niu dad

# What kind of father do YOU want to be?

What fathers (and fathers-to-be) need to know

**A responsible and committed father. That's what most fathers (and fathers-to-be) want to be today. But what does it mean? And how do you manage it?**

This brochure sets out a brief presentation of 40 years of work with fathers and fathers-to-be. The key observation is that today's fathers face conflicting demands: the model of a successful breadwinner is still very much present. But at the same time, fathers and fathers-to-be want or need to be more present on a daily basis and more emotionally involved in the family.

Yes, you're not the only one feeling this pressure! For most fathers, reconciling work, family and personal space is a very difficult balancing act. No one can do it perfectly. The real question is: what is "good enough" for me and my family?

# Why your child needs you

You want what's best for your child. It's a desire all fathers share. But not everyone sees it in the same way.

**TIP**

Ask yourself how your child will remember you later on.

The image you give of yourself as a father has to reflect who you are. With all your good points and bad points: a man and a person with many talents – but also with limitations. Being a superhero doesn't help you be a good father. Being present and being authentic do, though.

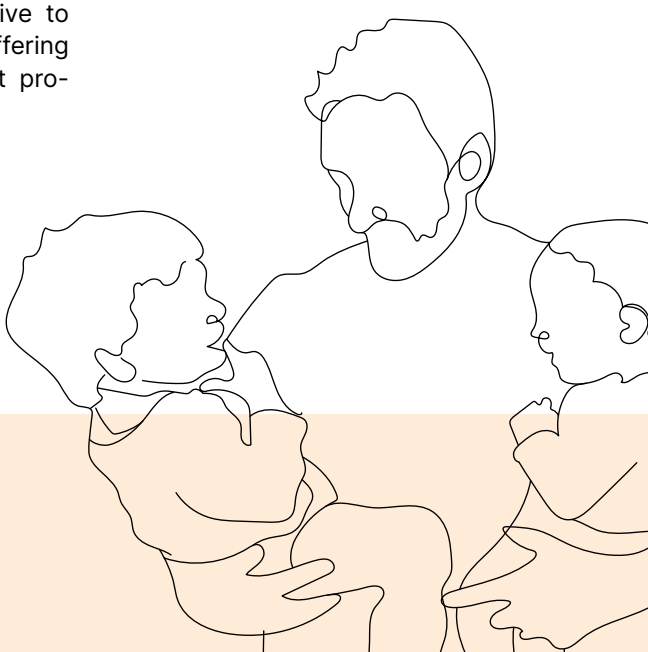
Being present as a father means investing time in caring for your child and forming a relationship. It also means being emotionally open, receptive to their needs and feelings and offering access to your internal thought processes.

Your involvement will make all the difference. With this bond, you are helping support your baby as they go through the natural process of becoming independent of their mother.

Your role is not just to do some of the chores, but also to share some of the mental load the mother carries in the household (planning, organising and controlling particular activities without her help). Sharing the burden is very important for the balance and mental health of the whole family.

**MINIMAL GOAL**

To learn the skills you need to look after your child on your own 24 hours a day if you need to.



# Support yourself

Being a parent means "learning by doing". The sooner you get down to it, the sooner you will gain confidence and become competent!

As we are experiencing major societal changes around the family, many fathers lack role models they can identify with. The division of labour between fathers and mothers was much more pronounced in our parents' generation. Interacting with other men in similar life situations helps to fill this gap.

**TIP**

Talk to your own father about what he would do differently today. Maybe you'll even find a chance to tell him what you missed as a child?

Fatherhood is a great emotional challenge for men because boys have been taught not to express their feelings, so as not to appear weak. Becoming a father gives you a chance to make up for this situation.

You have the opportunity to develop soft skills that you weren't able to discover when you were younger. You may experience different emotions (happiness, pride, accomplishment, helplessness, fear, sadness, anger, despair) that are completely normal. The more you try to understand what these emotions mean to you, the more you will learn about your needs and the better you will get to know yourself. By accepting what is happening in you without being judgemental, you strengthen yourself as a human being and as a father. Your child will also benefit.

**TIP**

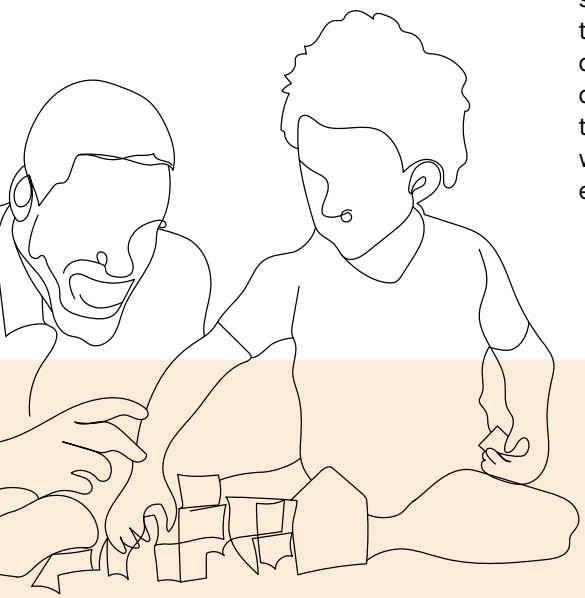
Listen to yourself. Nearly one father in ten experiences postpartum depression, which can take the form of exhaustion, irritability, mood swings, aggression, risky behaviour, withdrawal, anxiety and suicidal thoughts. If you are not sure, talk to your family doctor and tell them you may be suffering from postpartum depression. They will be able to provide you with the appropriate support to get over it faster.

