

Why Mothers Matter

Report to Family First New Zealand, Mother's Day 2018



FAMILY
FIRST NEW ZEALAND

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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He and his wife have five children.

ABOUT FAMILY FIRST NZ

Family First NZ is a charitable organisation formed in 2006, and registered as a charity with the Charities Commission. Its purposes and aims are:

- to promote and advance research and policy regarding family and marriage
- to participate in social analysis and debate surrounding issues relating to and affecting the family
- to educate the public in their understanding of the institutional, legal and moral framework that makes a just and democratic society possible
- to produce and publish relevant and stimulating material in newspapers, magazines, and other media relating to issues affecting families
- to speak up about issues relating to families that are in the public domain

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FOREWORD by Sue Reid



As a mother, this research paper is an important commentary. In this ever-changing modern world, it is paramount that we stop, pause in our busy world, and consider the significant role of the mothers in our midst.

This is part one of a two-part series. Part two will consider *Why Fathers Matter*.

I am sure we can all agree that if a mother fails in her duties of care and her role is not fulfilled, then society pays the price – such is the value of a mother. Different to a father's contribution, a mother's care, nurture and love is not measured easily. It is not measured in dollars and cents, and it takes longer to see the tangible results.

In a world that seems fixed on diminishing the unique roles of each parent, Stanton draws on extensive research from child psychologists and from child development science, highlighting the fact that mothers are different to fathers in what they bring to parenthood. For the best outcomes for a child, both mothers and fathers are key to a child's biological, psychological and emotional development.

Our modern society seems 'bent on equality' - but our roles are different. Stanton addresses in this report the need to acknowledge that each parent contributes to the success and function of the family in different ways.

Each parent in their differences enables a child to go on to be a healthy, respectful and positive contributor to society.

We lament when a child is without a mother, and acknowledge that there has been a deep wound and hole within, and it stirs feelings that something huge is missing from their life. We cannot comprehend when a mother harms her child, as it pushes against our natural understanding of mother as nurturer and protector.

In our minds, it is unfathomable that a mother could harm her child or deny a child's basic needs, and it stirs anger within us when we see or hear of tragic childhood abuse and death cases in the news. We wonder why or how a child is left without the mother's heart towards them.

Mothers are crucial for both sons and daughters. They not only role-model for their own daughters but they influence a son to be wired to care for and protect women around them.

It's not a competition of who is better or who does more, but a call to work together and appreciate the differences we have. After all, both parents – together – are raising the next generation.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is obvious to all that mothers are different kinds of parents than fathers. Of course, she is the one who grew and nurtured the child in the warm intimacy of her womb for nine months. She delivered the baby into the world under great pain and no small amount of anxiety. She nursed the baby many times a day (and night!) for months. What did dad do? On his best day, all he could do was help mum do what mums do, to be there as an encourager, provider and protector. For the first years, mum runs the show.

But the differences a mum brings to the essential task of parenting the next generation of humanity does not stop there. Not even close.

As a female parent, she makes countless contributions to bringing up children that are distinct from dad's way and she is typically not even aware how her special way of loving, caring for, protecting and teaching her children is as distinctive as it is important. This report provides a concise but broad and well-documented overview of the most important of these differences. It draws from the last few decades of leading research from the worlds of professional child psychology and child-development science.

The most significant differences explained in this report are:

The Physical Difference Itself: Our children can tell from earliest days the differences between mum and dad. Mum is softer and more soothing, providing security and nutrition while dad is more stimulating in his play as he tends to bounce, throw and spin his children. His skin and smell are distinct and he is more unpredictable in his responses. These differences provide the child with a great and exciting diversity in parenting experiences from birth into early adulthood.

Play: Mum's different way of play is important for child development. A mother's style is more intimate and relational, more one-to-one, more verbal, more face-to-face and generally safer.

She emphasises fairness in play while dad tends to emphasise competition. A mother's manner of play is also more likely to stimulate her child's fine motor skills, things that use more precise movements like eating, dressing, doing finger play, colouring, cutting and tying.

Problem Solving: Children are often drawn to their mother because she is more aware of their needs and more attentive to what's going on. This is important when it comes to the child's development in problem solving skills. She is more likely to notice when her child is having difficulty with a task, puzzle or problem. She is therefore more likely to provide immediate help, limiting the child's anxiety and frustration.

Protection: It's no secret that mothers are the more protective parent. Fathers will let their child explore more, try new things and face new challenges. These are vital in the right measure, but mums keep kids out of the emergency room.

Language Development: The ability of children to develop speech and communication impacts nearly all other parts of their human development. It drives their literacy, academic development and actually

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shapes and forms the brain. It determines their confidence with, and influence upon, others. It can even drive what they choose to do career-wise. A mother makes unique and essential contributions to the language development of her children by being the first one to connect with the child both in verbal and non-verbal communication. It is no coincidence that “mum” is usually a child’s first word.

Discipline: It is important every child learns the difference between right and wrong. No one can be fully human without this knowledge and discipline. Mum’s general way of parenting contributes to this important lesson as she is more understanding of the child and in light of the situation at hand. She is more likely to extend grace when a nap was missed and a child is irritable, or the child is frustrated due to a bad experience earlier in the day. Dad tends to be more black and white. Mum’s way provides a sense of security and acceptance and teaches the importance of context and empathy.

Sex Respect: Whether we want to think about it or not, our children are sexual creatures and this will become a very important and powerful part of their lives as they mature. A mother helps her daughter grow confident amidst the awkwardness of her developing womanhood, teaching her healthy modesty as well as the power and influence of her feminine body. Mum helps her learn what a good woman does and does not tolerate from a man, and how to affectively command these differences.

She teaches her son how he should respect and treat women, by helping him learn how and why girls and women are different. A boy who is well-mothered is a boy who is respectful – emotionally, verbally and physically – towards the girls and women in his life.

Mothers have irreplaceable influence in each of these essential areas of healthy child development while usually unaware they are doing anything unique or important. Mum’s femininity not only gave birth to and nourished her children, but helps them develop into the unique, healthy and influential human beings society requires. New Zealand cannot exist without her. She does what no other person in the life of every human being can do.

The research is clear: *mothers matter*. This report will help you learn why.

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INTRODUCTION

A mother plays one of the most important social roles and expressions of human towards human. This requires a lot of self-abandonment, generosity and kindness. That is the reason "mother" is the most beautiful word, the symbol of love and self-sacrifice. Children shall be thankful for their mother. She is not only a creator of new life but also helps to form future generations. Mother is a symbol of heart, love, tenderness and care.¹

Motherhood is the most powerful force on earth. That is a not an opinion, but a fact. If mothers didn't show up to work, nothing would get done. As we hear such a bold statement, we think: "Lunches wouldn't get made! No one would have clean clothes! And kids would never get anywhere on time!" But it's more basic than this. If mums did not do the very things that make them mums, humanity would not exist. It's that simple. The most powerful, influential man in the world cannot come close to being so consequential.

Can anyone *not* feel pity for the person who confesses they grew up without the blessing of a good mother? We don't dismiss such news as merely a symbol of 'a new kind of family.' And we don't consider the absence of a mother as merely *unfortunate*. We know such an absence is a tremendous life loss, a cavernous emptiness that a person carries deep within the heart and soul. When a father abandons his children, it's a profound tragedy with lasting harmful consequences. But it happens. When a mother abandons her children, something horribly unnatural has occurred. We suppose she must be struggling mentally.

Motherhood is one of the most natural and bonding forces in the world. It's why mama bears, literally and figuratively, are more dangerous than papa bears. Motherhood is a deep and powerful thing. According to the important national report *Growing Up in New Zealand*, 99% of Kiwi mums report that they always or very often express physical and emotional affection for their children.² Dads certainly do so as well, but not as often or as consistently as mums. Giving love and affection is just what mums do. As Kyle and Marsha Pruett - a leading child psychologist at the Yale Child Study Center and a Professor of social work at Smith College respectively - explain from their decades-long work on mum and dad differences:

A new born, moments old, is placed on his mother's belly. The cord is cut, he latches onto his mother's breast, hears her voice, and seems to recognise her. For nine months, he has heard her talk, laugh and cry; measured time by her heartbeat; and grown accustomed to her movements. Mother and baby have shared body fluids, ups and downs, illness, food and tissue – even emotions. For mothers and babies, birth is less the beginning than a continuation of an ongoing relationship.³

But mothers are important to all of us for many more reasons beyond the fact that they love us and have our happiness and well-being regularly on their minds. Motherhood is far more than warm sentimentality. The explanation and illumination of this fact is the purpose of this report. It answers the questions, from the science of child psychology, of how and why mums make essential and unique contributions to the healthy development of their children into useful adults.

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1 Katarina Gezova, "Father's and Mother's Roles and Their Particularities in Raising Children," Acta Technologica Dubnicae, 5 (2015):45-50.

