

JUST DADS

June 2025

Fatherhood, figured out together



Pops & Tots recipes

Hidden veggie mac 'n' cheese

Smoothie bowls



Four sons, one punchline

with **KANE BROWN**

7 activities

Summer fun for the family

CHRIS PACKHAM

'I DIDN'T REALLY LIKE MYSELF GROWING UP'

ADVERT

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EDITOR'S LETTER

Welcome to the very first issue of JUST DADS!

Whether you're a new dad figuring out the nap schedule, a stepdad embracing an unfamiliar family, or a seasoned father who's seen it all, this magazine is for you.

We want to build a community for dads and hope that our magazine will serve as a go-to source of advice and a space where you can laugh, learn, vent, and grow; where you can hear from other dads who are navigating fatherhood, just like you.

The wonderful Chris Packham joins us as our first Dad of the Issue with his insights into working out fatherhood.

Elsewhere in this issue, there's Pops & Tots, our food spot, with ideas for a hidden veggie mac 'n' cheese. We're also sharing tips on keeping the little ones occupied with your very own homemade board game and breaking down what NOT to do before meeting your baby for the first time.

We're not telling you how to parent – we're reminding you that you're doing better than you think.

We're so glad you're here!

Riya Pereira

Editor



Image: Gabriella D'souza

TEATIME NEWS

By Marian Mackinnon

'SHARK SKIN' PATCHES COULD HELP AIRCRAFT FUEL EFFICIENCY

Patches of material containing microscopic grooves as found on sharks' skin could improve fuel efficiency for commercial and supersonic planes. The patches were applied to the bottom of an experimental supersonic jet developed by Boom Supersonic. The material was developed by MicroTau, an Australian aerospace company. When the grooves are aligned with the direction of airflow, drag is reduced. This can save 4% on fuel consumption depending on conditions and how much material is used. Delta Air Lines and Jetstar Airways are looking to test the material on their passenger jets.

BITE MARKS FOUND ON BONES OF SUSPECTED BRITISH GLADIATOR

By comparing marks on a man's pelvis to those on horse bones fed to zoo lions, scientists have discovered that a gladiator may have existed in Roman Britain. The man's bones were found during an archaeological dig that took place near York between 2004 and 2005. The dig excavated the remains of nearly 100 young men from the 1st-4th century AD who had suffered traumatic injuries. One skeleton was found to have marks across the pelvis, including puncture wounds, which are similar in depth and position to those found in the horse bones chewed on by zoo lions. Researchers suggest the bite is likely to have happened when the man was being dragged away by a large carnivore.

AI ROBOTS TOO SLOW AT HOUSEHOLD CHORES

AI robots are still yet to catch up with human beings when it comes to their speed of completing household tasks. Researchers tested AI-enabled robots in real homes, making them perform chores such as putting plates in the sink, putting shopping away, and placing dirty clothes in the laundry basket. They found that the bots are disappointingly five times slower than a human.

SNAKE MAN HAS LIFE-SAVING BLOOD

Scientists have found a possible universal treatment for snake bites. Snake enthusiast Tim Friede has been bitten over 200 times and developed a hyperimmunity to snake venom. Scientists found antibodies in Tim's blood which have a protective effect against the venom of 13 of the deadliest snake species. Snake bites cause up to 137,000 deaths per year and hundreds of thousands of amputations.



Giants make a shell of an impact at Longleat



Image: Tom Anders/Longleat

GIANT SNAILS TAKE UP RESIDENCE AT LONGLEAT SAFARI PARK

Eight giant magnolia snails (*Bertia cambojiensis*) have been given a home at Longleat Safari Park, Wiltshire. Keeper Samantha Peeke says, "They are beautiful animals and having them at Longleat is wonderful, as we can show our guests how we care for all animals, whatever their size." The critically endangered snails are from a small patch of forest in Vietnam where there are estimated to be 300 remaining in the wild.

DAD CREATES SENSORY JACKET FOR SON

John Rudd, 47, from Walkden, designed a sensory jacket — now branded the Chammo — for his autistic son, Charlie, 13. He started with a design sketched on a scrap of paper and then began the making process. The jacket's material was weighted to reduce hyperactivity and high-vis stripes were added. He also removed the label from the jacket and each pocket contained a sensory fidget toy to help reduce anxiety. Charlie's favourite is the mini keyboard.



