

1.2 “Assumptions We Make” Activity

First, let’s consider the assumptions and beliefs you hold about fathers. Take a moment to reflect: *what do you believe fathers should do, what do you believe fathers should be like?*

- Submit your answer to our collective pool of answers from all practitioners on our Mentimeter link [here](#).

For this activity, we’ll consider and interrogate some commonly held beliefs about mothers and fathers.

Assumption 1: Mothers are ‘Better’ Parents

Reality Response:

The parenting *activities* of mothers and fathers are the same. Parenting can be seen as a series of tasks that both mothers and fathers perform: feeding, providing nurture, bathing, clothing, social interaction, etc.

Activity:

1. Have participants make a list of parenting tasks. Now have an open discussion about the tasks
 - a. Are any tasks exclusive to mothers or fathers? Why or why not?
 - b. Who decides which tasks are ‘mother’ tasks and which are ‘father’ tasks?
 - c. How does our culture and the history we were born into affect how we view the role of each parent?
 2. Now consider examples of fathers being just as capable at tasks often considered to be a mother’s responsibility
 3. Finally, close with a discussion of the merits of embracing a more neutral parenting language that does not single out tasks that are more weighted towards mother or father, instead framing tasks as parent tasks.
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Assumption 2: Dads Play Too Rough with Kids. Dads are often Insensitive.

Reality Response: It's important to remember that play for children is about gaining mastery over their environments. Consequently, different playing styles between mothers and fathers provide differing ways to gain the mastery that is the end result of play. Several studies have validated the mastery benefits of "rough and tumble play" of fathers with their children as helping with building the child's self-confidence and concentration. Additionally, although a child stumbling or getting hurt might not appear to bother fathers as much as other family members, many fathers see it as a parenting duty to teach and encourage the baby to have fun engaging in adventures such as running, jumping and climbing. As a result there is an expectation that there will be some tumbles and bruises that are to be expected which is not a result of the father being careless.

Consider also that there are many, many fathers in the world who are incredibly sensitive to their child's emotional needs. Many fathers prefer a slower, more gentle play with their children, or they engage in both styles of play. It's important to not label one kind of play ("rough and tumble") as bad or less meaningful than another. Our children require lots of different environments to explore and learn within.

Activity: Discussion & Reflection

- Ask participants to write down ways that fathers play with children
- Ask participants to write down the benefits and positive impacts of this kind of play for children. Why is fathers playing with their children important?
- Finally ask them to consider whether they are 'limiting' the kind of play that fathers can engage in. What if a father could engage in any kind of play?

Assumption 3: Dad's Presence Doesn't Make Much Difference

Reality Response:

A father's presence is as important to a child's development as a mother's presence. The research and literature is abundantly clear: children who do not receive father's love and emotional support are more likely to struggle with anxiety and aggression.



Activity:

Create a space for participants to share about their fathers' role (or lack of role) in their lives. Be sure to leave a space for reflection and processing of emotions. Be mindful that this might be a difficult topic for some so remind participants of the importance of holding this as a safe place.

- What, if anything, did you appreciate about the way you were fathered?
 - What kinds of emotional support do you wish you received from your father?
 - What does talking about our father bring up for you now? How are you feeling?
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