

WORK THOUGHTS

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Dads Make a Difference

Do you know that fathers have an extreme influence on their children? Research has revealed that compared with mothers, the quality of contact with fathers is *a stronger predictor of a child's later success or failure with school and friends*. For example, five-month-old baby boys with actively involved fathers were found to be more comfortable around strangers, and kids whose fathers showed high levels of nondirective and noncoercive physical play were much more popular among their peers. In study after study, children who fared best, academically and socially, were those whose dads validated their feelings and encouraged their accomplishments.

Conversely, children who fared worst in academics and social relationships were those whose dads were cold and authoritarian, derogatory and intrusive. In one study using video game play, some dads were observed making humiliating and critical remarks to their kids about kids' mistakes, sometimes taking over a game not going well. Three years later, researchers found that these kids, the ones with humiliating and nonsupportive dads, were clearly headed for trouble. They had problems with delinquency and were displaying aggressive behavior towards classmates.

Many researchers say that fathers influence their children through play and credit *Dad's* style of horseplay with helping the children learn about emotions. For example, when Dad is a scary bear chasing his overjoyed son across the yard, or lifting his delighted daughter above his head for an airplane ride, children learn to be both scared and amused at the same time. As children react to Dad's cues for a positive experience, they figure out that giggling and squealing makes Dad laugh and keeps the game going. When Dad is ready to stop, children also have the opportunity to practice regaining composure. These skills benefit children as they enter the wide world of playmates and much later as they engage in the wide world of the workplace relationships.

John Gottman, PhD, esteemed researcher and author, suggests healthy play with Dad helps children learn to read people's signals when feelings run high, to generate their own exciting play, and to know how best to react to others. He says that although today's fathers are more likely than their fathers to participate in children's births, to request flexible work schedules, and to pass up promotions in order to spend time with their children, dads engage with their kids only a *third* as much as moms do.

Therefore, let's remember that children's success in life depends on the consistent involvement of fathers, who, according to respected research, can never be totally duplicated by mothers, *in the ability to shape and strengthen children's emotional intelligence*. Yes, dads do make a difference. To learn more, please contact us at 337-436-9533.



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