Image: MicroTau

Shark skin could be a fin-tastic material for aerodynamics

UNCERTAIN

Q My wife and I have just moved to a new area with our two-and-a-half-year-old son. He attends lots of clubs, but usually I'm the only dad there. How do I make dad friends in a new city?

A Don't try to make new dad friends. Just try to make new friends. Friends are ephemeral things: you can't plan them. They're like nice weather; it comes and goes. It's not really in your control. If you make a friend and they happen to be a dad, so be it. If you make a friend and they're not a dad, then never mind. You've made a nice friend and that's the important thing. There's nothing more boring than two people only being friends because they happen to have children at the same point in human history.

Q I lost my temper for the first time with my 19-month-old daughter. I quickly calmed down and immediately apologised to my wife and daughter but I still feel awful. What should I do?

A First, I'll ask you some questions. Has anything bad actually happened here? And are there any really serious long-term consequences of what happened? You can answer those for yourself. It's fine to lose our tempers sometimes. Of course we're going to feel awful, but it sounds like you did the right thing and apologised. You can't do anything about what's already happened. Losing your temper is a perfectly acceptable thing when you're tired, stressed, and worn out, and parenting isn't going the way you want it to, which it sometimes doesn't.

Q My 14-month-old has been refusing to get into her car seat. Sometimes she crawls into the car seat but won't get buckled. We've tried foods and toys as bribes, but no luck. Any advice?

A Endless amounts of patience would be my first bit of advice! My second bit of advice would be, if possible, give yourself enough time to have that patience. They're not going to remember not getting in that car seat, but they might remember if

UNCLE

By Cassidy Bailey

Got a burning question about being a parent? Meet Dennis, our columnist, who's here to give you his best dadvice on your real-life questions.



Image: Riya Pereira

every day for six months you were really, really angry and cross with them. You could also try to set the expectations before. So, "when we get in the car, you'll get in your seat. Otherwise..." Set the consequence or reward before you get in the situation because, in the situation, you're just a hostage to fortune.

Q My wife is due with our second child soon and, after the first few months, they'll share a bedroom with their two-year-old sibling. I'm worried about how to put them to sleep separately and if they'll wake each other up. Any advice?

A I would cross that bridge when you come to it. For now, I would worry more about your wife and your new child being healthy and coming to a full and healthy term. You'll figure out the bedtime arrangements. Whatever has to happen for you all to get the best night's

sleep, it'll work itself out. Go with the flow, because you can't make a plan now for two children sharing a room in a few months' time. You've got more important things to think about in the present.

Q I'm about to start potty training my son. Any advice on how to make him want to start using the toilet and ditch his potty?

A It sounds like you've decided it's time to potty train. But has your child decided that they're ready for the potty? In my experience, most children at some point between the ages of zero and four will work out how to use a toilet, so try then. It might work, it might not. Obviously offer incentives, and remember to ask if they even want to use the potty. If they don't, they're not ready. Or do what I did and enrol your child in an epic nursery where they helped potty train her for us.

A GRANDDAD'S TALE

By Andrew Spencer

Colin Spencer, 88, on the nerve-wracking experience of bringing up children

We have eight grandchildren. When they were each born, Nanna, my wife, helped the new parents in those initial weeks, sharing her experience having raised four children. When you become a parent, you're presented with this thing that does nothing except yell and make a mess. It's nerve-wracking!

We took them on trips, bought them ice cream, and went hunting for blackberries. We went for family swimming sessions and hosted every Christmas. We made a real effort to be part of their lives.

When I was a child, I was quite mischievous. I used to put cling film over toilets, set fires, and

tap on people's windows. Maybe I should have been punished a little more. My dad was firm but I was lucky — he was always there.

During the war, he was a foreman at a works making steel for Spitfires, so didn't have to fight. He always came home and we spent our childhood in the same house. He was patient, always listened, and made time for us.

I tried to copy his approach in my parenting, but as a dad and a doctor in the Royal Air Force, I had to travel. I spent six months in Gan in the Maldives. In the end, I left the RAF because I didn't want more family disruption.

