

The 11 Life Lessons It Turns Out I've Taught My Six Kids

On my 46th birthday recently, my (mostly adult) kids wrote out a list of lessons I'd taught each of them in their lives so far. Each wrote their own list, and my wife Eva sweetly put them together in a notebook.

As I read through them, I felt like crying. It's so incredibly touching that they appreciate what I've been trying to pass on to them, things I've been learning and want them to understand.

As a father, there are few things more meaningful than to see how you've helped your kids through your example and talks over the years. We have a mixed family of 6 kids, aging from 13 years old to 26 years, and all of them are wonderful human beings.

It turns out, there were some lessons that all or most of the kids put on their list, which I'm going to share with you here. These lessons they had in common made me wonder if these were the more powerful lessons, or if they were simply the ones I talked about the most. ☐

So here they are, roughly ordered in how frequently they showed up on my kids' lists:

1. **Don't be afraid to make mistakes, and it's okay to fail.** This was tied (with the next one) as the most common lesson on their lists — it made all their lists, I think. I really love that this lesson hit home with them.
2. **Have empathy & try to see things from others' perspectives.** This was the other lesson on all their lists, and again, it's beautiful that they all took this to heart. I've tried to show them this through my actions, though of course I'm not at all perfect.
3. **Push out of your comfort zone.** This is another one I've tried to teach by example, from running several marathons and an ultramarathon to doing things that scare me, like speaking on stage or writing books. This lesson is so important to me that
4. **Don't spend more than you have.** This is such a simple idea, but one that is rarely followed. I'm glad my kids are starting out with this mindset — live within your means, save as much as you can.
5. **Appreciate what you have & enjoy where you are right now.** I love this one. It's something that I try to embody, but also remind them when they are thinking about what they don't have. Each time we're stuck in complaint, it's an opportunity to wake up to the beauty that's in front of us.
6. **Sadness is a part of life, and there's nothing wrong with feeling it.** Despite what I said in the previous item, it's OK to feel sadness, pain, grief, frustration, anxiety, anger. In fact, most of us never want to feel those things, so we'll do whatever we can to ignore them or get away from the feelings. Instead, I try to actually feel those things, as an experience. It teaches me about struggle — if we're not willing to face our own

struggles, how can we be there for others when they struggle?

7. **Don't give up just because something gets hard.** As new adults, our four oldest kids are facing various struggles in new ways. This is part of growth, of course, but struggles never feel good. My job as dad has been to encourage them not to give up just because it's hard — to keep going, and to use the struggle to grow.
8. **But don't overwork yourself.** That said, I'm not a fan of overwork. I believe the brain doesn't function well if you keep studying or working past the point of exhaustion, so I try to teach them about taking breaks, resting, going outside and moving.
9. **It's okay to be weird in public. Have fun.** I'm not sure why several of them had this on the list — they must have learned to be weird from someone else? OK, in truth, they might have gotten it from my tendency to dance and skip with them while we're out walking around in a city, or to encourage us all to do weird things as a group, no matter what other people might think.
10. **Your reality is a reflection of the narrative you tell yourself.**
11. **Make people laugh. It makes their day brighter.**

I love my kids with all my heart, and it has been a privilege to be their dad. I take 10% of the credit and give the rest to their moms, grandparents, and themselves.

Btw, you can read Chloe's full list in her blog post.

Also ... from them, I've learned some lessons that are just as important:

- **Kids deserve to be heard, to be listened to, to be respected.** I started out as a dad with the idea that what I say goes, and they just need to listen to me! But over the years, I've learned to listen to them, and treat them as I'd want to be treated.
- **Kids have tender hearts that hurt when you aren't kind to them.** As a young dad, my frustrations and insecurities led me to angry bursts of scolding, yelling, spanking. I've grown since then, but more importantly, I've learned to see the tenderness of their hearts, and how it hurts to be yelled at by someone they trust and love so much. I am much more gentle with those hearts these days.
- **I should relax and not take myself so seriously.** Whenever I think too much of myself, my kids humble me. Whenever I get too serious, my kids laugh at me. I love that playful reminder to loosen up.
- **Dads are goofy, dorky, uncool. And that's how we should be.** I sometimes harbor the notion that I can be a "cool" dad. When I try to break out newish slang or reference a meme, my kids will tease me about it. When I break out a joke or pun that I think is hilarious, they'll laugh while rolling my eyes and calling it a "dad joke." So I've learned just to embrace my uncoolness, and be myself with them.
- **All they need is love.** There are lots of things to stress out about as parents, and nowadays we tend to obsess about getting everything right with our kids. But really,

we're stressing about it too much. All the details are just details — there's only one thing that really matters. They want you to love them. And to receive their love. That's all. Feed them, clothe them, shelter them, educate them, sure ... but beyond that, they just want you to love them. Drop everything that gets in the way of that and let it come out as simply and clearly as you can.

Thank you, my loves.