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600 Words

Hero Dad: Going Solo

It's a Friday night in Boston. I have just picked up my one-year old son and his three-year old sister, and all their gear. I am patrolling the blocks of Newbury Street and Commonwealth Avenue around my apartment looking for a parking space. They are hard to come by. The kids are grumpy and hungry. I finally locate a spot several blocks from my apartment. I park the car and load the kids into a double stroller, their bags on top, and start pushing. I'm sweating profusely, driven by adrenaline, trying to make this all right for the kids. I finally reach my building. I unload the kids and get them through the locked door and into the lobby. I tell my daughter to hold her brother's hand while I go back outside the door to fetch their stuff. I collapse the stroller and lug it down the stairs, with the bags slung over my back, into the lobby. I corral the kids and we all squeeze into an impossibly small elevator, taking it to the top floor. Out of the elevator, the kids run ahead down the hall. They know where to go by now. I catch up and open the door to my apartment. Then up a final flight of stairs inside the apartment. Home. Time to make dinner.

I was a solo dad for the first time over a decade ago. Mine was a rude awakening caused by divorce with two babies. But the challenge of facing toddlers solo is universal for any dad, even if mommy is just gone for a girls' weekend.

“Face your fear and it will disappear,” says Philip Lerman, producer of “America’s Most Wanted” and author of Dadditude. “Dads are socialized to be afraid of babies. No man has held a baby for thirty seconds that some woman didn’t come up and say you aren’t supporting the head properly. If you can change a flat tire you can change a diaper. The lug nuts on a diaper are not nearly as tight as they are on a car.”

“Dads are more fun than moms,” Lerman contends. “Women chide us for being childish, but our children love it. Our natural ability to be idiots, when you give in to it, is your greatest tool as a father. We lose touch with the ability as men to not be in control. The gift of children is to let go of all that.”

“Sometimes it’s okay to lose an argument to a three year old,” according to Lerman. “Fathers think they have to be consistent and mothers think they have to pick their battles. It’s okay to be consistent, just not all the time. If your child is crying it doesn’t mean you can never give in. ”

“Be here, now. You’ve smoked enough, drank enough, everything’d enough,” Lerman points out. “Enjoy being at home making dinner for your child. There’s a great peace that comes from being in the moment. Kids only know right now. Holding your child touches that lizard part of the brain that controls bliss.”

“Nobody has parenting skills, mothers just pretend they know what they are doing. You have exactly the same skills as every mother. Struggling dads wish they knew the

rules, but there are none. We all just take our best shot. Just memorize your ointments!” advises Lerman. “An itch because of chaffing, that’s Balmex. But if it’s dry skin, that’s lotion. Mosquito bite? That’s Cortaid. Once you know your ointments you can sound like an expert too.”