

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Fatherhood: What Does It Take?

Research has shown again and again that a father's role is as important as a mother's in raising healthy, compassionate and confident children. Just as women want to be the best mother possible, men want to be the best father they can be.

Children don't come with manuals, and parents don't magically know all the answers. If you feel somewhat overwhelmed by parenthood, you're not alone. You'll gain experience and confidence as you go along. The tips below aim to give you a little background as you aim to meet the most exciting, and rewarding, challenge of your life.

Tips and Tools for Dads

Fathers can have a huge impact on a child's life. Research shows that men who play an active role in their children's lives stimulate all aspects of development, even when those men don't live in the same home as their children. Children with active dads:

- Are more ambitious
- Are less susceptible to peer pressure
- Are more competent
- Are self-protective and self-reliant
- Are more self-confident with their respective male or female identities

Before the baby is born, soon-to-be fathers have many opportunities to support mom and learn more about parenting. Consider:

- Attending prenatal check-ups with your partner
- Being present for tests such as amniocentesis and ultrasound
- Participating in childbirth classes and learning how to help mom in labor and delivery
- Learning how to change diapers, prepare and give a bottle, and comfort a baby

As baby and mom get settled at home, dad's role can increase significantly. Not only will your active involvement provide enjoyment for you and the baby, it's important to your relationship with your partner. Try to:

- Hold the baby often; touch is very important to his or her development
- Do your fair share of feeding and care, especially at night
- Play with your baby; dad's style is quite different from mom's and baby needs both
- Read to your baby frequently

Life will change as your baby grows. Being involved in your child's life can take many forms. The importance of a father's influence on a child's life cannot be overstated.

- Give your child your undivided attention as often as possible
- Take an active part in discipline and teaching right from wrong
- Be involved in your child's activities and interests
- Work together on projects at home and school
- Be considerate of and sensitive to your child's feelings

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Being a father does not end with babyhood or young childhood. All through your child's life, it is important that you express your acceptance and appreciation, as well as provide discipline and guidance.

- Be a role model
- Be a teacher
- Intercede on your child's behalf
- Provide encouragement
- Help your child build on his or her strengths
- Tell your child often that you love him or her
- Be honest, and teach your child to accept the truth
- Listen to your child
- Be patient
- Keep a sense of humor

Being a dad is clearly one of the most exciting, exhausting and rewarding challenges a man can face. By taking into account the tips above, you set the stage for a life-long relationship of support and caring between you and your son or daughter.