

Father Times

Fathers and Children's Relationships

Issue 8

A newsletter for fathers and father figures of young children

Taking Time for Friends

Think about the people that you most remember. Consider who has made the most difference in your life. Is it a Nobel Prize winner? An actor or actress who wins an Academy Award? Or is there someone else? Consider for a moment the mother, the father, the teacher, the coach, the grandparents, the pastor, the friends — the people who pass through our lives and the lives of our children.

It is generally not the people who receive headlines or applause that make the most difference in our lives. It is our family and friends and those we connect with and care about that matter most to us. How do we raise young children so that they become people who care for others and have good friendships? A child's social development, or how they grow in developing relationships with others, is an important factor in their growth and happiness.

Take time to pay attention to your child's relationships and what you can do to make them happy and positive.

Fathering Facts

On Fathers and Friendship

Happiness in life so often comes from interacting with others in loving ways and building good relationships. Career success also depends on being able to cooperate and get along with others. Fathers and father figures can do much to help children develop good relationships and provide a model for them to follow. What do the facts say about a father's relationship with their children? Here are some key findings:

- Fathers who know the parents of the friends that their children select and play with have kids that are less likely to become involved in risk behaviors and more likely to avoid aggressive or antisocial behaviors.
- Children with fathers who are engaged with them in activities that provide social interaction, such as youth clubs, sports activities or religious groups, tend to have more friends and better relationships with their friends.

- If fathers engage in a "permissive" parenting style by giving in to children's desires and setting few or no limits, children are more likely to be aggressive, impulsive, or non-conforming in their social relationships. Children may take things that are not theirs or think little about the effects of their actions on others.
- Fathers who engage in a "power assertive" (authoritarian) parenting style by giving orders without explanation or using threats and physical punishment tend to have children who are more aggressive or sometimes shy and withdrawn in social situations. Children who withdraw may think they are powerless and social interaction is unpleasant, while those who are aggressive may have learned that acting aggressively will bring results.
- Monitoring the quality of a child's friendships and peer interactions is associated with having children who experience more satisfying and successful relationships with friends.

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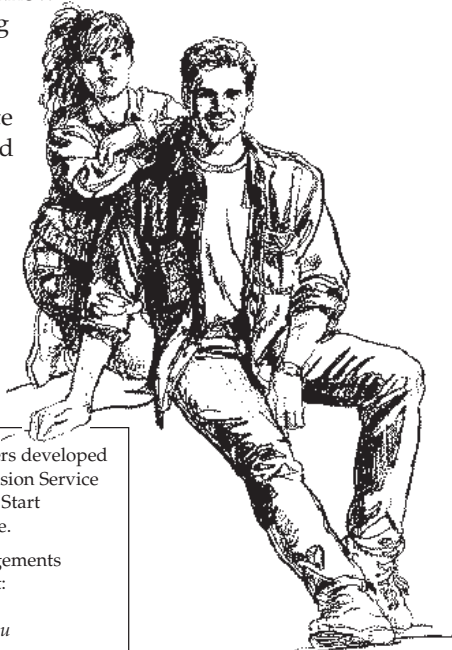
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It's important for children to have opportunities that develop their social skills. According to William W. Hartup, child development specialist from the University of Minnesota, the best indicator of how well your child will adapt as an adult is not school grades or IQ — it is the quality of their peer friendships. A child's ability to get along with others is possibly the most important factor in how he or she will succeed as an adult.

Hartup notes that friendships provide four basic functions for humans. They furnish: (1) Emotional resources — such as having fun and dealing with difficult situations; (2) Cognitive resources — for solving problems and learning; (3) Social opportunities — including learning to communicate, cooperate and gain entry in a group; and (4) Relationship models — to learn important skills for later relationships like dating and marriage. To assist children in developing their relationships, follow these tips.

With Babies

- Infants respond to faces and are calmed by being held. They can make eye contact and smile. Spend time with your infant getting to know her better. Take turns cooing at each other. Use words to express what you think the baby might be feeling. Invite the baby to take in the world at her own pace.
- Be sure the baby has one or two primary caregivers whom she can trust to take care of her every need. Be one of those two!
The lessons that babies



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learn early about trust and relationships will be carried with them throughout life.

With Siblings

- Acknowledge brothers' and sisters' feelings about each other. Stop all hurtful actions. Help children use feeling words such as "You sound really angry" or "You wish she would ask before playing with your teddy bear."
- Resist the urge to compare. Describe what you see, feel or need done rather than criticizing or comparing siblings to each other.
- Treat children uniquely, not equally. Think about your own siblings. Would you appreciate matching birthday gifts, or would you rather have something chosen especially for you? Give each child the time and attention she needs when she needs it.
- Don't let anyone lock a child into a role — not parents, siblings or the child. Help the child see himself in a whole new light by describing his successful attempts.
- Help children solve problems without taking sides.

- Learn to accept normal bickering. When your children need help getting beyond it, don't blow up — offer real help. Acknowledge their anger, reflect each child's point of view, describe the problem, let them know you trust them to work out a fair solution and leave the room. If the situation looks dangerous, stay close and help the children work it out peacefully with problem solving.
- Children with problems do not need to be viewed as problem children. Accept the child's frustration. Appreciate what they have accomplished. Focus on a solution.

