

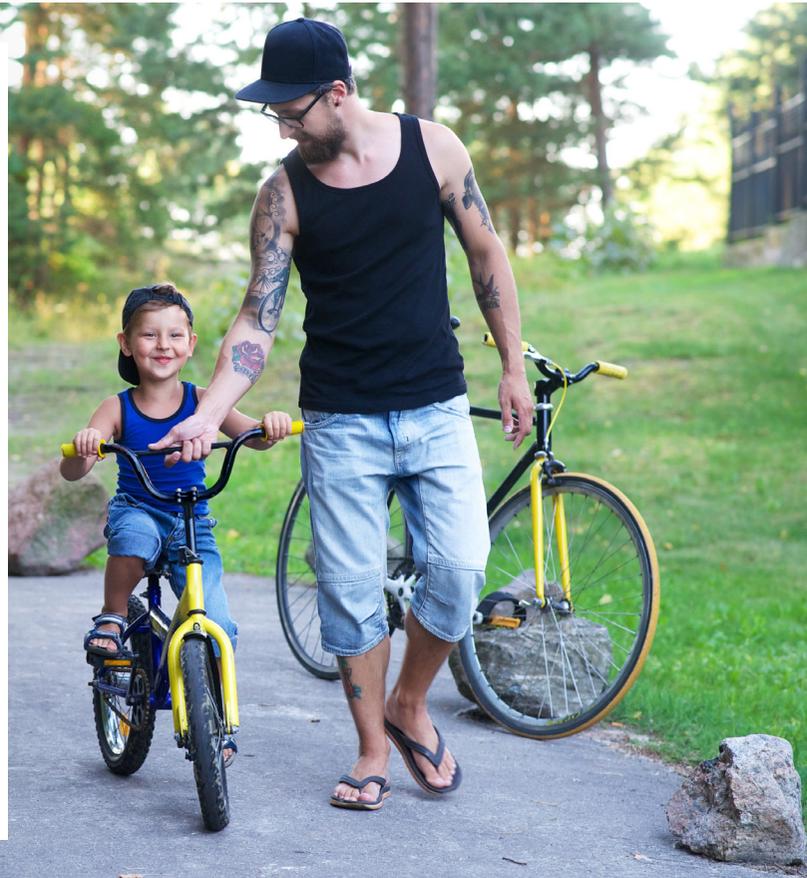
TIPS FOR YOUNG DADS¹

This National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse (NRFC) Tip Sheet has suggestions and resources to help young dads enjoy a successful journey with their child and their child’s mother.

Information is drawn from previously published NRFC material and other resources noted at the end of this document.

For a quick look, see the companion document *10 Tips for Young Dads*.

<https://www.fatherhood.gov/research-and-resources/10-tips-young-dads>



NO ONE SAID IT’S EASY

But being a dad can be the most rewarding and most important thing you do in your life.

