What is it?
There are all sorts of ways you can get dads and kids enjoying time together playing sport or doing other forms of activity. Don’t limit yourself to competitive activities, and don’t assume, as many do, that football is the way to a dad’s heart…it may be our national game, but there are plenty of other physical activities which can inspire men and their children.

What is so good about it?
• Sport and other outdoor activities encourage healthy lifestyles
• The children and dads can have great fun
• Playing sports and games can help children learn valuable lessons, eg about teamwork, coping with winning and losing
• It’s a great way for adults and children to co-operate, get to know each other and make new friends

Who is it for?
Men accompanied by 1-2 children (either gender). It can be open to women with children too if you prefer. Adult/child ratios will vary according to activity.

Sports where players are expected to understand and follow rules, and requiring technical skill, will only work with older children (5-7 plus) but others can work for all ages (eg swimming, going for a walk, working together to find your way around a treasure hunt).

What skills and resources are needed?
• Enough experienced adult helpers to supervise each activity
• If relevant, someone knowledgeable to act as referee/umpire
• Relevant equipment, eg bats, balls, water wings, rubbish with which to create models.

Detailed description of activity
Here are some ideas already working for groups of dads and children:

Organised team sports
Depending on the level of interest locally, it’s possible to set up regular team-based sports to which dads and their children are invited (mums might be made welcome too, but the activity might be promoted particularly with dads in mind). One way of giving such activities added appeal is to seek input from professional/semi-professional teams…the nearest major football, rugby, cricket or basketball club, for example. Input might be anything from regular coaching to occasional free tickets or prizes where families can win a VIP trip to the local ground and/or meet a star player.

A model working successfully in Barking and Dagenham is that the local football team (Dagenham and Redbridge FC, also known as ‘The Daggers’) donates 12 free tickets per week for dads and their children to watch the Saturday home games – and the local children’s centres have built a family activity programme around that. Every other Saturday, dads and children (up to age 14) play football together on a local playing field, supported by two qualified coaches; there are activities laid on for

Sport and other forms of exercise can be great fun, as well as being good for health and wellbeing. They also provide a key context in which family members establish and develop relationships with each other.

Academics have coined the term ‘purposive leisure’ to describe the way in which parents use leisure activities to pursue goals they value – both to contribute to family functioning and to achieve beneficial outcomes for children (Shaw and Dawson, 2001). Sport, in particular, has a special significance as a form of activity through which fathers have traditionally nurtured relationships with their children (Kay, 2009).
Dads’ Activities Pack

Sports and other outdoor activities

under-fives too; a healthy lunch is provided – and afterwards, all the families go by ‘walking bus’ to watch the match. The free tickets are raffled.

There are costs involved in this kind of scheme, for example to pay for the coach and lunches, but they should not be prohibitive and families may be willing and able to contribute something towards the cost. Read more about Barking and Dagenham’s Sports Fit programme here: http://bit.ly/j55GgL.

Informal activity days

Especially for those with younger children, it can be great for dads to know that if they turn up at a particular place at a set time, there will be other dads and children with whom they can take part in some kind of activity. Knowing that there’ll be other dads to talk to, and that the children will have friends to play with, might be just the right incentive to get everyone motivated rather than lounging around the house.

A good example is swimming. Depending on how many dads and children are likely to turn up, it may be possible to book the local pool, or part of it, and issue an open invitation to dads to bring their children (making clear whatever the local adult/child ratio is). Alternatively the meet-up can be as simple as this: dads and their children will meet at 11am in the leisure centre café and take it from there.

A similar approach might be taken with meeting to play in the park, go for a walk in the woods, a bike ride or along a canal – whatever makes sense in your locality. And it needn’t be the case that you always organise to do ‘sporty’. Especially given how unreliable the British weather can be, it might be just as effective to create a welcoming group of dads and children who meet in a particular café and are just as likely to then head off to a local museum or gallery, or on a shopping trip.

‘Making and doing’ activities

Sometimes dads and children can get really inspired by activities that require a bit more planning than just organising a time and place and making sure you’ve sourced a football, a Frisbee or a few sets of water-wings.

Here are some activities that dads’ groups have delivered successfully:

- Kite-making and flying
- Rocket-making and launching
- Scrapheap challenge – modelling with recycled materials
- Treasure hunts.

With all planned activities it’s best to have tried them out first and reassured yourself that they will work – there’s nothing worse than everyone turning up and then it transpiring that they’re not going to achieve what’s been advertised.

There are all sorts of websites with ideas and outlines for how to deliver these sorts of activities, including Dad Can Do (www.dadcando.com) and the craft section of Care for the Family’s Engage website (http://bit.ly/k1TOEA). Or check out the book list below.

How to publicise it

- If the event is for people of all abilities, make that clear
- Be clear if there are limits on who can take part, eg ages of children, basic skill level required, restrictions due to adult/children ratios
- If you’re organising an informal drop-in, choose a regular time and place (eg second Saturday of the month, a particular café at 11am) and stick to it, so people know you’ll always be there
- Send reminders by text

References