2 Susan M.B. Morton, et al., "Growing Up in New Zealand: A Longitudinal Study of New Zealand Children and Their Families. Now We Are Four: Describing The Preschool Years." (Auckland, 2017), p. 40.

3 Kyle Pruett and Marsha Pruett, *Partnership Parenting: How Men and Women Parent Differently – Why It Helps Your Kids and Can Strengthen Your Marriage*, (Da Capo Lifelong Books, 2009), p. 15-16.

The place to start is with this statement: **Mums matter because mums are female parents and they are different than dads.**

There is a great deal of consequence in this obvious statement. Their sex-distinct approach to parenting matters in profound and practical - but often unappreciated - ways which contribute to healthy child-development. While mums and dads share many similar parenting attributes, they are separated by many distinctions as well. These differences make substantial contributions to building skills, instilling confident and honourable character, encouraging intellectual development, and even influencing brain formation in our boys and girls. This field of research is extremely interesting, showing the unique ways mothers help both boys and girls, as sex-distinct children, become good men and women - often in ways that all of us will recognise as they are pointed out in the following pages.

It must be noted from the outset that not every mother demonstrates these particular habits of parenting in the same ways. Some might even do so less frequently than the fathers, and in some families, the mother / father dynamic can be reversed in many ways, although this is the exception. So, a key phrase to keep in mind throughout this booklet is "*tend to*." Mothers *tend to* do the following things more than fathers. Exceptions do not refute these findings. Nor do they necessarily mean your children are missing out on certain benefits. Mothers and fathers typically do a very good job at balancing these things out in their parenting teamwork. But it is true that there are distinct ways mothers tend to parent. Exceptions are exceptions because they prove the rule. You, the reader, whether as a mother or father, will likely recognise the demonstration of many these qualities in your own parenting as we discuss them.

The Difference Itself

It has long been found in research that an infant, surprisingly soon after birth, can distinguish mother from father simply by the sound of their voices and by how they hold and interact with him or her.

A mum's experience with her child will typically be quite distinct from dad's. This is obvious to anyone who pays the slightest bit of attention to what mothers are and do. These differences are extremely important for the healthy development of the child. The simple reality of the distinction between mum's way and dad's way provides children with a broader, richer experience of contrasting relational interactions - more so than for children who are raised by only one gender. Whether they realise it or not, children are learning at the earliest age, by sheer experience, that men and women are different and that they have different ways of dealing with life, with other adults, and with children. This is an important lesson that everyone must learn because it is fundamental to what humanity is: people living, acting, and responding as male or female. Our babies take this knowledge with them into every part of life. Sex distinction is the first thing we notice about everyone we meet. Everything else about them is secondary, is it not? This lesson then is one of the first in a baby's process of socialisation. And it happens without us even realising it. Mums and dads, simply by *being* mums and dads, can help their babies begin to grasp the concept of sex distinction from the earliest weeks of life without even trying.

Having established this, let us now consider one of the key attributes of mothers that will help explain differences in so many other parenting experiences.

Can fathers, especially new ones, get jealous of the time the mothers spend with their babies? Most men feel this to some degree. But have you ever heard a

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mum say, "He is far too attentive and affectionate with our baby and I feel shoved in the corner, like I'm not important to him anymore." No woman has ever said that because mums actually feel *more* deeply loved and cherished by the father of their child when they spend time involved with their child in play or care.

It's not that she doesn't enjoy time alone with her husband. But in a curious way, she sees attention, gentleness, and kindness given to her baby by her husband as attention, gentleness, and kindness given to her as well. Mothers are different creatures, and that is a good thing! Fatherhood changes a man for sure, but motherhood changes a woman on a deeper and more profound level. Motherhood is actually the most substantial change humanity regularly experiences. Men have no experience that comes even close in comparison.

With this in mind, it's easier to see how dads and mums provide unique experiences for their children at the earliest ages simply by being a male or female parent. Every infant learns that one parent is soft and pretty, smells pleasant, and has a tender, comforting voice. The other has notable differences. The hands are rougher, larger, and stronger; the body hairier and face scratchier; and the voice is louder and deeper. The baby's experience of simply being picked up is different depending on who is doing it. Mum and Dad simply 'feel' different. Babies find these differences curious and stimulating in pleasant ways. Professor Henry Biller, a pioneering researcher on mothering and fathering differences, explains the early benefits of these differences:

The father and mother offer the child two different kinds of persons to learn about as well as providing separate but special sources of love and support. The infant also learns that different people can be expected to fulfill different needs. For example, the infant may prefer the mother when hungry and tired and the father when seeking stimulation or more active play.⁴

It's true. Infants tend to be drawn early to mum over everyone else, but not because they were instructed to do so. Rather, they discern something different about mum, something they find wonderful that each of the other loving and caring people in their early lives doesn't possess. There is a deep, visceral connection that develops here and it is not rooted in the child, but in motherhood itself. Erich Fromm, in his important book, *The Art of Loving*, explains this connection:

The first months and years of the child are those where his closest attachment is to the mother. The attachment begins long before the moment of birth, when mother and child are still one, although they are two. Birth changes the situation in some respects, but not as much as it would appear. The child, now living outside of the womb, is still completely dependent on mother.

And in some very important emotional and psychic ways, she is completely dependent on the child. Most of her orientation is toward her baby and this is good.

Fromm continues, explaining the importance of the *other* part of what psychologists call the 'parental dyad' (which basically means both parents doing their job as parents) in the development of the child's growth, maturity, and independence:

But daily [baby] becomes more independent: he learns to walk, to talk, to



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⁴ Henry B. Biller, *Fathers and Families: Paternal Factors in Child Development*, (Westport, CT: Auburn House, 1993), p. 12.

*explore the world on his own; the relationship to mother loses some vital significance, and instead the relationship to father becomes more and more important.*⁵

And mum must allow and even encourage this independence. This is important because mum plays a role in control over the child's life like no one else. This has become known as 'maternal gatekeeping' by child-development scholars.⁶ The parenting program is really in her control, after all, and father and everyone else typically take their cues from her. Anyone – father, mother-in-law, grandpa – who tries to wrestle this away from her is seen to be overstepping their natural bounds. What she nurtured in her womb for 9 months, what emerged from her body under long, intense pain, and what has been nourished at her breast for many months tends to be governed by her from day one. *"Don't get in mum's way!"*

Thus, the mother/child relationship is the only family relationship that must decline in relational dependence and intensity. Good mothering and healthy child-development require it.

A child cannot maintain the intensity of his relationship with mother as he matures. The relationship with dad must be intentionally developed to a more intimate level. That relational growth most often requires continued attention and effort by both mother and father: mother in the form of encouragement and father in the form of intention and time. The child begins to become aware of both himself *and* his father. Mother clearly remains *vital* in the child's life, but now she does this in relation to others. To the growing and maturing child, mum becomes someone who is not just about the new baby, but is related to the father as well as the other siblings. The healthy infant grows beyond his mum-centric understanding of the world to rely on and draw from *both* parents. This is one of the child's first steps toward maturity and socialisation. It is one of the most basic foundations of full human development and it cannot happen if mum does not recognise and act on her need to pull back, ever so slowly, over the years. Again, mum's is the only family relationship that must pull back in intensity from time to time.

It is a monumental experience for both mum and dad on the day when their toddler gets nervous when a stranger pays attention to him, asks him a question, or wants to give him something – and instead of running to mum for comfort and security, he runs to dad for the first time without the slightest recognition that a profound shift has just happened. Rather than making mum feel sad or useless, this should be a reassuring sign that her child is growing and maturing in a very important way and that dad has become a new player in the game. It is no small event in the family and it marks something significant: the growing independence of the child and his knowledge that dad can be an effective caregiver and comforter, too.

The differences in maternal and paternal roles provide essential opportunities for the young child to learn what it means to be human in male and female terms, as well as the virtues and values that both sexes have to offer. They provide the child with an important diversity of human-to-human experiences. These differences also contribute to how children learn about themselves as boys or girls as the years pass, enabling them to grasp how they are similar to one parent and quite different to the other. Each parent, in their masculinity or femininity, is telling their boys or girls: *"I'm like you, and you can look to me as you*

The mother/child relationship is the only family relationship that must decline in relational dependence and intensity.

The healthy infant grows beyond his mum-centric understanding of the world to rely on and draw from both parents.

The other gender parent demonstrates the 'otherness' of humanity and what the child will not become, and how to appreciate that.

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5 Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, (New York; Harper & Row, 1956), p. 41.

6 Sarah J. Schoppe-Sullivan, *et al.*, "Who Are the Gatekeepers? Predictors of Maternal Gatekeeping," *Parenting: Science and Practice*, 15 (2015):166-186.

grow to be the man / woman you will naturally become." The other gender parent demonstrates the 'otherness' of humanity and what the child will *not* become, and how to appreciate that.