With Friends

- Introduce your baby and child to others. Teach your child from toddlerhood how to gain access into a group by modeling how you do it yourself and inviting him in too.
- Show your child how to act positively with other children. Young children who have a difficult time with being too bossy or aggressive do well playing with slightly older children. Those children who tend to be quiet or hold back do well playing with slightly younger children while they learn social skills.
- Children need time to learn social skills from their parents but, by about age three, they need to practice with playmates their own age.
- Notice when children are being appropriate with friends, and talk about that. When trouble strikes, make corrections as positively as possible.
- Schedule play dates for short amounts of time to begin with. Help your child to plan some possible choices of activities for the play date before the other child arrives. Start with one friend at a time. Crowds are overwhelming to children who aren't used to them.

Activities for Fathers and Children – Friendship Time

This section provides a variety of activities you can do to spend time with your children and build a good relationship together. Have fun as you and your child enjoy some friendship time!

- ❑ Pretend you are a customer in a restaurant. Have your child come to you, take your order and bring your meal. Try this type of pretend play also when visiting the dentist, going

to the store, or talking to a teacher. This type of play is good for young children.

- ❑ Make a puzzle by cutting an empty cereal box into puzzle piece shapes. Use a cookie sheet or cake pan lid for a frame if you need one. Take turns putting the pieces together.
- ❑ Clean out the family “junk” drawer, garage or attic together. Try to figure out what an item is or at least who it belongs to. The kids can play delivery person to put each (safe) item where it belongs — or into the trash if needed!
- ❑ Working together, cut pictures of animals, fish, sea creatures, birds, etc. out of magazines. Mount them on construction paper if you want the pictures to last. Draw three signs. Draw waves on one and label it “In the Water.” Draw “land” on the second one and label it “On the Land.” The third one can include

clouds and be labeled “In the Air.” Talk about each picture as you decide which sign to place it under.

- ❑ Do someone a favor. Tell your child what you did, how it helped and how it made you feel. Next time, let your child help you help someone else. This teaches caring.
- ❑ Collect many sizes of plastic containers and their screw on lids. Can your child figure out which one goes on which container? Observe him. How does he figure it out? How does an older child solve the problem? Have him put the lids in order from smallest to largest. This activity helps with problem solving.
- ❑ Incorporate your child into doing chores. This gives the child more time with you, teaches her skills, and makes her feel like a needed person in the family.



My Child's Relationship Skills

Children need both personal skills and social skills to create good relationships with others. Ask yourself where your child is on each skill and what you might do to assist if needed.

Personal Skills – My child:

- is usually in a positive mood.
- is not excessively dependent on teachers or other adults.
- usually engages in activities willingly.
- usually copes with rebuffs adequately.
- demonstrates the capacity to empathize.
- has positive relationships with one or two peers.
- displays capacity for humor.
- has positive feelings about himself/herself.
- can manage feelings of stress or anger.
- is able to control impulses and behave appropriately.

Social Skills – My child usually:

- approaches others positively.
- understands expectations for working with others (sharing, etc.).
- expresses wishes and preferences clearly.
- is not easily intimidated by bullies.
- can sense the feelings of others.
- expresses frustration and anger appropriately without harming others or property.
- takes turns fairly.
- is able to make decisions and plan.
- negotiates and compromises with others.
- shows acceptance for peers of other ethnic groups.
- is accepted fairly easily into ongoing activities or groups.
- interacts nonverbally with other children with smiles, waves, nods, etc.
- tries to solve problems with peers.

Ten Friendship Tips for Dads and Kids

Dad — you set the example!

Here are ten tips on how to help your child make and keep friends:

1. Have your child list ten activities they'd like to do with you and invite a friend. Do one such activity a week for ten weeks. Focus on one or two specific friends to invite each time.
2. Teach your son or daughter to make eye contact, say hello, and offer a suggestion about playing together.
3. When your child gets upset with a sibling or friend, let them calm down and then ask why they became upset. Ask them to think about how they might have responded differently. Practice two or three different responses with them.
4. Start a neighborhood game of tag or hide-and-seek. Invite your children and others to participate and join the game.
5. Ask your child who they'd like to invite over to play. Help your child make the invitation and plan two or three activities to do with his or her friend.
6. Get your child involved in an organized social activity such as a youth club (4-H, Boy or Girl Scouts, etc.), sport (soccer, etc.), or other group.
7. Organize a small group of fathers for a weekend outing with your kids to watch a ball game, go fishing or hiking, or have a picnic.
8. Play family games such as board games, charades, hide-and-seek, or other activities. Help your child learn to participate and take turns.
9. Talk to your children about how they feel about their friendships or interactions with others. Focus on small, positive interactions and successes.
10. Read stories or books to your child that highlight children's friendships. Ask your child what he or she thinks and what ideas the story teaches about being a friend.

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Story Time

I Love You the Purplest by Barbara M. Joesse,
Mary Whyte, Illustrator

Feathers for Lunch by Lois Ehlert (Harcourt,
1990)

Waiting for Jennifer by Kathryn Osebold
Galbraith & Irene Trivas (1987)

Annabelle Swift, Kindergartner by Amy Schwartz
& Franklin Watts (1988)

Fathering Resources

*Kids Are Worth It! Giving Your Child the Gift of
Inner Discipline* by Barbara Coloroso, 1995.
Toronto: Somerville House Publishing.

*Raising Self-Reliant Children in a Self-Indulgent
World* by H. Stephen Glenn & Jane Nelsen,
1989. Roseville, CA: Prima Publishing.

Raising Your Spirited Child by Mary Sheedy
Kurcinka, 1998. New York, NY: HarperCollins.

*Touchpoints: Your Child's Emotional and Behav-
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Reading, MA: Perseus Books.

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