



Dads make
a difference!



Dads make a difference!

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Parents

Be an Active Parent

In the past, the role of a father was different than it is today. A father was seen as the provider and the protector. The father was expected to provide his family with food, shelter, and clothing, and to discipline his child for misbehaving. Today, the traditional role of a father is changing. As the mother becomes more actively involved in working outside the home or attending school, the dad is becoming more actively involved with the day-to-day care of his child.

Whether you are a biological, adoptive, step, or foster dad, it is important to recognize that your positive involvement in the life of your child is essential to your child's health, development, and well-being.





Respect Different Parenting Styles

A mother and father are different. The way they parent can be different as well, as long as it is in a healthy, positive way. It is not that one parent or parenting style is better than the other; their styles are simply different. As a parent, one of the best things you can do for the development of your child is to show respect for the other parent. This is important whether you and the child's mother are living together or apart. Your child is more likely to feel accepted, respected, and safe when both parents respect each other.

A gift that only you can give your child is a relationship with you. This may be difficult. For example, you may be separated from your child's mother, working away from the home, incarcerated, or unable to care for your family due to personal problems such as an addiction. However, building a positive relationship is worth it for both you and your child. As a dad, it is important for your self-esteem to remember that you are your child's dad and that doing the best you can do is okay.

Remember it is never too late to start. Even if you have not been an involved dad, it is important for your child to know you.

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Follow Child Custody Guidelines

It is in the best interest of the child to have a relationship with both parents. Access is the right of the child to spend time with the non-custodial parent. A relationship with the non-custodial parent is encouraged unless that relationship causes harm to the child. If a parent is considered by the court to be violent or at risk of neglecting or harming the child, access may be denied completely. However, arrangements may be made for supervised access to ensure the safety of the child.

Provide Financial Child Support

As a parent, you have a duty to support your child. If you are working and living apart from your child, you are expected to pay child support. There are guidelines that set the amount. Please remember this is law because it is in the best interest of your child. If you are unable to afford to pay child support, that does not mean you can be denied access. As a father, you should know your rights. You can check with the Legal Aid Commission to see if you qualify for Legal Aid, or you may hire a lawyer on your own.





Register the Birth

After a baby is born, parents must register the birth with the Department of Vital Statistics. Birth registration does not give either parent rights to the child. Signing the form is evidence that you are a parent of the child. This legal link may be very important to your child in the future. A single mother who does not acknowledge or does not know who the father is may register the birth herself. As the father of the child, you must sign the birth registration to have your name included on the baby's birth certificate. If you are not available at the time of the baby's birth, Vital Statistics can add your name to the birth registration later. However, both the mother and the father must apply to have the original registration changed. The parent who registers the birth may choose any name he/she likes for the child's first, middle, and last name. If the parents have different last names and cannot agree, the child's name must consist of both names hyphenated in alphabetical order.

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Seek Help and Understanding

Remember — you are not alone. Whether you parent your child with the mother, have your child full-time as a single dad, or do not get to see your child as much as you would like, there is support available for you. Attending a parenting program and consulting with family or friends will help you find support and make you feel more confident about your parenting skills. Dealing with legal issues, problems with relationships, financial difficulties, or increased responsibilities can be very stressful.

It is important to understand what is causing the stress in your life and to find healthy ways to cope with it.

PARENT HELP LINE
1-888-603-9100





Body

There are many resources available for you to find information on how to keep your child healthy. Health professionals such as your family doctor or the public health nurse, magazines, books from the library, friends, and other community agencies can help. If you do not live with your child, the mother (or caregiver) may be the best person to talk to about how to keep your child healthy and happy. Your child's daily activities are best known by the person who spends the most time with the child. For example, the caregiver knows what your child prefers to eat, what time is bedtime, how your child likes to be held, as well as favorite toys or security items.

It is important to be aware of your child's health. Do not be afraid to ask if immunizations are up to date or if your child has visited the doctor recently.

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Provide Physical Activity

Be active with your child. A child needs to play outside in the fresh air and sunshine. Turn off the television and video games, and encourage your child to be active. Get involved with your child by going walking, biking, swimming, or participating in other activities together.

