Daddy and Me On the Move

Activities dads can do with their children age 0 to 6

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Introduction

It's a great thing to be a dad. It is a chance to have someone depend on you, who wants to spend time with you, and who learns so much from you. It is an opportunity to pass on what you know and be part of your child's growth and development. Learning to be a father takes time and experience. Take all the opportunities possible to bond with your child. This booklet is about making the relationship you have with your child the best it can be.

Sharing activities is a great way you can build the important bond with your child. Doing things together provides closeness, builds trust, creates memories, and teaches skills that last a lifetime. In short, sharing quality time gives your child a sense of belonging. As an involved dad, you have a powerful and positive influence on the development and health of your child.

This booklet will:

- Give you ideas of things you can do with your young children, beginning with the important bond that starts during pregnancy.
- Provide information on how activities are important for you and your child.
- Explain how doing activities with your child can strengthen your relationship.
- Highlight cues you can watch for in your child so you know what activities to suggest.

Although many dads love rough and tumble kinds of play, there are many different ways you can be active with your children. All the activities in this booklet are meant to be fun and done easily, whether you live in a busy city or a quiet town. But remember that the most important gifts you can give your child at any age are your time and attention, so make the most of the time you have with them.

SECTION 1:

What Children Need from You

Your child is naturally curious and loves to be busy, especially when it includes you. Here are some things your child needs in their relationship with you.

Exploration (Show me the world)

Children love to see the bigger world. It is how they learn about the world around them. This gives children a chance to try new things. You can encourage this by:

- Taking your child to places with you.
- Going outside.
- Planning fun activities.

Risk-taking (Let me try tough stuff)

Trying new things involves taking risks. This allows children to test themselves and learn about their strengths, their skills, and what they love to do. Dads often allow some risk for their children. They also keep their children safe by staying nearby, offering words of encouragement, and being ready to step in if help is needed. You can encourage this by:

- Giving your child new things to try.
- Encouraging with words, a thumbs up, or “high 5”.
- Praising your child’s efforts.

Creativity (Let’s not sit still too long)

We know that kids are always on the go. They are trying new things all the time. This creativity encourages them to develop all kinds of important skills, like being flexible, anticipating what might be next, and seeing how things work together. You can encourage this by:

- Letting your child lead activities.
- Providing different ways to be creative.
- Showing how things affect each other, like how pressing a cookie cutter into play dough makes a shape or how blowing on a pinwheel makes it spin.

Wait and see (Let me try to figure it out on my own)

Dads frequently let their children try to work out problems on their own. If a child is getting a little upset, dads often give their children a chance to succeed by staying back and waiting to see if they can work it out. This helps the child to become a creative thinker and problem solver. And if they need their dad's help, it teaches the child that they can trust their dad to be there when it is too difficult to do it on their own. You can encourage this by:

- Allowing your child to feel a small amount of frustration from time to time.
- Being close by and encouraging your child's efforts.
- Exposing your child to new experiences.

Mystery (Keep me guessing)

Dads often interact with their children in ways that leave them anticipating some new surprise. You can encourage this by:

- Talking in different voices.
- Picking up your child in different ways.
- Surprising your child in fun ways.

SECTION 2:

Child Development

Activities are meant to be fun. They also provide opportunities for children to develop the following skills:

Cognitive Development is the child's ability to learn and solve problems. This can include a 2 month-old baby learning to explore the environment with their hands or eyes or a 5 year-old learning how to do simple math problems.

Social and Emotional Development is the child's ability to interact with others, care for themselves, and show self-control. It involves skills such as learning to share, helping someone who is hurt, waiting patiently, following directions, dealing with conflict, and enjoying friends. This can include a 6 week-old baby smiling, an 18 month-old waving bye-bye, or a 5 year-old knowing how to take turns in games at school.

