

What to Know

Do you have the skills to be a good dad? The fact is you likely have some of the skills but not others. And that's okay, as long as you're willing to acquire the skills you lack.

The goal in building your skills is to become an involved, responsible, and committed dad. But what does it mean to be involved, responsible, and committed?

Involved means that you spend time with your children. Time is like oxygen for your children. You should spend as much time as you can with your children, given your situation. Try to have that time be of high quality. Invest your time in simple activities, like eating meals with your children and going for walks with them.

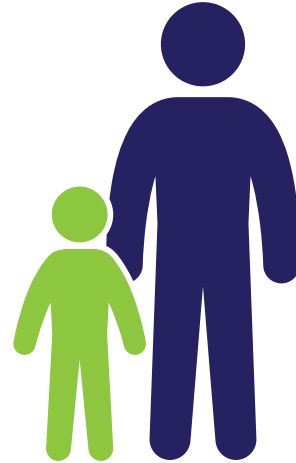
Your involvement shows your children that you love them. Your love should be “unconditional.” Love them no matter what they do. Be there for them through thick and thin, the messy toddler years, moody adolescence, and into adulthood. It's the type of love that leads you to put your life on the line to protect your children.

Responsible means that you care for the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual well-being of your children. You think about the impact that your actions and decisions have on your children.

Committed means that you keep your word to your children. Do what you say you're going to do. Your commitment to them is forever.

Along the way, you must learn that fathering is not mothering. Dads tend to excel at certain skills, and moms tend to excel at others. Dads, for example:

- Tend to play in a rough and tumble manner with their children more often than do moms. This skill helps children because it teaches them how to regulate their emotions.
- Often engage their children by acting as their children's toy, such as letting their children climb on them. Moms tend to engage their children with toys.
- Dads encourage their children to explore the world by challenging their children to learn new skills through correct risk-taking. Moms tend to focus more on their children's safety.
- Dads look to their children's futures. Moms tend to focus on the present needs of their children.



As a result, dads and moms have different styles of parenting. The bottom line is that you will parent differently than her. **And that difference is good for your children.** Both of your parenting styles will help your children.

What Else

You can be just as good a parent as your children's mother. Mothers don't have a corner on the parenting market.

Fathering isn't the same thing as parenting. "Fathering" is your unique ability to contribute to the good health and well-being of your children and family. "Parenting" is the knowledge and skills that dads and moms need to raise healthy, happy children.

You are a unique and special in your children's lives. You can't be replaced by another man or by a mother.

Father your children in all the ways they need you. You are more than a paycheck. Care for their physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual needs.

What to Ask

Reflect on each of the questions below. Take your time. Write your answers if you like.

1. What fathering and parenting skills do I have?
2. What fathering and parenting skills do I need to learn?
3. How can I build on what I have and learn what I need?
4. How are my children helped by the unique skills my children's mother and me bring to raising them?
5. How can I become more **physically** involved in the lives of my children? How can I become more **emotionally** involved? How can I become more **intellectually** involved, as in more involved in their education? How can I become more **spiritually** involved?

Learn More

Bringing humor, laughter, and fun into your fathering is vital to being an involved, responsible, committed dad. But some dads find it hard to have fun with their children. These dads say things like:

- “You won’t catch me acting like a kid.”
- “Having fun and acting like a kid is foolish.”
- “You won’t catch me crawling around on the floor acting silly.”

Don’t be one of those dads!

Here are some things to keep in mind when using humor, laughter, and fun.

Avoid using humor, laughter, and fun in bad ways—in ways that hurt your children. Don’t use bad or hurtful:

- **Humor**, such as jokes that make fun of your children.
- **Laughter** that makes fun of something your children do, such as falling down.
- **Fun** in which you say something that hurts your children’s bodies or emotions, such as continuing to tickle your children after they ask you to stop, or pushing your children into the pool when they don’t want to go in.

And don’t use bad or hurtful humor, laughter, or fun with others in front of your children. Your children will learn as much from what they see you do to others, as they will from what you do to them.

There are a lot of good ways to use humor, laughter, and fun. The best ways are those that teach your children a lesson while having fun. If you have children under the age of 10, use these fun ways to teach them lessons.

- **Reverse Psychology:** In a happy and playful way, ask your children to do what you don’t want. For example, you say, “Okay, I don’t want anyone to get ready for bed. Just sit there and don’t put your PJ’s on. I bet none of you can beat me up the stairs and get ready for bed before I come back!” You make it fun by walking away for a few minutes and watch your children try to beat you up the stairs. Let your children win!
- **Fooler Approach:** This approach fools your children into learning the right thing to do. For example, you say, “I bet I can fool you guys. I bet nobody can brush their teeth by themselves. You guys can’t do it!” Or you say, “I bet nobody knows our family rule about sharing. But I know it! Keep things to yourself and don’t share. Right?” Of course, your children yell, “No! We’re supposed to share!” You then say, “Well, I sure couldn’t fool you kids!” Your children will love this game because they get to tell you that you’re wrong.

- **Talking Objects:** Act like an object that talks to get your children to do something or to teach them a lesson. For example, you act like the bathtub and say, “Hey Jessie! It’s time to jump inside me and get nice and clean.” Or, you act as a piece of fruit and say, “No, no don’t eat me now. Eat me after supper!”

If you can’t or rarely see your children, you can still use humor, laughter, and fun. You just have to be creative. For example, find a funny movie, or video on YouTube, and tell your children to watch it. Then talk about it the next time you talk, email, or text.