



# Journey into Fatherhood Report

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## Section 1 - Context

On 11 March 2020 the WHO described COVID-19 as a pandemic and declared a public health emergency. ‘Stay at home’ orders were soon imposed, upending everyday life for everyone. Fathers Network Scotland (FNS) quickly recognised the urgent need to hear directly from Scottish fathers and their families about how they were coping. In June 2020, FNS launched a dads’ survey asking about: life at home and work; changes in familial relationships and how their mental health was being affected - 284 fathers shared their experiences.

**Since that first lockdown**, our nation has navigated a series of unprecedented global shifts, from international conflict and economic instability to a rapidly evolving social and technological landscape. Throughout this turbulent period, **we have continued to listen closely to Scottish dads from all walks of life**, with our efforts **culminating in nine comprehensive reports** that have **amplified the voices of just under 3,000 fathers** as they and their families navigate a rapidly changing world.

### Reports in Our Series

- **Dads Survey 2020: Lockdown 1** (*June 2020*)
- **Dads Survey 2021 (Spring): Lockdown 2** (*March 2021*)
- **Dads Survey 2021 (Winter): Life after Lockdown** (*November 2021*)
- **Dads Survey 2022** (*October 2022*)
- **Dads Survey 2023** (*October 2023*)
  - **Dads Survey 2023: Supporting a Quiet Childcare Revolution** (*December 2023*)
- **Dads Survey 2024: Fatherhood in the Balance Report** (*November 2024*)
  - **Dads Survey 2024: Time with Dad Report** (*March 2025*)
- **Dads Survey 2025** (*November 2025*)
  - **Dads Survey 2025: Journey Into Fatherhood** (*February 2026*)

### Journey Into Fatherhood

This report is the second to utilise findings from our Dads Survey 2025, **bringing together fresh insights from 440 fathers across Scotland alongside findings from our 2024 Time with Dad Report**. Together, these data sets provide one of the most comprehensive pictures to date of what the journey into fatherhood looks like today for Scottish dads.

**This report explores how dads navigate their journey and what would make that transition easier.** It brings together the challenges they face, where they look for support, and the systemic changes they want to see. Shaped by the voices of dads themselves, these findings highlight the real experiences of new fathers and identify the practical support they need to succeed in their role.

## Section 2 - Key Findings

### 1. Many of Scotland's infants are being denied the best start in life as a result of the UK's statutory paternity leave, the worst in Europe.

Dads and non-birthing parents get just two weeks off, paid at less than half the minimum wage, while self-employed fathers receive no statutory support at all. **Three quarters of dads** surveyed in 2025 took two weeks paternity leave or less. **78% of all dads** felt they **had insufficient time to bond with their baby or support their partner**. Financial pressure is forcing many to return to work.

### 2. Scottish dads don't know where to go to access support and information as they transition into fatherhood.

**Over three-quarters (76%)** of dads surveyed in 2025 **wish they had received more information on what support was available to them when becoming a dad**. This was the top priority for dads, followed closely by a desire for more support in **copng with the transition into fatherhood (67%)**, navigating **childcare (65%)**, and gaining **practical parenting skills (61%)**. These high numbers across the board suggest a significant chasm between a father's intent to be an active, involved parent and the level of support and guidance they are currently offered during the first 1,000 days.

### 3. Mobile phones frequently interrupt the time dads spend with their infant in the first year.

**Nearly one-third (31%)** of fathers with infants under one report that mobile phone use "often" or "very regularly" interrupts quality time with their baby. **Social Media, perhaps unsurprisingly, is the primary source of distraction, cited by 84% of dads.**

### 4. New dads go to their partners first for advice, but often find the most helpful support through friends and family.

Despite 68% of new dads turning to their partner for information and support on childcare, **the majority (58%) report that their most helpful support comes from their wider social circle**. This gap raises a critical question: is using mothers as a conduit to pass on information an effective practice, or should the focus shift toward equipping fathers with their own knowledge through direct communication?

## **5. Fathers love spending time playing with their children, particularly outdoors, and helping them learn.**

Dads love playing with their babies and helping them explore the outside world right from the start. Encouragingly, during this time dads also enjoy reading to their children and helping them learn. After the first year, the number of dads sharing the outdoors increases, with almost a third (62%) of dads telling us they love spending time outside with their wee one, even if it's just a trip to the park.

## Section 3 - The Importance of Time

### 3.1 Why Time Matters

Pregnancy and childbirth often give mum a head start when it comes to bonding. During the first few weeks babies attention tends to be focused on mum, with fathers often getting little feedback from their efforts.

This 'slow start' is to be expected. However, even in these initial weeks, a father's presence and attention is critical to start building a secure bond which will only develop and deepen as baby becomes more and more able to communicate through smiles, babbling, and laughter.

#### Biology of Bonding

There is a common misconception that unlike women, men are not primed for parenthood. In reality, a father's body and brain undergo a profound biological shift to meet the demands of parenting.

As men transition into fatherhood, they often experience:

- **Hormonal Shifts:** Testosterone levels decrease to facilitate nurturing, while **Oxytocin** and **Beta-endorphins** rise to support bonding with mother and child.
- **Brain Remodelling:** Grey matter increases in regions dedicated to affectionate care and threat detection, as well as for problem-solving and planning.

Crucially, the more time a father spends in one-on-one interaction during the critical first 1,000 days, the more rapidly and effectively his biology adapts, allowing him to become a more sensitive, attuned, and confident parent. Time is the essential ingredient that transforms paternal potential into paternal instinct.

#### Impact on the Child

A father's time is not a luxury or a secondary support. Research shows that dads early and meaningful involvement is linked to a range of positive outcomes that follow a child into adulthood:

- **Cognitive Growth:** Improved development and higher IQ scores.
- **Emotional Strength:** Better regulation, fewer behavioural problems, and greater resilience.
- **Social Mastery:** Stronger peer relationships and enhanced communication skills.
- **Future Wellbeing:** Higher academic achievement and a reduced risk of anxiety or depression.

This evidence makes one thing clear: **supporting and encouraging fathers to be actively involved in their wee ones' life is an effective way to give children the best possible start.**

## 3.2 How Time Is Being Spent

Knowing that time in these early years is vital, we must then ask: how is that time actually being spent? In our 2024 *Time with Dad* report, we explored this broadly across 400 Scottish fathers. The findings revealed a powerful alignment centered on play; **44% of fathers** identified "playing" as their favourite activity - a sentiment they believed was mirrored by their children. Additionally, the report highlighted a strong paternal preference for the outdoors, with **73% of all dads favouring outdoor activities compared to 48% who preferred staying inside**<sup>1</sup>.

While our previous research looked at childhood as a whole, segmenting the data for the earliest years uncovers more nuanced trends for understanding new dads and the bond with their child(ren).

### Play: A Matter of Preference

For fathers and their little ones, play and simply 'hanging out' become the pillars of their relationship right from the start and remain consistent throughout the early years. By age 1-2, these stands out as a clear favourites:

- **Play: 47% of dads** list this as their favourite activity, with **44%** believing their child feels the same.
- **Hanging Out: 20%** of dads value this unstructured time, mirrored by **23%** of children (as perceived by their fathers).

### The Great Outdoors

While dads show a clear preference for the outdoors even when their children are under one, that love truly springs into action as soon as their wee one can walk. **At the 1-2 year mark, 62% of fathers cite outdoor activities as their favourite way to spend time** (see chart below).

While dads perceive their children as not sharing quite the same level of excitement for the elements, the interest is still high. In fact, for 1-2 year olds, the **outdoors appears as the child's second favourite activity (36%)**, trailing only behind play (44%).

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<sup>1</sup> *Fathers Network Scotland - Time with Dad Report (2024).*

## Early Learning & Literacy

It is also welcomingly high to see how much value fathers place on their child's cognitive development. For dads of 1-2 year olds:

- **Helping them Learn** stands as the third most favoured activity (21%).
- **Reading and Storytelling** follow closely behind at 18%.

While dads perceive their children's interest in these areas to be a bit lower (15% and 12% respectively), it suggests that dads are taking the lead in these foundational activities by actively creating everyday moments that help their children learn.

**Preferred activity (%), by age of child**

|                        | Under 1<br>(n=34) |       | 1-2 Years<br>(n=66) |       | 3-5 Years<br>(n=42) |       |
|------------------------|-------------------|-------|---------------------|-------|---------------------|-------|
|                        | Dad               | Child | Dad                 | Child | Dad                 | Child |
| Playing                | 29                | 38    | 47                  | 44    | 43                  | 50    |
| Hanging Out            | 35                | 32    | 20                  | 23    | 21                  | 26    |
| Active Play at Home    | 9                 | 12    | 18                  | 24    | 7                   | 21    |
| Toys and Games         | 6                 | 12    | 17                  | 14    | 29                  | 26    |
| Rough and Tumble       | 6                 | 9     | 6                   | 11    | 2                   | 12    |
| Outdoor Activities     | 29                | 6     | 62                  | 36    | 79                  | 40    |
| Helping them Learn     | 21                | 6     | 21                  | 15    | 29                  | 14    |
| Storytelling / Reading | 21                | 6     | 18                  | 12    | 26                  | 14    |
| Local Park / Walk      | 18                | 3     | 30                  | 12    | 38                  | 5     |
| Adventures / Day Out   | 12                | 0     | 12                  | 9     | 33                  | 14    |
| Sports / Active Play   | 9                 | 0     | 9                   | 3     | 19                  | 17    |
| Watching TV / Film     | 3                 | 0     | 8                   | 0     | 10                  | 10    |

## A Child's Perspective

Beyond these core themes and the general harmony of preferences, there are a couple of standout trends where dads and their child(ren)'s preferences diverge:

- **Rough and Tumble:** Across all three age groups, dads consistently rate this form of play lower than their children. The biggest gap appears at ages 3-5, where only 2% of dads list it as a personal favourite, despite believing it is the top choice for 12% of their children.