The secret to being a good parent? Being present and being available as my father was for me.



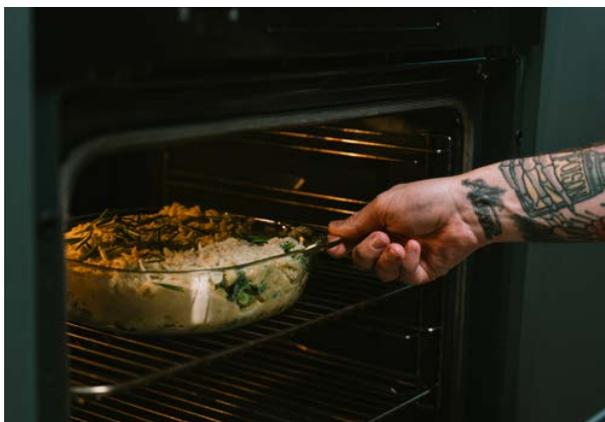
Image: Andrew Spencer

Looking for a way to sneak some greens into mealtime without the dinner-table drama? This creamy, comforting mac 'n' cheese is a family favourite with a clever twist – it's packed with hidden veggies like broccoli and onion that even the pickiest eaters won't spot. It's the ultimate cheesy disguise to help your little ones eat their greens.

Time: 35 mins // Serves: 4

INGREDIENTS

250g macaroni pasta
250g mature cheddar cheese (grated)
250g mozzarella (grated)
500ml milk (or milk alternative)
150g broccoli
½ white onion (finely diced)
50g plain flour
50g unsalted butter or margarine + 1 tsp for frying
Breadcrumbs
2 cloves of garlic (diced) or 1 tbsp of garlic granules
1 tbsp all purpose seasoning
2 tsp dried rosemary or fresh rosemary



Words & Images: Dani Bacon Recipe: Lauryn Wilson

POPS &

HIDDEN VEGGIES MAC 'N' CHEESE

- 1 Heat two medium-sized saucepans of 750ml water on a high heat and add a pinch of salt – one for your macaroni and one is for your broccoli.
- 2 While you wait for the water to boil, peel and chop the onion, finely dice the garlic and chop the broccoli into small pieces.
- 3 Add 1 tsp of butter to a small frying pan on a medium-high heat. Once the butter has melted, add diced onion and chopped garlic and fry until golden-brown.
- 4 Add macaroni pasta to a saucepan and cook for around 10 minutes stirring occasionally. Also add broccoli to the second pan and cook until slightly soft.
- 5 In a larger saucepan, heat 50g of butter on a low heat, gradually introducing the flour until it forms a paste. Add in a dash of milk and stir until you have a white sauce.
- 6 Add half of the cheddar, half of the mozzarella, half of the rosemary and the rest of the spices (if using garlic granules add them now) and stir together.
- 7 Check the macaroni – if it's soft enough for a fork to go through it, it's ready for the next step.
- 8 Pre-heat the oven to 240C .
- 9 Add the cooked macaroni to the white sauce mixture along with the fried onions, garlic, and broccoli and stir together well.
- 10 Pour the mac 'n' cheese into an oven-safe dish.
- 11 On top of the mixture, add the rest of the mozzarella and cheddar, the rosemary, and top it with breadcrumbs.
- 12 Add this to the grill and leave for 10 minutes or until golden brown.
- 13 Serve with an optional side salad or garlic bread. Enjoy your mac 'n' cheese with your tots.



G TOTS

Bright, fruity and packed with goodness, this frozen smoothie bowl is a fun and healthy treat your kids will actually get excited about - whether it's for breakfast or dessert. Made with frozen banana, strawberries and blueberries, and topped with colourful extras, it's a delicious way to sneak in some fruit while keeping things cool and playful.

Time: 10 mins // Serves: 1

INGREDIENTS

1 frozen peeled banana
150g frozen strawberries
50g frozen blueberries
4 tbsp milk (or milk alternative)
½ tsp vanilla extract
1 tsp honey

Optional toppings:

Chocolate chips
Granola or rice crispies
Sliced fruits or berries
Fruit and nut mix
Sprinkles



- 1 Add frozen strawberries, blueberries, and chopped banana into a blender. Blend until relatively smooth.
- 2 Add milk, vanilla extract, honey and blend further until smooth.
- 3 Pour the mixture into a bowl, add your chosen toppings. Serve and enjoy!



