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Parenting the Preschooler

<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/pp/>

Fathers are Important

Good fathering is hard work, but the most important kind of work men can do. The consistent and frequent presence of a father makes a powerful difference in the development and socialization of a child.

Be prepared, Dad, because your stamina will be tested. Your child seems to have boundless energy — physically, intellectually, socially — and you'll be challenged to keep up. It's an important time for you to establish a healthy pattern of involvement in your child's life.

When you are involved with your preschooler you send a clear message to your child: *I want to be your father. I am interested in you. I enjoy being with you. You and I have a relationship that is important to me.*

Children who grow up with fathers who stay involved in their lives enjoy all kinds of benefits:

- better school performance
- less trouble with the law
- to better jobs and careers
- better relationships with others
- higher self-esteem

Being an involved father supports the development of your preschooler. Children become just as attached to their fathers as their mothers. Attachment provides a life-long relationship providing a secure base in the world.

Fathers play differently with children, using more physical and vigorous play activities. Fathers use more physical contact and spend a larger proportion of time playing (40% vs. 25% for mothers).

Mothers almost automatically join at the child's level of play, often allowing the child to direct the play activity. In contrast, fathers are more likely to position themselves as the leader. Fathers encourage teamwork and stimulate children to experiment with new games, to learn new skills, to compete, and to push the limits of their knowledge and abilities. Children need both types of play interaction: a chance to direct and the opportunity to be challenged.

When mothers discipline children, they tend to adjust the discipline to the child's current state of mind. A father is much more likely to discipline by "rules." Mothers offer children flexibility and run the risk of continual bargaining. Fathers offer children predictability and run the risk of rigidity. Mothers offer sympathy; fathers offer consistency.

Fathers make a unique contribution as parents.

Characteristics of effective fathers

- They are involved in the day-to-lives of their children.
- They demonstrate unwavering love, communicating in words, affections, smiles, and actions just how special each child is. Fathers let the child know that their love will last forever, no matter what.
- They provide support—financially, emotionally, mentally, physically, socially,

and spiritually. They are proud of being their child's parent.

- They practice appropriate discipline, taking into account the age and personality of the child. Disciplining with respect and love, they socialize their children in positive ways.
- They schedule time on a regular basis to interact with their children, whether going to an event, doing chores together, reading a book, or just being together.
- They provide consistency in their children's lives, providing a stable environment that children can depend on everyday.

Spend quality time with your child. The emphasis is on what you do with your child, rather than how much time you spend with them. Is the child your center of attention or are you just trying to keep them busy while you do other things? Are you both doing something you like to do? Do you have enough energy everyday so you can spend time with your child?

Don't confuse providing with loving. While providing food, clothing, and shelter is essential to care for a child, more than anything a child wants their parent's attention and love. It means making sure your child has the benefit of you in their life.

A father's parenting style has a big influence on how children become socialized. Fathers who use a loving, reasonable, firm style in guiding their child's behavior produce children who have a high rate of competence. Fathers who are unloving, punitive, authoritarian tend to produce children who are dependent, withdrawn, and anxious.

A father's role is an important one that has a profound influence on the social, emotional, and intellectual development of a child. Fathers ought not to be compared to mothers, nor should they be considered "assistant mothers." Mothers and fathers interact with the child in unique and different ways. These roles are not equal or interchangeable, but each make their own contribution.

Barriers to Father Involvement	
Possible Barrier	Tips for Overcoming the Barrier
Pressure of work and career can result in little time for parenting. Personal choices as well as work policies affect time available.	Make it a priority to spend time with your child.
Some mothers are uncertain about increased father involvement.	In order for fathers to increase their parenting roles, women must make room for a collaborative parenting effort. Mothers who welcome father involvement and speak positively to children about their father invite a full parent partner. Men who believe they are good fathers and who think that their wives think they are good fathers are more likely to be involved with their children.
Lack of support for fathering (positive role models, preparatory classes, support groups) make it harder for fathers.	Participating in "Dads and Kids" community programs, taking parent classes, reading books or checking out Internet sites for fathers, and talking with other fathers about parenting builds a network of father support.

Fathers who are more and more taking on the nurturing and care-giving roles of parenthood are redefining fatherhood.

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