

Why Dads Matter



Please contact us on 0845 090 8044 for other leaflet formats e.g. large print, audio, another language or through discussion.

Did you know?

Whether or not young children live with their dads, evidence shows that those with involved fathers fit in better at nursery and school, learn better and have fewer behaviour problems. They make friends more easily and are better able to understand how other people feel. Later they have more contented love lives, better mental health and are less likely to get into trouble with the police. All this is true for girls as much as for boys.

Getting more involved in your kids lives

- Try and wind down at the end of the day's work by listening to music on the way home. Leave the day's problems behind.
- Check with your employer to see if you can work more flexible hours.
- Support your child learning at home by talking to your kids, reading them stories, surfing the net, doing homework and just having fun together.
- Get involved in your child's school by attending parents' meetings, school plays and volunteering for school trips.
- Try to maintain a good relationship with your child's mother - whether you are together or not. This is one of the most important things in a child's life.
- Stepfathers have a big impact on children, so if this is you be careful to encourage and support a child.

Why dads matter

Being a dad is a big job. You're like a hero to your child and there's no time off. They want you there to steady their bike, help them with homework, play football, read stories and make them laugh.

The more you are there for your kids; the better it is for them. If you're involved, children are more likely to stay out of trouble with the police, leave drugs alone, and do better at school. They're also more likely to get on well with their parents in their teens and end up in a happy relationship when they're older.

So how do you get more involved with your kids?

This booklet aims to answer this by offering advice to help you to:

- Get a balance between work and family;
- Support your child learning at home and at school;
- Have a close relationship with your wife or partner;
- Understand the role of stepfather;
- Help your children behave better;
- Get through the teenage years;
- Find out about your rights.

Work and family – how to get a balance

You know how important it is to spend time with your kids. But with a stressful job and long working hours, getting the balance right isn't easy. Here are some typical questions you may ask.

How do I switch off from work?

Avoid starting stressful jobs in the last half hour at work. Try and wind down at the end of your day, maybe by listening to music or reading the paper on the way home. Make up a 'getting home' routine – a big hug and some time to listen to what has happened to your child during their day.

What if work stresses me out?

Remember that stress can make you angry and distant with your child. Just before you get home, take deep breaths and try to leave the day's difficulties behind so you don't take them home. If you can't, walk around the block until you can.

How can I spend more time at home?

See if you can work out more flexible hours with your boss or check your company's policies on flexitime. For example, you may be able to have flexible start and finish times or to work a four-day week with longer hours during each day. You could also think about:

- Cutting out work-related activities that you don't need to attend;
- Reducing your travel time by moving house or job.

What if I'm unemployed?

A study of disadvantaged children found that many who had done well in life had unemployed fathers to care for and support them. Being unemployed and at home all the time can be good for your kids. Being a father is a full-time job already.

Your child's learning – how to support it

At home

Supporting your child's school learning starts at home.

- Talking about your child's day brings you closer together. Ask them about their friends, their favourite TV programmes and their favourite sports.
- Reading stories to your kids sets up good reading habits and creates a great bedtime routine. A story is much better than TV or a video, which can over stimulate children and keep them up for hours.
- Surf the internet with your kids. Visit kids sites with your child e.g. www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc.
- Get involved in their homework. You can be involved without actually doing it for them. It's a good idea to keep in touch with the teachers to understand what's expected.
- Have fun! Doing things that you both enjoy helps develop skills and interests, try carpentry, football, cooking, riding bikes and so on.

At school

Getting involved in your child's school can really benefit your child. Children can become more confident, better behaved and keener to learn.

- Get to know the teachers and see how they work. Arrive early to pick up or drop off your child, and visit the classroom.
- Attend every parents evening. If there's a school newsletter or website, read it regularly.
- Get involved with the term topic, maybe its something that reflects your cultural background.
- Volunteer to get involved in school trips, the school play or after school clubs.

Choosing a school

If you disliked school, you may be tempted to leave the school choice to mum. Don't do this, as your own experiences can be an important contribution. Think about how similar, or different, you and your child are and consider the following when you are making your decision:

- Listen to other parents – which schools do they rate and why?
- Read the most recent Ofsted inspection report (on the schools website) – this will tell you a lot, from class sizes to parent participation.
- Get worried if Ofsted judged the school 'unsatisfactory' (satisfactory means that it is fine).
- Check out school league tables. Beware though; a school may rank high because its pupils knew a lot before starting there, not because it teaches them well.
- Look out for 'value-added' details. This means how good the school has been in improving the children's performance. This can be a real marker of a good school.
- Visit the schools. How engaged, polite and happy are the children? How switched on and liked does the head teacher seem? How good are the facilities?

Thinking about going private? Just because it is a private school doesn't necessarily mean that it is a better school for your child. Private schools are inspected, but not by Ofsted and the curriculum can differ from state schools. It's important to do your research.

Keeping your relationship close

Looking after your child means looking after your relationship with your child's mother. Arguing with her hurts your child too. If you are separated, it's important to try to get on well together. If you are together then there are many ways to keep your relationship healthy.

- Set aside time to do things that you enjoy together – just the two of you.
- Talk important issues over without blaming or criticising each other. Give each other 10 minutes to talk in turn and listen carefully to the other.
- Seek help for things that make you more stressed e.g. debt, alcohol, depression, anger.
- If you feel your relationship is in trouble, try relationship counselling. A few sessions with a trained professional can help you live together better. See the back of this booklet for more help.

Separated Fathers

Whatever your own feelings, it is really important to put your children's needs first. Don't let them get caught up in conflicts and arguments.

