

FATHERHOOD

Fathers play an important role in every stage of a child's development. Fathers can help infants become more secure and trusting. They can help toddlers develop independence. Children whose fathers are actively involved in their lives often experience greater success in school.

Some men wonder what makes a "good" father. Here are some suggestions from the National Fatherhood Institute:

Spend time with your children. Children need to know they are a priority in their fathers' lives, and how you spend your time says a lot about what's important to you. If you always seem too busy, they will feel neglected no matter what you say. If you are engaged with an electronic screen, you are not "with" your child. Being truly involved in your child's life often means sacrifice. Spending quality time with your child will pay dividends in the future.

Be affectionate. A child needs to feel loved. Fathers should feel comfortable showing affection to their children. This helps children feel secure.

Read to your children. Reading helps children learn language, social concepts and basic information about the world. More significantly, it provides another opportunity for bonding between parent and child. The television and other electronic screens are not an acceptable substitute for reading together.

Participate in family mealtimes. Family mealtimes provide an excellent opportunity for all family members to reconnect. In our busy lives, it is tempting to let this valuable occasion pass us by. But research tells us that the long-term benefits of enjoying family mealtimes far outweigh the small effort needed. The key element is not a gourmet meal, but it is the time spent together sharing it. Remember, screens need to be off during mealtime.

Be a role model. Children learn more from what parents do than from what they say. Be sure your actions are teaching your children what you want them to learn.

Be a teacher. Help children learn specific skills and topics. Teach them the games and songs you learned as a child. Encourage them to help you with chores and household projects. Volunteer together. Teach them what is important in your life.

Teach right and wrong lovingly. Children need to know what is expected of them and what the consequences are if they do not follow the rules. These concepts should be taught firmly and lovingly, without swearing, screaming, hitting, belittling or other severe methods. Guidance and discipline need to be consistent and fair, and need to be appropriate to the child's developmental ability.

Learn to listen to your children and talk to them. Children are much more apt to communicate when they feel they are being heard. They are also more likely to listen to you if they feel that you listen to them. You may be surprised at how much your child has learned when you take the time to listen.

Respect your family and the child's mother. It is confusing to a child to have the two most important people in his or her life be at odds with each other. Whatever the nature of the relationship between father and mother, when you speak or act negatively within the child's hearing, it undermines his or her security and sense of well-being.

Always be a father. No matter what the child's developmental stage — from infancy through adulthood — a father is always needed.

**For more parenting information,
contact the Family Life Education
Office at 605-322-3660.**

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