

Making the most of fathers to... Support children's early learning

Young children do better when BOTH parents support their early learning. And in some cases fathers' influence is greater than mothers' ...

PARENTING STYLE: In a sample of African American families, fathers' authoritarian parenting style (rigid and bossy) was more influential than mothers', and was linked with poorer vocabulary, listening, reading and other skills in their children.

'SCHOOL READINESS' in young children is associated with high levels of fathers' sensitivity, in addition to mothers' sensitivity. Helping fathers as well as mothers to respond to infant-cues and develop quality interactions with their babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers, is very important.

LANGUAGE: Five-year-olds with two supportive parents score higher on language development than those with one or no supportive parents.

INTEREST IN BOOKS: Frequency of fathers' reading to 1-2 year olds is linked with their greater interest in books later in life; and time spent by fathers in reading to very young children is the strategy most consistently associated with their emergent literacy outcomes.

FATHERS' AND MOTHERS' OWN EDUCATION AND SKILLS: Better educated fathers, like better educated mothers, have a more positive impact on their children's early learning. Like mothers, fathers can be motivated to engage in further learning when they understand the benefits to their children.

BRAIN DEVELOPMENT: High quality (sensitive/supportive) and substantial father involvement from the month following birth onwards is connected with a range of positive outcomes in babies and toddlers, including higher IQs at 12 months and 3 years.

ATTACHMENT SECURITY is associated with superior functioning in young children - and young children with secure attachments to both parents do better than children who are securely attached to only one parent.

HOME LITERACY: When addressing literacy in the home, it's important to work with both parents, since both fathers' and mothers' participation in home literacy activities is connected with children's progress.

THEY DO IT :

A case study approach explored the effects of a family-environment literacy intervention with 25 fathers and their 5-year-old children. The findings indicated that the fathers promoted their children's literacy development *when they learned literacy strategies and activities in the program*. A 'dose effect' also seems to be important: a 'Head Start' intervention with fathers of 3-5 year olds found the more the fathers participated in the program and the more the fathers' 'play behaviour' with their children improved, the greater the improvement in their children's 'academic readiness' skills.

To download other 'Bringing fathers in' resources and access relevant links and references, go to:
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