Speech and Language Development is the child's ability to understand and use language. This can include a 12 month-old baby saying his first words, a 2 year-old naming parts of her body, or a 4 year-old learning to say "feet" instead of "foots".

Fine Motor Skill Development is the child's ability to use small muscles, specifically their hands and fingers. This can include a 2 year-old using a crayon to make scribbles and dots on paper, picking up small objects, holding a spoon or turning pages in a book.

Gross Motor Skill Development is the child's ability to use large muscles. This can include a 6 month-old baby learning how to sit, a 10-12 month-old using furniture to pull up to a standing position, and a 5 year-old learning to skip. It includes coordination and endurance.

Learning about your child's development helps you choose the right activities to do with your child. Check out the resource section on page 12 for more ideas.

SECTION 3:

Spending Time Together

Spending time together is good for your child and for you.

- Learning happens naturally for children when you follow their lead during activities and talk about what is happening. ("You are rolling out the green play dough.")
- You learn important things about each other: what you each like to do, what you are good at, how you get along with other people, and how you like to spend time together.
- You get to witness things your child may do for the very first time.
- You get a chance to understand your child's emotions and guide him in discovering how to manage his emotions.
- You have fun, which reduces your stress and gives you a chance to relax.
- You and your child create memories that last a lifetime.

Different activities will help your child develop different skills.

Reading offers enjoyment for your child. Reading to your child can start before birth and is something that can happen at any time of the day. Fun ways to read involve changing your voice for the different characters, making up the story, or having your child guess what is going to happen next. By reading to your child, you:

- Encourage language development.
- Encourage reading.
- Affect how your child does in school.

Drama offers your child a chance to play and pretend. It encourages him to use his imagination and explore new ideas and experiences. Your child loves it when you become part of the play, taking on the role of a tea party partner or a lion in the jungle.

Sensory activities give your child a chance to explore things he can touch, taste, smell, hear and see. Playing in a sandbox or with water, building with blocks, or creating with play dough are some great ways to learn with his senses.

Cognitive activities offer your child opportunities to develop his brain. Puzzles, matching pictures, and learning about letters and numbers are fun ways to encourage learning.

Music activities provide a variety of benefits. Doing things like singing, listening to music, or playing an instrument teaches your child concentration, coordination, patience, mathematics awareness, language development, and self-confidence. Music is also enjoyable and a great way for your child to relax.

Physical activities develop strength, body coordination, confidence, and are part of helping maintain a healthy weight. They also positively influence your child's health and wellbeing and encourage him to stay active as he gets older.

SECTION 4:

Dads' Roles in Being Active

There are different roles you can take when you are being active with your child:

Observer: You can sit back and watch your child participate in an activity. Watch your child colour a picture, work on a puzzle, or reach for a mobile above the crib.

Teacher: You can lead the activity by showing your child how to do it, as in giving verbal instructions or by doing the activity yourself. Involve your child in activities and hobbies you enjoy. You can also lead by describing what is happening:

- "The red truck is going over the hill."
- "You are pouring Daddy's tea into his cup."
- "We can share your blocks with your friend."
- "Look at the squished squirrel. He didn't look both ways!"

Being straightforward with your child and being a role model are great ways to teach. **Your child learns many things by watching you.**

Entertainer: You can be the centre of attention. You can do things that children love to be part of, but are unable to do themselves. This could be building with big blocks, reading a great story, or telling a joke.

Playmate: Dads carry around with them their greatest asset... themselves! Being a playmate shows children that you want to be with them. It helps your child feel valued. You can be part of your child's play by joining in, enjoying what they are doing, and doing what your child wants to do in the moment.

(adapted from Daddy, Come Play with Me, Dad Central Ontario)

SECTION 5:

Important Information for Dads

Allow for quiet time. Life doesn't always have to be full of activity. Your child needs times of quiet.

Get rid of distractions. Give your full attention to your child.

Follow your child's lead. He is the expert when it comes to activities he enjoys. You can give some direction and support his fun, but allow him to be the leader of the play.

