

Tips for Dads: *Advice to Non-Residential Fathers*



1. Respect the mother of your children. Regardless of your feelings toward your children's mother, you need to treat her with respect, for the sake of the children. Children are happier and feel more secure when their parents get along. Fathers should ignore negative comments, compliment the mothers when they can and keep lines of communication open. Try to find common ground with your children's mother around common goals for the children, and never criticize your children's mother in front of the children.

2. Keep your promises. Children who have endured divorce or the breakup of a parental relationship often feel abandoned and distrustful of the adults in their lives. Fathers need to be careful to nurture or restore their children's faith in them and in adults in general. Keep the promises you make and earn your children's trust by keeping your word.



3. Do not be a "Disneyland Dad." It is tempting to spend virtually all your time with your children in fun activities. "Disneyland Dads" miss opportunities to help their children grow in virtue and miss chances to get to know their children in their ordinary lives. Spend time doing ordinary things with your children like helping with homework, having them do chores and tucking them into bed on a school night. You will discover much more about your children amidst the ordinary struggles of daily life than in eating popcorn in a darkened movie theater.

4. Stay in regular contact. Non-residential fathers should stay in regular contact with their children. If you live nearby, be faithful about seeing your children on a given day. If not living nearby, be faithful about calling or sending a letter or email to your children on a weekly basis. Children, even teenagers, thrive on maintaining regular contact with their fathers.

5. Do not be soft on your kids. Fathers often feel like they should go easy on their children when it comes to discipline. But children may take advantage of their fathers' laxity by pushing the behavioral envelope even more. Be a firm, consistent disciplinarian with your children. In the long-term, children who are disciplined well are better behaved and more respectful of their fathers than children who are given a free reign.



6. Take care of your children financially. Non-residential fathers need to take at least partial responsibility for the financial welfare of their children. Children who receive regular financial support from their fathers do better educationally and are more confident that their father is there for them and their family. Pay child support on time and be flexible enough to help your children when unforeseen expenses come up. If possible, tell your adolescents that you will help pay for college or vocational training. If money is a problem, contact a local fatherhood program to get help with job skills, job placement and addressing any outstanding child support owed.



This material is adapted from The Office on Child Abuse and Neglect. (2006). The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children (Appendix E). Retrieved September 26, 2008, from the Child Welfare Information Gateway, at http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/fatherhood/append_e_8.cfm