



Data Snapshot 2018: Father Involvement

Fathers—and father-like figures—play an important role in the lives of children. The time fathers spend engaged in activities with their children and the financial supports they help provide are linked to the health and wellbeing of children at all ages.ⁱ This is true whether a father lives with his child or not. Notably, fathers today are spending more time than in the past with their children.ⁱⁱ

Data on multiple domains of father involvement are shown for resident and non-resident fathers (see Data Box, page 15), including:

- Taking the child on outings, errands, and to and from activities and appointments.
- Eating dinner with the child and either reading and playing with the child (ages 0-4) or being aware of the activities and friends of the child (aged 5-18).
- Engaging in physical affection, praise, or discipline.
- Being engaged in age-appropriate caregiving activities.

Because the type of engagement with a child varies by age, we report separately on involvement with children ages 0 to 4 years and involvement with children ages 5 to 18 years. For non-resident fathers, we provide additional information on time spent with their child, their level of satisfaction with that time, and the extent to which they contribute financially to their child (including through formal child support payments).

Highlights

- Resident fathers are very engaged in the lives of their children. For example, during the month prior to the survey:
 - Most resident fathers reported spending quality time with their children at least several times per week—eating and playing with them (aged 0-4) and helping them with homework (aged 5-18).
 - Most resident fathers of children under age 5 engaged in important caregiving activities—such as feeding and putting them to bed. However, one-quarter of fathers with a young child reported never reading to their child.
 - Importantly, most resident fathers showed affection to their children every day.
- Many non-resident fathers are also positively engaged in the lives of their children. For example:
 - The majority of non-resident fathers with young children (aged 0-4), and a large minority (40 percent) with older children (aged 5-18), showed physical affection to their child several times a week or more.
 - A large minority of non-resident fathers reported eating dinner with their child several times a week or more.
- However, roughly one-third of non-resident fathers reported not reading to, eating dinner with, or putting their young child (aged 0-4) to bed at all in the previous four weeks. Additionally:
 - One-fifth reported not eating dinner with their older child (aged 5-18) and not knowing about their friends or activities.
 - More than half reported that they saw or spent the night with their child less than once a week, regardless of age.
 - About six in ten reported being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with how often they saw their child.
- Most non-resident fathers—84 percent—contributed some amount of child support to their child in the past year on a regular basis, although the amounts varied widely.

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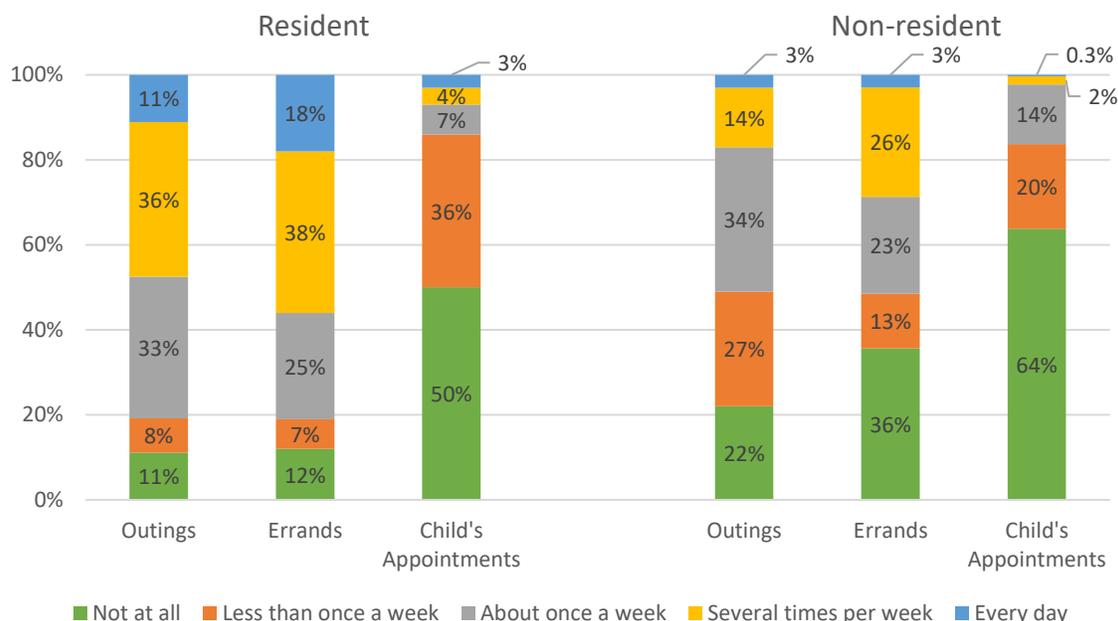
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Fathers of children aged 0-4

Outings, errands, and travel to appointments

Figure 1 provides detail on how often resident and non-resident¹ fathers reported taking their young child on outings (e.g., museums, zoos, movies, or playground), errands (e.g., going to the grocery store, post office, or bank), and to the doctor or other appointments in the past four weeks. Responses range from never doing the activity with the child to doing it every day.

Figure 1. Father reports of taking children aged 0-4 on outings, errands, and to appointments in past four weeks, by resident status, 2014



Source: Child Trends analyses of the 2013-2015 National Survey of Family Growth. Includes resident (n=790) and non-resident (n=103) fathers whose youngest/only child was aged 0-4. Notes: Data are weighted. Due to rounding, some columns do not add up to 100 percent.

Resident fathers

- During the previous four weeks, most resident fathers (about 80 percent) reported taking their child on **outings** or **errands** at least once a week. Roughly one in ten (11% and 12%) never took the child on **outings** or **errands**.
- Half of resident fathers reported they had not taken their child to the doctor or other kind of **appointment** in the past four weeks.

Non-resident fathers

- During the previous four weeks, more than half of non-resident fathers reported taking their child on **outings** or **errands** at least once a week. Twenty-two percent reported not taking their child on any **outings** and 36 percent reported not taking them on any **errands**.

