

# Daddy/Baby Bond

Daily hands-on time is essential, says this new dad.

BY DONALD FRASER

There's nothing like the awkward feeling of being at an important meeting and realizing that you smell like stale pee. Sometimes diapers leak, you see. And sometimes, when you're in a rush to get to a meeting, you just grab whatever shirt you see first.

Confession time: I've also shown up for meetings with baby puke on my back and with a diaper bag instead of a computer case.

Apparently this is called being a dad. And I wouldn't trade it for the world. I would, however, recommend being ready for some pretty spectacular life changes – and not just of the pee-smelling variety.

The first? Being on the clock 24/7. This can be difficult for a lot of fathers. I try my best to limit my work hours to 9 to 5. Housework and errands happen once the kidlet has gone to bed. The two brief hours between work and Clara's bedtime are baby time.

I cannot stress enough the importance of these two hours on the mental health of my partner, my child, and myself. Having spent the entire day together, both Krista and Clara deserve a break. Krista will be desperate for a shower, for an uninterrupted snack, or for a bit of adult companionship. And Clara and I will be in need of some important bonding.

Because, dads, if you want the bond between you and your baby to develop and grow, you're going to need some daily hands-on time. And it won't always be easy. If your infant is tired, hungry, or cranky, she'll definitely crave the safe intimacy of her mother. Crying fits are definitely a part of this territory.

But here's the thing: the more time you spend with your baby, the better able you'll be to diffuse any major meltdowns. You'll discover the emotional rhythms of your child. You'll learn what you can do to make her smile, laugh, and play. And your time together will ultimately be a lot more fun.

Chances are good that daddy/baby time will be quite different than mommy/baby time. Many dads tend to be more physical and less intimate, with more of a reliance on humour and excitement. Moms, on the other hand, are often more nurturing, usually having their newborns very close to their bodies.

Psychologists are now recognizing that both styles of interaction are integral to healthy social development. So ham it up guys. Get those giggles going. And if you are less successful in cuddling those tears away than your partner, remember that this will help build your baby's self-control in the long run. It takes



some varied strategies to raise an emotionally healthy child.

Finally, find something that really works for ensuring quality happy moments. Many fathers find that bath time is a good way to build some smile-filled bonding time. For others it is a shared nap – there's nothing like the feel of a baby snoozing on your chest. For me, it is music. Several times a week, I'll prop Clara up in a corner of the couch, pull out the guitar, and sing. It's a half hour of smiles and amazed looks.

But do be ready to suck it up. As much as those daily bonding moments help, you're still not mommy. And those nuclear meltdowns are still going to happen from time to time. Heck, I'm pretty sure my neighbours know exactly when it's me trying to soothe a crying fit. It's not a lot of fun. But it's part of being a dad.

Just as much as smelling like a wet diaper. *Donald Fraser writes for television, radio, and print publications. He's also a new father. Which means he's pretty much given up on sleep.*

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