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Listening, learning, and living together: it's the science of life.

Changing Roles of Fathers¹

Donna Davis²

As researchers continue to explore changes in U.S. families, they're directing more attention to understanding the impacts fathers have on family life. Drawing on 13 national surveys that measure parenting, family formation, and fertility, Child Trends recently pinpointed several key findings that help us better understand the role fathers play in today's families.

The researchers uncovered interesting insights into the value men place on family life and childrearing, as well as the contributions fathers can make to the lives of their children. Not surprisingly, fathers who live with their children typically reported regular participation in some kind of leisure or play activity. However, today's fathers are also very likely to be involved in their children's daily activities and are actively engaged in monitoring those activities.

The fathers studied are also much more likely than mothers to believe that two parents are more effective at raising children than a single parent, and 20% of young children in two-parent families have fathers who function as the primary caregivers when their mother is working, in school or seeking employment. Fathers also reported showing their children love and affection, with 73% reporting that they hugged their

1. This document is FAR0099, one of a series of the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. First published March 2009. In the interest of time or clarity, the broadcast version of this script may have been modified. Please visit the EDIS Web site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.
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children or showed them physical affection and told their children that they love them at least once a day (Child Trends, 2003).

As researchers continue to understand the dynamics of family life in the new century, they hope to better understand and appreciate the contributions both parents make in raising their children.

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