**Being a mum is a not a full time job**

Being a mum is a not a full time job. It is a lifetime 24 hour a day commitment: a 'complete time" job, to coin a phrase. The original intent of our Dads' playgroup was to give mums a break at least once a month from this complete time job. It has developed into much more than that.

Often Dads and mums do not have enough time to play with their children. All the Dads in our playgroup are working full time. Being a breadwinner, however, is not enough.

A Dad and child share a special bond, one that is not necessarily natural but acquired and strengthened. A great way to do this, is to share time to play and grow together, even better of the experience is shared with other children and Dads.

It is no surprise to me that the most common word spoken by our daughter is "Mum". Although the word easier to say for a speaker who is still developing full control over their vocal muscles, it does reflect that mothers have a different bond to their children than fathers. Not better, just different. Women carry and nurture children in their bodies for 40 weeks. Men do not. Many men may seem to use this is a reason to be either apathetic about or absent from playing with their children.

For me the difference is the starting point for a new journey. It is a journey of understanding through play, for both fathers and children. The primary bond between mother and child is being challenged, as our world changes. More mums have to work, to keep their families afloat and economically functioning, or choose to work and many Dads are now choosing to stay at home and be full time carers. These freedoms need to be nurtured, but at their core is an embodied relationship that I have already mentioned is hard to break.

A child will tend to bond first with their mother, other mother or primary care-giver. This person represents the first social relationship that a child will have in their life. In sociological terms this type of relationship is called a dyad. Dads or secondary care-givers represent the second type of social relationship, where a third party enters the relationship. This is a called a triad in sociological terms. In simple terms mums represent the first significant other for a child, whereas a Dad represents the presence of other people in the world. This makes active participation in a child's development very important, as play with mums (or primary care-givers) and Dads (or other secondary care-givers) are a microcosm of the wider social world.

The Dads in the ACT Dads Playgroup are key players in the development of their children’s understanding of the social and wider worlds. Bonds between Dad and child, Dad and Dad, child and child have been developed and grown through the group. It has would be a positive movement, based on enhancing existing relationships that we would love to see grow and expand.

Starting Dads' group has been a rollercoaster of joy and despair. Joy in the playgroup has come from watching kids learn and grow together. Joy has come too from shared stories, frustrations and experiences of fathering. An unexpected joy has been the ability to talk openly and frankly with others Dads about the challenging transition from husband to Dad. This has been true for both our images of our own selves but also our relationships with our partners. Despair has come from the apathy of some Dads that I have encountered, who seem to think that playgroups can only be useful for mums. This is a myth that I counter at any opportunity.

We are also lucky enough to have recently been joined by two regular elder attendees: two grandfathers. They have brought a fresh and experienced element to the group.

The ACT Dads' Playgroup meets once a month, at lunch time (11am to 3pm) on the first Saturday of every month. Most meetings include meeting and greeting each other, songs and activities (one in English and others in other languages), a pot luck lunch for children and Dads and unstructured play. We have held a number of special events, including a joint birthday party, excursions and regular Christmas party with Santa, story time and presents.

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