



Dads make a difference!

How a Father's Parenting Style Benefits His Child's Development

based on *Fatherneed* (Free Press 2000), by Kyle D. Pruett



Some researchers observe that mother behavior has clear initiating stages; it appears to be more of a biological experience. They say for many mothers it begins with the delivery of the placenta.

Father behavior varies much more, since fatherhood is more of a social construct than it is a biological construct. They report that it is a unique moment for each father-child pair.



At six weeks, infants can distinguish their fathers' voice from their mothers' voice.

A quiet and alert infant will attend more quickly to a mother's voice.

An upset or fretting infant will calm more readily to a father's voice.

In a split screen study of 8 week-old infants seated comfortably, researchers noted significant differences in the infant's response to an approaching parent.

When an infant sees her mother approaching, her eyes narrow, shoulders relax, heart beat and respiration decrease. The infant becomes calm in the presence of her mother.

When an infant sees her father approaching, her eyes widen, shoulders will raise, the heartbeat and respiration increase. The infant becomes stimulated in the presence of her father.

By one month of age, a mother has a distinctive way of holding her baby, and she holds him that way 9 times out of 10.

A father on the other hand will pick up his infant 9 different ways out of 10.

In a one-on-one situation a mother will typically use objects from her environment to interact with her pre-school age child: a toy, game, book, doll, puzzle, etc.

A father will typically (50%) make use of his body when interacting with his pre-school age child: he becomes a jungle gym, monkey bars, rocking horse, piggy back, roughhousing, tickling, wrestling, etc.

Mothers tend to simplify and slow their speech to get and hold their toddler's attention.

Fathers use bigger words and longer sentences spoken in less rhythmic sequences, perhaps showing a reluctance to baby his child.

When the child confronts a novel situation, a dog, stranger, new toy, moms instinctively move closer, offering the reassurance of her familiar presence.

In the same situation, fathers tend to stay back and allow the child to explore it herself. He typically stands three times the distance that mom will.

When a young child is upset, mothers tend to get down on the child's level and soothe the child.

When a young child is upset, fathers tend to get down on the child's level and redirect the child.

Both approaches benefit healthy child communication.

One researcher reported that parents' response to a question regarding the nicest thing about having children:

Mothers allude to the love and warmth aspects of the affiliative pleasure that accompanies raising her child.

Fathers focus on the influence of forming the character of the child.

FATHERS AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT:



Infants who have time alone with their fathers show richer social and exploratory behavior than children not exposed to such experiences.

One of the most critical roles that a dad plays in the life of his child in the toddler years is helping the child safely and securely separate from the intense maternal dependency of infancy. Fathers help baby differentiate one's own self from one's own mother's self. That is why babies decisively turn to dad in their second year, as they practice their personal autonomy and differentiation from the mom.

He serves as a second adult to learn from and to provide support to balance the powerful pull of the mother. He does this by being interesting, with a different smell, feel, temperament, voice, size and rhythms.

Babies become aware that dads typically aren't around as much as moms. They seem to pop up at odd times. They learn about comings and goings, transitions, separations, and a different nurturing style.

Fathers have a slight proclivity to encourage their pre-schoolers of both genders to play with sex-types toys.

Fathers are seen as better able to teach sons and daughters assertiveness and achievement orientation, and provide better formative experiences for daughters to develop the capacity for intimacy, trust and even femininity.

Dads help kids transition to the adult world. This is especially critical for boys whose transition requires that they be affirmed as "man enough." If not, he may try through sexual conquests, fighting, drinking, power struggles, coercion and other inappropriate ways.



Moms and Dads



Across all cultures, maternal instincts are different from paternal instincts. The desire to feel emotionally connected to one's children is often the same for fathers and mothers, however, it is expressed in different styles, hues, shades and degrees. The information listed here should never be used to diminish single mothering, single fathering, nor same sex parenting. Rather it is presented to help promote understanding of the rich and important differences between both masculine and feminine approaches to parenting.