Be careful of overstimulation. Too much of a good thing can quickly become uncomfortable, like tickling. Watch for cues that he is tired of the activity, like turning his head away from you or wanting to do something different.

Keep safety in mind. It is great to encourage risk taking and to let him try new things. You can include your child in the chores you are doing, such as washing the car or repairing or building things around the home. Just remember to stay close and be aware of what your child is doing.

Praise effort, enjoy the process and appreciate the end result.

Find balance. Your life is likely really busy, so it takes effort to find the time to do things with your child. Make whatever quantity of time you have the highest quality you can. Choose to spend time with your child, to turn off your cell phone, to set limits on your work time and to reduce distractions. Enjoy spending your "downtime" with your child.

Learn from other dads. Watch how other dads do activities with their children. You may get new ideas and it is likely that other dads will be watching and learning from you, too.

Stretch yourself. There may be things your child wants to do that you are uncomfortable doing. Try them anyway. You may be surprised how fun these things can be.

Keep it fun. Your child will develop memories of things you did together.

Enjoy your child. When your child knows you enjoy being with them, it helps your child feel secure. Your child's trust in you will grow and your bond will become stronger day by day. Learning to trust is important for the relationships that she will build with others.

SECTION 6:

Fun Activities to Keep a Kid Busy

During Pregnancy

Becoming a dad can bring many feelings: excitement, wonder, worry, love, confusion and more. You can bond with your baby even before birth. Getting involved early with the pregnancy helps you to get ready to be a dad. You can:

- Ask mom to tell you when the baby is moving. Place your hand on her belly so you can feel your baby's movements.
- Listen to your baby's heartbeat.
- Talk to your unborn child through mom's belly. You can read stories, sing songs, or just talk to your baby. As early as 21 weeks of the pregnancy, your baby can hear your voice.
- Attend medical appointments and prenatal classes.
- Help prepare the stuff the baby will need at the hospital and once home.
- Talk with others about what it is like for you to be expecting your baby.

The Early Days

Up to 6 months

- The first few months of a baby's life is an important time for bonding with you. Your baby is learning to read your face and listen to your voice. Talk to your baby with your "normal" adult voice and use real words. She is figuring out what her arms can do, what her toes may taste like, and how to move around. Activities that involve cuddling, closeness, and your voice are important at this age. Consider taking a parental leave. You will be doing an incredibly important thing for your baby and the bond you have with him. You and your family will all benefit from it.
  - **Skin-to-skin.** Hold your baby close to your body. This comforts him as he feels your heartbeat, feels the warmth of your body, smells your scent, sees the hairs on your body, and senses the vibration as you talk.

  - **The Portable Mobile.** Tie or tape ribbons, fabric, or other interesting streamers onto a wooden spoon and dangle them gently in front of your baby's face.
  - **Tummy Time.** Place colourful objects at different distances that encourage your baby to reach for them, either from their tummy or sitting up (if able to).
  - **Coloured Feet.** Put different coloured socks or booties on your baby's feet and encourage him to reach for them.
  - **Songfest.** Sit on the floor with your baby lying on your legs, facing you. Sing action songs, like The Wheels on the Bus, The Itsy-Bitsy Spider, or Head, Shoulder, Knees, and Toes. Do the actions gently with your baby as you sing.

6 - 12 months

- By now your baby may be getting ready to crawl, stand, and walk. You may see more smiles and laughter, and he may be discovering new objects (toys, his body, pets, etc.) and how to use them. Activities that promote his healthy development will allow him to explore new objects safely, give him opportunities to use his muscles, and provide lots of times for smiles and laughter together.
  - **Book Time.** When reading a story book, point to characters or objects while you read about them. Change the tone of your voice, make the sounds that the objects may make. For example, "toot toot" goes the horn.
  - **Climb a Mountain.** Make a pile of pillows and other soft things your baby can crawl over. Stay close to help him and keep him safe.
  - **Bubbles Galore.** Bring some bubble bath into the bathtub. Show your baby how they feel, how they sound, and how they float.
  - **Peek-A-Boo.** Play peek-a-boo with your baby while changing her diaper. Use a small blanket to hide her face. This can especially help with the fussy diaper changes.
  - **Kick the Pans.** Place aluminum pans on the floor, one close to each of your baby's feet. Show him the noise he can make when he kicks a pan.

