



FACTSHEET

Resources for families

The biggest myths about dads

The idea that women make better parents than men, and that men have to be dragged kicking and screaming into parenthood, is underpinned by a number of myths.

MYTH ONE: Men don't want children as much as women do

Early on, men do lag behind women in wanting children: girls in their teens are more likely to want children than teenage boys – and so it continues into the 30s. But by the age of 40 everything has changed: there's a catch up in men's desire to have children; so by this age just as many men as women think that having children is very important.

Maybe men are less keen on the idea early on because they worry more about the financial costs: both dads and mums tend to regard fathers as having a greater duty to support their children financially – even if the mum is in fact the main breadwinner.

MYTH TWO: Men are insensitive to babies

Wrong. Dads can be super-sensitive to babies – and just as sensitive as mothers. For example:

- Men's hearts race as fast as women's when they hear a baby scream.
- Fathers can recognise their own infants, blindfold, just by touching their hands – after only an hour spent cuddling them.
- When a man bottle-feeds an infant, he does so just as sensitively as a woman – and the baby drinks the same amount of milk.

Men are just as capable of sensitive parenting – like women, they just need practice.

MYTH THREE: Mums are naturally better at caring for children

Wrong. Both sexes are equally ham-fisted to start with. But new mums are on a steep learning curve, spending many hours on their own early on, developing their childcare skills, often with great support from health professionals, family and friends.

The average dad spends less time than his partner on hands-on caring (and there's little support out there for those who buck the trend and do the lion's share). But when men and women are able to spend the same amount of time looking after babies, and are given the same support, they develop childcare skills at exactly the same rate.

MYTH FOUR: Dads don't make much difference

Wrong. Young children with involved dads fit in better at nursery and school, have higher IQs and fewer behaviour problems. They make friends more easily, are better able to understand how other people feel and are more likely to get good school results.

Later, they tend to have more contented love lives and better mental health, and to be less likely to get into trouble with the police. All this is true for girls as much as for boys. And it's still important when parents have separated.

MYTH FIVE: Dads hardly ever look after children

Wrong. Even though they work much longer hours, British fathers do one-quarter of the parental childcare during the average working week (about two hours a day), much more at weekends, and one third when their partners work.

Britain's dads do eight times more childcare than their fathers did 30 years ago – and the gap between mothers' and fathers' input is narrowing every year. And when mums work, who's the most likely to care for the children? Nursery? Childminder? Granny & Grandpa? No – it's dad!

MYTH SIX: Men can't multitask

Wrong. Research shows clearly that men are just as good at multi-tasking as women (think about it: does a bartender multi-task? Can a computer-freak with eight applications open at once dodge between them? Of course!)

Men may be less likely than women to multi-task at home, but that's not due to any kind of biological inferiority. It's more likely to be that they're in a support-role (managers generally multi-task more often than support staff) or that they're not totally confident about the task in hand, and need to focus on it.

Prepared by Jeremy Davies of the Fatherhood Institute

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