

Dads and sons

TIP SHEET

Relationship Australia WA's education team has developed a range of tips to help support you during difficult times. As a free resource, we encourage you to share this with your community.

We know boys whose fathers are involved with them from a young age do better in lots of ways.

Boys learn a lot about being a man by watching and listening to their Dads from a young age. When they watch their father interact with their mother, they learn about respect in relationships and how to deal with conflict. When they watch their father interact with other men, they learn how men relate to each other and how they deal with problems. So Dads, you are very influential in teaching your sons to be good men.

Here are some suggestions to help you build your relationship with your son:

1. Get involved

Good relationships are about Dads being around and involved. It is best to start early, rather than waiting until he is 'old enough to do things with' to start relating to your son. If it helps to make it happen, schedule time to be together and be strict with it. When he becomes a teenager and more independent, you may need to seek new ways to stay connected.

You don't have to be joined at the hip all the time - it might just be that you're in the house when he's in his bedroom. He will benefit just from knowing that you're there if he needs you.

2. Play with your son

Boys love rough and tumble games, so use these for enjoyment. A side benefit is that rough and tumble play teaches a boy self-control - knowing when to back off. Play fighting can be a great way for you both to let off steam. But set some rules first, like no elbowing and no punching. Remember to give yourselves some time to calm down before moving on to the next activity.

3. Teach your son skills

Boys love to learn from their Dads. If you're skilled as a handyman, work on a project together - perhaps you could make that go-cart or build a model plane or ship. If you don't know how, this could be the time to learn together.

Do the things together you enjoyed doing when you were a kid, or wish you had done. Perhaps teach him how to build and light a fire, go for a walk in the dark with a torch, head into the bush and teach him to climb a tree or sleep in the tent in the backyard (without mum). You'll create some great memories to look back on!

4. Take an interest in what interests your son

It's easy to want to spend time with a child you connect with or share a common interest with (such as a love of music or sport), but sometimes that connection doesn't come readily. It may be difficult but it's important you make an effort to take an active interest in what interests him. It may take time and some false starts, but persevere. The activity is not what's important, it's just the means to developing your relationship.

5. Go easy on your son

Many Dads are tough on their boy and pressure him to be someone he's not, or push him beyond his abilities. Don't be tempted to turn games into lessons and give advice when he just wants to be understood. Most of all, your son wants your approval and acceptance.

6. Your son is learning about relationships from you

Boys learn a lot from their Dads about being in relationships. How you speak to and about their mother establishes a blueprint for his future relationships. Whether you're living with your son's mother or not, being respectful to her is vitally important. If tensions mount, don't criticize or use abusive language. You will be a great role model if you can argue calmly and still be polite. And NEVER allow your son to speak disrespectfully to his mother.

7. Your son is learning how to express himself from you

Boys learn about feelings and how to express them by watching you and other men. You may be feeling irritable or frustrated but try not to get angry (which is probably more comfortable). Saying "I'm frustrated too" has a far bigger impact than yelling, swearing or slamming doors.

8. Show your son you are proud of him

Boys desperately want their Dads to be proud of them. They equate your pride with being loved. The need for their father's approval has a massive influence on a boy's behaviour, their achievement levels and, ultimately, on the nature of your relationship.

Most importantly, remember your sons don't need a perfect Dad, they need a loving, involved and reliable one.

As we journey through these challenging times, please reach out for support and connection amongst your community or if you'd like further support from Relationships Australia WA you can call us on 1300 364 277.

Our Education team are continuing to facilitate Relationship Australia WA's seminars, workshops and courses face-to-face and online.

If you'd like to register your interest in attending a course on **Dads and Sons**, or any of our other courses, please email education@relationshipsaustralia.org.au or call 6164 0200.