

Dr. Stefan Michaelis (*1974) is a research associate in science management of a special research area at the Faculty of Computer Science. He lives with his son (*2012) and his wife in Herten. The couple is expecting a second child in summer 2017.



Source:
private

The observing companion

I visit Stefan Michaelis one morning in his office, which offers a great view over Dortmund. I had spontaneously asked him for an interview and am thrilled that he agreed so quickly. He reports that he had already read the fathers' brochure when it was published in 2013. He is also thrilled that there is such an expressive format for and about fathers. Of course, that motivates me all the more to talk to him about his fatherhood.

Deeply relaxed and satisfied

Stefan Michaelis finds it rather difficult to assign himself to a father type. Spontaneously, he would think of a "rock in the surf. At least, that's what he tries to be for his son,

But this description doesn't quite fit either. He grumbles, somewhat dissatisfied with his spontaneous choice. For him, it is very important to accompany his child calmly in everyday life, not to be overprotective or excessively caring. It is about observing the child in his experiences and being with him. He therefore sees himself more in an "accompanying function" than in a "caring function".

"controlling". From the shortlist for possible father types, he immediately refers to the "father for everything": He wants to be open to all questions and concerns, strives for a holistic father role. Nevertheless, he shakes his head somewhat dissatisfied.

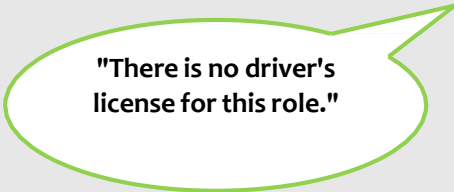
"There is no driver's license for this role," grins the computer scientist. Ultimately, you have "first experiences" with a child every day, which always presents him with new tasks. But he enjoys it just as much. Some situations are so new that he could not have imagined them. He smiles somewhat tentatively. As his son grows older, it is also important for him to be a role model and provide structures. Being a father is not possible without rules. He seems satisfied.

He could not say that there had always been a concrete plan for him to become a father. This desire would only have been clear in the

relationship with his wife. It all developed quite "classically" when they moved in together and got married. Nevertheless, of course, no one can guarantee it, that life would develop according to this ideal, that having children would work out. He shrugs his shoulders. You only know what you've missed if you know something. That's probably why he was so relaxed.

Parental leave for both

When his son was born in 2012, it was "ideal timing," he says: Already employed in his current job, he found great support in his supervisor for the compatibility of family and career. That is why he was able to take two months' parental leave in a very relaxed manner. His wife had been on parental leave for 3 years. For this reason, his son did not go to kindergarten until he was 3 years old, which was rather unusual in comparison, as he noted with regard to his environment. His wife very much enjoyed this extra time with their son. Otherwise, the couple "tried to divide everything around the child fairly" and got along very well.



"There is no driver's license for this role."

There are various agreements, such as always taking turns putting the son to bed. Parenting also emphasizes the "team aspect," as Michaelis calls it, in a couple's relationship.

Soon everything new!

The couple is expecting their next child in the summer. At the moment, they plan to divide the workload in the same way as they did with their first child. He wants to take two months of parental leave again. Spontaneous it occurs to him that he will soon have to clarify at his workplace when it will be feasible for everyone. "Longer would be even nicer, of course, but someone has to earn money," he smiles, emphasizing that the fixed-term nature of his position also plays a role here. If you go on parental leave for a very long time with a fixed-term contract, it could be that the position no longer exists after the parental leave. For him, the big question at the moment is what it will be like to be the father of two children. He doesn't quite realize it yet, he laughs, because he's not much different from his 4 ½-year-old son.

Support in the work environment central

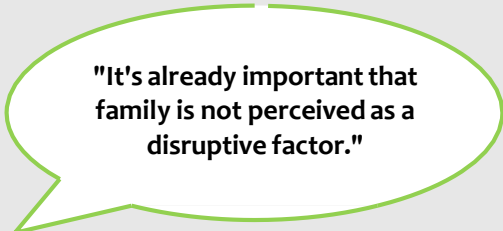
For Stefan Michaelis, support in his fatherhood means above all support in balancing work and family. And this is primarily related to his supervisor and his colleagues.

Even if only a few of his colleagues are parents, he nevertheless senses a fundamental openness to the topic. It is important, he stresses, that family is not perceived as a disruptive factor.

he would take parental leave. When he became a father for the first time in 2012, his supervisor very openly communicated that he was welcome to take parental leave.

He also considers the TU Dortmund University of Technology to be a family-friendly employer, even though he has not yet been able to take advantage of infrastructural options such as childcare, etc., due to his place of residence.

had not perceived. "The awareness of this is central," he adds emphatically. All the necessary steps, such as scheduling his parental leave into the workflow of the special research area, went very smoothly, he summarizes with a nod.



"It's already important that family is not perceived as a disruptive factor."

In his environment, he and his wife tended to belong to the later parents. Of course they knew their parents, but they really knew what it meant to be parents.

He grins, however, that he doesn't want to be a father. However, taking other fathers as role models or contact partners did not consciously occur to him. Unconsciously, he considers

families in everyday life probably also rather as a whole, differentiates less between father role and mother role. Thus, he could not say which specific father could be a role model for him.

But he doesn't want that either, he shakes his head.

Profession as part of identity

Stefan Michaelis is certain that his fatherhood has not influenced his career. This is often the case with other fathers, he says, if they do not receive support at work.



Source: Private

and would meet with "massive resistance. He thinks again. Two months would probably be too short a period to distance himself too much from the topics in his job. At

of course, it can be somewhat more difficult to stay on the ball in terms of content during longer parental leave. In addition, the possibly increased difficulty of a longer parental leave is due to fixed-term contracts. If it is not certain that there will still be funds for one's own position afterwards, this is associated with a risk. Encouragingly, however, he adds, " But with the right support and attitude, that shouldn't be a problem either." His general attitude toward his job is less influenced by his role as a father. He says it's about finding a balance between work and fatherhood. "It's a give and take," he notes. Of course, he tries not to let meetings get out of hand or to schedule them in the evening. But if he has to, his family can handle it. His professional activity is certainly also part of his "self-image," he admits. It is very important to him. In his opinion, however, what is really influenced and shifted by children are general priorities in life and the concrete allocation of time. Fatherhood overturns everything he was used to until then.

Stefan Michaelis wants to be a role model for his children and provide them with structure. The couple is expecting their second child in the summer.

Future prospects

He is optimistic about the future. Professionally, the third phase of the special research area for which he works will soon be applied for. But he is confident that this will work out. With the imminent birth of his second child, he is facing a new life-changing experience. For him, becoming a father has been the most drastic experience in his life so far. He does not know how his second child will turn out. "Some things just can't be planned," he comments with a shrug. He hopes that everything will go as well as before with his second child. "I'm very, very excited," he smiles. He is letting the new life situation come to him as best he can. Observing other parents obsessively or making accurate plans would do very little good from his point of view. He does have one concrete vision for the future, however: "We'll definitely need more lead time to get somewhere on time," he laughs with a shrug.

The interview was conducted by Stefanie Raible in 2017.