GABE SHIREY

SIDE BY SIDE

Activities to do with your kids

30 WAYS TO SPEND TIME TOGETHER, SORTED BY AGE, READY FOR THIS WEEK

Gabe SHIREY

A NOTE FROM GABE

Why I made this

For a long time, I thought time with my kids needed a plan: a trip, an event, something worth putting on the calendar.

What my kids actually remember is smaller. I caddie for my son now, and it's the best round of golf I play all week. I know my daughters' cheer routine well enough to mouth along from the stands. Neither one cost anything except attention.

Children don't need you to entertain them. They need you inside the thing they already love, with your phone somewhere else.

This guide is sorted by age, from kindergarten to the year they leave home. Most of these activities take under an hour, and many cost nothing. You can start one tonight.

Pick one. Let them lead. Pay attention to what they tell you along the way.

TO YOUR FAMILY'S LEGACY,

Gabe SHIREY

Before you start

The activity matters less than how you show up for it. 4 rules make any of these work.

1 Let them lead

You cross into their world. You don't summon them into yours. They pick the rules, the route, and the pace.

2 Skip the lesson

Leave the coaching and the teaching moments at home. Time with no purpose is the purpose.

3 Phone in a drawer

Not face down on the table. Your child can tell the difference.

4 Be bad at it

Children love watching Dad be a beginner. It makes it safer for them to be one too.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

The real conversations rarely happen when you ask for them. They show up 40 minutes into a bike ride or halfway through a stack of pancakes. When one starts, slow down and listen.

AGES 5 TO 10

At home

At this age, they'll say yes to almost anything with you in it. Make it a little ridiculous.

Secret mission

20 MIN | PAPER, ENVELOPE

Write a top-secret mission and seal it: find 3 red things in the yard, a rock shaped like a letter, and something that smells good. Your child is the agent. You're the sidekick who carries the bag.

The game only we know

15 MIN | ANYTHING

Invent a game in the hallway or the backyard. Let them make most of the rules, give it a ridiculous name, and write the rules on an index card. Bring it back next week.

Fort night

1 HOUR | BLANKETS, FLASHLIGHT

Build a fort in the living room, then read a book inside it by flashlight. They're the architect. You're the crew.

Restaurant night

45 MIN | PAPER, MARKERS

They name the restaurant, design the menu, and take your order. Tip well, and ask the chef about the specials.

Teach me the routine

20 MIN | THEIR MUSIC

A dance, a cheer, a magic trick. Whatever they're learning, ask them to teach it to you. Do it badly and let them correct you.

AGES 5 TO 10

Out the door

Get outside, let them set the pace, and expect to get a little dirty.

Be the caddie

THEIR NEXT PRACTICE

Pick the thing they love most and work for them. Carry the bag, hold the water, rebound every shot. No coaching, only help.

Flashlight walk

30 MIN | 2 FLASHLIGHTS

After dark, walk the neighborhood or the backyard and see what's out. They pick the route. Kids talk more in the dark.

Saturday breakfast

45 MIN | SAME SPOT EVERY TIME

Pick a pancake place, a donut shop, or your own kitchen, and make it a standing date. They'll remember the tradition long after they forget the food.

Car wash crew

40 MIN | BUCKETS, A HOSE

Your child is the manager. They assign the jobs, inspect the work, and decide when the car passes. Expect to get sprayed.

Draw each other

10 MIN | PAPER, A TIMER

Set a 2-minute timer and draw each other, then swap and try again with your eyes closed. Hang the worst one on the fridge.

AGES 10 TO 13

Their turf

Pre-teens start pulling toward friends and screens. Meet them there before you ask them to come to you.

Teach me your game

30 MIN | THEIR CONSOLE

Ask them to teach you the game they play most. Lose often and ask questions. You'll learn more about their week than you would at dinner.

The $5 challenge

45 MIN | $5 EACH

Go to a dollar store, split up for 20 minutes, and buy the strangest gift you can find for each other. Do the reveal in the car.

Mystery cook-off

1 HOUR | 1 NEW RECIPE

Pick something neither of you has made, like homemade pasta or dumplings. Split the jobs and eat whatever happens.

Interview night

20 MIN | A PHONE

Record a podcast where you interview each other. They ask the first question. Save the recordings. You'll want them later.

Playlist battle

ANY DRIVE | THE CAR STEREO

Take turns picking songs for the whole drive. Every pick comes with a 1-sentence reason it made the cut.

AGES 10 TO 13

Build something

This is the age to make something real together, something they'll still see a year from now.

Fix it together

1 HOUR | SOMETHING BROKEN

A flat bike tire, a squeaky door, a wobbly chair. Let them hold the tools and run the how-to video while you follow their instructions.