- **Active Play at Home:** Similarly, active play is often more for the child than the dad. At age 3-5, only 7% of dads favour it, compared to 21% of children.

These figures highlight an important role: the facilitator of a healthy, varied childhood. By pairing their child's desire for rough and tumble play with their own focus on the outdoors and teaching, dads are providing their children with a range of opportunities to learn, explore and develop.

### 3.3 Why Play Matters

As explored in our previous *Time with Dad* report, these activities are far more than mere pastimes; they are essential for healthy development<sup>2</sup>. In the first few years of life, children have an insatiable appetite for play driven by an ancient neurobiological 'play circuit'. This drive helps infants master everything from language, physical agility, and social skills.

Research by Evolutionary Anthropologist Dr Anna Machin suggests that 'loving adults' (usually mum and dad) have evolved different specialisms when it comes to childcare, as she states in general terms:

**“ Dad and baby get peaks in neurobiological reward from playing together while mum and baby get their hit from nurturing. Hence kids have a tendency to seek dad out to play and run to mum for that reassuring hug. ”**

Whether it is a structured outdoor trip or a rough and tumble play session in the living room, time spent playing is literally wiring the brain with the essential skills a child will use for the rest of their life.

### 3.4 Current Levels of Play

While the biological benefits of father-infant bonding are well established, the amount of time fathers spend with their children is often a reflection of broader cultural and economic factors. Fathers are remarkably adaptive and respond to the needs of their family and children as the social landscape around them shifts.

We saw this adaptability in sharp relief during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Data from the Fatherhood Institute (2022) revealed that when structural barriers vanished, fathers stepped into the domestic space with unprecedented speed (see pie charts below)<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> *Fathers Network Scotland - Time with Dad Report (2024)*.

<sup>3</sup> *Fatherhood Institute - Closing the Gap analysis (2022)*.



The 2020 lockdown transformed the father-child relationship. Dads reported understanding their children better, feeling closer to them, and gaining confidence in supporting their learning. At Fathers Network Scotland, we tracked these shifts through our annual surveys, witnessing what we celebrated as the **'Quiet Childcare Revolution'** - a cultural shift mirrored globally in reports such as the *State of the World's Fathers 2023*<sup>4</sup>.

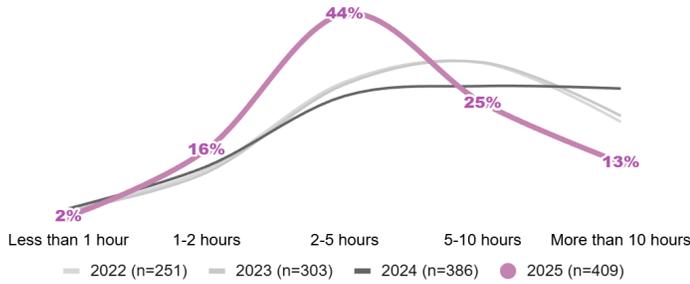
## Fatherhood Today

While the years following the pandemic suggested that these new norms were holding firm, our recent 2025 data revealed a noticeable shift in how fathers are distributing their time. While time spent on daily cooking remained relatively stable (dropping slightly from 41% to 38%), other areas of domestic life saw a worrying decline:

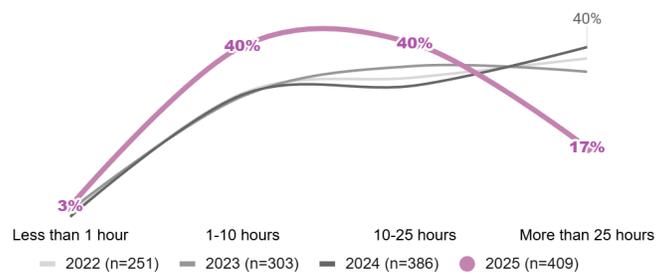
- **Household Chores:** Dads spending 10+ hours a week on chores **dropped from 28% to 13%** (see chart below, to the left).
- **Play and Learning:** Most concerningly, the percentage of dads spending 25+ hours a week playing with or supporting their children's learning **plummeted a stable 40% to just 17%** (see chart below, to the right).

<sup>4</sup> *Equimundo, MenCare - State of the World's Fathers (2023).*

How many hours per week do you normally spend on household chores? (compared)



How many hours per week do you spend playing with your children or supporting their learning? (compared)



While not yet definitive, these findings suggest a potential slide towards traditional gender stereotypes and cultural norms with dads spending less time at home and more time in the workplace. However, we must remember that while a father's biological drive to bond is constant, the practical reality of his time is often influenced by his environment. This tension is particularly visible in the next generation; a recent Working Families report found that<sup>5</sup>:

“ **84% of Gen Z fathers said they wanted to embrace equal parenting** but felt there was stigma around taking time off work. ”

This ‘want’ confirms that the instinct to be a present, involved parent is stronger than ever, yet the broader environment continues to exert a heavy influence. As the May 2025 Understanding Scotland Economy Tracker report notes<sup>6</sup>:

“ **Economic sentiment has deteriorated further...** households with children are consistently more likely to report serious impacts, from deteriorating mental and physical health to food insecurity and strained relationships. ”

It is undeniable that there is a deep-seated desire from fathers to be more actively involved, yet the demands of daily life often force a difficult compromise. In light of this, it is important that we better understand the specific and complex barriers preventing these new dads from making their hopes for more equal parenting a reality.

<sup>5</sup> Working Families - Barriers to Equal Parenting (2025).

<sup>6</sup> Understanding Scotland - Economy Tracker (2025).

## Section 4 - Barriers to Bonding

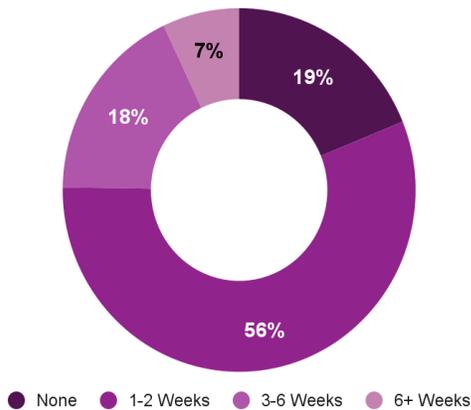
### 4.1 Paternity Leave

In the UK, dads are entitled to just two weeks of paternity leave, paid at less than half the minimum wage, while self-employed fathers receive no statutory support at all. Research consistently shows that the UK's paternity offer is among the weakest in Europe, falling well behind neighbouring countries in both duration and pay<sup>7</sup>.

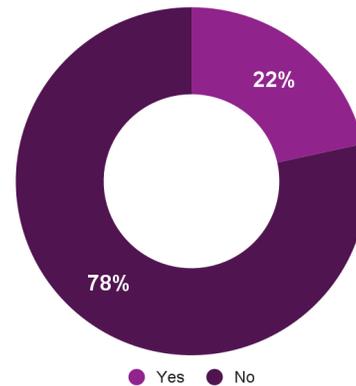
#### How Dads View Paternity Leave

In our 2025 survey we asked dads about their experience of access to and experience of paternity leave. The results showed a system that is fundamentally out of step with the needs of modern families<sup>8</sup>:

How much paternity leave did you take?  
(n=440)



Do you feel you had enough time off on paternity leave to bond with your baby and support your partner?  
(n=399)



- **The Two-Week Norm:** 75% (n=440) of fathers took two weeks or less of leave (the minimum statutory duration provided) (see chart on top-left).
- **Insufficient Time :** 78% (n=399) of dads felt that they did not get enough time to bond with their baby or support their partner (see chart on top-right).

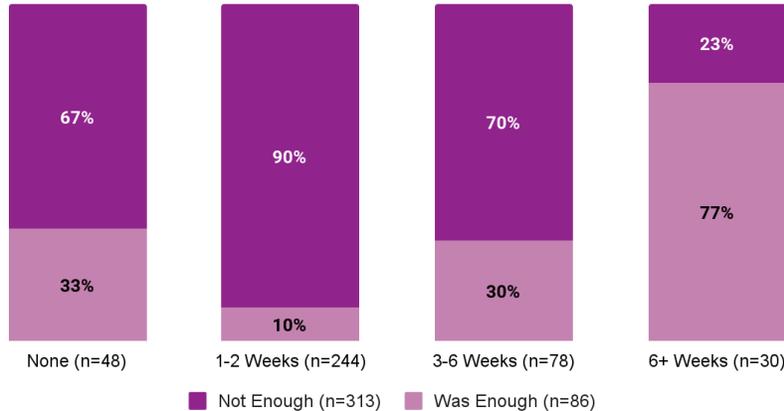
In fact, the data revealed that when fathers are given the opportunity to stay home longer, their satisfaction with bonding and time to support their partner increased significantly (see graph below):

<sup>7</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development - OECD Family Database (2024).

