



Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Through Child Care

April 2004

What the Research Tells Us

Over the last four decades, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of children growing up in homes without fathers. In 1960, fewer than 10 million children did not live with their fathers. Today, the number is nearly 25 million. More than one-third of these children will not see their fathers at all during the course of a year. Studies show that children who grow up without responsible fathers are significantly more likely to experience poverty, perform poorly in school, engage in criminal activity, and abuse drugs and alcohol.¹

Involvement by fathers, the development of a positive relationship with their children, and the provision of child support have been shown to have a positive effect on children's social, cognitive, and academic achievement,

and behavior. Children do better in school when fathers are involved—they get better grades, are less likely to repeat a grade, and are less likely to be expelled.² Even for very young children, good fathering contributes to the development of emotional security, curiosity, and math and verbal skills.³ Fathers also play a unique role in shaping children's gender development: children develop a firmer gender identity by having a warm, nurturing, involved father.^{4,5}

“When fathers play a responsible and nurturing role in their children’s lives, the benefits are profound and longlasting. In our effort to encourage fathers to involve themselves deeply in the lives of their children, child care providers can help lead the way.”

**—Assistant Secretary Wade Horn, Ph.D.
Administration for Children and Families**

Involving Fathers in Early Childhood Programs

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) supports programs and policies that reflect the critical role that both fathers and mothers play in building strong and successful families and in the well-being of children. Under the leadership of President Bush and HHS Secretary Thompson, HHS' Administration for Children and Families (ACF) is developing innovative programs to promote responsible fatherhood. Some of these programs seek to sharpen fathers' parenting skills. Others aim to discourage young men from becoming fathers until they are married and prepared for fatherhood's life-altering responsibilities. Still other programs fund research to improve our understanding of how fathers contribute to child development. The Administration is undertaking many of these programs in partnership with others, including State governments, academic institutions, and community and faith-based organizations.

Father involvement in early childhood programs refers to opportunities that are designed specifically to attract and engage fathers.⁶ Involvement can mean both involvement of fathers in the education of their children and involvement in their care and support.⁷ It can be as varied as spending time in a classroom, reading to children at home, participating in parenting and family relationship classes, or attending job training.

Specific Steps for Early Childhood Programs

Specific steps that child care programs can take to involve fathers include:

- Arranging special father-child activities;
- Recruiting fathers to volunteer in the classroom;
- Sponsoring fatherhood workshops and discussion groups;
- Ensuring that fathers are depicted in newsletters and classroom posters; and
- Matching fatherless children with male mentors.

Experts note that several key issues must be explored as early childhood programs seek to promote father involvement: being specific about father involvement goals; identifying significant role figures; and providing training and support services to staff.⁸ Programs should build on the needs and interests of the individual fathers in the program and should design activities for both fathers and mothers that are flexibly scheduled. Several studies have noted that the highest father participation was in family activities that involved the father and the child or the whole family.^{9, 10}



References

- 1 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2002. "Promoting Responsible Fatherhood"—*HHS Fact Sheet*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- 2 U.S. Department of Education. 1996. *National Household Education Survey (NHES): Parent and Family Involvement in Education*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.
- 3 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Fatherhood Initiative Web site (<http://hhs.fatherhood.gov>).
- 4 Child Trends, Inc. 1998. "What a Difference a Dad Makes! What Research Tells Us About Fathers: Child Trends Summarizes Key Findings." Washington, DC: Child Trends, Inc.
- 5 Riley, D. 2001. "Fathers Caring for Their Children," in *Child Care Connections*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin—Extension; and Lamb, M. E. (Ed.) 1997. *The Role of the Father in Child Development, 3rd Ed.* New York: Wiley.
- 6 Fagan, J. and Woody, D. 2002. *Involving Fathers in Early Childhood Programs*—Presentation at 2002 State Child Care Administrators Meeting, Washington, DC.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 McBride, B. A. and Rane, T. R. October 1996. "Father/Male Involvement in Early Childhood Programs," an *ERIC Digest*. Urbana, IL: Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC).
- 9 Tubiville, V., Umbarger, G. and Cuthrie, A. July 2000. "Fathers' Involvement in Programs for Young Children." Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).
- 10 Sylvester, K. and Reich, K. 2002. *Making Fathers Count*. Washington, DC: Social Policy Action Network (SPAN).

