# Fatherhood 101

*by* Steven J. Kolbe

“I don't have to go. If you're not feeling well, I mean,” the father-to-be said.

“No, you should definitely go,” the mother-to-be replied. And then sucking in air and grabbing her side: “You have to learn what to do if the baby's choking.”

“Oh, I know all about that,” he dismissed her.

“Oh yeah? What do you do first?” she asked.

“That's easy. First I put out my cigar.”

She glared. He smiled. She smiled.

“But really, I'm sure there's something useful. Baby CPR, how to check allergies, something…”

When the father-to-be arrived, two minutes late, the instructor had already started talking. “Imagine this: It's been a long day at work, you're exhausted, your wife hands you the baby and then vanishes out the front door, car keys in hand. The baby is crying and nothing will work. Should you or should you not…shake your baby?”

A twenty-something in the front row raised his hand tentatively. “No? You shouldn't shake your baby?”

“That's correct,” the instructor said enthusiastically. “You should never shake your baby. No matter how much it screams.”

*What sort of class am I in?* the father-to-be thought then. *I knew I was a little smarter than the average bear but…*

“Okay, now here's a trickier one. Heisman pose. Should you or should you not hold your baby like a football for comedic effect?”

“No?” the class asked in unison.

“That's correct, and do you know why?” Again the teacher's pet up front raised his hand.

“Because you might drop the baby?”

“Exactly.” Now he moved over to the whiteboard and wrote in big block letters “FOOTBALL” and then crossed it out. “You should just never treat your newborn like a football. That means no passing it *or punting* it. You can hand it off, but only in a gentle, head-supporting

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manner, and only if you have a good eye on your running back." They then proceeded to name off items you shouldn't treat your baby like, which included but was not limited to a Frisbee, a hula hoop, a Christmas-themed nutcracker, and a driver's license.

"Having a baby does not prove that you're 21, so let's stop taking out kids to the bars with us, shall we?"

*Who is doing these things?* the father-to-be wondered. But then a car seat came up on the PowerPoint and so he readied his pen to start taking notes.

"Your car seat," the instructor started and then gave a too-long pause. Some of the men looked at each other in confusion. Others, thinking they'd reached a break, got up and walked into the hall. Finally, those remaining in the room checked their iPhones and waited for the instructor to resume. "…is not a third parent. You should use it for traveling, not for sitting all day in the living room. You should not put it outside on the porch at night so you don't hear the crying. You should not put it on the kitchen table and then take a three-day business trip. I learned that one the hard way."

Just then the father-to-be realized that he was going to make a great father. He knew how to not treat his baby like sports equipment, and he knew the importance of not leaving children strapped in a chair for days on end. Perhaps that's why these classes existed, to reassure you that you knew more than you thought.

"Okay, now for the real meat of the class: Infant First Aid." The instructor then detailed 40,000 ways the world was going to conspire to kill their babies—from brain bleeds and fatal allergic reactions to infants drowning in half an inch of water and electricity exit wounds in tiny feet—and with each section, he told them a handful of stories from the ER and his EMS days. When it was all over an hour and a half later, the instructor asked for any questions. The father-to-be raised his hand tentatively over his head. He didn't even know what he needed to ask. He just knew that he didn't know anything.

"Yes?"

“You mentioned the poison control number, but you didn't give us the, um, other one. For the electrocution people.”

“For an ambulance?” the instructor asked.

The father-to-be nodded.

Then without any sign of a smirk, the instructor replied, “Just dial 9-1-1.”

“Dang it, I knew that one,” the father-to-be muttered to himself.

The room nodded.

“At the end of the day, you have to know in your heart that you're being a good dad. Your little son or daughter isn't going to high five you when you get it right. They're not physically capable.”

The father-to-be wrote hurriedly in his notebook: *Babies cannot high five.* It was not the last stupidly obvious fact he would struggle to commit to memory.

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