<sup>8</sup> Fathers Network Scotland - Dads' Survey Report (2025).

- **Dads who took 1-2 weeks: 90%** felt they didn't have enough time.
- **Dads who took 6+ weeks: Only 23%** felt they fell short.

**How much paternity leave did you take? (and was it enough?)**  
(n=399)



**Dads who felt they did not have enough time said:**

" We had premature twins, my wife was recovering from a C-section, and we had almost no family help.

**I needed more time but didn't get any. "**

(1-2 weeks)

" I had four weeks partner's leave and expected two weeks annual leave.

**My manager demanded I return after the first week. "**

(3-6 weeks)

[📄 Explore the full 2025 Dads' Survey Report for more detail](#)

## The Reality of Current Paternity Leave

For many Scottish families, paternity leave remains a financial impossibility rather than a genuine choice. The Working Families Index 2025 states<sup>9</sup>:

<sup>9</sup> *Working Families - Working Families Index (2025).*

" 7 in 10 **fathers who took less than two weeks paternity leave said it was because they were worried about money.** "

This financial barrier is twofold: not only is the pay insufficient, but the Working Families Index 2025 continues by highlighting that **21% of fathers have no entitlement to leave at all**<sup>10</sup>.

Meanwhile, a 2023 poll by the TUC confirms that these economic hurdles are the primary reason 1 in 5 dads take no leave whatsoever, noting that<sup>11</sup>:

" More than **half (53%) of families struggle financially when dads/partners take paternity leave.** "

Beyond economics, persistent social barriers remain. Research has shown that **workplace culture, gendered leave practices, and broader cultural norms all impact on how fathers engage with leave policies**, often creating no encouragement for men to step away from work<sup>12</sup>.

Despite these deep-rooted pressures, the response to better support is immediate. The Working Families Index 2025 found that **when employers provide enhanced leave**, fathers take an **additional 1.26 weeks** on average - a 75% increase in time at home compared to the standard two-week minimum. This proves that **when the structural barriers are lowered, fathers are eager to bridge the gap.**

Ultimately, there is no lack of interest from Scottish dads; the desire to be present is there:

- **Paternal Intent:** 87% of fathers would be comfortable taking their full leave entitlement for a future child (Working Families, 2025)<sup>13</sup>.
- **Current Views:** 90% of dads who took the statutory minimum report that the time provided was insufficient (Dads Survey Report, 2025)<sup>14</sup>.

However, bonding is a biological process that requires time. When systems limit fathers into such a narrow window, it effectively squeezes out the chance to build a deep connection and establish the habit of play from the very earliest days.

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<sup>10</sup> *Working Families - Working Families Index (2025).*

<sup>11</sup> *Trade Union Congress - Survey Article (2023).*

<sup>12</sup> *Moran, J., & Koslowski, A. (2019). Making use of work–family balance entitlements: how to support fathers with combining employment and caregiving.*

<sup>13</sup> *Working Families - Barriers to Equal Parenting (2025).*

<sup>14</sup> *Fathers Network Scotland - Dads' Survey Report (2025).*

## 4.2 Workplace Barriers

While economic constraints are a fundamental factor on the duration of paternity leave, the day-to-day reality of being an active father is governed by workplace culture.

For the majority of men, work is not just a job; it is the primary consumer of their time. In the UK, **88% of working-aged men work full-time**, averaging **38.1 hours per week**. When commuting is factored in, over **25% of a father's entire week** is dedicated to work. As the famous saying goes:

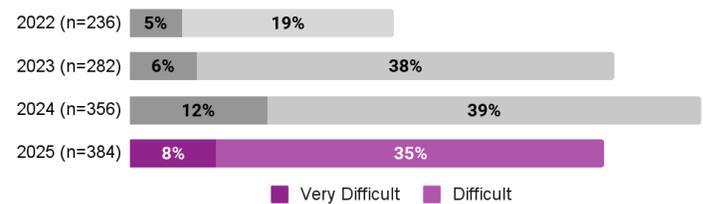
“ How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives. ”

Because a quarter of a father's life is occupied by the workplace, it inevitably acts as a primary barrier to bonding, making it a critical area to address if we are to make family life truly accessible.

This time-bind creates a constant friction for Scottish fathers, who find themselves caught in a tug-of-war between the traditional role of provider and the modern desire to be a caregiver.

Our data shows that the struggle to balance work and family life has been a consistent burden for years. **Since 2023, nearly half of all fathers surveyed have reported this balance as "difficult" or "very difficult,"** peaking at 51% in 2024 and remaining high at 43% in 2025 (see graph above).

### Balancing work and family life is... difficult or very difficult (compared)



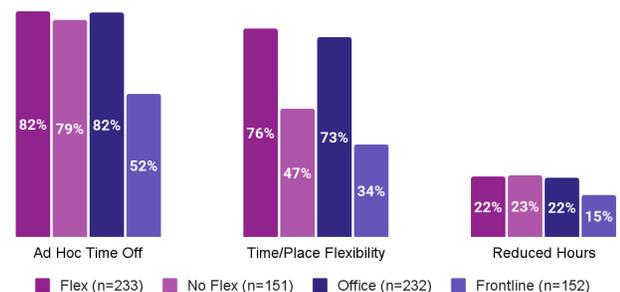
### Flexibility Gap

To alleviate this pressure, flexible working policies are the primary tool for giving fathers the space they need for family life and time to bond.

However, the ability to actually access this flexibility is not distributed equally; there is a stark divide between those who work behind a desk and those on the frontline, as shown in our latest Dads' Survey data<sup>15</sup>.

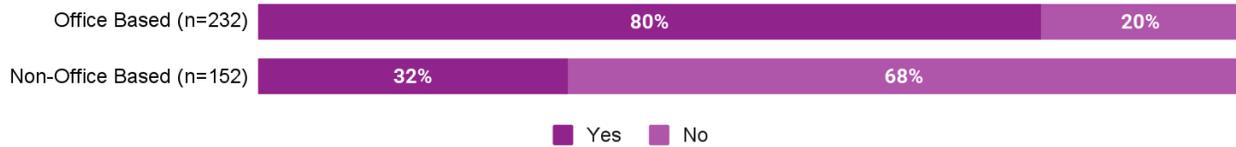
- **80% of office-based workers** have access to flexible working, while only **32% of dads in non-office/frontline roles** report the same (see chart below).
- 76% of office-based dads view flexibility in hours or location as vital, compared to just **34% of non-office dads** (see chart to the right).

### Importance of flexible work options (by work and flexibility type)



<sup>15</sup> Fathers Network Scotland - Dads' Survey Report (2025).

## I have flexibility on where I work:



This divergence likely reflects a cycle of lowered expectations. Dads in non office-based roles may place **less emphasis on flexibility simply because it is uncommon or perceived as an impossibility.**

**This cultural deterrent acts as a double-edged sword:** not only are these fathers often denied or discouraged from accessing these flexible policies from their employers, but even in workplaces where they are readily available, the fear of negative perception prevents men from ever utilising them.

## What Discourages Dads from Asking?

When we spoke to dads dissatisfied with their current work-life balance, the reasons for not requesting change were rarely financial. Out of 56 fathers who shared their reasons, **only three mentioned a drop in income.** The rest described a gauntlet of cultural and systemic hurdles<sup>16</sup>:

- **Unsupportive Workplace Culture (29%):** A general sense that family needs are secondary to business needs, making fathers feel that requesting flexibility is actively discouraged.
- **Negative Perceptions (29%):** This includes worries that requesting flexibility will impact career opportunities, invite negative judgment, or unfairly burden colleagues.
- **Job Constraints (21%):** The feeling that the nature of their role makes flexibility impossible.
- **Lack of Policy (14%):** No framework to support flexible requests.
- **Fear of Rejection (11%):** Dads who had already requested flexibility and were turned down.

These local findings are largely supported by the Working Families Barriers to Equal Parenting (2025) report, which highlights a persistent gendered expectation in the UK workforce<sup>17</sup>. Their research found that **74% of working dads want to embrace equal parenting** but feel a stigma around taking time off, while:

**" 1 in 5 fathers report a lingering social expectation** that their partner should be the one to cover all childcare duties. "

<sup>16</sup> *Fathers Network Scotland - Dads' Survey Report (2025).*

<sup>17</sup> *Working Families - Barriers to Equal Parenting (2025).*

These findings reveal the silent cultural resistance that many fathers face when trying to redefine their role within the family. However, when these cultural barriers are challenged and flexibility is encouraged, dads are able to be there for their wee one, and families benefit immediately. According to aforementioned Barriers to Equal Parenting report, when fathers successfully secure the flexibility they need<sup>18</sup>:

- **42% of dads** reported **spending significantly more quality time with their children.**
- **39% of dads** were **able to be present for major milestones and key events.**

Ultimately, work plays a major role in most dad's life. And, as such, until workplace culture embraces men as essential caregivers, the 'provider' stereotype will remain an underlying barrier to bonding.

### 4.3 Digital Distraction

The debate surrounding screen time and social media is rarely out of the headlines. Usually, the conversation focuses on how children and teenagers interact with and are impacted by technology, but parents' digital habits should also play a significant part in this discussion.

