

# PARENTING INFANTS AND TODDLERS TODAY

## Tuning in to Dad: Key Findings From a 2009 National Parent Survey

Findings from a national survey of 1,615 parents of children from birth to 3 years, recently conducted by Hart Research for ZERO TO THREE, helped us understand what's on the minds of fathers and what you need for support in nurturing your young child's healthy development. Here is what you told us.

### You Are Less Likely to Be Satisfied With Your Work/Family Balance

This generation of fathers is significantly more involved in the care of their children than previous generations. What a good thing for children (and, of course, dads, too)! Research clearly shows that children benefit when their fathers are regularly involved in their care, both physically and emotionally, and form close bonds with them. Involved fathers strengthen early development by helping young children:

- Develop better problem-solving skills;
- Keep on trying when faced with a new challenge and cope better with everyday frustrations;
- Feel secure enough to actively explore the world around them;
- Have greater tolerance for stress and be better able to wait their turn for teachers' and parents' attention;
- Develop greater confidence in their own abilities and thoughts;
- Have a better chance to enter college or find stable employment after high school;
- Be 75% less likely to have a teen birth; and
- Be 80% less likely to spend time in jail and half as likely to experience multiple depression symptoms.

Research shows that it is the *quality* of the interaction between father and child—whether the father is sensitive to the child's needs and reactions—that determines the overall value of his involvement in his child's life, not the *quantity* of time spent together. (This happens to be true for mothers, too.) You don't have to be a stay-at-home dad or even live in the same home as your child to develop a close relationship and nurture his or her development in these very important ways.

### Parents Rate Child Rearing's Greatest Challenges

Proportion Rating Each as a Most Difficult Behavior

Behavior	% All	% Mothers	% Fathers
Temper tantrums	34	40	21
Controlling emotions, crying	15	15	16
Biting, fighting, hitting	14	16	9
Not listening	13	13	13
Sleep, bedtime issues	11	8	17
Potty training	9	10	9
Attitude, talking back	9	9	9
Eating, food issues	8	6	11

### The Way Your Parents Raised You Has a Major Influence on Your Approach to Parenting (59%)

Just as *you* are your child's first teacher, your parents were *yours*. The things your mom or dad said and did, their way of relating to you and others, laid the foundation for many of your beliefs, values, attitudes, and parenting practices. It is likely that you experienced some of those practices as positive that you want to recreate with your child—for instance, teaching the value of hard work by encouraging her to keep trying when she faces a challenge, or teaching him to be empathic and give to others by having him choose some of his toys to give to less fortunate children.

Then there are those times when the child-rearing approach you learned from your own parents does not work well for you or your child: One father realized that the annoyance he felt when his toddler felt sad and wanted comforting was actually rooted in a memory of his own father making him feel like a failure any time he expressed a need for support. This awareness allowed him to be more nurturing and supportive of his son.

- In what ways do you see the influence of your family's beliefs and values in how you parent your child?
- How do you see the things you do as a dad being helpful and good for your child? Which, if any, are not? Why? What might you do differently?



National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families

To view the full report, go to: [www.zerotothree.org/parentsurvey](http://www.zerotothree.org/parentsurvey)

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## You Find Certain Aspects of Parenting More Challenging Than Others

In the survey, dads ranked temper tantrums and trouble controlling emotions/crying as the most challenging behaviors. Mothers also identified these behaviors as the most difficult, but dads find sleep and feeding issues more vexing than moms do. Seventeen percent of dads, versus 8% of moms, reported sleep as a “most difficult behavior”; and whereas 11% of dads find eating and food issues most difficult, only 6% of moms share this sentiment. To learn more about how to address these challenges, go to the following Web sites:

### *Developing self-control from 0–12 months*

[www.zerotothree.org/site/PageServer?pagename=ter\\_key\\_social\\_selfcontrol012](http://www.zerotothree.org/site/PageServer?pagename=ter_key_social_selfcontrol012)

### *Developing self-control from 12–24 months*

[www.zerotothree.org/site/PageServer?pagename=ter\\_key\\_social\\_selfcontrol1224](http://www.zerotothree.org/site/PageServer?pagename=ter_key_social_selfcontrol1224)

### *Developing self-control from 24–36 months*

[www.zerotothree.org/site/PageServer?pagename=ter\\_key\\_social\\_selfcontrol2436](http://www.zerotothree.org/site/PageServer?pagename=ter_key_social_selfcontrol2436)

### *Sleep*

[www.zerotothree.org/site/PageServer?pagename=key\\_sleep](http://www.zerotothree.org/site/PageServer?pagename=key_sleep)

### *Feeding*

[www.zerotothree.org/site/DocServer/healthy\\_from\\_start\\_eng.pdf?docID=1041&AddInterest=1153](http://www.zerotothree.org/site/DocServer/healthy_from_start_eng.pdf?docID=1041&AddInterest=1153)

## You Need More Information on Social and Emotional Development

Survey results also show that dads could use more information on their children’s social and emotional development. Follow the link below to learn about how deeply affected babies and toddlers are by their earliest experiences and how you can help your young child develop strong, positive relationships and a range of other skills that will help them thrive as they grow: [www.zerotothree.org/site/PageServer?pagename=key\\_social](http://www.zerotothree.org/site/PageServer?pagename=key_social)

## REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

### **Parenting and Child Development**

[www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org)

### **Fatherhood**

- National Fatherhood Initiative: [www.fatherhood.org](http://www.fatherhood.org)
- Administration for Children & Families Early Childhood and Knowledge Center: <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/For%20Parents/Everyday%20Parenting/Fatherhood>
- The Supporting Father Involvement Program: [www.supportingfatherinvolvement.org](http://www.supportingfatherinvolvement.org)
- *Partnership Parenting: Why Mothers and Fathers Parent Differently—and How to Successfully Raise a Happier Child Together* by Kyle Pruett and Marsha Kline Pruett (2009), Cambridge MA: Da Capo Press
- *Fatherhood* by Kyle D. Pruett (2000), New York: The Free Press



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