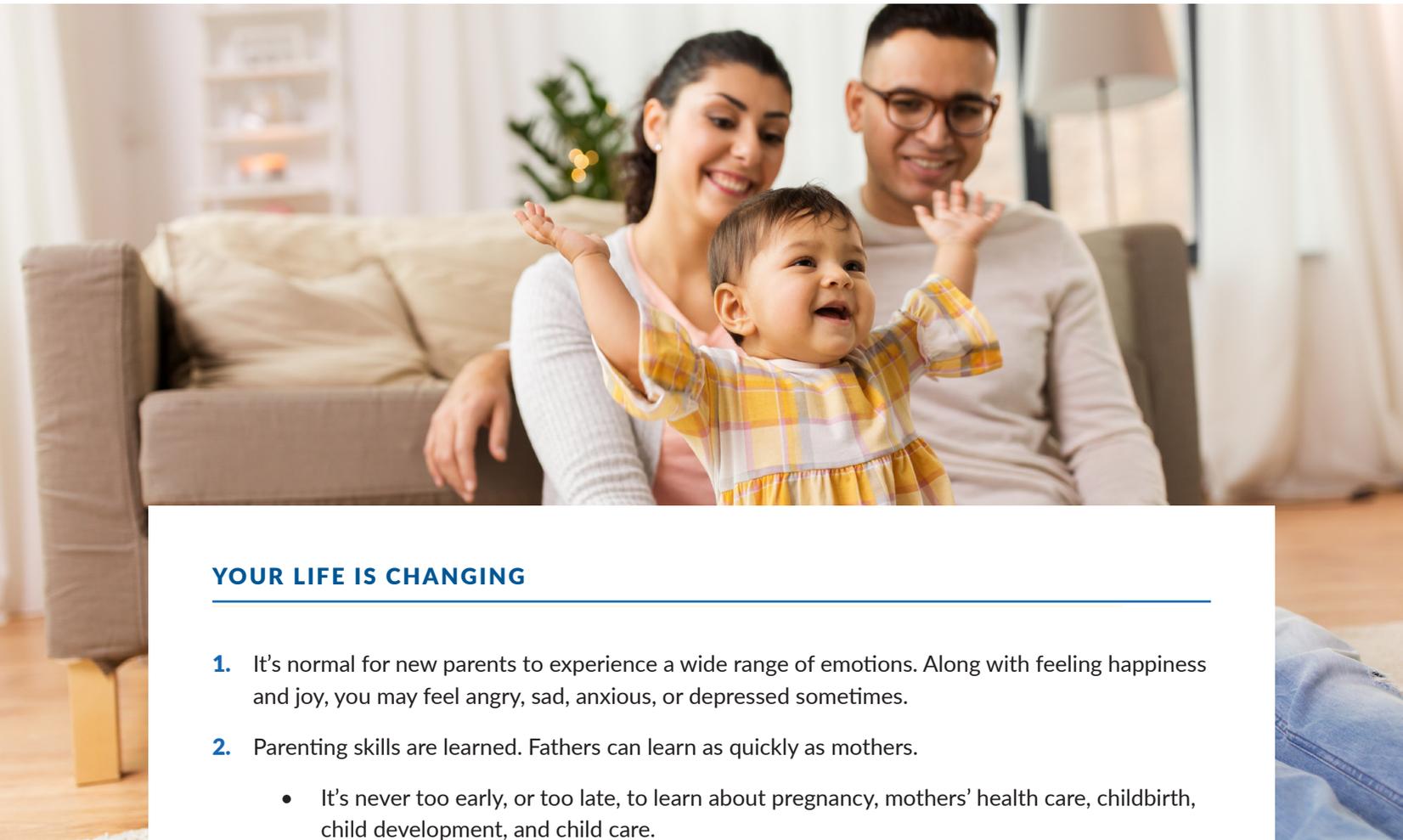
- You may be worried and thinking, “How can I do this?”
- You may hear others saying, “You’re too young..young dads are irresponsible, they never stick around to raise their kids.”
- Don’t listen to negative thoughts or words. You can do this! Many responsible young fathers are doing a wonderful job raising their kids. You can be one of them.
- Remember, you are the most important man on the face of the planet to your child. That’s a gift, privilege, honor, and responsibility.

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To watch your kids grow and mature before your eyes is the greatest experience in life, but too many men miss it! Don’t be one of them.

COMMENT ON FATHERHOODGOV’S FACEBOOK PAGE

¹ Nigel Vann (Fathers Incorporated) compiled these tips and received helpful feedback and suggestions from Stacey Bouchet (Fathers Incorporated), Barry McIntosh and Johnny Wilson (Fathers New Mexico) and Avis Files (Brothers United, Pathway Inc.). Suggested citation: Vann, N. (2020). Tips for Young Dads. (NRFC Tip Sheet). National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse. [LINK TO BE ADDED]



