



Babyfathers:
African Caribbean Dads Speak
Real fathers with real problems

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The stepfather...

Jason, 23, a taxi driver, separated from his partner when their son was three and started a relationship with a woman with two boys of her own.

"It was a big shock. When you get with a woman who has children, you're suppose to care for them like your own. That's what women say - they're part of the package. But I didn't know how I was suppose to feel. I was questioning myself all the time. Should I try to be a friend - or an uncle of some kind? Be there for them but not in the role of father? Or should I feel, 'I'm the man now, you just do as I say?' Am I suppose to act like the child's father? But the children could easily turn round and say I'm not their father and tell me to fuck off - and they'd have every right to 'cause I'm not. But her children never did anything bad. Jah know they weren't cheeky, didn't give any backchat, didn't get into trouble. We got on just fine but I wasn't sure how to act around them. I wasn't sure of what they expected of me. One of them was six, and he'd come and sit in my lap or hold my hand when we were out and that made me feel awkward cause I know they have a dad and I have my own children. I should be doing that sort of thing with my children. Now I'm thinking about how my children are going to react to when my ex gets another boyfriend. How's will that affect them and how I'm going to react? That's something I'm gonna have to deal with - someone telling my son what to do. It must be confusing for children too."

The absent father...

Maxwell, 27 and currently unemployed, has five children. He does not live with them but sees three of them regularly but has not seen the other two for four years:

"It's not that I want it that way, but my one son and daughter live in Cardiff and she makes it hard - the baby mother. She starts to bring up something and we start arguing, going at it like nobody's business. I know it takes two so I guess it's not all her fault and I've got to down up to my part. When I think about it, it's disgusting 'cause we're big people. It's not nice for her, not for me and definitely not nice for the children cause they're caught right in the middle and see and hear everything. I've taken legal advice and been through the courts but it's like the system is not interested in the child or the father. It feels like banging your head off a brick wall. The only thing I can do now is be there for them - when they get big. The worst thing about it though, is missing out on the time when they're growing up and I'm not with them."

The father whose relationship is breaking down...

Benny, 28, owns a fast-food outlet and mobile catering agency. He has three children from the same woman, and one on the way...

"I've been with my woman for 15 years - that's a long time isn't it? But for the last two years it's been hell. She's going on like she don't want me around. There's this constant arguing over next to nuttin'. She don't listen or take on board what I have to say ...it's mad! She's even trying to use the children against me. She's spoiling them and you can't just keep giving in to them and buying everything the system promotes. But I come across like the bad guy. Naturally they're starting to listening more to what she's saying, so when it comes to simple things like bedtimes, she has them up all hours watching shit on TV, and they don't listen to me. Sometimes I think she has another man and wants me out of the way, but at the same time, she has me round. I don't know if she's thinking about the money, or if it's coming from her friends or what she sees other women doing on 'Footballers Wives' and all that. That's what's so confusing. You don't know where you stand. Then there's the children. I'm concerned about her teachings and what she's showing them, as well as the effects all this is having on them. I can already see signs."

The father in jail...

Gary, 34, went to jail for two years when his son was eight.

"The time I was in jail was dread! When you get there the thing you have to deal with is your own survival, so you think about your kids but sometimes you push them to the back of your mind. Most crucial to the relationship with my son was my relationship with his mother - serious! When things were cool - and that was most of the time - it was great. She was taking my son to see my side of the family and keeping that end strong and letting me know how he's growing, and I respect her for that. When I was on home leave I could see him then but he only saw me twice inside cause I wasn't proud of being there. I think age was a big factor cause I had already built up a relationship with him. I was never one for hugging and kissing but if he needs advice I'm there or if anything goes wrong, I'm there, and that helped, cause I could sorta parent over the phone - but that depends on how much money you got and on the relationship with the baby mother. Really, fathering from inside boils down to how much support you got on the outside. Anyway, I ain't going back there again."

Contact

Father Direct, 9 Nevill Street,
Abergavenny, NP7 5AA

Email

mail@fathersdirect.com

Telephone

0845 634 1328