

Being a Dad

Whether you are part of a traditional two parent family, a stepfamily, a full-time single parent, or have your children for some of the time, being a dad is your most important job. Parenting can be done by either parent, but children have different experiences with their fathers than with their mothers.

Some things that all dads can do:

- ▶ talk about your feelings so your child learns it's okay for men to talk about feelings
- ▶ spend time with your daughter. It will help her to feel good about being female if she sees you enjoy your time with her and you respect women. You are teaching her how to expect men to treat her when she grows up
- ▶ show your son how to be a man. Ensure he spends time with you and other men. He will learn more from what you do than what you say
 - ▶ enjoy your child's company, get involved, read, play, have fun and do things together
 - ▶ encourage your child to stick at a problem, even if it is hard
- ▶ expect your child to do their best, be proud of them when they do, but also when they try, but fail.

What matters most for your child is how you behave as their dad. Even if you are not a full-time dad your child needs to know that you care about them and will look after them.

Dads in nuclear families

If you're a dad in a nuclear family it's important your relationship with your partner/spouse is working well. Children usually love both parents and it hurts them to see parents fighting or putting each other down.

What you can do:

- ▶ make time to be together as a couple without your child
- ▶ discuss your feelings right from the start. Your first baby will bring many changes to your relationship with your partner. She may feel tired or overwhelmed coping with body changes and new responsibilities. You may feel left out or even jealous
- ▶ talk to your partner about how it is for you as well. Men often feel a great responsibility to look after their family when there is a new baby and the wife's income has suddenly stopped
- ▶ talk about what you each expect of yourself and your partner in looking after your child. Work out how you will share things like getting up at night or bathing and feeding

The most important gift that you can give your child is your love. Get to know them and be involved in their lives.

Single dads

If you are separated from your child's mother, being a dad may be hard. But you are still a parent and it's important your child still feels this.

What you can do:

- ▶ don't let hurt or anger towards your child's mother spoil your relationship with your child. If you can't work something positive out with your ex-partner, get outside help for the sake of your child
- ▶ keep in touch with your child even if it is painful saying goodbye after a visit
- ▶ your child will be hurt if you stay away because you are angry about money arrangements with your ex-partner
- ▶ be positive (or don't say anything) when you talk to your child about their mother

- ▶ talk to your friends and get adult support about your concerns regarding your ex-partner
- ▶ be on time for pick-ups and drop-offs
- ▶ keep in touch with your child often. Phone, write and remember birthdays and special occasions
- ▶ children have the right to be cared for by both parents, even if their parents are not together.

When children are asked what they most want from their fathers they say they want to do things with them, or simply just sit and talk. They also prefer it when their fathers spend less time working so they can be with them.



Dads in stepfamilies

Being a stepfather can be difficult, especially if the children are older when you join the family. You may also have your own children who will still want your time. Children who have been alone with their mother often feel upset or angry about having someone else take some of her time.

Some children do not want anyone else to replace their own dad's place in the family.

What you can do:

- ▶ be prepared to spend time getting to know your partner's child
- ▶ give the child time. You cannot take their dad's place, but you can still build a close relationship with them
- ▶ be friendly but don't crowd them
- ▶ plan household rules with your partner and include the child. The rules you decide upon may be very different from what they are used to
- ▶ let the child have some time on their own with their mother without you around
- ▶ offer to do some things with your stepchild yourself. Choose things they enjoy
- ▶ make sure that you have some special time with your own child, too. It can be tricky making a place in your life for everyone, but it is important to your child that you are involved in their life
- ▶ help your stepchild to stay in contact with their dad if this is what they want.



- ▶ try to sort out relationship problems away from your child
- ▶ treat your partner with respect so that your daughters will grow up knowing that it is good to be a woman and your sons will know how to treat women well.

If you still can't agree, remember children can learn to cope with parents being different. What they can't cope with is parents putting each other down.