Encourage Breastfeeding

The best and most complete food for a baby is breast milk. As a dad, breastfeeding is not something you can do; however, you should encourage the mother's decision to breastfeed. You can help the mother by changing diapers, bringing the baby to her, burping the baby after feeding, and helping with other chores during a feeding. The mother can also pump some of the breast milk into a bottle to enable you or another caregiver to help with the feeding when required.

Promote Healthy Nutrition

As your child gets older, it is best to encourage healthy, nutritious foods. Eating candy and junk food is not necessary and can lead to future health problems for your child. Teaching your child to eat healthy foods and making good choices yourself will help your child stay healthy.





Be a Good Role Model

A child will often start to smoke when exposed to an adult who smokes. It is not enough to tell a child not to smoke because it is unhealthy; you need to quit smoking or at least not smoke in front of your child. Teach your child how to live healthy and provide a good example by exercising, eating well, and taking care of yourself.

If you choose to drink alcohol or do drugs, always ensure your child is with a responsible person while you are partying. If your child is around while you are drinking or doing drugs, you need to think about the message you are sending your child.

Your child will learn more from watching your actions than by anything you could ever say to her.

There is no law that says how old a person should be before he or she can babysit. It is, however, against the law to babysit during school hours if the babysitter is under the age of 16. It is your job to ensure the person watching your child is dependable, responsible, and capable of babysitting, regardless of whether he or she is an adult or teenager.

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Support the Mother

Parenting begins before the baby is born. As a dad, you need to be supportive of your baby's mother during the pregnancy to ensure the healthiest baby possible. Support her financially so she can live in a safe environment with healthy food to eat. Attend doctor appointments, and see the ultrasound so you can get to know your baby before he or she is born. Attend prenatal classes with your baby's mother to obtain information and support her during pregnancy and delivery. Sometimes it is hard to figure out what is happening, but try to understand that a pregnant woman goes through many physical and emotional changes.

Your understanding and support during pregnancy will decrease the stress on both the mother and your baby — this will help to improve the health of your baby.





Prevent Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)

Every year, babies are born with lifelong disabilities caused when a woman drinks alcohol during pregnancy. Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is a combination of mental and physical disabilities that a child is born with and will have for life. FASD is preventable by not drinking alcohol during pregnancy.

If you and your partner are planning a pregnancy, and want to give your baby a healthy start, the best advice is for both of you to avoid alcohol while trying to get pregnant. Alcohol includes wine, beer, hard liquor, coolers, and non-beverage alcohol (e.g. cough syrup). If your partner is already pregnant, supporting her to stop drinking will improve her health and the health of the baby. If you or your partner struggle with alcohol dependence, finding support services to help you reduce or quit drinking will be beneficial for all.

Your lifestyle, behaviour, and the emotional support you provide, can affect your partner's behaviour, her health, and the health of your baby. As a dad, if you stop drinking, your ability to support your partner in her decision to avoid alcohol during pregnancy will be strengthened.

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Safety

One of your most important jobs as a parent is to keep your child safe.

Prevent Injuries

An injury is the most common cause of death for a child between the age of one to four years. Most injuries can be prevented. Injuries happen because children are active and like to learn about the world around them. Your child will grow and change quickly. As a dad, you need to be aware of your child's development and watch for new skills.

Your child needs to be cared for and taught to avoid surrounding dangers. Pay attention to your child at all times, and never leave your child without adequate supervision.





Child-proof Your Home

Child-proofing your home means making your home safe; there are many things to consider. Major hazards such as broken door latches, missing screens from windows, uncovered electrical outlets, or dangerous items in the yard need to be fixed, or your child is at risk of injury. If you only have your child part-time, you need to be aware that injuries are more likely to occur in an unfamiliar environment. It is also important to try to keep your child on a good sleep routine, as injuries often occur when a child is tired.

As a dad, you need to anticipate the new skills your child will learn and have safety measures in place, such as safety gates installed, before he learns to crawl.

