

FATHERS AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Certain behaviors are normal for children at certain ages. The following are activities a father can do with his child to promote healthy developmental growth.

Birth to 3 Months

- ♥ Offer me a finger to hold. Listen to me and learn my responses. Smile and touch me when you talk to me. Tell me I am wonderful.
- ♥ Develop trust. Gently hold me while talking in sweet encouraging tones. Call me by name and make eye contact.
- ♥ Pick me up when I cry and reassure me. Do not leave me alone crying and give me the impression that no one cares for me.
- ♥ Learn how to soothe me and meet my needs before I cry.
- ♥ Gently rub my back, sing to me, play music for me, or bounce me gently to music. I am sensitive to sound, so keep music low.
- ♥ Hold me securely in new places and protect me.
- ♥ Keep me clean, well fed, and clothed appropriately for temperature.
- ♥ Give me colorful toys that make interesting sounds.
- ♥ Sucking calms me, so let me suck my fingers or a pacifier. Be gentle and do not interrupt my sucking by pulling or jiggling something I am sucking on.

3 to 6 Months

- ♥ During bath time, try washing me in a sitting position; help me sit up for 5-10 minutes. I may also want to sit up and play. Help me keep my back straight while I sit for 5-10 minutes.
- ♥ Give me safe healthy finger foods at 5-6 months (e.g., crackers.)
- ♥ Lay me on a blanket on the floor and let me roll and reach.
- ♥ Spend time with me (toy play, smile, nod, talk, and laugh.)
- ♥ Give me toys or attention when I need a distraction.
- ♥ Respond to my fears and cries by holding, talking to, and reassuring me. Tell me what I'm feeling and that it's okay.
- ♥ Talk to me, sing to me, or give me my favorite toy at diaper changing time. Don't scold, make loud noises, or frowning faces.
- ♥ Keep me in the back seat in my car seat, even if I complain. Distract me with some toys and reassure me. Put my seat where I can see outside.
- ♥ Avoid separating me from you for days. I need consistent, reliable relationships, so if you leave me for long periods, expect me to be more attached to you for a while and to need more reassurance.

FATHERS AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT (continued)

6 to 12 Months

- ♥ Play peek-a-boo, puppets, wave bye-bye; teach me words and colors, even if I can't repeat the words right now.
- ♥ Have a regular bedtime routine. Slow my activity an hour before bedtime; rock me, pat my back, and bring my favorite blanket. Once dry, fed, and well prepared for bed, leave me with a kiss. Ignore my cries for a few minutes until I am asleep.
- ♥ Encourage physical exploration within your eyesight.
- ♥ Keep dangerous objects away from me and baby-proof my environment. Be there to comfort me when I get hurt.
- ♥ Help me stand by holding my hands. Make sure my heels are flat.
- ♥ I may purposefully drop and throw things as an experiment. Give me safe things to drop and throw.
- ♥ Open a cupboard in the kitchen kept safe for my exploration. Keep only non-breakable objects that are baby-friendly.
- ♥ Give me something interesting on my tray to explore at mealtime (e.g., cooked spaghetti, spoons.)
- ♥ Do not force me to eat, and understand that I am learning and will be messy with my food.

12 to 24 Months

- ♥ Learning to walk takes time. Hold my hand and encourage me to take steps when I am ready—do not rush me.
- ♥ If I grab, hit, or bite when I am mad, do not scold me or hit me. Teach me words to use instead of hurting others.
- ♥ It will take time before I am able to do many things. Set limits, but I will break rules many times before I learn. "No!" is not enough; please explain why (e.g., "The stove is too HOT!" Move me and show me a safe place to play.)
- ♥ Give me choices whenever possible. Do not say "no" too often, and distract me if I am refusing something. Reward me for good behavior. Ignore my "no" if I do not get a choice.
- ♥ Let me scribble with thick washable crayons or felt markers; tape a paper to the table so it does not slip.
- ♥ Compare colors and sizes with me (big spoon, red balloon.)
- ♥ Read to me. Tell me about the story; let me pat the pages and make noises; help me learn to turn pages by half lifting one.
- ♥ Building blocks, sandboxes, ride and pull toys, jack-in-the-boxes, music toys, and balls are very important learning tools.
- ♥ Understand that "me" and "mine" are important before I can learn about "you" and "yours." Set up a box that is mine.
- ♥ Teach me about not hurting others and about sharing, but do not shame me. Be patient, and encourage my empathy for others.

