

The Important Role of Dad

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While almost any man can father a child, there is so much more to the important role of being dad in a child's life. Let's look at *who* father is, and why he is so important.

Fathers are central to the emotional well-being of their children; they are are capable caretakers and disciplinarians.

Studies show that if your child's father is affectionate, supportive, and involved, he can contribute greatly to your child's cognitive, language, and social development, as well as academic achievement, a strong inner core resource, sense of well-being, good self-esteem, and authenticity.

How fathers influence our relationships.

Your child's primary relationship with his/her father can affect all of your child's relationships from birth to death, including those with friends, lovers, and spouses. Those early patterns of interaction with father are the very patterns that will be projected forward into all relationships...forever more: not only your child's intrinsic idea of who he/she is as he/she relates to others, but also, the range of what your child considers acceptable and loving.

Girls will look for men who hold the patterns of good old dad, for after all, they know how "to do that." Therefore, if father was kind, loving, and gentle, they will reach for those characteristics in men. Girls will look for, in others, what they have experienced and become familiar with in childhood. Because they've gotten used to those familial and historic behavioral patterns, they think that they can handle them in relationships.

Boys on the other hand, will model themselves after their fathers. They will look for their father's approval in everything they do, and copy those behaviors that they recognize as both successful and familiar. Thus, if dad was abusive, controlling, and dominating, those will be the patterns that their sons will imitate and emulate. However, if father is loving, kind, supportive, and protective, boys will want to be that.

Human beings are social animals and we learn by modeling behavior. In fact, all primates learn how to survive and function successfully in the world through social imitation. Those early patterns of interaction are all children know, and it is those patterns that effect how they feel about themselves, and how they develop. Your child is vulnerable to those early patterns and incorporates those behavioral qualities in his/her repertoire of social exchange.

It is impossible to over-estimate the importance of dad. For example, girls who have good relationships with their fathers [tend to do better in math](#), and boys who have actively involved fathers tend to have better grades and perform better on achievement tests. And well-bonded boys develop securely with a

stable and sustained sense of self. Who we are and who we are to be, we are becoming, and fathers are central to that outcome.

Changing family roles.

Only 20 percent of American households consist of married couples with children.

Filling the gap are family structures of all kinds, with dads stepping up to the plate and taking on a myriad of roles. When they are engaged, fathers can really make a difference. He may be classically married, single, divorced, widowed, gay, straight, adoptive, step-father, a stay-at-home dad, or the primary family provider. What is important is that he is involved.

The emergence of women into the job market has forever changed how society views the traditional roles of fathers and mothers. Feminism and financial power has shifted classic parenting trends, and today approximately 60 percent of women work. Add to that, the shift in marriage, divorce, lowered birth rates, and family structures of all types, and you can see the emergence of a softening and changing of traditional parenting roles. This transition in economics, urbanization, and sexual roles has led to more opened, flexible, and undefined functions for fathers.

A recent study by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), indicates that dads are more engaged in caretaking than ever before. The reasons for this are varied, but they include: mothers working more hours and receiving higher salaries, fathers working less, more psychological consciousness, coping skills, mental illness intervention, self-worth issues, intimacy in marriage, social connection, and better role modeling for children.

Further, children who are well-bonded and loved by involved fathers, tend to have less behavioral problems, and are somewhat inoculated against alcohol and drug abuse. Yet when fathers are less engaged, children are more likely to drop out of school earlier, and to exhibit more problems in behavior and substance abuse. Research indicates that fathers are as important as mothers in their respective roles as caregivers, protectors, financial supporters, and

most importantly, models for social and emotional behavior. In fact, a relatively new structure that has emerged in our culture is the stay-at-home dad. This prototype is growing daily, thanks in part to women's strong financial gain, the recent recession, increase in corporate lay-offs, and men's emerging strong sense of self.

Even when fathers are physically removed from their families, there are ways for them to nurture healthy relationships with their children. For instance, recognizing the important role fathers play in daughters' lives, Angela Patton started a program in which young girls went to visit their fathers in prison for a father-daughter dance. It was a successful program that has spread across the country and helped not only daughters find connection, love, and support from fathers, but also for fathers to feel important in the lives of their daughters.

When fathers are separated from their children after a divorce, [there are many ways they can remain bonded with their children](#). Though divorce is traumatizing to boys and girls alike, strong, consistent, and loving parenting from fathers can help make the transition successful.

Thanks, Dad.

Finally, on this Father's day, it is important to recognize and reward dads for being there, and actively teaching important life skills to children. It is important to their children, and meaningful to dads everywhere when you say "Thank you, job well done." This, after all, is what makes life worth living. This is your true legacy: ensuring the health and well-being of your children, that future generation to be.

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