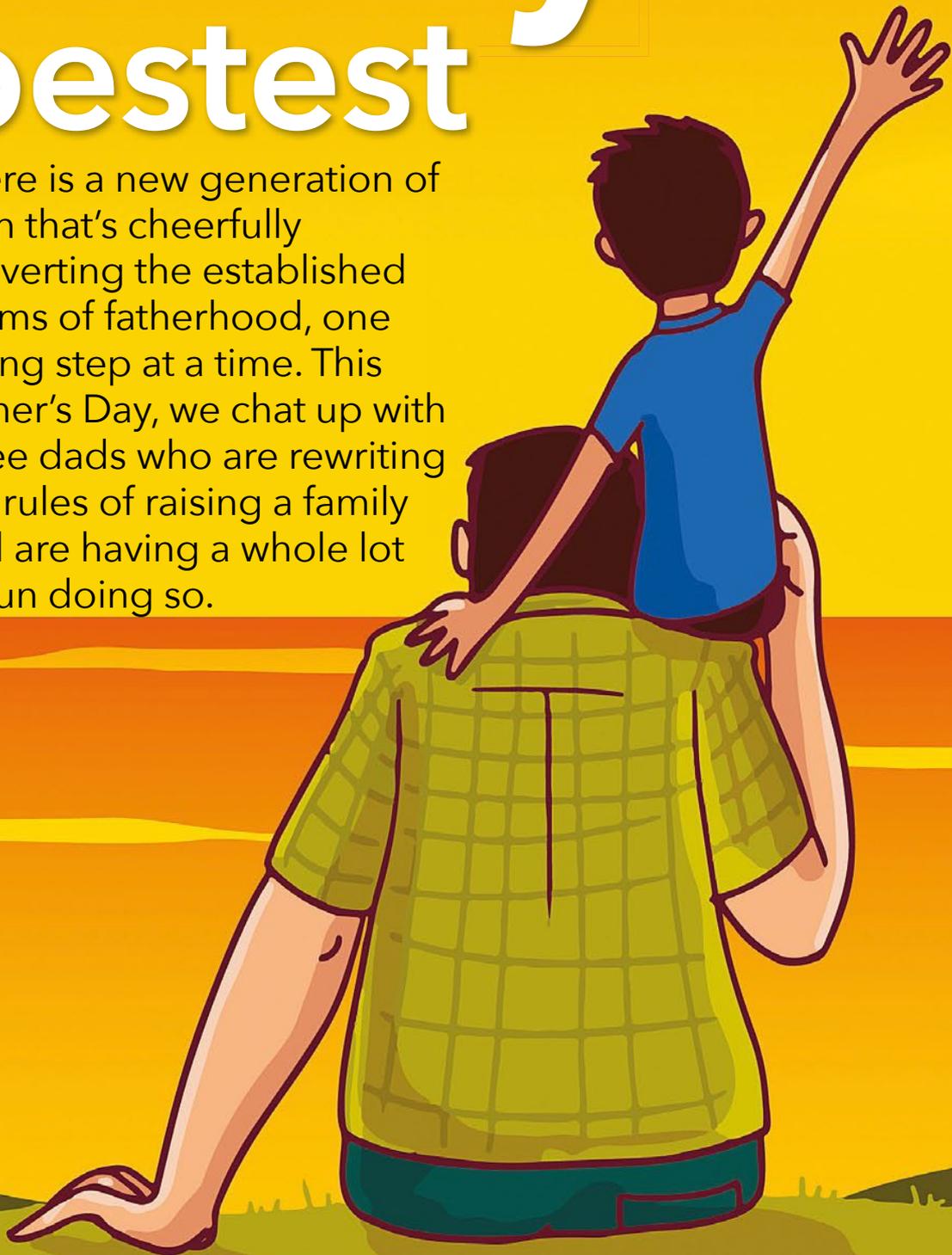


you • dad

# my daddy bestest

There is a new generation of men that's cheerfully subverting the established norms of fatherhood, one loving step at a time. This Father's Day, we chat up with three dads who are rewriting the rules of raising a family and are having a whole lot of fun doing so.



me raise Avi. My workplace has been considerate enough to offer me two months' adoption leave. I have made countless global friends, on social media, who shower their affection on my son and me. On his part, Avi has brought an immeasurable burst of happiness in my life. I cannot get enough of his excited prattle, or the way he dances to every song. He also loves sweets and fruits, and finishes his meal without any fuss.

