

Why did fatherhood evolve?

We might take the doting [modern dad](#) for granted, but if you take a look at the rest of the animal kingdom, he's a pretty unique specimen.

Fatherhood didn't just happen, it had to evolve and scientists are starting to get a better idea of the conditions that honed human fatherhood.

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[Anthropologist Hillard] Kaplan suggests fatherhood was forged during a trying time for ancient humans about 2 million years ago, during the Late Pliocene and Early Pleistocene periods. During that time, the African savannah began to dry out. The amount of mammals present out in the open increased, as did tubers (potatoes) and nuts, but water-dependent fruits declined.

A 2020 [paper](#) in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences suggests that these conditions actually favored dads over “cads” – or males who simply tried to make as many babies as possible with different mates.

In the paper, the authors argue that this ecological change would have made it more advantageous for men and women to work together to glean a diversity of food sources. For example, females, who were primarily responsible for childcare could forage for carbohydrate-rich products.

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That created a complementarity between males and females, which would make the partnership extremely worthwhile for each parent, says Kaplan. Fathers could provide a tangible benefit that would have helped keep their children alive.

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