DAD'S TOOLKIT

Building Blocks & Talking Tools for dads with children 0-8 years

Father’s Tool Kit Project | Northern Sydney
Whether you are a new dad or have older children - being involved in your child's life matters. Research has shown that as a dad, building a positive and involved relationship with your child from the beginning can make an enormous difference not only to their early development...but right into their adult life.

**Early Development**

Dads and mums often parent differently. As a dad, the way you talk to, play with and care for your child provides them with unique experiences. Your involvement meets different developmental needs. Children can really benefit from this (especially in their early years). It helps your child to grow and develop in certain emotional, psychological, social and cognitive aspects.

**Ongoing Benefits**

Maintaining a positive relationship with your child while they are growing up can lead to a range of benefits for them throughout their life. Their self confidence, self esteem - even the kind of relationships they form when an adult - can benefit from your ongoing involvement.

**Your Relationships**

Research shows that the best possible outcomes for your child occur when both you and mum are involved and supportive in their life. Whether you parent together or separately, being able to resolve conflict, show respect, and demonstrate care will have a positive impact on your child’s early development and later life.
BUILDING BLOCKS

Inside each double page of the Toolkit you will find 3 Building Blocks of ideas for building a positive and involved relationship with your child. Research has shown that when dads are 1) hands-on 2) available for their child and 3) sharing parenting they can have a positive influence on their child’s development.

1 Being Hands-on

This Building Block is about having regular and direct contact with your child. You will find some practical ideas on how you can be involved in play, comfort and care.

2 Being Available

This Building Block is about being physically and emotionally available for your child. You will find some practical ideas on how you can be accessible and present for your child.

3 Sharing Parenting

This Building Block is about your role in planning and organising for your child’s care. You will find some practical ideas on issues that can involve your planning and decisions and participation.

TALKING TOOLS

Being a dad today is different to previous generations. That’s why we have included a series of questions called Talking Tools. They are helpful to think through or talk over. The Tools are about being a dad, about you, about your relationships and your support networks. There are no right or wrong answers to the Talking Tool questions because there is no one way to be a dad. Every dad’s situation is different.

This toolkit contains some ideas for you in your journey as a dad.
Dads!
This chart shows, over the course of your child’s life, some developmental areas your early involvement can affect.

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<th>BABY</th>
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<th>Small Child</th>
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<tr>
<td>bonding</td>
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Research shows that being hands-on, being available for your child and sharing parenting are great ways for Dads to be involved.
**Support Networks**
Are there family and friends you could call on for help and support with your new family?
What useful experience and knowledge do they have?
What would you like to learn from them?
Who has baby items you can borrow? Who will meet you at a park for a play?
Do you know what services are available to give you information and support? (The back page can get you started.)

**Hopes and Dreams**
What excites you about fatherhood?
What are you not sure about?
Can you describe how you want to be involved in your child’s life?
What hopes and dreams do you and your partner have for your child?

**Your Relationships**
How do you think your baby will impact on your other relationships?
What are you expecting to stay the same?
What, if anything, will be different?
What are you expecting of yourself?
How does your partner expect the baby will impact on your relationship with each other?

**Your Dad**
What role did your dad play in your life as a child?
What stands out for you?
Is there anything you would do differently when you are a dad?
Being Hands-on

*Interacting with your baby from before they are born is the best way to build your unique bond.*
- Get close to your partner’s belly and play your favourite music and sing your favourite songs.
- How does your baby respond to your music? What other music would your baby like?
- Talk to your baby. Talk about your day or read a book aloud.
- Your baby already has a routine. Ask your partner when your baby is sleeping and when awake to familiarise yourself with their routine.

Being Available

*Finding ways to support and care for your pregnant partner is important for her and your baby.*
- Care for your partner with nourishing food and provide opportunities for her to rest and relax.
- Watch DVD’s, or read and learn about the changes in your baby’s growth.

Sharing Parenting

*Dads can play an important role preparing the home and physical environment for the changes ahead.*
- Create a safe home for your new baby to sleep and play in. Check your home for hazards and risks and make it a smoke free zone. Read instructions before putting together baby equipment.
- Prepare yourself to be a healthy dad with an exercise routine - quit smoking, reduce drinking.
- Attend child birth and parenting class and learn about labour, birth, how to support your partner and parenting skills.
- Prepare a Dads Hospital Bag with snacks, drinks, a change of clothes, numbers to call.
- Talk with your employer about paternity leave conditions so you have the opportunity to spend time getting to know your baby from the start.
Support Networks
Are there other new dads among your friends and family?
What have they learnt about being a dad?
Is there anything they would do differently?
How has becoming a dad changed their lives?

