

Building Bridges: Linking Practice and Research on Home Visitation



SPRING ■ 2006

Fatherhood

Celebrating
15 Years
of Service



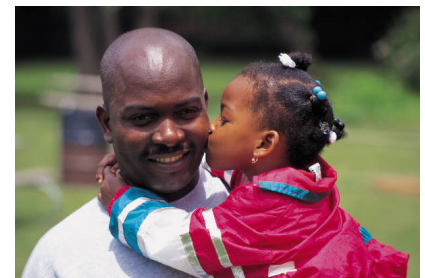
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What We Know About Fathers, Children, and Child Development



By Craig LeCroy, Ph.D.

HISTORICALLY WE HAVE EMPHASIZED THE ROLE OF THE MOTHER IN CARING FOR INFANTS. BUT CAN FATHERS DO JUST AS GOOD OF A JOB IF LEFT WITH THE TASK OF CARING FOR AN INFANT?

Research studies have suggested that the answer is yes, fathers can act sensitively and responsively with their infants. To get at this complex question naturalistic studies have been conducted on male primates, well known for having little interest in their offspring after birth. However, when female caregivers are absent, the males are able to care for the infants without difficulty.

Some of the most exciting research on fatherhood originated over 35 years ago when Michael Lamb began conducting research to answer the question, “do fathers behave differently toward infants than mothers do?” In his classic book, *The Role of the Father in Child Development*, Lamb documented that fathers contribute to their children’s development in ways that are unique from mothers. Mothers were observed to interact with infants primarily around

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We are pleased to provide this newsletter to family support programs, decision makers, and researchers through the partnership of LeCroy and Milligan Associates, Healthy Families Arizona, and the Western Regional Healthy Families America Center. It is our goal to encourage the integration of current research into practice to improve outcomes for children and families.

From the Editor:

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you read this: **Fatherhood in contemporary society**? For most of us, it is the dubious distinction in the United States of becoming the world leader in fatherless families and the fact is that record numbers of children are growing up without a father's involvement. Yet, the irony is that the social science research literature has built a ground swell of evidence that fathers are major contributors to child development — *fathers are essential*.

As a father of an 11-year old son, I know that "fatherwork" is critical to a healthy family. I also know it takes effort to step up to the responsibility of putting aside my work and career and make the necessary time to do the fatherwork. I like the notion that Dollahite and Hawkins have presented in their book, *Generative Fathering: Beyond the Deficit Perspectives*: fathers have an ethical obligation to meet the needs of the next generation. From this perspective, fathers have the ability and responsibility to choose involvement. To be a good father I need to think about the needs of the next generation and not respond to societal expectations. My career is challenging and sometimes difficult, but good fathering... that is hard! And it is the most important work that men can do.

How can home visitors support fathers in the family and maximize their contributions to children's development? This is the guiding theme in this issue of *Building Bridges: Linking Practice and Research on Home Visitation*. The first step is to understand what those contributions are and we have reviewed some relevant literature on father involvement and child development. However, as practitioners it is important to consider the reality: fathers can be difficult to engage in a child's development. We have gleaned ideas from research about how this can be accomplished, provided an assessment so readers can test their father involvement IQ, and provided some practical suggestions. In the end, father involvement is hard work but our children will be better if we leave the deficit model of fathering behind and step forward to build strategies and programs that promote positive fathering.

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Director of Research and Evaluation
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Fathers, Children and Child Development

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childcare activities such as feeding, whereas, fathers interacted more around play. Indeed, the unique play fathers engaged in included more rough-and-tumble play—bouncing, throwing (carefully!) and tickling.

When mothers play with infants they do so in a less physical and arousing manner than that of fathers. More recent research supported Lamb's study finding that fathers promoted their children's intellectual development and social competence through physical play, whereas mothers promoted these skills through verbal expressions and teaching activities.

Fathers can competently care for infants, but would an infant have a preference for their mother or father

under stressful circumstances? When both parents are present, infants do not show a preference for either mothers or fathers. However, add some stress to the situation, like an unknown adult, and some fatigue for the infant, and there will be a stronger attachment by the infant to the mother.

Many studies have shown that higher levels of father involvement (meals together, outings, homework assistance) are related to higher levels of school performance, fewer behavior problems, more school enjoyment, and increased social competence.

Not all fathers parent the same and research studies have shown that how a father parents their child can influence a child's subsequent development. In one study, fathers who set appropriate limits with their children had sons with higher academic achievement. In another study of preschoolers, boys whose fathers used praise and support

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Tips for Promoting Father Involvement

NOTWITHSTANDING THE COMPLEX POLICY ENVIRONMENT, SOCIAL CONTEXT, AND FUNDING CONSTRAINTS THAT PROGRAMS FACE, THERE ARE WAYS TO PROMOTE FATHER INVOLVEMENT ON A DAY-TO-DAY BASIS.