But the benefits of mother and father extend beyond the arena of sex distinction. Psychologists, social scientists, and child-development specialists have been investigating the different ways men and women tend to parent for nearly 75 years. As we will see, their research consistently reveals measurable benefits in the different ways mothers and fathers do a number of important, but seemingly mundane, things. These studies help explain how healthy child-development happens for boys and girls through mum's and dad's unique ways of caring for, playing with, and simply just being with them.

In looking at these specifics, we will start by considering how the mother and father contribute in their own ways to the most serious business of every child: *play*.

Mum And Child's Play

For children, play is not so much recreation, but *creation* itself. It is the work that children do that helps them become who they are meant to be. It is their way of exploring and understanding the world itself and the people who make up that world. It is one of the things they learn to do on their own and in their own way. Kids have the remarkable ability to create their own entertainment and build their own make-believe worlds, whether it's playing princess, Spider-Man, shop owner, or doctor. They pretend to become other people and learn to identify with other personas and roles. Play takes children outside of themselves and provides them with the understanding that they have the power to shape their behaviours and identities in creative ways.

Children develop their humanity through their play. All of us experienced this when we were younger. But children certainly don't go through this process alone. While we might tend to think of dads in this regard, mothers also contribute – in essential, but often unappreciated, ways – to the play experiences of their children. Let's start by looking at the most universal and basic view of mothers and fathers at play with their children: *their orientation toward the child*. Appreciating this distinction is critical.

Mother: Orientation Towards The Child

Good mothers and fathers are both certainly very physical with their children. However, mothers are physical in different ways to fathers – ways which stem from their basic nature as women.

From moment one, what is it that you, as a mother, will do with your child? Take any cultural or gender stereotypes you might have and put them aside to think about this in the larger human experience across cultures and time. Is there a common answer? Yes, there is – and it has nothing to do with any particular cultural gender caricature that feminist studies professors will warn you about. It has *everything* to do with the essence of every good mother.

As soon as a child emerges from the womb, the overwhelming first inclination and physical activity of the mother is to take the crying, quivering newborn close to her and put it to her breast for comfort and sustenance. No mother need to be taught that this should be done. That desire flows from her as strong as any emotion or force she has ever experienced. Everything within her *needs* to hold and comfort her child. Her body itself, and not just her emotions, is reacting to her baby's cry. A mother's brain viscerally and physically responds at this moment.

Research consistently reveals measurable benefits in the different ways mothers and fathers do a number of important, but seemingly mundane, things.

It is their way of exploring and understanding the world itself and the people who make up that world.

The brain activity of women and men differed considerably when they both heard the cries of a baby.



In one interesting experiment conducted in Italy, men and women were placed in a brain-scan machine. The researchers played two different sounds intermittently, with periods of silence in between. One sound was just white noise, the other was an infant's hungry cry. The subjects were not informed beforehand that the sounds would be played, so that anticipation would not be a factor. Their brains were observed for internal responses – neural firings – to these sounds. During periods of silence and when white noise was played, the brain responses of males or females were identical. But, as the researchers explained, *"the brain activity of women and men differed considerably"* when they both heard the cries of a baby.



The men showed no significant response. But women did, regardless of whether they were mothers or not. The female brain sends signals throughout the body when it hears a baby crying for food and comfort. It's natural. In fact, these scholars reported something else that's natural. When the father seems oblivious or indifferent to your baby's cries, it's not because he is selfish or uncaring. It's that his brain is actually wired that way. The Italian researchers explain, *"In functional terms, this finding suggests that, whereas the female brain during hunger cries interrupts on-going mind-wandering, the male brain continues in self-reflection"* even if he is reflecting on nothing in particular. In other words, dad's brain can remain unaffected by his child's cry.⁷

It is a remarkable and frustrating quirk of nature - but it's not his fault. Having said that, fathers must learn to be attentive and respond more quickly to the child's cries.

Mum's body does not just respond to the baby's cry. Science also shows us that something significant happens in the deepest interiors of the bodies of both mother and child during the intimacy of nursing. It is not just the functioning of the breast and delivery of nutrition to the baby. Mothers who have more skin-to-skin interaction with their child – including breast feeding – are shown in longitudinal, control-group studies to experience reduced postpartum depression and overall psychological stress, increased uterine health, protection against Type II diabetes and cardiovascular disease, and improved menstruation.⁸

In short, the mother's orientation is unmistakably *toward the child*. This is hard-wired and hard-driven. Others who seek to interrupt it will often do so at their own peril.

A new father is certainly interested in the child itself, but he is also very interested in his child *in relation to the rest of world*. More so than the mother. This is an important distinction. Dad is more likely to celebrate the child with the rest of his community as a badge of honour and excitement. Curiously, he considers the newborn as *his* accomplishment even though he felt no pain or broke no sweat! This is why fathers have long passed out cigars to their friends. It's about his relationship as a new father to the larger community, and a celebration of the event of the arrival of his new child.

I remember when my first child, Olivia, was born. The question flashed through my mind, ever so briefly, as to whether her arrival would be on the news that night. Why not? Her birth was undoubtedly the most meaningful event our city

Something significant happens in the deepest interiors of the bodies of both mother and child during the intimacy of nursing.

Mothers who have more skin-to-skin interaction with their child experience reduced postpartum depression and overall psychological stress, increased uterine health, protection against Type II diabetes and cardiovascular disease, and improved menstruation.

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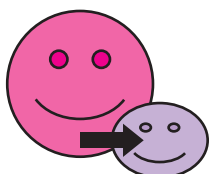
7 Nicola De Pisapia, et al., "Gender Differences in Directional Brain Responses to Infant Hunger Cries," *Neuroreport*, 13 (2013):142-146.

8 Ann E. Bigelow, et al., "Effect of Mother/Infant Skin-to-Skin Contact on Postpartum Depressive Symptoms and Maternal Physiological Stress," *Journal of Obstetric Gynecologic & Neonatal Nursing*, (41) 2012:369-82; Jennifer Hahn-Holbrook, et al., "Breastfeeding and Maternal Mental Health and Physical Health," in *Women's Health Psychology*, Mary V. Spiers, et al., (eds.) (Wiley, 2013), 414-439.

had seen all week. That was obvious to me. But just as quickly, I realised that perhaps not everyone would consider this news as monumental as I did.

Fathers, in contrast to mothers, think about their child in relationship to the larger world. The good father will spend the next few decades caring for, providing for, protecting, and preparing the life that he helped create for the world. This is the *Dad-with-child-toward-the-community* orientation. The *Mother-to-child* and *Dad-with-child-toward-the-community* orientations can be symbolised this way:

Mum/Child Orientation



Mother-to-child orientation is largely true of mothers *every time* and *everywhere* mothers have appeared on the earth. It is true of mothers on the sun-bathed savannahs of Middle Africa and the rural rice fields of China; from the high-rises of New York City to the maraes of New Zealand.

Thus, mum's manner of play is more protective and intimate while dad's way is more chance-taking, surprising, and exploratory. Fathers are more likely the *ticklers* and *baby-bouncers*. Mothers will give the child more *cuddle* and *care* time.

Scholars have found that universally, only about four percent of mother-infant play is rough and tumble, geared toward getting the child to laugh boisterously and wiggle excitedly.⁹ That is more dad's arena. Mother's style of play is more intimate and relational. It is more one-to-one, verbal, and face-to-face oriented. In a sense, we can say that mother play does *with* the child and dad play does *to* the child. Of course, dads cuddle and snuggle too, and mothers bounce and play peek-a-boo with their children, but mum and dad are much more likely to do one than the other.

Child-development professionals observe that mother play is distinct from father play in the following general ways. Children need to experience both of these types of play.

Fathers are more likely to:	Mothers are more likely to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tickle and rough-house • <i>push</i> the limits • play louder • encourage independence and confidence • stress <i>competition</i> • stress <i>doing</i> and <i>accomplishing</i> • encourage <i>large</i> motor skill development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • comfort and cuddle their children • <i>mind</i> the limits • play more quietly • encourage dependence and security • stress <i>equity</i> • stress <i>being</i> and <i>relationship</i> • encourage <i>fine</i> motor skill development

Mothers are not as likely to wind their children up in play. They are more interested in comforting and settling them down. It's why mothers do a better job at getting their children to bed. Even at bedtime, fathers can hardly keep themselves from stimulating their children, making story time more exciting, or tickling them as they tuck them in. When the child is the frightened victim of a

Mother-to-child orientation is largely and generally true of mothers every time and everywhere mothers have appeared on the earth.

Dad's way is more chance-taking, surprising, and exploratory.

It's why mothers do a better job at getting their children to bed.

⁹ Eleanor E. Maccoby, *The Two Sexes: Growing Up Apart; Coming Together*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 266.

'scary monster', we know it's a sure bet which parent is the monster and which one the child will run to for safety, even as they giggle all the way. Fathers are more likely to see their children as cool little people to do things *with*, to have fun with. Mothers are more likely to see their children as little people to do things *for* – little people who need love, comfort, and protection.