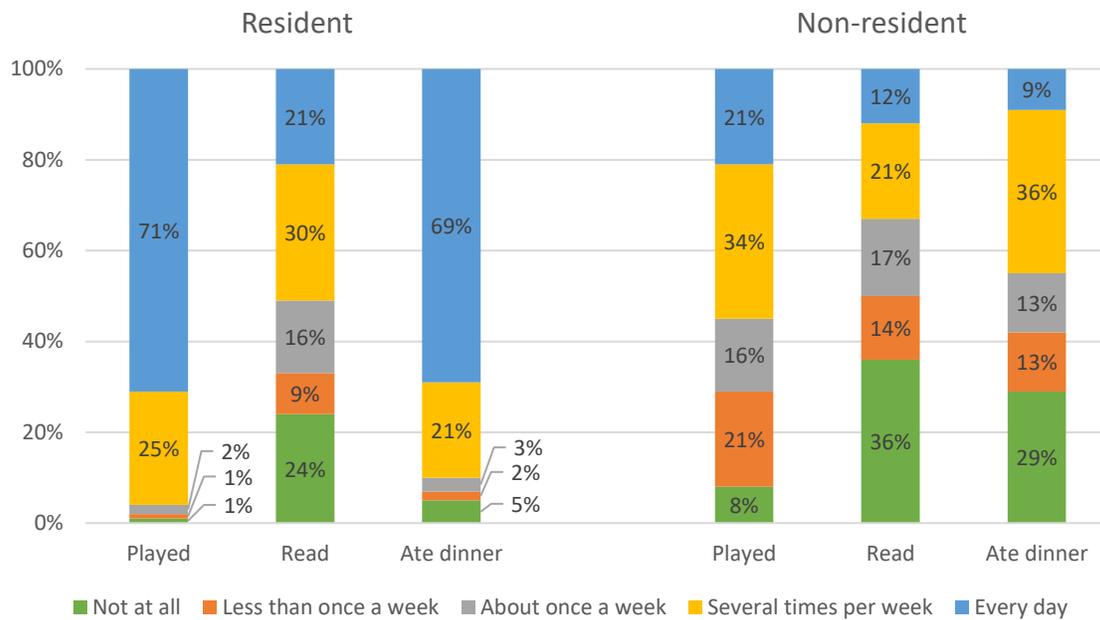
¹ Non-resident fathers who reported they had not seen their child in the last 4 weeks were not asked about their involvement with their child, and therefore are not included in Figures 1-8.

- Nearly two-thirds of non-resident fathers (64 percent) reported they had not taken their child to the doctor or other kind of **appointment** in the past four weeks.

Playing, reading, and eating dinner

Figure 2 shows how often resident and non-resident fathers reported playing with, reading to, and eating dinner with their young child in the past four weeks. Responses range from never doing the activity with the child to doing it every day.

Figure 2. Father reports of playing, reading, and eating dinner with child aged 0-4 in past four weeks, by resident status, 2014



Source: Child Trends analyses of the 2013-2015 National Survey of Family Growth. Includes resident (n=791) and non-resident (n=102) fathers whose youngest/only child was aged 0-4. Notes: Data are weighted. Due to rounding, some columns do not add up to 100 percent.

Resident fathers

- The vast majority of resident fathers (90 percent or more) reported **playing** with and **eating dinner** with their child every day or several times a week.
- Although 51 percent of resident fathers reported **reading** with their child either every day or several times a week, 24 percent had **not read** to their child at all in the previous four weeks.

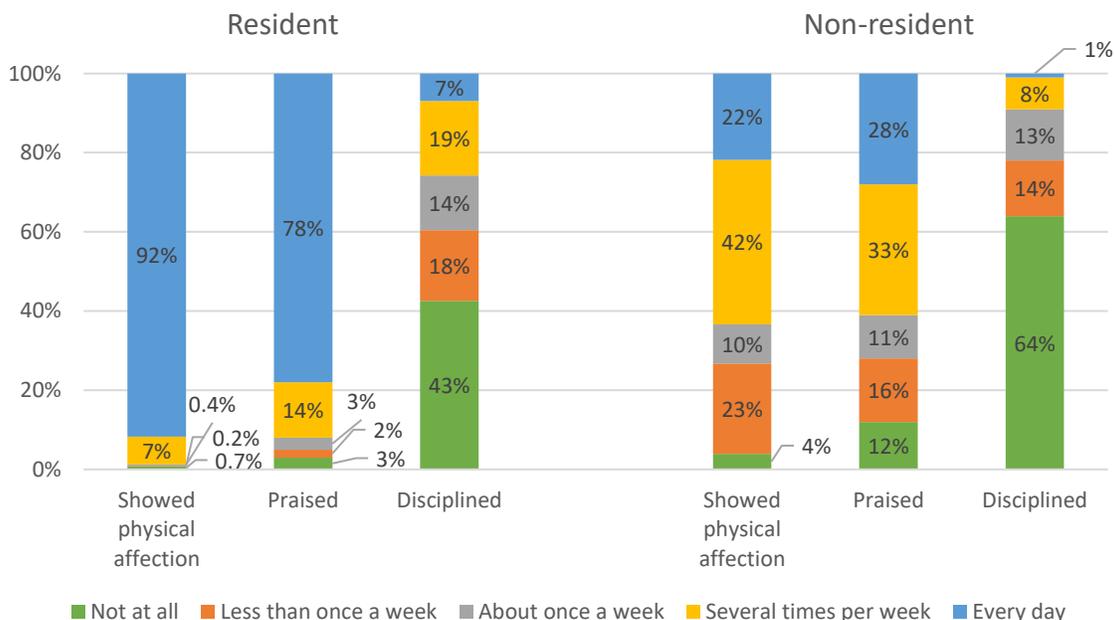
Non-resident fathers

- Many non-resident fathers (over 40 percent) reported **playing** with or **eating dinner** with their child several times a week or more, even though they do not live with them.
 - However, roughly four in 10 fathers **ate dinner** with their child less than once a week or not at all, while three in ten **played with** their child less than once a week or not at all.
- Although 33 percent reported **reading** with their child either every day or several times a week, 36 percent had **not read** to their child at all in the previous four weeks.