► **Expect fathers to participate**

When the family's situation allows it, invite both parents to events, address letters and program information to both parents, and consult both parents when decisions about a child need to be made, even if by telephone. Encourage parent-child activities that can be accomplished with one or two parents present, and suggest activities that encourage parents to share interaction with their children. Of course, use discretion in working with families in which separation exists for the protection of family members.

► **Make fathers feel necessary**

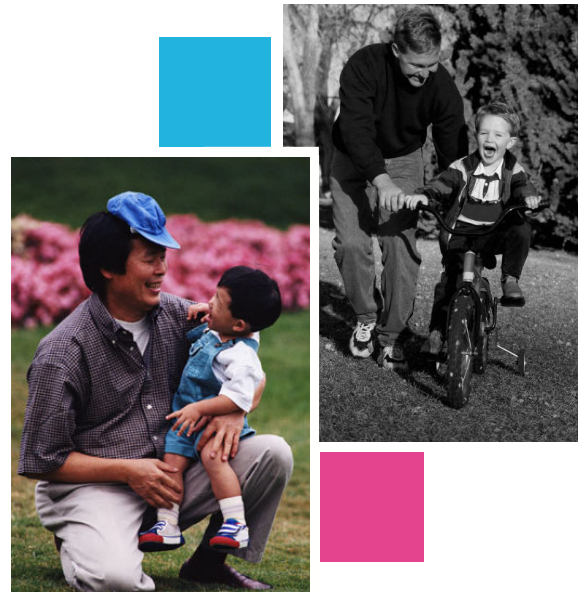
Sponsor activities that will help to show fathers that they are an important part of the program and of their children's lives. Get fathers to participate by calling upon their individual skills (teaching children to play a musical instrument or kick a soccer ball, cooking, etc.). Develop father-child activities. Host an annual Dads' Day.

► **Meet fathers' needs**

Conduct meetings or support groups for fathers, and provide services that address the interests and needs of fathers, such as employment assistance or training and recreation. Also, be wary of setting aside special resources for mothers (such as a "Mom's Room") unless there is a corresponding resource for fathers.

► **Make men visible**

Have men on staff or as volunteers. A father might feel more comfortable participating if he doesn't



have to worry about being the only man there. Spotlight a father every month in your newsletter.

► **Go the extra mile**

Send a personal invitation to fathers, explaining that you would like to meet them, since they are an important part of their children's lives.

► **Create a neutral forum**

Make sure that program literature refers to parents as "she" and "he," and that photographs on the walls or in brochures include both mothers and fathers. ¶

Reprinted with publisher's permission from the Family Support America publication, "Family Support and... Father Involvement" (Family Support America, n.d.)

We want to hear from you!

This newsletter was designed with you in mind. If you have ideas for future newsletters, comments or suggestions about what you have read here, please send them to Kerry Milligan at: kerry@lecroymilligan.com.

Thank you!

Promoting Child Involvement Among Non-Resident Fathers



By Craig W. LeCroy, Ph.D.

A NON-RESIDENT FATHER IS A PARENT WHO DOES NOT LIVE IN THE SAME HOUSEHOLD AS HIS CHILD.

There are a huge variety of non-resident fathers—divorced, separated, and never-married — some who see their children everyday and others who never or rarely see their children.

The number of non-resident fathers has been growing dramatically. What can account for this growth? Increases in divorce and separation, non-married couples having children, and incarceration may be some of the answers. Twenty-five years ago there were less than 8 million children living in families where the father was absent. Today, there are nearly 20 million children living in families where the father is absent. This means about 25-35% of children are living in mother-only households.

An important goal for home visitors is to promote non-resident fathers' involvement with their children. How can this goal be accomplished?

► **Help an unmarried father establish paternity.**

As the Office of Child Enforcement notes: “once paternity is established legally, a child gains legal rights and privileges. Among these may be rights to inheritance, rights to the father’s medical and life insurance benefits, and to social security and possibly veterans’ benefits. The child also has a chance to develop a relationship with his father, and to develop a sense of identity and connection to the ‘other half’ of his or her family” (Office of Child Enforcement, 1997, p. 11).

► **Promote visitation agreements or shared parenting.**

More fathers are obtaining legal custody of their children but the vast majority (85%) of custodial parents are mothers. Visitation by fathers can be beneficial to positive child development. Working out visitation agreements or developing shared parenting can directly facilitate the positive development of the child.

► **Schools and programs can help non-resident fathers share their children’s lives.** Fatherhood experts (Lamb, Pleck, & Charnov, 1985; Pleck, 1997; Sandberg & Hofferth, 2001) describe three dimensions of father involvement that can be encouraged:

1. **Engagement:** direct contact and shared interactions with the child from caretaking, play or leisure.
2. **Accessibility:** the father’s presence and availability to the child—regardless of the nature or extent of interactions.
3. **Responsibility:** the father’s understanding of the child’s needs, including economic resources.