They navigate

1 TO 2 HOURS | BIKES OR THE CAR

Pick a destination, a taco stand or a trailhead. They plan the route and give the directions. You follow, even when it's the long way.

Start from zero

1 HOUR | A NEW SKILL

A climbing gym, a chessboard, a language app. Pick something you're both new at. Watching Dad struggle is good for a kid who's afraid of looking bad.

Breakfast date

30 MIN BEFORE SCHOOL

Once a month, take one child to breakfast before school. Just the two of you, phones in your pockets.

Build a real thing

A WEEKEND AFTERNOON

A birdhouse, a skateboard ramp, a shelf for their room. Let them choose the project and keep the plans when you're done.

AGES 13 TO 18

On their terms

Teenagers say yes to plans that respect their time and their taste. Offer, don't require.

Late-night food run

30 MIN | CAR KEYS

Around 9 p.m., ask if they want a milkshake or tacos. The drive is the point. Teenagers will tell a windshield what they won't tell a face.

Watch their show

1 EPISODE | THEIR PICK

Ask them to start you on the show they're watching. No commentary while it plays. Afterward, ask which character they'd be.

Their concert, their game

AN EVENING | THEIR PICK

They pick the event. You drive and you buy the tickets. Your only rule: no critiquing the music.

Train together

45 MIN | GYM OR A ROUTE

Let them program the workout and set the pace. Some of the best conversations happen between sets.

Parking lot lessons

30 MIN | A LEARNER'S PERMIT

If they have a permit, find an empty lot on a Sunday morning. Stay calm, talk less, and celebrate the first clean parallel park.

AGES 13 TO 18

Bigger projects

Older teens want to be taken seriously. Treat their ideas like you'd treat a pitch from someone you respect.

The $100 portfolio

30 MIN, THEN MONTHLY

Open a custodial account with $100 and let them research and choose what to buy. Check it together once a month and talk about what moved and why.

Back their business

A SATURDAY | THEIR IDEA

Mowing lawns, reselling sneakers, editing videos. Ask sharp questions, become their first customer, and let them run it.

Plan the trip

A FEW EVENINGS | A BUDGET

Give them a budget and a weekend. They pick the destination, the route, and every place you eat. You're the passenger.

Serve together

2 TO 3 HOURS | THEIR CAUSE

Sign up for a volunteer shift at something they care about and work it side by side.

Teach me something

30 MIN | THEIR SKILL

Video editing, a new app, a skateboard trick. Let them be the expert in the room, and ask a lot of questions.

When you have 15 minutes

Short counts. A small window that shows up every day tells a child they're on the schedule, not squeezed in around it.

- [ ] Rebound in the driveway while they shoot
- [ ] Kitchen dance party, 1 song each
- [ ] A card game at the table: Uno, Spit, or gin rummy
- [ ] Walk the dog together with no destination
- [ ] Sit on the floor while they play and ask what's happening
- [ ] Read the same chapter as your teenager, then compare notes
- [ ] Pull up old photos and ask what they remember
- [ ] Tell a story together, 1 sentence each

MAKE IT A HABIT

Pick 1 of these per child and run it every day for 2 weeks. Track it with a simple yes or no. If you miss a day, don't make it up. Just run tomorrow.

KEEP THIS ONE

Pick one this week

SCREENSHOT THIS PAGE AND KEEP IT ON YOUR PHONE.

Ages 5 to 10

- ☐ Secret mission
- ☐ The game only we know
- ☐ Fort night
- ☐ Restaurant night
- ☐ Teach me the routine
- ☐ Be the caddie
- ☐ Flashlight walk
- ☐ Saturday breakfast
- ☐ Car wash crew
- ☐ Draw each other

Ages 10 to 13

- ☐ Teach me your game
- ☐ The $5 challenge
- ☐ Mystery cook-off
- ☐ Interview night
- ☐ Playlist battle
- ☐ Fix it together
- ☐ They navigate
- ☐ Start from zero
- ☐ Breakfast date
- ☐ Build a real thing

Ages 13 to 18

- ☐ Late-night food run
- ☐ Watch their show
- ☐ Their concert, their game
- ☐ Train together
- ☐ Parking lot lessons
- ☐ The $100 portfolio
- ☐ Back their business
- ☐ Plan the trip
- ☐ Serve together
- ☐ Teach me something

The 4 rules: let them lead, skip the lesson, phone in a drawer, and be bad at it.

The thinking behind these activities is in my book.

THE BOOK

THE DRIVEN DAD CODE

THE UNTAUGHT PLAYBOOK FOR HIGH-PERFORMING FATHERS TO BUILD REAL CONNECTION AT HOME

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