1-2 years

- As she learns to walk, she begins to understand what you are saying (more than you may realize!), and she is able to follow simple, two-step instructions. Your child starts to enjoy activities that encourage closeness with you, provide a chance to make simple decisions, and begin to involve the imagination.
  - **Water Play.** Fill a large tub or bucket with water. Collect containers and have your child pour water from one to the other. Add some small plastic bugs or other toys in the tub, too.
  - **Books in the Park.** Take some books to the backyard or a park. Bring a blanket and some snacks to share.
  - **That's My Song.** Sing familiar songs, but add your child's name. "Old Mac Jenny had a farm…" or "Amir is my sunshine, my only sunshine…"
  - **Humpty Dumpty.** Sit your child on your knees facing you. Bounce him up and down while saying the Humpty Dumpty rhyme. On the word "fall", open your legs and lower him gently to the floor and say "boom" when he reaches the floor.
  - **On a Roll.** Sit on the floor across from your child. Find 4-5 different balls and roll them back and forth to each other.
  - **Into Dad's Closet**. Bring out some of your shirts, socks, and shoes. Let your child try them on.

Life of a Toddler: 2-3 years

- The Terrific Twos! This is a time where the imagination is really starting to take off and your child's ability to talk and communicate grows. If he sees something he wants, he will believe it is his. Sharing and empathy are beginning to develop. Activities at this age will encourage learning to control their emotions, how to get along with others, and simple problem solving.
  - **Build a Reading Fort**. Make a fort out of chairs, blankets, and pillows. Climb inside with some books and read them together. Other items to make it fun: flashlight, snacks, or music.
  - **Kitchen Symphony.** Pull out some plastic bowls and some wooden spoons. Put on a favourite song and play and sing along together.
  - **Slime Time.** Make some jello. Pour unset jello into a stove pot, add some tapioca and boil it for a few minutes. Allow to cool and put the mixture into a large bowl. Add plastic insects, dinosaurs, or other things to the slime.
  - **Over and Under.** Lie on the floor while your child walks over you. Form a bridge using your hands and feet while your child crawls under you. Sit on the floor with your legs apart while your child jumps over them.
  - **Nature Match.** Collect a variety of things outside (leaves, stones, sticks, etc.) Have your child group them by type, colour, size, weight, etc.
  - **Box Car Run.** Give your child a large cardboard box or laundry basket to push around the room. Suggest a doll or stuffed animal your child can put in the "car". Encourage your child to get into the box as well and you can push them around the room.

Getting Ready for School: 3-4 years

- Preschoolers are eager to explore the world around them and experience things for themselves. They are learning a lot through play and interacting with other people. Their independence is growing, their ability to speak and understand is increasing, and they continue to learn about controlling their emotions.

  - **Mystery Bin.** Put things in a box. Have your child reach in and guess what they are touching (bowl of jello, rocks, a sock, etc.). Put in pictures of your family, things around the home, animals, etc. Have them guess what is coming out next.
  - **Sudsy Rainbow.** Pour dishwashing soap and water into a bucket or container. Let the suds form and then pour off most of the water. Add drops of food colouring into the suds. Join your child mixing the colours in the suds.

– **Target Practice.** Find two or three tubes of different lengths (paper towel, gift wrap, etc.) and some small balls. Have your child hold the tubes at an angle to the floor. See if they can hit some targets (other balls, blocks, toy bowling pins, etc.) on the floor by rolling a ball down the tube. The bigger the tube the better!

