



**The Center for
Men's Excellence**
*Psychological Science
with Proven Results*

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The Fatherhood Role

In 2006, the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration of Children, Youth, and Families developed a report titled *The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children*. The authors of that document synthesized a large amount of research related to fathers' involvement with their children, and one key suggestion they made was that the most important roles and behaviors which fathers of young children can enact are:

- Fostering a positive relationship with the child's mother.** You can accomplish this by clearly accentuating the positive and showing affection when interacting with mom
- Spending time with the child.** Children see time spent with them as an indicator of your love for them, so spend time playing and having fun with them every day. Dads should maintain an active, physical playful style and work with their children to do household chores including household chores like washing dishes and cleaning up the house/yard.
- Nurturing the child.** By being responsive to your child's cries, hugging, feeding, and providing for basic care, you are being a nurturing father. The more you respond calmly to misbehavior, the better adjusted your child will be.
- Disciplining appropriately.** Maintain control of your emotions, body language, and your hands when you discipline. And remember that you can't discipline an infant or newborn because they aren't set up to retain the learning. Love, feed, and attend to these very young children and you're doing what s/he needs.
- Serving as a guide to the outside world.** Engage in vigorous, physical play and encourage small steps toward autonomy. Tell kids about your own experiences as a child and in school, teach about participating in a sport that helps with working as part of a team.
- Protecting and providing.** Beyond employment and providing financial resources, help baby-proof the home, attend the child's medical appointments, and monitor the child's social environment for potential issues. Dads should get help for any issues they are experiencing and provide their family with the best version of themselves possible.
- Being a role model.** Promote the "mission" of your family by taking part in and discussing work, religious/spiritual activities, social involvement, and acknowledging to your child and partner when you make mistakes.

So, while mothers and fathers commonly develop their own idiosyncratic ways to play with and care for their children, you can simply review these points to determine what you've done that day in keeping with these behaviors as well as what you plan to do tomorrow. If you can point to clear examples of how you are doing these things each day, then you're well on your way to being a great dad!

"You can't babysit your own kid – that's called, 'fathering.'"



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Why Is Fathers' Involvement So Important?

Beginning as early as during pregnancy and especially within the first year of a child's life, having a highly involved and attuned father has been shown to predict a number of very positive outcomes for their children, the child's mother, and even the father himself.

Child Outcomes:

- Higher IQ, school readiness, social skills, emotional regulation, and empathy
- Increased attachment, emotional security, popularity, independence

Paternal Outcomes:

- Fewer mental health issues
- Increased confidence, parenting satisfaction, relationship satisfaction

Maternal Outcomes:

- Fewer mental health issues
- Increased responsiveness, confidence, and affection

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