

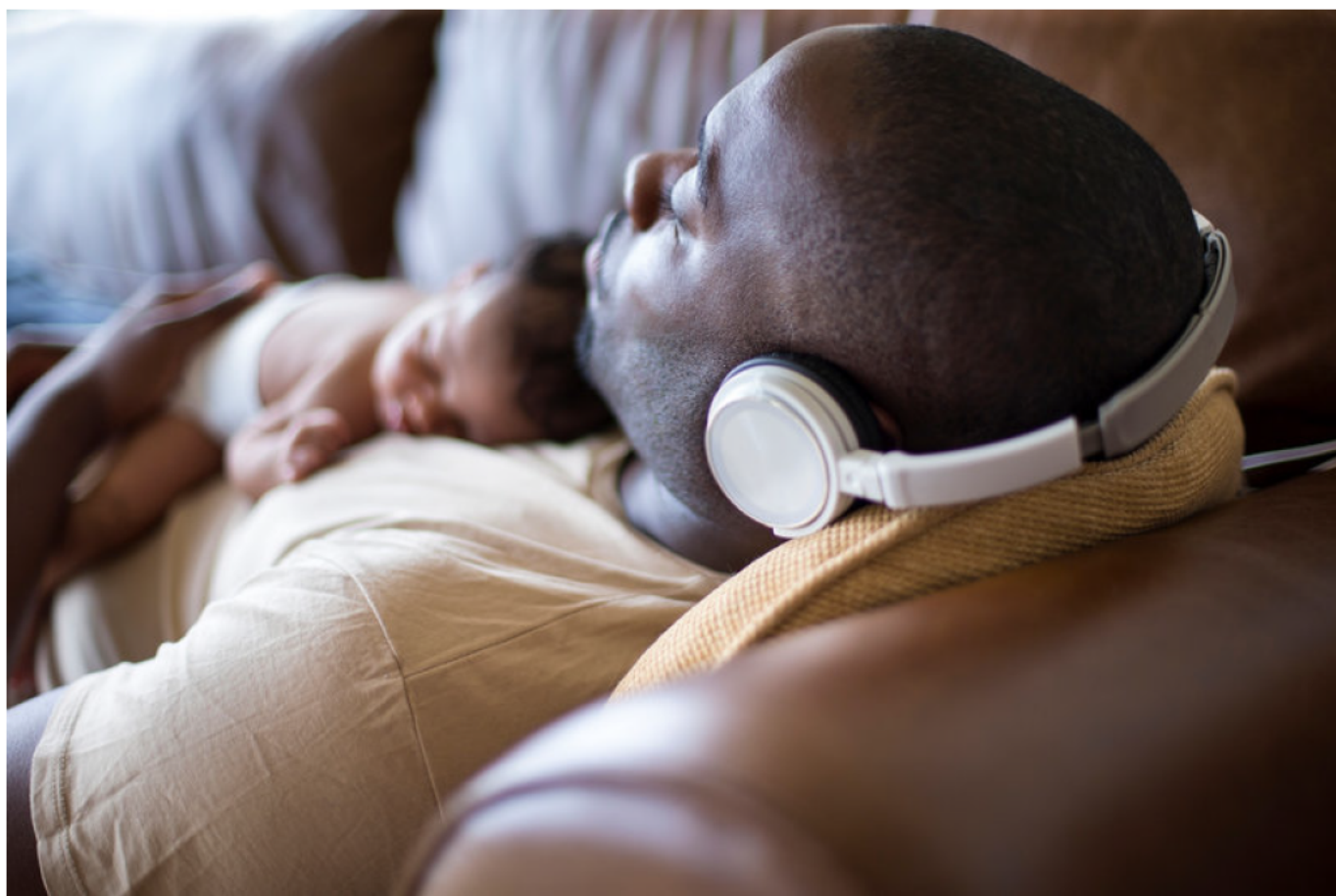
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YOUR HEALTH

As They Dig Deeper Into Parenting, Fathers Seek Community, Support

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Resources to help parents are typically aimed at moms, not dads.

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As a Seattle-based fiction writer and a part-time stay-at-home dad, Josh Mohr, 40, spends his days in the world of make-believe.

His routine begins at approximately 5:30 a.m. when his 3-year-old daughter, Ava,

waves a magic wand to turn him into a children's storyteller.

Mohr cozies up to his toddler, who's dressed for the occasion in a purple princess dress and a sparkly crown with rainbow jewels. After they've finished a few readings of *Curious George*, Ava asks her dad to read the story again.

