



Parenting Tips

CHILDREN NEED INVOLVED FATHERS

Children need someone who "is crazy about them." They can thrive in intact families, divorced families, blended families, single-parent families and foster families. It is not the structure of the family that counts; it is the quality of the relationship that parents have with their children that most influences their development.

What is the role of father in the family? Father absence has been associated with youth violence, juvenile crime and teen promiscuity. Divorce, separation, employment demands and incarceration diminish the influence of fathers on their children. Even in two-parent families, fathers may be detached, apathetic or simply too worn out to be active, effective parents.

On the flip side, research supports the importance of father involvement. Fathers who take an active interest in their sons and daughters help them to develop positive self-esteem, a system of moral standards, and intellectual and social competence.

So how can fathers become more involved in their children's lives?

- ☞* Show affection in concrete ways. Say "I love you" often; snuggle and hug more.
- ☞* Strike a balance between work and family. Marriage and family must be a priority if fathers intend to have enduring relationships and positive influence.
- ☞* Be a role model for healthy male-female relationships. Express love openly and frequently. Communicate often and respectfully. Invest time and energy in your relationship with your spouse.
- ☞* Divide household and parenting responsibilities fairly. The daily chores of maintaining a home and raising children can overwhelm one person and lead to parental burnout. Even when dad is the breadwinner, he should help with housecleaning, laundry, doctors' visits and meal preparation.
- ☞* Get involved with your child's education. Review and help with homework. Attend school orientation and participate in parent-teacher conferences. Join the PTA and attend meetings.
- ☞* Play with your children every chance you get. Usually father's play is more active and raucous than mother's play--and children love it.
- ☞* Be a good listener. Show genuine interest when your children share their ideas, feelings and stories. Turn off the TV and put down the newspaper and give them your undivided attention.
- ☞* Volunteer to help with your child's activities. Fathers are needed to coach, teach and lead youth teams and groups. These experiences can enrich the parent-child relationship.
- ☞* Have fun with your family. The greatest motivation for involved fathers is the enjoyment and satisfaction they derive from active involvement with their children. Play board games, take hikes and bike rides, go camping or canoeing, plan family field trips together.
- ☞* Even separated, divorced or estranged fathers can stay involved in their child's life. Support your child financially and keep the lines of communication open with her mother. Provide a consistent, nurturing, emotionally safe environment when your child visits you.

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