

Dad, I'm gonna be sick..."

AND 13 OTHER ANNOYING
AND DISGUSTING, BUT
YES REWARDING, ASPECTS
OF FATHERHOOD

1 You'll lose control of your sleeping and mating habits. But you can regain them by (a) teaching the children to fall asleep on their own and (b) teaching them to amuse themselves when they wake up in the morning. Until then, there's coffee.

2 Sure, you'd take a bullet for your kid. But what are the odds you'll have to? So vow to take a minute instead to calm yourself during your own toddler rages ("He spilled the milk!" "He won't drink the milk!" "We're out of milk!"). If you're calm and understanding with his mistakes, he'll return the favor with yours.

3 Your daughter learns her taste in men from you. And that can be by either a positive example or a negative one.

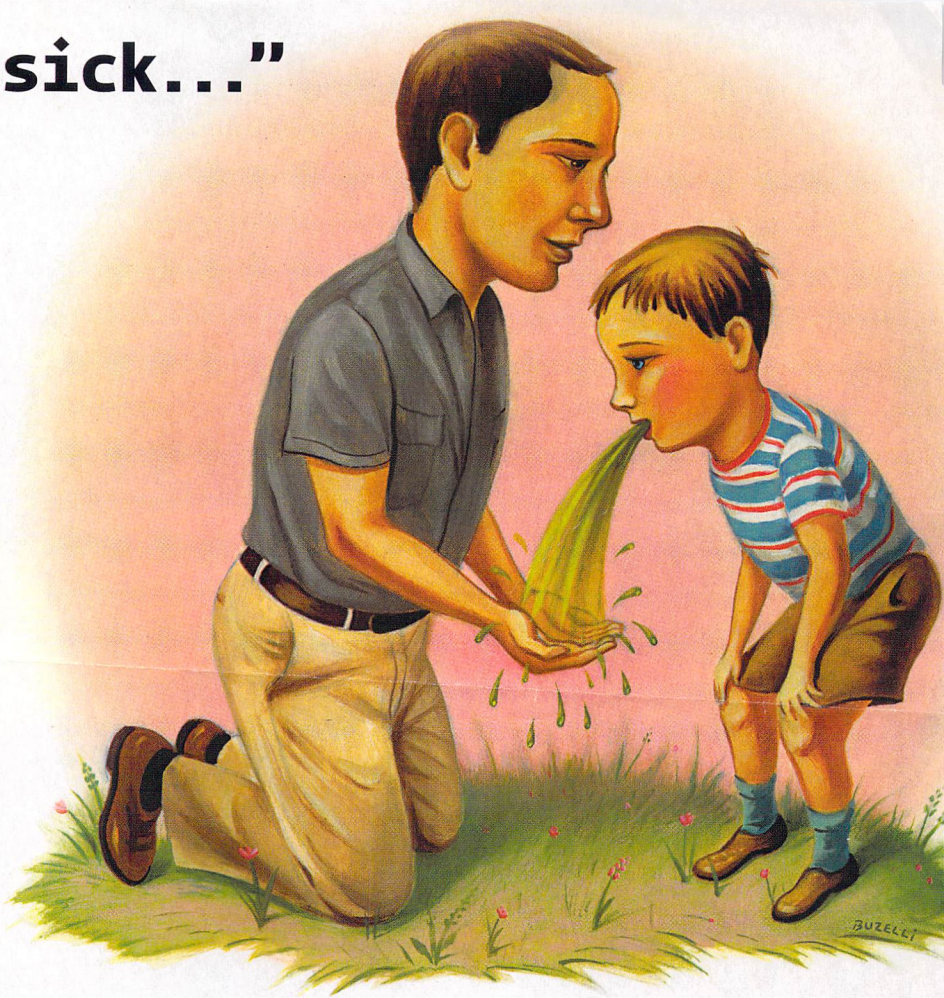
4 Corollary: Your son learns how to treat women from the way you treat your wife. And yes, that's true even if you divorce her.

5 At some point, your kid will desperately want some stupid thing that all his friends have, and you'll be loath to give in, to teach him a lesson. But if it's just a bauble, not a big principle, go ahead and give in. If you want him to be flexible with what you want, you need to demonstrate the same flexibility with him.

6 Exception: when he whines. Appropriate responses are feigning deafness or incomprehension, reacting with hysterical laughter, chattering in a foreign language, or simply leaving the room. Just don't cave, which is like coughing up money for the hostages.

7 You'll catch vomit in your hands and not think twice about it. If it came from your little darling, how bad can it be?

8 You will enjoy a show called *Bunnytown*. The reason: All that "important" stuff you did before kids—playing 18 holes of golf, reading the Sunday paper, joining fantasy sports leagues—is a waste of time compared with the precious span you have with your kids, including many, many hours of *Bunnytown*.



9 Your son's music is terrible? Your daughter's hair is too pink or missing entirely? Don't belabor it. If you keep the ratio of praise to criticism at five to one, you'll still have an audience when you deliver the "one."

10 It's important to use the word "surprise" with caution. Saying, "I have a surprise" to a toddler is like saying "We have beer and loose women" to sailors on shore leave. So that's your leverage: Always have a "surprise" in mind to distract him when he's about to go all Linda Blair on you.

11 When accidents happen, you and your wife will instantly adopt two opposite roles. One of you will be calm and rational, and the other will freak out. Try to be the calm one as often as possible.

12 Kids? Chores? Yeah, right. Life isn't Tom Sawyer and the picket fence anymore. But look at it this way: If they don't do chores, you will have failed at two of the primary tasks of parenthood—teaching your children not only to work but also to find joy in that work (no matter what it is).

13 Ninety percent of the job is keeping your children from accidentally killing themselves. Another 5 percent is making them feel comfortable taking risks, and the final 5 comes with teaching them how to decide which risks are the right ones to take. (The ones they prepare for.)

14 To paraphrase the writer Clarence Budington Kelland, you're not supposed to tell your children what to do. You're supposed to let them watch you do it.