

The Dad Difference in Child Development

Adaptive and Problem-Solving Abilities

Infants who have been well fathered during the first eighteen to twenty-four months of life are more secure in exploring the world around them.

Empathy

The strongest predictor of a child's empathic concern for others in adult life is a high level of paternal child care.

Self-Control

Young children with positively involved fathering display less impulsivity and more self-control.

Moral Sensitivity

Positive paternal engagement, for boys and girls, is closely associated with (1) a lower incidence of disruptive behavior, depression, sadness, and lying; (2) higher sociability through complying with parent's wishes, getting along with others, and being responsible; (3) boys having fewer school behavior problems; and (4) girls having more cheerful and happy interchanges, greater capacity for positive self-involvement, and greater willingness to try new things.

Physical Development

The single most important birth circumstance that protected against birth complications and further illness or trauma in the new born was the father's presence at delivery.

Indirect Effects

Paternal involvement affects the child indirectly through its effects on the mother herself. When a mother feels supported by the father, she is more patient, flexible, emotionally responsive, and available to their children.

"The Dad Difference" taken from research described in Kyle D. Pruett, M.D.'s 2000 book, Fatherhood. Excerpted by Edward M. Stephens, M.D., from The American Psychiatric Association (APA) Committee on Mental Health in Schools.