FROZEN FRUIT SMOOTHIE BOWL





By Riya Pereira

Did you always want to be a father?

I think for me, it was always going to be a considered process – do I have enough money or a house to live in? Am I in a stable relationship and suitable environment to raise my child?

As an undiagnosed autistic person, I didn't really like myself growing up and decided that to have children you need to like yourself first.

Because like it or not, you're going to be producing a partial replica of yourself.

When I met Jo (Megan's mother), I didn't even know she had a child. When she broke the news, I thought, oh, blimey, it's a massive decision to be made here.

How did you process becoming a stepfather?

It was never one of those things that I was going to take lightly, so you could say that I did quite a bit of soul searching.

Jo and I had a long period of frank conversations about responsible parenting. While I didn't meet Megan straight away, Jo spoke about her a lot and we were always looking at her pictures. She's got...the best documented childhood of all time. I think because Megan wasn't mine biologically, I found it easier to develop a relationship with her.

'She's 30 now and our relationship is indestructible'

This is going to sound harsh, but it really only takes one sperm to be a father. It takes a lot more to be a lifetime parent and friend to your child.

What are some things that the two of you bonded over?

When she was younger, she didn't sleep very well, and I hardly slept at all. We would then stay up together reading books and watching VHSs of all sorts of things. I also wanted to introduce her to a great diversity of life so she could find her own interests. I bought her all sorts of different music, different films, different books, not just the stuff that I liked.

She enjoys taking photos, which was something I introduced her to when she was very young. I don't like the word 'holidays' but we took adventures together.

We went to India once and slept on the roof of a train all the way from Delhi into the body of India. Woke up in the morning in the middle of a desert somewhere. We never booked any fancy hotels and we made up the itinerary as went. We met when she was just 18 months. She's 30 now and our relationship is indestructible.

Have you ever had an argument with Megan and how did you solve it?

I can't remember the last time we fell out – it would have been 10-15 years ago. I had a riotous youth, but she was never as badly behaved as I was. We didn't have any of the

'IT ONLY TAKES SPERM TO BE A FATHER

...but parenting is a lifetime's work' says TV presenter and naturalist Chris Packham, 64, about his decision to not become a biological father, the strong bond he shares with his stepdaughter Megan McCubbin, and his tips for keeping family dynamics healthy



conflicts that I had with my parents.

But we did have a 15-minute rule. We could be in a bad mood with each other for 15 minutes maximum and then we'd have to come back and talk it out. And do you know what? It worked.

How do you maintain your family relationships when separated?

Jo and I split up when Megan was young. Even though we may have fallen out of love with one another, what held us together was our love for Megan. I do think that we did everything we could to stay focused on making sure that whatever happened to us, it worked for her. We didn't always agree but there was always dialogue and her best interests were always at the core of those discussions.

“KEEP TALKING TO YOUR KIDS”

Keep the dialogue open on parenting. You don't have to agree, but if you're talking you'll come to a resolution. The point is to remember that the focus is on your children – they have a dependency which isn't just financial or temporary. You're there to nurture and protect them.

The other thing is, it's just better if the relationship between the two families is positive.

My partner, Charlotte, knew that Megan was never going to leave my life and that meant she'd have to have a relationship with Jo, Megan's mother.

I know that some families struggle with maintaining those relationships but ultimately you need to focus on what's best for your child.

OUT & ABOUT

By Buraera Ahsen Idris

We're on the hunt for the UK's best dadventures, and this time, it's all about Nottinghamshire. Relax, dads – we've got you. The summer holidays are around the corner, so we've rounded up the best things to do and places to visit for family fun with your children.

Break Escape escape rooms

This escape room experience in Nottingham city centre lets you explore the world of wizards, a magical chocolate factory, and outer space. It's the perfect place to let imaginations run wild.

Children: £17 Adults: £24 Under 4s go free

breakescape.co.uk/nottingham

Wheelgate Park theme park

If you want the quintessential summer experience, head to Wheelgate Park. It's got a theme park, a water park, an animal adventure zone, cafés, and the biggest outdoor splash park in the UK – all in one place.