Birth
How did you feel during the birth if you were present?
What were your responses to the birth?
What did your partner most appreciate about your role during labour?

Your Dad
Are there things about your relationship with your dad you would like to change?
How is the relationship you had with your dad similar to what you want your child to have with you?
How is it different?
What memories do you want your child to have about you?
How do you want your child to feel about you while growing up?

About You
What kind of support, help or information would be useful for you right now?
What do you think your baby needs from you at this age?
How is it similar or different to what your baby needs from their mum?
Do you and your partner know what each other needs to relax and feel supported?
Being Hands-on

*There are many ways to hold, care and comfort your baby. Find what works for you.*

- Hold your new baby directly against your skin. You can calm your baby as effectively as mum.
- Ask the midwife to show you how to bath your baby and check water temperature.
- Ask to be shown how to change nappies.
- Let your baby fall asleep on your chest.
- Play your baby their favourite music from before they were born.
- Create special dad’s time. Take your baby out for a walk and get to know one another, one on one.

Being Available

*Just spending time together as a family – sleeping, resting builds familiarity with being a dad.*

- Visit the hospital or birthing unit as often as you can.
- Learn how to assist and support mum when she is breastfeeding your baby.
- Support your breastfeeding partner in practical ways – bring her cold drinks, (hot drinks are dangerous), prepare a meal, ask her what she is needing.

Sharing Parenting

- Talk to your employer about sick leave arrangements should you need to care for your child or your partner at short notice.
TALKING TOOLS

0 - 6 Months

You and Your Baby
What do you enjoy doing most with your baby?
What does your baby seem to most enjoy you doing with them?
What do you feel you do well when caring for your baby?
How is this similar or different to what your partner notices?

Learning
Are there areas of parenting you don’t feel confident about?
Is there an area of parenting you want to learn more about?
Who could you ask? (check the back page for information links)
What things in life were important to you before you became a dad?
How is this the same or different to what is important to you now?

Work Life Balance
If you are back at work, how are you balancing work and home?
What is working well for you? What is difficult?
What have you learnt about your ability to adapt?
If you work away from home, in what ways can you stay connected with your child while apart?

Change
Becoming a dad can also bring some difficult or uncomfortable feelings.
Are you aware of some of the signs of post natal depression?
Has anyone in your family or circle of friends experienced post natal depression?
Are you aware that men can also experience post natal depression?
Do you know what help and support is available? (check the back page for links).
**Being Hands-on**

*Giving your baby frequent, regular care is how you get to know one another.*
- Learn baby massage in a 1 day course - your baby will like your touch.
- You are their best toy. Talk and read and sing to them anything that comes to mind.
- Wrap, burp, feed and bathe your baby. Have a bath with your baby and hold them afloat in your arms.
- Comfort your baby when crying. You can cuddle, wrap them in a blanket, gently bounce or talk softly, whisper in their ear, go for a walk or car ride, be silly and sing or make funny faces, play calming music.

**Being Available**

*Simply being there with, and for, your baby lets them know they are loved.*
- Spend quiet time together as a family – just sleeping in, lying in bed together.
- Bring your baby in for feeding during the night.
- Create special Dad’s time as often as possible when you and your baby can be alone together. It might be bathing or going out for a walk in the pram.
- Be near or hold your baby when they are content as well as upset.

**Sharing Parenting**

*The planning and preparation involved in caring for your partner indirectly cares for your baby too.*
- Share with the housework, share the load.
- Attend breastfeeding classes with your partner to understand the process.
- Keep supporting your partner with meals, helping her get extra sleep and rest where possible.
- Take turns sleeping in - the first few months can be tiring and daunting for both of you.
TALKING TOOLS

6 - 12 Months

You and Your Baby
What do you enjoy doing most with your baby?
What does your baby seem to most enjoy you doing with them?
Are you as active and involved with your baby as you would like to be?
What makes your involvement easier? Are there any obstacles?
What developments and changes have you noticed about your baby?

Your Relationships
Has becoming a dad changed any of your relationships?
What, if anything, is good about this change?
What, if anything, is difficult about his change?
In what situations do you and your partner communicate well with each other?
What situations, if any, make it difficult to communicate well with each other?

