

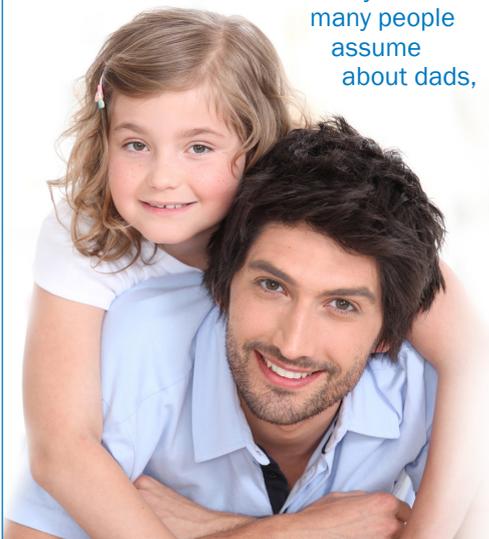
The Best Kind of Dad

I was listening to a radio programme in which a discussion was taking place about parents returning to work after having a baby. A mother was saying that looking after children was fine for a couple of hours at a time, but then it became boring; work was a much more attractive proposition.

It made me want to shout at the radio – not because I objected to how she felt about looking after children, but because in the way she expressed herself, she did not seem to leave any room for someone feeling differently. It sounded like she believed that looking after children was boring for everyone. I find it infuriating to hear people make huge generalisations about being a parent, based solely on their own feelings and experiences – even though I am sure I have done it myself from time to time.

The truth is that parenting is different for us all. I am a father and I have never felt that looking after my children is boring. Sometimes I wish it was! Megan is sixteen years old now and Billy is thirteen, so the days of changing nappies, feeding from bottles and rocking them to sleep are well and truly over, but if I am honest, I do miss them.

Contrary to what many people assume about dads,



I loved being involved in caring for them when they were young babies. It was hard work, but it was also a lot of fun! I had an enormous sense of fulfilment watching them grow and develop, and knowing that it was partly down to me.

Am I one of a kind then? I really don't think so. If you read magazines or listen to some social commentators you would be forgiven for believing that men are only interested in sex, sports and motor cars, and that being a father – particularly when the children are young – is a responsibility to endure. The suggestion is that the rewards only come as your children get older because they will then want to play rough and tumble games, join you in wild camping trips, and risk-filled expeditions, and compete against you at your favourite computer game. I have often heard people say that dads are not great with babies but can become much more useful when the children are a bit older. This is a generalisation which may be true for some fathers, but definitely does not apply to all dads, including me.

As I write this article I am sitting in a café watching a father feeding his baby. The guy is, without a doubt, enjoying himself – laughing, pulling faces, squeaking toys – and his little daughter is clearly happy as her tummy is being filled. He does not seem desperate to get back to his career, to be driving his car or watching sport on television. He and his daughter only have eyes for each other; and he certainly does not look bored!

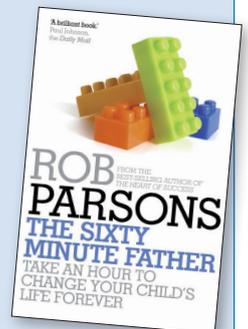


So what is unique about a father's role? The only thing I can say – that does not creep into a generalisation of the kind I so dislike – is simply this: A father is a man, and whatever kind of man he is, his children are seeing a unique model of manhood. So as dads we can be ourselves, as long as it involves being a positive example and loving our children with all of our hearts, minds and souls. If we fathers do that, I don't think we can go far wrong.

**Mark Chester,
Who Let The Dads Out?**

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