

EVERYDAY FATHERING

You may not realise it, but as a father you have a profound impact on your children's learning and development. And the most significant, enduring contribution you make is not through 'big ticket items' like gifts, expensive outings or holidays, but rather through the normal, everyday interactions you have with your children.

HIGH QUALITY INTERACTIONS

Not all interactions between fathers and children offer the same learning benefits. Some interactions are higher 'quality' in that they promote children's learning better than others.

High quality interactions happen when fathers capitalise on opportunities to do that little bit more than what's required simply to care for or manage their child. This could include:

- taking a moment to listen attentively and respond to what your children are saying
- making a special effort to explain something
- taking the time to offer choices and listen to their child's opinions.

IT'S NOT ROCKET SCIENCE

The good news is that you don't need special training to provide quality interactions. Quality interactions happen in all families. Chances are, you are already doing lots of good things. And while not every encounter with your children will be a high quality one, just increasing their frequency will have an impact on how your children learn and develop.

Being aware of what quality interactions look like is the first step to creating more of these everyday moments. Once you know what to look for, you'll find more opportunities to inject quality into your interactions.



FATHER FACT ■

According to a recent Australian survey, 87% of fathers find parenting to be very or extremely rewarding and fulfilling; about the same number (85%) also reported that parenting is very or extremely demanding!



FATHER FACT ■

Father Time

The average Aussie dad spends:

- about 8 hours a day in the company of his children
- about 2 hours a day caring for his children
- about 40% of their childcare time playing or talking
- about half of their interaction time with their children doing that and nothing else



FATHER FACT ■

38% of fathers read to their children every day, according to a recent online survey.

Here are some simple ways of adding learning value to your interactions.

Talk to your children. There's more to talking than just conveying information. Adult talk is like brain food for babies and young children (and they don't have to understand your words to get the benefit). It also brings you closer emotionally. Talk about what you are doing; talk about what they are doing; talk about how you're feeling or what you think of the latest Bond movie – they'll never get sick of you!

Tell your children about things. Point out the things that are worth noticing or remembering. When they show an interest in something, talk about it some more: "Yes, it's a truck. It's a fire truck that firemen use to put out fires." It's also good to continuously prepare your child for what's coming next: "Let's clean you up now, then we need to change your nappy?" Preparing them like this also helps them to learn how to cope with situations they don't like: "I'm going to rinse your hair now, so get ready so you don't get water in your eyes."

Listen to your children. It's great for their development! Moments when your children have your exclusive attention are gold. Interrupt your own activity – even for a short time – and pay full attention to your child. Look at them. Comment on what they are doing. Repeat what they say. Focus on their interest and add your thoughts.

Try to be nice. Your children learn how to interact with others through their interactions with you. They will copy the 'tone' of your interactions with them. Being nice is about trying to keep the atmosphere as positive as possible. It can be a challenge at times, especially when you have to enforce rules or prohibit behaviours. Every parent has to say "no" and "don't" occasionally, but even these moments can be 'learning moments'. Be clear about the behaviour you want, and give them time to respond. Praise them when they cooperate, and model politeness. When your child is not permitted to do something, explain why and offer alternatives. Show them how you can be strong and persistent as well as gentle and respectful.

Create challenging learning opportunities. They are great for learning. If you watch carefully, you will work out how to keep a game just within reach of your child's ability – not too hard, not too easy. Like pointing to where a puzzle piece might go, rather than letting him flounder or doing it for him.

Offer choices. Choices can be a good alternative to commands and they help children learn about making decisions. Choices help build independence, encourage responsibility and give children the opportunity to voice disagreement.