

Why Dads Matter



Did you know?

We all know that children grow up in many different kinds of families, some live with mum and dad, some have two mums, two dads or stepmums and stepdads, some children may be adopted or living with relatives, some have parents that have passed away and others may have parents that are separated. Living in a loving and safe environment is the most important thing.

This leaflet is to help anyone who has the important role of being a father figure in a child's life. Being a father figure is an important role and there is evidence to show that children learn better and have fewer behaviour problems when fathers are actively involved in their lives.

They are less likely to get into trouble with the police or involved with drugs and are more able to make friends easily, to understand better how others feel, to form their own loving and stable relationships and have better mental health. Being an active father figure is both important for both boys and girls.

How to get more involved in your kids' lives:

- Try to get a balance between work and family life and set aside time to spend with your kids.
- Be a role model and encourage good behaviour.
- Be supportive with your child's learning by talking to them, reading them stories, doing homework together and also by just taking time to have fun.
- If you can, try to get involved in your child's school by attending parents' evenings, school plays or sporting events or volunteer to support school trips.
- If you struggle to get to things like parents' evenings, after school activities etc. you can request flexible working from your employer.
- Maintain a good relationship with your child's other parent or parents whether you are together or not. This is particularly important.
- If you are separated or things are difficult, find out about your rights.
- Stepfathers can be as important father figures to children so make a point of getting involved.

The work and family balance

It is very important to spend time with your kids but with a stressful job and long working hours, getting the balance right isn't easy. Here are some typical questions you may ask yourself.

How do I switch off from work?

Try to avoid starting stressful tasks in the last half an hour of the work day and do some routine tasks where you can start to wind down. Try to relax on the journey home by perhaps listening to music, reading the paper or even incorporate some exercise by walking or cycling to and from work to help you unwind. Get into a routine where you ask your child what's happened in their day.

What if work stresses me out?

Stress can make you anxious and irritable. This can make you seem distant to your child. When you leave work switch off, do something to help you take your mind of work and try not to take it home. If you are struggling with the stresses of your job speak to your employer.

How can I spend more time at home?

You have the statutory right to make an application to your employer for flexible working. Check out your company's policies on flexitime. For example, you may be able to have flexible start and finish times or to work a four-day week with longer hours during each day. It's important to think about the impact to your employer when making this application and negotiating a pattern that can work for you both.

Ideas for achieving a better work and family balance:

- Can you reduce the time you spend commuting? Or perhaps even consider moving house?
- Are there any work-related activities that could be cut out or reduced?
- Arrange specific times and activities to do with your children.
- Arrange holidays and outings to spend some quality time together.
- Get creative – it might be difficult to find the time, so if you're busy at home encourage your children to get involved and help with things like doing the dishes, making the dinner or helping with home improvements.
- If you are part of a couple decide on a pattern and schedule which enables you both to be involved.

Supporting your child's learning

Supporting your child's learning starts at home

- Talking about your child's day brings you closer together. Ask them about their friends, their favourite subject or lesson, their favourite TV programmes and their favourite sports.
- Reading stories to your kids sets up good reading habits and creates a great bedtime routine. A story at bedtime is better than TV or a video, which can over stimulate children and keep them awake.
- The internet is a great source of information. Support your kids by researching school topics online. There are also great websites with educational games like www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc.
- Get involved in their homework. You can be involved without actually doing it for them. It's a good idea to keep in touch with the teachers to understand what's expected. They may have a homework diary which you can look at.
- Have fun! Doing things that you both enjoy helps develop skills and interests. It can be anything like football, cooking, bike riding, martial art or even carpentry.

Supporting your child's learning at school

Getting involved with your child's school can really benefit children. They can become more confident, better behaved and keener to learn.

- Get to know the teachers and see how they work. Arrive early to pick up or drop off your child, and visit the classroom.
- Attend parents' evenings and if there is a school newsletter or website, read it regularly.
- Get involved with the subjects and topics they're learning, you can find out more at <https://www.gov.uk/national-curriculum>
- Volunteer to get involved in school trips, the school play or after school clubs.
- Read school reports and ask the school for advice on how you can help your child(ren) reach their potential.

Choosing your child's school

Choosing the right school is an important decision. As a father figure you know your child very well and therefore are best placed to be involved in this decision. Think about your own experiences of school and the similarities you have with your child when thinking about these decisions. Here are some things you can do to help you make the right decision:

- Listen to other parents - which schools do they rate and why?
- Read the most recent Ofsted inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk) - this will tell you a lot, from class sizes to parent participation.
- Understand what the different Ofsted inspection outcomes mean and investigate further any that are "inadequate" or "requires improvement".
- Check out school league tables (www.education.gov.uk/schools/performance) and understand what these tables are showing. Sometimes a school may rank highly because its pupils knew a lot before starting there and not because it teaches them well.
- Find out how well the school has been doing to improve the children's performance. This can be a real marker of a good school.
- Visit the schools. How engaged, polite and happy are the children? How switched on and liked does the head teacher seem? How good are the facilities?
- Does your child have a special interest, perhaps sports, art, science or technology? Is the school well equipped to help them reach their potential in these areas?