Kyle and Marsha Pruett, authors of *Partnership Parenting: How Men and Women Parent Differently*, give just a few practical examples of how children might prefer mum's unique way in certain situations:

- William chooses Mum at bedtime because she is snuggly and smells 'sweeter.'
- Emily talks to Mum about what happened on the playground because she 'cares about the stuff that happens between the kids.'
- Anna, who worries if Mummy is happy, doesn't worry so much about Dad because 'he always seems okay.'
- Jenna likes to go grocery shopping with Dad because they get more 'fun foods', but Johnny prefers Mummy because she knows more of the brands he likes.¹⁰

Go to the playground and listen to the various parents call out to their children. Some parents are more likely to be saying:

- Not so high!
- Be careful!
- Slow down!
- Watch out!

Others will be saying:

- Swing higher!
- Look how fast you're going!
- Climb to the next level!
- Go for it!

Which are more *likely* to be the mothers? It's the same answer the world over. Mothers tends to keep kids safer, more secure, and out of the emergency room. And this has nothing to do with gender stereotypes. It is rooted in the general maternal nature.

Professor Robyn Fivush, who was a research fellow at the University of Otago in 2000, finds that mothers tolerate less aggression than fathers, but more from their sons than they do from their daughters.¹¹ There are clearly gender-distinct approaches to play for mothers and fathers. It's not a question of whose way is best. Kids need both.

Why? Because the tug-of-war between mum's way and dad's way provides a healthy balance between the confidence-building of dad's 'take it to the next level' encouragement and mum's 'don't do anything you're not ready for' caution and safety. Children benefit from both, even if it seems like these differences could result in conflict between the mother and the father.

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There are clearly gender-distinct approaches to play for mothers and fathers. Kids need both.



¹⁰ Kyle Pruett and Marsha Pruett, *Partnership Parenting: How Men and Women Parent Differently--Why It Helps Your Kids and Can Strengthen Your Marriage*, (Da Capo Lifelong Books, 2009), p. 67.

¹¹ Robyn Fivush, "Emotional Content of Parent-Child Conversation About the Past," in C. A. Nelson (ed.) *Memory and Effect in Development: Minnesota Symposium on Child Psychology*, (University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 39-78.

Competition And Equity

While fathers tend to be more interested in who is winning in most kinds of competitive play, mum is more likely to be paying attention to whether everyone is being treated fairly and to making sure that everyone is getting a proper chance, that the rules are being followed, and that every child is having fun. Dad is about the thing. Mum is about the people and the interactions between them.

Again, both ways are correct. Mum's way gives a sense of hope and fairness to everyone. When a new group of children is playing together for the first time with the parents standing around watching, everyone might be pleased with how well the children are getting along. But if one of the adults brings it to everyone else's attention by saying, "Isn't it wonderful how the kids are all getting along together so well?" you can be almost certain it's a mum making the comment. Mums are the ones that note such things, while the dads will be more likely to be able to tell you what games the kids are playing. Children need to learn the ins-and-outs and ups-and-downs of both competition and fairness - in play, and in life.

How annoying is it to have someone who is constantly making sure that everyone is treated fairly, as if that is the only thing that counts? But even worse is someone who always has to win at any cost. The competitive drive is clearly the more likely of these impulses to be taken to extremes, so balance is key. Mums and dads can work together to provide this.

Again, dads tend to be about the thing, and mums tend to be about the people.

Doing vs. Relating

Closely related to the 'competition /equity' dynamic is the difference and balance between *doing* and *relating*. When mums play with their kids, it's about how they are connecting and relating rather than the act itself.

Consider the scenario of a mother and her son making pancakes together for the family. The effort for mum would be about the process. She will be more willing to let her son do the measuring, mixing, and pouring, not really caring if it gets a little off-track along the way or takes three times as long to complete. Her boy is having a good time and experiencing something important. She relishes the experience for herself and her child. Dad, while not opposed to any of this, is more likely to have the end result in mind. He has a mission to accomplish, even if that mission is only pancakes. He might not even be aware of it, but his gut wants to show his kids how to 'get the job done!'

Kids need to learn the importance of both relating and doing. Imagine this in the work world. Maybe your grown daughter has amazing skills in chemical science. She was at the top of her class. But what if she has a reputation of not working well with others, of not being a team player? Her boss and co-workers might be very impressed with her skills, but if she's constantly offending and alienating her co-workers, things will deteriorate fast. Her bad attitude will surely overshadow her skills, and she will find herself looking for another job soon. That could become a habit throughout her career. On the other hand, if someone is a delight to work with, helpful, kind, and considerate of others, that will take them a long way in the professional arena, even if their skills are not world-class. People like to work with nice people. Relationships are much more important than accomplishing things, but in the work world, the boss – man or woman – will want results. And children need to learn how to deliver them. Good mums help their kids learn this important balance.

Fathers tend to be more interested in who is winning in most kinds of competitive play.

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Dads tend to be about the thing, and mums tend to be about the people.



Large And Fine Motor Skills

In thinking about play, child development specialists divide kids into two groups: those who make use of fine motor skills, and those who make use of large motor skills. This generally has to do with the 'largeness' or 'smallness' of the play, if you will. Playing netball, swimming, or climbing a tree require large motor skills. These types of activities involved the participant's entire body. On the other hand, building with Lego, working with crayons, scissors, and glue, or playing a musical instrument involve fine motor skills. They make more use of the hands, eyes, and mind. A healthy child must learn to develop both sets of skills. Of course, many types of play, such as golf, lawn bowling, or archery, involve both at the same time. That is one reason why too much screen time is not good for our children. It makes use of their fingers, eyes, and minds, but not the rest of their bodies. It's doesn't get them 'out there' in the world, making good use of their legs and lungs.

The mother/father difference in child's play is relevant here. Father play is more likely to stimulate *large or gross motor skill growth* – such as sitting up, tumbling, balancing, rolling, throwing, jumping, catching, or running. Mother is more likely to encourage *fine motor skill growth* – eating, dressing, doing finger play, colouring, cutting and tying.

Think about an invitation from a parent for a child to play tag or climb on the jungle-gym. Or to sit at the kitchen table to colour, paint, or cut out and glue papers. Which invitation is more likely to come from the mother, and which from the father? And which is most important for the child? Both are important, but mum's way teaches more self-control and precision, along with certain types of discipline, patience, and creativity.

To summarise, mums teach kids to make fine and skilled use of their hands more often, while dads teach kids how to use their bodies. Both are important to a child's physical development.

Problem Solving

The ability and confidence to solve problems is critical in healthy child development. We all wonder about the child who is easily frustrated at a challenge or has no idea where to even start to solve it. We know that if things don't change, he or she is going to have a hard time later on because much of life is... well, about solving problems. It's hard to be successful without developing this skill. Mothers make unique contributions here.

This is demonstrated in a very interesting real-life example. A number of years ago, a major newspaper did a large profile on various 'new kinds of families', including multiple-adult and same-sex families.¹² One of these families embraced the idea that gender difference didn't really matter, and that all kids needed was love. But, unwittingly, the adults in this family proved precisely how much gender difference *does* matter for children. The family in question consisted of two lesbian women, their sperm donor friend, and his gay partner. It was essentially a four-way family with the two women as the primary parents of a little boy. If all the child needed was love, then wouldn't four doting 'parents' be a developmental gold-mine for him?



Father play is more likely to stimulate large or gross motor skill growth.

Mother is more likely to encourage fine motor skill growth.

What was at work in this family's disagreement is very much a natural part of the mother/father difference in parenting young children.

12 Karen Peterson, "Looking Straight at Gay Parents," *USA Today*, March 10, 2004, 2D.

The journalist asked the adults if they ever had problems parenting in such a unique set-up. One of the women said that yes, of course they did. The biological father spoke up to explain. He said that when Alec, the boy, was trying to figure out a puzzle or was having trouble with his building blocks, the women are more inclined to step in at the first sign of frustration to help him solve the problem. Why would coming to the child's aid possibly be a problem? The father explained that he and his partner thought it best to hold off a bit in order to give Alec a chance to solve the problem for himself.

These men, unbeknownst to them, were simply acting like male parents. The women, too, were acting like mums, even though all four of them thought they had set themselves and their child free from supposed ugly and stifling gender stereotypes. Kyle and Marsha Pruett explain that what was at work in this family's disagreement is very much a natural part of the mother/father difference in parenting young children:

*Dads are seemingly more reluctant to assist their children, and mums are supposedly more reliably attuned to their children's needs. Fathers are more likely to allow a certain amount of frustration to build while his child works to solve the problem. Most mothers, on the other hand, are more likely to intervene as soon as a child's irritation develops in order to protect the child from too much frustration and failure. Dad worries mum is spoiling the child, while mum says that dad is ignoring the child's request for help and support...*¹³

It is interesting how spot-on the foursome was in experiencing what the Pruett described. There is indeed a mother/father nature in teaching problem-solving in children. Even these 'new kinds of families' cannot escape human nature. Mum's way is certainly not wrong here. It lets the child know he can go to mum to find security and help, and that it will always be there for him. But the good mother also realises that she cannot always follow her motherly heart totally in such matters. Her children have to learn, even through frustrating experiences, how to solve problems for themselves. But mums are more dependable in meeting the early needs of the child, and this instills an essential sense of security. It is from this security that the father's more chance-taking encouragement is properly founded. It starts with mum's way.

