

FATHERHOOD – THE GREATEST JOB ON EARTH

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RESPONSIBLE

UNTIL A few years ago, Father's Day was just another bachelors Sunday for Thabo – but not any more!

Come 11 June, Thabo will be treated to a special day by his family and he wants to enjoy his day off.

Before Thabo became a father, he and his wife Rose had enjoyed a very active social life and had spare cash for luxuries such as travel and eating out, but having a baby changed all that.

"We had planned to have a child and tried for our baby at a time that suited us. Bang on schedule, my wife fell pregnant and our lives changed for the better forever."

He said: "I do miss being free to do whatever I want, whenever I want – and have the money to do it. But when I compare that to being noisily welcomed home every evening by my beautiful little three-year-old, or hearing her laughter, well, there's nothing that compares."

Thabo's marriage also has been strengthened by the arrival of his daughter.

"Parenthood has tested us as a couple, as it does

most people, and we have had to change our lifestyle to accommodate our child. But I love my wife more than ever for having given me such a lovely child, and seeing what a wonderful mother she is has given me new-found respect for her."

Because Rose works late hours, Thabo has to look after his daughter most evenings. It's tough, especially after a long day but he tackles it with pleasure.

"All too often, fathers leave the parenting to the mother and only step in to discipline a child. By feeding and bathing my daughter and reading her a bedtime story every night I get to spend special time with her – now she can't wait for bedtime!"

"I saw little of my own father while I was growing up because he worked so much, and my biggest fear was that I would also be 'missing'. But because my wife and I have both had to pitch in with the child-rearing I'm very close and loving with my daughter," he said.

"It is true that children are bundles of joy, and they live to love you. So I want to ask those deadbeat dads out there: Do you realise how you are robbing yourself of lifelong happiness?" he asked.



By being an active parent and helping around the house, dads can play a big role in their children's development and show support for their partners – and create strong, happy families in the process.

Dads must be there for mums

SUPPORT is a two-way street in any healthy relationship – and you need your partner's support when it comes to parenthood.

Support can take many forms: Financial, emotional, spiritual or practical. Of these, your partner will probably most need your emotional and practical support when she carries and gives birth to your child.

It begins by talking openly about when and how you want to start a family, and making sure that you are emotionally and financially ready.

Supporting your partner during pregnancy will not only strengthen your relationship as you await the arrival of your child together, but you are more likely to form a stronger bond with your child once it is born. But while many men do want to

be more involved in their partner's pregnancy, many are unsure how they can do this. **Apart from offering financial support, you can also:**

★ Visit the ante-natal clinic with your partner to learn practical tips about pregnancy and birth.

★ Test together for HIV – it is very important to know if either of you are HIV-positive – so you must protect your baby from HIV infection.

★ Monitor the foetus' health and progress together.

★ Maintain a healthy lifestyle, making it easier for your partner to do so. A good way to exercise together is to take walks.

★ Avoid alcohol – because drinking alcohol during pregnancy can result in a handicapped baby. Support your partner by not consuming alcohol

while she is pregnant.

★ Talk to your partner about sex during pregnancy so that she knows your needs – and protect her and your baby from HIV by keeping faithful.

★ Let your partner rest by helping with the household chores and make sure that she can relax for at least an hour every day.

★ Avoid the stress of your changing lives by talking things through.

The first three months are usually the most difficult especially if you are first-time parents. Your baby is still very small and needs a lot of time and attention. You and your partner will likely be very tired, especially because of night-time feeding. Work out a plan so that can both get some rest and be able to cope with baby, work and other pressures.

My dad is cool because:

So how do you become a cool father in your child's eyes?

We asked Grade 6 and 7 children at a Joburg primary school why they think their dads are cool.

This is what some of the kids said:

★ "Cool, caring, incredible, passionate are a few words to describe my dad. He's a refiner by profession, a diamond trader, but best of all he treats me like a rare diamond." – Sharmeen, 12.

★ "He knows good sports. He likes to play with me. He always tells me what to do. He likes me just the way I am." – Alana, 12.

★ "My dad is cool because he can make funny jokes. He also helps people and he knows what I like. Finally, my dad's fun." – Zander, 12.

★ "My dad is not only cool, he's awesome. He is the bestest dad in the world. He takes care of us all. He loves

us very much." – Kayla, 11.

★ "My dad is cool because he taught me how to play guitar and fish. He encourages me to do sport at school, and he helps me with my hockey and cricket." – David, 12.

★ "My dad is cool because he's embarrassing. If I go out with a boy, it's 'How old is this boy?', but my dad loves me, so what's he going to do?" – Dali, 11.

★ "I think my dad is cool because when I go to soccer practice, he plays soccer with me. Yesterday, when he was sick, he still took me to soccer practice." – Udhayan, 11.

★ "My dad is cool because he plays guitar, he sings and he plays drums. He is always making things and drawing, or he is building houses. When he is not busy he teaches me how to play guitar or drums." – Jethro, 14.

Tips for dads with sons

★ As a dad, your job is not to judge or give orders. A dad should guide, inform, educate, have fun with and accept your son.

★ At the proper age, educate your son about adulthood, manhood, fatherhood and how to treat women and how to care for himself and his family.

★ Be aware of things that are troubling your son and support him in learning the best ways to deal with issues.

★ Make time to be with your son. You may have a lot on your plate, but if you want to teach life values to your son, spend time with him.

★ In order to teach respect you need to earn respect. Respect those around you.

★ As your son grows up, he will explore his own sexuality and will need your support.

Be a dad, be a mentor

IT IS something that we all know and understand: Fathers have a very important role to play in raising their children.

More and more, fathers are stepping up to the plate and becoming more involved in their children's upbringing by being a positive role model to them.

Not that it's easy juggling work and family life. Some men work very long hours – or even long distances – to support their families, which makes it difficult to provide those things that money cannot buy: Love, support, time and teaching children to become good adults.

Many men also missed having a father in their lives and didn't have someone to teach them how to be good dads. And in some cases women may exclude men from playing their part in caring for their children.

But being there as a father benefits the entire family, not just the kids. When men accept more responsibility for child care and house-

work, they make things easier for their partner – and they create a happier house.

Men have a critical role to play in setting an example for their sons, grandsons, nephews or brothers – and, indeed, any other boys they may teach and coach. Their daughter's future relationships are influenced by how their fathers interacted with them and their mothers.

Boys learn what it is to be a man through observing how their fathers and other male role models behave – so you have to show them the right way through your deeds not just your words. And that means things like showing respect for those around you (especially women), living a clean and honest life and making time for your children so that you can guide them through the ups and downs of life.

By choosing to set a good example, you can help your children to grow into confident young adults who take responsibility for their lives.

Tips for dads and daughters

★ Find opportunities to be with your daughter and to understand what she likes.

★ Do your best to support her choices while giving guidance as a parent.

★ Daughters do not want you to fix their problems. They want you to listen and understand and help them in finding their OWN solutions.

★ If you are a single dad, you may want to find a strong and capable woman to be a mentor or role model for your daughter.

★ Puberty and adolescence in girls can be an emotional and difficult challenge for dads. The best way is to be honest and up-front with your daughter.

★ As she grows into a woman and learns about her own sexuality, your daughter needs your support and understanding – no matter what her sexuality is.

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