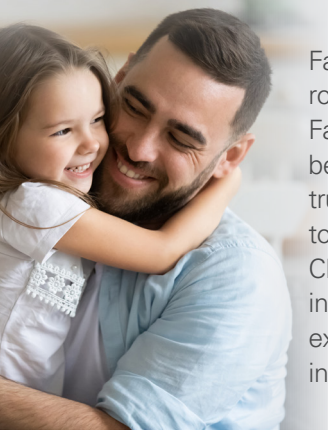
Fatherhood



Fathers play an important role in a child's development. Fathers can help infants become more secure and trusting. They can help toddlers develop independence. Children whose fathers are involved in their lives may 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're engaged with an electronic screen, you're not "with" your child. Being truly involved in your child's life 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. It also provides another opportunity for bonding.

Participate in family mealtimes. Family mealtimes provide an excellent opportunity for all family members to reconnect.

Research tells us that the long-term benefits of enjoying family mealtimes far outweigh the small effort needed. It's not about a gourmet meal, but 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's important in your life.

Teach right and wrong lovingly. Children need to know what's expected of them and what the consequences are if they don't 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.

Listen to your children and talk with them. Children are more apt to communicate when they feel heard. They're also more likely to listen to you if they feel that you listen to them.

Respect your family and the child's mother. It's 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, speaking or acting negatively within the child's hearing 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.

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