Physical affection, praise, and discipline

Figure 3 shows how often resident and non-resident fathers reported showing physical affection to, praising, and disciplining their young child in the past four weeks. Responses range from never doing the activity with the child to doing it every day.

Figure 3. Father reports of physical affection, praise, and discipline of child aged 0-4 in past four weeks, by resident status, 2014



Source: Child Trends analyses of the 2013-2015 National Survey of Family Growth. Includes resident (n=792) and non-resident (n=103) fathers whose youngest/only child was aged 0-4. Notes: Data are weighted. Due to rounding, some columns may not add to 100 percent.

Resident fathers

- Resident fathers reported being very affectionate with their child.
 - Nine in ten reported **showing physical affection** every day, while more than three-quarters reported **praising their child** every day.
- Twenty-six percent of resident fathers reported **disciplining** their child more than once a week, while 43 percent had **not disciplined** their child at all in the previous four weeks.

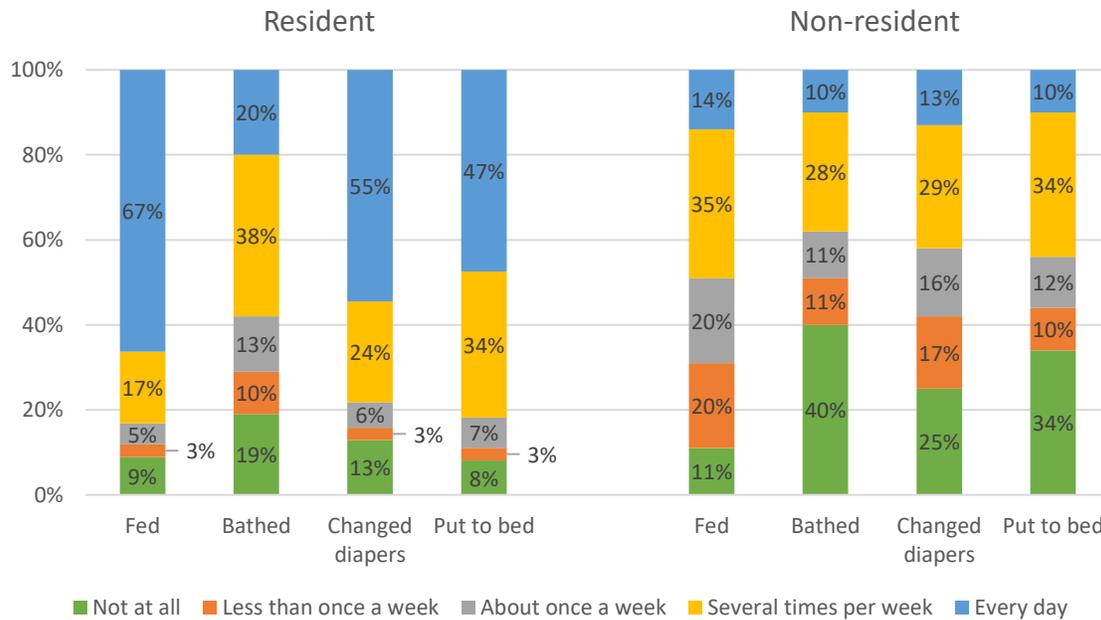
Non-resident fathers

- Most non-resident fathers (more than 60 percent) **showed physical affection** to or **praised** their child frequently (several times a week or more) even though they did not live with them.
- Nine percent of non-resident fathers reported disciplining their child more than once a week, while 64 percent had **not disciplined** their child at all in the previous four weeks.

Feeding, bathing, changing, and putting to bed

Figure 4 shows how often resident and non-resident fathers of a young child reported feeding their child, bathing their child, changing their child’s diapers or helping their child use the toilet, and putting their child to bed in the past four weeks. Responses range from never doing the activity with the child to doing it every day.

Figure 4. Father reports of feeding, bathing, changing, and putting child aged 0-4 to bed in past four weeks, by resident status, 2014



Source: Child Trends analyses of the 2013-2015 National Survey of Family Growth. Includes resident (n=792) and non-resident (n=103) fathers whose youngest/only child was aged 0-4. Notes: “Changed diapers” includes helping child on the toilet. Data are weighted. Due to rounding, some columns may not add to 100 percent.

Resident fathers

- More than three-quarters of resident fathers reported being very engaged in some of the caretaking activities for their young children during the previous four weeks.
 - Eighty-four percent indicated they had **fed their child** every day or several times a week; 79 percent had changed their **child’s diapers or helped them with the toilet** every day or several times a week; and 81 percent reported **putting their child to bed** every day or several times a week.
- Fifty-eight percent of resident fathers reported **bathing** their child more than once a week, although 19 percent had not done so at all in the previous four weeks.