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Ensure Child Passenger Safety

You need to be aware of your child's safety in vehicles. Whether you are in your own vehicle, someone else's vehicle, or a taxi, your child must be in an age and weight appropriate car seat to be safe. The three types of car seats that are available are: rear-facing for birth to one year old, forward-facing from one to about four years old, and booster seats for children from about four to eight years old.

For questions about child passenger safety seats, contact the Prevention Institute at 306-655-2512 or Transport Canada at 1-800-333-0371.





Stop Domestic Violence

A child will often become the target of violent behaviour. If a relationship in your life is abusive, the violence must stop. Even if you do not intend for it to happen, an abusive environment will cause your child to be neglected, physically injured, or emotionally harmed. If you want your child to grow up healthy and to be in healthy relationships as an adult, you must stop the violence your child is experiencing, even if you think your child is not listening or seeing what is happening. A child who is exposed to abuse at a young age will often grow up to repeat the cycle of violence. All forms of abuse such as emotional, physical, sexual, financial, and spiritual are damaging and will affect your child in some way.

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Examples of Domestic Violence

Emotional

Ignoring a person's presence or feelings, isolating a person from friends and family, swearing at or in front of a person.

Physical

Pushing, kicking, slapping, punching, throwing, choking, refusing help if sick.

Sexual

Not allowing the use of birth control, forcing a person to perform certain sexual acts, having unprotected sex with others.

Financial

Spending money recklessly on addictions, not allowing control over family money.

Spiritual/Religious

Preventing or forcing involvement in spiritual or religious practices, ridiculing beliefs, forcing involvement in ritual abuse.





Reduce the Risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS)

SIDS is the sudden death of a healthy baby. When SIDS occurs, the baby is usually between one month and twelve months old. There is no known medical reason for the baby's death. SIDS is the leading cause of death for infants. No one knows how to prevent SIDS, but there are things you can do to make it less likely.

- *Always put your baby to sleep on her back.*
- *Encourage the mother to breastfeed your baby.*
- *Create a healthy home for your baby. Provide a drug-free and smoke-free environment.*
- *Don't let your baby get too warm.*

Prevent Shaken Baby Syndrome

A baby's cry is an annoying sound. It is supposed to be. Crying is the only way a baby can ask for help. Your baby may be hungry, need a diaper change, feel too hot or too cold, be in pain, or just need to be held. A frustrated or angry parent in combination with a crying baby can lead to Shaken Baby Syndrome. Shaking a baby can lead to brain damage, blindness, or death. Never shake a baby.

It is important that you, as a dad, understand it is common and very normal to feel frustrated at times. Learning how to handle these feelings in a safe and appropriate way will ensure you do not harm your baby. Always have a plan — how are you going to handle the frustration? If feeding, changing, walking, rocking, and cuddling have not worked, gently place the baby in a safe place, and allow yourself some time to relax and calm down before attempting to console your baby again. If nothing seems to be working, call someone to help.

Although it is unlikely that severe injuries would occur from holding an infant in the air playfully or bouncing a small child on a knee, you must always support the baby's head and neck.





Mind

Just like the rest of the body, your child's mind will grow, change, and develop. Your child must feel safe, secure, and loved as a baby to grow emotionally into a healthy, independent person.

Develop Trust

Providing an environment that is routine and predictable allows your child to develop a trust towards you and your relationship. A child who learns to trust develops into a healthier child.

