

# Fathers forever

Do you as a father understand, protect, teach, guide and care for your children, or do you just love them, work hard and try to save enough for their education?

*Children  
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Every child deserves a loving, involved father. Children need your involvement in their lives, and it is particularly important to help develop their sense of self-confidence. Putting your children first may mean re-prioritising several areas in your life, but the rewards are great and they will last a lifetime for both you and your child.

Admittedly it will take some time (about 10 or 12 years) for your son or your daughter to understand, appreciate and admire to your rôle as bread winner, head of the household, concerned parent, devoted patriarch, etc. Your ambitions for them, the investments you carefully made for their college education, the life insurance policies and the fortune you pay out by way of dentist's bills will not matter to them as much as it does to you, until they are old enough to understand.

But compound it with the long hours you spend at work, the days you spend on business travel, the hours at the gym, and you run the risk of letting your children think you are a semi-invisible provider and simply, no more.

But like my little friend, five-year-old Salim used to say until a year ago, "I am the apple in my father's eye," your child too can make you the centre of existence. Just believe in yourself and your potential to be an active, caring father and you will be transformed into one.

By demonstrating mutual love and respect for each other, parents can ensure that their children grow up in a secure environment. Avoid serious marital rows in front of children, keep channels of communication open and never, never, speak disparagingly of your wife to your children.

Work together as a team, by sharing as much as you can, if

not equally, in all child rearing tasks. Discuss with your partner the concerns and issues you have about your child's health, education, safety and development. Remember that parenting means a father's involvement as well as the mother's.

Spend time with your children - read a bedtime story to your child, play with her and attend her school programmes. Do organised activities such as swimming or exercising or random activities like teaching them your favourite sport or indulging in their favourite form of recreation, even if it means playing with water. Also, spend some quiet time every now and then - watching a movie, reading, or travelling together.

Model your manners, speech and behaviour for your children, and earn the right to be heard and obeyed by them. Remember that your child watches you and all your interactions with others. By setting an example, you promote a feeling of acceptance and respect in your own child.

Reward your child's desirable behaviour with a physical expression of praise or cheering words, and simultaneously, be ready to offer guidance for less positive behaviour - establishing boundaries, setting reasonable limits and disciplining them. Children need to understand how their behaviour may affect others, and this understanding will come only with their secure relationship with you.

As a father, it is your rôle to 'protect' your children. While you enjoy the physical development of your children, be clued in to their health and their visits to the family doctor or dentist. If necessary, childproof the home environment, making secure items that may be potentially dangerous. Teach them street smart skills, give them lessons on how to deal with strangers, and educate them about the world outside the home so that they are prepared.

Hard though it may sound,

share at least one meal together everyday. While eating, listen to your children and encourage them to talk about their day. Provide them with support and advice about situations that they have experienced and plan on visiting friends and relatives and attend community events as a family. Your history, that of your parents and your own family, will be of great interest to your children - tell them your story. By

your reflections on your past, you provide your child with a sense of history and the rich experience of past generations. You can avoid the fine details, but tell them stories that leave them with the feeling that you too were once a child before you grew up and became an involved father.

Being an involved father is for life. Your children will grow up and perhaps eventually will have children of their own, but your involvement in their lives and those of their children is an ongoing duty. Fatherhood is a lifelong commitment and your relationship with your child is forever. ●