



DADS AT A DISTANCE

Divorced or Separated Dads

Ideas for Strengthening Relationships Between Dads and Children

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

Children with involved dads

- have better grades, positive problem solving skills, good health, ability to maintain close friendships, higher levels of empathy and compassion.
- 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 like feeding, bathing, clothing, and general care. They take children to activities, doctor appointments, school conferences, child care, games and practices. Involved dads play and interact in ways that show love and limits to their children. They know their children's likes, dislikes, and routines. Involved dads know the important people in their children's lives like friends, teachers, and coaches. They connect with their children on an emotional and spiritual level and reconnect with their children after an absence.

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. If needed, 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 whether or not to send it. Write about how you *feel* about being his son.
- **Carry your child's photo** in your wallet or on your phone. Share with your co-workers.

Co-parenting:

- **Be pleasant**, or at least polite, to your child's other parent.
- **De-escalate the next argument** with your child's mother. Look at her when she talks. Re-state what she says so she knows you heard her. Stay calm.
- **Pick a neutral exchange site** if you tend to get into arguments with your ex-spouse.
- **Follow the 3 P's**; be pleasant, be positive, and be persistent. Don't give up.

Involvement:

- **Be the adult.** Don't let your child become the other parent when he is with you. You are the father and the responsible adult in charge. Be cautious about giving your child more responsibility than he should take on.
- **Follow through** on your promise to be with your child at a specified time.
- **Create space** for your child in your home. Your home will feel like hers too when she has her own bed and space for belongings. Having full sets of clothing and personal care items at your home can make the transition more comfortable for your child.
- **Plan your greeting.** Smile and greet your child with a "pet" name. Many dads have affectionate names for their child like "squirt" or "boomer." This is a special connection for dads and kids.
- **Know your child's routine.** Find out about her daily schedule, what are her favorite foods and activities. If you don't know, ask her the next time you talk.

- **Prepare and eat at least one meal together** when you are with your child. Get nutritious ideas from *Spend Smart Eat Smart*: <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/foodsavings/>
- **Talk about divorce.** Tell your child as much about your separation/divorce as he can understand and is appropriate. *Divorce Matters*: <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/Publications/PM1639.pdf>
- **Go school shopping together.** Talk about what he is looking forward to at school and what he is worried about. Shopping on the Internet is an alternative to going to a store. Ask your child to select an item; you can purchase it on-line; and have it sent to him.
- **Play car tunes:** Hum a tune and ask her to Name That Tune! This simple game makes traveling to and from places extra fun!
- **Stay connected to your child's extended family** by email, Facebook, telephone, sending birthday cards, etc. Talk to your child about where the family members live and how you are all related. Extended family is part of your child's heritage and respecting those relationships strengthens your child's sense of identity.



Although fathers may not be with their children every day, they are devoted to them. How fathers handle divorce and separation situations will make an impact on their children.

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