

The Daily Parent

Special Focus: FATHERHOOD

How Dads Are Involved

Your involvement with your child can benefit him in many ways. Here are some practical suggestions for being involved:

- Walk or take your child to school
- Attend your child's school conference
- Read to your child
- Establish rituals around your business trips such as packing together or writing special notes
- Create a connection with your child's school or child care program by visiting and volunteering
- Ask your child specific questions about what he does each day ✨

Much has been written about mothers and raising children, but what about fathers? Men feel the conflict between what it takes to build good relationships with their children, and how to handle the pressures of the workplace as much as women.

Fathers may also experience attitudes that women are better at handling the demands of raising children. For many fathers it is difficult to be involved with their children because of feelings of incompetence or that mothers know best. Your relationship and love for your child is as important for your child's happiness, self-esteem and social and academic success as his relationship with his mother.

One of the biggest challenges today is managing the competing demands of home and work. Many fathers lack workplaces that are family-friendly and supportive to the needs of working parents. Yet, with the steady rise of the number of mothers who work, many fathers are taking on increasing responsibilities for the care and nurturing of their children. It is not easy. However, there are many ways to be involved as a working father that support the needs of your family while answering the demands of your workplace.

New Fathers

The earlier you are involved with your child, the better. Regular and consistent involvement in your child's life plays a key role in his development. Many fathers want to be involved in their baby's care but may not have had much experience with infants and are unsure about what to do. You may feel doubtful and awkward. The best way to overcome these feelings is to learn by doing.

Start by carrying your baby around and talking to her so she learns the sound of your voice. Reading or singing aloud can be a wonderful way to be together. Play, touch and bathe her. As you spend time, you will begin to understand the difference between her cries for food, a new diaper or sleep. When she is fussy, experiment with how to calm her. Don't be afraid to keep trying even if your partner offers to take over.



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All parents have different ways of interacting with their children and you will find what works best for you and your child. This is part of why your relationship is special. ✨

Resources

- ✦ *Working Fathers* by James Levine and Todd Pittinsky
- ✦ *New Expectations* by James Levine and Edward Pitt
- ✦ *Getting Men Involved* by James Levine
- ✦ American Coalition for Fathers and Children
www.acfc.org
- ✦ Families and Work Institute
www.familiesandwork.org
- ✦ The Fatherhood Project
www.fatherhoodproject.org
- ✦ National Center for Fathering
www.fathers.com
- ✦ National Center on Fathers and Families
www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu
- ✦ National Fathers' Network
www.fathersnetwork.org

Getting Involved



Often dads don't know how to connect with their child once past the infant, toddler and preschool ages. The physical demands of these earlier years are gone. Create daily rituals for being involved that work for both you and your child. You might walk him to the bus stop, share jokes, get the mail, do the dishes or play a game together. It is important to connect each day to share and keep your relationship growing. ✦

Opportunities to be with your child can happen during planned and unplanned times. Instead of thinking of your weekend chores as something that you have to get done and will take time away from your child, consider having him involved. Include him in your trips to the hardware store or adding air to the tires of your car. These experiences allow your child to explore, learn, ask questions and to bond with you. What is important is just to spend time together. ✦

Staying Involved and Managing Work

If possible, have your child spend some time with you at your workplace. It can help her understand why you are not always available as she learns where you go and what you do. A chance to visit your workplace can give her a picture of what you do everyday. Having a picture of your child at your workplace also lets her know that she is important.

If you travel, tell your child in simple terms where you are going and why. Young children can help to pack. You may want to mark a calendar with the date of your return and leave a note on her pillow to read from you before she goes to bed the first night. Call your child regularly when you are away from home. Use it as a special way to stay connected. ✦



Non-Custodial Dads

Although it is clearly more difficult to stay involved with your child when you are not living with your child, there are some steps you can take to show your support. Make a plan for your involvement with your child's mother. Try to agree on expectations for your child. Visit your child's program or classroom early to establish a connection with the staff and to familiarize yourself with the place your child spends much of his time. Let the staff know if you have agreed to both

being included in school activities so your child does not have to choose between his mom and dad.

It is also important for fathers who don't live near their child to feel connected. Talk to your child's mother and to the child care program or school and ask to have drawings, work and program announcements sent to you as well. ✦

Connecting To Your Child's School or Child Care Program

It is important for every father to meet his child's teacher or caregiver and stay in touch as needs or questions come up. Visit your child's classroom or program. Even an hour will leave a lasting impression with your child and his classmates. You can also volunteer a skill or interest of yours. If demands at work prevent you from spending time in the classroom, walk your child to the bus stop, or arrange to pickup from child care.

Many parents take the time to check over homework and encourage their child to do well and study hard. Attending conferences and events at your child's school sends a strong message to your child about how important his education is to you. You can show your child that you value the other parts of his day when he is not with you.

Often parents ask the standard "How was your day?" and get a limited answer from their child. Once you have visited and seen where your child spends his day, you will be able to ask more inviting questions such as "What did you build in the block area today?" or "Is Mrs. Brown still helping the class with the science unit on magnets?" Asking questions that require more than a yes or no answer will open up the possibility of real conversation between you and your child.

Most schools, programs and professionals are so used to dealing with mothers that many assume fathers are unavailable or uninterested. Sometimes it may feel to you that they are discouraging the involvement of dads. Often fathers will not attend an event or participate until they are specifically

invited. You can help to change the system. Talk to caregivers, teachers and administrators to direct their attention to areas that are not friendly to fathers. Encourage other dads, support one another, and share ideas with each other. *

Fathers' Involvement in your Child Care Program

Here are some strategies that you can build on to increase fathers' involvement in your child care program:

- Find out what fathers want to do to be involved: it may or may not be the same as your ideas
- Have dads call other dads to encourage involvement
- Be sure to have fathers' names on all your lists and flyers
- Examine your practices, materials and environment to ensure they are father-friendly
- Offer training to your staff on how to effectively work with fathers
- Be persistent. You may have to try several ideas before you find what works best for your program and your families
- Make parent involvement a core value of your program *

Strategies for Child Care Programs

Every child care provider can examine how inviting their program environment is for fathers. Look at your enrollment forms and parent notices to be sure you are as welcoming to fathers as you are to mothers. Have photos or drawings of men on your bulletin board and on the walls. If you have a place for parents to drop in and browse, add a few items that fathers may head for. If your program doesn't have many fathers involved, your efforts will send a message

as to what you would like to achieve in the future.

Reach out to fathers to let them know ways they can be involved in your program. Some may have special skills or hobbies to share. Others may feel more comfortable reading a book to their child before leaving for work in the morning. Offer a variety of opportunities for involvement that allow all parents who work full time to participate. *

For Your Reference

The Daily Parent is published 4 times a year. If you would like to order any of the past issues, visit Child Care Aware's web site at www.childcareaware.org or call 202-393-5501 ext. 115 for more information. *



For More Information

For more information about choosing child care, call the Child Care Resource and Referral Agency (CCR&R) which serves your community. To find the number of the CCR&R in your area, contact Child Care Aware 1.800.424.2246. www.ChildCareAware.org

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✦ **The research is clear: fathers factor significantly in the lives of their children. There is simply no substitute for the love, involvement and commitment of a responsible father.**

—U.S. Department of Health and Human Services