



Dads are important from the start

AS A DAD, YOU ARE SO IMPORTANT TO YOUR CHILD'S development. Research shows conclusively that children whose fathers are involved in their lives have

- ◆ healthier social-emotional development
- ◆ less alcohol and drug abuse in the teen years
- ◆ lower school drop-out rates
- ◆ healthier relationships

Before your baby is born

You are a positive force in your child's life, and your influence begins even before your child is born. When you offer your baby's mother your strength and support while she is pregnant, you set the stage for getting to know your child. You begin to form the bond that will grow into love and protection even before your baby is born.

Your infant

These days, more dads are able to be present at their babies' births and can care for them from the very start. Men can give tender loving care to infants just as women can. It will feel different to your baby when you hold him because your size and muscles are different. He will hear that your voice is lower than his mother's. These differences prepare him for other differences he will encounter in life. Your young baby needs your love, care and active involvement in his life from the very start.

Your toddler

It won't be long before your little son or daughter is up and moving. You'll hear your child's first words, and most often they include "Dada." You have a great opportunity to play with your active toddler. Dads play differently than moms do; they are more spontaneous and more physical in their play with children. Mothers are more likely to use toys and props. Both kinds of play are important for healthy brain development.

Children who are read to by fathers are more likely to be good readers themselves. Toddlerhood is a good time to establish solid routines for reading to your child.

Your preschooler

As your child moves toward kindergarten, she will need many experiences to help her be ready. Fathers are able to walk along side their children and show them how the world works. You have many interests you can share with your child. Keep in mind your child's developmental



and skill level and make activities you do together fun and a little bit challenging without being frustrating. Talk with your parent educator to get information about your child's development.

Reading takes on new meaning in the preschool years. Children can listen to longer stories and enjoy non-fiction books, too. Share your interests with your child through reading together.

It's worth it!

Dad, you are so important in your child's life. He doesn't need fancy toys or expensive computer games. He needs you to be his dad and to spend time with him. Keep the lines of communication open with your child's mother and let her know you want to be actively involved in your child's care and experiences. No matter what you need to work out, it's worth it. No one can replace you and the contribution you make to your child's future. ❖