Ticket prices vary

wheelgatepark.com

Treasure trails

Discover hidden gems in Nottingham's city centre and Arboretum. The treasure hunt-themed walking trail is approximately 2.2 miles long and self-guided, so you can go at your own pace. It's best for kids age 6 and up.

£9.99 per trail booklet (ideal for 4-5 people)

treasuretrails.co.uk/products/what-to-do-nottingham-notts

Tenpin bowling

If you love bowling, arcade games, and singing your heart out, it's time to head to Tenpin Nottingham. There's table tennis, pool tables, arcade games, laser tag, and even karaoke – a total classic!

Children: £6.75 Adults: £8.25

tenpin.co.uk/our-locations/nottingham

Green's Mill and Science Centre

Looking for ways to make learning fun? Tour the historic 19th-century windmill, experiment like a scientist at the learning centre, and enjoy the views of the award-winning community garden at Green's Mill.

Entry is free

greensmill.org.uk

Colwick Country Park

Found just outside Nottingham city centre, Colwick Country Park is an all-rounder! There's geocaching, birdwatching, wildlife photography, horse riding, nature walks, and a playground to burn off energy.

Entry is free

nottinghamcity.gov.uk/colwickcp

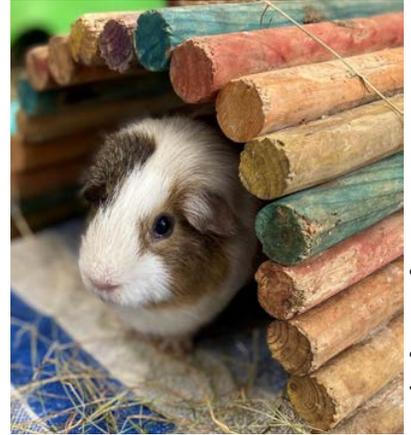


Image: Stonebridge City Farm

Stonebridge City Farm

Summer at Stonebridge City Farm means live music workshops, hanging basket and sunflower planting sessions, woodland trails, plus lots of cute farmyard animals including guinea pigs, goats, rabbits, and cows.

Entry is free

stonebridgecityfarm.com/events-calendar



Words and images: Phebe Leonard

BORED KIDS? Make a board game

Beat summer holiday boredom and create a board game to play with your kids. Grab a few supplies from around the house and get to work making a game like no other. It's perfect for a rainy day too.

Things you'll need

A sheet of A3 card

Ruler

Pencil

Pen

Coloured pencils

Bottle caps to use as game pieces, one for each player

Die (if you don't have one, you could use a random number generator online and put numbers from 1-6)

Instructions

1 Using your pencil and ruler, draw a grid of eight squares wide and five squares long, 2 x 2 inches each.

2 Write 'Start!' on the bottom left corner square.

3 On the final square in the top right corner, draw 16 smaller squares that are 0.5 x 0.5 inches. Colour in alternating squares black to make a chequered flag.

4 Use your pen to number each square on your board.

5 Write directions on some of the squares, things like 'move back one space', 'roll again', and 'move forward two spaces'.

6 With your coloured pencils, colour in the squares of the grid.

How to play

Each player places a bottle cap on the start square. Choose which player will go first. Player one rolls the die and moves forward the number of spaces shown. If they land on a space with a direction on it, complete the direction. If they land on a space with no directions, it's Player two's turn. Continue alternating turns until a player reaches the final square and wins.

Mix it up

If you want to make the game more interesting, try these directions.

Count to 10 in twos

Say four words that rhyme with each other

Turn around three times

Do a star jump

Name five animals starting with the same letter

FIRST-TIME FATHERS

By Marian Mackinnon

In our regular first-time-fathers feature Joe Christmas talks about how becoming a parent for the first time was not what he imagined

Joe Christmas became a father to Alf on February 28 2025 and in the summer of 2025, he's still coming to terms with it. "I imagined it might be a big rush, but it's not been like that. It's been a subtle, quiet, joyful, wholesome experience," says Joe, 34. He learned news of his partner Martha's pregnancy when he was sat on the loo. "Martha stormed in and she said, 'Oh, my God, I'm pregnant!'", which he says he found surreal.

