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Stay at Home Dads Face Unique Challenges at Home

By Jennifer Wake



Moraga stay-at-home dad Andy Hubbell sits with his daughters Sophia, 11 (left), and Olivia, 8 (right)
Photo provided

Since 2003, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, the number of men choosing to stay at home in order to raise their kids full-time has nearly doubled. Yet even with this upsurge, stay-at-home dads continue to struggle with stereotypes while navigating stay-at-home parenting challenges in a world consisting mostly of women.

One Lafayette stay-at-home dad, who asked to remain anonymous, said it took about a year for him to get "into a groove."

"I fumbled through it at first," said the former marketing executive.

"When I was working, I was incredibly busy with calls coming in all the time. You lose some self-importance when you no longer work.

Before, my coworkers and staff were constantly looking to me for input and what I said was important to them. Now, I just have the two kids looking at me and I have to convince them my input is important."

And being a guy in a world of mostly women, he added, isn't easy.

While he volunteered at his children's elementary school, he said that sitting in a classroom volunteering with a bunch of women was not comfortable.

"They approach the kids differently," he said. "I'm more likely to high-five the kids; I want to be the pal." And although no one ever said anything to him, he said he always had the feeling they were thinking, 'This guy can't provide for his family' - a common stereotype stay-at-home dads must cope with.

Moraga dad Andy Hubbell said the decision to stay home came when he and his wife didn't want to do long-term daycare anymore. "We wanted to stay in the area, and my job took me to San Diego Monday through Friday," he said. "It made sense for me to quit and stay home."

He went from teaching at a university to changing diapers (a lot).

Hubbell says it was hard initially to become familiar with the moms and the circles they run in. "My brain needed to switch gears, which took a while."

Hubbell found it difficult, at times, to network with moms. "Networking with dads was easier - when I could find them."

Just the names of some parenting support groups underscore the focus on women: Mommy and Me music classes, La Leche League (for mothers who are breastfeeding), and Lamorinda Moms, to name a few.

When Alicia Griffith moved from New York to Moraga in 2008, she immediately joined Lamorinda Moms.

"It was the best decision I made," she said. "I met so many other moms going through the same thing I was. This community is great. A lot of women are open to getting together for playdates, meeting at the park or going to the zoo."

While some dads occasionally come to Lamorinda Moms' playdates, Griffith says it's rare.

In recent years, new social groups for stay-at-home dads have begun to crop up. East Bay Dads is a group that caters to dads in Lamorinda and beyond. While Lamorinda Moms offers members opportunities to hear guest speakers on parenting issues, has a gardening club, and a book club, East Bay Dads has blogs, discussion boards, and an extensive listings of hiking sites and outdoor parks that have great trails and sports fields available.

This "community for dads" understands that while parenting styles can be similar, how men and women approach parenting and interact with parents of the same gender can be quite different.

"I probably did approach parenting differently," Hubbell said. "I went for a lot of hikes with my kids, carrying them in Kelty Kids backpacks, with dog in tow. We also did a lot of sports activities at the local parks, and when they got older, I coached most of their early teams. Once they got bigger, and my lack of expertise at coaching became obvious, I just tried to help out on the teams."

Others dads learned how to balance boy and girl activities, shuffling Nerf football tosses with a son before sitting for a tea party with a daughter.

"I didn't realize that I was 'signing up' without knowing much about 'girl stuff' - her hair, her clothes," the Lafayette dad said. "My wife had just bought my daughter a new outfit including a lacy shirt and tie-dye black skirt with Capri stretch pants. I didn't know the three weren't part of a set. When I looked at her after she put everything on, I thought, 'That doesn't look right,' but I didn't question it because my wife bought the clothes. I didn't realize how bad she looked until I picked her up from school."

Whatever the challenge, however, in the end dads and moms are in it for their kids.

"I always recommend it to dads who ask me if they should do it," Hubbell said. "I think I have a closer relationship with my daughters. . . I think they depend on me and interact with me maybe a little differently since I've always been the parent around the house. I don't know. . . maybe not. But I like to think so."

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