

# Kids report good relationships with dads who took parental leave years ago

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The best fathers combined masculine traits with the belief they should be nurturing. Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Taking parental leave shortly after the birth of a new son or daughter may be the key to developing strong father-child bonds that last for

years, says new research from Ball State University.

"We find that 9-year-olds report greater satisfaction with father involvement," said Richard Petts, a Ball State sociology professor who conducted the research with faculty collaborators Chris Knoester at The Ohio State University and Jane Waldfogel at Columbia University.

"They feel closer to their fathers and report better communication with their dads if their fathers took [paternity](#) leave, and especially if their fathers took two or more weeks of leave."

"We also find that the [positive relationship](#) between paternity leave and father-child [relationship](#) quality may be due to accumulating advantages that may result from fathers' leave-taking. These include fathers being more involved in children's lives, more likely to identify as a good father, and better relationship quality with the mother."

"Fathers' Paternity Leave-Taking and Children's Perceptions of Father-Child Relationships in the United States," published by the academic journal *Sex Roles*, uses data on 1,319 families, largely socioeconomically disadvantaged, from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study to analyze the associations between paternity leave-taking and 9-year-olds' perceptions.

"We found evidence that part of the reason two or more weeks of paternity leave may lead to 9-year-olds expressing greater satisfaction seems to be that longer periods of paternity leave-taking link to parental relationship satisfaction, as well as fathers' engagement and fathers' identities to a lesser extent," said Petts, who teaches in the Department of Sociology in the College of Sciences and Humanities. "These results further highlight the interdependence of family relationships because the linked lives of fathers, children, and mothers are bound to each other."

"This suggests that paternity leave-taking patterns may provide

advantages to children that accumulate over time. In addition to providing time for fathers and children to bond, leave-taking may also help to strengthen parental relationships and encourage fathers to be, and identify as, engaged and overall 'good fathers.'"

The study is the latest in a series examining the effects of [parental leave](#) in the development of children and its impact on the family. It also is the first research known to assess the associations between paternity leave and children's perceptions of father-child relationship quality in the United States, Petts said.

Petts said the findings of the study have implications for families and policymakers who aim to strengthen families and promote higher quality father-child relationships.

The current structure of paternity leave in the United States provides limited opportunities for fathers to take leave and, in fact, often discourages fathers from taking leave, he said.

"Access and ability to take leave is often limited to higher-income families," Petts said. "A lack of a national paid family leave policy limits access to important benefits for American families. The current structure may be exacerbating inequalities. That is, the inequalities that exist in access to leave may accumulate over time such that fathers who are able to take longer paternity leaves may be better able to bond with infant children and have more satisfying parental relationships that then promote stronger father-child relationships compared to fathers with less access to paternity leave."

Petts said that providing more equitable access to paternity leave, as well as encouraging [fathers](#) to take longer periods of paternity leave, may help to change these patterns and strengthen [family](#) relationships.

**More information:** Richard J. Petts et al. Fathers' Paternity Leave-Taking and Children's Perceptions of Father-Child Relationships in the United States, *Sex Roles* (2019). [DOI: 10.1007/s11199-019-01050-y](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-019-01050-y)

Provided by Ball State University

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