

"Research has shown that fathers, no matter what their income or cultural background, can play a critical role in their children's education. When fathers are involved, their children learn more, perform better in school, and exhibit healthier behavior. Even when fathers do not share a home with their children, their active involvement can have a lasting and positive impact." ⁶

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InfoSheet 3: Positive Father Involvement

Research demonstrates that children benefit in a variety of ways when they have significant positive involvement with fathers and father figures. Research also demonstrates that fathers accrue a variety of benefits by being positively involved with their kids. This **two-way street of mutual benefits for children and fathers** is increasingly noted as a reason for strengthening the relationship between dad and child.

Broad Benefits for Kids¹

Young children with involved fathers display enhanced social skills:

- Greater empathy;
- Less gender role stereotyping;
- More awareness of needs and rights of others;
- More generous;
- Higher self-esteem;
- More self-control and less impulsive.

Children who grow up with involved fathers demonstrate important problem solving abilities:

- Increased curiosity;
- Increased exploration of the world around them;
- Less hesitance and fear in new situations;
- Greater tolerance for stress and frustration;
- More willingness to try new things.

Father involvement increases cognitive capacities for young children:

- Higher verbal skills;
- Higher scores on assessments of cognitive competence;
- Daughter's increased competence in math;
- Son's IQ is related to father's nurturing.

Academic and Cognitive Benefits for Kids²

In the first year of a child's life, significant father involvement can lead to higher scores on assessments of cognitive development.

Boys whose fathers offer praise and compliments perform better on tests of cognitive achievement than boys whose fathers are cool and aloof.

In first through twelfth grade, children get higher grades and enjoy school more when both parents are active in schooling.

Higher levels of father involvement with their children (i.e., eating meals together, going on outings, helping with homework) are associated with fewer behavior problems, higher levels of sociability, and a high level of school performance among children and adolescents.

Father involvement protects children from engaging in delinquent behavior and is associated with less substance abuse among adolescents, less delinquency, less drug use, truancy, and stealing and a lower frequency of externalizing and internalizing symptoms such as acting out, disruptive behavior, depression, sadness and lying."³

Benefits for Fathers^{3, 4}

Men who are involved in their children's lives accrue a number of personal benefits.

Men can learn from their children in a number of different areas, including:

- Heightened regulation and expression of emotion;
- Expanded ability for caring and nurturance;
- New understanding of empathy;
- Delayed gratification of own needs;
- Expanded sense of self and self confidence;
- Increased self-scrutiny;
- Better understanding of sexism and its impact upon children; and
- Deepened emotions and emotional intensity.

"The guys who fear becoming fathers don't understand that fathering is not something perfect men do, but something that perfects men."

-Frank S. Pittman, M.D., Man Enough: Fathers, Sons, and the Search for Masculinity. 1994.

Negative behaviors decrease among involved fathers. They tend to have:

- Fewer accidental and premature deaths;
- Less than average contact with the criminal justice system;
- Less substance abuse;
- Fewer hospital admissions;
- A greater sense of overall well being.

Communities benefit from involved fathers. Men who are involved in their children's lives are more likely to:

- Participate in the community;
- Serve in civic or community leadership positions;
- Attend church more often.

Men benefit most from their role as fathers when the following conditions are present:

- Critical amount of involvement with children;
- Energy to devote to the parenting role;
- Commitment and motivation to be a good father; and
- A learning environment that supports questioning and reflecting on the parenting time.

Various Types of Fathers and Male Involvement Create Similar Benefits for Kids⁵

In two-parent households, father's involvement in their children's schools has a distinct and independent positive influence on school achievement separate from that of mothers (data includes biological, step and adoptive fathers).

In single-father households, children do better in school and are less likely to have ever been suspended or expelled if their fathers have high levels of involvement in their schools.

Nonresidential fathers can make a difference in academic outcomes through their active participation in their children's schools. Positive outcomes are especially strong for youth in 6th—12th grades.

Grandfathers, uncles and other adult males can promote positive child development, especially when no father is present.

Sources:

¹ Kyle Pruett, "Fatherhood: Why father care is as essential as mother care for your child," New York: Free Press, 2000.

² What Do Fathers Contribute to Children's Well-Being? Child Trends research brief. www.childtrends.org.

³ "The Effects of Father Involvement: A Summary of the Research Evidence," Father Involvement Initiative Ontario Network, Fall 2002 newsletter, www.webapps.ccs.uoguelph.ca/cfww/fira.

⁴ Glen Palm, "Involved Fatherhood: A Second Chance," Journal of Men's Studies, November 1993.

⁵ US Dept. of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Issue Brief April 1998, "Students Do Better When Their Fathers Are Involved in School"; US Dept. of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Fathers' Involvement in Their Children's Schools", 1997; and University of Wisconsin-Extension, InfoSource, Fathers are important to babies, 2003, <http://infosource.uwex.edu/index.cfm>.

⁶ US Department of Education, "A Call To Commitment: Father's Involvement in Children's Learning."