

Mom's Role & Dad's Role – Parenting Styles

After birth, mothers are focussed on the new baby, and breast-feeding and maternity leave only strengthen the connection. Fathers may feel envious of the time their partners are able to spend with their children at this age and the bond that forms as a result.

Because moms spend so much time with their babies during the first year, sometimes moms think they know what the child wants or needs more than dad does. Be careful moms: your criticism or encouragement could determine how involved your partner will become in daily child care routines. Praise will often result in fathers taking on a more active parenting role, but criticism causes lowered self-confidence and less interest in child care.

For the sake of mothers, fathers, and the baby, moms need to let go and let dads enjoy time with their baby. This provides great down time for mom and bonding time for dad. It is vital for a father to bond with his child by bathing, feeding, cuddling and putting him/her to bed. This non-verbal physical contact strengthens father-child relationships.

Enjoy time with your child and away from them. No one can replace the bond you have with them. Sometimes moms feel guilty passing their kids off to others, whether it is dad or another caregiver, to take a break. Don't! You need time to unwind and regroup. This much deserved time away from kids should not be a guilty pleasure. Enjoy it and bring your rejuvenated energy back to your family so they may also enjoy the benefits of a happy, relaxed mom.

Dads: this is not only a great way to bond with your child, but to also maintain a healthy relationship with your spouse. This gives mom time to unwind and shows that you are supportive of both her and your children. Dads don't need to watch the kids while mom is cooking or doing other chores. Fathers need to also step up and watch the kids while mom watches her favourite TV show, has a nap or meets up with friends.

Studies have shown that fathers have a unique way of playing with, caring for and communicating with their children. A healthy father-child bond helps foster independence, confidence and healthy relationship building in children.

Both the father and mother have their own unique contributions to make in the life of a child and these contributions change with age. Moms have a special bond with an infant during times of breast feeding that dads may feel excluded from. However, as children age, they need their dad for different things. Dads always have a special role. Cherish the time you spend with them and make it count!

If dads are looking for a place to come play with their child(ren), Family Services of Central Alberta offers a program called "My Daddy and Me". This free drop in program runs Tuesday evenings from 6:00 – 7:30pm. Weekly themes allow children to explore toys, stories and activities with their "dad" or the main man in their lives. Plus, dads get to network with other fathers without feeling outnumbered by women.

But you don't need a program like this to give moms a break and give dads a chance to spend some quality time with their kids. Make time for the children to have an opportunity to bond with parents both together and separately. This benefits not only the kids, but the parents as they will have time to themselves to relax and become refreshed. Give it a try – everyone wins!

By Jessica Ludwig. Jessica is a child development worker at Family Services of Central Alberta. For information about parenting programs, call 403-343-6400 or go to www.fsca.ca.