Unfortunately, little Alec was robbed of this important balance. When the journalist asked the men how they negotiated a solution to their disagreement with the mums, one of them was quite direct in saying, "Well, the mums are the primary parents, so I just keep quiet."

Both mum and dad help their children explore the fullness of their world of play, and often encourage them to explore that world in very different ways according to their own sex-distinction. Remember what we learned about the difference in the mum / dad orientation toward their child?

A mother's eyes and heart are toward her child, and they exist together in the larger world. In play, mothers provide protection, security, and comfort. They help their children to become aware of limits and to avoid things that are dangerous or that the child is not yet ready to handle.

Dad worries mum is spoiling the child, while mum says that dad is ignoring the child's request for help and support.



In play, mothers provide protection, security, and comfort.

¹³ Kyle Pruett and Marsha Pruett, *Partnership Parenting: How Men and Women Parent Differently--Why It Helps Your Kids and Can Strengthen Your Marriage*, (Da Capo Lifelong Books, 2009), p. 20.

Preparation And Protection

When my brother and I were young, I remember our dad giving us very detailed lessons about what to do if we started getting roughed-up by neighbourhood bullies. His instructions encompassed attitude, moves, and technique. He had us practice them on each other. We all loved the experience.

Mum's approach was different. She said to our dad, "*Bill, let me just throw this out there. How about teaching the boys to just avoid the bullies?*" It seemed like the obvious angle to her. She was not keen on dad's militaristic training sessions. Her priority was not preparation for confrontation, but protection and avoidance of threats. This makes perfect sense to mums and seems totally reasonable. And it is. But so is preparation for dangers and problems that might arise. Protection from danger and harm is mum's way. Preparation for inevitable challenges is dad's way. He sees his child in relation to the world as it is.

Mums are wall-builders between their children and *any* possible threat, real or imagined. A woman's most basic orientation from the beginning of her mothering process is protective. Her first relationship with her child was protective and nurturing. That is what the womb is all about. And that largely remains her orientation years after her child is born. She receives, takes in, and cares for that which she has miraculously been given by nature. Practically, mothers are motivated primarily by things from the outside world that could possibly hurt their child (e.g., lightning, accidents, disease, bullies, strange people, dogs in the neighbourhood) and they seek to protect their children from such contingencies.

The bottom line is this: mums *protect*; dads *prepare*.

For little Alec, his biological mother and her female partner wanted to protect him from the difficulty and frustration of figuring out a puzzle. His biological father and his male partner wanted to make sure Alec was given the opportunity to face the challenge and solve the problem for himself. There certainly is a mum way and a dad way of seeing our children in relation to life, the world, and the childhood experiences we find there, even if we are not aware of it.

Language Development

Language development is a very natural thing; when it doesn't happen naturally, it causes great concern for all those around the child. Every child gains their language development from those around them, for good or for bad. It is one of the first things they learn to do in genuine human development. All other things – eating, pooing, crying, wiggling, playing, sleeping – are things we share with the animals. Talking is not. It is uniquely human.

According to the *Growing Up in New Zealand* study, 'mum', 'mummy', or 'mama' was the most common first word from New Zealand children. The various terms for dad were the second most common first words.¹⁴

Learning and using language is not just about communication. Your child's language development is intimately attached to a host of other developmental factors, such as social confidence and stronger literacy.

In fact, Professor Elaine Reese, Education Expert Adviser to the *Growing Up in*

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'Mum', 'mummy', or 'mama' was the most common first word from New Zealand children.

14 Susan M.B. Morton, et al., "Growing Up in New Zealand: A Longitudinal Study of New Zealand Children and Their Families. Now We Are Two: Describing The First 1000 Days." (Auckland, 2014), p. 17.

New Zealand study, explains, “We know from other research in New Zealand and internationally that when children are strong in their first language, those skills transfer to their second language and to literacy.”

A professor of early childhood education from the University of North Carolina adds, “The diversity of maternal vocabulary is a strong predictor of children’s later language and vocabulary development... the complexity of maternal language input to young children has been associated with young children’s increased language development.”¹⁵

We typically don’t realise that mothers tend to speak in unique ways to their children. Mum’s speech enriches her child’s language development in essential ways. In fact, recent research conducted at Stanford University’s School of Medicine illuminates this fact. Not only can infants distinguish their mother’s voice from all others in the first days of life, but as they become more familiar with it over time, her unique vocal stimulus guides social and emotional functioning in the developing years. A mother’s unique speech patterns and habits actually light up and therefore strengthen different and broad parts of the child’s brain that are central to many other factors of healthy human development that seem to have nothing to do with language itself. This includes things like socialisation, emotional control, and neural development. All of this happens just as a result of a mother *talking* to her child.

What makes this research especially interesting is the care with which the study was conducted. It involved reading the brain activity of young children as they were spoken to. The researchers had two ‘control female’ voices speak to the child, along with mum’s own voice. They wanted to see if it was the child’s mum who had any unique impact, or if the child would respond positively to *any* soothing female voice. The control females and the mother spoke the same nonsense words to the child, such as “teebudishawlt,” “keebudishawlt,” and “peebudishawlt.” They wanted just the *sound* of mum’s voice and not previously learned cue words that could spark good or bad reactions. The results were stark and surprising to the researchers.

Let’s hear from them, in their own technical jargon, explaining what happened in the children’s brains when their mothers uttered just these nonsense words:

*Compared to female control voices, mother’s voice elicited greater activity in primary auditory regions in the midbrain and cortex; voice-selective superior temporal sulcus (STS); the amygdala, which is crucial for processing of affect; nucleus accumbens and orbitofrontal cortex of the reward circuit; anterior insula and cingulate of the salience network; and a sub-region of fusiform gyrus associated with face perception. The strength of brain connectivity between voice-selective STS and reward, affective, salience, memory, and face-processing regions during mother’s voice perception predicted social communication skills.*¹⁶

That’s a lot of brain work and activity being created by mum simply saying three words of gibberish to her child. Just think what meaningful and sustained communication does for a child’s brain and neural development.

These authors go on for paragraphs with additional highly technical reasons why, as

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15 Nadya Pancsofar, *et al.*, “Mother and Father Language Input to Young Children: Contributions to Later Language Development,” *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, (27) 2006:571-587.

16 Daniel Abrams, *et al.*, Neural Circuits Underlying Mother’s Voice Perception Predict Social Communication Abilities in Children,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, (22) 2016:6295-6300.

they explain it, “*mother’s voice elicited greater activity in a number of brain systems*” than other voices did. Mothers can say with utter confidence, “*Simply by talking to my child as a mum, science says I’m doing good and important things for my baby’s brain.*”

The authors conclude: “*These studies have highlighted the profound influence that mother’s voice has on children’s cognitive, emotional, and social function.*”

Related to this, additional genetic research tells us we all gain a great deal of our basic intelligence from mum and her side of the family. The author of this study, Professor Gillian Turner, an internationally acclaimed geneticist from the University of Newcastle (Australia), tells us that for Mother’s Day, we would do well to design a t-shirt that says, “*Intelligence – Thanks for the genes, Mum!*” Turner proposes that this gesture would appropriately, “*give thanks to mothers from their children for her X chromosomes for their major contribution to their intelligence.*”¹⁷

In a different long-term study, we learn that mum’s comforting words during stressful events in early childhood are a “*powerful predictor*” of larger hippocampus size when a child reaches the school years. This is the part of the brain that builds long-term memory. Your child could not remember his phone number, address, or the names of his friends, teachers, and siblings without it. These scholars found that:

*Maternal support observed in early childhood was strongly predictive of hippocampal volume measured at school age. These findings provide prospective evidence in humans of the positive effect of early supportive parenting on healthy hippocampal development, a brain region key to memory and stress modulation.*¹⁸

Furthermore, it’s not just the child’s brain that is physically shaped and molded by mum. The impact flows from child to mother as well. The Pruett’s explain that, “*the [mum’s] brain itself undergoes changes that will make it easier for a mother to understand her infant’s cries and preverbal cues.*”¹⁹

On a more basic, practical level, researchers have long found that mothers benefit their children’s language development simply because they are more verbal with them. Not only do they spend more time with their children, thus sharing more words with them, but they also tend to speak more words to their children than fathers do in the same period.

When a mother leaves her child to go into another room, she will often keep talking, explaining what she’s doing and assuring her little one that she’ll only be a moment and will return soon. This typically happens even if the child is too young to understand the explanation. Mum is also more likely to call out the names of various things she encounters with her child during the course of a day. “*Rebecca, see that cute dog?*” “*Nick, look at that colourful apple.*” Mothers are simply more verbal.

