



Getting Dads Through the Door

*Best Practices and Next Steps
to Effectively Involve Fathers in Head Start Programs*



Presented by Strong Fathers-Strong Families

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Question Recap



1. What kind of adult do you want your child to become?

¿Qué le gustaria que fuera su hijo de grande?

2. What are the strengths of strong mothers?

¿Cuales son los habilidades (o características)de una mama fuerte?

3. What are the strengths of strong fathers?

¿Cuales son los habilidades (o características)de una padre fuerte?

Grassroot Father Involvement



By J. Michael Hall, *Executive Director*, Strong Fathers – Strong Families



Foundations for Fathers

- Y Fathers regularly interact with their children (60%+)
- Y Fathers have a strong desire for their child to succeed
- Y Fathers have strengths to offer (distinct & important)
- Y Programs that strengthen fathers strengthen kids



Obstacles to Father Involvement

- Y Father's fears of exposing inadequacies
- Y Ambivalence of program staff members about father involvement
- Y Gate-keeping by mothers (and female staff)
- Y Inappropriate program design and delivery

Father's Fear of Exposing Inadequacies

- ◆ Actual fear of being hammered
- ◆ Why expose what I already deal with?
- ◆ Programs don't know strengths exist so they don't "expose" those.
- ◆ Fathers don't need more drama since they already have mama.
- ◆ Programs are stronger if they focus on strengths of constituents.

Ambivalence of staff toward fathers

- ◆ Issues with the father of their children
- ◆ Issues with their own father
- ◆ View father involvement as short term
- ◆ Fail to see the focus on positive child outcomes
- ◆ Don't understand the culture of fathers

Gate-keeping by mothers (& staff)

- ◆ Views herself as the "true" parent
- ◆ Fails to see his strengths in terms of child development
- ◆ Uses child as currency in relationship (interaction decrease value)
- ◆ Feels the need to approve interaction
- ◆ Is threatened by father involvement in regards to her own role

Inappropriate program design & delivery

- ◆ Program is feminized (views father as second string mom)
- ◆ Program is deficit based (fails to view fathers as competent)
- ◆ Program is not focused on outcomes (fails to understand program goals)
- ◆ Program is culturally insensitive (fathers culture and father's culture)
- ◆ Program is an afterthought



1. Be Specific About Goals

- ◆ FOCUS on child outcomes
- ◆ Build on inherent strengths of fathers and father figures
- ◆ Set goals for child outcomes, father development, and participation
- ◆ Communicate your goals to staff, mothers, and fathers



2. Acknowledge Resistance to Initiative

- ◆ Ask for input from all stakeholders
- ◆ Use viewpoints to build program components
- ◆ Build a flexible framework for program (able to withstand pressure)
- ◆ Promote child outcomes as basis for program
- ◆ Personalize your efforts with staff



3. Identify significant male role models

- ◆ Role models first, then males
- ◆ Do not assume or delegate actual leaders
- ◆ Allow champions to develop on their own
- ◆ Build leadership development into program goals and practices
- ◆ Identify role models in all facets of programming



4. Provide Training and Support for Staff

- ◆ Train EVERYBODY
- ◆ Focus training on child outcomes then program details
- ◆ Keep support as a high priority
- ◆ Train from the roots up



5. Train female facilitators to accept male involvement

- ◆ Redefine the world view of program “families”
- ◆ Work on abundance mentality
- ◆ Focus on weaving male involvement into daily fabric of your program
- ◆ FOCUS ON CHILD OUTCOMES
- ◆ Address personal and professional issues early and often



6. Don't neglect mothers

- ◆ Work from abundance viewpoint
- ◆ Promote the goal of positive child outcomes
- ◆ Continually validate mom's role
- ◆ Seek out moms as program promoters



7. Go Slowly

- ◆ Develop an annual plan, a three year plan, and a five year plan
- ◆ Begin with organizational culture (top to bottom)
- ◆ Develop a strong site culture for father and father programs
- ◆ Develop a program regardless of funding



8. Don't Reinvent the Wheel

- ◆ Use what you have, keep it simple
- ◆ ASK the fathers
- ◆ Look for “natural” opportunities
- ◆ Steal, Steal, Steal! Ideas, programs, handouts, etc.
- ◆ Look for successful programs and practices

Build Your Own Fatherhood Program



Instructions: Think about your local program, your local fathers, and local resources. Design an interactive, relational activity for dads and kids at a specific site within your program. This program must fit within your present budget..