– **Shopping Fun.** Take your child to the grocery store when they are neither tired nor hungry. Let your child feel the items you buy and talk about how things feel. ("This milk is cold. This apple is smooth.") Talk about what you are seeing, what you are buying next, the colour and shape of items, etc. (Just be sure to head home before your child gets grumpy!)

School-age Days – 5-6 years

- Children entering school-age want to figure out what their world is like. They are becoming better at solving problems, adapting to new experiences (like school), and enjoying playing with their friends. "Hands on" activities help them learn about their world. They will have more interest and ability in writing and reading.

  – **Living Room Basketball.** Sit about one metre away from your child. Hold out a large plastic laundry basket. Let her try throwing a large, soft ball into the basket. Give her different objects to throw (sock, paper bag full of crumbled newspaper, etc.)

  – **A-Z Around the Room.** Get a box or bucket. Starting at "A", find things with your child that begin with each letter of the alphabet OR look for things for each letter of your child's name.

  – **Parachute Fun.** Find a large sheet. Have your child hold one end. Raise it high, make waves, or have it fall over both of you. Add cotton balls, bean bags, or a stuffed toy and watch it bounce and jump around.

  – **Reading Scavenger Hunt.** Go to the library and take out 5 new books your child has never read before. Hide them around the living room or bedroom in places that are not too difficult to find. Have your child try to find them.

  – **Balancing Act.** Place a plastic cup upside-down on the floor with an aluminum foil pan face up on the cup. Ask your child to put blocks or letters on the pan, one at a time. See how many your child can put on until it falls with a crash! As your child puts the letters on, say the letter or the colour of the block with her. Try this with different objects around your home.

  – **Celery in Water Experiment.** Place 3 or 4 short stalks of celery with the leaves in their own glasses of water. Have your child add food colouring to each glass. Use different colours if possible (red and blue work best). Leave them overnight. Next day, the celery should have changed colour by absorbing the coloured water.

Resources and Links

Where to go

Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs: resources and links for community organizations and newcomer families: www.frp.ca

Ontario Early Years Centres: to find the nearest location: www.ontarioearlyyears.ca

Play and Child Development

- **Active for Life:** to make a difference in the health and happiness of your children: www.activeforlife.ca
- **Baby Wants:** encourages parents to do simple things like playing, reading and singing to help develop their young child: www.beststart.org/resources/hlthy_chld_dev/babywant/Babywant_ENGLISH_2010.pdf
- **Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs:** a series of brochures on play and child development: www.frp.ca/index.cfm?fuseaction = page.viewpage&pageid = 741
- **Caring for Kids:** growing and learning information: www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/growing-index
- **Dad Central Ontario:** information for dads: www.dadcentral.ca/im_a_dad
- **Healthy Baby Healthy Brain:** to help support your baby's brain development: www.healthybabyhealthybrain.ca
- **Hands-on As We Grow:** hands on activities to do with your kids: http://handsonaswegrow.com/
- **Have a Ball Together:** activities to help your child to be active: www.haveaballtogether.ca
- **Infant Mental Health Promotion:** a series of educational videos and guides: www.imhpromotion.ca/Resources/SimpleGiftVideoSeries.aspx
- **Kid Sense:** information on child development: www.childdevelopment.com.au/component/content/article/170
- **Learning to Play and Playing to Learn: What Families Can Do:** informs of children support play-based learning at home, in child care and preschool settings and in Kindergarten: www.beststart.org/resources/hlthy_chld_dev/school_readiness_ENG_Nov2013_blur.pdf
- **My Child and I:** Attachment for Life: to help understand the principles of attachment and learn ways to promote it: www.beststart.org/resources/other_languages/parent_attachment/parent_attachment_eng_Oct2012.pdf
- **Naître et grandir:** informs parents and increase social awareness of the importance of early childhood development: www.fondationchagnon.org/en/what-we-do/awareness-activities-and-tools/naitre-et-grandir.aspx
- **Nipissing District Developmental Screen:** a free checklist to help evaluate your child's growth and development: www.ndds.ca
- **Parents2Parents:** parenting approach to support your child's healthy development: www.parents2parents.ca
- **ParticipACTION:** to encourage more active play: www.participACTION.com