They are also more predictable in their speech in that they are more repetitive. Mums typically adopt a sing-song style of communication with their children as well. They are more likely to ask questions that they know very well a young child cannot understand or answer. Things like, “*Do you have a pooey nappy?*”

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“Intelligence – Thanks for the genes, Mum!”

Maternal support observed in early childhood was strongly predictive of hippocampal volume measured at school age.



17 Gillian Turner, “Intelligence and the X Chromosome,” *The Lancet*, 347 (1996): 1814-1815.

18 Joan L. Luby, et al., “Maternal Support in Early Childhood Predicts Larger Hippocampal Volumes at School Age,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 109 (2012): 2854-2959.

19 Kyle Pruett and Marsha Pruett, *Partnership Parenting: How Men and Women Parent Differently--Why It Helps Your Kids and Can Strengthen Your Marriage*, (Da Capo Lifelong Books, 2009), p. 16.

or “You want some juice, don’t you?” Even though understanding does not yet exist between mother and child, she is already functioning in a way that invites her child into the conversation. This stems from her more relational nature and it very much prepares the child, slowly and subtly, to learn that language is really about interaction and is not just the transfer of information. This is a unique human quality, and it is mother who initiates it at the earliest ages.

Another very consequential difference between mum’s and dad’s communication is their use of words. Mothers are more likely to simplify their words and speak on the child’s level. Most men do not do this. As Eleanor Maccoby, a ground-breaking scholar on gender difference and child development from Stanford University explains, “the mother’s mean length of utterance is more closely related to that of the child she is addressing than is the father’s, and... fathers used more unfamiliar, difficult or specialised words” with their children.²⁰ Mothers are actually more perceptive and tuned in to how to speak to and connect with their child on his or her level.

This means that mum’s way facilitates immediate communication between child and parent. This is good for the child, because it provides a secure and close parent-child connection. Mum’s voice is typically more inviting and calming for the child as well.

Also, mothers are more likely than dads to be able to understand baby’s unique way of asking for certain things. Our youngest daughter, as she was just learning to talk, would declare very emphatically, “Mo hashi mek, mo hashi mek!” and slam her cup down. Mum understood her as if she were speaking plain English. The rest of us had to rely on her as our interpreter: “She wants more chocolate milk!” Mum’s conversations with her child are longer and more sustained because she can, in fact, carry on a meaningful conversation when everyone else just hears baby babbling.

In short, mum’s communication provides predictability and security of connection by being immediate and more natural.

Speaking Without Words

Another very important form of communication that our children must learn in order to live well in the world is non-verbal. This is essential because we convey a great deal of important information through facial expressions, gestures, a certain but subtle tilt of the head, or non-articulated hums and grunts.

Statements such as “I really like that hat!” or “I’m so glad you stopped by!” can be interpreted very differently depending on the subtle facial expressions and body language accompanying them. If we don’t know how to read these non-verbal cues, we are significantly handicapped as communicators. So it is critical that our children learn the art of non-verbal communication as they grow and develop.

It is very important to appreciate that mum’s non-verbal communication tends to be quite different than dad’s. Think about this. If dad suddenly puts his hands on his hips, we are likely to think he’s just stopping to catch his breath or trying to remember where he left his pen. When mum does the same thing, it *might* be

The mum’s brain itself undergoes changes that will make it easier for a mother to understand her infant’s cries and preverbal cues.

Mothers are simply more verbal. This stems from her more relational nature.

Mothers are more likely to simplify their words and speak on the child’s level.



20 Eleanor E. Maccoby, *The Two Sexes: Growing Up Apart, Coming Together*, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 269.

for similar reasons, but more likely it's because she's displeased with something that's happening. A woman can look you straight in the eyes with her hands on her hips and communicate so much. Any perceptive person knows they should check their behaviour in such a situation! This is one of the many ways mothers uniquely communicate with just their bodies.

Boys and girls learn something important about what it means to be a man or a woman just by listening to, observing, and responding to verbal, vocal and body-language cues from their parents. Verbal cues are words. Vocal cues are sounds, such as the clearing of the throat, a hum, or a whistle. Body language is a tilt of the head, a raised eyebrow, a subtle nod, or a pursing of the lips. Each of these communicates something significant. They are different for mums and dads because they are demonstrated or offered in different ways.

For girls, observing mum's subtle but unmistakable communication through infancy, toddlerhood, and the primary school and adolescent years helps them learn how a woman can and should communicate with confidence and influence. Girls can also learn how *not* to communicate as women by observing people's reactions to their mothers' unhealthy communication habits.

Boys, too, learn from their mums how to communicate with women - when to push a little harder and when to back off. They learn when to use a particular tone or not. They come to understand, over time, what exactly will push a woman's 'yes' button or her "*back it down, buster!*" button. And they begin to learn how to comfort mum when she gets hurt.

A boy who is both well-mothered and well-fathered is shown to be more sensitive to women as he grows. He is learning from both mum and dad what women want, need, and deserve. And he learns all of this just by reading mum's non-verbal cues, her reactions to others, and his dad's reactions to her.

Our children are picking up so much more than we imagine they are by simply communicating with us in a thousand different ways and situations every day of their lives. This language development impacts their literacy skills, brain function, and intuitiveness, and helps them understand how they should or should not deal with other people.

Sociability

Learning to become sociable with others is another important milestone of human development. It largely happens alongside language development, and beyond.

It's not unusual for us to show concern for children in their primary years who seem reluctant or just unwilling to connect with others, whether visually and/or verbally. We know this is not healthy. On the other side of the coin, we're duly impressed with young children when they are totally comfortable and eager to engage with others, especially adults. We see such behaviour as a sign of healthy confidence and maturity.

Much of this confidence in making 'small talk' comes from mum, because she tends to be much more social than dad. Dads are more likely to socialise in the community seeking information. "*How far is it to the lake?*" "*When do the shops close?*" "*Is everything going alright?*" The art of asking for information is important, and our kids benefit from it. But it is mum's ability to engage in conversation in a shop, at church, or just on the street that gives children the confidence to do the same. She is more verbal, and her children are learning



Mum's communication provides predictability and security of connection by being immediate and more natural.

Boys learn from their mums how to communicate with women.

Our children are picking up so much more than we imagine they are.

that spontaneous and smart conversation can make life fun. Over time, they will grow more confident and be willing to try it themselves. Mum helps her kids mix well with others, giving them the confidence and skills to do so in ways that are engaging to the other person.

Of course, this will pay dividends throughout life as the child seeks to make new friends, negotiate some kind of trade, compete for a job, or speak publicly.

Discipline And Correction

We typically think of the father as the family disciplinarian. But quite often, people will say that it was their mum who called the shots and kept the kids in line.

Given their greater sensitivity to their children, mothers are more likely to struggle with the way they discipline and how they do it – more so than fathers. According to the most recent *Growing Up in New Zealand* report:

- More than one in five mothers usually found it difficult to discipline their children
- Almost one in five mothers regularly struggled with ways to solve their child's misbehaviour.
- Nearly 40% of mothers threatened their child with punishment, but regularly did not follow through.²¹

Mothers and fathers tend to mete out correction and discipline in different ways. A healthy balance of each is extremely important for children, as it not only keeps them on the straight and narrow, but actually creates in them an essential sense of security and confidence.

The *American Society of Landscape Architects* tells of an interesting research study in this regard. Two groups of preschoolers were taken to two different playgrounds. One had a long fence around the property. The other had no fence at all. The researchers found something very interesting about the play patterns of the children in the two different settings. The preschoolers playing on the fenced playground actually explored and used more of the playground. Those playing on the unfenced property tended to stay closer to the play equipment and the adult supervisors.²² Why the curious difference in play habits?

Ironically, the restrictive fence created greater freedom and opportunity. Without the protective boundary of the fence, the children felt vulnerable and therefore less free. The fence actually created a carefree sense of security for the kids. It set them free to enjoy the whole playground. Children not only need boundaries, they desire them – whether they always realise it or not.

Discipline works the same way. It's not a question of 'lots of discipline vs. no discipline'. It's about finding a proper balance and a healthy mix of the right kinds of discipline needed to provide our children with love and direction. The distinct ways that mothers and fathers tend to approach discipline provides this healthy balance for our children and our homes.

In many ways, mothers and fathers represent different attributes when it comes to discipline - firm and wrathful, but also gracious and forgiving. These two seem contradictory, but they are actually essential to each other.

Mothers are more likely to struggle with the way they discipline and how they do it – more so than fathers.



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²¹ Susan M.B. Morton, et al., "Growing Up in New Zealand: A Longitudinal Study of New Zealand Children and Their Families. Now We Are Four: Describing The Preschool Years." (Auckland, 2017), p. 40.

²² ASLA 2006 Student Awards, *Residential Design Award of Honor*, Peter Summerlin's essay, Associate ASLA Mississippi State University, USA.