Keeping your relationship close

Looking after your child involves setting an example so it is important to do this by showing your child/ren that you have mutually respectful relationships. If you are part of a couple, it's important that you remember to look after your own relationship, so make a commitment to spend some quality time together, without the children if possible.

It's very likely that you will disagree about things from time to time. It's important to think about how you resolve these disagreements and how to handle arguments that can be potentially damaging for children and cause resentment. If your children see you having structured and respectful debates, it can help them with their own challenges as they grow up.

Tips on handling disagreements:

- Have an agreement with your partner to use lowered voices, avoid demeaning language and to focus on solutions when problems arise.
- Give each other time to talk and listen and give each other direct eye contact.
- If things are getting out of control call a time-out and agree to talk again about it later with a proper discussion.
- If things are likely to become heated consider talking about it at a time when the children are not around.
- If the kids do see a heated argument take the time to apologise to them, reassure them things are OK and explain the solution.
- If you feel your relationship is in trouble you could try relationship counselling.
- Seek professional advice for issues around e.g. debt, alcohol, depression and anger.

Separated Fathers

In some circumstance the only option is for parents to separate. Whatever your own feelings, it is really important to put your children's needs first. Don't let them get caught up in conflicts and arguments. Research shows that it is normally in the child's best interest if:

- Both parents raise children whether or not they live together as long as it is safe to do so.
- Each parent supports his or her children to enjoy a positive relationship with the other parent.

Work out what is best for each of you and for your child/ren and involve each other in decisions that affect your child/ren. The way you talk to and act with your ex-partner will have an effect on your child/ren. If your child is going to spend time at your home, make sure that they have their own space.

Focusing on behaviour

All parents want their children to be happy, make friends easily and do well in life. One of the most important things you can do to help them is to encourage good behaviour.

- Be constructive and consistent with discipline. Tell your child what you want, explain why and stay positive.
- Concentrate on what you want them to do and not on what not to do.
- Set out to help not punish. When you need to discipline your child, try to give them the chance to change their actions and feel good about what they're doing.
- Try giving your child choices to focus them on action rather than resistance, for example, 'You can catch the bus home at eight or we'll come to collect you at eight thirty'.
- Don't assume your child will react the same way as you did at their age.
- Remember that children learn by example.
- Sometimes children behave badly as a way of getting attention, so praise and hug them for doing something well. That way they will start to use good behaviour to get attention in future.

- As they get older, you may need to change or amend boundaries to reflect different behaviours and experiences. Involve your child in this - they're more likely to cooperate - and focus on the areas that are really important to you.
- Some local authorities run parenting courses. These are for all parents not just those experiencing difficulties. To find out more about courses in Warwickshire visit www.warwickshire.gov.uk/parenting programmes or call 01926 742219.

Getting through the teenage years

As children get older and become teenagers your relationship with them is likely to change. They will want to become more independent which can sometimes be tough for parents especially if you have been very close. It's important to keep some boundaries in place and consider where you can start allowing them to be more independent.

Giving them their independence

If you are close to your child you should sense when they're ready to become more independent and start doing things for themselves. This should be a gradual and staged process. Create an open forum for them to talk to you about any issues. As a dad you can help children explore the outside world and can help encourage this.

- Be clear, set limits and teach accountability for actions. It's important they know they are accountable for the things they do.
- Be reasonable and give choices where possible e.g. you must do your homework tonight but you can choose if it's before or after dinner.
- Teach them to be responsible. If they do not fulfil their responsibilities there should be consequences. If you set a 9pm curfew and they come home at 10pm follow through with consequences to these actions.
- Explain to them how you expect them to respond in a difficult or emergency situation.
- Let them make mistakes. This is an important part of becoming independent and resilient.
- Take them shopping and teach them about money.
- Say no to things that matter – some things just aren't worth arguing about. You might not be happy about how your child chooses to dress. If however they choose to smoke or skip school be clear that this is a "no" that is not negotiable.
- Guide and motivate them to make good decisions.

Keep a close eye on your teenager and look out for the following worrying signs:

- A decline in school interest and achievement.
- Reports of bad behaviour at school. Disrupting school classes or non-attendance.
- Hanging out with kids who you have heard cause trouble.
- Harming themselves or others or perhaps developing worrying eating patterns (eating disorders).
- Behaving in an over-sexualised way.
- Showing signs of depression or low self-esteem.
- Sign of drugs or alcohol abuse.