Title of Program: _____

Location: _____ Day of the Week: _____ Time of Day: _____ to _____

Who is invited? (all, site only, classroom) _____

Proposed Outcome: *Because of this event our children will* _____

Method of Evaluation: _____

Activity 1: _____

Activity 2: _____

Supplies Needed: _____

Agenda:

Time	Activity	Facilitator
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____



The Impact of Strong Fathers on Childhood Development

A study assessing the level of adaptation of one-year-olds found that, when left with a stranger, children whose fathers were highly involved were less likely to cry, worry, or disrupt play than other one-year-olds whose fathers were less involved.

Kotelchuk, M. "The Infant's Relationship to His Father: Experimental Evidence." *The Role of the Father in Child Development*, Ed. Michael E. Lamb. 2nd edition. New York: Wiley, 1981.

In a study of 75 toddlers it was found that children who were securely attached to their fathers were better problem solvers than children who were not securely attached to their fathers. Children whose fathers spent a lot of time with them and who were sensitive to their needs were found to be better adapted than their peers whose fathers were not as involved and were less sensitive.

Esterbrooks, M. Ann and Wendy Goldberg. "Toddler Development in the Family: Impact of Father Involvement and Parenting Characteristics." *Child Development* 55 (1984): 740-752.

In a study of preschoolers, children whose fathers were responsible for at least 40 percent of childcare tasks had higher cognitive development scores and a greater sense of mastery of their environments than those children whose fathers were less involved.

Radin, N. "Primary Caregiving Fathers in Intact Families." In A.E. Gottfried & A.W. Gottfried (eds.) *Redefining Families: Implications for Children's Development*. New York: Plenum Press, 1994: 55-97.

Fathers who had spent more time with their children without the mothers present during the first year of life (independent of maternal employment status) were found to exhibit greater variety in their interactions when their children were 12 months old, and their children showed more responsiveness and exploration.

Pedersen, F.A., et al. "Paternal Care of Infants during Maternal Separations: Associations with Father-Infant Interaction at One Year." *Psychiatry* 50 (1987) 193-205.

A study on parent-infant attachment found that fathers who were affectionate, spent time with their children, and overall had a positive attitude were more likely to have securely attached infants.

Cox, M.J., et al. "Prediction of Infant-Father and Infant-Mother Attachment." *Developmental Psychology* 28 (1992): 474-483.

In 1988, a study of preschool children admitted to New Orleans hospitals as psychiatric patients over a 34-month period found that nearly 80 percent came from fatherless homes.

Jack Block, et al. "Parental Functioning and the Home Environment in Families of Divorce," *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 27 (1988)

"Father hunger" often afflicts boys age one and two whose fathers are suddenly and permanently absent. Sleep disturbances, such as trouble falling asleep, nightmares, and night terrors frequently begin within one to three months after the father leaves home.

Alfred A. Messer, "Boys Father Hunger: The Missing Father Syndrome," *Medical Aspects of Human Sexuality*, January 1989.

share meals, spend leisure time with them, or help them with reading or homework do significantly better academically than those children whose fathers do not.

Cooksey, Elizabeth C. and Michalle M. Fondell. "Spending Time with His Kids: Effects of Family Structures on Fathers' and Children's Lives," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 58 (August 1996): 693-707.



The Impact of a Strong Father on His Child's Education

A study using a national probability sample of 1250 fathers showed that children whose fathers share meals, spend leisure time with them, or help them with reading or homework do significantly better academically than those children whose fathers do not.

Cooksey, Elizabeth C. and Michalle M. Fondell. "Spending Time with His Kids: Effects of Family Structures on Fathers' and Children's Lives," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 58 (August 1996): 693-707.

In a study of 29 fathers of academically successful African-American males, six childrearing practices were observed: child-focused love (consistent concern and showing interest); setting limits and discipline; high expectations; open, consistent, and strong communication ("talking with" rather than lecturing); positive racial and male gender identification; and drawing from community resources (especially the church).

Greif, Geoffrey L., A. Hrabowski, and Kenneth I. Maton. "African American Fathers of High-Achieving Sons: Using Outstanding Members of an At-Risk Population to Guide Intervention." *Families in Society* 79 (January/February 1998); 45-52.

"In summary, 30% of the children in the present study experienced a marked decrease in their academic performance following parental separation, and this was evident three years later. Access to both parents seemed to be the most protective factor, in that it was associated with better academic adjustment...Moreover, data revealed that noncustodial parents (mostly fathers) were very influential in their children's development...These data also support the interpretation that the more time a child spends with the noncustodial parent the better the overall adjustment of the child."

Factors Associated with Academic Achievement in Children Following Parental Separation, L. Bisnaire, PhD; P. Firestone, PhD; D. Rynard, MA Sc *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 60(1), January, 1990

In a longitudinal study of 1,197 fourth-grade students, researchers observed "greater levels of aggression in boys from mother-only households than from boys in mother-father households."