➔ 'I want to change the unfair bias against special children'

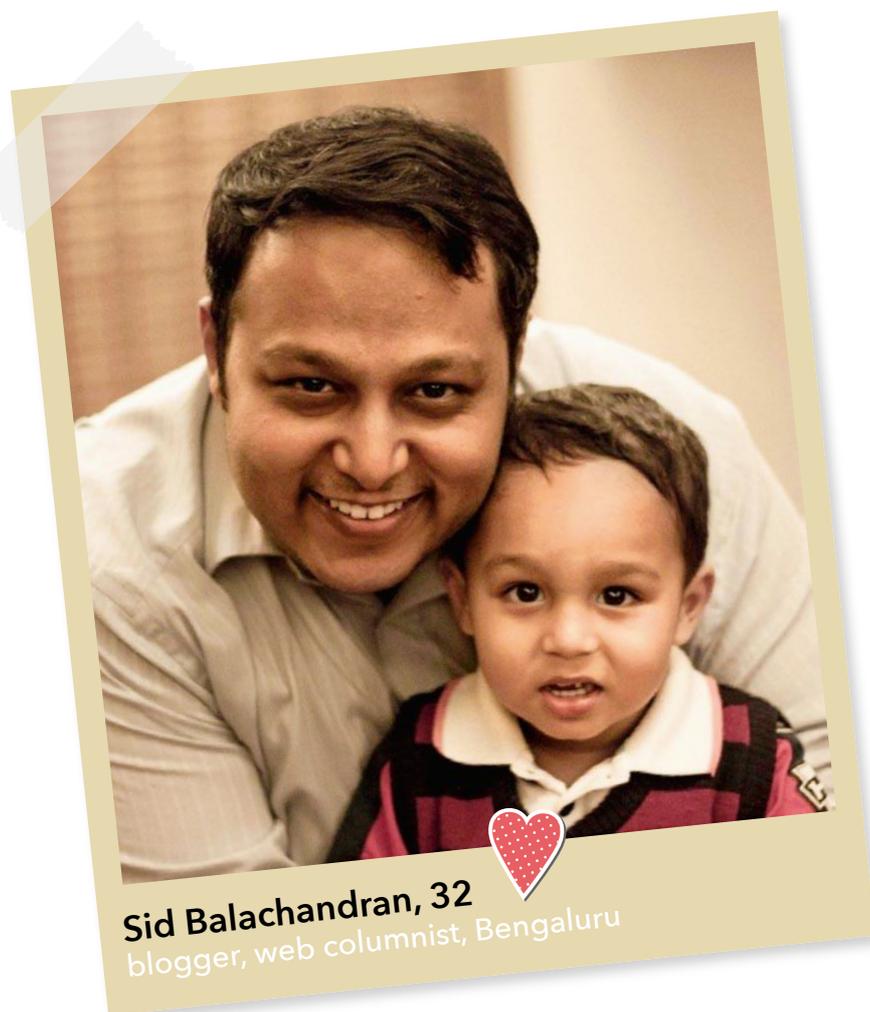
Yes, it hurts me to realize that my son's intellectual powers will

not be able to keep pace with his physical growth some years from now. But he is so bright, curious and cheerful that I also know he will have enough strength to sail through life's ups and downs. I have been taunted for 'enjoying' my adoption leave, for being whimsical with my desire to adopt, and for being media-hungry. Not everyone understands that I have spoken vociferously about Avi's adoption only because I want people to shed the pathetic bias against children with special needs. Avi has taught me to look at the world differently, to smile more, and to demonstrate love uninhibitedly. He has inspired me to take up a new venture: Now, I

have started my work on setting up a chain of vocational centres and day care facilities for kids with special needs.