FATHERS AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT (continued)

24-36 Months

- ♥ Let me do it myself when possible. Let me feed myself, even if I am messy. Give me two choices when you can.
- ♥ Let me make choices about the food I eat, and let me refuse food. Reduce in-between snacks so I will be hungry at mealtimes. Do not use food as a reward or punishment.
- ♥ Teach me about dangerous things (matches, knives, strangers, stray animals, cars, etc.) There should be significant consequences for dangerous behavior after giving warnings.
- ♥ Naps are still important to reduce cranky and moody behavior.
- ♥ Give me a warning that it will soon be time to move along.
- ♥ Do not hurry me too much; I need patience and time to learn.
- ♥ Read to me, color with me, and teach me games.
- ♥ If there is a new baby, remember I will be jealous. Assure me of your love, give me special time, and let me help with the baby.
- ♥ Tell me what I am feeling, comfort me, and don't scold me.
- ♥ Offer a hand when I am in a new situation. (This substitutes for picking me up.) Do not insist I have to grow up.
- ♥ Blow bubbles for me. Teach me to catch and throw a ball.
- ♥ Respect my fears and do not force me into fearful situations. Comfort me and encourage me that there is nothing to fear.

Potty Training Tips

- No age is exact for toilet training. Watch for me to grimace at dirty diapers, show you my wet pants, and stay dry for up to two hours. I need to be verbal enough to understand toilet training.
- Change me as soon as possible; tell me it is nice to be clean.
- Let me have a toy to keep me happy and busy on the potty-chair. Put me on the potty briefly at first (up to 5 minutes.)
- Praise my efforts and encourage me to let you know when I need to go potty. Teach me the family words for toilet training.
- Dress me in easy to remove clothing; be patient, never scold me; visit the potty before going somewhere; help me wipe, teach me to wash my hands, and show me how to flush.

Tantrums

- Learn warning signs and distract me. Do not expect too much.
- Since tantrums are a release of frustrated feelings and a way to get attention, ignore me if I am in a safe place. Do not reward tantrums. Stay calm and leave me, reassuring me you will be back when I am quiet. When I stop, talk to me; tell me what I am feeling. Help me express my frustration in words.

FATHERS AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT (continued)

3-5 Years

- ♥ Discuss physical gender differences with me. Teach me the proper names for body parts without shame. If I am old enough to ask the question, I am old enough to understand the answer. Do not give me more information than I ask for.
- ♥ Create a home library with interesting books about heroines and heroes, fables, and fun stories. Read to me every day, and let me point to pictures, fill in missing words, predict what happens next, and discuss the ideas in the book. Understand when I want my favorites repeatedly.
- ♥ Remember, rewards works better than punishment. Have a sticker chart, give balloons, pennies for the bank, etc.
- ♥ Play children's music; sing, clap, and dance with me.
- ♥ Encourage physical involvement and imaginative expression (e.g., "Itsy-Bitsy Spider" and "I'm a Little Teapot.")
- ♥ Teach me to count, sing my ABCs, and write my name with lots of patience. This will take time and repetition.
- ♥ I need a bike or tricycle, balls, clay, and play space with toys.
- ♥ Plant a garden or a pot from seed. Help me water it and watch it grow. Pick flowers for my table and let me eat the vegetables.
- ♥ Follow a routine at bedtime. Show me the clock and tell me it is time for bed. Let me pick out my bath toys, choose my pajamas, read me a story, etc.
- ♥ Spend time with me. Sing me a song; rub my back. Kiss me, say goodnight, and I love you.
- ♥ Give me permission to say "no" to adults that make me feel uncomfortable. Talk with me and get to know how I am feeling.

5 to 8 Years

- ♥ Discuss physical gender differences with me. If I am old enough to ask the question, I am old enough to understand the answer. Do not give me more information than I ask for.
- ♥ Create a home library with interesting books about heroines and heroes, fables, and fun stories. Read to me every day, and let me read a part of each book; discuss the ideas in the book.
- ♥ Remember, rewards works better than punishment. Have a sticker chart, give balloons, pennies for the bank, etc.
- ♥ Play board games with me.
- ♥ Sing, draw, and cook with me.
- ♥ Teach me new things with lots of patience. This will take time and repetition.
- ♥ I need a bike or tricycle, balls, clay, and play space with toys.
- ♥ Plant a garden or a pot from seed. Help me water it and watch it grow. Pick flowers for my table and let me eat the vegetables.
- ♥ Let me help with chores around the house.

FATHERS AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT (continued)

Strategies for Play Groups

- Give flashlights to my friends and me. Let me turn out the lights. Teach us to make shadow puppets on the walls.
- Set up a folding table or chairs in the living room. Drape a sheet over it and let us play in the “tent” or “cave.”
- Allow us to dig a hole in the back yard. Fill it with water.
- Remember attention spans and likes vary with children. Plan a variety of activities; be flexible. Allow some children to move on while other children finish the activity.
- Encourage cleaning up when a child becomes bored with one activity before moving to the next activity.
- Organize a game of “Duck, Duck, Goose.”
- Set up a tea party with juice and crackers with a toy tea set or plastic cups and plates. Hold tea parties outside.
- Give my friends and me the broom and mop for horse riding in the house on a rainy day.
- Set up a folding table on its side to create a stage for a puppet show.
- Dress up and act out children’s stories.
- Draw faces on the tips of fingers and play finger puppets with friends. (Draw mouth in the crease of the finger.)
- Make a house out of a discarded appliance box. Cut a door and windows for my friends and me. Help us decorate.

