

### Being a Dad

Studies show that involved fathers contribute to providing a strong, happy, stable environment for a child to grow up in. Flexibility in paternity leave, childcare and work-life balance is increasing and the definition of the father is growing and changing. We need to acknowledge the challenges that fathers face across a range of backgrounds and situations.

It's normal for all new parents, including dads, to feel confused, and unsure if they are ready to face the challenges of parenthood. Being informed about what to expect and where to get further information can contribute strongly to the development of good parenting skills.

### Myths about Fatherhood

There are many misconceptions about what being a father means, for example:

- **'Newborn children don't really need dad'**: Comforting and bonding with a newborn infant is very important. Dads can help with bottle-feeding (formula or expressed milk), and/or learn about breastfeeding from the midwife or health visitor to be supportive. They can help with other tasks such as nappy-changing and establishing a general routine. Simply talking to, holding and rocking your child is hugely important for establishing a bond.
- **'Dads who take time out to be with their children are jeopardising their career'**: Increasingly, men choose to use flexible working arrangements and paternity leave to spend time with their children. Work was traditionally seen as a man's route to self-definition; today, this is increasingly challenged and many men see becoming a good father as an achievement in itself, rather than an obstacle to progress at work.
- **'Men don't want to have children as much as women'**: This may be true at a younger age, but as men and women get older, their priorities change. By the age of 40, just as many men as women consider parenthood a priority.
- **'Dad has to be the financial provider, not the carer'**: Often, men's worries about parenthood stem from concerns about how becoming a father will affect them financially. Many couples now choose to share work and childcare between them.
- **'Mum is naturally better at caring for children'**: Both parents are on a steep learning curve and developing their new parenting skills at the same rate. However, mothers obtain information from relatives and professionals, which is not always made as immediately accessible to fathers. An informed father is a more confident father.

### Single Dads

Men can find themselves becoming single dads through divorce, death or other painful experiences. In the UK, 11% of single parents are fathers.

**SCOOP Aid (Sheffield Committee of One Parents)** is the main local organisation supporting single parents. They are based at Arbourthorne Lodge, Guildford Avenue, Sheffield S2 2PL.

They have a telephone advice service on 0114 2537672 and e-mail at [info@scoopaid.org.uk](mailto:info@scoopaid.org.uk)

**One Parent Families/Gingerbread** is a national organisation which supports lone parents and provides free information on a variety of issues – it also aims to put lone parents in touch with other organisations and groups who are best placed to help them, as well as identifying groups in their local area. They have a Lone Parent helpline on **0800 018 5026** and are based at 255 Kentish Town Road, London NW5 2LX. Website: [www.oneparentfamilies.org.uk](http://www.oneparentfamilies.org.uk)

[www.lone-parents.org.uk](http://www.lone-parents.org.uk) and [www.loneparents.org](http://www.loneparents.org) are lone parent help and support sites.

You can also find information on local support at [www.dad.info/fatherhood/local-support-for-dads-what-is-there](http://www.dad.info/fatherhood/local-support-for-dads-what-is-there)

### **Dads Apart (or non-custodial dads)**

Fathers who either don't have custody of their children or who have a joint custody arrangement may want to be informed about issues such as child support, visitation rights and child safety.

**Families Need Fathers** is a social care organisation. It helps parents who are worried that their relationship with their children is under threat. They offer help, support and advice. They are based at 134 Curtain Road, London EC2A 3AR and have a helpline on **08707 607 496** open from 6.00pm to 10.00 pm weekdays. You can also email them at [fnf@fnf.org.uk](mailto:fnf@fnf.org.uk) and their website is [www.fnf.org.uk](http://www.fnf.org.uk)

The **BBC website** has a section on separated dads at [www.bbc.co.uk/parenting/dads/separateddads.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/parenting/dads/separateddads.shtml)

[http://fatherhood.about.com/od/fathersrights/Fathers\\_Rights.htm](http://fatherhood.about.com/od/fathersrights/Fathers_Rights.htm) also has a selection of useful links.

### **Young Dads**

Being a young parent is an especially challenging job. Young fathers are less likely to be emotionally prepared or to have financial security. However, young fathers will also be more likely to have energy and time, and there is a lot of support out there – start here:

[www.young-fathers.org.uk](http://www.young-fathers.org.uk) Aims to support and benefit young fathers – those aged 25 and under – and expectant young fathers. Offers a free advice booklet as a PDF download.

[www.youngdads.co.uk](http://www.youngdads.co.uk) A site created to enable young dads to access information on everything they wanted to know about pregnancy, birth and beyond.

[www.youngfathers.net](http://www.youngfathers.net) The **Supporting Young Fathers Network** is run by the Trust for the Study of Adolescence, based at 23 New Road, Brighton, BN1 1WZ. Tel: **01273 693311**

### **Gay Dads**

How you define your sexuality is up to you, and being gay or bisexual is no obstacle to being a father.

[www.newfamilysocial.co.uk](http://www.newfamilysocial.co.uk) is the website of a support group for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual adopters. It's a membership site where you can get advice and support from gay adoptive dads. Email: [andy@newfamilysocial.co.uk](mailto:andy@newfamilysocial.co.uk)

In addition, networks exist for gay men who have had children through a heterosexual relationship or marriage: [www.gaydadsupport.net](http://www.gaydadsupport.net) is a Europe-wide network of gay fathers, while <http://gaydads.co.uk> is a UK support site.