➔ 'Avi makes my world complete'

People wonder if my son's limitations will have an impact on my eligibility in the 'marriage market'. I am sure it will. Of course, Avi and I will be happy if there is a wonderful woman out there who genuinely wants to be part of our unusual, chatty, fun-filled, music-loving family. If not, this dad and son are more than happy making this journey together, with just each other for company.



STAY-AT-HOME DAD TO RISHI

**FOUR** years ago, I was working as an engineer with an IT firm in London. My wife was working full-time too. We were newly minted parents with a balanced mix of work and fun. Life was good. When our son was a few months old, we decided to relocate to India. Both of us were conscious that if we shift, we would need to make a few changes. If we had continued in London, our son would have probably ended up going to a day care centre, because to be financially sound, both of us would need to work. Our decision to move to India was partly prompted by the fact that we wanted to be closer to our families and wished for our son to know his roots better. We were also very clear that at least one parent should be around our son during the formative years. So

when my wife got a wonderful offer to head the country operations for her company in India, we decided that I'd stay at home. I never quite understood why a woman should have to give up a fab opportunity just because she's a mother. After all, there's no better time than that for a partner to show his support.

➔ **'I have been a stay-at-home dad for 3 years now'**

We moved to India in 2013 and I've been a stay-at-home parent ever since. Though I was a pretty hands-on father even while I was working, I felt incredibly nervous about my role during the first few months. It helped that my wife made sure I eased into the role gradually. Also, my mom and my in-laws were around initially to help us settle down. Once I was on my own, I was frequently on the phone with my wife/mother-in-law/mother to figure out answers to basic parenting questions such as: Why is he not eating? What do I do if he doesn't burp? Am I giving him enough water?

➔ **'I have a hectic routine'**

Things are a little more manageable now, as Rishi has started school, and he is away for a few hours in the morning. My day usually starts a couple of hours before he wakes up and ends a few hours after he goes to sleep. Fortunately my wife's workplace is nearby and hence she doesn't spend a lot of time travelling. In the mornings, she and I share a lot of things—from breakfast to getting his school stuff ready. Of course, there have been days when I've had to do everything alone. Once he leaves, I have a few hours to get my life as well as the house in order. By lunch time my son is back. After his lunch, he takes a nap in the afternoon, which helps me retain

my sanity for a bit. Then I help him finish his homework and let him enjoy his playtime. When my wife returns from work, we ensure we have some 'family time' where we put away all technology and do something fun. So as you can see, most of my day revolves around my 4-year-old son.

➔ **'I almost feel ostracized by both the sexes'**

During my initial days as an SAHD, my interactions with other people left me feeling miserable. I've had fathers avoid me because I don't have a 'socially acceptable' answer for 'What do you do?', and I've had mothers look at me suspiciously because I've been the only man at the playground or at school. Isn't it strange that we rarely refer to full-time moms as stay-at-home moms? Maybe because we've been conditioned to think that it's acceptable for a woman to stay at home taking care of the kids, whereas when a man does it, there are titles involved. Truth is, gender hasn't got much to do with the style of parenting—it's usually the result of a number of factors such as upbringing, personality, etc. Today, I do have an edge in terms of knowing my son's likes, dislikes and responses better than my wife. Of course, I also get treated to the larger share of his tantrums, and that's nothing to brag about!

➔ **'I have evolved a lot as a person'**

Besides a great improvement in my housekeeping skills, being around a kid almost 24x7 can have



an incredibly positive change on your perspectives about things. My people skills have improved—maybe not professionally, as talking about 'potty schedules' and 'lunch boxes' are a far cry from discussing PowerPoint presentations. Plus the happiest change has been a rekindling of my love for writing. I am a professional blogger and web columnist today.

➔ **'This role-reversal has strengthened our bond'**

My wife and me are both happy with the paths we've chosen and also with how our son is growing up. She's my pillar of support and I remain hers. When we took the decision that I would be a SAHD, I didn't do it to bring about change but because it worked best for our family. However, today, 3 years later, I discover that a tiny change in my lifestyle has made me a torchbearer of sorts for parenting beyond gender stereotypes. People are realizing that it's no longer necessary to stick to 'the expected notions', and that we can all work together to make a better society where gender equality is the norm.