It is common to feel that we are using our devices too much. In a 2023 YouGov poll, **54% of men aged 25-49 admitted they used their phones too much**, with a **third (33%) actively trying to reduce their usage.**

#### Interruption of Quality Time

In our 2025 Dads' Survey, we asked fathers to reflect on how often their mobile phone use interrupts quality time spent with their child. The results suggest that the youngest children - those who need the most active face-to-face connection - are the most affected.

When looking at dads who reported that phone use "often" or "very regularly" interrupted their time:

- **Under 1s: 31% (nearly one-third)** of dads reported frequent interruptions.
- **Ages 3-5: 29%** reported frequent interruptions.
- **Other age groups:** Averaged between **15% and 22% (roughly 1 in 5).**

It is important to note that these figures were self-reported. Due to social desirability bias - the natural urge to present ourselves in a better light - the reality may be even more pronounced than these numbers suggest.

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<sup>18</sup> *Working Families - Barriers to Equal Parenting (2025).*

## Bridging the Early-Years Gap

The high rate of distraction during the first year of a child’s life is perhaps not surprising. As we have previously highlighted, many fathers feel the focus of attention is on mum and not them during the early months. There is also a well-documented tendency for some dads to not feel a powerful connection until their child can provide verbal feedback.

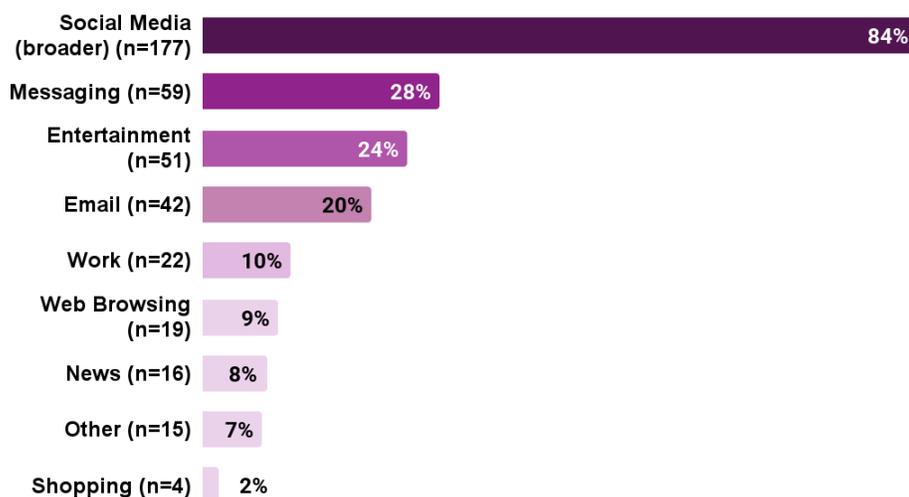
A father might think a quick glance at a notification is harmless, especially if the baby doesn’t seem engaged or interested. However, this overlooks the vital importance of the bonding bridge. Even when unreciprocated, the effort to engage during these earliest days builds the foundation for healthy outcomes years down the line.

## So, What’s Capturing Dads’ Attention?

Out of all 440 fathers surveyed, 210 shared more detail about what was pulling them away from their children. Unsurprisingly, **Social Media is the primary driver of digital distraction.**

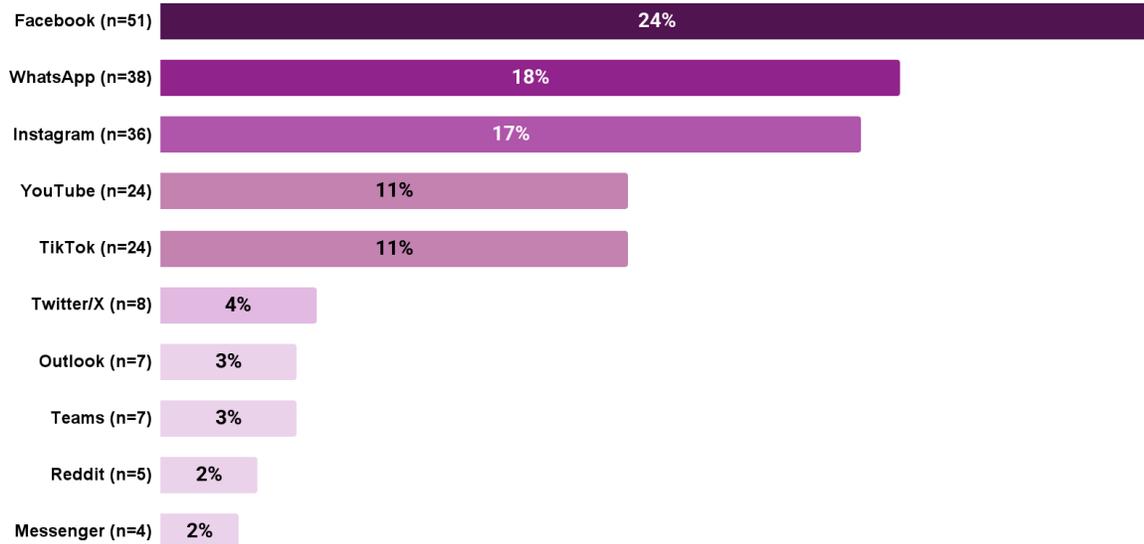
For this report, we’ve used the broader definition of social media (which includes platforms like WhatsApp and YouTube), though many dads may categorise these simply as "messaging" or "entertainment." Under this broader definition, **84% of dads** identified social media as their primary distraction (see graph below).

### What is interrupting dads time with their child(ren) most (n=210)



The graph below highlights the specific platforms capturing fathers' attention, including all the apps that were mentioned more than once. The results portray a clear hierarchy: **Facebook** stands tall above the rest as the most frequent distraction, followed closely by **WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, then TikTok**

### What apps are interrupting dads time with their child(ren) most (n=210)



## Consequences of Screentime

Mobile phones are an almost inevitable part of modern life, but because they are so prevalent in our daily routines, the consequences can be hard to see.

A recent study, *Parental Social Media Engagement and Family Communication*, found that excessive social media usage can lead to:

- **Reduced Emotional Availability:** Being physically present but mentally absent.
- **Relational Disruption:** Weakening the emotional cohesion of the family.
- **Negative Role Modelling:** Influencing a child's own future relationship with technology.

Crucially, this study highlighted that **fathers were more likely than mothers to have a lower awareness of these negative effects.**

We cannot assume that the importance of consistent, early-years engagement is self-evident, particularly when fathers are often sidelined or treated as secondary parents. By failing to include dads in the conversation around early bonding, we leave them to navigate complex digital and cultural hurdles in a vacuum.

This highlights an urgent need for targeted education. It is not enough to hope that fathers will instinctively work out the nuances of early-years bonding on their own; we must actively **enable and work with them** by providing clear, father-inclusive information.

**When fathers are equipped with understanding, they are no longer just observers, but active architects of their child's future.**

## 4.4 Practical Barriers

Practical barriers continue to shape many fathers' experiences of seeking and accessing support. A lack of awareness and knowledge about available services and pathways is a significant barrier for dads, even where support does exist. Many fathers express a clear desire for more help, but poor or inconsistent signposting often becomes a pitfall, leaving dads unsure where to turn. Without timely and visible support, these gaps can contribute to fathers struggling alone.

▢ See 'Section 5.4 - What's missing? The support that's falling short' for more detail.

## Section 5 - Supporting New Dads

### 5.1 New Dads' Mental Health

While maternal mental health has gained significant focus in policy and research, paternal mental health needs remain largely overlooked. Although an estimated **89% of men** become a dad in their lifetime, research into this transition is limited<sup>19</sup>. Much like new mothers, fathers face significant challenges; estimates for Paternal Perinatal Depression (PPD) and Anxiety (PPA) can reach as high as **25%** and **51%** respectively<sup>20</sup>.

Despite these high figures, fathers are rarely screened. This is partly because **paternal symptoms often differ from maternal ones**, manifesting as irritability, anger, or social isolation, which are frequently missed by diagnostic tools designed for mums.

**Crucially, paternal mental health is a family issue.** Maternal depression is the strongest predictor of PPD, and mothers with depressed partners are four times more likely to see their own symptoms worsen by six months postpartum. This interdependence directly impacts the next generation as **poor paternal mental health is linked to disordered attachment and negative emotional and social development in children.**

#### Mental Health Today

In our recent 2025 Dads Survey, we found that while dads' mental health is in general stabilising when compared to previous years, the figures still remain high. **About a third of dads reported that their mental health right now is "not great" or "very poor" (32%)** and that they were worried or extremely worried about the next 12 months (32%).

| Cause of MH Deterioration (compared)<br>Dads with a child 2 years and under (against average) | Child (0-2)<br>(n=51) | Average<br>(n=146) | Increase /<br>Decrease |
|---|-----------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| <b>Work</b>   | <b>41%</b> (n=21)     | <b>38%</b> (n=55)  | ↑ <b>3%</b>            |
| <b>Pressure on time</b>   | <b>31%</b> (n=16)     | <b>21%</b> (n=31)  | ↑ <b>10%</b>           |
| <b>Financial concerns</b>   | <b>24%</b> (n=12)     | <b>21%</b> (n=30)  | ↑ <b>3%</b>            |
| <b>Physical &amp; mental health issues</b><br>(personal and close family)                     | <b>24%</b> (n=12)     | <b>27%</b> (n=40)  | ↓ <b>3%</b>            |
| <b>Relationship difficulties</b>  | <b>14%</b> (n=7)      | <b>23%</b> (n=33)  | ↓ <b>9%</b>            |

<sup>19</sup> **Modern Fatherhood** - Briefing Report: Who are today's fathers? (2013).

