

being a dad

While parenting can be done by either parent, children still have different experiences with their fathers than with their mothers. Fathering is not the same as parenting.

Children are lucky if they know they are loved and cared for by both parents. Many fathers know what they don't want to do from childhood memories, but they aren't sure what they should do. There is no recipe for being a dad. There is no one right way to be a parent. What is important is to work out what is going to work for you.

Some things that all dads can do

- Talk about your feelings so that your children learn that it is alright for men to talk about feelings.
- Spend time with your daughters. You are the first man that your daughters really know. You are helping them to learn how to expect men to treat them when they grow up.
- Show your sons the ways that you would like them to be when they are men.
- Enjoy your children's company.
- Take your children to work with you sometimes if you can. Let them get to know how you spend your days when they are not with you.



- Being out of work can make problems for parents, but may mean that you have time to give to your children.
- Comfort them. Children, even tiny babies, often get a special feeling of security from being comforted by their dads when they are frightened or upset.
- Play with your children. Fathers often enjoy rough and tumble play. Children can learn a lot from this sort of play with their fathers. They learn that you can be strong and yet not too rough to hurt others. They learn that you can get excited and yet you can stop before things get out of hand.
- Help your children with their sport or hobbies.
- Share your own interests and hobbies with them.
- Share your child's life. Go with them to school and preschool parent nights, to the doctor, to the park and to watch their sport.
- Teach your children about rules and laws.
- Expect your children to do their best and be proud of them when they do, even when they fail.
- Show your love in different ways if you find it hard to say you love them. It doesn't need a lot of talking to:
 - take your children fishing
 - help them with their homework
 - go for a walk in the park
 - cheer at a school football or netball match.

Even if you are not a full-time dad your children need to know that you care about them and you will look after them.

What children say they want from fathers

- Do things together.
- Sit and talk.
- Don't work so much.

Dads in families

Being a dad in a family means making sure that your relationship with your partner is right. Children usually love both parents. They are hurt by parents fighting or putting each other down.

Fighting does not teach children how to make good relationships with others as they get older.



- Make regular time to be together as a couple without the children.
- Talk about what you expect of each other and what you are prepared to do in looking after the children.
- The birth of your baby will cause a change in relationships. Your partner may feel tired and overwhelmed by new responsibilities. You may feel left out and jealous. Talk about your feelings and listen to hers.
- If you don't agree with some of the ways she parents, discuss it in private.
- Treat your children's mother (and all women) with respect so that your daughters will grow up knowing that it is good to be a woman and your sons will know how to treat their future partners.

What single dads can do

- Single fathers can give children a feeling of being safe and secure by the way they look after them.
- Try not to let any hurts or anger you may have about your children's mother spoil your relationship with your children.
- Keep in touch with your children even if it is painful to have to keep saying goodbye after you see them.
- Be positive (or don't say anything) when you talk to the children about their mother. If you don't do this they will be torn between the two of you and things will be much harder for them.
- If there are bitter court disputes and you are very upset, try not to weigh the children down with your feelings.
- Be reliable about pick-ups and drop-offs and sending back clothes. Use 'give and take' when it comes to making arrangements.
- Try not to send messages with the children or keep asking them questions about their mother.
- It is OK to have different rules and ways of doing things at your house. Children can learn to understand that there are different ways of doing things in different situations.

- As children get older, give permission for them to choose to stay with their mother or at a friend's place instead of staying with you. They need to know that it is OK with you so they don't feel guilty.
- Try not to show that you are upset if your children's mother gets another partner. She is moving on from the old relationship and so can you. You will still always be the children's father.
- Parents have the right to separate from their partner, but they still have responsibility to be a parent. Children have the right to be cared for by both parents, even if you are not together.

Dads in step-families

Being a step-father can be difficult, especially if the children are older when you join the family. Children who have had time alone with their mother often feel sad or cross about having someone else take some of her time. You may also have your own children who will still want your time.

- Give the children time. A step-father cannot take their father's place.
- Be a friend, but don't crowd them.
- Plan household rules together and include the children. These may be very different rules from what the children are used to.
- Be wary about giving discipline even if their mother asks you to. It is usually better if parents discipline their own children, especially at first.
- Let the children still have some time on their own with their mother.
- Do some things with the children yourself. Choose things they enjoy.
- Make sure that you have some special time with your own children too. It can be tricky making a place in your life for everyone, but it is worth it.
- Support your step-children in seeing their father if that is what they want.
- Children in step-families often come and go between houses, so you need to be flexible to allow for this.

Services for parents and children

- Parentline (8am to 10pm 7 days/week) **1300 301 300**
- Kids Help Line (24 hr) **1800 551 800**
- Community Child Health Service (24 hr) **3862 2333**
Outside Brisbane **1800 177 279**
- Child Care Information Service **3224 4225**
Outside Brisbane **1800 637 711**
- Women's Infolink **1800 177 577**
- *dvconnect* womensline (24 hours) **1800 811 811**
Domestic violence counselling and refuge placements
- *dvconnect* mensline (10am to 6pm) **1800 600 636**
Counselling, support and information

Your local library has a range of excellent books on parenting.

Look in your local White Pages for your Queensland Health Community Child Health Service and for information about their parent education courses (Positive Parenting Program - Triple P)

Adapted from information contained in the Parent Easy Guide Series © Parenting SA, Government of South Australia 2000.

Published by the Department of Communities. For reorders phone 3224 4225 if in the Brisbane metropolitan area or 1800 637 711 if outside the metropolitan area.

Tip sheets are also available from the Department of Communities website at www.communities.qld.gov.au



Queensland Government
Department of **Communities**