Harvard educational psychologist Carol Gilligan did some early research on how mum's way of discipline is distinct from dad's. In her celebrated book, *In a Different Voice*, she tells us:²³

Fathers tend to stress	Mothers tend to stress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • justice • fairness • duty (based on rules) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sympathy • grace • care • help (based on relationship)

A leading Rutgers University sociologist explains a very important but subtle point in this regard:

The disciplinary approach of fathers tends to be "firm" while that of mothers tends to be "responsive." Mothers' discipline varies more from time to time, involves more bargaining and is adjusted to the child's mood and context. It is seemingly based on a more intuitive understanding of the child's needs and emotions of the moment. Based on this distinction of course, mothers are often accused of being too soft, while fathers are accused of being too arbitrary and rigid.²⁴

Our children need both of these approaches, but at different times relative to the situation.

Fathers tend to be more concerned with the rules, enforcing them sternly and objectively regardless of the situation. This teaches children the objectivity and consequences of right and wrong.

Mothers tend to enforce rules relative to the state of the child, with grace and sympathy. Mum is more concerned about feelings and relationships. This provides an important sense of hopefulness in the child.

Which one is best?

Again, both are necessary because that's the way the world works. Let's consider a simple example:

You get stopped by a police officer on the motorway. You wonder what the trouble is, and he explains that you were doing 120 km/h. In addition, he says you seemed to be swerving in and out of the lane. Not good news. You assure him that your behaviour has a perfectly reasonable explanation. You're simply late to pick up your child, and you are just coming off a double-shift at the hospital. "Therefore, my lateness is the reason for the speeding and I tend to swerve when I drive while tired." The officer responds, "Well thanks for explaining. I tend to swerve sometimes myself when I've been working a long shift. I'm giving you a warning, but try to keep it down."

What kind of public-safety officer would that be? But now envision a different scenario with the police officer. What if you were racing to the hospital? "My wife is having a baby...NOW!" you tell the officer when he pulls you over, and he can see she's clearly in advanced stages of labor. What if he replied, "Well, congratulations, sir, but rules are rules. She and your new baby will have to wait

Children not only need boundaries, they desire them – whether they always realise it or not.

Mothers' discipline is seemingly based on a more intuitive understanding of the child's needs and emotions of the moment.

Mum is more concerned about feelings and relationships.

²³ Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, (Harvard University Press, 1982).

²⁴ David Popenoe, *Life Without Father*, (New York: The Free Press, 1996) p. 145.

while I write you a ticket!" Some occasions call for unrelenting firmness, and others call for grace and understanding. Knowing the difference is critical.

Mums and dads need to work in tandem to balance one another out and to know when to compromise with each other. Kids need a healthy balance of both styles.

Sex Respect

Sexuality is a fundamental part of human life, and it impacts our children far earlier in life than we typically appreciate. Children are 'sexually active' in a much larger sense from the moment of birth. Think about that process. Even though they are not aware of it, their trip from womb to world is an intimate, sex-distinct experience. And it's not just *how* your child entered the world. The process itself was a very consequential experience of development. Anthropologist Ashley Montagu wrote a remarkably intriguing book some years ago on the power of human touch and how it changes us in profound ways. He explains how this happens in the birth process itself in the touching of the contracting birth canal of the mother upon the body of the child. Montagu writes:

Contractions of the uterus upon the body of the fetus stimulates the peripheral sensory nerves of the skin. The nervous impulses thus initiated are conducted to the central nervous system where, at the proper levels, they are mediated [distributed] through the nervous system to the various organs which they innervate [stimulate into full action].

Even though the child and mother are certainly not aware of this miraculous dynamic happening in the infant's body, it is indeed a sex-distinct experience. The baby's body is recognising and responding to very distinct action and influence of the very intimate part of woman's body. That experience is profound. Montagu adds:

The short, intermittent stimulation of the skin over a prolonged period of time that are produced by the contractions of the uterus upon the body of the fetus thus appear to be perfectly designed to prepare it for postnatal functioning.

It doesn't just stop there. As the child proceeds from the birth canal facedown, her face, nose, and lips are stimulated by their compressed movement across mum's contracting vagina. The child's mouth – being stimulated in this way – is connected as the primary passageway to both the gastrointestinal and respiratory systems. This movement actually stimulates and activates parts of the essential sucking response. Montagu concludes:

The uterine contractions of labor constitute the beginning of caressing of the baby in the right way – caressing that should be continued in very special ways in the period immediately following the birth and for a considerable time thereafter.²⁵

The birthing process is a study in intimacy. After emerging from the womb – and when has a person ever been so fully, completely, physically closer to another person – the newborn proceeds immediately to another most intimate interaction: suckling at the breast. This is not simply the delivery of nutrients to the child. There are so many other things going on between mother and child during this process. Nursing stimulates the contracting of mum's uterus and releases large amounts of the 'love hormone', oxytocin. It also helps develop the infant's respiratory system as it learns to draw forth mother's milk.

Mums and dads need to work in tandem to balance one another out and to know when to compromise with each other. Kids need a healthy balance of both styles.

The baby's body is recognising and responding to very distinct action and influence of the very intimate part of woman's body.

That intimacy with the female body is quite mysteriously wonderful.

These are certainly not sexual experiences in the typical sense, but there is undoubtedly a sexual component to them. The child, boy or girl, has had essential experiences thanks to the unique opportunity and functioning of a female body. Their own body and psyche respond to this sex-distinct experience in profound ways. It is their first lesson that mum's nature is different than dad's, and that intimacy with the female body is quite mysteriously wonderful. Dad's is quite boring by comparison.

Now, the fuller picture of being sexually active, the way we typically think of it in terms of male and female coupling, usually starts for our children around or after puberty. This is not to say children are literally sexually *active* during this stage. It only means they are learning about themselves as sexual creatures and noticing for the first time that they are interested in the opposite sex.

Sons and daughters are learning important lessons about the opposite sex from their mums. One of the most important and consequential decisions will be the choice of their spouse / partner. The right choice can lead to great happiness, while the wrong choice will result in profound heartbreak. Your sons and daughters will both learn from you how to be wise when the time comes for them to enter into relationships of their own.

A daughter is watching her mother's example closely, even if the mother is not fully aware of it. She is learning what a good woman is and does. She is witnessing how a woman sacrifices herself for the good of her family. She is watching you protect your dignity as a woman as you draw lines on how you're treated by other family members and as you discern when to give in for the good of all without compromising your principles. She is learning the power of a woman, her influence, and her touch upon the home and the wider community. She will learn about the power, influence, and modesty of a woman's body when the time comes for romantic relationships. Through your example she'll begin to understand how influential she can be and learn to establish her own dignity. Your example will inform how she adorns herself and what she expects from others in their treatment of her.

This will shape the kind of woman your daughter grows to be. It will determine the ways she will interact with both her male and female friends as she gets older. It will impact her confidence and expectations in making sure men treat her with the dignity that she deserves and that you have expected from others as she has grown.

Your son, too, is learning important lessons about being a good man, even if he's not aware of it.

First, he's learning about his 'otherness' from you. As a boy, he is not like his mother. In learning the distinction between male and female, he is discovering more about himself as a male and considering what this curious creature 'female' is. From you, he is learning that she is more tender. She has different interests. She dresses differently and has a different temperament, a different smell, and a whole different vibe. He begins to notice how his father treats you and observes your womanly reaction to his father's actions and manner. He notes that sometimes you respond very positively to him. Something he says or does makes you giggle, want to hug him, kiss him, and playfully tease him. The boy learns that these are things women seem to like.

Other things his father does might get a totally different reaction from you. This most influential woman in your son's life might cry, get angry, shut down, grow

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quiet, or perhaps yell. But with time, she gets over it. Your son is learning that such behaviours on his father's part are not the kind of thing he wants to do.

As you demand respect and consideration from his dad and other men, your son is learning what he should do - what he *must* do - to win and maintain a women's respect and affection. This is must-have information for any man. You are teaching him how to treat girls as he starts to date, and how to treat the person he marries when that time comes. This will be true even if the woman he marries doesn't expect to be treated with respect. He can help her learn what she deserves as a woman because his mother expected it from his father. What you demand, what you teach your daughters to expect, is what your son will learn that he should give to others.

By your example, you are raising and training a gentleman that women and others will one day appreciate profoundly. This will translate into sexual dignity, happiness, and safety for the woman to whom he becomes close. Just as you don't allow anyone to treat you as a sexual object, your son will learn that no other woman should be treated like that either.

As a mum, you have the power to influence and build strong, confident young women who know what they want and who won't settle for less. You have the power to influence assured, respectful, and self-sacrificing young men who know what it means to treat a woman and others well. No one else can do this like you can, and there will be a young man or woman in your child's future who will be forever grateful that you had the influence you did.

Does this sound too good to be true? It's all demonstrated in scientific investigations. One such study explains, *"important adult romantic outcomes are systematically related to relationship experiences that occur very early in life, well before individuals can form conscious memories."*²⁶

You have a great deal to do with this, mum! Well-mothered girls are significantly less likely to be used sexually or emotionally. And well-mothered boys are substantially less like to be those who do so. It's that simple.

