



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime

TUNING IN
NATIONAL PARENT SURVEY

Spotlight



7 Things Dads Wish You Knew About How They Really Feel About Parenting

Science tells us that fathers make a unique and important contribution to their children's early development and life-long success. Young children with involved fathers tend to be more patient and better able to handle stress and frustration once they're in school. Children with involved fathers are less likely to experience depression, obesity, teen pregnancy and more.

We asked dads who are raising this generation of children what they think and how they feel. Here is what they wish you really knew:

1

I love being a dad and I think I'm doing a good job at it. Still, I always want to do better.

Seeking parenting advice and information doesn't mean I don't know what I'm doing. It means that I can always learn more—about effective discipline, early brain development and how to handle my own feelings when I'm overwhelmed. Like most dads, I love parenthood and I think I'm doing a good job. And like most dads, I work hard to do better and I am open to learning more about parenting, even if I don't know where to get answers. I'd love to see more realistic media portrayals of how dads deal with parenting challenges.

2

I'm a dad, not a babysitter. Give me the credit and support I deserve.

When I'm with my kids, don't assume I'm the temporary helper. I'm not "babysitting" my own kids; they need me and I love being a dad. I feel like my life started when I became a father. But too often, I feel judged—by strangers, by family members and even by my child's mom. When I feel stressed and overwhelmed, I don't feel like I get enough support. Like most dads, I'm not in it for the credit, but I'm not getting the credit I deserve.

3

My parents were influential, but I'm doing fatherhood differently. I'm more present, loving and playful than my own parents were with me.

Being a dad doesn't just mean being strong; it also means being loving and affectionate. When I think back on how my parents were with me, I'm more present, more involved and more playful with my kids. I say "I love you" to my kids more than I ever heard as a child. I take more time to listen and talk with my kids. I want them to know that I'm here for them, for the little things and the big things. It matters to them and it matters to me.



4

If I'm not intensely involved with my kids, don't assume it's because I don't want to be.

There are some dads who don't stick around. But there are lots of us who want to be more involved in taking care of our kids, and we are working hard to find ways to be there. Sometimes, it's my own co-parent who keeps me at arm's length.

5

I want to share real parenting experiences—problems and solutions—with other dads.

I want to collaborate with other fathers—not at the expense of expert advice, but to enhance it. I need to know that I'm not alone. I do believe that parenting can be learned. In fact, if I knew of more effective parenting strategies, I'd use them. Dads don't always have a way to share parenting challenges and solutions with other fathers, but we'd like to. I want to hear more from dads like me about helpful resources, how they handle their own parenting fails and what's worked well for them.

6

I want my kids to respect me, not to fear me.

I know that harsh discipline methods like spanking don't work well, so I'm looking for more effective ways to teach and set limits, rather than punish my kids. I may not have a good role model for positive discipline, and I do want good examples of what works without shaming or hurting my kids. Discipline is an important part of raising my child—to nurture as well as to correct behavior. It's an important part of helping my kids succeed out in the world, so I want to get it right. I know that the time to figure out positive discipline strategies is when things are calm, so that I can put them into action when things get heated.

7

I know that my kids pick up on everything I do. That's motivating and a little terrifying.

I know that even before my kids can talk, they're learning from everything I say and do. I'm an important role model for my kids—for how my sons and daughters will shape their own identities and how they will relate to people as teens and adults. I want my daughter to know she's valued so she doesn't look for love in the wrong places. I want my son to see what it looks like to be a good, responsible man. I know that what I do in the early years will last a lifetime.

Learn more about what dads think, know and need.

Get the facts on how dads make a difference.

And get helpful tips for fathers of young children at: www.zerotothree.org and www.JoinVroom.org.

Quotes and polling data from *Tuning In: Parents of Young Children Speak Up About What They Think, Know and Need*.