

**FIGURING FATHERHOOD**  
BY EHSANUR RAZA RONNY



# The right kind of child labour



Fatherhood isn't easy. It is why cat-dads and dog-fathers are never around for the litter. They are busy painting the lampposts of the town a light shade of yellow. They may appear for meal time but never when the pups and kittens need their bottoms wiped. Lions and grizzly bears are the worst. They are so afraid of fatherhood duties, they often kill and eat the cubs.

We humans are a little better and smarter because we can operate the toilet flush most of the times. We don't eat our children. Most of us fathers have learned to consider our



children more than a tool to reach into small places. They make supposedly cheap assistants. But first you need to get around the challenge that children are often lazy or selfish.

## TICK THEIR INTEREST

My son would rather cycle outside for hours than do actual physical work. So the trick is to make him feel like the work is super interesting, maybe forbidden even. Last year, in my usual sense of machismo, I embarked on a house remodelling project. My son and I painted the house. Yes I know this is Bangladesh and labour is cheap so why not hire painters? Because we both figured in the end

we would emerge victorious as manly men.

But first I needed to get him to consider it more fun than Cartoon Network. The paint and repair work started in front of him with me acting very excited which I actually was. He soon enough asked to join. I refused. A few more times and he was literally dying to paint the walls. In fact he was lying on the floor in front of the buckets pretending to have died. So I handed him a brush. And we made glorious messes.

During one bedroom wall session, he jumped over the bed and landed



feet first into a two litre ice cream container full of beautifully mixed lime green paint. The paint went flying in all directions, some landing on the bed which in our father-son brilliance, we forgot to cover completely with newspaper. I got mad. Then instantly started laughing. Then got worried that the wife will probably not find it as funny. What a roller coaster of emotions. And that's what working with a 3-6 year old is like. I made sure to take some pictures of him in his sad state so I can embarrass him in his teens. I assume that's one of the ways dads bond with grown up children.

## LEARNING FROM SCREW-UPS

I try to bring my son into everything I do, encouraging him to do physical labour for a sense of achievement. Once we put up wall shelves for my model cars. My son helped me mark the positions and hold the shelves in place while I drilled and put in the screws. Then we found one shelf was a little skewed because neither of us really bothered to use the levelling app on the phone. Apparently holding the phone against the wall and drawing lines around it does not work. So we started again. He learned that mistakes will happen and you work till you fix it. And mistakes are guaranteed when you start off over-confident after having watched one YouTube tutorial.

Maybe you don't have the time, skills or awesomeness to make slightly irregular shelves. But doing physical work with your child brings you closer. Regular work for us includes helping me wash the car, the new puppy and any mess we make while painting our model cars. When kids learn to work from a young age, the habit sticks for life. Studies show they become more self-reliant.

Teaching a child how to work isn't child labour; it's the right kind of child labour. But more often than not, you end up having to repair, clean-up and repurchase more than you would have otherwise. You may even end up tearing out your hair in exasperation. But would you have as much fun saving all that time, money and hair? I think not.

*The column comes back from now with DIY projects that you can do with your little one.*

**Photo: Sadia Islam**

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... and remember :  
"Healthy **eating** + less **stress** + adequate **sleep** + right **workout** = keeps a **healthier you**."



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