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26 Jeffrey A. Simpson, *et al.*, "The Impact of Early Interpersonal Experiences on Adult Romantic Relationship Functioning: Recent Findings from the Minnesota Longitudinal Study of Risk and Adaptation." *Current Directions in Psychological Science*. 20, (2011): 355–359.

In Summary...

Girls who are close to their mothers tend to:

- **Have a healthier confidence in their femininity** because they have had it modelled for them by a confident woman in relation to their fathers and others in the community. They don't have as much to prove because they know who they are.
- **Be less likely to be petty and catty** based on this confident femininity. Their confidence and security allow them to be more gracious and giving to others - and especially other women - rather than seeing them as competitors.
- **Learn how to carry their physical femaleness** in more attractive and modest ways. These girls are more likely to develop a healthy balance between prudishness and immodesty, both of which are unhealthy extremes. They are comfortable being women and demonstrate their femininity in positive ways, which is precisely where their womanly power is found.

Boys who are close to their mothers tend to:

- **Be more secure and comfortable around girls**, knowing what kinds of behaviours and attitudes are most welcomed and desired by females and which are not. They don't feel like they have to work as hard to impress, because they're more interested in making a woman happy. Throughout their childhood, their mothers demonstrated which behaviours delight women and which ones don't. Their sons picked up on this through repetition and experience.
- **Be far less likely to be manipulative toward girls** because they were chastised for such behaviour by their mothers, as well as by good dads.
- **Be more sensitive in and attuned to healthy masculine ways** because they have learned what a woman wants from a man through their mothers and what a good man does through their fathers.

Conclusion

Mum, there is an enormous body of strong science that testifies to how important you are as a female parent to your boys and girls. There are countless ways in which this is true. We have only given you a sampling of some of the most important themes, but hopefully it provides you with an idea of just how important and consequential you are. This is true not only in the lives of your boys and girls, but in your surrounding community. Those well-rounded boys and girls are going out into the world to shape it in diverse and important ways. That is the real power of motherhood.

The *Growing Up in New Zealand* study recognised that: "Significant changes in individual measures of child behaviour occur between two and four years of age."²⁷ Consider this against the fact that no one is more influential in the life of a child over these early years than his or her mother. This means that the shaping of your child is established powerfully in these early years, and grows exponentially because of your early influence. It lays the foundation for and determines

They are comfortable being women and demonstrate their femininity in positive ways.

They have learned what a woman wants from a man through their mothers and what a good man does through their fathers.

The shaping of your child is established powerfully in these early years, and grows exponentially because of your early influence.

You have no replacement in your child's life. Any father who is working to raise his son or daughter on his own knows this.

27 Susan M.B. Morton, et al., "Growing Up in New Zealand: A Longitudinal Study of New Zealand Children and Their Families. Now We Are Four: Describing The Preschool Years." (Auckland, 2017), p. 30.

future growth and development as you continue to influence, over months and years, your child's transformation into a strong, confident, productive and compassionate man or woman.

You have no replacement in your child's life. Any father who is working to raise his son or daughter on his own knows this. The good news is that Kiwi mums, in particular, are doing very well at their task. They are extremely confident about how their children are growing, maturing, and readying themselves for the world. For instance, last year's *Growing Up in New Zealand* study found that:

- Nine out of ten Kiwi mums are confident their children will be ready socially to begin their formal schooling.
- Nearly all mums (94%) were confident that their child had the skills and confidence to successfully engage with other children to get along at primary school.
- Sixty-two percent of mothers felt confident that their child had developed the pre-reading and writing skills needed to start school.

And remarkably...

- Only one in five mothers expressed concern that their child would find being separated from mum while at school extremely difficult.²⁸

One medical news publication explained the powerful influence of a mum like this:

*A child learns how the world works through his mother. His mother is his wealth of information; he learns love, compassion, forgiveness, humanity, equality, kindness, respect, generosity and ethics from her. A mother is an amalgam of emotions. She is a complete package and indeed the best teacher a child could have.*²⁹

As we noted at the beginning of this report, nothing would happen in the world if mums didn't exist. Mums are the creators, shapers, and primary influencers of humanity. If they didn't show up to undertake this critical mission, it simply wouldn't and couldn't get done. It's not so much about *what* she does, but *who* she is.

Mothers make the world. And that's why they should be celebrated every day.

Nine out of ten Kiwi mums are confident their children will be ready socially to begin their formal schooling.

A child learns how the world works through his mother.

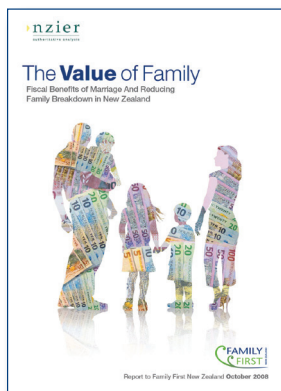
It's not so much about what she does, but who she is.



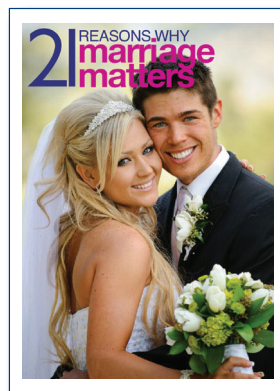
28 Susan M.B. Morton, et al., "Growing Up in New Zealand: A Longitudinal Study of New Zealand Children and Their Families. Now We Are Four: Describing The Preschool Years." (Auckland, 2017), p. 44, 47.

29 "A Mother's Role in a Child's Development," *Health Units*, May 7, 2016.

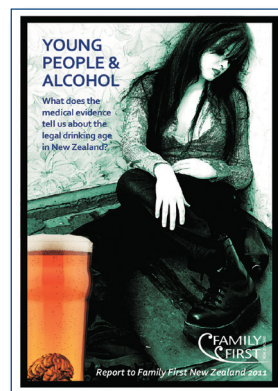
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Family Breakdown
2008



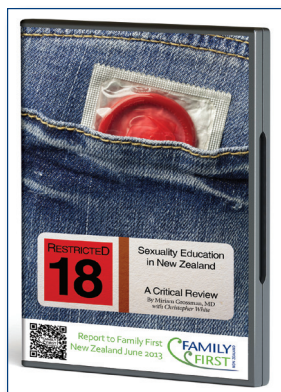
Marriage
2009



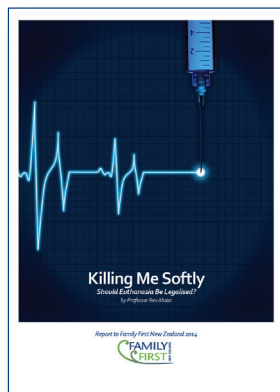
Drinking Age
2011



Daycare
2012



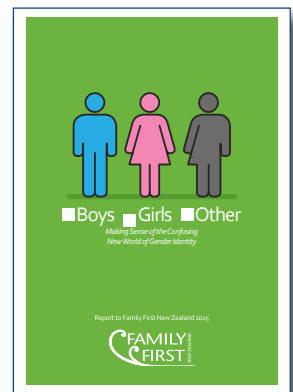
Sex Education
2013



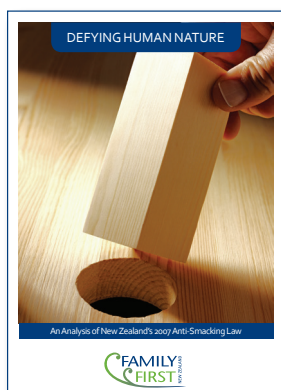
Euthanasia
2014



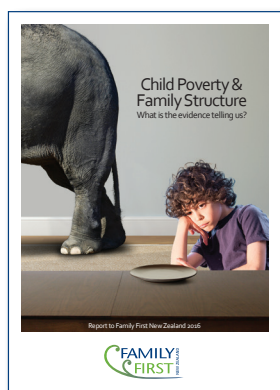
Screentime
2015



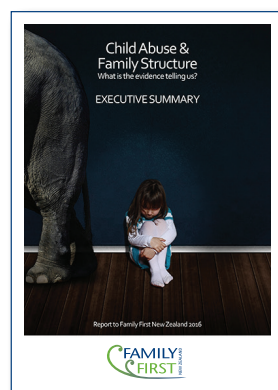
Gender Identity
2015



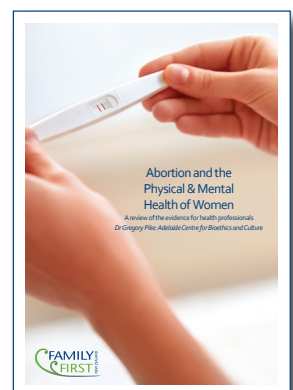
Anti-Smacking Law
2016



Child Poverty
2016



Child Abuse
2016



Abortion & Health
2018