8 to 12 Years

- ♥ Allow lights on after bedtime if I am reading a book. Check out a new library book each time a book is read. Used bookstores are also economical resources. Let me choose.
- ♥ Turn off the TV and play a game with me or talk things over. Do not let me watch PG-13 or R rated movies.
- ♥ Bake cookies with me; we can wear aprons, and do not get too upset about how messy the kitchen becomes.
- ♥ Provide an allowance contingent on performing household chores. Encourage saving money in a piggy bank, and give me bonuses for a good attitude and/or an exceptional job done.
- ♥ Teach me cards and board games I can play with my friends.
- ♥ Encourage outside play (e.g., jump rope, skates, balls, etc.) Draw a hopscotch grid on the sidewalk with chalk.
- ♥ Teach me about nurturing by giving me responsibility for a family pet. Understand I may forget and remind me.
- ♥ I need to know how to swim to stay safe in water.

FATHERS AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT (continued)

- ♥ Teach me about nature through camping, hiking, and going to the zoo.
- ♥ Let me organize a water fight with the hose and balloons.
- ♥ Establish family traditions. Remind me about what we did last year. Tell me why it is important.

Strategies for Child Safety

- Know where I am at all times. Teach me to check in and give me timelines. Provide clear instructions to me about what you believe is safe, and supervise my activities.
- Make my house safe, friendly, and child centered. Children can visit under your watchful eye.
- Get to know the parents in my neighborhood and my friends' parents. Teach me to keep away from places that are unsafe.
- Give me permission to say, "My mom or dad wants me home," or "My mom will not let me," if I need to make an excuse to get out of an uncomfortable or pressure situation.
- Teach me about drugs, alcohol, smoking, and teen pregnancy. Let me tell you how I feel about these things.
- Teach me how to value myself and care for myself. Value me.
- Teach me to be cautious of overly friendly adults or strangers.
- Ask me how I am feeling. Listen. Keep communication open.
- Be reliable and predictable, and create a safe place for me to put my trust. Forgive me when I fail, and apologize when you have let me down. Teach me about respect by modeling it.
- Teach me about my bright future and celebrate each accomplishment along the way. Give me vision.

12 to 18 Years

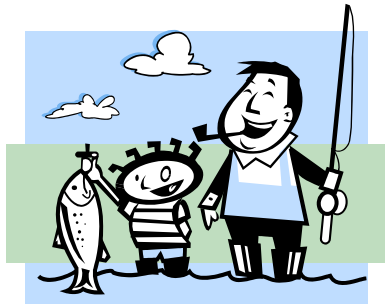
- ♥ Be clear about what you expect of me. Set curfews and know where I am at all times. Make sure I check-in frequently.
- ♥ Start with small freedoms, assuring me that larger freedoms will be allowed once I've proven myself capable of the smaller ones.
- ♥ Allow me to have privacy by giving me a lock on my door, a journal, and by knocking before entering my room. My lock is a privilege, as long as I open the door when you knock.
- ♥ Allow me to have my own music in my room.
- ♥ Encourage me to express my feelings in writing and verbally. It is okay to be angry, but not mean.
- ♥ When I speak, listen to the feeling underneath, along with the words. Am I scared? Or hurting?

FATHERS AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT (continued)

- ♥ Peers are very important for me. Allow me to talk on the phone and have friends over. Let me organize a slumber party, pool party, or homework session. Allow my friends and me to take over the living room for an evening.
- ♥ Let me wear what I like as part of self-expression. Go shopping with me to buy clothes we both like.
- ♥ Encourage volunteer or paid work. I need to build a resume. Instill responsibility and polite public behaviors.
- ♥ Support and encourage me to gain a special talent early in my teen years (dance, music, drama, sports, art, etc.)

Strategies for Dealing with Conflict

- Understand my need for developing a separate self, and do not take my struggles to gain independence personally.
- Understand that I still need supervision, guidance, and protection, even if I push you away or am critical of you. Troubled children often report a parent does not “love them enough” to wonder where they are or what they do.
- Acknowledge my feelings and maintain consistent consequences for my disobedience of clear limits you set.
- Always relate consequences to my disobedience (e.g., if an hour late, set the next curfew time an hour earlier.)
- When I make mistakes, disobey, or lose my temper when you set limits, know that this is normal. Do not give up. Reassure me that you still care and will not give up on me.
- Give me another chance. I want your love and approval and I will keep trying. Reassure me that you are still proud of me.
- Give me a vision for who I can become. Give me a reason why I should make healthy positive choices.
- Maintain communication and physical affection.



Source: Brinker, Robert. (April 2006). *305: Engaging Absent Fathers*. Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania: The University of Pittsburgh.