► **Explaining the benefit of father-child relationships.**

It is important for mothers and fathers to understand that fathers matter. Fathers may be reluctant to become involved in their children’s development because they feel unsure of themselves or that their contributions do not matter. However, research has found that children who feel a closeness to their fathers are:

- 75% less likely to have a teen birth
- 80% less likely to spend time in jail
- twice as likely to enter college
- have increased cognitive competence, empathy, and more internalized locus of control.

Reach out and let a father know that fatherhood makes a difference! ¶

Sources:

- Lamb, M. E., Pleck, J. H., Charnov, E. L., & Levine, J. A. (1985). Paternal behavior in humans. *American Zoologist*, 25, 883-894.
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Photo credit: Image taken from familiesandcommunities.org



What can Parenting Programs Aimed at Adolescent Fathers Hope to Achieve?

By Judy Krysik, Ph.D.

DESPITE THE GROWTH IN RECENT YEARS OF PARENTING PROGRAMS AIMED AT PREVENTING CHILD ABUSE/NEGLECT AND IMPROVING PARENT/CHILD RELATIONSHIPS AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT, LITTLE ATTENTION HAS BEEN PAID TO FATHERS.

A pilot program in New York sought to change the neglect of young fathers through a randomized clinical trial (Mazza 2002).

Sixty urban African-American adolescent first-time fathers were randomly assigned to either a control group consisting of weekly group parenting skills training, or an experimental group which included parenting skills training in addition to weekly individual counseling, biweekly group counseling, educational/vocational referrals and placements, medical care and referrals, housing and legal advocacy, and cultural and recreational activities.

At the end of six months the fathers in the experimental group had made statistically significant



gains compared to fathers in the control group in the areas of employment, vocational planning, feeling positive about their current relationship with their children, using birth control, being able to plan for the future, and increasing their number of close friends.

The results indicate that the program aimed only at teaching parenting skills to young fathers was not effective.

Rather, an approach to fathers similar to that Healthy Families

advocates for mothers allowed the young fathers to become more goal oriented, increased their support network, improved their relationships with their children, and improved their behavior with regard to family planning and employment. Importantly, the study demonstrated that young fathers can be engaged in a helping relationship and can make significant changes in many aspects of their lives. ¶

Source

Mazza, C. (2002). Young dads: The effects of a parenting program on urban African-American adolescent fathers. *Adolescence*, 37 (148), 681-690.

What's this all about?

This newsletter is made possible through the partnership of LeCroy and Milligan Associates, Healthy Families Arizona, and the Western Regional Healthy Families America Center.

Healthy Families Arizona is a home visitation program designed to provide supportive services and education to parents of newborns who might benefit from support to strengthen their families at this crucial time.

The goals of the program include: promoting positive parent/child interaction, improving child health and developing and preventing child abuse and neglect.

For more information about Healthy Families Arizona browse to:

www.healthyfamiliesarizona.org

In recent years there has been a lot of interest in “fatherhood” and “father involvement.” Twenty years ago fathers were described as the “forgotten contributors to child development,” but today fathers are more recognized for their contribution to child well-being (Navaie-Waliser et al., 2006). The question for practitioners is clear: How can we get fathers more involved in child development?

A team of researchers (see Navaie-Waliser et al., 2006) has developed an evidence-based model of father engagement. The following questions were developed as a tool for individuals and agencies to use to evaluate their efforts at father engagement (based on Navaie-Waliser et al., 2006).

Step 1: Create a culture of inclusion

1. Do you have clarity about what is meant by father involvement?
2. Have you received training with regards to techniques that are most effective in interacting and building relationships with fathers?
3. Have you conducted a self-assessment to uncover personal beliefs, experiences, and values regarding father involvement?
4. Have you created a physical environment that welcomes fathers (e.g., pictures of fathers, father-focused materials, etc.)?

Step 2 : Making initial contact with fathers

1. Have you devised strategies for making initial contact with fathers?
2. Have you conducted any community outreach aimed towards fathers?
3. Do you have a home-based outreach plan for involving fathers?
4. Have you sought out other ways to contact fathers?

Step 3: Building a relationship and promoting fathering

1. Are you building a relationship with fathers that involves collaboration (providing relevant and timely information and consistency of contact)?

2. Are you building a relationship with fathers that involves patience (building trust and allowing the process to be driven by fathers)?
3. Are you building a relationship with fathers that involves reflection (remaining non-judgmental and having varying levels of acceptance of fathers' lifestyles and behaviors)?