N. Vaden-Kierman, N. Ialongo, J. Pearson, and S. Kellam, "Household Family Structure and Children's Aggressive Behavior: A Longitudinal Study of Urban Elementary School Children," *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* 23, no. 5 (1995).

Fatherless children -- kids living in homes without a stepfather or without contact with their biological father -- are twice as likely to drop out of school.

U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, *Survey on Child Health*. (1993)

Children from low-income, two-parent families outperform students from high-income, single-parent homes. Almost twice as many high achievers come from two-parent homes as one-parent homes.

"One-Parent Families and Their Children;" Charles F. Kettering Foundation (1990).

Among black children between the ages of 6 to 9 years old, black children in mother-only households scored significantly lower on tests of intellectual ability, than black children living with two parents.

Luster and McAdoo, *Child Development* 65. 1994.

Fathers' Role in Children's Academic Achievement and Early Literacy

Vivian Gadsden and Aisha Ray

Family involvement has been a key theme in early childhood education for more than three decades (Fantuzzo, Tighe, & Childs, 2000). However, because early childhood educators tend to engage more with mothers than with fathers, the study of fathers' involvement in children's development has been neglected. This Digest explores what is known about the role of fathers in young children's academic achievement and early literacy.

Fathers and Infants

Early research indicated that the earlier fathers became involved with their children's learning and socialization, the better. For example, Yarrow et al. (1984) observed 6- to 12-month-old infants separately with mothers and fathers at home and in a laboratory setting. They found that in 6-month-old infants, parental attention and sensory stimulation, especially of mothers, was associated with infant persistence. At 12 months of age, significant results were found only in relation to paternal stimulation and boys' persistence at practicing sensorimotor activities. Clarke-Stewart (1978) observed fathers, mothers, and children 15, 20, and 30 months of age, at home in unstructured and semi-structured situations. She found that the intellectual skills of 15- to 30-month-olds (as measured by the Bayley Mental Scale at 16 and 22 months, and the MCDI at 30 months) were significantly related to the fathers' engagement in unstructured play, fathers' positive rating of children, the amount fathers and children interacted, and fathers' aspirations for children's independence as measured on an age-expected questionnaire.

Early Literacy Development

In areas such as children's early reading, Gadsden and Bowman (1999), in a critical review of research on father involvement in children's education and schooling, conclude that fathers' participation in literacy activities, the barriers that parents face as a result of low literacy, and their perceptions of the role that they can play in their children's literacy development may affect children's preparedness for school. These factors also may influence the direct and subtle messages that fathers send to their children about the value, achievability, and power associated with literacy, schooling, and knowledge.

Although mothers' education historically has been used as the primary predictor of children's achievement, educational research increasingly is examining the effect of father-child interaction on children's early learning, particularly among fathers with low incomes (Gadsden, Brooks, & Jackson, 1997). In a study of 50 low-income African American fathers participating in fatherhood programs, Gadsden et al. examined fathers' beliefs regarding the valuing, uses, and problems of literacy learning for themselves and in relation to their children's early schooling. Fathers' accounts suggested that many fathers felt challenged by the expectations attached to parenting roles—a challenge that was exacerbated by their own limited formal literacy capacities and their desire to support their children's early literacy development. In addition, fathers' beliefs about their children's educational success and future possibilities were ambivalent, often contraindicated their practices, and sometimes were at odds

with their self-perceptions of facilitating children's literacy achievement. The researchers remind us that low-income African American fathers are a diverse group, not only in their literacy abilities, literacy experiences, literacy preparation, and goals for their children, but also in their family relationships and family resources. These and other studies suggest that a father's ability to support his child's learning affects the child's engagement with books and schooling. Fathers (and mothers) who have limited schooling as well as low reading and writing abilities have difficulty participating in school-related activities requiring high levels of literacy. However, these parents have high hopes for their children and depend on programs to ensure that their children will become *competent learners*.

Research suggests that even when fathers have limited schooling, their involvement in children's schools and school lives is a powerful factor in children's academic achievement. Nord, Brimhall, and West (1997) analyzed data from the 1996 National Household Education Survey (NHES) to compare the involvement of nonresident and married fathers in school activities of kindergarten to 12th-grade students. Married and nonresident fathers' involvement in four types of school activities during the school year were examined—attending a general school meeting, attending a class or school event, attending a parent-teacher conference, and volunteering. Involvement was defined as low if fathers did none or one of the four activities during the school year, moderate if they did two activities, and high if they did three or four activities. Fathers in two-parent families and nonresident fathers who were moderately or highly involved in their children's school had children who were significantly more likely than children with less involved fathers to receive mostly high marks, enjoy school, and never repeat a grade.

