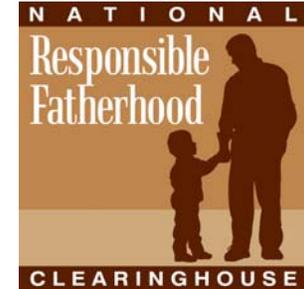




U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Administration for Children  
and Families  
Office of Family Assistance

[www.fatherhood.gov](http://www.fatherhood.gov)

# Responsible Fatherhood Spotlight



## Nonresident Fathers of Young Children

Not living in the same household as one's young child makes it difficult for a father to maintain contact with and involvement in the child's life. Further, research shows a link between fathers' lack of social and financial involvement in their children's lives and negative child outcomes, such as problem behaviors and low academic achievement.

### Definitions

A *nonresident father* is a father who does not live in the same household as his child.<sup>i</sup>

### Importance and Implications of Nonresident Fatherhood

Research findings on the importance of nonresident fathers to child well-being are mixed. Some studies have found that nonresident fathers' contact with their child is positively associated with the child's well-being. However, other studies have shown negative and no association between these two factors. When it comes to financial support from a nonresident father, though, the evidence is unambiguous: that support consistently has been shown to have a positive association with children's standard of living, health, and educational attainment.<sup>ii,iii,iv</sup>

### Implications for Fathers' Involvement With Children

- Contact with one's child has been shown to be necessary for a close relationship, but does not guarantee one.<sup>v</sup> However, a close relationship (warm and supportive involvement)—along with authoritative parenting—has often been found to be associated with an increase in children's academic achievement, a decrease in internalizing and externalizing problem-behaviors,<sup>vi</sup> and better social and emotional adjustment.<sup>vii</sup>
- Participation of nonresident fathers in activities with their children—combined with financial support—has been shown to be associated with high school completion for children.<sup>viii</sup>

- Greater nonresident father involvement has also been found to predict decreases in adolescent delinquency over time.<sup>ix</sup>
- Nonresident father involvement and behavior have been shown to have an association with adolescents' smoking behavior. Generally, this involvement has been found to decrease the likelihood that an adolescent will smoke. However, having a nonresident father who smokes increases the likelihood that an adolescent will take up the habit.<sup>x</sup>
- Nonresident fathers with higher levels of contact are more likely to have closer and more intense relationships with their child. However, these close relationships can be positive or they can lead to conflict.<sup>xi</sup>
- Nonresident father-mother conflict over parenting and financial matters is associated with a decrease in father involvement with the child and increased adjustment problems in the child.<sup>xii, xiii</sup>
- While conflict between parents can exist when a nonresident father is involved with his child, the positive effect of involvement on child well-being outweighs the negative effect of the parental conflict.<sup>xiv</sup>

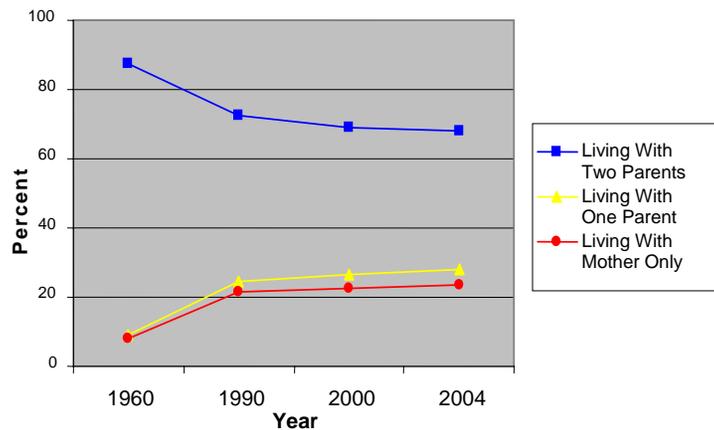
*Implications for Fathers' Partners*

- Greater contact between a nonresident father and his child is associated with higher quality parenting from the resident mother.<sup>xv</sup>
- Mothers' satisfaction with the nonresident father's contact with the child can remain high even when there is conflict over visitation. Increased contact may lead to more conflict, but increased contact also is associated with greater satisfaction.<sup>xvi</sup>
- Among unemployed mothers, a positive relationship with the nonresident father has been found to be associated with decreased depressive symptoms.<sup>xvii</sup> However, higher depressive symptoms among mothers have been found to be associated with a nonresident fathers' absence in their child's life.<sup>xviii</sup>

**Trends in Nonresident Fatherhood Over Time**

**Table 1** and **Figure 1** show that the proportion of children living with two parents has decreased since the 1960s. At the same time, the proportion of children living with one parent has increased, and the majority of those children are living with their mother only.

**Figure 1. Percentage of Children Under 18 Years of Age by Living Arrangement, Selected Years, 1960-2004**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau. "Living Arrangements of Children Under 18 Years Old: 1960 to Present." Table CH-1. Internet Release Date: September, 21 2006.

**Table 1. Percentage of Children Under 18 Years of Age by Living Arrangement, Selected Years, 1960-2004**

Living Arrangement	1960	1990	2000	2004
Living With Two Parents	87.7	72.5	69.1	67.8
Living With One Parent	9.1	24.7	26.7	28
Living with Mother Only	8	21.6	22.4	23.3

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. Current Population reports, P20-537. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, 2001

**Differences in Nonresident Fathers of Infants by Subgroup**

This section draws on Child Trends' analyses of data collected as part of the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study. Note that the study is not based on a representative sample of the entire U.S. population, but on survey responses of parents in cities with populations over 200,000.

