



Of all one-on-one time, fathers spend **45%** playing, while mothers only spend **15-20%** playing.



A study of 27 preschoolers found that popular children are more likely to have fathers who are physically playful, affectionate and socially engaging and mothers who are highly verbal.

Source: Bridging the Gap: Parent Child Play Interaction and Peer Interactive Competence, Mac Donald and Parke

Traits common to **mothers** and **fathers**

Mom		Dad
<b>Indirect</b> asks questions <i>Do you want the ball?</i>	<b>Communication</b>	<b>Direct</b> gives imperatives <i>Go get the ball.</i>
<b>Less Successful</b> boys are less compliant	<b>Discipline</b>	<b>More Successful</b> boys are more compliant
		girls show no difference
<b>Soothing</b> rhythmic one-on-one	<b>Stimulation</b>	<b>Active</b> physical social
<b>Tender</b> to social cues with soothing sounds	<b>Responsiveness</b>	<b>Assuring</b> to gross motor cues with rhythmic pats
<b>Structured</b> caregiving activities educational play	<b>Time</b>	<b>Impromptu</b> play-oriented activities less directed play
<b>Things</b> uses toys more cognitive	<b>Props</b>	<b>Self</b> uses body more physical
<b>Direct</b> assists child points him to answers	<b>Help</b>	<b>Indirect</b> guides child lets him find answers on own

Sources: Compliance and Self-Assertion, Power, McGrath, Hughes and Manire; Fatherhood, Pruett; Infant Mental Health Journal; Paternal and Maternal Behavior with Premature Infants, Marton and Minds; And Daddy Makes Three: The Father's Impact on Mother and Young Child, K. Alison Clarke Stewart; Developmental Course of Parental Stimulation and Its Relationship to Mastery Motivation During Infancy, Yarrow, MacTurk, Vietze, McCarthy, Klein and McQuiston.

## How do fathers and mothers differ?

*Your child's recognition of the differences between mother and father care actually enhances his development.*

—Kyle Pruett, MD  
Fatherhood



### ACTION ITEMS

#### Questions of equality

**?** When it comes to connecting with an infant, does a mother have an advantage over a father because the baby has heard her voice for nine months?

Surprisingly, mothers do not have this type of advantage, however many men report feeling like strangers to their children at the very beginning. Fathers should not give up hope—the connection will form if they spend time with their child and play a role in her life. After all, parenting is something that both men and women learn through practice and persistence.

**?** Women tend to play with their kids in a more structured manner than men do. Is one style better than the other?

One of the truths in life is that men and women are different, and that means moms and dads too. A child has just as much fun playing with a father, even if it is not planned out or structured—and the child is learning. By simply allowing a child to be a part of whatever task a father is involved in gives him the chance to explore, learn and bond. Structured time together can be beneficial because kids like routines, but they enjoy spontaneity, too.

**?** Men, more so than women, tend to encourage persistence when it comes to learning new things. Is it detrimental to be more demanding?

Research shows that fathers, more than moms, tend to challenge their children and encourage them to be persistent when facing a difficult task, and that such lessons translate into social and academic confidence later in their lives. Although letting a child get too frustrated while trying to accomplish a task can be detrimental to learning, if an adult can figure out just how far to push and when to give in, he will help her understand the benefits of pushing through a hard task and build self-esteem.