Learning
What routines seem to work well for your baby?
What routines don’t seem to work so well?
What could you do differently?
What routines work best for yourself and your partner?
In what ways do you and your partner work well together to care for your baby?
**Being Hands-on**
- Kids love dads who act and play - wear silly hats, make faces, blow raspberries.
- Read your child their favourite book.
- Play give and take. You give them toys, they give you toys. Use whatever is close at hand.
- Play drop and pick up. Play hiding and finding.
- Give single words when you see your child looking or reaching for something. If they reach for the keys, say ‘keys’, if they crawl to the book, say ‘book’.
- Choose toys your baby enjoys playing with - plastic bowls and spoons.

**Being Available**
*Children can become very clingy at this age to one parent. If it isn’t you, it’s not personal - they still need dad.*
- If your baby clings to mum gently take them from your partner saying “it’s okay, mummy has just gone and…” and distract them by pointing out whatever you can see – traffic, dishes, toys.

**Sharing Parenting**
*Be informed and involved in important decisions.*
- Make and attend appointments at the child health clinic when possible. Request an after hours appointment if you work. Your observations are valuable and insightful too.
- Allocate household tasks in a manageable way for you and your partner. You are also role modelling positive behaviour for your child.
- Now is a good time to start researching childcare waiting lists.
Communication
What do you say and do to show your child that you are listening to them?
How does your child respond to your praise and encouragement?
How do you respond to your child’s emotions and behaviour?
What response works best for you and your child?

You and Your Child
What do you think your child needs most from you at this age?
What does your child need from their mum at this age?
How are these things similar or different?

Your Dad
How is the way you were parented by your dad influencing the way you parent your child?
Is there anything you would like to do differently?
If so, who can you ask for new ideas, information, or skills?
(also look at the parenting program website on the back page)
Being Hands-on

*Kids often love the excitement of rough and tumble play with dad.*

- Get messy with your child in their play – in sand, with water, hands painting.
- Paint the fence with water, draw with chalk on the pavement, build trains and houses from cardboard boxes, kick balls.
- Talk with your toddler – you encourage your child to use a more diverse vocabulary.

Being Available

*To be nearby but not directly involved in your child's play is also one way of playing together at this age.*

- Comment on what you observe your child doing. If you are sitting on the lounge and they are playing at your feet, state what is happening “hey, you are building a tower”.
- Describe what your child is looking at ‘yellow duck’ or ‘big tractor’.
- Sit down and play beside your child, and you can each be doing different things.
- Leave a low cupboard unlocked with plastic containers and saucepans. Your child will love playing with this while you are in the kitchen cooking.

Sharing Parenting

*Thinking ahead, making plans, planning surprises - dads can play a role in every area of their child’s life.*

- Stay connected with your child at work or if living separately with photos, letters, calendars.
- Check the calendar for upcoming events and appointments. Can you arrange babysitting, do you need to rearrange your schedule?
- Childproof your home. Check the Raising Parents website on the back page for a helpful list of ideas.
TALKING TOOLS

Hopes and Dreams
What dreams and goals do you have for yourself?
Are they similar or different to your dreams and goals for your family and your child?
How are they similar or different to those of your partner?
What values do you want for your child when they are an adult?

You and Your Child
What does your child seem to most enjoy about being with you?
What do you think you do well as a dad?
What does your partner see and think you do well as a dad?
In what ways are they similar or different?

Stress and Change
Are there any causes of stress in your life?
How might stress impact on your relationship with your child?
How might stress impact on your other relationships?
What do you usually do to manage stress?
Are there other strategies you would like to learn? (check the back page for numbers)
**Being Hands-on**
- Set up the sandpit or grow vegies in the garden or the verandah.
- Try story-time, snuggle up and read a book. Take your time and talk about the pictures. They may want to make up their own story.
- If the TV is on watch it with your child, stimulate interactive play by singing, dancing etc. Talk about what is on the screen.
- Support your child through the anger of a tantrum but do not give in. Give your child words ‘I can see you are angry’ or ‘let’s go outside and sit down quietly’. Hold your child, pick them up gently and take them to their room.
- Play simple games with balls or cards. It is okay to play dolls with boys and trains with girls.

**Being Available**
*Just spending time together doing what you both enjoy is how to be a great play-mate for your child.*
- Sit and play side-by-side – you play with the blocks while your child plays with farm animals.
- Play alongside your child and on their level. Watch them and wait for their instruction and response.
- Describe what you see your child doing “Now you are piling up those blocks”, “Now you have a green one”.