Research that examines the extent to which fathers are involved with their children's schools (e.g., Nord, Brimhall, & West, 1997) has generally shown that fathers are less involved than mothers in all types of school activities. In particular, Nord, Brimhall, and West (1997) found that fathers with less than a high school education were much less likely to be involved in their children's schools than fathers with higher levels of education. Although nonresident fathers were found to be substantially less involved with their children's school than fathers residing with their children, Nord, Brimhall, and West (1997) indicated that the involvement of nonresidential fathers was in no way trivial. Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) examined whether the motivational resources (e.g., self-regulation, perceived competence, and control understanding) of 300 11- to 14-year-old children mediate between three types of paternal involvement (e.g., *behavior with regard to school*, the child's perception of the parent's *affective and personal availability*, and exposure of the child to *intellectual and cognitive activities*) and school performance (e.g., grades). They reported that for fathers two of the involvement factors (behavior and intellectual/cultural activities) both uniquely influenced perceived competence and indirectly influenced school performance. In a recent study of Head Start children, Fagan and Iglesias (1999) used a nonequivalent control group design to assess whether participation in a Head Start based father involvement intervention influenced child outcomes (e.g., early academic

readiness in reading and mathematics, social skills, and problem behaviors). The intervention involved adapting traditional Head Start parent involvement activities (e.g., volunteering, weekly Fathers' Day programs, father sensitivity training with staff, monthly support groups for fathers, and father-child recreational activities). Three levels of father participation (e.g., low, adequate, and high) were measured. Fagan and Iglesias report a positive association between high-level participation in a father involvement project and change in children's mathematics readiness scores.

Early literacy development is a significant part of preparing children to achieve academically. Children's early literacy is one of the areas to show the most promise in engaging fathers. Although empirical studies in this area are few, the applied activities suggested in *Young Children* (e.g., Ortiz, Stile, & Brown, 1999) and other publications demonstrate how fathers can be invited to engage in basic literacy activities. Literacy researchers (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998; Dickinson & Tabors, 2001; Wasik & Bond, 2001) have identified a range of early literacy behaviors that are associated with children's engagement with texts and success in reading:

- Oral language development, which includes book reading
- Phonemic awareness activities
- Exposure to the alphabet

In more expansive definitions of literacy, a parent's engagement is not limited specifically to reading and writing but encompasses a range of cognitive and social learning. As we know, young children acquire phonemic awareness through nursery rhymes, jingles, poetry, and books that contain words with rhymes and alliteration. Book reading, one of the most important activities in providing a context for language development, is an essential component of an effective preschool curriculum (Senechal et al., 1998). It is intimately tied to language development, helps children to develop phonemic awareness and mastery of the concepts of print, and can be used to engage fathers with the program and at home.

How Fathers Can Be Involved

Children's development of early literacy begins at birth and relies on a range of environmental stimuli. Fathers can ensure that their children are exposed to the best environmental stimuli by participating at home and in early childhood education settings, which are often children's first significant experience outside of the family. In this way, fathers can be supported as they foster optimal early childhood experiences through which their children can develop cognitive abilities. For example, they can tell stories, read and select books with their children, and learn how to use appropriate visual and cognitive cues. Early childhood educators can introduce fathers to approaches that provide opportunities for children to scribble and write, learn new vocabulary, identify letters and important words such as their names, and utilize relevant print within and outside the household (e.g., the brand names on milk cartons and street signs). They can also encourage fathers to talk with their children, a critical but often under-rated parent-child activity.

This type of support could be integrated within the context of a program's family involvement practices or presented as a workshop that is followed up with activities involving both mothers and fathers. Parents might be asked to maintain a portfolio of their children's efforts—that is, a folder of the child's best work—which both child and parent choose. This activity requires that parents follow through on helping their children with literacy tasks, acknowledge their role in their children's learning, and maintain a relationship with the program. Fathers who do not live in the same household with their children can also use this activity as a tangible way to connect with them regularly around a shared activity of interest and demonstrate that they value literacy.

Parents who have low levels of English language and literacy skills can read aloud, recite rhymes, and sing songs to children in their home language. In these cases, early childhood educators can clarify how children's early literacy

experiences in the home language support them as English-language learners. A father can describe what he is doing while engaging in household tasks and ask the child to predict what he might do next. Fathers might also create games that require reading, writing, and problem solving.

Conclusion

Our ability to incorporate the cultural strengths and the distinctive ways that families, specifically fathers, contribute to educational accomplishments of their preschool children is severely constrained by major gaps and inadequacy in our research literature. Before early childhood programs can tap these fathers' or families' potential to enhance children's development, research needs to define father and family involvement more precisely and to examine the culturally rich dimensions of children's early care and education experiences.

For More Information

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