If you see any of these signs it is likely they need some help. Encourage your teenager to talk to you about things they're worried about. Assure them you will be supportive with whatever they tell you. If you are part of a couple agree strategies with your partner, it may be unhelpful to be overly strict and also to take too much of a soft approach. To find out where you can get advice on handling teenagers, see the last page of this booklet.

Know your rights/benefits

There are different types of financial support available to families with children.

Your entitlements

- If you are responsible for bringing up a child under the age of 19, you may be able to claim child benefit. You may also be entitled to child tax credit.
- If you are working, you may be entitled to claim Working Tax Credit and may qualify for help with childcare costs.
- All 3 and 4 year olds are eligible for 15 hours of free education olds. Some 2 year olds will also be eligible for this.
- For more information on Tax Credits, Child Benefit and other benefits visit: **www.gov.uk**
- You could consider opening a Junior ISA and save even a small sum regularly, in your child's name.
- You could consider life insurance – cover of 10 – 20 times your income means that, if you die, your family will be protected financially. There are cheaper policies which pay out only until your child is grown up.

There may be more specific support for families with children with special educational needs or disability, families affected by unemployment or low income. Please get in touch with the Family Information Service for further information on this - www.warwickshire.gov.uk/fis

Paternity leave and Parental leave

The early years in children's lives are crucial for them to build their first bonds and attachments.

Paternity rights (April 2014)*

- You're entitled to 2 weeks Paternity Leave but can take up to 26 weeks Additional Paternity Leave (subject to certain criteria), both paid at a set flat weekly rate or at 90% of average earnings, whichever is the lower.
- To attend the birth, you have a right to take unpaid 'emergency leave for dependents'.
- You and your partner can claim 18 weeks unpaid parental leave to be taken at any time before their child's fifth birthday (or 18th birthday if your child is disabled). It will be made available to parents of all children up to 18 years old from 2015.
- As the parent of a young child you have a right to ask for flexible working from your employer who must give a very good reason for refusing.
- For more information visit www.workingfamilies.org.uk.

* *Please note that the rules around paternity leave are changing in 2015 in line with the government's 'flexible parental leave' consultations.*

Parental responsibility

If your child was born after November 2003, your name on the birth certificate gives you automatic 'Parental Responsibility' which allows you to authorise medical treatment, see your child's medical records and be consulted over many things including adoption, schooling, change of surname, or being taken abroad. Other ways of getting Parental Responsibility include marrying the mother or through a Parental Responsibility Agreement.

Further help

Family Rights Group

www.frg.org.uk

Tel: 0808 801 0366

One Parent Families

www.oneparentfamily.co.uk

Tel: 0800 018 5026

The Childrens Legal Centre

www.childrenslegalcentre.com

Tel: 08088 020 008

Dad Info

www.dad.info

Family Lives

www.familylives.org.uk

Tel: 0808 800 2222

Local parenting classes

www.warwickshire.gov.uk/parentingprogrammes

Parent Channel TV

A new online resource featuring short and engaging videos designed to support parents with information and advice on the day-to-day challenges of parenting.
www.parentchannel.tv

Families Need Fathers

www.fnf.org.uk

Tel: 0300 0300 363

Separated Dads

www.separateddads.co.uk

Fatherhood Institute

www.fatherhoodinstitute.org

Flexible Working

www.gov.uk/flexible-working/overview

Working Rights

www.workingfamilies.org.uk

Other titles in this series include:

Choosing Childcare and Early Education

Dealing with Bullying - A Parents' Guide

Dealing with Discrimination - A Parents' Guide

Dealing with Separation and Divorce

Encouraging Good Behaviour

Life with a Teenager

Moving on to Secondary School

Surfing Safely - Your Family's Guide to Internet Safety

Tackling Homework and Revision

Talking to your Child about Alcohol and Drugs

Talking to Your Children about Relationships and Sex

Your Child's Learning - Getting Involved

Contacting the Family Information Service

If you are looking for any further information or advice for your family the Family Information Service can help you. We offer a free and impartial information and signposting service for parents and carers of children and young people on a range of topics such as; childcare, benefits, health, leisure and much more. If you don't know who to ask, ask the Family Information Service!

Opening Hours:

Monday to Thursday - 9.00am-5.30pm

Friday - 9.00am-5.00pm

Phone us:

0845 090 8044 (local Rate) or 01926 742274

(Voicemail for out of office hours)

Email us:

fis@warwickshire.gov.uk

Visit our website:

www.warwickshire.gov.uk/fis

Write to us:

Family Information Service

Children, Young People and Families

Saltisford Office Park, Ansell Way, Warwick CV34 4UL

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**Warwickshire Family
Information Service**