Non-resident fathers

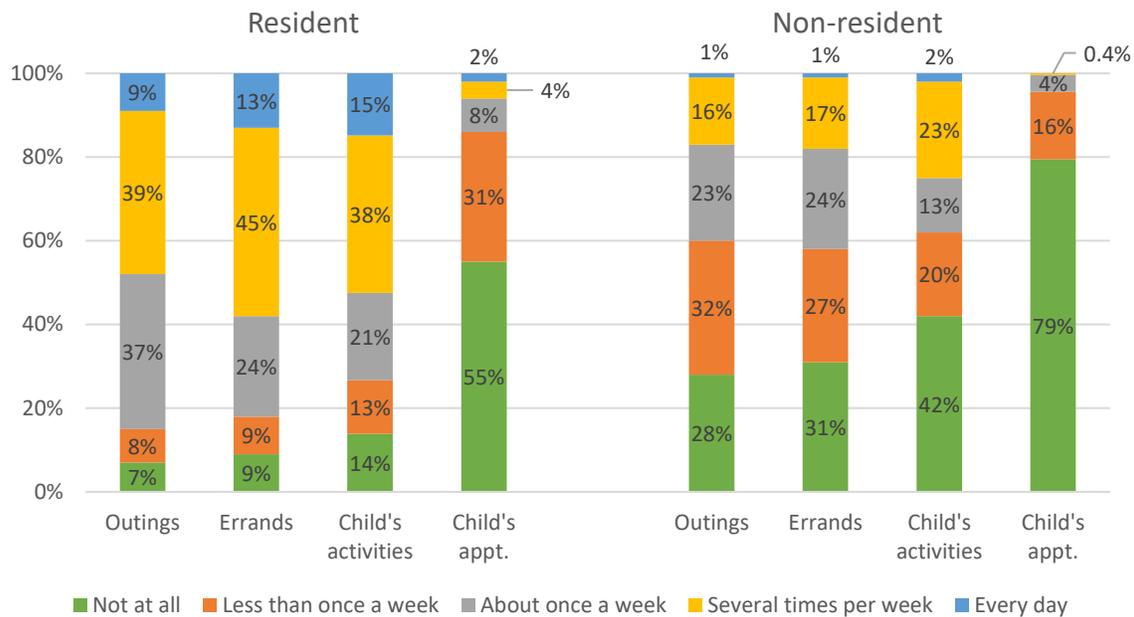
- Many non-resident fathers also reported being very engaged in some of the caretaking activities for their young children.
 - In the last four weeks, 49 percent indicated they had **fed their child** every day or several times a week; 42 percent had changed their **child’s diapers or helped them with the toilet** every day or several times a week; and 44 percent reported **putting their child to bed** every day or several times a week.
- Thirty-eight percent of non-resident fathers reported bathing their child more than once a week, although 40 percent had not done so at all in the previous four weeks.

Fathers of children aged 5-18

Outings, errands, and travel to activities and appointments

Figure 5 shows how often resident and non-resident fathers reported taking their school-aged child on outings (e.g., to museums, zoos, movies, or the playground), errands (e.g., going to the grocery store, post office, or bank), and to activities and appointments in the past four weeks. Responses range from never doing the activity with the child to doing it every day.

Figure 5. Father reports of taking child aged 5-18 on outings, errands, and to activities and appointments in past four weeks, by resident status, 2014



Source: Child Trends analyses of the 2013-2015 National Survey of Family Growth. Includes resident (n=550) and non-resident (n=190) fathers whose youngest/only child was aged 5-18. Notes: Data are weighted. Due to rounding, some columns may not add to 100 percent.

Resident fathers

- Most resident fathers (74 percent or more) reported taking their school-aged child on **outings, errands, or to activities** at least once a week during the previous four weeks. Forty-eight percent or more had done so several times a week.
- Fifty-five percent of resident fathers had not taken their child to any **appointments** in the past four weeks, and another 31 percent had done so less than once a week.

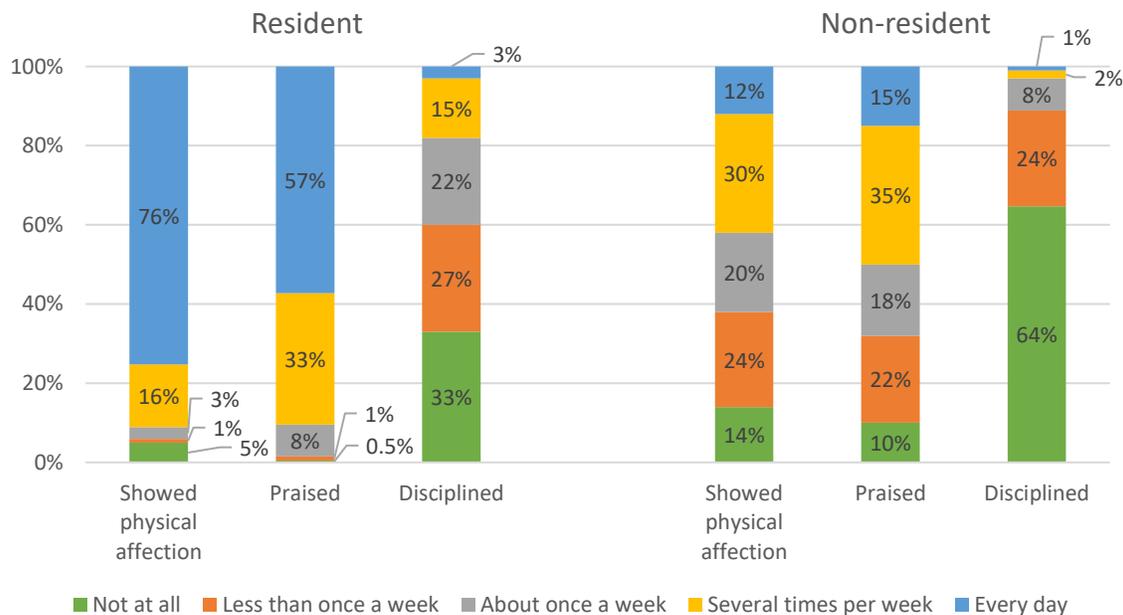
Non-resident fathers

- Approximately 40 percent of non-resident fathers reported taking their school-aged child on **outings, errands, or to activities** at least once a week during the previous four weeks. Seventeen percent or more had done so several times a week.
- Almost 80 percent of non-resident fathers had not taken their child to any **appointments** in the past four weeks, and another 16 percent had done so less than once a week.

Physical affection, praise, and discipline

Figure 6 shows how often resident and non-resident fathers reported showing affection to, praising, or disciplining their school-aged child in the past four weeks. Responses range from never doing the activity with the child to doing it every day.

