



Four predictors of father involvement

Positive father involvement is good for children and families

Children benefit in many ways when their dads are involved in their lives. A positive father-child relationship is linked to better cognitive development, higher educational achievement, higher self-esteem, and pro-social behavior.¹

Positive Coparenting Relationships

A positive coparenting relationship with their child's mother is strongly associated with both the quantity and quality of father involvement.^{2,3} When mothers support fathers' relationships with their children and parents can cooperate with and support one another in raising their child, fathers see their children more, engage in more activities with them, and have more positive relationships with their children.^{4,5,6} The quality of parents' relationships also matters.⁷ As a result, fathers who are in healthy romantic relationships with their children's mothers are consistently more likely to be involved with their children and to have higher-quality involvement than fathers who have no relationship with their children's mothers.^{8,9,10,11}

Financial Stability

Financial stability is linked to fathers' involvement with their children, particularly among fathers who view their role as the provider.^{12,13} Among fathers who live with their children, men who are unemployed or feel that they are inadequate providers are less involved with their children and use fewer positive parenting behaviors.¹⁴ Nonresident fathers who provide either formal or informal support tend to have more contact with their children; furthermore, nonresident fathers who have more contact with their children tend to provide more informal support.¹⁵ In contrast, child support debt can reduce fathers' willingness or ability to engage with their children, inhibit fathers' ability to spend time with their children, and impede fathers' capacity to regain economic stability.¹⁶

Reduction of Risky & Criminal Behavior

A number of risk factors predict lower father involvement.¹⁷ Fathers with a history of incarceration,^{18,19} abusive behavior,²⁰ or drug and alcohol problems²¹ are less likely to have positive interactions or maintain contact with their children over time. Other risk factors for low father involvement include multipartner fertility,²² depressive symptoms,²³ stress,²⁴ unintended pregnancy or low prenatal involvement,²⁵ and young age at the birth of the child.²⁶ However, employment, completion of education, and family and social supports all build resilience to these behaviors and promote increased father involvement with their children.²⁷

Parenting Confidence, Knowledge, & Skills

Fathers' parenting skills and confidence are important predictors of father involvement. When fathers feel competent²⁸ and believe that they can parent well,²⁹ they spend more time with their children, take on more caretaking responsibilities, and engage more positively with their children.^{30,31} Increasing the amount of time they spend with their children allows fathers to build more parenting skills and efficacy;^{32,33} and, in turn, having parenting skills and efficacy is linked to increased involvement.³⁴ **Fathers who have positive beliefs about fatherhood and the importance of father involvement are more engaged with their children.**³⁵ On an individual level, fathers who understand and value their identity as fathers are more involved with their children and have higher-quality relationships with them.^{36,37} Research also suggests that men with higher self-esteem and more egalitarian beliefs about gender roles are more involved with their children because they are more willing to take part in caregiving and nurturing.³⁸ Community cultures that express the norm that fathers are valuable and equal coparents also contribute to fathers' positive beliefs about fatherhood. Fathering and views of fathering are shaped in part by the broader community, including cultural norms, social support, and institutional practices.³⁹



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The Evidence Base

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