YOUR LIFE IS CHANGING

1. It's normal for new parents to experience a wide range of emotions. Along with feeling happiness and joy, you may feel angry, sad, anxious, or depressed sometimes.
2. Parenting skills are learned. Fathers can learn as quickly as mothers.
 - It's never too early, or too late, to learn about pregnancy, mothers' health care, childbirth, child development, and child care.
 - As children grow up, they move through different developmental stages that influence what they can do, how they feel, and how they behave.
 - For links to information on child development and other parenting questions, see [NRFC Resources](#), [Video Resources](#), and [Other Resources](#) at the end of this tip sheet.
3. Parenting requires spending time with your children. This means you can't spend as much time having fun with your friends as you once did. The responsibilities of parenting may make it hard to focus on school or find a job.
 - Try to stay positive—don't dwell on challenges.
 - Do at least one positive thing each day—e.g., complete a school assignment, look for a part-time job, feed your child, take them to a doctor's appointment.
 - Connect with other young fathers—look for a young fathers' program; maybe a local Head Start or Healthy Start program has activities for young fathers.
 - Call the NRFC National Call Center (877-4DAD-411) for information on local resources or referrals for advice on parenting and relationship issues.

IT'S IMPORTANT TO BOND EARLY AND OFTEN WITH YOUR BABY AND YOUNG CHILDREN

Babies and young children need to feel loved, safe, and secure.

- They need to know their mom and dad will respond to their needs in predictable, loving ways. You are the most important people in their lives.

Children who feel secure and loved benefit in many ways:

- They are more confident in their abilities.
- They have better social relationships.
- They are more willing to explore their environments.
- They cope better with stress.

WAYS TO BOND WITH YOUR CHILD

1. Talk or sing to them, look into their eyes, change their diaper, hold them.
2. As they begin to speak, ask them questions. This helps them learn new words.
3. Help them learn.
 - Reading a story and looking at pictures together is a great way to do this.
 - Check to see if your local library hosts storytelling groups for parents and children.
 - Singing age-appropriate songs, dancing together, and playing catch together are great ways to teach older children new skills.



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When fathers spend time with their children, it is beneficial for the children and the fathers.

For example, holding their new baby or reading to their 1-year-old helps fathers feel good, but it can also help them feel more confident in their abilities as a father and in their life generally.

**NATIONAL RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD
CLEARINGHOUSE (HELPING YOUNG FATHERS
MAKE DECISIONS)**

BE THERE, BE INVOLVED



Being there for a child entails more than just providing financial support.



You can contribute in nonfinancial ways, just by being there. That's what your child wants—to be with you.



Go with your child's mother for "well baby" doctor appointments and check-ups.



Pay for essential items, such as diapers or baby food, when you can.



Young fathers rise above the negative expectation of others all the time!

**JOHNNY WILSON,
FATHERS NEW MEXICO**

If you don't live in the same household as your child:

