



The Role of Fathers and Father Figures

1. **What: There's no doubt about it: Fathers and father figures are essential for children's healthy development.** Being physically and emotionally present for their children helps them develop a sense of self, a feeling of security, and a confidence that helps them grow and interact with the world around them.

Why: Fathers and father figures play critical roles in their social and emotional development. Historically, mothers may have gotten more attention for their caregiving role and impact on child development. But current research confirms that fathers play just as vital a role in shaping their child's cognitive, language, behavioral, and social-emotional development. Children learn from imitating their parents, fathers no less than mothers.

2. **What: Fathers are often thought of primarily as disciplinarians, but fathers and father figures play a critical role in all aspects of parenting, including the nurturing of their children.** The ability to be open, to laugh, cry, and play with their children, as well as sometimes stressing rules, makes dads more likely to be seen as approachable and respected, actually lessening the need for strict discipline.

Why: Children are more likely to develop healthy and strong relationships with their fathers and father figures when they experience them as someone who can help them learn and understand limits, as well as someone who will comfort and nurture them in a time of need. It's vital that children- both girls and boys- see that men can be emotionally available and nurturing.

This ability supports their healthy social-emotional development

3. **What: Fathers should try to connect with their children in many different ways. Learning what their children enjoy and participating or supporting their interests (even if they may not enjoy it themselves),** keeps the lines of communication open. Having open-ended conversations, "shooting the breeze," lets them hear what their children consider important.

Don't save all your talking for those tension-filled moments. You can do this by speaking with them every day about the important things going on in their lives. Reading together is another great way to feel connected and support your child's learning at the same time. Find a way to communicate and connect with your child that matches their interests and temperament. For example, a typically calm or reserved child may have a difficult time connecting through rough and tumble play, so suggesting alternate ways of spending quality time together, like reading or coloring together, may be helpful.

Why: Fathers may tend to engage with their children more naturally through active play. Play is a great way to build your relationship with your child. And, it's also essential to convey to children that they can even talk about their feelings. But children may have ways of relating to the world different from their fathers'. Adapting to how they enjoy playing instead of trying to mold them to yours can earn big dividends as your child, and relationship, grows. **JPA**