

## At Home Dad

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Several weeks ago, my employer “reorganized” me out of a job. After a few days, ok more than a few days, of bitter anger, I came to a grand realization. I would, at least for a little while, be home with my daughters all day. It is summertime, the rain is finally ending, and I would be home to revel in the joys of being a Dad! I had no idea what sort of adventure I was in for. Because while I always considered myself a pretty “Hip Dad,” I was now going to be immersed in the day-to-day happenings of two little girls. Mom would pick up more hours at her job, day-care was suspended, and Dad would begin a journey into the delicately balanced world of what I call “direct-parenting.”

Until now, I was a master of “indirect-parenting.” In the morning I would peek in on my little sleeping angels, whisper a soft “goodbye,” and take off. When I returned home, they would run up to greet me shouting “Daddy!” Ahhhh kids. In direct-parenting, you do not enjoy the pre-morning and the welcome-home parts of the day. The angels that so recently longed to hear every detail of my day, now do not care that I was up super-late working on an article about who-remembers-what. They want to watch cartoons about seafaring sponges and a turtle that talks. They want breakfast. They want all sorts of stuff, all of which starts with Daddy emerging from bed.

But it’s not a Saturday. Daddy cannot simply transfer from bed to the sofa, turn on the TV, and slip back into sleepy-land. Today is softball for Daughter #1, and tot-sports for #2. They must be fed and dressed and in the van...in an hour! I tell myself I can do this, and that it will be fun. I’ve got an hour, right. I slowly sit up and open my eyes to a sight that shocks and frightens me. It appears that during the night, Daughter #1 got out of bed and went to a hair salon for Halloween witches. Arrrghhh! What happened to her head? It never looks like that when I come home from work! She looks at me, not realizing my fear, waiting for me to transform the snarly blonde haystack atop her head into...well...I don’t know what. She tells me, “I want a ponytail! No, piggies (pig tails for the hair-unaware)! No, no, *braided* piggies!!!” Calmly, confidently, I suggest a hat. It’s softball; you’ll need your hat, right? Uh, wrong Dad. Besides, unless her team is wearing

those rainbow-colored reggae-style “Jiffy-Pop” hats, you better get brushing. No worries, you’ve got, uh oh, 45min?!? I begin raking through the tangled forest of hair, getting more and more frustrated by the frequent wincing and ouch-ing from my daughter. Is there no better tool for this? It’s like thatching the lawn with a plastic fork. Finally, I can pull the brush from forehead to neck. A quick jamming of the now expanded mop of hair into a “hair-pretty,” a glorified rubber band, and I’m done. I sigh with relief, sweating from the task I have conquered, when I see Daughter #2 standing before me, brush and hair-pretty in hand. Thankfully, #2’s hair is much less thick and snarly. Having survived the jungle of #1’s head, this would be a piece of cake. Or not. You see, #2’s hair is so wispy, it makes the gathering and holding as difficult as the detangling of #1’s. Time is racing past me! The girls need to get dressed. Daddy needs to get dressed! Breakfast! Water-bottles! “Woof-woof.” Didn’t Mommy feed the dog?!?!? Arrrgggghhh!!!

Just then, when it seemed that this time-crunched series of tasks would most certainly send me to the corner of the room, rocking back and forth with my thumb in my mouth, it happened. Daughter #1 came into the room and said, “Good job on the pony-tail Daddy.” Then #2 ran in from her room with her shorts on and shirt stuck on her head. I pulled the shirt over her lopsided pony-tail to reveal a smiling little face. “Thank you Daddy,” she said as she scurried off to get the socks, most likely mismatched, that I laid out for her. I realized that I was home, with my girls. I was spending time with them that I never realized was shooting by faster than the 13min I had left to get ready that morning. I decided that being a little late for softball is a wee bit less tragic than being late for their childhood. So, I gave them each a big hug and joined them for a bowl of fruit-oriented-loopy cereal (hey, it’s got fruit in the name, and look how healthy the bird on the box looks). And while I had no idea what I was in for, I smiled at the prospect of my new job: *At Home Dad*.