"Again, Daddy. Let's do it again," she says.

As repetitive as this may seem, their little ritual fills Mohr with pride.

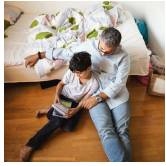
"When I was a kid, my dad worked long hours, and because of this, he wasn't very involved in my life. With Ava, I don't want to have that same regret, and so I am re-inventing my fatherhood role," Mohr says. "I don't want to look back when she's older and wish that I had spent more time with her at the park, telling her silly stories and putting her to bed at night."

Mohr's sense that he's parenting from a new and different playbook than the one that his father used is not uncommon. A survey published by the Pew Research Center last year reveals that more and more dads are staying at home to help care for their children.

In fact, since 1965, fathers have more than doubled their family involvement. This includes spending more time with their kids as well as devoting additional time to household tasks like grocery shopping, cooking, and cleaning. Fathers and mothers equally report that parenting is an essential part of their identities and that balancing work and home life is challenging.

But greater family involvement doesn't necessarily mean that today's dads are fathering with confidence.

"Just because dads are changing diapers, carrying their babies around in a Baby Bjorn and driving their kids to soccer games doesn't mean that they feel confident about their fatherhood roles," says Will Courtenay, a psychotherapist and men's health expert in Oakland, Calif.



How To Get Dads To A Parenting Class? Ask Them To Read To Their Kid

Courtenay says that today's dads are participating in aspects of parenting that their own fathers may have neglected, and because of this cultural shift they are less likely to turn to their dads for parenting advice.

According to research conducted by the Fatherhood Initiative, a nonprofit organization that creates fatherhood education programs for community organizations, 50 percent of fathers don't feel prepared for parenthood.

Matt Lowe, 36, of Kansas City, Mo., is a married father of a teenage daughter. Lowe grew up with an absent father who struggled with alcoholism, and he remembers well how deeply his dad's personal issues affected their relationship.

"My parents were separated for part of my childhood, and this led to feelings of bitterness and resentment. There were times when I felt hurt and I pushed my dad away. For me, fatherhood is an opportunity to work through that and try to ensure I don't foster these feelings with my daughter," says Lowe.

Lowe makes a concerted effort to spend significant time with his daughter, and he tries to reflect upon his parenting practices.

"I worry that I spoil her or maybe overlook things that I shouldn't, but I try to be mindful of this in the best way that I can."

While Lowe and Mohr are consciously fathering their children differently from how they were raised, finding parenting support geared towards dads hasn't been easy. For one thing, many of today's most popular parenting books and blogs are targeted at women.

"I've been a father for 14 years, and I've never read a parenting book or blog because the information is written for mothers and it's boring," says Lowe.

Instead, many dads rely on their partners for advice. A small study of expectant fathers published in the December issue of the journal *Social Work Research* reveals that even before their children are born, men tend to ask their partners how to parent.



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However, this doesn't necessarily help strengthen the father-child relationship, nor is it a replacement for the community that many dads crave.

There are a plethora of new mom and baby groups, as well as online forums and blogs, to help women transition into motherhood, but fewer options when it comes to dads.

There are some "daddy blogs" like greatDad.com and howtobeadad.com written by dads for dads, but these resources don't always help fathers navigate the day-to-day emotional challenges, such as feelings of insecurity, partnership stress and the new daddy blues that parenthood brings.

Also, says Courtenay, "Dads may be less inclined to talk about their feelings at a parenting group, but they want to connect. Oftentimes they look to other dads to figure out what they're supposed to do as a father, and many dads say that they feel a responsibility to help other fathers improve their parenting skills."

Even though he's never taken a formal parenting class, Lowe turns to the fellow fathers in his school and neighborhood communities to help show him the ropes. This informal sort of "dads' group" helps teach him about everything from how to discipline a teenager to the importance of self care.

"I watch the way that my friends balance their work and family life. They might take an afternoon to go on a hike or to go golfing, and this has taught me that it is OK for me to take time for myself, too," Lowe says.

As a newer father, Mohr is creating his own dads group by reaching out to the elder fathers in his community. He says that he asks his friends about their parenting highs

and lows and that he learns from the parental wisdom that these friends share.

"Parenthood has taught me that you're never above the humble process of learning," Mohr says. "Even if my friends parent differently than I do, I realize that we are all in this together."

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