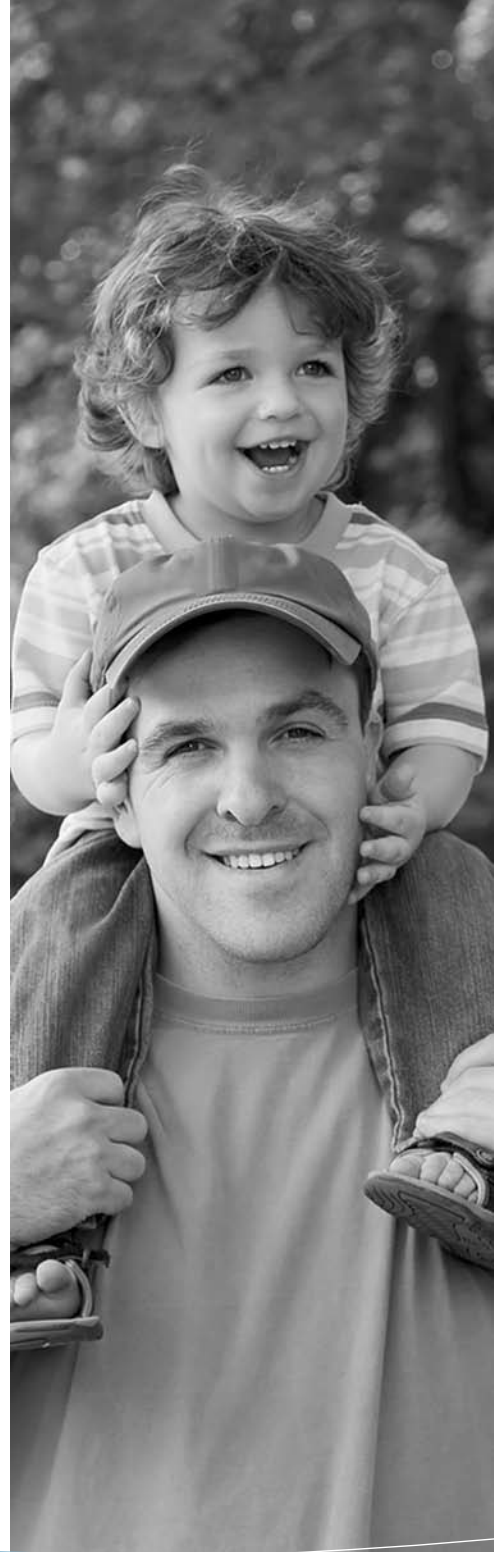
Remember: a child learns by seeing and hearing. Tell your child how much you love him, and show him that he is special to you.

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Provide Bonding Time

A dad looks, smells, and feels different than a mother. Those differences help your baby to learn. A baby will respond differently to the mother and the father. A study showed that eight week old babies respond to their mothers by settling down, decreasing their heart rates, slowing their breathing, and partially closing their eyes. When the babies know their dads are going to pick them up, they respond excitedly by hunching their shoulders, widening their eyes, and speeding up their heart and breathing rates (Yogman). A baby, even that young, knows the difference between a mother and a father, and that makes you very special. By school age, a child who has had an involved dad is a better problem solver, has higher self-esteem, and is more open-minded about differences in people.

If you cannot be involved in your child's life, encourage your child's mother to provide contact for your child with other males, such as grandfathers, uncles, or close friends. It will help your child's mind develop.





Stay Connected with your Child

If you have to be away from your child because of your job (in the oil or mining industry, military service, or other out of town jobs) or because of special circumstances (such as illness or incarceration), it is important to stay connected with your child. Make time to spend with your child, and make your child feel special. If you cannot live with your child or are away from home for extended periods of time, you can stay connected through phone calls, letters, small gifts, and visits.

Mothers need to encourage fathers to father, as long as you are dependable when it comes to your child's safety and well-being. Never use your child to get back at the mother because you are angry with her. As parents, you both have a responsibility to ensure your child's healthy growth and development.

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Teach Traditions, Values, Culture, and Beliefs

As a dad, you can pass on traditions, values, cultures, and/or religious beliefs to your child. It is important for your child to understand your family roots in order to have a sense of belonging. By teaching traditions, values, cultures, and/or religious beliefs of both parents, you provide your child with tools to live and grow by.

Learn to Play

It is important for you to play with your child. Playing is how a child learns. A dad often plays differently than a mother does, and that is okay. A dad tends to encourage more risk-taking behaviours and uses fewer toys. A dad tends to use his own body as a jungle gym where a mother tends to use toys, stays closer, and encourages caution while playing.