Joe's the kind of guy who takes things as they come. "During the pregnancy, I found it really hard to imagine being a dad." He read books on fatherhood and a baby development week-by-week guide that helped him recognise pregnancy milestones. Joe and Martha also attended antenatal classes.

"I was very curious about the number of nappies that we'd have to do and the number of hours of sleep that we'd get because I'm a bit of a sleep diva. When we were told that we'd be doing 12 nappies a day in the first couple of weeks, I was aghast. But it was good to be prepared for that," he says. Martha went into labour the day before her due date. "I didn't get properly anxious until Martha was on the bed at 3am on all fours and said she thought the baby was coming. Then I shat myself! I thought, 'we have got to get to hospital, I don't want to deliver the baby!'"

Once at the hospital, Joe became calmer. "I thought that I would be a nervous wreck, but I surprised myself because I went into practical mode," says Joe. He dutifully passed a drink and Haribo to Martha during labour. The antenatal classes had prepared him for "feeling quite useless in the moment" but with reassurance that just being there was helpful.

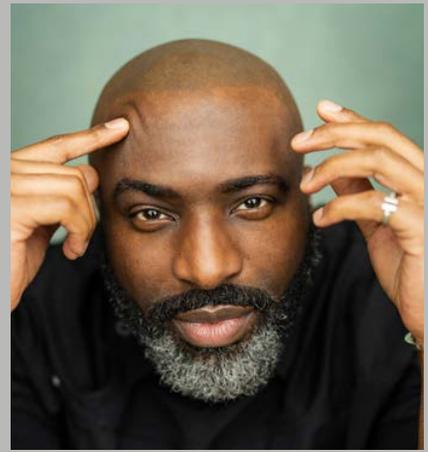
When Joe held Alfred for the first time, "it was a strange, quiet moment, like when a storm has

passed. I didn't get the rush of immense love that people talk about. But I did have a quiet awe. We were looking at each other, almost like the way that you might look at those weird fish that you see in the deep sea."

In advising dads-to-be, Joe says, "reach out for help from friends and family, and accept it".

Of the labour-saving devices that have really helped, Joe recommends the nappy twist-and-click bin that bags and seals the nappies to stop them smelling, and a bouncer chair which keeps Alf entertained long enough for Joe to make a cup of tea. So how is the self-proclaimed sleep diva coping with an average of five hours per night? Joe says he found an extra gear. "I think it must be the oxytocin – the love drug. You've got a higher purpose and that helps you crack on."

'It's been a subtle, quiet, joyful, wholesome experience'



A STAND-UP DAD

By Pheobe Leonard

Comedian Kane Brown, 50, on being an affectionate parent and passing on the comedy gene.

Do you bring your kids when travelling for work?

My oldest is 28 and then I have twins who are 25, so it doesn't affect them. But my youngest is eight, so it affects him more. I did used to bring him along sometimes, but I don't anymore. It's often late nights and working in venues that sell alcohol. So I don't like to bring him with me.

What's your favourite activity to do with your kids?

I love something simple like going on a bike ride and bringing a picnic. It's the best thing when the weather is good and everyone's riding together. And we love sitting down and eating food. That's my go-to, it's where I get my pleasure.

Do you parent differently to how your dad did?

Yes, very much. My dad wasn't very emotional when I was growing up. There were no hugs, no kisses, no "I'm proud of you". I've made the conscious effort to be the complete opposite, so every time I talk to my kids, I tell them I love them. I give my kids kisses, even though most of them are in their 20s.

How has your experience of parenting changed?

I had my first three kids quite young. I had my oldest at 22 and the twins at 25, so I had a lot of challenges then that I don't have now. I didn't know myself at the time and I wasn't financially secure. We were basically kids ourselves. But life is a lot more stable now, so my youngest has got a new version of me.

Have you passed on your comedy talents?

With my older kids, not as much. I wasn't a fully-fledged comedian when they were younger and I split up with their mum, so they viewed my comedy career from the outside. But my youngest has grown up around it, so he's definitely inherited the comedy gene. He's always trying to make us laugh because he's around me being silly all the time.

Kane Brown will be on tour in October, for more information visit www.livenation.co.uk.



Images: Joe Christmas, Kane Brown

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