

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

Stay-At-Home Dads

Whether they're taking advantage of their company's parental leave policy for a short time or making a longer-term decision to be a stay-at-home dad, more fathers are taking on responsibility for child raising these days.

Still, dads who are new to the full-time parenting role need to overcome some of the barriers imposed by traditional views of child raising, and they and their partners may need to adjust their own perspectives to fully explore, enjoy and get the full benefits of this new lifestyle.

The Financial Factor

The decision to implement a non-traditional parenting arrangement may be made primarily for economic reasons. As women have entered the workforce in greater numbers, it’s not uncommon for some to earn more than their partners. Concerns about the reliability, availability or costs of child care may also lead couples to re-evaluate their options, and determine that the family will be better off if one parent can stay home.

Depending on each partner's career stage and commitment, it’s more often the case that fathers may choose the option to stay at home. As traditional household and child rearing tasks have come to be more equally distributed, many men view a full-time commitment as not just worthy of their time, but an essential experience that they would regret missing out on.

Joint Commitment

To make the stay-at-home dad arrangement work—and work well—both partners need to demonstrate a willingness to sacrifice and change. The greatest adjustment that couples may need to make is coping with non-traditional gender role responsibilities. While each may feel fully liberated, it’s not until they encounter discrimination toward the stay-at-home dad (or, indeed, the working mom), that their commitment to this new lifestyle will be put to the test.

Keep in mind that new roles take time to evolve and become established. The process of developing new routines and ways of relating to each other, your children, your neighbors and families can bring a couple together. Keep in mind your ultimate goal—whether it's to increase Dad's time with the tots, reap the economic advantage of stay-at-home child care, or simplify your life by getting back to the basics and what's really important to you.

Adapting to Change

Fathers who decide to make the transition to being a stay-at-home dad are leaving a structured environment that fosters confidence to one that has little structure or avenues for positive feedback, such as the type one would get from a co-worker or manager. The transition should be made slowly and communication between parents should be effective and regular so that adjustments can be made to make it a rewarding experience for all.

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Even though their numbers are growing, stay-at-home dads are a relatively small group when compared to stay-at-home mothers. As a result, unlike stay-at-home moms, dads may not have a large support network of other dads or community resources. Consider:

- Participating in neighborhood Mom's groups. You might feel like the odd man out for a while, but chances are you will be welcomed the same as another parent.
- Looking into any existing community groups specifically available to stay-at-home dads; or failing that, starting your own.
- Visiting online chat rooms and Internet discussion groups, which can help reduce any feelings of isolation you may experience.

Alternative Options

The arrangement of a stay-at-home dad does not have to be all or nothing. Couples—and family friendly companies—are being very creative in developing strategies that work for them, such as:

- **Compressed work weeks.** Consider working more hours per day and fewer days per week.
- **Alternate shift start times.** Parents work at different hours to minimize the amount of time the children are away from home.
- **Part-time hours.** If fathers work less than 40 hours per week, the family might feel a little pinch, however, a simpler lifestyle can make this work while giving dads more time at home.
- **Working from home.** From one day a week through to full-time telecommuting, various work-from-home strategies meld the workplace and home in unique ways. These will depend on the type of work you do, the ages of your children, the availability of work space and your company's ability to be flexible.

Couples that make a successful switch from traditional parenting roles to non-traditional ones find that both mothers and fathers can, indeed, parent their children. They do not necessarily parent in exactly the same ways, but they are able to provide children with the love and care that they require. When both members of a couple participate as active, involved parents, the benefits are tremendous: from stronger fathers, to stronger families, to stronger communities.