



# Speaking for Children

What's best for our youngest children is best for everyone!

## Kids need dad's love just as much as mom's

A father's love is just as important to a child's development as a mother's, and sometimes more so, suggests a new review of about 100 studies published between 1949 and 2001.

Researchers found that, overall, the love -- or rejection -- of mothers and fathers equally affects kids' behavior, self-esteem, emotional stability, and mental health. "But in some cases, the withdrawal of a father's love seems to play a bigger role in kids' problems with personality and psychological adjustment, delinquency, and substance abuse," says study coauthor Ronald P. Rohner, Ph.D., director of the Center for the Study of Parental Acceptance and Rejection at the University of Connecticut in Storrs. The presence of a father's love may do the most to boost children's sense of well-being and improve their emotional and physical health.

### The impact of fathers on language and thinking skills and school success

Children with involved, caring fathers do better in school. A number of studies suggest that fathers who are involved, nurturing, and playful with their infants have children with higher IQs, as well as better language and thinking skills. Toddlers with involved fathers are more prepared to start kindergarten. They are more patient and can handle the stresses and frustrations associated with schooling more readily than children with less involved fathers.

The influence of a father's involvement on academic achievement extends into adolescence and young adult-

hood. Many studies find that an active and nurturing style of fathering is associated with better verbal skills, intellectual functioning, and academic achievement among adolescents. For instance, a 2001 U.S. Department of Education study found that highly involved biological fathers had children who were 43% more likely than other children to earn mostly A grades and 33% less likely than other children to repeat a grade.

### The impact of fathers on emotional well-being and social behavior

Right from birth, children who have an involved father are more likely to be emotionally secure, be confident to explore their surroundings, and, as they grow older, have better social connections with peers. These children also are less likely to get in trouble at home, school, or in the neighborhood. Infants who receive high levels of affection from their fathers (e.g., babies whose fathers respond quickly to their cries and who play with them) are more securely attached; that is, they can explore their environment comfortably when a parent is nearby and can readily accept comfort from their parent after a brief separation. A number of studies suggest they also are more sociable and popular with other children throughout early childhood.

The way fathers play with their children also has an important impact on a child's emotional and social development. Fathers spend a much higher percentage of their one-on-one interaction with infants and preschoolers in stimulating, playful activity than do mothers. From these interactions, children learn how to regulate their feelings and behavior. Rough-housing with dad, for example, can teach children how to deal with aggressive impulses and physical contact without losing control of their emotions.

Generally speaking, fathers also tend to promote independence and an orientation to the outside world. Fathers often push achievement while mothers stress nurturing, both of which are important to healthy development. As a result, children who grow up with involved fathers are more comfortable exploring the world around them and more likely to exhibit self-control and pro-social behavior.

One study of school-aged children found that children with good relationships with their fathers were less likely to experience depression, to exhibit disruptive behavior, or to lie, and were more likely to exhibit pro-social behavior. This same study found that boys with involved fathers had fewer school behavior problems and that girls had stronger self-esteem.

In short, fathers have a powerful and positive impact upon the development and health of children.

Source: [www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/fatherhood](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/fatherhood)

## Ten Ways to Be a Better Dad

**1. Respect your children's mother.** One of the best things a father can do for his children is to respect their mother. If you are not married, it is still important to respect and support the mother of your children. A father and mother who respect each other and let their children know it provide a secure environment for them, children are more likely to feel that they are also accepted and respected.

**2. Spend time with your children.** How a father spends his time tells his children what is important to him. If you always seem too busy for your children, they will feel neglected no matter what you say. Treasuring children often means sacrificing other things, but it is essential to spend time with your children.

**3. Earn the right to be heard.** Too often, the only time a father speaks to his children is when they have done something wrong. That is why so many children cringe when their mother says, "Your father wants to talk with you." Begin talking with your kids when they are very young so that difficult subjects will be easier to handle as they get older. Take time and listen to their ideas and problems.

**4. Discipline with love.** All children need guidance and discipline, not as punishment, but to set reasonable limits. Remind your children of the consequences of their actions and provide meaningful rewards for desirable behavior.

**5. Be a role model.** Fathers are role models to their kids whether they realize it or not. A girl who spends time with a loving father grows up knowing she deserves to be treated with respect by boys, and what to look for in a husband. Fathers can teach sons what is important in life by demonstrating honesty, humility, and responsibility.

**6. Be a teacher.** Too many fathers think teaching is something others do, but a father who teaches his children about right and wrong, and encourages them to do their best, will see his children make good choices. Use everyday examples to help children learn the basic lessons of life.

**7. Eat together as a family.** Sharing a meal together can be an important part of healthy family life. It gives kids the chance to talk about what they are doing and want to do. It is also a good time for fathers to listen and give advice.

**8. Read to your children.** It is important that fathers read to their children. Begin reading to your children when they are very young. When they are older, encourage them to read on their own. Instilling your children with a love for reading is one of the best ways to ensure they will have a lifetime of personal and career growth.

**9. Show affection.** Children need the security that comes from knowing they are wanted, accepted, and loved by their family. Parents, especially fathers, need to feel both comfortable and willing to hug their children. Showing affection everyday is the best way to let your children know that you love them.

**10. Realize that a father's job is never done.** Even after children are grown and ready to leave home, they still look to their fathers for wisdom and advice.

Whether it is continued schooling, a new job, or a wedding, fathers continue to play an essential part in the lives of their children as they grow and, perhaps, marry and build their own families.

Source: Child Welfare Information Gateway

### About First 5 Sonoma County

First 5 Sonoma County funds children's health insurance and programs that improve childcare quality, help children succeed in school, and help parents provide safe and nurturing environments for their children. For more information on *First 5 Sonoma County* and its programs, please call 565-6626 or visit [www.first5sonomacounty.org](http://www.first5sonomacounty.org)