Step 4: Supporting fathers to become engaged in their children's lives

1. Do you understand fathers' motivations (emotional, tangible, or social) for being involved with their children?
2. Do you understand fathers' needs (intrinsic and extrinsic) for being involved with their children?



Step 5: Assisting fathers to prioritize incremental action steps to increase participation in their children's lives

1. Have you discussed father involvement as a goal for fathers?
2. Have you helped fathers describe and list ways to increase their participation in their children's lives?
3. Have you helped fathers prioritize action steps to increase participation in their children's lives?

Step 6: Identifying diverse home-based, center-based, or community-based activities for engaging fathers with their children

1. Have you identified activities for engaging fathers with their children?
2. Have you identified activities for engaging fathers with their child's mother?
3. Have you identified activities for engaging fathers with the Healthy Families program and community? ¶

Source:

Retrieved from: <http://www.vnsny.org/research/staff/HSrschabstract.doc>, March 20, 2006.

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performed better in cognitive achievement than boys whose fathers were less involved and more aloof. Similarly, in households where fathers were harsh and used inconsistent discipline their sons experienced more problems with adjustment and classroom behavior when compared with fathers who did not use this style of parenting.

Father involvement has also been found to be a more important predictor than mother involvement in the likelihood of getting higher grades. In single father families, higher father involvement was related to getting higher grades and less school suspension or expulsion.

Can father involvement positively influence a child's social, cognitive, and academic development? Many studies have shown that higher levels of father involvement (meals together, outings, homework assistance) are related to higher levels of school performance, fewer behavior problems, more school enjoyment, and increased social competence.

The impact of fathers does not end here. Studies have found a positive association between the father's provision of child support and the well being of children in terms of cognitive development, academic achievement, and behavior. This finding is also true for children who live apart from their biological fathers. ¶

Sources:

Article organization based on: Santrock, J. W. (1998). *Child Development*. Boston: McGraw Hill; and Child Trends Research Brief (2006). Washington, DC: Retrieved from: <http://www.childtrends.org>

Research based on:

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Research to Practice

Below are some successful efforts across the country to involve fathers in children's learning:

- **R.E.A.D. to Kids: Reconnecting Education and Dads (Kansas City, MO)** - dads develop a reading program for their children
- **Kindering Center (Bellevue, WA)** - support group where dads get help in raising a child with special needs
- **Head Start's Accepting Leadership Challenge (Pinellas County, FL)** - dads receive training on weekends in vocational and parenting skills
- **Fairfax-San Anselmo Children's Center (Fairfax, CA)** - dads have breakfast with their children before attending a dads-only discussion group, then do projects with their children around the center
- **Florence S. Brown Pre-K Program (Rochester, NY)** - dads meet once a month over lunch, spend time with their children in the classroom, and do handiwork that benefits the program
- **The Illinois Fatherhood Initiative (Illinois)** - statewide organization that promotes responsible fathering through curriculum-based learning and other activities

IT'S A FACT:

There is a lack of research about the role of fathers in child development

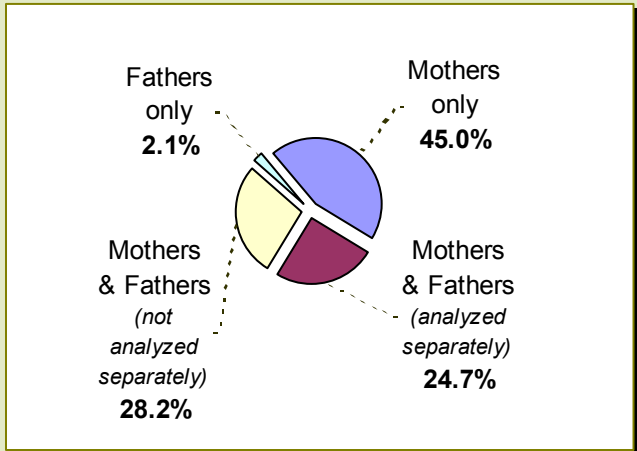
“WHERE’S POPPA?”

This title is from Dr. Vicky Phares who wrote about the lack of research on the role of fathers in child development. Examining 514 studies published in 8 research journals over the past eight years, she found that “Poppa” is missing from the research.



Of the 514 published studies, only 2.1% of the studies examined the role of fathers on child development alone, while 45% of studies examined the role of mothers alone. As the figure shows, there is much to do to increase the inclusion of fathers in research on child well-being.

Review of 514 Published Studies over Eight Years



Source:

Phares, V., Fields, S., Kamboukos, D., & Lopez, E. (2005). Still looking for Poppa. *American Psychologist*, p. 735-736.

What's Next:

SUMMER 2006
SCHOOL READINESS

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WINTER 2006
CHILD DEVELOPMENT FOR CHILDREN 5-10 YEARS OF AGE

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