Selected Publications

Annotated Bibliography: Fatherhood (August 2002)
Research to Practice (R2P)
Child Welfare League of America
Web: <http://www.cwla.org/programs/r2p/biblioofa.pdf>

**Early Head Start Father Studies Papers/
Presentations** (December 2002)
Early Head Start Father Studies Workgroup
Web: <http://fatherhood.hhs.gov/on-going/headstart.htm>

**Expanding the Goals of “Responsible
Fatherhood” Policy** (December 2002)
Juliane Baron and Kathleen Sylvester
Social Policy Action Network (SPAN) and the
National Practitioners’ Network for Fathers and Families
(NPNFF)
Web: <http://www.span-online.org/gender.pdf>

**Father/Male Involvement in Early Childhood
Programs** (October 1996), an *ERIC Digest*
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)
Web: http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed400123.html

Fatherhood Initiative: Resource Guide
(December 2001)
Head Start Information & Publication Center
Web: <http://www.headstartinfo.org/pdf/fatherhoodInitiative.pdf>

**“Fathers Caring for Their Children”
Child Care Connections Vol. 10, No. 1**
(September 2001)
University of Wisconsin – Extension
Web: <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/ece/tips/pdfs/connect0901.pdf>

**“Fathers’ Involvement in Programs for Young
Children”** (July 2000)
Vicki Tuberville, Gardner Umbarger, and Anne Cuthrie,
in *Young Children*
National Association for the Education of Young
Children (NAEYC)
Web: <http://www.naeyc.org/resources/journal>

**Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study:
Baseline Report** (March 2003)
Sara McLanahan, Irwin Garfinkel, Nancy E. Reichman,
Julien Teitler, Marcia Carlson, and Christina Norland Audigier
Center for Research on Child Wellbeing, Princeton University
Web: <http://crcw.princeton.edu/fragilefamilies/nationalreport.pdf>

**A Guide for Dads: Give Your Child an Early Lead
in Life... Quality Child Care** (2003)
Child Care Aware
Web: <http://www.childcareaware.org/en/tools/pubs/pdf/111e.pdf>

Involving Fathers in Early Childhood Programs
(August 2002)
Jay Fagan and David Woody, Microsoft PowerPoint
Presentation at 2002 State Child Care Administrators
Meeting (SAM)
For a copy of this resource, contact NCCIC at 800-616-
2242 or e-mail info@nccic.org.

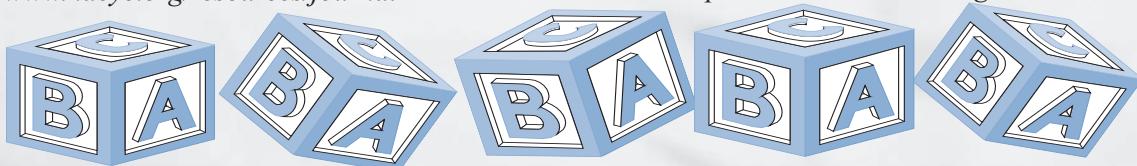
Making Fathers Count (2002)
Kathleen Sylvester and Kathleen Reich, for the Social
Policy Action Network (SPAN)
Web: http://www.span-online.org/fathers_count.pdf

The Meaning of Father Involvement for Children
(May 1999)
Child Trends, Inc.
Web: <http://www.childtrends.org/Files/dadmeaning.pdf>

**National Household Education Survey (NHES):
Parent and Family Involvement in Education** (2003)
U.S. Department of Education
Web: <http://nces.ed.gov/nhes/pdf/quex/pfi/pfi03.pdf>

**The Role of the Father in Child Development, 3rd
Ed.** (1996)
Michael E. Lamb, published by John Wiley & Sons

**What Do Fathers Contribute to Children’s Well-
Being?** (May 1999)
Child Trends, Inc.
Web: <http://www.childtrends.org/Files/dadchild.pdf>



Selected Agencies and National Organizations

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)

Fatherhood Initiative

Web: <http://fatherhood.hhs.gov/index.shtml>

Head Start Bureau (HSB)

Administration for Children and Families (ACF)

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

330 C Street SW

Washington, DC 20447

Phone: 202-205-8572

Web: <http://www2.acf.hhs.gov/programs/hsb/index.htm>

National Center on Fathers and Families (NCOFF)

University of Pennsylvania

3700 Walnut Street, Box 58

Philadelphia, PA 19104-6216

Phone: 215-573-5500

Web: <http://www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu/>

National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI)

One Bank Street, Suite 160

Gaithersburg, MD 20878

Phone: 301-948-0599

Web: <http://fatherhood.org>

National Fathers' Network (NFN)

Kindering Center

16120 NE 8th Street

Bellevue, WA 98008-3937

Phone: 425-747-4004

Web: <http://www.fathersnetwork.org>

National Head Start Association

1651 Prince Street

Alexandria, VA 22314

Phone: 703-739-0875

Web: <http://www.nhsa.org/index.htm>

National Latino Fatherhood and Family Institute (NLFFI)

5252 E. Beverly Boulevard

East Los Angeles, CA 90022

Phone: 323-728-7770

Web: <http://www.nlffi.org>

The National Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families, Inc. (NPNFF)

1003 K Street NW, Suite 565

Washington, DC 20001

Phone: 800-34N-PNFF (800-326-7633)

Web: <http://www.npnff.org>

Social Policy Action Network (SPAN)

444 North Capitol Street, Suite 309

Washington, DC 20001

Phone: 202-434-4770

Web: <http://www.span-online.org>

Welfare Information Network (WIN)

1000 Vermont Avenue NW, Suite 600

Washington, DC 20005

Phone: 202-628-5790

Web: <http://www.financeprojectinfo.org/win>



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U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families