<sup>20</sup> **Scottish Government** - *Paternal perinatal mental health: evidence review* (2024).

**Over a third (34%) of dads with a child aged 2 or under (n=173) reported a decline in their mental health over the past six months.** Of these dads, 51 shared the reasons behind this decline. Pressure to provide was clear, as financial and work pressures stood slightly above the average for these dads (shown in the table above).

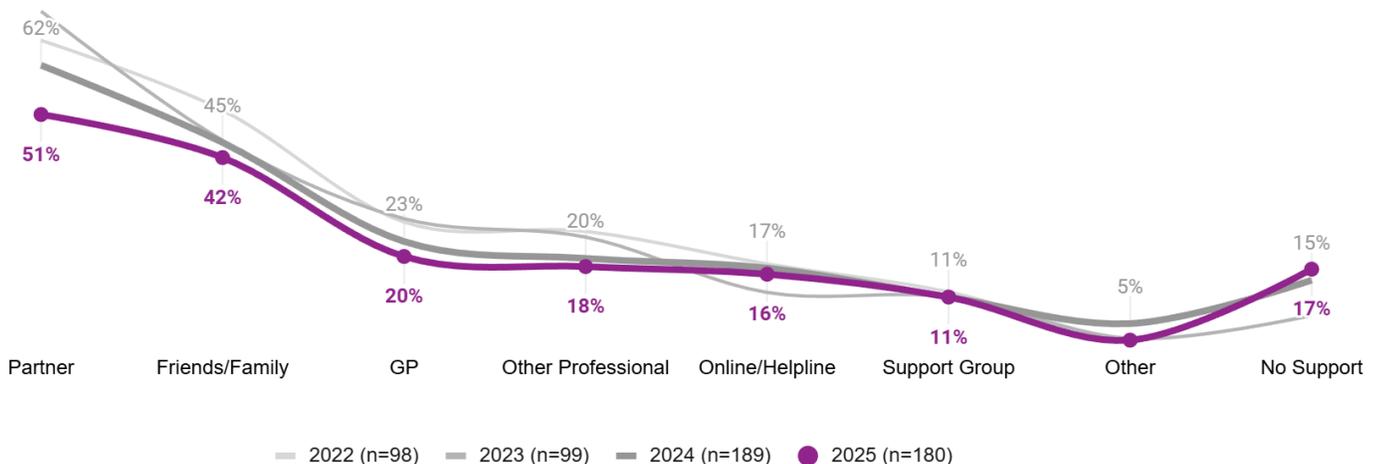
However, the most notable difference for this group was a **10% higher-than-average pressure related to time and being present for their children.** This finding aligns with data presented in Section 4.1 which highlighted that 90% of dads who take the minimum statutory paternity leave agree that they had insufficient time off to support their partner and care for their newborn.

## The State of Mental Health Support

While the specific stressors of early fatherhood contribute to a unique mental health decline for new fathers, our wider data reveals a broader, more systemic issue in how dads across the board are managing their mental health. Of the 180 fathers across our 2025 survey who reported that their mental health had worsened in the past six months we looked at where - or if - they were turning for help.

Encouragingly, we found that **83%** of these dads **had taken some form of action.** However, beneath this figure lies a concerning shift in *how* they are seeking support. **We are witnessing a steady decline in dads reaching out to traditional networks like family, friends, and GPs.**

### What support have dads looked for or received in the last 6 months? (compared)



The most striking finding is the steady erosion of the partner relationship as a source of support. Over the past three years, the **number of dads turning to their partner has dropped sharply: from 74% in 2023, to 62% in 2024, and falling further to just 51% in 2025** (see graph above).

This trend represents a significant concern because **men often rely on their partners as a key source of emotional support** - a vital dynamic highlighted in the Samaritans *'Men and Suicide'* report<sup>21</sup>:

**“ Men in mid-life are dependent primarily on female partners for emotional support. Women help them to recognise their own distress, provide them with care and encourage them to seek help. ”**

Furthermore, the number of **dads who reported not seeking or receiving any form of support has more than doubled over the past two years**, rising from 7% in 2024 to 17% in 2025 (see graph to the above).

This reflects a concerning overarching trend of dads increasingly disengaging from support services, revealing that countless fathers are navigating their struggles alone, feeling isolated and left without the vital support they need.

[\*\*□ Explore the full 2025 Dads' Survey Report for more detail\*\*](#)

## Supporting Mental Health

It's clear that the declining rates of support-seeking are not a mystery. In 2024, the Scottish Government published the **Paternal Perinatal Mental Health: Evidence Review**, which provides a comprehensive roadmap of the barriers preventing new fathers from accessing help<sup>22</sup>.

The evidence review identifies a multi-layered set of obstacles that trap fathers in a cycle of isolation during the perinatal period:

- **Systemic Invisibility:** Healthcare services frequently overlook dads, leaving them feeling like 'invisible parents.' Because the workforce is predominantly female and lacks specific training in paternal mental health, dads are rarely screened or even asked how they are doing.
- **Stoic Norms:** Many fathers feel a self-imposed pressure to be the rock for their family. This leads them to dismiss their own mental health as unimportant or less than their partner's, causing them to hide symptoms like anxiety or anger.
- **Lack of Tailored Provision:** When support does exist, it rarely accounts for the father's perspective. Most interventions are designed for mothers, and structural issues - such as appointments only being available during standard business hours - effectively bar working fathers from attending.
- **Social Stigma:** While dads want to talk to other dads, a fear of judgment or not fitting in often stops them. This sense of social stigma can cause men to drift away from their friendships exactly when they need a support network the most.

<sup>21</sup> **Scottish Government** - *Paternal perinatal mental health: evidence review (2024)*.

<sup>22</sup> **Samaritans** - *Men and Suicide Report*.

## 5.2 Dads in the Community

These barriers to mental health support, such as lack of tailored provisions, social stigma, stoic norms, etc. All also map onto their experiences of connecting with the community around them. In our 2024 Time with Dad Report, we explored how dads engage with their community and crucially found out that are difficulty engaging in their community with:

These internal barriers to mental health - such as the lack of tailored provision or social stigma - are not isolated to mental health support; **they map directly onto how fathers experience the world around them as a whole.** Our 2024 Time with Dad Report revealed that these **same pressures create a profound sense of isolation within the local community**, with fathers reporting significant barriers when trying to engage:

- **Almost half dads (44%)** reported that they "almost never" or do "not often" feel able to get involved with local groups.
- **Half (51%) of fathers** expressed difficulty connecting with other parents in their local area.
- **Nearly a third (31%) of fathers** stated they do "not often" or "almost never" feel comfortable participating in community activities.

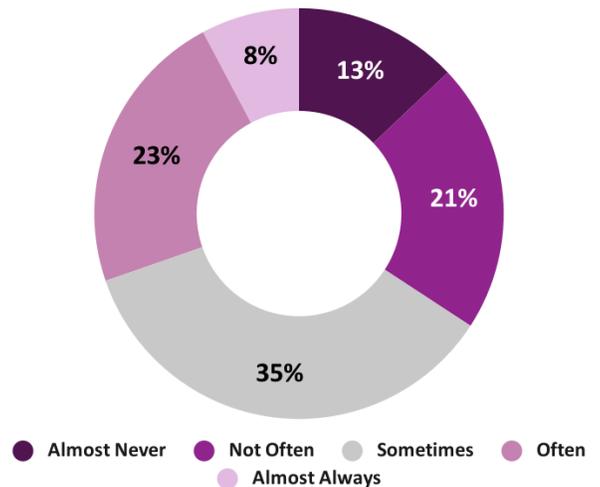
### Barriers to Community Engagement

**Over half (59%) dads cited practical barriers, most commonly relating to work**, such as a lack of time or the timing of activities conflicting with their work schedules. Other actors included a general shortage of activities, particularly those that were father-friendly, and a lack of information about events.