*Differences by Sex*

**Table 2** shows that higher proportions of males are nonresident parents of infants than are females.

**Table 2. Gender of Nonresident and Resident Parents of Infants**

Gender of Parent	Nonresident Parent	Resident Parent
Male	14.8	85.3
Female	0.3	99.7

Source: The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, 12-month Follow-Up (Child Trends' analyses, 2007)

*Differences by Age*

**Table 3** shows that the majority of nonresident fathers of infants are 24 years of age or younger, whereas about 77 percent of resident fathers are 25 years of age and older.

**Table 3. Percentage Nonresident and Resident Fathers of Infants by Age**

Age	Nonresident Fathers	Resident Fathers
<20	16.5	4.1
20-24	37.6	19
25-29	23	24.6
30-34	10.4	25.9
35+	12.5	26.4

Source: The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, 12-month Follow-Up (Child Trends' analyses, 2007)

*Differences by Education Level*

**Table 4** shows that, compared with resident fathers, larger proportions of nonresident fathers have less than a high school education.

**Table 4. Percentage of Nonresident and Resident Fathers of Infants by Education Level**

Education Level	Nonresident Fathers	Resident Fathers
Less than HS	37.3	24.2
HS Graduate	37.9	33.5
Some College +	24.8	42.3

Source: The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, 12-month Follow-Up (Child Trends' analyses, 2007)

*Differences by Race/Ethnicity*

**Table 5** shows that the majority of nonresident fathers of infants are non-Hispanic blacks. Non-Hispanic whites comprise the majority of resident fathers.

**Table 5. Percentage of Nonresident and Resident Fathers of Infants by Race/Ethnicity**

Race/Ethnicity	Nonresident Fathers	Resident Fathers
Non-Hispanic White	18.6	39.3
Non-Hispanic Black	50.9	21.5
Hispanic	23.6	32.8
Other	7	6.5

Source: The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, 12-month Follow-Up (Child Trends' analyses, 2007)

*Differences by Marital Status*

**Table 6** shows that among unmarried, noncohabiting fathers, the majority of nonresident and resident fathers of infants have no romantic relationship with the mother of their child.

**Table 6. Percentage of Nonresident and Resident Fathers of Infants by Relationship Status**

Marital Status	Nonresident Fathers	Resident Fathers
Romantic involvement, not cohabiting	20.2	21.4
Divorced/ Separated	10.8	6.5
No relationship	69	72.2

Source: The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, 12-month Follow-Up (Child Trends' analyses, 2007)

*Differences by Employment Status*

**Table 7** shows that the majority of nonresident and resident fathers of infants are employed. However, a larger percentage of nonresident fathers of infants are unemployed than are resident fathers of infants.

**Table 7. Percentage of Nonresident and Resident Fathers of Infants by Employment Status**

Employment Status	Nonresident Fathers	Resident Fathers
Employed	69.7	88.8
Not Employed	30.3	11.2

Source: The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, 12-month Follow-Up (Child Trends' analyses, 2007)

#### *Differences by Income Level*

**Table 8** shows that among nonresident fathers, the largest percentage earn less than \$20,000, whereas among resident fathers, the smallest proportion earns this amount.

**Table 8. Percentage of Nonresident and Resident Fathers of Infants by Income Level, 2005**

Family Income	Nonresident Fathers	Resident Fathers
Less than \$20,000	44.3	17.8
\$20,000-49,999	31.5	41
\$50,000-74,999	16.7	20.1
\$75,000+	7.5	21.2

Source: The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, 12-month Follow-Up (Child Trends' analyses, 2007)

#### **Definitions and Measurement**

Fathers and mothers were classified as nonresident parents in the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study if they reported that their child lives with them half of the time or less. Respondents were classified as employed if they reported doing regular work for pay in the past week, or, if on vacation, the week before vacation.

#### **Data Sources**

Tables and charts documenting nonresident parenthood among men and women were gathered from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, 12-month follow-up (Fragile Families). Fragile Families is a nationally representative longitudinal survey of births in cities with populations over 200,000. The survey has a sample of 5,000 families. Interviews with fathers and mothers were conducted

separately at the child's birth and also when the child was one, three, or five years old. Sixty-eight percent of the fathers who participated at baseline also participated in the three-year follow-up survey.<sup>xix</sup> The sample of fathers is representative of urban men in cities with a population over 200,000.

#### **Data Limitations**

Because some parents were not living with each other at the time of the follow-up survey, fathers and mothers were interviewed up to 14 months apart in some cases. Therefore, relationship status and income may be different between parents.<sup>xx</sup> Another limitation to the Fragile Families data is that fathers' reports of their own behavior may be different, when compared with mothers' reports of fathers' behavior.

#### **Resources**

- The **National Fatherhood Initiative** provides research and outreach to help children through increasing father commitment: <http://www.fatherhood.org>
- The **United States Department of Health and Human Services** provides programs and research about fatherhood development and the importance of fathers for children: <http://fatherhood.hhs.gov/>
- The **National Center on Fathers and Families** provides research on father involvement and child well-being aimed at improving children's lives through the positive participation of their fathers: <http://www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu/>
- **The National Center for Fathering** conducts research and provides resources to increase involvement of fathers in the lives of children: <http://www.fathers.com>

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