Figure 6. Father reports of physical affection, praise, and discipline of child aged 5-18 in past four weeks, by resident status, 2014



Source: Child Trends analyses of the 2013-2015 National Survey of Family Growth. Includes resident (n=550) and non-resident (n=190) fathers whose youngest/only child was aged 5-18. Notes: Data are weighted. Due to rounding, some columns may not add to 100 percent.

Resident fathers

- Resident fathers reported very high levels of positive engagement with their school-aged child.
 - Ninety percent or more reported showing **physical affection** to their child or **praising** their child either every day or several times per week. Most reported doing so every day.
- Eighteen percent of resident fathers reported **disciplining** their school-aged child more than once a week, while 33 percent had not disciplined their child at all in the previous four weeks.

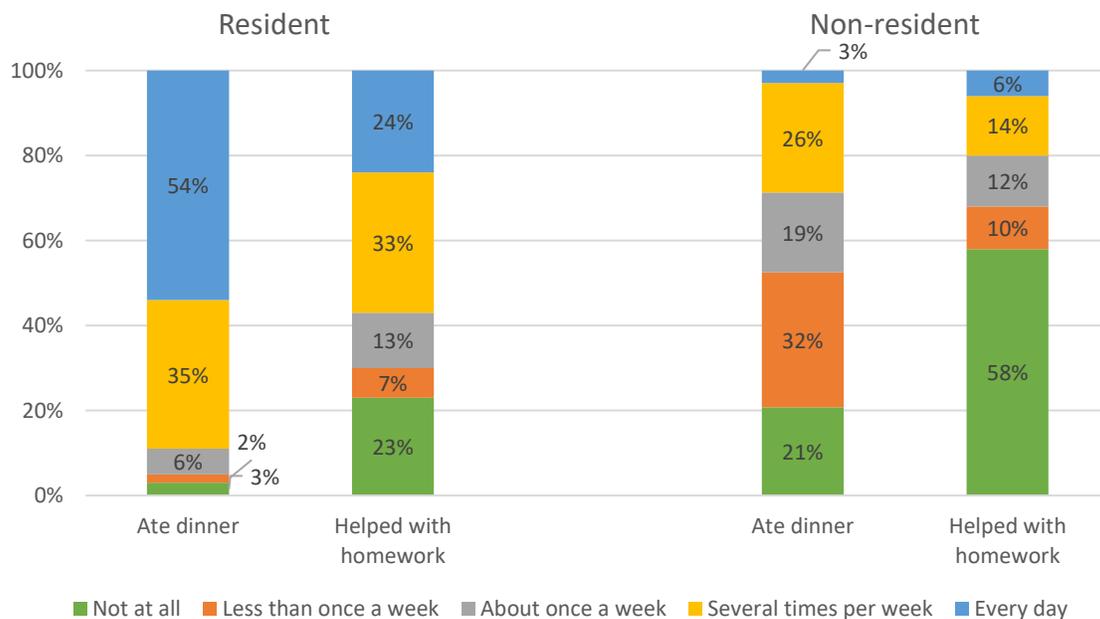
Non-resident fathers

- Many non-resident fathers also reported showing **physical affection** to their school-aged child or **praising** them quite frequently during the previous four weeks.
 - Half reported **praising** their child every day or several times a week, while over 40 percent reported showing **physical affection** to their child that often.
 - However, a substantial minority reported they had shown little or **no physical affection** to the child (38%) and given **little or no praise** to the child (32%).
- Only 3 percent of non-resident fathers reported **disciplining** their school-aged child more than once a week, while 64 percent had not disciplined their child at all in the previous four weeks.

Dinner and homework

Figure 7 shows how often resident and non-resident fathers reported eating dinner with their school-aged child or helping their child with homework in the past four weeks. Responses range from never doing the activity with the child to doing it every day.

Figure 7. Father reports of eating dinner with child aged 5-18 and helping them with homework in past four weeks, by resident status, 2014



Source: Child Trends analyses of the 2013-2015 National Survey of Family Growth. Includes resident (n=550) and non-resident (n=190) fathers whose youngest/only child was aged 5-18. Notes: Data are weighted. Due to rounding, some columns may not add to 100 percent.

Resident fathers

- Almost 90 percent of resident fathers reported they had **eaten dinner** with their school-aged child either every day or several times a week during the previous four weeks.
- Almost 60 percent of resident fathers reported they had helped their school-aged child with **homework** either every day or several times a week during the previous four weeks.
 - Twenty-three percent of resident fathers had **not helped their child with homework** at all in the past four weeks.