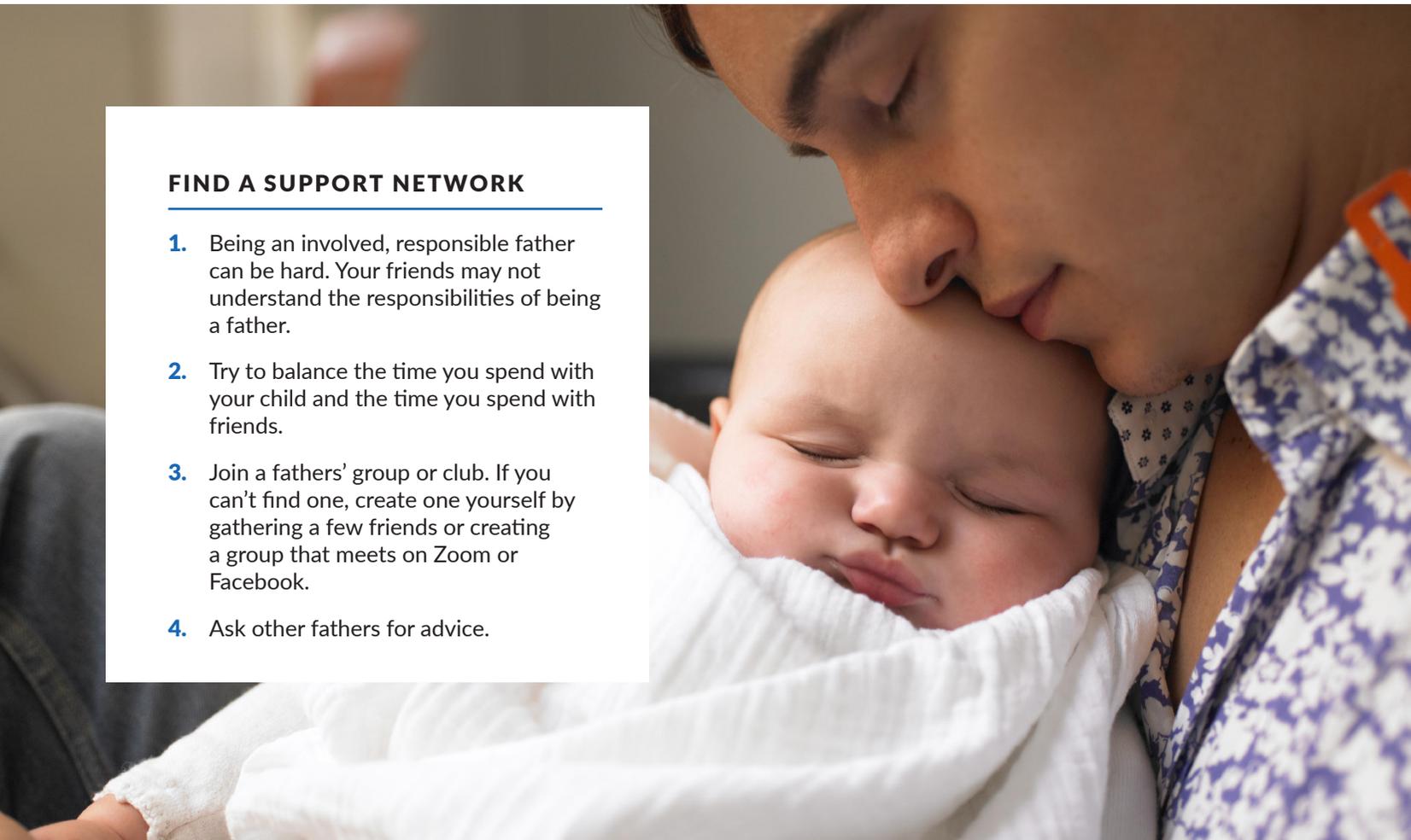
- A.** Make sure you know the name and location of your child's doctor, dentist, day care, etc., and make sure they know you and have your name and phone number in their records so they can contact you.
- B.** Find ways to be involved in your child's life, and be consistent with communications and rules.
 - Knowledge is power. Share important information with your coparent—for example, ask: When did your child eat last? Have they been bathed? Will they need a diaper change soon?
 - Work with your coparent to create a coparenting plan with ground rules to guide how and when you communicate. (For example, you might agree to schedule regular phone calls and send a text message before coming to pick up or drop off children.)
 - When your child is old enough, talk with him or her on the phone every day or use video apps such as FaceTime.
- C.** You have legal avenues to assert your rights as the father, if this becomes necessary.
- D.** The NRFCC National Call Center (877-4DAD-411) can help you find programs and people who can help. Trained mediators can talk with you and the mother of your child.

Focus on working as a coparenting team with your child's mother and other family members.

- A.** Understand the importance of working together with the mother of your child and other family members, whether you live together or in different households.
- Try to understand their point of view and develop a functional relationship with them.
- B.** Focus on communication and conflict management skills.
- It's natural for parents to argue about some things, but only if they do so in respectful ways. It can be very upsetting for children if they see or hear their parents being mean or disrespectful to one another.
 - Remember children do best when they feel safe and secure. Try to find ways to stay positive in front of your children.
 - Talk in kind and respectful ways with the mother of your children. This will teach your children to be kind and respectful too.
- C.** Try to avoid giving different or confusing messages to your children.
- For example, work together with your child's mother and other family members to agree on bedtimes, snacks, and limits on TV watching.

