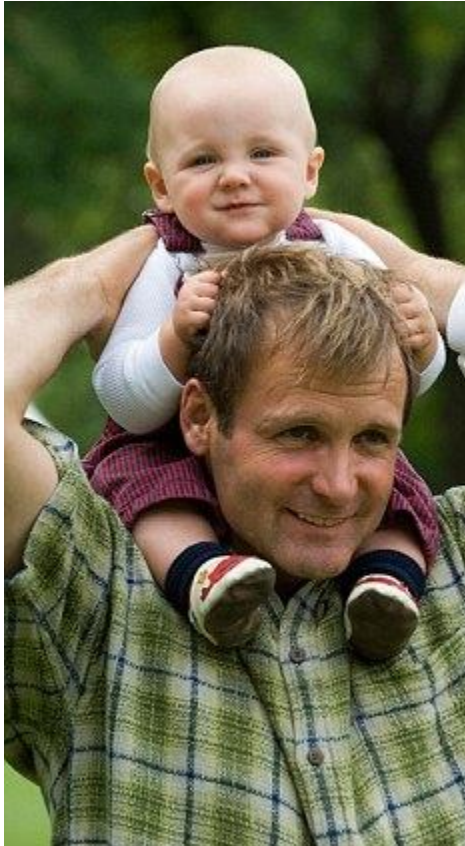


Why boys who bond with their fathers in the first three months grow up happier

By [Tamara Cohen](#)



Positive role model: Scientists at Oxford University found positive contact with their dads at the age of just three months was linked to better behaviour at a year old

Fathers who fail to bond with their sons in the first three months could cause them lifelong behavioural problems, scientists say.

Loving contact with baby boys in their earliest days is essential if they are to thrive and can help to produce a calmer, happier child at the age of one.

Although important for all children, it is vital for boys, who seem to benefit from a strong paternal influence at a very early age, the researchers claim.

Dr Paul Ramchandani, who led the Oxford University study, said behavioural problems in early childhood often lead to health and psychological problems in adulthood which can be difficult to overcome.

But he said most research on how parents affect a baby's behaviour and development has focused on mothers, when fathers also play an important role. The research team recruited 192 families from maternity units and experts filmed the mothers and fathers separately as they played with their children at home in different situations – looking at how caring or engaged they were.

The parents did psychological tests, while the children's behaviour was assessed examining whether they were fretful, disobedient, had tantrums or in the worst cases showed aggression by hitting and biting. 'We found that children whose fathers were more engaged in the interactions had better outcomes, with fewer subsequent behavioural problems,' said Dr Ramchandani.



Bonding: It was particularly important for boys, who seemed to derive long-term benefit from a strong paternal influence at the earliest stage, the researchers said

'At the other end of the scale children tended to have greater behavioural problems when their fathers were more remote and lost in their own thoughts, or when their fathers interacted less with them. 'This association tended to be stronger for boys than for girls, suggesting that perhaps boys are more susceptible to the influence of their father from a very early age.'

The study, which is published today in the Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, found the three-month-olds with less engaged fathers were more likely to be in the 10 per cent of children who displayed the beginnings of behavioural problems at one year old.

