

## Dads and Kids:

### 5 things men can do to get—and stay—involved

#### Jump in

Men are just as capable as women of loving and caring for children. But a lot of dads worry that they don't know how to be a good parent or that they'll do something wrong. The truth is that being a good parent comes with practice. If you don't take the initiative, you'll never be able to assume the responsibilities that you really want to and that your children deserve. So instead of letting your partner pluck your crying or smelly baby from your arms, try something like, "No, honey, I can take care of this." And remember, "quality time" is wonderful but "quantity time" is the foundation for good, close relationships. So do everything you possibly can to make yourself more available.

#### Be yourself

Don't let anyone tell you that safely wrestling, bouncing on the bed, or other "guy things" aren't important. Dads and moms make different—but equally important—contributions to their children's development. Children with involved fathers do better in school and have less chance of becoming teen parents or getting involved with drugs, alcohol, or crime. They also manage their emotions better and are less likely to resort to violence.

#### Communicate

If your partner is reluctant to share parenting with you, don't take it too personally. Many women have been raised to believe that if they aren't the primary caregiver they've failed as mothers. Give her time to learn that you're serious about wanting to be an equal participant, and that you're ready and able for the job.

#### Know your legal rights

Find out whether you're eligible for time off under the Family Medical Leave Act or some other plan. But do yourself and your employer a favor: give everyone at work a few months' notice so they'll have time to get ready.

#### Stay involved after separation or divorce

Not being able to see your children as often as you'd like can make you angry, sad, and frustrated. But never fade away. Make sure your kids know you'll always love them and that the breakup was not their fault. Never badmouth their mother, and never use the kids to deliver messages or spy on her. The better you get along with your ex the better your kids will be able to cope. Finally, pay your child support. Not paying hurts your children, not your ex. If she's keeping you from seeing them or if you're having trouble making payments, contact your lawyer or the local child support agency right away.

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