Moms	PARENTING STYLES DADS	Dads
• More often picks up her infant, wraps baby close to her breast, limits movements, underscoring a sense of comfort, calm, warmth and security. • Most times pick up their infant to tend to their care. • Follow personal established patterns of physical style and interactions. • Likely to intervene more quickly in face of child's frustration. • Promote independence inside the home. • Promote emotional awareness. • Predilection for caring for children. • Mothers tend to focus on helping their children with emotional expression. • Mothers' approach facilitates immediate communication: an important building block in maintaining healthy relationships.	• More often holds baby at arms length, makes eye contact, tosses in air, turns her back against his chest or props her shoulder, underscoring a sense of freedom and exploration. • Pick up their infant 50% of the time to "make something happen". • Less predictable and more activating in physical style and interactions. • Offer less immediate support in face of the child's frustration, thus promoting adaptive problem-solving competencies. • Promote independence outside the home. • Promote exploratory freedom. • Predilection for action with children. • Fathers tend to focus on helping their children with emotional regulation. • Fathers' way challenges the child to expand vocabulary and linguistic skills: an important building block of academic success.	

Moms	PLAYING AND TEACHING	Dads
• Mothers spend more time with infant in physical care: - are quieter in play... - tend to cuddle and soothe their babies... - and calm their children. • Teach with focus on the process of learning. • More likely to promote intellectual and social development through talking teaching while care giving. • Play is more conventional, employing traditional games, songs and themes. • Will stress emotional security and personal safety. • Are inclined to play at the child's level. Will let child direct the play, be in charge, to proceed at child's own pace.	• Fathers spend more time with infant in play: - tend to be louder and more boisterous... - prefer to bounce and excite their babies... - and chase and play "scary monster" with them. • Teach through example, emphasizing lessons learned from experience. • More likely to promote young child's social and intellectual development through physical play. • Play is less predictable, following activation-exploration themes • Will stress physical risk-taking. • Will play to push the child to higher level, to challenge the child to take risks.	

Moms	AUTONOMY	Dads
• Mothers encourage security. • Moms tend to see the rest of the world in relation to their children. • Mom's emphasis: <u>Protect</u> my child from getting hurt by the "outside world" such as from dangerous strangers, disease, lightning, mean dogs, bullies, car accidents, falls, etc. • More ambivalent about autonomy and independence until elementary years.	• Fathers encourage independence. • Dads tend to see their children in relation to the rest of the world. • Dad's emphasis: <u>Prepare</u> my child to cope with the harshness of the "outside world", dealing with the same dangers. • Emphasize autonomy and independence even in early years.	

Moms	MORAL DEVELOPMENT	Dads
• When mothers interact with their children, they focus upon teaching and modeling sympathy, care and help. They tend toward grace and compassion in the midst of disobedience, which provide a sense of hopefulness and personal connection. • Discipline with focus on impact of behavior on emotional relationships. • Tend to focus on child's expressive behaviors: feeling.	• When fathers interact with their children, they focus upon teaching and modeling justice, fairness and duty (based upon rules). They tend to observe and enforce rules sternly and systematically, which teach children the objectivity and consequences of right and wrong. • Discipline with an interest in the societal bottom-line outcome. • Tend to focus on child's instrumental behaviors: doing.	



GENDER IDENTITY

Fathers contribute significantly to help shape gender identity. They offer the male view of the world. He helps children distinguish masculinity from femininity. How he treats mom and how mom treats dad influence how children expect to relate to adults later on.

Experts tend to see the parenting contributions of mothers and fathers as linked to their gender, with mothers generally emphasizing connection, safety, and care, and fathers emphasizing autonomy, action, risk-taking and following rules.

"A wise woman once said to me: 'There are only two lasting bequests we can hope to give our children. One of these is roots; the other, wings.'" — Hodding Carter, Where Main Street Meets the River