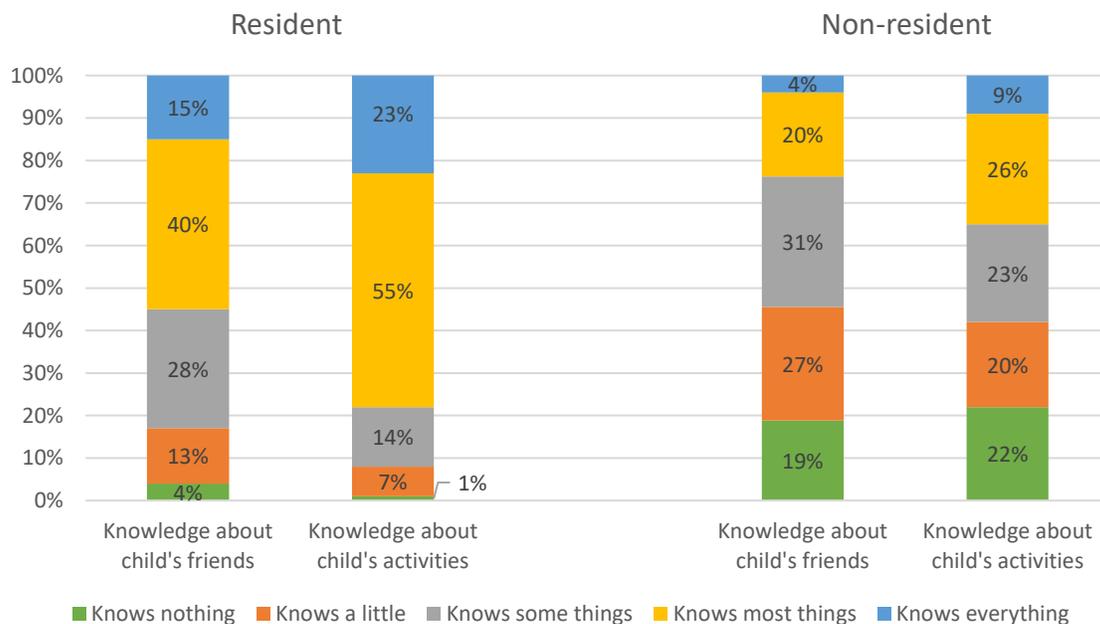
Non-resident fathers

- Twenty-nine percent of non-resident fathers reported they had **eaten dinner** with their school-aged child either every day or several times a week during the previous four weeks.
 - Twenty-one percent had **not eaten dinner** with their child at all, and 32 percent had done so less than once a week.
- Twenty percent of non-resident fathers reported they had helped their school-aged child with **homework** either every day or several times a week during the previous four weeks.
 - Fifty-eight percent had **not helped their child with homework** at all in the past four weeks.

Knowledge about friends and activities

Figure 8 shows resident and non-resident fathers' reported knowledge of their school-aged child's friends and what the child does when the child is not at home. Responses range from knowing nothing to knowing everything.

Figure 8. Father reports of knowledge about friends and activities of child aged 5-18 in past four weeks, by resident status, 2014



Source: Child Trends analyses of the 2013-2015 National Survey of Family Growth. Includes resident (n=550) and non-resident (n=190) fathers whose youngest/only child was aged 5-18. Notes: Data are weighted. Due to rounding, some columns may not add to 100 percent.

Resident fathers

- Fifty-five percent of resident fathers reported they either knew everything or most things about their school-aged **child's friends** and 78 percent reported they knew everything or most things about their out-of-home **activities**.
 - Twenty-eight percent reported knowing only some things, and 17 percent little or nothing, about their **child's friends**.
 - Fourteen percent knew only some things, and 8 percent little or nothing, about their out-of-home **activities**.

Non-resident fathers

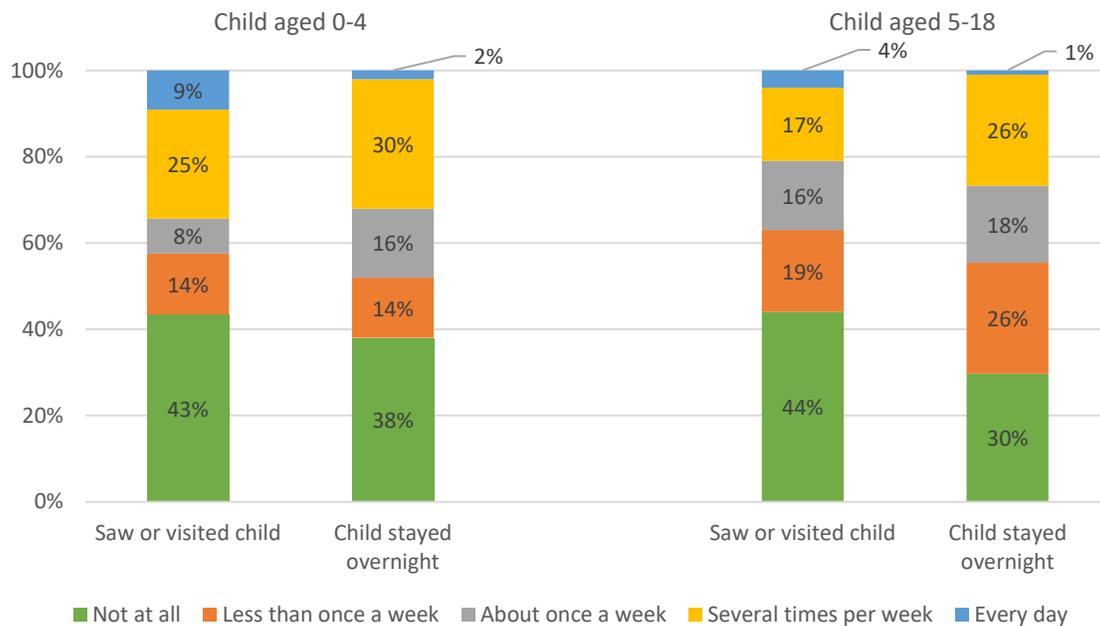
- Twenty-four percent of non-resident fathers reported they either knew everything or most things about their school-aged **child's friends** and 35 percent reported they knew everything or most things about their out-of-home **activities**.
 - Thirty-one percent reported knowing only some things, and 46 percent little or nothing, about their **child's friends**.
 - Twenty-three percent knew only some things, and 42 percent little or nothing, about their out-of-home **activities**.

Child visitation among non-resident fathers

Frequency of visitation with child

Figure 9 shows how often non-resident fathers reported seeing or visiting with their child and how often they reported spending the night with them in the past four weeks. Responses range from not at all to every day.

Figure 9. Non-resident father reports of visitation with child, 2014



Source: Child Trends analyses of the 2013-2015 National Survey of Family Growth. Includes non-resident fathers whose youngest/only child was aged 0-4 (n=161 for visited child, and n=103 for child stayed overnight) and non-resident fathers whose youngest/only child was aged 5-18 (n=330 for visited child, and n=190 for child stayed overnight). Notes: Data are weighted.