FIND A SUPPORT NETWORK

1. Being an involved, responsible father can be hard. Your friends may not understand the responsibilities of being a father.
2. Try to balance the time you spend with your child and the time you spend with friends.
3. Join a fathers' group or club. If you can't find one, create one yourself by gathering a few friends or creating a group that meets on Zoom or Facebook.
4. Ask other fathers for advice.



Education and training can help you get a better job.

1. Taking the time to complete education and training courses can lead to better job opportunities and higher wages.
 - A high school diploma or its equivalent is a minimum requirement for most jobs.
 - Pursuing a GED can generally be done on a flexible schedule to fit around your work or child care schedules.
 - An associate's or bachelor's degree can increase your range of job opportunities.
 - A four-year engineering degree can lead to a wide variety of careers.
 - A two-year criminal justice degree can be a great option for a career in law enforcement.
 - Check with your local community college for available courses.
 - Job training classes can provide the skills you need to find and keep a good job.
 - Trades such as plumbing, electrical work, carpentry, or truck driving pay wages far above the minimum wage.
 - Check <https://careeronestop.org> for training opportunities in your area.
2. When you are ready to look for a job, consider carefully what is most important to you and the well-being of your child.
 - A job with a stable schedule will make it easier to spend time with your child. A job that provides stable hours, even if they include overnight hours, may be better than one with inconsistent hours during the day.
 - A job that includes health insurance may also be important, especially if your child's mother does not have health insurance for the child.



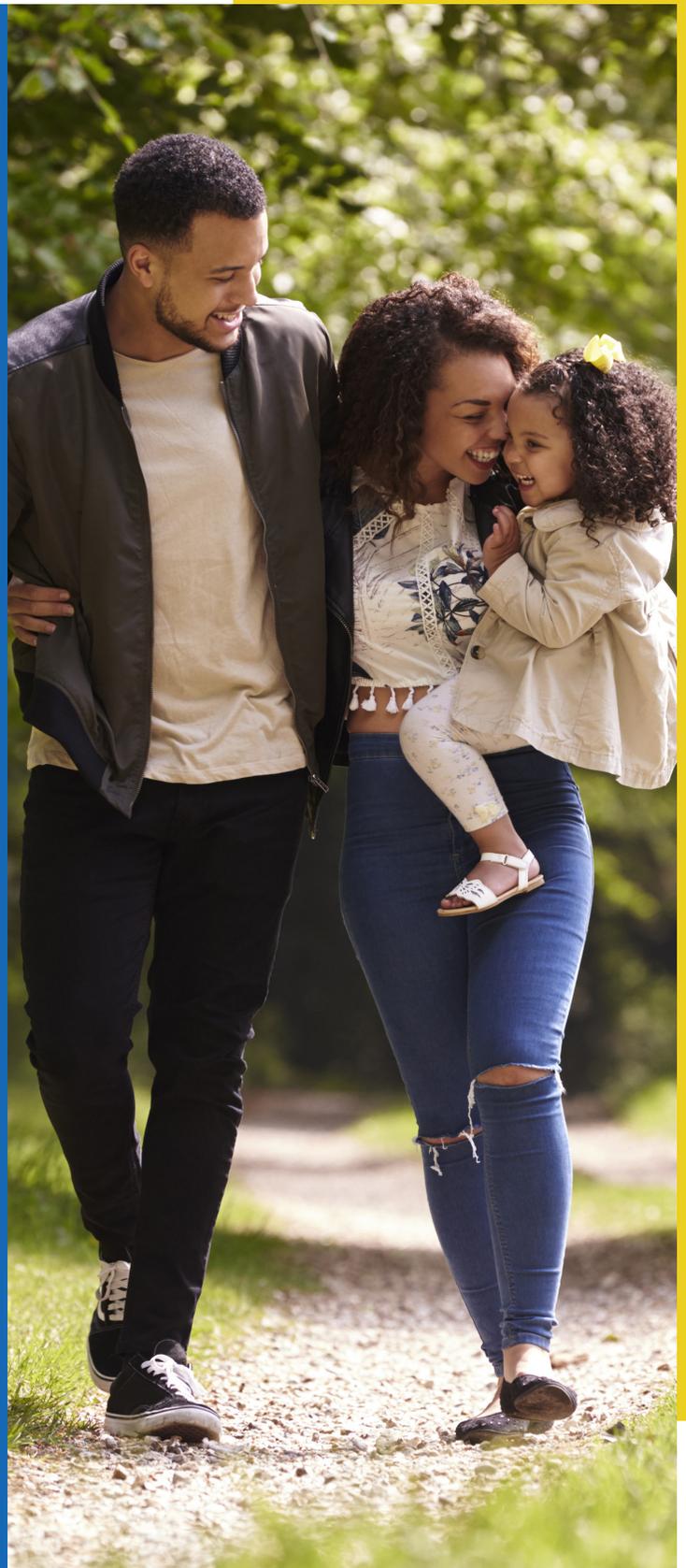
Young fathers consistently report that they want to be a positive influence in the lives of their children.