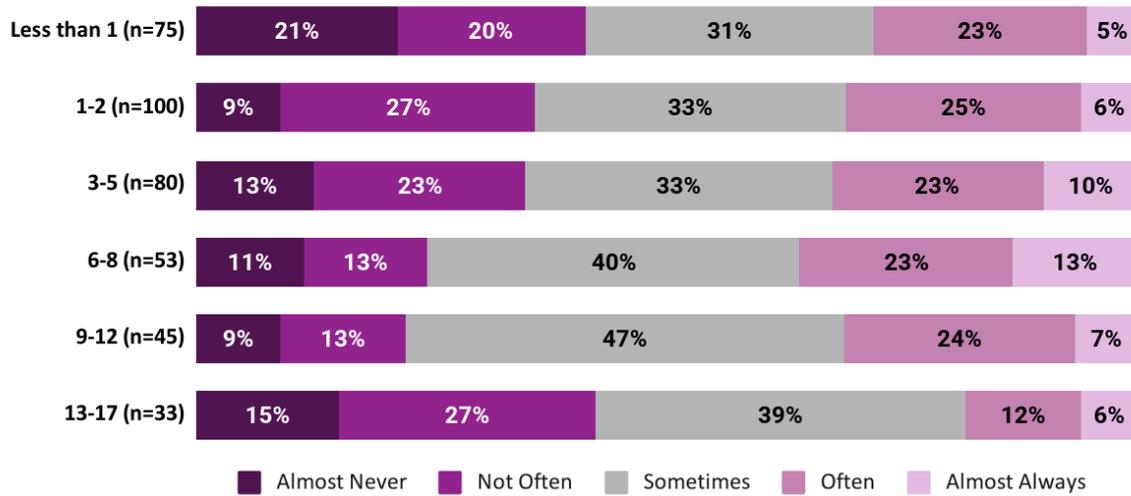
Meanwhile, **53% cited social/emotional barriers which primarily focused on their discomfort in female-oriented spaces** such as feeling out of place, ignored, ostracised, and seen as a threat. This can be compounded by some dads who shared a lack of confidence and difficulty with poor mental health.

**Dads with infants and children in the early years are particularly disconnected**, as one in five of dads with a **child under 1** shared they are 'almost never' able to get involved in community activities (see graph below)

I feel **ABLE** to get involved in community activities with my child(ren)



## I feel ABLE to get involved in community activities with my child(ren)



It is clear that many dads face structural and societal barriers that reinforce isolation, impacting their mental well-being and limiting their children’s social opportunities and development.

[Explore the full 2024 Time with Dad more detail](#)

## 5.3 Where new dads turn for parenting advice

Becoming a father is a transition defined by doubt and rapid change. It is a period where life as you know it is completely reshaped, **leaving many to grapple with the fundamental questions**: How do I care for my newborn? How do I become the best father possible? And how do I cope with the big changes and expectations of being a father?

Given that dads are increasingly turning away from traditional mental health networks, as well as facing significant barriers to community engagement, we are left with a critical question: **where do fathers go for the answers they need?**

And more importantly, **in a world saturated with information, which sources do dads actually find the most helpful?**

### Information and Support: Caring for Their Newborn

In our **2025 Dads’ Survey**, we asked 439 fathers: *“During pregnancy and the first two years, where did you go for information or advice about caring for your wee one?”* The results reveal a clear hierarchy of support, with most fathers keeping their questions close to home:

- **68% of dads** say they ‘often’ or ‘almost always’ turn to their **partners**.

- **41%** turned to **friends and family** for guidance
- A smaller, equal share of dads turn to more formal or static resources, with **19%** using **parenting websites**, **18%** reading **parenting books, podcasts, and apps**, and only **17%** reaching out to **statutory services** (such as GPs or Health Visitors).

## Information and Support: Becoming A New Dad

We asked these same 439 dads: “*When you were becoming a new dad, where did you go for advice and support to help you personally cope with the change?*” to better understand how they navigate the emotional upheaval of becoming a father. While the **patterns remained similar** to their search for practical advice, the number of dads asking for help took a noticeable dip:

- **45% of dads still turned to their partners** to help them personally cope with the transition into fatherhood.
- **35% lean on friends or family** for emotional support.
- While **15%** specifically sought out the guidance of **other dads**.

## Where Are Dads Finding the Most Helpful Advice?

We then asked dads: “*Where did you get the most helpful advice or support?*” The responses from the 268 fathers who answered reveal a clear preference.

When it comes to the quality of support, the people closest to home are the clear winners. Dads ranked their most helpful sources as:

- **Friends and Family (46%):** This was the standout leader, with **almost half of all dads** citing their wider social circle as their most valued source of support.
- **Partners (24%):** While **partners were seen as the second-most helpful source**, there is a telling disconnect: though nearly 70% of dads turn to their partner first, only a quarter find this to be their most effective support.

## Specific Organisations

Interestingly, while only a small number of dads mentioned specific organisations (n=55), their feedback provides a blueprint for what effective support looks like:

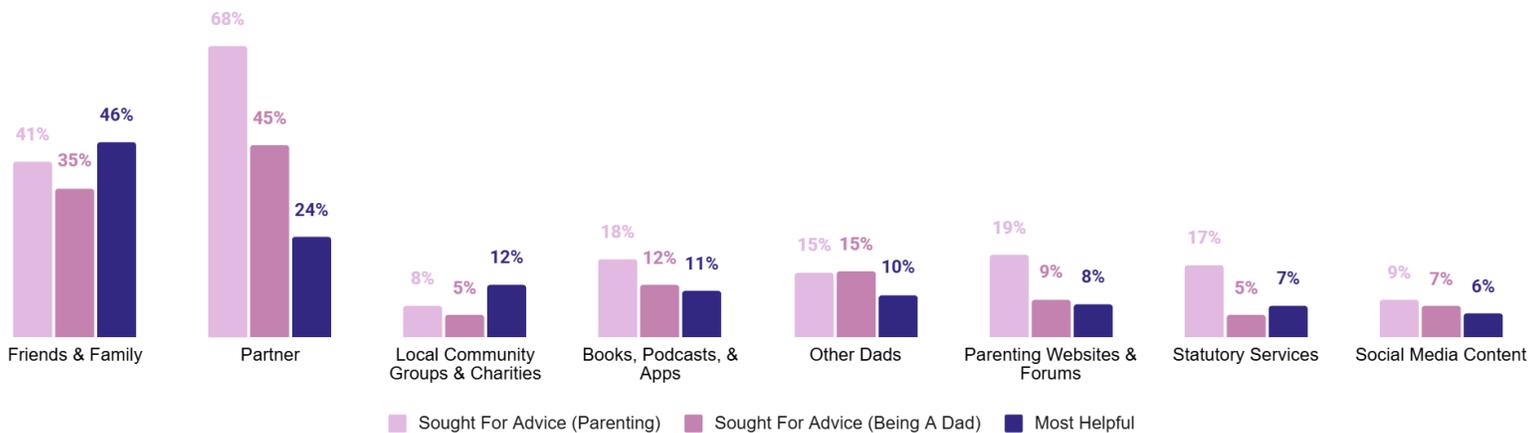
- **The NHS (27%, n=15)** was cited as the most helpful formal service, showing that when the healthcare system does engage dads, it is highly valued.
- **National Childbirth Trust (15%, n=8):** The NCT was a significant mention, with dads highlighting the helpfulness of their **training courses**.

- **Father-specific Orgs:** Groups like **Dads2Be (13%, n=7)** and **Dads Rock (11%, n=6)** were also well-mentioned, proving that dad-focused spaces provide a type of support that dads seem to gravitate towards and appreciate.
- **Social Media:** While not ranked highly in regards to helpfulness, a small portion of dads specifically mentioned some social spaces and apps they found helpful, including: **Reddit (5.5%, n=3)**, followed by small numbers of dads finding help via **Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube (3.6% each, n=2)**.

## Support From A Partner

The chart below compares where fathers go for information against what they actually find most helpful. By analysing these datasets side-by-side, we can identify significant disparities in how fathers currently access and experience support.

Where dads seek advice and what sources they find most helpful



**The vast majority of dads stated they turned to their partner for advice on caring for their newborn.**

This reliance is understandable; as previously noted, men in their mid-life often depend on their partners as their sole source of emotional support. This is especially understandable in the perinatal period, during which mums have significantly more interaction with health services, naturally becoming a ‘conduit’ of information for the father.

However, while partners remain a vital source of information, **these findings reveal a clear imbalance.** The fact that over **two-third of dads reach out to their partner** but less than **one-quarter perceive this information as helpful** suggests that the information being passed through the mother may not always be relatable, applicable, or tailored to the father's specific needs.

This is especially relevant in regards to how almost **half (45%) of dads are turning to mum to help themselves better understand and cope with their own transition into fatherhood.**

**It certainly isn't a mum's duty to act as an educator for the dad**, yet the current system often defaults to this conduit-model because services struggle to engage men directly. While these findings don't give us all the answers, they do show that **we need to rethink how we support new dads**:

- **Is the information we give mums actually helpful for fathers?**
- **Is engaging with dads directly a more helpful/efficient method, despite the difficulty?**
- **Is there another way services can get information to dads in those early years?**

## Further Findings

When we compare how often dads reach out to a source versus how helpful they actually find it, three clear trends emerge:

- **Friends and family are more than just a convenient option.** They are highly effective. Interestingly, more dads rated this as their "most helpful" source than those who said they "regularly" reach out to them. This suggests that even a single conversation with a peer can have a massive positive impact.
- **Local community groups and charities** currently have a lower uptake, but for the dads who do turn to these groups, the support seems to really click.
- There is a clear **disconnect between how often dads use parenting websites and statutory services versus how much they actually value them.** Only about half of the dads who used these sources found them helpful, indicating that while these platforms are easy to access, the content often feels unhelpful for dads.

