

THE EVIDENCE BASE: PREDICTORS OF FATHER INVOLVEMENT

A positive co-parenting relationship with their child's mother is strongly associated with both the quantity and quality of father involvement.^{1,2} When mothers support fathers' relationships with their children and parents can cooperate with and support one another in raising their child, fathers see their children more, engage in more activities with them, and have more positive relationships with them.^{3,4,5} The quality of parents' relationships also matter: mothers who have positive relationships with their children's fathers are more likely to have positive co-parenting relationships with them.⁶ As a result, fathers who are in romantic relationships with their children's mothers are consistently more likely to be involved with their children^{7,8} and to have higher-quality involvement⁹ than fathers who have no relationship with their children's mothers.¹⁰

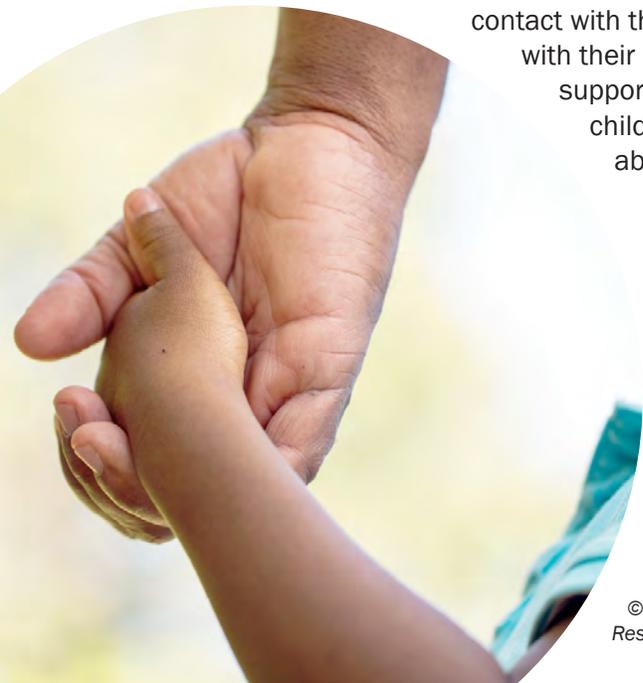
Fathers' parenting skills and confidence are important predictors of father involvement. When fathers feel competent¹¹ and believe that they can parent well,¹² they spend more time with their children, take on more caretaking responsibilities, and engage more positively with their children.^{13,14} Increasing the amount of time they spend with their children allows fathers to build more parenting skills and efficacy;^{15,16} in turn, having parenting skills and efficacy is linked to increased involvement.¹⁷

Fathers who have positive beliefs about fatherhood and the importance of father involvement are more engaged with their children.¹⁸ On an individual level, fathers who understand and value their identity as fathers are more involved with their children and have higher-quality relationships with them.^{19,20} Research also suggests that men with more self-esteem and egalitarian beliefs about gender roles are more involved with their children because they are more willing to take part in caregiving and nurturing.²¹ Community cultures that express the norm that fathers are valuable and equal co-parents also contribute to fathers' positive beliefs about fatherhood. Fathering and views of fathering are shaped in part by the broader community, including cultural norms, social support, and institutional practices.²²

Economic stability is linked to fathers' involvement with their children, particularly among fathers who view their role as a father as the provider.^{23,24} Among fathers who live with their children, men who are unemployed or feel that they are inadequate providers are less involved with their children and use fewer positive parenting behaviors.²⁵

Nonresident fathers who provide either formal or informal support tend to have more contact with their children; furthermore, nonresident fathers who have more contact with their children tend to provide more informal support.²⁶ In contrast, child support arrears can reduce fathers' willingness or ability to engage with their children and the consequences of child support debt can inhibit fathers' ability to spend time with their children and to regain economic stability.²⁷

There are also a number of risk factors that predict lower father involvement.²⁸ Fathers with a history of incarceration,^{29,30} abusive behavior,³¹ or drug and alcohol problems³² are less likely to have positive interactions or maintain contact with their children over time. Other risk factors for low father involvement include multipartner fertility³³ depressive symptoms,³⁴ stress,³⁵ unintended pregnancy or low prenatal involvement,³⁶ and young age at the birth of the child.³⁷ However, fathers' resilience (e.g., employment, completion of education, family and social support) in the context of these risk factors is associated with fathers' involvement with their children.³⁸



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