

Dads do it differently by Michael Grose

There is little doubt that fathering has come a long way in a short time. Move over the provider dads of the 1950's and 60's and the absent dads of the last decades of the twentieth century. Today's dads want to be active participants in the lives of their children.

Surveys reveal that men today want a better relationship with their children than they had with their own fathers so a healthy relationship is a high driver for Australian dads. But many lack the confidence to be good fathers.

Amazingly, one Australian study showed that more than 50% of men doubted their ability to care for children. The same study found that fathers who shared the day-to-day parenting with their partners had no qualms about their ability to be competent parents. They knew they were doing a great job.

The best way to learn about parenting is by doing it so those fathers who lack sufficient confidence need to become involved in as many aspects of parenting as they can.

Children are also terrific resources for fathers - men can learn about children from children themselves. By being alert, watchful and learning to listen to their children fathers can learn all they need to know about parenting.

Here are some ideas to help you become a confident father and get maximum enjoyment from the job:

- **Remember that fathering is different to mothering.** The language of fatherhood is often physical so play and activity are common ways that men connect with their children, which can be the cause of frustration to many mothers!

- **Take responsibility for at least one aspect of you children's lives.** When heavily involved in at least one area of children's lives mens parental confidence and satisfaction increases dramatically.
- **Ensure you have at least one ritual that connects you regularly to your children,** particularly if work prevents you from being the dad you want to be. Bed-time stories, meal-times and shared games are some ways that men can stay in touch with their children.
- **Develop a shared interest with each child,** which will help you maintain a relationship during the teen years. Adolescence can place a strain on parent-child relationships however a common interest such as a shared love of sport can help keep the relationship strong.
- **Let your children into your life.** Children generally love to learn about their father's interests. A man's passion can often rub off onto his children during the primary school years.

Everyone benefits when fathers become active participants in the lives of children. The outcomes are better for children, mothering improves when they can share the emotional and financial burdens of child-rearing with a partner and men themselves benefit as their emotional well-being is strongly connected to their fathering. OK

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Sibling fighting – there is a better way of handling it by Michael Grose

It seems at some point all children and teenagers just can't stand their brother or sister. There are some children, who have almost entirely different personalities and interests. Conflict needs to be managed so that it leads to a positive outcome. Kids need to learn to live with each other, even if they don't like each other.

Kids have L-plates when it comes to conflict resolution and often resort to ineffective, impulsive ways of resolving conflict or to get what they want. Kids also learn a great deal about resolving conflict from their families.

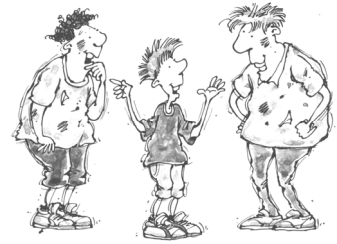
The following contributes to sibling fighting and poor conflict resolution:

1. inflexible, hard parenting

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'Sibling fighting' continued

2. **modelled use of power by a parent to resolve conflict**
3. **inconsistent parenting**
4. **parents taking sides in disputes**
5. **sibling comparison – praise one, criticise the other**



When a squabble is physical, loud or particularly abusive it is tempting for adults to be an umpire and work out who began a squabble or ascertain the particular place of each child in the problem. When this happens adults usually become part of the problem. But we can take a restorative, rather than punitive, approach when children hurt, hit or put each other down. This means we involve children in the resolution rather than be the umpire, judge and jury, as they want us to be.

Rather than place children as the central focus it may be better to sit down and place the problem in the middle and get everyone to look at the problem rather than focus on the offender. This means that you as an adult may have to allow children the chance to acknowledge their feelings. It is then useful to talk about the right that each child has to feel safe and to function freely and fairly.

When children have infringed on the rights of others or have been hurtful, then it is helpful to acknowledge the infringement and make up for it, either through an apology or some form of reparation. At the heart of this process is the maintenance or restoration of the relationship between siblings. A punitive approach where one child is sent to his room by parents does have immediate results in getting some peace but it does little to maintain relationships.

However, if we take a restorative view then any wrongdoing is seen as violation of the relationship between children. The central focus should be on involving both children in solving the dispute, ensuring both children's needs are met, that they are accountable for their behaviour and that their relationships are restored and maintained.

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What you should know about...children friendships by Michael Grose

Research into children's friendships shows that those children who are able to form friendships at school are far happier and also learn better. More significantly, a positive beginning to friendships has long-term implications for social and academic success.

Studies also indicate that children can be taught friendships skills. The strategies revolve around teaching children a range of friendly behaviours such as:

- ... **talking with others while playing**
- ... **showing an interest in others**
- ... **smiling**
- ... **offering help and encouragement when needed**
- ... **a willingness to share and**
- ... **learning how to enter a game or social situation.**

It is also useful to discuss with children alternatives to

fighting and arguing when there is disagreement and conflict within groups.

Gender impacts on the ability to make friends. Recent research has found that girls are further advanced along the stages of friendship than boys.

It is healthy for children to form friendships inside and outside of school and their regular day settings. It seems that having friends outside school can be quite an insulating factor to teasing and bullying that can occur within the school gate.

Parents often become concerned about an apparent lack of friends that a child has compared to a sibling or a friend. One research project indicated that children on average have only two significant friendships at any one time. Anecdotal evidence suggests that second born children frequently have more friends than first borns and only children prefer one-on-one friendships to group relationships.

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