## 5.4 What's missing? The support that's falling short

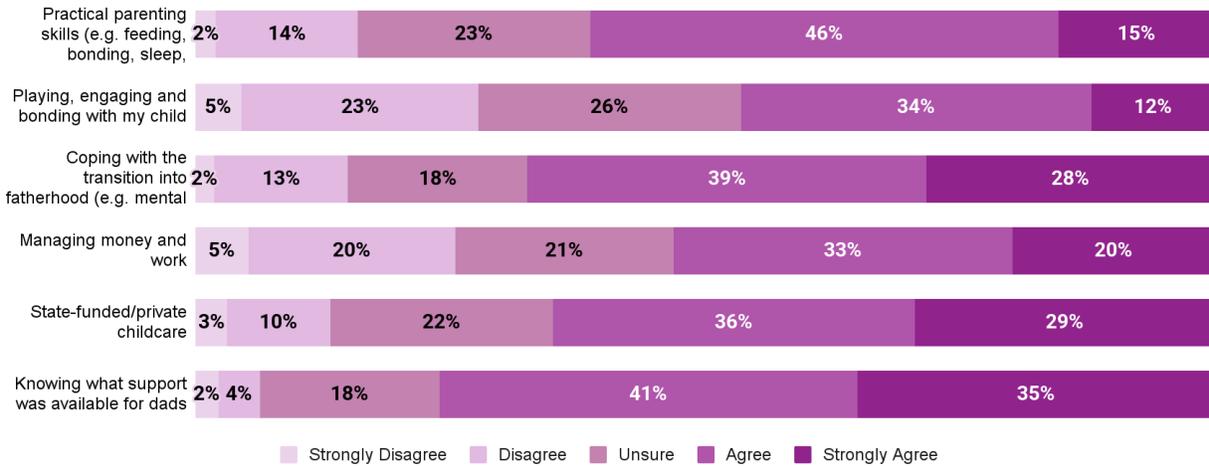
There are clearly significant question marks over how we currently support fathers and how they, in turn, access information. While there is no magic wand to fix the system overnight, a realistic and honorable starting point would be to simply meet the needs that fathers themselves have identified.

We asked 439 dads: "**What information or support would you have benefited from most when you were becoming a father?**" Their answers provide a clear hierarchy of what is currently missing from the fatherhood experience:

- The most common need, shared by **76% of dads** (n=334), was simply knowing **what support is actually available to dads.** It is clear that even where support exists, dads often cannot find it.
- **Two-thirds of fathers** (67%, n=296) felt they **lacked the information needed to personally cope with the transition** into fatherhood. This reinforces our earlier findings that the emotional side of being a new dad is often overlooked.

- Close behind were requests for more **childcare information (65%, n=285)** and **practical skills (61%, n=269)** like feeding and bonding. Dads are eager to be hands-on, but they feel they aren't being given the toolkit to do so confidently.
- Finally, while the least agreed upon, still around half of fathers highlighted a need for **better information on managing money and work (53%, n=233)** and **information on playing, engaging, and bonding (46%, n=204)**.

I would have benefitted from MORE information and support with... (n=440)



These insights underline a consistent and powerful theme: the majority of dads are not looking for complex interventions. **They want clearer signposting, practical knowledge, and emotional preparation.**

## Section 6 - Peer Advice: From One Dad to Another

In our recent **2025 Dads Survey**, we asked 440 participants what one piece of advice they would offer to first-time fathers. Of those, 330 dads shared their thoughts, revealing four primary themes:

- **Cherish Time Together (48%)**
- **Trust the Process of Becoming a Dad (47%)**
- **Look After Yourself (20%)**
- **Look After Your Partner (19%)**

Supported by specific subthemes, the sections below present a collection of insights and advice shared from one dad to another.

### 6.1 Cherish Time Together

This was the most frequent piece of advice, shared by **47% of respondents (n=155)**. Dads emphasised the importance of being physically and emotionally present, urging new fathers to appreciate every moment with their child. The core message was clear: maximise your time, take as much leave as possible, and lean into the practical side of childcare while asking questions and staying curious.

#### Spend As Much Time Together As Possible

**28% of dads (n=93)** focused on the fleeting nature of childhood. They noted the **importance of spending time with their children during those early days** and affirmed the father's role is vital from day one:

“ Enjoy and revel in the love you give and receive. **Know that the love and masculine care you give is special and enriches your children in a unique way that can't be replaced.** Keep at it. ”

- Dad, Aged 35-44, Edinburgh

“ **Your child can't wait for you, everything else can.** ”

- Dad, Aged 35-44

“ **Prioritise your children**, work is just a job. Spend as much time with them bonding, playing, reading etc as you can. It'll be worth it ”

- Dad, Aged 35-44, Aberdeenshire

“ Value every minute with your child. **Your presence has an impact.** ”

- Dad, Aged 45-64, Fife

“ You will always earn more money or see another video on instagram, **spend all the time you can enjoying the little moments bonding with your baby and supporting mum.** ”

- Dad, Aged 35-44, Fife

## Take As Much Leave As Possible

While spending time together is the ultimate goal, the opportunity to do so during those early days often hinges on the amount of leave a father can secure. Reflecting this, **18% of dads (n=60)** specifically highlighted the importance of taking dedicated time off.

This advice carries additional weight when viewed alongside **Section 4.1**, which detailed the benefits that time off provides for early father-child bonding. The fact that nearly 1 in 5 dads took the time to recommend taking leave **reinforces just how vital this period is for establishing a strong foundation with their wee one:**

“ **Take as much paternity as you can** and share every experience. ”

- Dad, Aged 45-64, Dundee

“ **Spend as much time as you can at the start** and try to keep that allocation of time once things return to normal i.e. back to work. ”

- Dad, Aged 35-44, Fife

“ **Ask your employer about flexible working.** While it's been a challenge to work condensed hours, **having every Monday off to have one on one time with my daughter has been amazing!** ”

- Dad, Aged 35-44, Edinburgh

## Get Involved

For **16% of dads (n=54)**, the best advice was simply to "get stuck in" into everyday parenting. This largely focused on the **importance of active involvement and a commitment to equal parenting.** With a focus

of going beyond simply helping out, and instead emphasising the need to challenge outdated ideas of being the 'secondary' parent and embracing a new norm where childcare responsibilities are shared equitably:

**“ It's a modern age, dads are just as responsible for caring as the mother, step up and get stuck in, you will love it. ”**

- Dad, Aged 35-44, Renfrewshire

**“ Don't view spending time with your child as babysitting. ”**

Childcare is not just for the mothers. ”

- Dad, Aged 35-44, Clackmannanshire

**“ Get involved as much as you can - it's the only way to learn and your confidence and bond will grow. It's probably all new for your partner too, they don't magically know more or have more experience just because they are female - you can really make a contribution/a difference. ”**

- Dad, Aged 35-44, East Lothian

**“ Try to help as much as you can, it is not a mother's job to do the majority. ”**

**The more you help, the better it is for everyone. ”**

- Dad, Aged 45-64, Fife

## Ask Questions and Learn What You Can

Lastly, complementing the push for active involvement, **5% of dads (n=16) highlighted the importance of proactive learning.** They advised new fathers to ask questions and educate themselves, suggesting that being well-informed helps build parenting confidence and makes the early bonding process that little bit easier:

**“ Learn patience. Learn to LISTEN. ”**

**It's a journey and it's life changing. Get educated. ”**

- Dad, Aged 35-44, Lanarkshire

**“ The more comfortably educated you are before baby arrives the more time you will have to spend connecting with them. Enjoy the chest sleeps! ”**  
- Dad, Aged 35-44, Ayrshire

**“ Be involved, ask the question, fight the stigma and have fun ”**  
- Dad, Aged 35-44, Renfrewshire

## 6.2 Trust the Process of Becoming a Dad

Following closely behind the advice to cherish time together, **47% of dads** (n=155) highlighted the importance of **trusting the process**. This advice was underpinned by the admission that not everything can be planned for, and that perfection should never be the standard. Instead, the focus should be on effort and the understanding that while life has undeniably changed in a way that adds difficulty, it also changes in a joyous way that must be cherished. Ultimately, this section and its subthemes portrayed dads advising one another to accept the change, relax, be kind to themselves, and enjoy the step into fatherhood.

