



# The Involved Father

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*The New American Adulthood National Survey of over 500 Baby Boomer men found that 84 percent said that being a good father was a very important factor in their definition of success.*

## Trends

Over the past decades, fatherhood has changed significantly. Expectations for fathers have shifted and the roles they fulfill have changed. In the 1950s and 1960s men were considered good dads if they had a good job and were the disciplinarian. In the 1970s, men were good dads if they participated in their child's birth and helped with domestic chores. In the 1980s, good dads were in touch with their feelings and the feelings of their kids. In the 1990s, good dads balanced work and family, and had more diverse roles such as stay-at-home dads, step-dads, single custodial dads, surrogate dads, and much more. Fathers of this millennium will contend with many of these changes as they define a good dad in the 21st century.

## The Power

There is overwhelming support for fathers to be more involved in their children's education. A poll conducted by The National Center for Fathering noted 96.8 percent of all Americans believe fathers need to be more involved in their child's education. Department of Education research shows father involvement positively impacts a child's success and opportunities in school. Through parent/teacher meetings, helping with homework, and involvement at school functions, a father's presence contributes to his child's performance and a more positive attitude in the school setting.

## The Meaning

Fathers are involved in their children's lives in a multitude of ways that go beyond the traditional roles of provider and playmate. Researchers have identified three main ways that fathers are involved with their children. The view of father involvement is applicable to fathers who live with their children as well as to those who do not.

1. Fathers can have direct contact with their children.
2. Fathers can make themselves available to their children even when they are not in physical contact.
3. Fathers can take responsibility for their children's welfare.

## The Difference

Father involvement is different than mother involvement. When children are young, fathers are more likely to engage children in play, while mothers tend to spend more time in routine care giving. Mothers' and fathers' play styles have been found to differ. Fathers typically engage young children in more physical interaction during play. It is important to note that one type of play is not better than another, just different.

## The Twenty-First Century

The twenty-first century is beginning with rapidly changing structures and functions of family life. According to Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, and Lamb (2000), four social trends will impact the roles of fathers.

- Increased female employment
- Increased father absence
- Increased father involvement
- Increased cultural diversity

These changes have led to different family structures as well as to different expectations and beliefs about the roles of fathers.

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