**Sharing Parenting**
*An active role planning and organising keeps you in touch with your child’s life.*
- Make appointments with the Childhood Health Centres or GP for your child.
- Create a safe environment for your toddler. Put things out of reach. Minimise the need to say ‘no, don’t touch’. Baby proof your house. Replace worn electrical cables, lock away power tools.
- Plan some fun time together as a family. What might you all like to do?
Role Model
How does your child respond to your praise and encouragement?
What is your relationship with your child teaching them about respect?
What is your relationship with others teaching your child about respect and conflict resolution?
How might this impact on your child’s behaviour in their adult life?

Communication
What do you say and do which tells your child you love them and they are important?
How does your child let you know they love you and you are important?
When have you felt cared for, loved and/or respected by others?
What was being said or done at that time?

You and Your Child
What does your child seem to most enjoy you doing with them?
How do you mostly spend your time together?
What else would you like to do together? (the websites on the back cover can give you some ideas)
**Being Hands-on**

*Making time each day for your child makes them feel special and you can see how important you are to them.*
- Be there for one on one play time as much as possible. It can be climbing, active, drawing, kicking a ball, collecting rocks, reading.
- Take some time each day to ask your child about their day.
- Dad-child talk is very important for their language development. You can describe what you are doing now, and ask your child to predict what you will do next.

**Being Available**

*Children are just as happy helping you with simple jobs like digging the garden or washing the car.*
- Be there while they play in a group with their friends. Play along with their ideas.
- Take them to your workplace so they can see where daddy goes and what daddy does.
- Help your child meet other kids - go out and meet other dads at the park, the beach. Help your child get to know and play with other children.
- When shopping with your child encourage them to help you - to find and hold the bananas, to count 3 tins of tomatoes.

**Sharing Parenting**

*There are lots of ways you can show you care for your child - even if you aren’t with them.*
- When you drop off or collect your child from childcare or preschool, have a look at their classroom, where they eat and play.
- Get involved in the preschool. Be part of a working bee, or show and tell.
- Attend a Dad’s breakfast of function at the preschool.
- Stay connected to your child – desktop photos, a calendar marking the days you will be together.
Child Development
How do you want to support your child in school?
In which areas does your child learn well?
What kind of praise and encouragement does your child respond well to?
How can you help your child practice what they don’t understand so well?

You and Your Child
What does your child seem to most enjoy you doing with them?
What activities do you think your child would enjoy doing with you?
What activities or sports would you enjoy sharing or teaching your child?

Role Model
Who were your role models at this age?
What did they say and do which made an impact?
What did you learn from them?
How could this help you in the your parenting?
**Being Hands-on**
- Tell stories about when you were a kid, or when grandma and grandpa were kids. Kids love stories, especially about people they know.
- If possible come home early from work and give yourself time to play with your child.
- Create special dad time and take your child on an outing with you, doing something which interests you both.
- Help your child learn to ride a two wheel bike.
- Create a folder with your child’s drawings, scribbles, writing. Talk about this at story time.
- Help your child with their homework. Praise them for what they are learning and enjoy what they are good at.

**Being Available**

*You are great fun when you play along with your child’s lead.*
- Be the audience while they put on a show.
- Ask them what they learnt at school, what they can show you.
- Get to know who their friends are.
- Children like to watch you do things they can’t do yet.

**Sharing Parenting**

*You can be actively involved with your child’s school, which supports their learning.*
- Attend a parent teacher night, a school event or school meeting.
- Mark events important in your child’s life on the calendar – trips, birthday parties.
- Get involved in working bees, coaching sport, visiting the class to talk about something you know
- Look for events and educational opportunities outside of school for your child (and you).
- When possible drop off and pick up your child from school.
RESEARCH


Flouri, Erini (2005), Fathering and Child Outcomes, Wiley Press.


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Content and Review
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24 hour help and support for you:
Mensline Australia 1300 789 978
Lifeline 13 11 14

24 hour parenting help and advice:
Tresillian 1800 637 357
ParentLine 132 055

LEARNING MORE:
www.cfi.ca
www.dad.info
www.zerotothree.org
www.raisingchildren.net
www.resourcingsparents.com
www.families.nsw.gov.au
www.menslineaus.org.au
www.beyondblue.org.au
Useful booklets and information on being an involved dad
Practical and easy to browse U.K. site covering all dad issues
Learn how to promote your child’s learning development
Tips on child development and parenting
Calendar of practical parenting programs across Sydney
Parenting information, services, and how to access them
All about men, families and relationships
Depression and postnatal depression information

Further copies of Dad's Toolkit are available at: www.families.nsw.gov.au