

## **Don't Call Me Mr. Mom! What Not to Say to an At-Home Dad**

By Buzz McClain Oct 2000

Men who chose to stay at home to raise the children while the mothers commute to work experience things most fathers do not. Not the least of these are the insensitive comments by people who can't comprehend the concept.

It's the price at-home dads pay for being daring and non-traditional. After all, it's not every day you encounter an at-home dad -- then again, maybe you do and just don't realize it because they look like ordinary fathers, except they have slightly more spit-up on their shoulders -- so you can't be blamed for saying the wrong thing. Well, we're here to help.

Here are a few things that make at-home fathers cringe, according to the members of the National At-Home Dads Association, who have heard it all.

1. "What are you going to do when you go back to work in the real world?" Oh, how at-home dads hate this. It implies raising children isn't real and it isn't work. It is lots of both.
2. "Wouldn't it be better for the kids if the mother stayed at home?" No offense, but no. Studies show that working mothers are more involved in their children's lives when the father stays at home than when given over to professional day care; and because of the circumstances, the fathers are far more involved with the children than the dads who see their children only briefly after work and on weekends. The kids get two parents with strong influences.
3. "What do you do with all your spare time?" No matter the ages and numbers of the kids, the statement is baloney: There is no spare time. Besides seeing to the children's feeding, clothing, bedding, amusement and education, at-home dads typically assume command of household chores, from laundry to kitchen duty to lawn care. And you can't punch a clock after eight hours and go home. You ARE home.
4. "Who wears the pants in the family?" This implies staying at home with the children makes you less masculine; true, at-home dads are likely to wash more dishes, fold more laundry and go to the tot lot more than the father who commutes, but when mom is home dads play and watch just as much sports, ogle just as many women and perform just as many testosterone-driven activities than other fathers. And they do it with more gusto because getting out of the house means more to them.
5. "Oh, so you're Mr. Mom." Don't call us Mr. Mom. The kids already have a mother. At-home fathers do not replace mothers, they simply assume duties traditionally performed by them. If you must call at-home dads something, try Mr. Dad.
6. "That's a nice Mommy Wagon you drive." Ahem. It is NOT a Mommy Wagon. It's a marvelously functional all-purpose utility vehicle that just happens to have enough room to seat more than half of the Stingers Little League soccer team.
7. "What does your wife think about you not working?" Ordinarily a fair question, but often asked to see how the woman is handling the pressure of being the primary

breadwinner. Get real: The empowerment is a heady sensation, one most women don't get to experience, and she loves it. As a bonus, she goes to the office each day knowing her baby is in good hands. Real men deal with the role change just fine, thank you.

8. "How can you stand to change diapers all the time?" This is likely to be asked by the "traditional man," the kind who will overhaul a greasy auto engine but can't bring himself to wipe a baby's butt. We know of one such man who, when confronted with a messy diaper, put the baby in the bathtub until the mother came home. Diapers are easy, pal. (Plum-and-sweet potato spit-up is another thing altogether.)
9. "Do you miss the security of having a job?" Maybe at first, but who isn't disillusioned by the general lack of loyalty companies express these days? Mergers, takeovers, layoffs, forced relocations and a slavish devotion by corporations to the bottom line are enough to rattle anyone's sense of security. An at-home dad has the job of a lifetime -- you can't be fired or transferred to a lesser position.
10. "What do you mean you didn't get a chance to finish the laundry?" Most often asked by frazzled wives coming home from work. Well, honey, things got really fun at the tot lot with the playgroup and we stayed a few hours longer than we expected . . .

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