

## Fathers Matter to Children

Fathers are not like mothers...but together they make a great team. It is not a question of who is more important--mothers or fathers. The point is having both parents involved in rearing a child has advantages.

### Mothers and Fathers Play Differently

Mothers and fathers play differently with children. Fathers tickle, wrestle, and throw their children in the air. Fathers chase their children, sometimes as playful, scary monsters. Fathers are louder at play; mothers are quieter. Fathers' play tends to be surprising and unpredictable, while mothers tend to stick with calm, familiar routines.

According to Wade Horn, President of the National Fatherhood Initiative, children benefit from a father's rough and tumble play. Children, especially boys, learn to keep their aggressive impulses in check through interacting with and observing an adult male in the home who consistently and regularly controls himself. If, during rough and tumble play, the child gets too aggressive and begins hitting dad or pulling his hair, dad says, "Calm down or else the play will stop." Children who rough house with their father learn that biting, kicking, and other forms of physical violence are not acceptable. They learn



self-control by being told when to settle down. In this way, the child learns to regulate his activity level and aggressiveness so it doesn't get out of hand.

Daughters also benefit from physical interaction with their fathers, says Horn. Daughters whose fathers engage them in rough and tumble play go on to have higher self-esteem, do better in school, and have more self-confidence.

### Fathers Push Limits and Encourage Risk Taking; Mothers Encourage Security

Go to any playground and listen to the parents. Who is encouraging their kids to swing or climb just a little higher, ride their bike a little faster, throw just a little harder? Who is yelling, "Slow down, not too high, not so hard!" Fathers encourage children to take chances and push limits, says Glenn Stanton in "Why Children Need Father-love and Mother-love." When their children are climbing on the jungle gym, fathers invariably encourage them to "Keep going, you're almost at the top!" Moms, on the other hand, are likely to warn their children to "Be careful." Mothers protect and are more cautious.

This difference, according to the Fatherhood Initiative, can cause disagreement between mothers and fathers on what is best for the child. But this difference is essential for children. Either can be unhealthy. One can tend toward risk without considering consequences. The other tends to avoid risk,

which can fail to build independence, confidence, and progress. Joined together, they keep each other in balance and help children remain safe while expanding their experiences and confidence.

*Father love and mother love are qualitatively different kinds of love.*

*Kyle D. Pruett.*

*The Nurturing Father, 1987.*

## Mothers and Fathers Communicate Differently

Father talk tends to be brief, directive, and to the point. Fathers also make greater use of subtle body language and facial expressions. Mothers tend to be descriptive, personal, and verbally encouraging. Children who do not have daily exposure to both will not learn how to understand and use both styles of conversation as they grow. (Stanton, 2008)

Mothers tend to be more repetitive, frequently ask questions and give explanations. Fathers talk less, are more focused on doing things together and their verbal interactions are more directive. Fathers also tend to be more demanding when it comes to language than mothers. These higher expectations may better prepare children for settings outside the home and challenge them to work harder at articulating their wants and needs.

## Fathers Make a Difference for Children

According to the Hidden Benefits of Being an Involved Father (Florida Extension Service, 1999), children who grow up with fathers who stay involved in their lives tend to enjoy all kinds of benefits including:

- better school performance,
- less trouble with the law,
- better jobs and careers, and
- better relationships with others.

Researchers Sarkadi, Kristiansson, Oberklaid, & Bremberg (2008) indicate a positive father-child relationship is associated with a reduced risk of first delinquency and substance use and is associated with social competencies, academic success, and lower levels of problem behavior. They point out that the positive influence of the father-child relationship is more protective for boys because boys with an engaged father have less behavioral problems during early school years and less delinquency/criminality in teen and early adult years.

Children who grow up with a good relationship with their fathers as well as their mothers are more compassionate, secure, responsible and self-confident.

Certainly children can - and do - develop well when they are reared with only a mom or a dad. But lucky is the child who grows up with both.



### Sources:

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