



## Sources of Information on Involved Fatherhood Research

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### Abstract

This *CASEmaker* bibliography includes selected references for understanding the benefits of father and father figure involvement in families and early childhood educational programs. Father and father figure involvement has been and continues to be conceptualized using the three components originally conceived by Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, and Levine (1985). A father or father figure's level of engagement, accessibility, and responsibility are directly related to the benefits provided for the family. Realizing these benefits for the family, early childhood education programs have begun to create and implement programs to increase paternal participation.

### Introduction

Beginning in the 1970's, father and father figure research emerged as a focus of scholarly interest (Lamb, 2000). Father involvement moved from a dichotomous measurement of present or not present to different operational and conceptual definitions. Quality began to be emphasized more than quantity. With new interest in the field, psychologists, sociologists, as well as other social scientists needed a conceptual basis for the idea of involved fathers. Paternal involvement was conceptualized as engagement, accessibility, and responsibility (Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, & Levine, 1985). This definition has led the majority of academic research over the past 25 years.

With such a diverse topic as father involvement, the research has expanded into many different areas (e.g., two-parent households, single fathers, stay-at-home fathers, step-fathers, and family leave). Themes of sex-role equality, household labor, and parental responsibilities are present throughout the research. Evidence points to the many benefits for children, fathers, families, and early childhood education programs when men take on a more involved role as a father. In many cases, this evidence has provided the support for early childhood programs to dedicate resources to promoting father and father figure involvement.

### Child Benefits

Father involvement has been linked with better outcomes for children including enhanced school performance (Blanchard & Biller, 1971; Grolnick & Slowi-

aczek, 1994), increased cognitive development (Sagi, 1982; Sarkadi, Kristiansson, Oberklaid, & Bremberg, 2007), and better self-esteem (Amato, 1986; Rohner & Veneziano, 2001). Lamb (2010) stated, "Fathers influence their children directly through their behavior and the attitudes and messages they convey" (p. 8). Parker and Parker (1986) conducted research on physical care and the correlation to sexual abuse with findings that indicated men who participate in the physical care of a biological child or stepchild younger than three years of age are significantly less likely than less-involved men to sexually abuse their own or anyone else's children later in life. Every parent plays a pivotal role in child development and fathers are no different than mothers with respect to the positive benefits they can bestow on their children.

Amato, P. R., & Gilbreth, J. G.. (1999). Nonresident fathers and children's well-being: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 61(3), 557-573.

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### Father Benefits

Evidence is building on the positive benefits experienced by the father or father figure through involved parenting. "The transition into fatherhood is a significant time that can shape men's expectations and behaviors about their roles as fathers" (Fagan, Palkovitz, Roy, & Farrie, 2009, p. 1389). The concept of an involved father can be defined in a variety of ways; yet, themes

#### Rx Prescription for Practice Rx

The prescription for practice lists four references especially important in the on-going research of fatherhood and inclusion of fathers in early childhood education programs.

- Day, R. D., & Lamb, M. E. (2004). *Conceptualizing and measuring father involvement*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
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of increased competence and confidence in the parental role are universal. Men gain increased self-esteem, psychosocial development, and emotional connections with the mother of the child through involved fatherhood (Fletcher & St. George, 2011; Gerson, 1993). Men who maintain engagement, accessibility, and responsibility for a child are seen as co-parents and receive the respect bestowed to the title. The generative effect of involved fatherhood can be seen in the father, the child, and progeny which follow.

- Esgebeen, D. J., & Knoester, C. (2004). Does fatherhood matter for men? *Journal of Marriage and Family, 63*(2), 381-393.
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- Palkovitz, R. (2002). *Involved fathering and men's adult development: Provisional balances*. London: Psychology Press.
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### Involving Fathers in Early Childhood Education

Palm and Fagan (2008) state, "The research literature strongly suggests those fathers who are highly involved with their young children are also more involved in early childhood programs" (p. 745). Men who are involved fathers in family life extend this involvement into the child's education at all levels, especially early childhood education. More and more men are taking on the role of involved father, but work remains to be done on involving men in early childhood education, both by the men themselves and the professionals who work with the

fathers. Programs intended to increase involvement and promote responsibility in men are being formed throughout the county. These programs work on areas ranging from job skills, child support, transportation issues, parent education, and child development. In an attempt to accomplish the many goals associated with increasing father involvement, these programs take shape in many forms and styles, adapting to the size, scope, and needs of the group.

- Anderson, E. A., Kohlet, J. K., & Letiecq, B. L. (2002). Low-income fathers and "responsible fatherhood" programs: A qualitative investigation of participants' experiences. *Family Relations, 51*(2), 148-155.
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## Conclusion

With the changing dynamics of family structure over the past 50 years, the nature of father involvement has also evolved. Expectations for men have moved from breadwinner to co-parent. Men are now expected to share in household labor and child-rearing. Changing family roles and increased parental responsibilities create a very different conception of fatherhood than that of the last century and increasing evidence exists to support the benefits of involved fatherhood to the child and the father. Many fathers now join mothers in balancing employment, household tasks, and parental responsibilities. Early childhood education programs are attempting to create an atmosphere conducive to increased paternal involvement. This bibliography lists the pertinent research in the area of benefits to the child and father of involved fatherhood as well as the research surrounding the current and best approaches to encouraging involvement of fathers and father figures in an early childhood education program.

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