Child aged 0-4

- Thirty-four percent of non-resident fathers reported **seeing or visiting** their child aged 0-4 several times a week or more.
 - Eight percent **saw or visited** their child about once a week, but 57 percent did so less than that or not at all.
- Thirty-two percent of non-resident fathers reported **spending the night** with their child aged 0-4 several times a week or every day.
 - However, 52 percent **spent the night** with their child less than once a week or not at all.

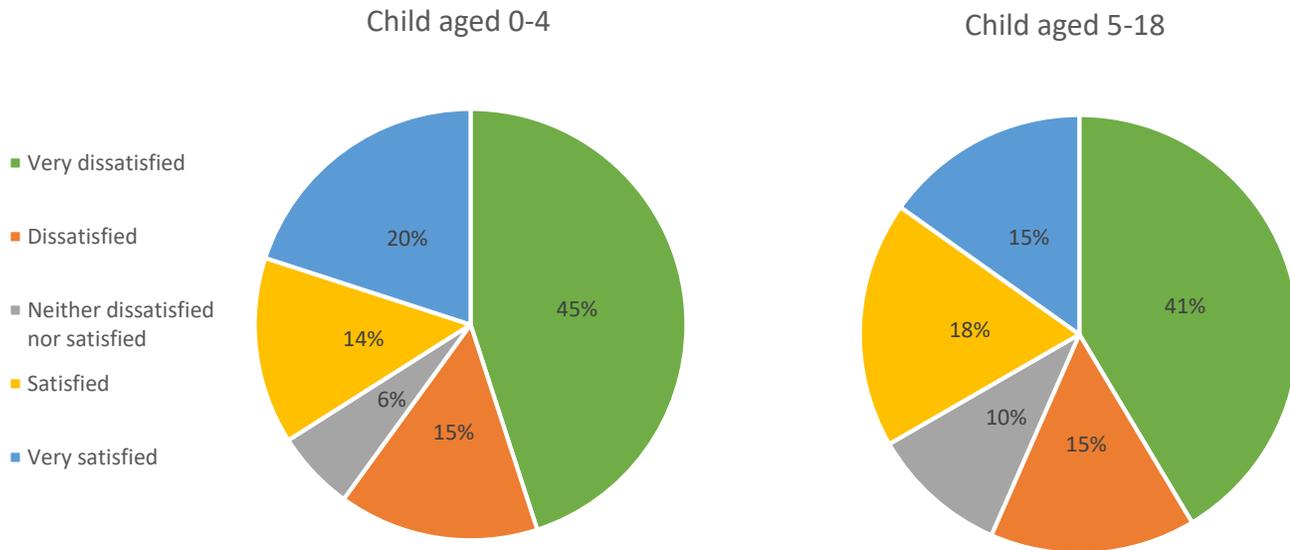
Child aged 5-18

- Twenty-one percent of non-resident fathers reported **seeing or visiting** their child aged 5-18 several times a week or every day.
 - Sixteen percent **saw or visited** their child about once a week, but 63 percent did so less than that or not at all.
- Twenty-seven percent of non-resident fathers reported **spending the night** with their child aged 5-18 several times a week or every day.
 - However, 56 percent **spent the night** with their child less than once a week or not at all.

Satisfaction of non-resident fathers with frequency of visits with their child

Figure 10 shows how satisfied non-resident fathers are with how often they see or visit with their child. Responses range from very dissatisfied to very satisfied.

Figure 10. Non-resident fathers' satisfaction with frequency of visits with child aged 0-18, by child's age, 2014



Source: Child Trends analyses of the 2013-2015 National Survey of Family Growth. Includes non-resident fathers whose youngest/only child was aged 0-4 (n=161) or 5-18 (n=330). Notes: Data are weighted. Due to rounding, totals may not add to 100 percent.

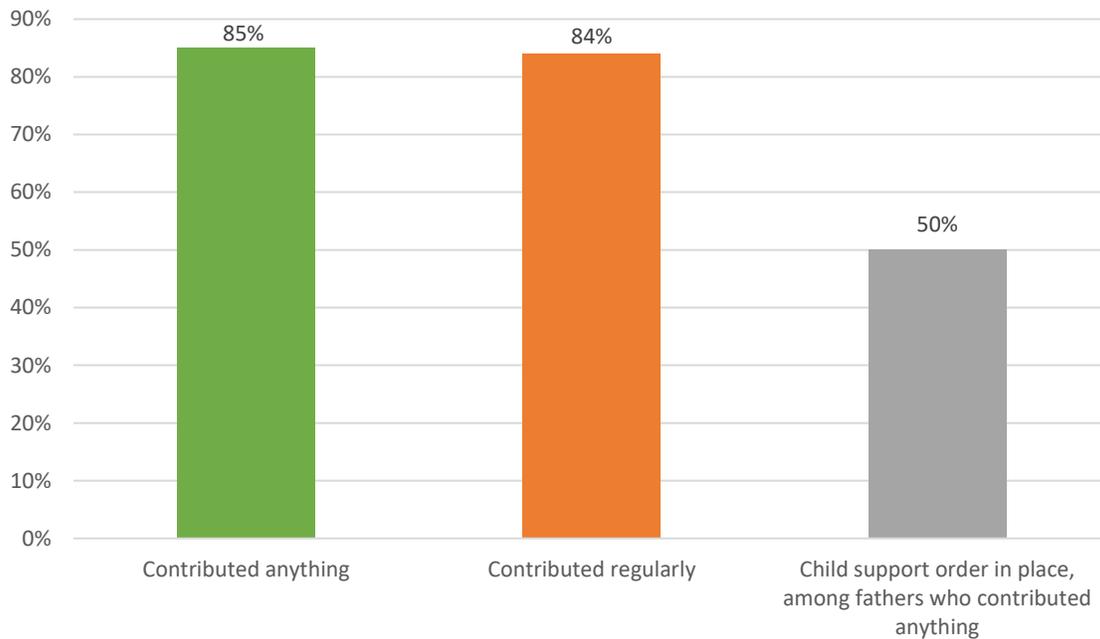
- Sixty percent of fathers whose youngest child was aged 0-4 and not living with them reported being **“dissatisfied”** or **“very dissatisfied”** with the **amount of time they were able to spend with their child** during the previous four weeks.
 - Similarly, 56 percent of fathers whose youngest child was aged 5-18 and not living with them reported being **“dissatisfied”** or **“very dissatisfied”** with the **frequency of visits**.
- Thirty-four percent of fathers whose youngest child was aged 0-4 and not living with them were **“satisfied”** or **“very satisfied”** with the **amount of time they were able to spend with their child** during the previous four weeks.
 - Similarly, 33 percent of fathers whose youngest child was aged 5-18 and not living with them were **“satisfied”** or **“very satisfied”** with the **frequency of visits**.

