



FACTSHEET

Resources for families

Why dads matter in the early years

Research shows that fathers who undertake a significant amount of hands-on caring, bond more quickly with their babies and are likely to enjoy fatherhood more. Fathers' positive involvement is key to many aspects of children's educational, social and emotional development.

Here are some more key findings:

- The frequency of fathers' reading to 1-2 year olds is linked with their greater interest in books later on.
- Firstborns with highly involved fathers are more positive and accepting towards their second-born sibling.
- Fathers' relationships with their babies promote their baby's security.
- Sensitive, supportive and substantial father involvement from the month following birth is connected with a range of positive outcomes in babies and toddlers, from better language development to higher IQs.
- Fathers' active care of 'difficult-to-raise' pre-schoolers is related to fewer problems in the children later.
- Physically playful, affectionate and socially engaging father-child interactions at age 3-4 predict later popularity with peers, particularly when father and child take turns to make play suggestions and lead the play.
- When fathers display anger with their 3-5 year olds and engage in negative 'tit for tat' interactions, their children are later rated by teachers as more aggressive, less likely to share and less accepted by their peers.
- Babies of very highly involved fathers interact equally with both parents, interact comfortably with a stranger (both in the presence of their father or their mother), and are generally more sociable with everyone – mother, father and stranger.

- The quality of the father's relationship with his baby has a greater effect than the mother-baby relationship on problematic behaviour at ages 5 and 6.
- A father's sensitivity in playing with his two-year-old predicts the child's security at age 10 and adjustment at age 16.
- Fathers' positive involvement in the month following birth is linked with better infant brain development at one year.
- More sensitive fathers have children with better language and intellectual capabilities at 18 months old.
- The babies of more involved fathers show better development and higher IQs at 12 months and 3 years.
- A fathers' authoritative parenting style, combined with help with school work at home, has a positive influence on children's social behaviours.
- School readiness in young children is associated with the sensitivity of their father, over and above that of their mothers.
- Early stimulation from fathers in linked to baby boys' motivation to learn.
- Because fathers tend to spend less time with their young children they are less able to understand their early speech – so they ask them to explain themselves more often. This may contribute to language development.
- A good relationship between fathers and their young daughters reduces the girl's risk of anti-social behaviour in early adolescence.
- The quality of a boy's relationship with his father at seven-and-a-half years old predicts his likelihood of engaging in anti-social behaviours in childhood and adolescence.

Prepared by Jeremy Davies of the Fatherhood Institute

More resources for employers, service providers and families are available at: www.yearofthedad.org

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