

DADS AT A DISTANCE

Divorced or Separated

Ideas for Strengthening Relationships Between Dads and Kids

Research tells us that children with active dads receive benefits that kids without involved fathers don't get.

Children with active dads have better grades, positive problem solving skills, good health, ability to maintain close friendships, higher levels of empathy and compassion.

Kids who have involved fathers become adults with a higher sense of satisfaction with life, more education, higher income, more stable jobs, stronger and longer marriages.

Involved dads provide physical care such as feeding, bathing, clothing and general care. They take children to doctor appointments, school conferences, child care, etc. Involved dads play and interact in ways that show love and limits to their children. They know their child's likes, dislikes, and routines. Active dads know the important people in their child's life like friends, teachers, and coaches. They connect with their children on an emotional and spiritual level as well as reconnect with their children after an absence.

Although you are not with your child every day, you are devoted to your children. How you handle your situation will make an impact on your children.

Self care:

- **Focus** on what you have control over, YOU! You can't change someone else, but you do have control over your own emotions and actions.
- **Deal with your anger** towards your former spouse and your current situation. Enroll in an anger management class to help direct or diffuse your intense emotions.
- **Write a letter to your own father.** If he is alive, you can choose to send it or not. Write about how you *feel* about being his son.
- **Carry your child's photo** in your wallet. Show and tell with your co-workers.
- **Choose healthy habits** such as regular exercise and adequate water intake. Eat nutritious foods, quit smoking and other addictive behaviors. Get a medical check-up. Your children depend on you to be available and active in their life for a long time.

Co-parenting:

- **Be pleasant** to your child's other parent.
- **De-escalate the next argument** with your child's mother. Look at her when she talks; restate what she says so she knows you heard her. Stay calm. (You might be surprised at what doesn't happen!)
- **Pick a neutral exchange site** if you and your ex-spouse tend to get into arguments at that time.
- **Follow the 3 P's;** be pleasant, be positive and be persistent. Don't give up.
- **Learn about parenting** by taking a class or reading about child development and guidance. Sign up at *Just in Time Parenting* <http://www.parentinginfo.org/>



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Stay tuned to your child:

- **Be the adult.** Don't let your child become the other parent when they are with you. You are the father and you are the responsible adult in charge. Be careful of giving your kids more responsibility than they should take on.
- **Follow through** on your promise to be with your child at a specified time.
- **Create space** for your kids in your home. Having their own bed and space for their belongings makes it feel like your home is theirs also. Even having full sets of clothing at your home can make the transition more comfortable for your child.
- **Plan your greeting.** Smile and greet your child with his/her "pet" name. Many dads have affectionate names for each of their children like "squirt" or "boomer". This is a special connection for dads and kids.
- **Prepare and eat at least one meal together** when you are with your kids. Get nutritious ideas from Food for Fitness and Fun: <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/food>
- **Get outdoors** with your child. Hike, bike, run, fish and play in the natural world. You and your child will be healthier, happier, smarter and have great memories to share later! For outdoor adventure ideas go to Greenhour: <http://www.nwf.org/Get-Outside/Be-Out-There/Activities.aspx> and Nature Explore Family Club: <http://www.arboday.org/explore/families/>
- **Talk about divorce.** Tell your child as much about your separation/divorce as they can understand. Divorce Matters: <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/Publications/PM1638.pdf>
- **Know your child's routine.** Find out about his/her daily schedule, what are favorite foods and activities. Ask them about it the next time you talk to them.
- **Go school shopping together.** Talk about what they are looking forward to and what they are worried about. Shopping together on the Internet is a good alternative. Ask your child to select an item, you can purchase it on-line and have it sent to them.
- **Stay connected to your child's extended family** by telephone, social networking sites such as Facebook, sending birthday cards, etc. Talk to your kids about where they live, how they are related to you and your children. Extended family is part of your child's heritage, respecting those relationships strengthens your child's sense of identity.
- **Car Tunes:** Hum a tune and ask them to Name That Tune! Makes traveling to and from (day care, doctor, mom's house, school activities) extra fun!

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