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Listening, learning, and living together: it's the science of life.

Co-parenting and Father Involvement¹

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About half of all U.S. children will live apart from their fathers some time during their childhood because their parents have divorced or separated. While some nonresidential fathers do not maintain contact with their child, others are able to continue to be a part of the child's life. A very important factor in whether a father remains involved seems to be how the mother and father work out their co-parenting relationship after they split up. Fathers may be involved in decisions about the child, have frequent contact, and be involved in warm and supportive relationships with their children—or they may be fairly distant or not involved at all.

A recent study published in the *Journal of Marriage and Family* looked at co-parenting relationships between custodial mothers and fathers living apart from their biological children. Using data collected from a national sample of children and custodial mothers, the researchers found that cooperative co-parenting is fairly uncommon: 66% of mothers say that the father has no influence over childrearing and 58% say that they get no help from the father in childrearing (Sobolewski & King, 2005).

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These results suggest that "many parents may find it difficult or even impossible to engage in cooperative co-parenting after separation" (Sobolewski & King, 2005, p. 1210). However, when they can cooperate, fathers are able to have more frequent contact with their children and a more trusting and supportive relationship, confirming other research that finds father involvement has many positive outcomes for children.

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