

TIPS FOR DADS

SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD’S MOTHER: HOW ARE YOU DOING?

Children and teens rely on their parents to be there for them. Whether it’s a soiled diaper or an upset tummy, infants develop trust that their parents will respond to their needs. Older children need to know that their parents “have their back” while they explore and learn about the world and how it works. Teens turn to parents for re-assurance and consistent limit-setting. A violent relationship between you and your child’s mother is bad for a lot of reasons:

- ◆ Children can be left with a persistent feeling of insecurity—a feeling that family life is not safe and that bad things can happen. It may also lead them to think they cannot trust you. Boys can learn that force is part of being a man. On the other hand, they may jump in to protect their moms or feel like failures if they hold back. Girls can learn that being hurt by men is normal.
- ◆ Witnessing verbal abuse can lead to hopelessness about relationships and disrespectful behavior as children get older. If you find yourself yelling a lot, name-calling, ignoring your child’s mother, criticizing her all the time, ridiculing her, bad-mouthing her in front of the kids, and so on, you are modeling negative behavior that they will copy and expect from others.

RESPECT and SUPPORT

Respect is treating other people with dignity—showing that they matter even when you are angry or disappointed. If you give respect, you are more likely to be treated with respect. Support involves providing active help (pitching in whenever you can), encouraging another, and acknowledging what they do. These are all important behaviors to model. Here are some things you can do:

Praise your child’s mother. Acknowledge the work that she does; acknowledge good efforts, even if you don’t think what she did was perfect. This is crucial for a positive family experience.

Model how to resolve conflicts for your children with their mother. It’s an opportunity to show self-control and to reassure your kids that violence and chaos are not a permanent part of their lives. Try to listen, reflect back her point of view, and *think* about what she says. Slow down. Repeating yourself or raising your voice doesn’t help. State your point of view slowly. Try to come up with an idea that might work for *both* of you. This is especially important when conflicts have been resolved violently in the past.

Respect your child’s mother’s parenting decisions. Even if you don’t agree, show you can remain respectful. If you are not living together, remember your job is supportive co-parenting.

Follow through on your promises to your child’s mother. Make only promises you can keep. It’s always better to promise less and do more. You can be a great father by doing some of the “boring” things: take your children shopping, to doctor’s or dentist’s visits (a great time to read to your kids), drop them off and pick them up at school, or go to their sports events. Keeping promises to your child’s mother about these things also shows your kids that you care.

Do not expect immediate praise for your efforts to improve your parenting and to improve how you relate to your child’s mother. If you have been violent or abusive, it may take a long time for people to acknowledge changes. In fact if people feel safe with you, they might let you see some of the anger and hurt they have held back from you. They may not ever be able to have good feelings for you.