Research shows that is normally in the child's best interest if:

- Both parents raise children whether or not they live together as long as it is safe to do so
- Each parent supports his or her children to enjoy a positive relationship with the other parent

The way you talk to and act with your ex-partner will have an effect on your children. You and your ex-partner will have to work out what is best for each of you and for your children and how to involve each other in decisions. It matters less that you're split up, than how you split up.

If your child is going to spend time at your home, make sure that they have their own space and that their surroundings are pleasant.

Father figure

Children can never have too many adults who care or support them. Often a child will have a father figure in their life who is not their real father. They can be stepfathers, grandfathers, uncles and so on. One in seven families contains a stepfather. They may have a bigger impact on the children's self-esteem than their natural fathers or mothers. This means stepfathers have to be particularly careful to help children feel good about themselves.

Focusing on behaviour

Most parents want their children to make friends easily and do well in life. One of the most important things you can do to help them is to encourage them to behave well.

- Be constructive and consistent with discipline. Tell your child what you want, explain why and stay positive.
- Concentrate on what you want them to do and not on what not to do.
- Set out to help not punish. When you need to discipline your child, try to give them the chance to change their actions and feel good about what they're doing.
- Try giving your child choices to focus them on action rather than resistance. 'You can catch the bus home at eight or we'll come to collect you at eight thirty.'
- Don't assume your child will react the same way as you did at their age.
- Remember that children learn by example.
- Sometimes children behave badly as a way of getting attention so praise and hug them for doing something well. That way they will start to use good behaviour to get attention in future.
- As they get older, you may need to change or amend boundaries to reflect different behaviours and experiences. Involve your child in this - they're more likely to cooperate - and focus on the areas that are really important to you.

Getting through the teenage years

To grow into healthy individuals, teenagers need to push their parents away. This can be especially hard if you have been very close. If you have a good relationship, relax, one day they'll come back to you.

Keep a close eye on your teenager and look out for the following worrying signs:

- Disrupting school classes or absence from school
- Fast decline in school interest and achievement
- Hanging out with kids who cause trouble
- Harming themselves or others (including developing eating disorders)
- Behaving in an over-sexualised way
- Showing signs of depression or low self-esteem
- Abusing drugs or alcohol

The more worrying signs teenagers display the more they need your help. At this stage, dads usually go for a firmer approach while mums go for a softer one. Neither way is right. A joint strategy with your child's mother is the way forward. To find out where you can get advice on handling teenagers, see the last page of this booklet.

Giving them their independence

The best way of letting your child go is to be close to them to start with. That way you're able to see when they're ready to be independent. You know who they're mixing with and how vulnerable they are to strangers. Dads who help their children explore the outside world:

- Introduce them to their own social and cultural networks
- Teach them the green cross code and help them practise crossing the road
- Take them on public transport and let them plan their routes
- Take them shopping and teach them about money
- Take them swimming, skating, boarding or biking

Know your benefits/rights

Benefits/Tax credits

There are lots of ways you can support your family by claiming benefits and/or tax credits. There are different types of support for children, parents and guardians.

Your entitlements

- If you are responsible for bringing up a child under the age of 19, you may be able to claim child benefit. You may also be entitled to child tax credit.
- If you are working, you may be entitled to claim Working Tax Credit and may qualify for help with childcare costs.
- There is a new deal for lone parent's, which can help with the cost of childcare, training and transport.
- For more information on claiming benefits for your family visit www.dwp.gov.uk.
- For further information on Tax Credits and Child Benefit go to www.hmrc.gov.uk.
- Register for the £250 Child Trust Fund which the Government pays out for each new baby.
- Save, even a small sum regularly, in your child's name: most children don't pay tax on interest.
- Consider life insurance – cover of 10 – 20 times your incomes means that, if you die, your family won't be any poorer or there are cheaper policies which pay out only until your child is grown up and then lapses.

Paternity leave and parental leave

- You're entitled to 2 weeks paternity leave paid at just over £100 a week. Low income families can receive Income Support while a dad is on paternity leave.
- To attend the birth, you have a right to take unpaid 'emergency leave for dependents'.
- You and your baby's mother can each claim up to 4 weeks unpaid Parental Leave in the year after the birth. In the first five years you can claim up to 13 weeks.
- As the parent of a young child you have a right to ask for flexible working from your employer who must give a very good reason for refusing.
- For more information visit **www.workingfamilies.org.uk**.

Parental Responsibility

If your child was born after November 2003, your name on the birth certificate gives you automatic 'Parental Responsibility' which allows you to authorise medical treatment, see your child's medical records and be consulted over many things including adoption, schooling, change of surname, or being taken abroad. Other ways of getting Parental Responsibility include marrying the mother or through a Parental Responsibility Agreement.

Further help

Family Rights Group

Web: www.frg.org.uk

Tel: 0800 731 1696

One Parent Families

Web: www.oneparentfamilies.org.uk

Tel: 0800 018 5026

The Childrens Legal Centre

Web: www.childrenslegalcentre.com

Tel: 0845 120 2948

Dads Space

Web: www.dads-space.com

Dad Talk

Web: www.dadtalk.co.uk

Parentline Plus

Web: www.parentlineplus.org.uk

Tel: 0808 800 2222

If you are looking for any further information or advice for your family the Family Information Service can help you. We offer a free and impartial information and signposting service for parents and carers of children and young people aged 0-20 on a range of topics such as; childcare, benefits, health, leisure and much more. If you don't know who to ask, ask the Family Information Service!

Tel: 0845 090 8044 or 01926 742274

Email: fis@warwickshire.gov.uk

Web: www.warwickshire.gov.uk/fis

