

Dads who bond with kids help keep marriage strong

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Sharing housework also key, study found, as is open communication with spouse.

(HealthDay)—For dads aiming at marital bliss, a new study suggests just two factors are especially important: being engaged with the kids, for sure—but also doing a fair share of the household chores.

In other words, just taking the children outside for a game of catch won't cut it.

"In our study, the wives thought father involvement with the kids and participation in household work are all inter-related and worked together to improve [marital quality](#)," said Adam Galovan, lead author of the study and a researcher at the University of Missouri, in Columbia. "They think being a good father involves more than just doing things involved in the care of children."

Galovan found that wives feel more cared for when husbands are involved with their children, yet helping out with the day-to-day responsibilities of running the household also matters.

But Galovan was surprised to find that how husbands and wives specifically divide the work doesn't seem to matter much. Husbands and wives are happier when they share parenting and household responsibilities, but the chores don't have to be divided equally, according to the study. What matters is that both parents are actively participating in both chores and child-rearing.

Doing household chores and being engaged with the children seem to be important ways for husbands to connect with their wives, and that connection is related to better relationships, Galovan explained.

The research was recently published in the *Journal of Family Issues*.

For the study, the researchers tapped data from a 2005 study that pulled marriage licenses of couples married for less than one year from the Utah Department of Health. Researchers looked at every third or fourth marriage license over a six-month period.

From that data, Galovan surveyed 160 couples between 21 and 55 years old who were in a first marriage. The majority of participants—73 percent—were between 25 and 30 years old. Almost 97 percent were white. Of participants, 98 percent of the husbands and 16 percent of the wives reported they were employed full time, while 24 percent worked part time. The average couple had been married for about five years, and the average income of the participants was between \$50,000 and \$60,000 a year.

Couples indicated which spouse was generally responsible for completing 20 common household tasks— or if both or neither of them

were responsible. Fathers rated their involvement in their children's lives and mothers noted how involved they felt their husbands were with the kids. Both spouses rated how happy they were with how they divided household tasks and with their marriage.

Men and women differed in how they reported marital quality. For wives, the father-child relationship and father involvement was most important, followed by satisfaction with how the household work was accomplished.

For husbands, satisfaction with the division of family work came first, followed by their wife's feelings about the father-child relationship, and then the degree of involvement the dad had with his children.

For her part, Laurie Gerber, president of Handel Group Life Coaching in New York City, said the study rings true. Women really appreciate getting hands-on help at home, but men don't realize this intuitively because they see things very differently, she said. "If a man wants to get into his wife's good graces he should do a chore," she said. "If a woman wants to get into a man's good graces, she should jump him."

A study published earlier this year in *American Sociological Review* showed that married men who spend more time doing traditional [household tasks](#) reported having less frequent sex than do husbands who stick to more traditional masculine jobs, such as gardening or home repair. While women like getting help, doing too many of the chores may inadvertently turn the husband into more of a helpmate than a lover, the research found.

Rather than basing the choice of chores on traditional roles, Gerber recommends that tasks be divided based on both who cares most about getting the particular job done and who is best at it. "My husband doesn't care if my kids have matching outfits on and I don't care about getting

the oil changed," she said. Couples need to sit down and discuss who will be primarily responsible for what. "That stops fights and clears so much air."

For Gerber, it's critical to try not to be influenced by how you were raised, what your culture says you should do or what the gender stereotyping says, but rather, by what you think is right. "Marriage is all about being there for the other person and you work as a team to get the job of the family done," she said.

More information: Learn more about parenting from the [U.S. National Library of Medicine](#).

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