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## FATHERS

### are VIPs (Very Important Persons) in Raising Children

*A walk through your neighborhood or a visit to a shopping mall will quickly reveal that fathers are becoming more involved than ever in nurturing and rearing their children. Changing economic and societal patterns have made this trend not only possible, but acceptable, sometimes necessary, and in nearly all cases, very desirable.*

#### Why the Father is Such an Important Part of the Parenting Team

*As a masculine model, the father can help children develop sex role behavior*

The father plays a vital role in helping a child feel good about being a boy or a girl. Since gender identity begins to develop when a child is about three, it is especially important for the father to relate closely with his children during this formative preschool period. For boys, the father provides a model for being a man . . . an example of masculine feelings and interests. For girls, the father provides a bridge for developing a trusting, comfortable relationship with men in the future. The importance of role models in developing gender identity cannot be stressed enough. In single parent homes, growing children should be provided opportunities to develop a close relationship with a person who is the same sex as the absent parent.

#### *A father can give needed support in nurturing children*

In contrast to traditional beliefs that it was appropriate for only the mother to nurture or be emotionally close to children, it is now recognized that children usually benefit from having both parents actively involved in their upbringing. By interacting with two people, children learn that problems can be solved in a variety of ways . . . that people have different feelings and reactions. They learn that people have varied skills, strengths and approaches to life. They learn to seek help from different people for different needs.

The earlier both parents become involved with their children, the better! Numerous long-range studies indicate that the foundation of a child's personality is formed during the first five years of life. There is probably no other period of time when it is more important for both parents to actively participate in creating an environment that provides learning opportunities, encouragement, recognition, love and guidance for their children. Such an environment greatly increases a child's chances for developing a vital sense of security and good feelings about himself or herself.

#### *Many more good reasons that can't be covered here*

The impact of a father's involvement with his children obviously extends far beyond this limited discussion. Through his experience and example, he may influence the economic, social and educational goals of a child or family. Additionally, he provides a model for being a husband and a father.

## Suggestions to Help Dad Feel More Comfortable on the Parenting Team

For some men, involvement in child rearing comes easily. For others, it initially may seem somewhat strange and uncomfortable. Although the following suggestions are directed primarily to new or "expectant" fathers, the principles involved hold true and have application in nearly all stages of parenthood.

### Notes for Dad

■ *Set aside some time to learn about the pattern of growth that your child will follow.* Review books and magazines which discuss children and their development. Take time to observe and actually be with children to further add to this understanding. Both will help you enjoy your child more by building an appreciation of what to expect, and when and why.

■ *Start early!* If possible, join your wife for prenatal or childbirth preparation classes. Lend help and support in making arrangements for your baby's homecoming. The earlier you begin your involvement, the easier it will be to enjoy your child and feel comfortable as a parent.

■ *First things first!* Begin your participation with your child in areas where you feel comfortable and at ease. One father might begin by heating a bottle of milk . . . another by reading to his child . . . a third by assuming full child care for an hour or two. Branch out from there!

■ *Share your child's milestones with your spouse.* This will help you both better understand your child's development and foster a very satisfying form of communication between you and your wife.

### Notes for Mom

■ *Collect an assortment of child development information to keep at home.* Numerous popular books (see list below) are available in libraries or book stores. They are good general resources for improving parenting skills and offer suggestions for times of stress.

■ *Encourage your husband to feel involved from the beginning.* During your pregnancy, share with him progress reports from the doctor. Work together in making preparations for the baby. Take time to discuss your attitudes about raising children.

■ *Encourage your husband to take over some of the actual care of your child.* Close physical contact allows time for special father-child communication and helps your husband experience your child's reactions firsthand.

■ *Share your child's milestones with your husband.* . . . the first smile . . . the first tooth . . . the first day of school. A full exchange of experiences helps you both more completely enjoy and understand your child.

### References and Recommended Readings (paperback editions)

Billler, Henry and Dennis Meredith, *Father Power*, New York, N.Y.: David McKay Co., Inc. 1974.

Dodson, Fitzhugh, *How to Father*, New York, N.Y.: New American Library, 1974.

Sullivan, S. Adams, *The Father's Almanac*, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1980.

*Parents' Magazine and Better Homemaking*, published monthly by Parents' Magazine Enterprises, Inc., Bergenfield, N.J.



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