

Dads are Divine!

FATHERHOOD WITHOUT FEAR

Revolutionary Common Sense by Kathie Snow, www.disabilityisnatural.com

What child doesn't adore being with dad? Fathers, grandfathers, uncles, or other male role models are so important in a child's life. They provide what moms and other females can't—an intangible, sometimes mystical, influence that profoundly impacts a child's daily experiences and shapes her life.

For some men, however, raising a child with a disability is not only an unknown experience, but it can also be confusing and/or frightening. It can be especially unsettling for first-time fathers. Because mothers typically handle doctor's visits, therapy sessions, and working with professionals, dads may feel powerless and/or "clueless" about a child's condition. In turn, this unawareness may cause a man to be uncomfortable with his child. But it doesn't have to be this way. *Fatherhood without fear* can and should rule the day!

First, dads (or other father figures) can take the big leap and become more involved in dealing with professionals (educators, therapists, medical personnel, and others). Accompany your wife and child to as many appointments and meetings as possible. No matter how competent your wife may appear to be, *she needs you!* We moms may seem to have everything under control most of the time, but underneath the surface, we want and need your strength, companionship, wisdom, and common sense.

Second, interact with your child *as if he or she does not have a disability*. When a child has a physical

disability and/or significant medical needs, dads are sometimes afraid to play with a child (or feel they don't know how) in the same way they play with children who do not have disabilities. As a result, a child with a disability may not receive the magical gift that's part and parcel of a father's attention.

What does it mean to interact with a child as if he/she doesn't have a disability? In our family, my husband, Mark, and our son, Benjamin (who has cerebral palsy and uses a power wheelchair), regularly "wrestled" on the bed when Benj was younger. They both took their glasses off and prepared for battle! Mark "pinned" Benj and then rolled off the bed when

Benj "pushed" him off. Then Mark put Benj on top of him so Benj could "pin" his dad. These were priceless moments for both of them, and allowed the two guys to engage in some all-important "male bonding" experiences.

Some children appear to be fragile or they may be unable to move their bodies the same ways other kids do.

Even so, this doesn't erase their wants or needs to rough-house, be tickled, roll around in the grass, ride on Dad's shoulders, go fishing, help Dad with his chores, and do the same things all kids enjoy doing. Children with disabilities need these interactions just as much (and sometimes more) as children without disabilities. So figure out how to provide accommodations or assistance so your child can benefit from all the wonderful things only you—*Dad*—can bestow on your child.

Play with your child as if she does not have a disability!