Child Support

Non-resident fathers' financial contributions to child

Figure 11 shows fathers' reports of financial contributions to their non-resident child in the past year, as well as whether that contribution was made regularly (as opposed to once in a while) and whether it was part of a formal child support order. Only non-resident fathers, defined as fathers who do not live with their child at all, are included in these analyses.

Figure 11. Financial contributions to child aged 0-18 in past year, among non-resident fathers, 2014



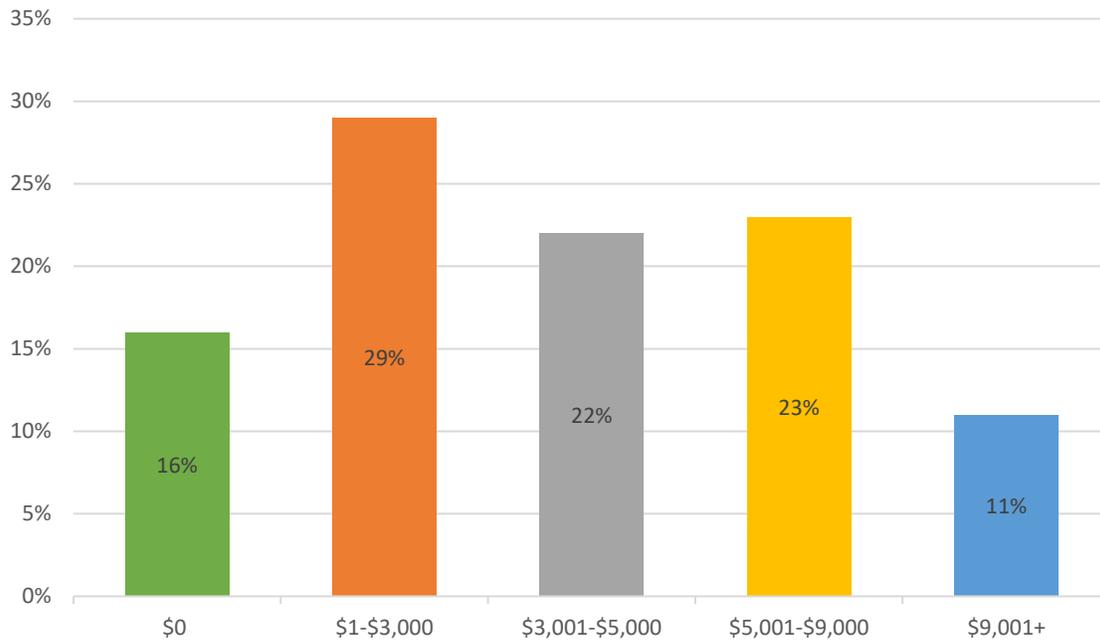
Source: Child Trends analyses of the 2013-2015 National Survey of Family Growth. Includes non-resident fathers whose youngest/only child was aged 0-18 (n=495 for contributed anything, n=414 for contributed regularly, and n=413 for contributed as part of child support order). Note: Data are weighted.

- A large majority of non-resident father (84 percent) reported **contributing money** and/or **formal child support** for their child aged 0-18 on a **regular basis** during the previous year.
 - Half (50 percent) of those fathers reported that at least part of their financial contribution was paid as the result of a **formal child support order**.

Amount of financial contributions to child

Figure 12 shows the amount of yearly financial contributions, in dollars, non-resident fathers reported paying for their child aged 0-18.

Figure 12. Amount of yearly financial contributions for child aged 0-18, among non-resident fathers, 2014



Source: Child Trends analyses of the 2013-2015 National Survey of Family Growth. Includes non-resident fathers whose youngest/only child was aged 0-18 (n=468). Note: Data are weighted. Due to rounding, the total may not add to 100 percent.

- Although the clear majority of non-resident fathers reported **paying** some child support in the past year, the amount they paid varied widely.
 - Twenty-nine percent of non-resident fathers with a child aged 0-18 reported **paying \$1-3,000** towards yearly child support.
 - Twenty-two percent reported **paying \$3,001-\$5,000**.
 - Twenty-three percent reported **paying \$5,001-\$9,000**.
 - Eleven percent reported **paying \$9,001 or more**.
- Sixteen percent of non-resident fathers with a child aged 0-18 reported they did not **pay** anything towards child support in the past year.

Data Box

This NRFC Data Snapshot draws on information from the 2013-2015 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG), which collects data on family life from a nationally representative sample of men and women between the ages of 15 and 44. When weighted, the 2013-2015 wave of the NSFG is representative of men ages 15-44 in 2014. In 2013, the NSFG began asking fathers about their involvement with their youngest child only. Therefore, for these analyses, we include information on the involvement of fathers who reside some or all the time with their youngest child (“resident”) and those who do not live with their youngest child at all (“non-resident”).

ⁱ Primus, L. (2017). *Changing systems & practices to improve outcomes for young fathers, their children & their families*. Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Social Policy. Retrieved from <https://www.cssp.org/pages/body/Changing-Systems-Practice-Young-Fathers.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Parker, K. & Gretchen, L. (2017). *6 facts about American fathers*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/06/15/fathers-day-facts/>