



FACTSHEET

Resources for families

Supporting your child's education: five top tips

As busy parents we're forever being told we should be doing more to turn our children into healthy, well-adjusted adults: feed them more vegetables, limit how much TV they watch, monitor their internet usage.

But surprisingly little effort is put in to helping us see how best to support our children's education – something in which dads, as well as mums, can play a really important role. Here are some top tips on how to do it:

1. Get into the reading habit

It's easy to assume that reading with your children only matters once they're at school – and that it's ok for mum to do it all.

But in fact, research suggests that dads' reading to very young children is the strategy most associated with their early reading and writing skills.

Children whose dads read a lot to them when they're 1 or 2 tend to get more interested in books later – they also tend to behave and concentrate better at nursery, and do better in maths.

Five-year-old children whose dads have been reading regularly with them tend to know and use more words, can pick out letters more accurately and are better at problem solving – and by the age of 10 they have wider vocabularies.

2. Talk to them

Researchers have found that verbal exchanges between fathers and their infants, and between mothers and their infants, each have an independent effect on children's social ability at pre-school – and can make them less aggressive.

So even if you spend less time with your children than their mum does, your conversations with them are special, and bring extra value.

Interestingly, dads tend to be more 'demanding' of their children conversationally, often asking more questions of them and using longer words for example – all of which can bring benefits.

This may be a side-effect of dads being less familiar with children's speech than mothers are, because dads are more likely to work full-time and tend to spend less time with their children.

But regardless of how much time you spend with them, keep talking - it helps children build their understanding, learn new words and become good communicators.

Read more about [how to talk to children by an expert on child interviewing](#).

3. Don't forget the boys

[Survey data](#) suggests that although parents spend roughly equal time playing with their sons and daughters, both mums and dads are more likely to engage in literacy activities with girls.

They're more likely to take young girls to libraries, and read to them for longer periods of time, for example; girls are also more likely to own books than are boys.

This is probably a significant factor in the well-known 'reading gap' that exists between girls and boys throughout the education system. The relative lack of male role models to 'model' interest in literacy activities for boys in nurseries, schools and libraries, may also play a part – another reason why dads doing literacy activities with sons can have particular benefits.

Read more about the 'reading gap' in these resources produced by the [Boys' Reading Commission](#), set up by the All Party Parliamentary Literacy Group and National Literacy Trust.

4. Learn to be a good co-parent

People think of 'co-parenting' as something separated parents do – and it's certainly important in that context. But it's also relevant to mums and dads who are together.

Being a good co-parent means sharing the decision-making, coordinating parenting activities and supporting the other parent's interactions with your child.

Getting good at this brings all sorts of benefits for you and your children. Shared decision making by parents (rather than one parent always taking the lead) has been found to be directly linked to very young children's better academic and social skills.

In fact, as a father, your co-parenting is more important than your income in predicting good educational outcomes for your children!

Read more in our Research summary: [Co-parenting and early child development](#)

5. Take part in school/pre-school activities

By getting involved in literacy activities organised by schools, nurseries and the like, you can have real impact.

One intervention with dads of 3-5 year-olds in the US helped dads improve their 'play behaviour' and found that this boosted the children's 'academic readiness' skills, for example.

And a recent evaluation in nine primary schools in London, UK found that children who took part with their dads in a programme called Fathers Reading Every Day were 4 times more likely to make better-than-expected progress in reading than those who didn't take part.

Read more about [FRED](#).

Read more about [dads' impact on young children's language and literacy](#).

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

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