

What to Know

Picture this situation. A dad prepares a meal for himself and his three-year-old son. As they dine, the three-year-old starts to eat with his hands. The dad tells his son that he must use a fork. The child uses the fork for a few minutes and then uses his hands again. The dad becomes angry and yells at his son to stop using his hands and pick up the fork. The dad threatens to take the food away.

What's wrong here? If you said the dad shouldn't have yelled at his son and threatened to take away the food, you're right. But why did the dad yell at and threaten his son? The main reason is that dad didn't know that it's normal for a three-year-old to use both a fork (or spoon) and hands to eat!



Some of the biggest mistakes made by dads stem from a lack of knowledge about child development. So it's vital that you learn about child development and the physical, emotional, and social milestones your children should reach by a certain age. It's also vital that you learn how you can help your children to reach these milestones.

As you learn about child development, keep in mind that all children are unique. Your children might differ from other children in when they reach milestones. **If you are ever concerned about how your children are developing, talk with your children's doctor.**

[Click here](#) to access the Ages and Stages Charts. These charts from [National Fatherhood Initiative](#)[®] will help you learn about your children's development and the milestones for their age. (Scroll through the charts to find the information for your children's ages.) The best thing about this tool is the tips for helping your children reach their milestones.

Be cautious when using this tool or any other on child development. Take the information with a grain of salt in terms of what it means about your children and your role in their development. These charts can raise concern. Some dads think they should know this stuff. No one knows this stuff cold. Even doctors keep copies of these kinds of charts around their offices to use.

The Ages and Stages Charts help you to know about your children's development in the present and future. Don't use the charts like box scores or report cards. **And never use them to compare your children to each other or to other children.** They are road maps that give you a little guidance about what is coming around the corner. They're simply a tool to do the job at hand, like a good socket wrench set or software program

What Else

Learn how much impact you have and don't have on your children when it comes to their development.

There are two large forces that affect how children develop: nature and nurture.

Nature is the traits that your children are born with and that don't change, such as race, sex, and hair and eye color. These are traits that you can't affect.

Nurture is the way you raise and treat your children. Nurture affects some traits, such as self-worth, how a child treats others, and what a child does for a job as an adult.

The way you raise your children can strengthen a natural weakness or weaken a natural strength. You can bring out and grow your children's natural talents. You can also suppress and not allow them to develop to their fullness. You can get your children training to run faster, for example, but your children can only run as fast as their natural gifts will allow. You can make sure your children eat healthy foods to grow taller, but your children will only grow as tall as their bodies will allow.

If you've gone through the topic "Family History," you learned about self-worth and how you can build it in your children. You can also harm your children's self-worth when you lack knowledge about child development. If you lack this knowledge, you're in danger of setting goals for your children that they might not be able to reach by the time you think they should. And, depending on the goals, they might never reach them.

Sadly, many dads set the bar too high when it comes to their children's development. It's okay to have goals for your children's development. The key is to make sure they're realistic. What will harm your children's self-worth is when the goals aren't realistic and you react poorly when your children don't reach them.

What to Ask

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

1. How much do I know about how my children should develop? Do I know the physical, emotional, and social milestones for their ages?
2. What can I do to help my children reach their milestones?
3. Am I concerned about the development of any of my children? If so, why am I concerned? Have I spoken with my child's doctor about my concern?
4. Do I have unrealistic goals for the development of any of my children? If so, how can I adjust the goals to make them realistic?

Learn More

One of the best things you can do for your children's development is prepare them to do well in school. And after they're in school, help them to succeed in it.

Here are some ways you can help your children succeed in school.

1. **Don't let the mother of your children do all the work.** Some dads leave everything to do with school up to their children's mom. When you're not involved, it leaves them with only one parent to count on.
2. **When your children are young, read to them daily.** Children who learn to read at an early age are more likely to succeed in school.
3. **Tell your children what you expect and then take a back seat.** Children who succeed in school have parents who are clear about what they expect from their children. (Don't be shy about expecting good grades.) But children who succeed also have parents who step aside. These parents let their children find their own paths to success. They don't hover over their children.
4. **As your children age tell them to ask you questions, with respect, that challenge you and others.** Allow your children to challenge you at home so they'll become more comfortable challenging others, such as teachers. Asking lots of questions that challenge others will become even more helpful to your children as they move into higher grades.

5. **Encourage your children to do homework in groups and with friends who succeed in subjects they struggle with, or just need a little help in.** Helping your children with homework in the early years of school can help, but it can backfire later on. The way children learn today can differ a lot from the way you learned. As your children age, have them study in groups of peers who learn in the same ways they do, or with a friend who really gets the subject.
6. **Help your children get into classes with good teachers.** More than choosing the right courses, what matters most is who teaches those courses. If your school allows your children to select teachers, do your homework on the school's teachers.
7. **Go to school and class events.** Go to meetings with the teacher(s), class parties, to school ballgames and plays, and to events that involve the entire school.
8. **Get to know other children and parents.** Your children will make friends at school and may not get along with some other children. Knowing the other children, and their parents, will help you talk with your children about the good and not so good things that happen at school. It can also help in talking with your children's teachers about problems that happen over and over again.
9. **Join a group that helps parents become involved.** Become a member of a group, like the PTA, that helps parents to get involved in their children's school. This is a great way to make sure your children's teachers are doing the best they can to teach your children.

Bonus! Would you like to have fun with your children and help them thrive at the same time? Download the free Dad Guideposts and Activities Packet. ([Click here to download it.](#)) It will help you make the most of the time you spend with your children. It has fun things you can do with your children that are fitting for their age ("age-appropriate"). These things will help your children grow in healthy ways!