



FACTSHEET

Resources for families

Why dads matter as children mature

There are all sorts of ways in which your positive involvement in your child's life can help them as they grow up. Research shows that:

- Fathers' influence is more significant than mothers' in enabling boys to escape from poverty.
- Engaging fathers in behavioural and other parenting interventions can make a difference to children's behaviour and wellbeing, whether the engagement is separate from engagement with the mother, in concert with her, or without her participation at all.
- Fathers can influence their children's behaviour indirectly by their impact on mothers' behaviour and circumstances.
- Conflict with father, father's negativity and father's harsh or neglectful parenting are strongly associated with behavioural problems in children.
- Fathers' harsh parenting has a stronger effect than mothers' on boys' aggression levels.
- Eight year olds whose fathers help them with their sadness and anger are less aggressive (boys) and less negative with friends (girls).
- Few young offenders have had models of good fathering.
- High father involvement in childhood and in adolescence is correlated with lower adolescent risk behaviour and criminality.
- Fluctuations in adolescents' satisfaction with the relationship with their father are correlated with fluctuations in their psychological wellbeing.
- High father involvement and father-teen closeness is associated with less psychological distress in adolescent boys and girls.

- Children whose father spends time with them, in terms of reading or going on outings, have higher IQs and are more socially mobile than those who receive little attention. The differences in life chances are still detectable by the age of 42.
- Children of teenage mothers with greater levels of father contact have fewer behavioural problems and higher reading scores.
- Children whose fathers are involved in their school activity are more likely to complete school and have higher incomes than children whose fathers are not involved.

Anti-social behaviour

- Fathers' qualities, beliefs, personal circumstance and understanding of child development and behaviour impact on the likelihood of their children engaging in anti-social behaviour.
- Both the quality and quantity of father-child interaction are linked to anti-social behaviour, and this is true whether or not father and child live together full time.
- There is a strong link between positive, highly involved fatherhood and positive outcomes for children in terms of resilience to anti-social behaviour and its correlates such as school failure.
- Children who see little or nothing of their fathers tend to idealise or demonise them, blame themselves for their absence, and suffer distress, anger and self-doubt through to adulthood. This is likely to play a part in some children's engagement in anti-social activities.
- A father's absence (combined lack of time and quality) is linked to aggression, anti-social behaviour and low self-esteem in children.
- Getting on badly with even one parent more than doubles the likelihood of a young person engaging in anti-social behaviour.
- Anti-social personality disorder in fathers is associated with problems of conduct and aggression in children and adolescents.
- For girls, having an anti-social father is associated not only with early conduct problems and later anti-social behaviour – but also with having a convicted partner.
- More serious anti-social behaviour by fathers tends to result in worse outcomes for children, as does more extensive contact with a father with serious anti-social behaviour.
- Adolescent boys whose parents have a high conflict relationship are more likely to show anti-social behaviour and mental disorders both at the time and in young adulthood, and also to have ongoing relationship problems with their fathers.

- Low levels of involvement of non-resident fathers with their children are linked to problem behaviour in adolescence (aggression, anti-social behaviour, over control of emotions, depression, anxiety and low self-esteem).
- Children whose fathers are in prison are more likely to show antisocial behaviour, poor academic performance, emotional suffering, alcohol and drug abuse and own (i.e. child's) involvement in the criminal justice system.
- A father's low interest in his child's education has an enormous impact on school failure (and therefore, indirectly, on anti-social behaviour) particularly for boys.
- Early anti-social behaviour is a powerful predictor of early fatherhood.

Smoking

- Fathers' smoking is a risk factor in their children's smoking.
- Adolescents who are more involved with their fathers are less likely to begin smoking regularly.
- Changes in father-child involvement over time predict changes in the probability of teenagers' regular smoking, suggesting a direct relationship between these two factors.

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