



Father does best

Caroline James

A THERHOOD is unquestionably a life-changer for men.

But because many fathers feel obliged to accept more work to provide for their families, they often end up working longer hours and sacrificing precious time with their children, says YMCA Victoria's Akiva Quinn.

And, according to Dean Mason, author of *Daddy's OK: Fathers' stories of separation, divorce and rebuilding*, an Australian Bureau of Statistics study in 2011 showed about one in five fathers (about 740,000) live apart from their children, making it even more difficult to build close relationships.

"It's important, where possible, that those dads and their children stay connected and have a good relationship. (And) if that relationship is strong it helps mum too - even if she's not with dad any more," Mason says.

Quinn co-ordinates DadsLink, a program dedicated to enhancing the relationships between fathers and their children.

Run by the YMCA in partnership with Relationships Australia Victoria and the Life Is... Foundation, it provides information, support and hands-on activities

for dads and their families.

Quinn stresses that mothers who help fathers connect with their children enjoy big benefits too.

"Many fathers have less time to be with their children than they would like (but) mums can help dads connect with their children and to be the best fathers they can be," he says.

So how can mums help?

MAKE time each week for Dad and the kids, Mum and the kids, and the whole family to do things together, and plan one-on-one time for each parent and child.

ENCOURAGE Dad to look after the children and meet all their needs on his own, while Mum does other things or simply relaxes.

RESIST stepping in too quickly when Dad is with the children.

"It's good for Mum when children learn that Dad can help them just as much as she can," Quinn says.

"Stepping in too quickly can also undermine Dad's confidence with the children."

PUT yourself in the other parent's shoes and believe that, like you, they want to be the best parent possible - especially in cases of separation, Mason advises.

MUMS divorced from their children's father can help by

"encouraging longer and more frequent visits and even also encouraging children to call Dad in between these visits", recommends Bloke Support director and counsellor Rodney Owen.

Quinn says there are many benefits for Mum when Dad shares parental responsibilities.

Mothers are able to get more time for their friends and other family, their personal interests, and can more readily pursue further education and career development.

And research shows children with highly involved fathers typically benefit educationally, show greater empathy, have better self-control, and have a better view of gender equality, according to Quinn.

"Children crave the love, attention and active engagement of both parents, and thrive on the nurturing and support provided by two caring and involved parents," Quinn says.

Owen stresses, however, that as important as mothers can be, fathers must be active and present if they want to strengthen relationships with their children.

"Mothers can only open the doors. Fathers must walk through them," he says.

