



Supporting dads in their role as literacy role-models

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based on the work of
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InfoSheet 9: Dads & Early Literacy

Educators, social service workers, and family service professionals frequently look for new ways to aid in the educational achievement of young children. According to Dr. Glen Palm, "Fathers are an important and understudied resource for promoting literacy with young children." The following list describes 10 steps for helping fathers to become stronger advocates and role-models for the literacy development of their young children.

1. Expect fathers will want to be involved in their child's early learning and promoting school success.

- Invite fathers and mothers to events and activities in the library, child care center, pre-natal classes, pre-school, faith community, and other environments where parents can learn about and support healthy child development
- Encourage fathers to be involved at home and in public settings
- Design parent-child events that encourage parents to interact with their child

2. Help fathers to feel and understand their importance in promoting early literacy development.

- Ask fathers to participate in specific ways: reading a favorite book, playing an instrument, telling stories, talking about their job or a hobby
- Sponsor father-child activities such as breakfast before work or a Saturday morning program for dads and kids
- Talk about the added benefits of father involvement – which is often distinct from mother involvement (see sidebar, "Benefits of Reading with Dad")

3. Introduce fathers to good literature for young children.

- Display examples of good books at parent events
- Give away books at father-child events
- Provide lists of books on topics that fathers might enjoy
- Visit author Jon Scieszka's website www.guysread.com for lists of books for boys and men

4. Provide information about and models of story reading skills.

- Send information about reading to children that uses male models
- Send home tapes of books with male voices as models
- Invite a male story-teller to parent-child events
- Provide parenting classes that focus on emerging literacy

Benefits of Reading with Dad

When dads read with kids, they help to...

- foster emotional security
- aid relaxation
- transmit shared values

Eirini Flouri (2003)

Children who read with their fathers...

- are superior readers
- perform better in school
- have better relationship skills

Stephen Green (2002)

- Learn about Jim Trelease’s “Read-Aloud Handbook” by visiting the author’s website: www.trelease-on-reading.com/rah.html

5. Share information about typical developmental sequences for literacy in young children.

- Offer to parents information on how children learn about reading
- Send home information and examples of children’s writing letters and attempts at early spelling
- Give parents ideas for supporting children’s word and letter recognition in their every day environments
- Share tips from the parents’ guide “A Child Becomes a Reader” from the National Institute for Literacy: www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading/publications/reading_pre.pdf

6. Introduce fathers to books for young children that focus on positive role models of fathers.

- Create book lists that feature fathers in positive roles
- Read stories with fathers during parent-child events
- Create a bulletin board that displays books with fathers
- Share the “Reading with Dad” booklist, available from the Minnesota Humanities Commission: www.minnesotahumanities.org

Motivation to Read

Why do dads tend to read with their children?

60% focus on skill building - getting children ready for school

35% focus on bonding with children - comfortable and fun activity to share with child

Robert Ortiz (2000)

7. Support informal and simple literacy activities that are connected to fathers’ interests or activities.

- Listening to children’s stories while riding in the car
- Reading newspapers, cartoons, or magazines as a model and time to share about letters and words
- Following sports teams / players or collecting sports cards
- Using household tools (paint brushes, hammers, tape measures, etc.) to promote literacy and pre-literacy skills

8. Make men visible.

- Hire male staff as teachers of young children, librarians, and story-tellers
- Invite fathers and local male professionals as volunteers
- Display posters, pictures, and photographs with both men and women interacting with children

9. Find out about fathers’ needs and interests.

- Conduct surveys to identify what fathers like and might want to do with children
- Find out when fathers are available for events or meetings
- Find out what fathers already do around early literacy and support and build upon these activities

Mothers can be advocates for father-child reading.

Mothers are more likely to recognize the importance of early exposure to books

Mothers are more likely to initiate book reading at various times throughout the day

Reading by fathers is often delegated and supervised by mothers

Fathers are more likely to be involved when the family context is positive

Nichols (2000) and Clark (2005)

10. For hard to reach fathers - make an extra effort.

- Send a personal invitation to fathers who rarely or never visit
- Send an invitation from the child to invite a father to attend a parent-child event
- Make a phone call to a father to invite him to an event or ask him to do something specific for a class
- Help mothers to understand the value that positive male role models can play in child development

Visit MFFN online for additional InfoSheets about how to engage fathers in family service programs: www.mnfathers.org/resources.html