

PATERNAL INVESTMENT IN THE CARE OF A DOLPHIN CALF

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The rearing and socialization of bottlenose dolphins calves has been described as an exclusively female role, whether via direct maternal care or allomaternal parenting. This study focused on the role of paternal care and male socialization of a calf in a captive setting, with an emphasis on male kinship bonding with his offspring. Observations were collected postpartum on an adult male and his female calf multiple times per day over the course of the first year of the calf's life, including social behaviors (proximity and orientation), aggressive behaviors (tail slapping/swatting, threats, jaw popping, chasing, yelling), and tactile behaviors. For comparative analyses, data were simultaneously collected on mother-calf (and allomother) interactions. The results demonstrated that cohabitation of the paternal male and offspring was successful, even during maternal estrous. The male demonstrated minimal aggressive behaviors toward the calf (e.g. chasing), none of which resulted in injury. Conversely, the male's interactions with the calf were nurturing and positive. Although the paternal male spent less time with the calf than did the mother, father-calf interactions were more frequent than were calf interactions with other dolphins. When the calf was with either parent, she maintained an average proximity closer to her mother than she did to her father. Over the course of the study, the amount of time the calf spent with mother, father, and allomothers decreased. Overall, these results confirm that allomaternal care can involve the paternal male, although the captive setting of this study limits assumptions about wild behavior. Nonetheless, these observations suggest that dolphin fathers may play a role in their calves' social development. Although additional research on calf socialization is clearly needed, this dolphin father invested more in his offspring's rearing than did allomothers.