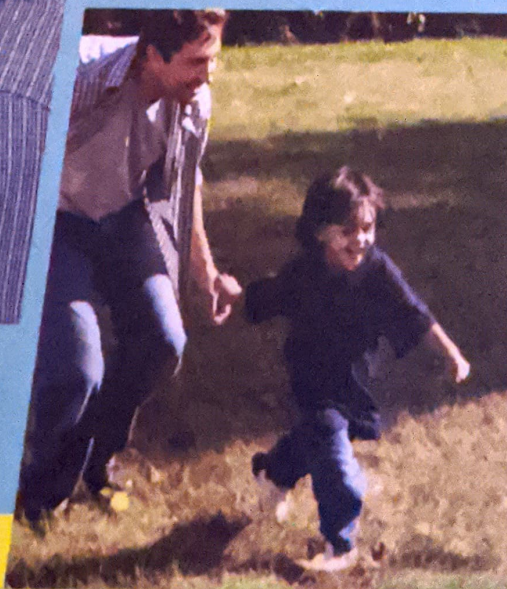


12 Ways to Be the Best Dad You Can Be



Dads matter—a lot.

With you in his or her life, your child can thrive. Without you, it's tough.

A positive relationship brings so many benefits.

A father-child relationship has a unique power. A good one gives a child a better chance to:

- ▶ do well in school
- ▶ avoid risky behaviors (such as drug use and sex)
- ▶ have healthy self-esteem.

When the relationship is weak, the child is at risk.

For example, he or she is more likely to:

- ▶ struggle in school
- ▶ have emotional or behavioral problems
- ▶ have low self-esteem
- ▶ be abused or neglected
- ▶ use alcohol and other drugs.

Children's futures depend on fathers.
Learn ways to be a dependable dad.

12 WAYS TO BE THE BEST DAD YOU CAN BE

1 Spend time with your child—regularly.

Time is the magic ingredient. If you invest time in your child, it has the power to transform his or her life. Your time is just as valuable to a newborn as it is to a high school senior. So, whether you're rocking your child to sleep or rocking along to some music together, be sure to be there for your child, again and again.



2 Don't let distance deter you.

Maybe you live apart from your child. Perhaps the only way to get in touch sometimes is by phone. Don't let that stop you. The more you're in contact, the better. Dads who live under a separate roof can still protect their children with their guidance, their concern and their care.

3 Set a healthy example.

Your son or daughter watches you for cues about how to live. Keep in mind:

- ▶ If you stay physically active, your child will want to, too. (Help your child maintain a healthy weight.)
- ▶ If you smoke, your child is more likely to smoke.
- ▶ If you abuse alcohol or use illegal drugs, there's more of a chance your child will do the same.



Good health is a gift you give your child—and yourself. (Ask your health-care provider before starting an exercise program.)

4 Communicate—and listen well.

Building a bond with your child starts with communication. Words are something you share. You talk, and your child listens. Your child talks, and you listen. It goes back and forth, and it's between just the two of you.

- ▶ Start young. A baby can recognize a parent's voice within the first few weeks of life.
- ▶ As your child grows, talk about everything together. This includes "little" daily stuff and "big" stuff, like how to avoid unhealthy influences.
- ▶ Meals are a good time to talk. Eat together regularly.
- ▶ Be a patient listener. You want your child to feel he or she can come to you to talk about anything.



5 Show your affection.

It's OK to hug your child and say "I love you." In fact, not only is it OK, it's great! And don't stop just because your child is a little older. Showing affection teaches your child that he or she is loved. And that's the most important message, at any age.



6 Give praise.

Point out the positive in your child often. Focus on good character traits—such as honesty and generosity—as well as accomplishments.

7 Be involved in your child's education.

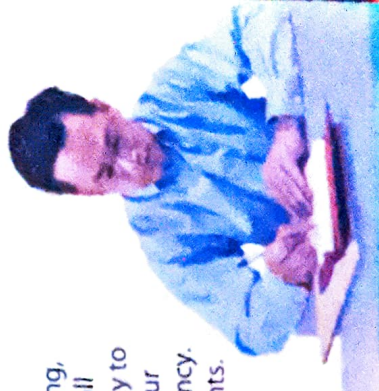
Before children are old enough for school, parents are their teachers. When your child goes off to school, it's still very important for you to stay involved in the education process. Your child will have a better chance to do well!

- ▶ If your child is still young, read to him or her often. It helps his or her language development.
- ▶ Be upbeat and positive about school, teachers, homework, etc. Your attitude influences how your child will feel about education.
- ▶ Attend and help with school events, especially ones your child is in!
- ▶ Help with homework. But don't do it for your child.
- ▶ Be sure to go to parent-teacher conferences, and ask your child's teachers any questions you have.



8 Take your financial responsibility seriously.

The basic necessities of life—food, clothing, shelter, medical care—cost money. Like all parents, you have a financial responsibility to provide for your child. Maybe you and your child's mom are saving up during pregnancy. Or maybe you're making support payments. Whatever your situation, organize your finances carefully and with your child's needs a top priority.



Co-parent cooperatively.

The better this relationship, the healthier it is for your child—whether you're married or not, living together or apart. You can teach valuable life lessons by:

- ▶ working together, not against each other
- ▶ showing respect, not disrespect (talk favorably about the other parent)
- ▶ sharing the workload—you can change diapers, do laundry, and take your child to doctor's appointments!

Watching how you work together with your child's mother teaches your child a lot about:

- ▶ how to get along with others
- ▶ how men should treat women
- ▶ how parents can both support a child even if their relationship is strained.

Discipline in a positive way.

No parent should play "good guy" all the time, letting a child do as he or she pleases without limits. But that doesn't mean you have to be a bad guy, either. The key is to stay calm and nonviolent, and to be fair.

Have clear, reasonable rules, and explain why you have them. (If your child is older, you can design fair rules together.) Set consequences for breaking the rules. Make sure your child knows what the rules are before you have to enforce them. And enforce them consistently—follow through with the planned consequence every time.

Don't frighten and harm. Teach and guide.



11

Play!

It's important for dads and their children to have fun together.

For a lot of dads, that means physical activity—sports, good-natured roughhousing (with older children), etc. That is natural and helps build a bond. But play doesn't have to be physical. You can play board games and video games, build something, play music together—anything that's just plain fun enough to get you both smiling.



12

Accept your child for who he or she is.

As your child grows up, he or she becomes his or her own person. Accept this. Make sure your child knows he or she will always have your love, support and guidance. Maybe one day you'll be helping him or her to be as good a parent as you!

Expand your circle of support.

Fathers need help, too! Get more tips and connect with other dads at the:

- ▶ National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse
www.fatherhood.gov
- ▶ National Fatherhood Initiative
www.fatherhood.org

*Being a good dad takes time and patience.
Its rewards are priceless.*