Research shows that babies as young as three months are fully equipped to pay attention to two people at the same time:

- Babies can rapidly shift their gaze from one person to the other as the interaction develops, sharing attention and feelings with both adults. This process is likely to be important for baby's social and emotional development (Fivaz-Depeursinge and Corboz-Warnery, 1999).

- The baby's ability to do this is related to how well the parents are getting on. The more peaceful and cooperative the partnership between the parents, the more the baby actively engages in three way interactions (McHale et al, 2008).

'Co-parenting' refers to shared decision making between parents and the coordination of parenting activities, including the extent to which mothers and fathers support or undermine each other’s interactions with their child. Although couples who are happy together are more likely to 'co-parent' well, some – despite mutual relationship satisfaction – do not do so. This dimension of parenting is now attracting substantial attention. For example:

- Amongst families with baby boys, supportive co-parenting is related to more secure attachments between these babies and their mothers and fathers (Brown et al, 2009).

- Shared decision-making by mother and father is directly linked to very young children's better academic and social skills (Cabrera et al, 2012).

- Positive co-parental communication enhances mothers’ supportiveness of their children, and this in turn results in children’s better social skills and achievement, both in pre-school and, later, at school (McConnell and Kerig, 2002).

- Yeung (2004) found a one-point increase in fathers’ co-parenting behaviour associated with an almost four-point increase in children's academic test scores. In fact, fathers' co-parenting was second
only to their education level in predicting good educational outcomes for their children – and both proved more important than the fathers’ income.

• Children of involved fathers are more likely to live in cognitively stimulating homes (Williams & Sternberg, 2002)

Both mothers and fathers consider substantial time spent with children as a key component of positive co-parenting (Baxter, 2013).

• A key predictor of fathers’ involvement in children’s learning is having been involved in their care very early on (Goldman, 2005).

• In the US fathers’ greater involvement in routine childcare is associated with children’s higher school grades (Hoffman & Youngblade, 1999).

• A study of families with disabled children found those children more likely to display interest in literacy materials (and in adults who use literacy materials) when their fathers were involved in child care and household routines, as well as engaging their children directly in play and visiting (Barnes, 2009).

• When parents share care more equitably, fathers engage in more early literacy activities with their young children than in families where childrearing tasks are divided traditionally by gender. Such parents are also more likely to share similar attitudes toward childrearing and to resolve family conflicts calmly and with compromise (Ortiz, 1996).

REFERENCES


Baxter, J., 2013. Fathers as co-parents: how co-parenting perceptions are linked to Australian couples’ sharing of childcare, other household work and paid work. Available online. Accessed 17 March 2014:


