still the best.

Younger dad: I watched Batman cartoons when I was little. The ones on TV now can't be that bad.

Older dad: When it comes to TV technology, remember that TiVo and other such devices are tools, not crutches. Man cannot parent by DVR alone. Have you seen the violence that passes for children's TV now? Way beyond what we once knew — *G.I. Joe Sigma 6* and *The Batman* make Yosemite Sam look like H.R. Pufnstuf. Fortunately, there's actually some good TV out there — try *Dora the Explorer* and *Little Einsteins*. Watch what your kids watch and talk to them about it. You might learn something.

Younger dad: My child wants to play all the time, but, come on — can't it wait 'til the game's over?

Older dad: The younger dad lives like he has all the time in the world — still trying to make that great happy hour, get that great tee time. Here's what the Bald Dad Patrol has learned: Those things can wait. Something else cannot. You know that little girl crawling under the table, begging you to play while you're channel-surfing the many ESPNs? Better get under that table now. We're old enough to have been through this before, and in what will seem like about 17 seconds, a car horn will honk and off she'll zoom into the rest of her life.

Enjoy it now. As the saying goes, when you have a baby, the nights are very long, and the years are very short. **W**

PHILIP LERMAN is the author of the new book *Dadditude: How a Real Man Became a Real Dad* (PERSEUS BOOKS GROUP, \$19.95).



What Younger Dads Can Learn From Older Dads

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Newer fathers may try to jettison the image of yesterday's unfeeling dad in the gray flannel suit. But in trying to be more involved at home, get ahead at work and still have a life, working dads face a dilemma that working moms have struggled with for years: How do you juggle the increasing demands of the office with your desire to be a better father?

At our age, we've seen too many friends spend their kids' wonder years clawing their way up the corporate ladder, working late hours and missing the whole thing. Vow to be home for dinner at least three days a week. Or tell the boss that you have to leave early tomorrow because you have "a thing" you have to do. Then go pick your kids up from school. There's an ethic in the office that says whoever leaves last is the most macho — promise yourself you'll start losing that game.

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