



Habits of the nesting male

Yes, there is such an animal, and you'd be surprised what he's planning to do for his growing family **By Clay Allen**

There are such preparations to be made for a coming child! First, there's careful study of the miracle itself, memorization of a library of birth wisdom, and studying the fine art of transition. Then comes the selection of health and care practitioners, and finally the consecration of the nursery.

Yes, one of the precious few rooms in the house must be transformed. It needs cleaning and appointments. There is shipping and receiving to be done, along with intense janitorial services to be carried out house-wide.

This is nesting as it takes place in the modern American family. It's a phenomenon that's much respected and celebrated in our culture. It's joyous and wonderful and love thunders through all of it.

Any book in the newly established pregnancy library warns men to respect the nesting impulse. What these books fail to mention is that men are just as susceptible to the need to nest—we just express it in different ways.

This is how we do it

Male nesting, for example, involves tests of cunning and capability. If the dishwasher is running poorly, the nesting male will decide this is a good time to disassemble the appliance and clean the filter. There will be immense satisfaction gained from cleaning the dishwasher's filter. This may be replaced by extreme frustration as the power-sprayer shield won't screw into the power-sprayer assembly, and this may result in the breaking of the power-sprayer.

A call to a licensed appliance technician may explain what went wrong and even fix the unit, so that the next time the filter must be cleaned, it can be done effectively. This is the ultimate successful male-nesting experience.

Along with appliance repair, roofing, painting, and light carpentry are the new trades of the male nester.



Other skills

The proper male nest is current in its legal and business affairs. Wills and power of attorney are drafted, notarized, and filed. Life insurance is considered and retirement accounts are in order. Debt is closely monitored.

The male nester is a negotiator of service provisions. He will spend hours on hold and request supervisors. Three months of free HBO and Showtime are considered great victories for the nesting male.

One or both?

One of the most primal aspects of male nesting is the shopping trip to the hardware store. From a personal perspective, it was during a recent outing when I realized that I was in the grips of something truly powerful and larger than myself. It dawned on me as I stood in aisle 17 of the hardware store, considering the crowbar:

Four feet of forged steel. Heavy as hell. A true multi-purpose tool, the crowbar can be used for everything from prying out nails to full-scale demolition.

But then, the sledgehammer: Twenty-five pounds of lead, shaped like a bullet, mounted on a handle—this is the destroyer. With this tool, nothing shall stand between

you and your family. With a sledgehammer, you shall pass.

One or both? Which is more likely to do me good in an emergency? Will I ever really need the sledge, or will a crowbar cover my bets? Am I being foolish for not considering the axe and the hatchet? Should blade be entered into the equation?

And then it hit me: *What am I doing?* Certainly every California home should have an earthquake kit, but I've been in this store for over two hours, my cart is sagging with emergency supplies, and I'm twitching.

I nest, therefore I am

Perhaps the male nests in order to feel useful. There are many ingredients to being a good father, and usefulness is on the top of the list. To me, usefulness is self-reliance, and self-reliance is the great sacrifice of the post-modern era. We've

6 steps toward usefulness

- 1. Let panic be your guide:** If the thought of dirty gutters wakes you up at four in the morning, then four in the morning is probably the right time to clean them.
- 2. Get a safe and fill it:** Bare-essential safe contents include \$200 in cash, \$10 in quarters, vital records, insurance papers, discs of photos, and files.
- 3. Be fine with failure:** It doesn't matter that you don't know how to wire a lamp, this is the time to learn. Electricians can be called after the Internet runs out of advice.
- 4. Stock the freezer:** This might not be on the male nester's natural radar, but go ahead and carve out the time to make and freeze some soup.
- 5. Trust your instincts:** The mother's instinct is well-lauded, but—weird and unmentioned as it may be—yours is equally invaluable.
- 6. Leave your partner out of it:** She's grows the baby, you weather-strip the house.



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pounded our ploughshares into microchips. If the technology we rely on every day suddenly stopped working, we'd be a nation of starving middle managers.

So there it is: I want my kid to have a useful man for a father. Not a man with a great phone, not a man who's good at email—a man who's useful in the living world.

So each day is now precious in its offering to examine the workings of simple machinery, to learn how to keep bees, grow carrots, and fix a leaky faucet. With a coming child, there is no time to waste.

So it's in line to pay at Orchard Supply Hardware, I realize I'm buying nothing to supply a real orchard. But this is OK for now. Today a different kind of seed is sprouting.

Should the Big One hit, my little one can sip a specially allocated bottle of water and watch as his father sledgehammer his way through the rubble to the leaking gas valve with an emergency shut-off wrench.

Such are the visions of the nesting male. ●

Clay Allen recently left his position at Pasadena Waldorf School to become a full-time father to his newborn son. He lives in Los Angeles where he teaches ukulele and writes during naptime.