

Why dads matter for children's education

A briefing for teachers and early years practitioners



PIECE (Paternal Involvement and its Effects on Children's Education) is a major study that analysed data from almost 5,000, two-parent households in England.

The PIECE analysis showed that mothers' involvement helped to reduce hyperactivity in children, and supported them to socialise, behave and manage their emotions.

1 On average, mothers spend more time looking after children and doing home-based activities to help them learn. **If fathers get involved in these activities too, it can give their children an educational advantage.**

- Regular involvement in focused, interactive activities - such as reading, playing, sharing stories, arts and crafts, doing musical activities, going to the park, and playing sports or active games - is particularly important.

2 Children's cognitive behaviour is supported by mothers' involvement in these activities but fathers' input works differently: **When dads get involved in these activities too, it can help to improve their children's grades in the first year of primary school.**

3 And - **the earlier fathers start doing these activities the better** because the impact of his involvement is long lasting:

- Father involvement at age three helps to boost educational attainment at age five
- Father involvement at age five helps to boost educational attainment at age seven.
- If dads get involved from their baby's first year, they are more likely to remain involved as the child gets older, which can be beneficial for a child's educational progression.

Why do fathers have an important impact?

1 Two heads are better than one

Having two involved parents exposes a child to more varied stimuli, such as different behaviours, vocabulary, and parenting styles.

2 Fathers can bring something different

Fathers may bring particular and unique benefits, as research shows fathers tend to engage with their children in different ways to mothers. For more details, read the **What a difference a dad makes** report.

<https://piecestudy.org/toolkit>



What can you do to help?

1 Reach out and get to know dads

Make sure you have and use the child's fathers' up-to-date contact details. If you don't know who or where dad is, try to find out!

2 Refer explicitly to 'fathers' in all communications

When communications are sent to 'parents', it tends to be the mother that picks this up. Addressing communications to 'mum, dad or other carer' makes it explicit that the father is included too. If fathers do not live with their children, or do not live with them full-time, send communications to both parents (as sometimes information does not reach fathers who are not full-time resident with their children).

3 Invite fathers to get involved in activities and events

Provide resources and activities specific to fathers, to encourage their involvement. Many dads - and mums - don't realise how much impact dads can have. Nudging them can help.

4 Share our findings from the PIECE study

Why not display this infographic on your staff room noticeboard, and share our **What a difference a dad makes** guide for families.

<https://piecestudy.org/toolkit>

By doing all this, you can help to boost children's life chances by helping ALL parents understand how crucial they are in supporting their learning.

REMEMBER

Mothers may be more visible, so it can feel easier to engage with them - but it's just as important to reach out and engage with dads too.