Language

- **Ministry of Children and Youth Services:** information in 16 different languages on milestones and tips to help your child learn language: www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/earlychildhood/speechlanguage/index.aspx
- **Ontario Public Library:** to find the nearest location: www.mtc.gov.on.ca/en/libraries/oplweb.shtml
- **The Hanen Centre:** helping you to help children communicate: www.hanen.org/Helpful-Info/Fun-Activities.aspx
- **When Children Speak More Than One Language:** information for parents when your child learns more than one language: www.beststart.org/resources/hlthy_chld_dev/BSRC_When_Families_Speak_fnl.pdf

Safety

- **Caring for Kids:** information for parents to keep kids safe: www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/kidssafe-index
- **Children's Health and Safety Association:** provides up-to-date and vital health information for every concerned parent: www.safekid.org/en/
- **Parachute:** provides information on injury prevention: www.parachutecanada.org

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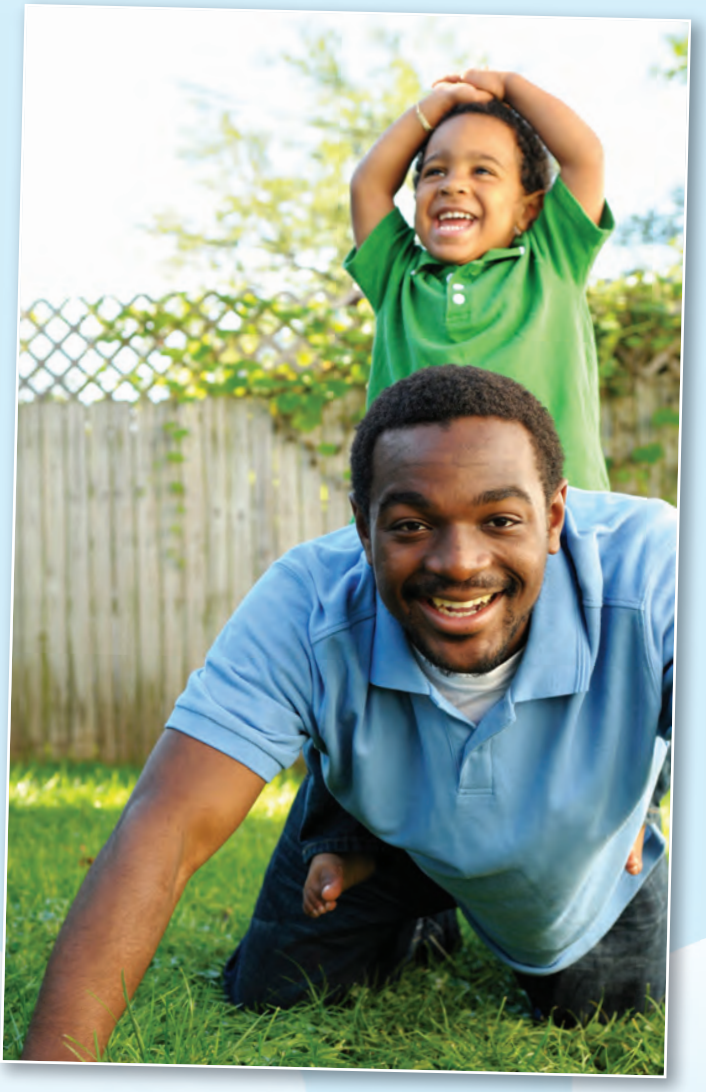

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