Relationships filled with love, warmth, hugs, and kisses are important for your child, but do not forget that talking, reading, and playing also help to develop a child's mind.





Behaviour

Provide Structure and Guidance

An older child needs to be taught the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. All children need structure and guidelines to learn acceptable behaviours and self discipline. This can be done by providing rules and discipline. Discipline is teaching; it is not punishing. There is no reason you should ever hit or spank a baby or a child. People who have studied the effects of spanking on children have found it is not a good way to teach a child how to behave.

"Contrary to what many people believe, children who receive physical punishment tend to have more behaviour problems than those who aren't spanked. Children who are spanked grow up to believe that hitting other people is okay. As children they are more likely to be aggressive with other children. As adults, they are more likely to resolve conflicts with their spouses and their own children with violence."

Dr. J. Durrant

You cannot spoil a baby by picking them up when they are crying. You are simply teaching your child they can depend on you.

Understand Behaviour

In the past, it has been seen as your job as the father to make your child behave. If the child was misbehaving, it was perceived that discipline from dad would make it stop. As a parent, you need to teach your child acceptable behaviour. Some behaviours are very annoying like whining, crying, fighting, demanding, clinging, not wanting to eat, and temper tantrums. These behaviours need to be dealt with in a positive way. Sometimes you may become angry or frustrated by your child's behaviour, but you need to learn to control these feelings. Never discipline in anger. Aim your reaction towards what your child did instead of at your child.

Remember that your role is to help your child learn better ways to interact and cope with the environment. This takes patience and understanding. If you take the time to understand the developmental stage of your child, you may not expect so much and will learn to be more patient. Understand that your baby cries to communicate a need for something. Perhaps your baby is hungry, wet, cold, uncomfortable, or just needs a cuddle.





Provide Opportunities to Learn

Help your child behave by providing a safe environment to explore and learn. A child learns by doing. Provide activities that will keep your child busy and not bored.

Please remember your child needs time to learn what acceptable behaviours are. It is important to set reasonable and consistent expectations to encourage this learning. Your child will also learn how to solve problems and get along with others by watching the way you handle situations. Be sure to notice when your child's behaviour is acceptable and let him know you are pleased. Take time in your busy day to let your child help with household chores; it is a wonderful way to spend time together. It may take a little longer, but your child will be kept busy and will be learning at the same time.

As a dad it is your job to teach your child many things and to give him the opportunity to grow up as healthy and happy as possible.

Remember ... Dads Make a Difference!

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Being a father is more than just making a baby. Are you doing everything you can to be the best dad to your child?





Dear Dad,

I am not a perfect child, so you don't have to be a perfect Dad. All I ask is that you love me with all your heart. It makes me happy to hear you say you love me. Hug me when I cry, smile at me when I laugh, and kiss me just because. Listen to me when I talk to you. Talk to me, sing to me, and read to me. I love the sound of your voice, and hearing your voice helps me learn to talk. Keep me safe from the things that could hurt me. Show me how to be healthy. Try to understand me and why I behave the way I do. Teach me about our family so I know I belong. Share the job of caring for me with my Mom. Please don't ever shake me or hit me.

I know it is a big job being a Dad and sometimes you worry about lots of stuff, but don't forget that being a Dad can be fun. Just by being in my life I can teach you how to play and how to be more loving, stronger, and kinder. If you haven't spent as much time with me in the past as you would have liked, remember it is never too late to get to know me. You don't have to be perfect, just be the best Dad you can. You and I are worth it!

Love,
Your Child

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Resources

For more information, visit the following websites:

Canadian Father Involvement Initiative-Ontario Network (FII-ON)

www.cfii.ca

Canadian Institute of Child Health

www.cich.ca

Dads Can

www.dadscan.org

Family Service Canada

www.familyservicecanada.org

Health Canada, Nobody's Perfect program

www.hc-sc.gc.ca/dca-ea/family_famille/nobody_e.html

Healthy Parenting Home Study

www.healthyparenting.sk.ca

Saskatchewan Prevention Institute

www.preventioninstitute.sk.ca

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