### **Blended Families**

A blended family is a family composed of a couple with a child (or children) from their marriage or relationship, plus a child or children from either or both of the previous relationships.

Information and advice at [www.helpguide.org/mental/blended\\_families\\_stepfamilies.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/blended_families_stepfamilies.htm)

[www.stepdad.org](http://www.stepdad.org) resource forum provides information and support for positive parenting.

The **BBC website** has a section on step-parenting at [www.bbc.co.uk/parenting/family\\_matters/step\\_becoming.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/parenting/family_matters/step_becoming.shtml)

### **At-Home Dads**

Fathers today do eight times more childcare than their fathers did in the 1970s. In the UK there are now 200,000 men staying at home to be the main carer for their children – almost double the number there were in 1993 when official records began. Four and a half million fathers share the childcare responsibilities, while over the same period the number of stay-at-home mums has fallen by almost a quarter.

Research by the Equal Opportunities Commission in 2005 found that eight out of ten fathers would be happy to stay at home and look after a baby.

[www.homedad.org.uk](http://www.homedad.org.uk) and [www.stayathomedads.co.uk](http://www.stayathomedads.co.uk) are UK at-home dads' support sites.

### **Disability**

There is a fathers' section at the **Association for Children with a Disability**, at <http://www.acd.org.au/information/dads.htm>

<http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/index.htm> has information for disabled parents.

Contact a Family have a dads' zone on their site specifically dealing with issues around disability. It includes a downloadable father's guide. You can see it at [www.cafamily.org.uk](http://www.cafamily.org.uk) (put "Dads' Guide" in the search box).

The **Disabled Parents Network** is an organisation run by disabled parents, their allies and family members. They offer a telephone helpline, a support network across the country and a quarterly newsletter for members. They are based at the National Centre for Disabled Parents, Unit F9, 89-93 Fonthill Road, London N4 3JH. Their helpline number is **0300 3300 639**, email is [information@disabledparentsnetwork.org.uk](mailto:information@disabledparentsnetwork.org.uk) and website is at [www.disabledparentsnetwork.org.uk](http://www.disabledparentsnetwork.org.uk)

## Dads and Toddlers

Sheffield Information Link has details of a couple of Parent and Toddler groups aimed specifically at dads – please call us on 0114 275 6699.

## Rights and Responsibilities

- Currently, working fathers are entitled to two weeks' paid Paternity Leave, although this may change in the future. You will need to give 15 weeks' notice and to have worked for your employer for at least 26 weeks. To be eligible you must be the biological father of the baby, or the mother's husband or partner, and expect to have responsibility for raising the child. There is currently no equivalent for self-employed fathers.
- You (or the mother) can claim up to 4 weeks' unpaid Parental Leave in the year after the birth, and in the first five years of parenthood you can claim up to 13 weeks.
- You can also request flexible working once you have been with the same employer for 26 weeks, and your employer must give a good reason for refusing your request. You also have the right to take time off work for family emergencies.
- It's important for many reasons to have your name on your baby's birth certificate, and if your child was born after November 2003 this will give you automatic Parental Responsibility. This gives you the right to authorise medical treatment, to see your child's medical records and to be consulted over important decisions concerning your child's future.

## Support and Advice: General

**Sheffield Information Link Library** has a range of books on different aspects of parenting, some of which contain specific sections on the dad's role (e.g. *The Good Behaviour Book*, *Raising Happy Children & Raising Boys*, amongst others).

We have two books just about fathers: *The Father's Book: Being a Good Dad in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* and *Gay Dads: A Celebration of Fatherhood*.

For fathers who have a child with a disability we have *Uncommon Fathers: Reflections on Raising a Child with a Disability*. Also the **SIGN Library** has *Different Dads*, which is 'a collection of inspiring personal testimonies written by fathers of children with a disability who reflect on their own experiences and offer advice to other fathers and families on the challenges of raising a child with a disability'.

Please contact us for details of how to borrow books from the library.

We also have **Dads' Packs** for new dads, which are available through our enquiry line **0114 275 6699**. The packs are full of great tips and strategies for dads covering pregnancy, birth, work, relationships, money, health, legal rights, praising and playing with your children. Ring us to get a copy.

**Websites with general information for fathers include:**

- [www.directgov.uk](http://www.directgov.uk) For the latest up-to-date information on paternity leave and pay (enter 'paternity' into the search bar).
- [www.dads-uk.co.uk](http://www.dads-uk.co.uk) General UK-based news and information site dedicated to giving a voice and support to all people interested in fathers' rights.
- [www.dadsnet.net/forums](http://www.dadsnet.net/forums) Dadsnet: general dads' discussion forums.
- The forum at [www.mumsnet.com](http://www.mumsnet.com) also has a 'Dadsnet' discussion sub-forum (unconnected). Many fathers also contribute to the general Mumsnet forum which is run 'by parents, for parents'.
- [www.dadmag.com](http://www.dadmag.com) An online magazine for fathers: covers issues such as relationships, single dads, divorce, sports, health, travel, etc.
- [www.fordads.com/links.html](http://www.fordads.com/links.html) Various links: stay-at-home dads, fathers' rights and more.
- [www.workingwithmen.org.uk](http://www.workingwithmen.org.uk) Support, advice and advocacy for men and boys and for those working with them on a variety of issues.