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ADVICE FOR YOUNG DADS

1. Love that child to the fullest and be in their life as much as possible!
2. Watch them while they sleep. Whisper your hopes and dreams to them. Wonder at their tiny fingernails and little toes. Fall deeply in love.
3. Take lots of photos ... make a memory box.
4. It doesn't take a genius, just love and patience!
5. Give all the love you can. They aren't little but one time.
6. Diapers and wipes, you can never have enough of those two items.
7. Expect to be exhausted. Sleep and nap together. That rest and bonding is far more important than a clean house or unfinished project.
8. Be the person you want your child to be!
9. Love and respect their mother.
10. Remember, they watch EVERYTHING YOU DO ... EVERYTHING.
11. Read to your children 30 minutes a day. By the time they reach kindergarten, they will have learned 500 words or more.
12. Do a 529 college investment plan. It only costs \$100 to start it, and you can do it at any federal credit union.

Selected responses from tips posted to Fatherhoodgov's Facebook page, March 4, 2014.



NRFC RESOURCES

- Tip card for expectant dads
<https://bit.ly/2Cc2gB2>
- Tip card for new dads
<https://bit.ly/2ZGZsE8>
- Helping young fathers make decisions
<https://bit.ly/2AIPw4E>

VIDEO RESOURCES

- Teen father and young father advice: Seasoned father offers advice (Leon Reed, New Young Fathers.com, 2020)
<https://bit.ly/2ZKRIul>
- Live your life and be a role model: Advice for young dads, from a young dad (Young Dads TV - YouTube)
<https://bit.ly/3gsjju9>
- Me and my dad: Advice for young dads (Young Dads TV - YouTube)
<https://bit.ly/3e65cwb>

OTHER RESOURCES

- Being a young dad: In the words of young fathers (University of Leeds)
<https://bit.ly/2BLD9VK>
- Developmental guidelines and positive parenting tips (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
<https://bit.ly/3ffgEY4>
- Everyday ways to support your baby's and toddler's early learning (Zero to Three)
<https://bit.ly/2iGMolg>
- Fathering activities by age of child (Brigham Young University)
<https://bit.ly/2AIP4UO>
- Following Young Fathers (Website)
<https://bit.ly/2VT0XOf>
- How to be a great young father (Gary Holdaway, We Have Kids.com, 2020)
<https://bit.ly/2O22SM7>
- Research summary: Young fathers (Fatherhood Institute, 2013)
<https://bit.ly/2Z5mENb>
- Resources for serving young fathers toolkit (Office of Adolescent Health, 2016)
<https://bit.ly/2ZGYVIC>

Disclaimer:

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