### Go Easy on Yourself

Reflecting a common sentiment among those who have navigated the early years, **21% of dads** (n=69) **advised that you shouldn't be aiming for perfection**. These dads noted that mistakes are inevitable, but as long as you are trying and improving day-to-day, then that is ultimately what matters. This perspective suggests that from the other side of the transition, **fathers recognise that "doing your best" is more vital than achieving an impossible standard**:

**“ Whatever you're doing right now is the best you could have done, and all you have to worry about for the future is to do better tomorrow than you did today. ”**  
- Dad, Aged 35-44

**“ Take each day as it comes, go slow, don't expect to know how to do everything or know how to feel. ”**  
- Dad, Aged 35-44

**“ Don't be too hard on yourself; nobody is automatically good at this stuff, It's the effort to get good at it which is the point. ”**  
- Dad, Aged 45-64, Edinburgh

“ Don't be afraid to learn from mistakes, you will make them but that's part of the course. **You can't be perfect, nor should you be** ”  
- Dad, Aged 35-44, Edinburgh

## Enjoy Being a Dad

While fathers never shied away from the fact that the transition can be daunting or even scary, **15% of dads (n=51) wanted to encourage others to relish the role.** Their advice emphasises that despite the initial fears and challenges, it is important to embrace and enjoy the moments of joy that come with becoming a father:

“ **This is one of the scariest but most beautiful experiences in the world!** ”  
- Dad, Aged 35-44, Clackmannanshire

“ Enjoy it. **It's hard work and tiring but before you know it they aren't babies** and you don't want to feel like you missed out. ”  
- Dad, Aged 35-44, Dundee

“ **Enjoy every moment no matter how hard it seems,** you will be amazing. ”  
- Dad, Aged 45-64, Clackmannanshire

## Go with the Flow

Parenthood is never smooth or by the book, and babies certainly cannot be negotiated with. As such, 11% of dads (n=35) shared that while **you might like to think there is a script or a manual, the reality is that chaos is to be expected.** They noted that the sooner you learn to go with the flow and take each moment and day as it comes, the easier being a dad may be:

“ **Be prepared to go off script and trust your own instinct/common sense.** Your child is its own little being if what's written in books isn't working don't force it and be comfortable adapting. ”  
- Dad, Aged 25-34, East Lothian

“ **Prepare to be unprepared.** To throw all your plans away and pivot in a moment because it's never what you expect. ”  
- Dad, Aged 35-44, East Lothian

**“ Chaos is normal and ok.** Learn to live with it and go with the flow. It doesn't make you a bad person. ”  
- Dad, Aged 35-44, Stirling

## Your Life Will Change

Finally, 5% of dads (n=17) shared that, **though it may seem obvious, becoming a dad means that life has truly changed forever.** Accepting this fundamental shift is a key part of the advice from those who have already navigated the early years:

**“ This is going to change everything.** You will need to prioritise the needs of your child and family over your own personal desires. Come to terms with this before the baby arrives. ”  
- Dad, Aged 35-44, Glasgow

**“ It's ok to feel completely overwhelmed by everything, it takes time for routines, bonds, relationships to balance and make sense or work. ”**  
- Dad, Aged 35-44, Renfrewshire

**“ Make room for one thing you enjoy and try to keep at it. You won't be able to do everything you used to but try and focus on one. ”**  
- Dad, Aged 35-44, South Lanarkshire

## 6.3 Look After Yourself

A further **one in five dads** (20%, n=66) **gave advice centered on the vital need for self-care.** They emphasised that while the focus is understandably on the mother and baby, fathers must not ignore their own health in the process. This advice primarily focused on three areas: seeking external support, maintaining personal wellbeing, and prioritising sleep.

### Seek Support

There's no denying fatherhood can be tough and **10% of dads** (n=32) made sure to emphasise that when things get difficult, you need to lean on those around you. They specifically noted that dads shouldn't

rely solely on their partner for every aspect of emotional support. Instead, they suggested tapping into the experiences of other dads, highlighting that it can be reassuring to turn to those who have already been in the same position.

“ Speak to friends and other dads about being a father.

**Avoid your partner being the go-to person. ”**

- Dad, Aged 35-44, East Lothian

“ **Talk to the blokes around you with kids.** Really talk to them. “

- Dad, Aged 35-44, Angus

“ Anytime you need to talk or are worried about something, always talk to someone about it because **9 times out of time someone else is or has gone through the same things.** “

- Dad, Aged 18-24, Moray

“ **Try and speak to as many other dads as possible** that are going through it at the same time as you. You will realise that all kids are the same and everyone is struggling/having difficulties. “

- Dad, Aged 35-44, Aberdeenshire

## Don't Ignore Your Own Health

Building on the need for support, **4% of dads** (n=14) **specifically highlighted the importance of not ignoring your own wellbeing.** With the expectation to prioritise the baby and partner, fathers can often find themselves ignoring their own health for the 'greater good'. These dads stressed that it is essential to remain aware of the impact the transition is having on you and to do what is necessary to ensure you are looking after yourself amidst everything:

“ **Support your partner but don't forget to support yourself.** Don't put too much pressure on yourself. There is support and help out there. “

- Dad, Aged 25-34, Highland

“ There is so much to remember, **don't forget about yourself.**  
Try to find your own space and your own people. ”  
- Dad, Aged 35-44, Glasgow

“ **Remember that it is hard for you too.** When everything gets too much,  
reach out, talk, and you need a little break too.  
Looking after your newborn and partner is hard. ”  
- Dad, Aged 35-44, Edinburgh

“ **Acknowledge the impact it has on you as well as your partner.**  
It is hard and it's OK to struggle at times. “  
- Dad, Aged 35-44, South Lanarkshire

## Prioritise Sleep Whenever Possible

It is no secret that sleep is affected when a little one arrives. **4% of dads (n=13) spoke about the difficulty of getting rest**, advising new fathers to find every way possible to sleep in the margins during those early days:

“ **Sleep when the baby sleeps**, no matter what time. ”  
- Dad, Aged 35-44

“ **Sleep when your partner is awake** and vice versa. “  
- Dad, Aged 35-44, East Lothian

“ **Sleep when you can**, as much as you can. “  
- Dad, Aged 45-64, East Lothian

“ **When it comes to baby's sleep try everything, nothing is silly**  
- white noise, swaddles, sleep sacks, no light etc - it really helped me. ”  
- Dad, Aged 25-34, Edinburgh

## 6.4 Look After Your Partner

Closely following the need for self-care, **19% of dads** (n=64) **highlighted the importance of looking after your partner**. These fathers emphasised that as dynamics shift and as inevitable stressors emerge, nurturing the bond with your partner is essential. While sharing the responsibilities of a new baby is expected, these dads' advice focused more on providing emotional care and continuing to communicate effectively for the wellbeing of their partner and the relationship as a whole.

### Support Your Partner

**15% of dads** (n=49) **focused their advice on the need of supporting your partner**. While helping with the workload is a given, these fathers pointed to something deeper; recognising the immense mental load and pressure that new mums carry, they urged other dads to stay attentive and present. The heart of this advice is less about splitting chores and more about ensuring mum feels cared for during the intensity of those early days:

**“ Support your partner more as she is going to be struggling**

with supporting the child. “

- Dad, Aged 35-44, Stirling

**“ Just be there for your partner, let her isolate herself and rest with the baby.**

**You need to be the buffer between them and all the visiting requests from family & friends. “**

- Dad, Aged 35-44, Highland

**“ Try and help your partner as much as possible during the night feeds, even just being there for company - it can hopefully mean they are not as isolated and don't feel too alone. “**

- Dad, Aged 35-44, Glasgow

**“ Slow down. Listen. Put your ego to the side, be there for your partner. “**

- Dad, Aged 35-44, Glasgow

## Nurture Your Relationship

Meanwhile, **6% of dads** (n=20) **highlighted that consciously nurturing the relationship with their partner is a necessity.** During a period of time that will inevitably be filled with the stressors of parenthood, the bond between a couple can be severely tested.

However, these dads' advice serves as a reminder that the relationship at the core of the family must be actively tended to so that these challenges do not create a divide. They emphasised that by maintaining open communication and practicing patience, forgiveness, and understanding, fathers can protect their partnership, ensuring it remains a source of mutual strength amidst the changing dynamics.

“ It's easy to get sucked into your child's world,  
but **remember to make time for your partner/wife.** ”  
- Dad, Aged 35-44, Stirling

“ **Be as forgiving of yourself and your partner as possible**  
because you will upset one another. ”  
- Dad, Aged 25-34, East Lothian

“ **Listen & be empathetic** toward your partner. ”  
- Dad, Aged 25-34, Ayrshire

“ **Reassure your partner constantly**  
and hold them as close as you can when you can. ”  
- Dad, Aged 25-34, Falkirk

“ **Communicate/check-in with your partner daily**  
to share your experience and feelings. ”  
- Dad, Aged 35-44

# Section 7 - What Dads Need to Thrive

## 7.1 Key Recommendations

### 1. Embed Whole Family Approach as a Core Professional Standard

**More than ever, dads want to be actively involved in the care of their children. Children's services must be prepared to support fathers equally if they are caring for their child.**

The UNCRC clearly states the responsibility both parents have for bringing up their child, and the responsibility of the Government to support them. These rights must be reflected in practice rather than just on paper. If we want children and families to flourish the all too common, outdated assumption that fathers are a 'secondary caregiver' must end. Children's services should determine and not decide who the family is around each child and support each caregiver equally.

### 2. Prioritise Bonding and Stability Through Enhanced Paternity Leave

**The UK Government must improve the current paternity leave offer, ensuring it provides the adequate time and financial support necessary for fathers to be present and active from day one.**

Getting it right from the start is essential, yet 4 out of 5 dads in our survey stated they did not have enough time off to bond with their child or support their partner. The UK's statutory paternity leave remains the worst in Europe, ignoring a mountain of research which proves that well-funded leave allows dads to build lifelong bonds and strengthen family. By ensuring fathers have the time and financial security they need, we aren't just supporting dads; we are strengthening the entire family unit, improving maternal wellbeing, and creating a more stable foundation for the child's future.

### 3. Improve Information and Support Signposting For Fathers

**Services must re-evaluate and re-strategise how they provide support and information to dads to ensure that advice is both tailored and relevant, while strengthening direct engagement to ensure fathers are never left in the dark.**

Dads are currently operating in an information vacuum, with a majority reporting that they simply do not know what support is available to them. This lack of clear signposting often leaves dads reliant on mums for information that often lacks relevance to their specific needs. We cannot expect fathers to confidently navigate their parenting journey or provide the best care for their child if they are left in the dark.