# Setting boundaries

To be a father you have to be mature. You have to accept that you are no longer the number one for your partner, learn to put your own needs to one side, put your life at the service of a love that is bigger than you. It's a real challenge. You're not the only one who has to deal with it. Many fathers experience feelings of anxiety in the cosy nest of their small family. That's perfectly normal.

**TIP**

Have the courage to break away from representations (your own and other people's) of the "perfect family". Follow through to this liberating conclusion: it's perfectly normal to hit your limits. Asking for support is not a sign that you're not capable. Quite the opposite, it's an expression of your ability to cope and take responsibility!



As a father, you must have the ability to set boundaries. To do this, it is useful to show some love to yourself. That way you can suppress your own needs without brewing up anger against your child. You also need to develop your ability to set boundaries for your child in a caring way. A lack of moderation is the privilege of children who are not yet able to set limits for all their behaviour on their own. Setting a framework is an integral part of growing up. Many fathers lose contact with their children, especially when they are stressed. Others simply give up or become authoritarian. Neither attitude is ideal. As a father, you need a certain strength within you (ego) so you don't depend on your child's approval. You can be confident: your child loves you, even if and precisely because you set limits and support them in their development.

As a father, you also have to demonstrate the value of your point of view to the other parent. Allow yourself to develop your own style of fathering by doing chores properly and in the way that best suits you. That way, your child will learn right from the start how different each person is.

# Trust the process

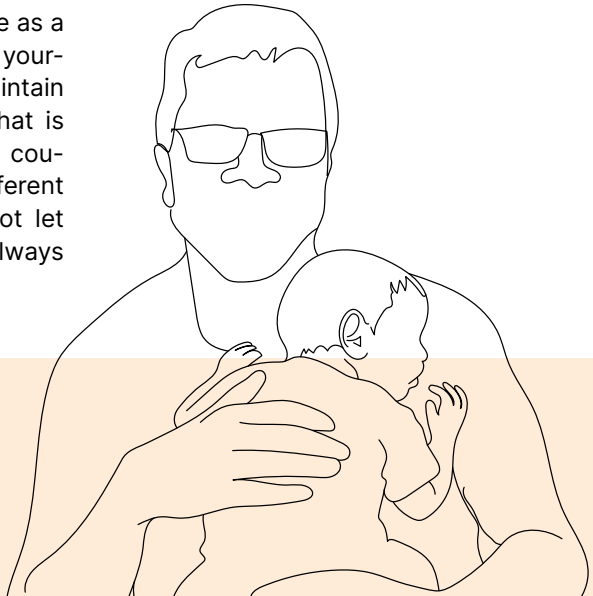
In the beginning, most couples operate in survival mode: basic needs, food and sleep take priority. Lack of sleep can be difficult to manage. Be careful that nervous exhaustion does not affect the baby by sudden gestures (shaken baby syndrome), which may endanger the child's life.

The rest of your energy is spent on work and chores. But this is not going to last forever! To the relief of many fathers (and mothers), this uninterrupted activity 24/7 only lasts during early childhood and fades after a few years. It also means that being a father is something that comes in phases. Your child needs you in very different ways depending on their age. You can and will discover with them what they need at every stage of their life. Open-mindedness and a willingness to constantly learn new things help you retain your bond.

Parenthood also changes your life as a couple. You have to rediscover yourselves as a loving couple and maintain a shared sex life in a context that is different and less favourable. A couple's sexuality will always be different from how it was before: why not let your imagination do the work? Always consciously take time to spend with your partner, so you stay the loving couple you originally were. External coaching may be useful where appropriate. It's worth it.

**TIP**

Always ask yourself what's really important right now. Most fathers say family is the most important thing in their lives. In practice, however, they often give priority to other duties, especially professional ones. You need to get around this reflex. Always allow yourself to shift the priorities in your life as time and context evolve. Being a father changes what's important to you. Give yourself the opportunity to mature as a man and as a human being.



# Take care of yourself

There are lots of different aspects of being a father. Your responsibility is to find the path that suits you and your family. In fact, there's only one mistake you can make: letting yourself be dragged along passively by your environment. Because then you'll very likely end up where most people really don't want to be: in the same position as their own parents.

Accept the challenge and get active. Network with other fathers – at the playground, at the street party, at the shopping centre. Look for information – in books, podcasts and magazines. Join a community – for example, the WhatsApp group "Papas et futurs papas de 🇨🇭 romande".

What we can offer you:

- **a national platform specifically dedicated to fathers and fathers-to-be**
  visit www.niudad.ch

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- **a free consultation on all matters relating to fathers**
  book an appointment at www.maenner.ch/erstberatung

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- **a constantly updated advice map**
  look for the nearest offering at www.maenner.ch/landkarte

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We wish you all the best in your next-level adventure as a father!

**The Niudad Team**

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