



Fathers Infants Toddlers and Young Children

The research on fathers' impact on their children ...

This note summarises the evidence base about fathers and their children in the early years of their lives. More detailed research briefings can be found on the Fatherhood Institute website.

Fathers and Young Children

Fathers have a big impact on their young children...

Sensitive, supportive and substantial father involvement from the month following birth is connected with a range of positive outcomes in babies and toddlers, from better language development to higher IQs.

Fathers' relationships with their babies promote their baby's security.

Babies of very highly involved fathers interact equally with both parents, interact comfortably with a stranger (both in the presence of their father or their mother), and are generally more sociable with everyone – mother, father and stranger.

Fathers' positive involvement in the month following birth is linked with better infant brain development at one year.

More sensitive fathers have children with better language and intellectual capabilities at 18 months old. The babies of more involved fathers show better development and higher IQs at 12 months and 3 years. The frequency of fathers' reading to 1-2 year olds is linked with their greater interest in books later on.

Early stimulation from fathers is linked to baby boys' motivation to learn.

Fathers interact with their children differently than mothers:

Fathers engage more in playful social interactions than in practical caretaking tasks.

Fathers who spend less time with their young children are less able to understand their early speech and so ask them to explain themselves more often. This can contribute to language development.

Involved fathers have a wider impact on social skills and behaviours...

Firstborns with highly involved fathers are more positive and accepting towards their second-born sibling.

Physically playful, affectionate and socially engaging father-child interactions at age 3-4 predict later popularity with peers, particularly when father and child take turns to make play suggestions and lead the play.

Fathers' active care of 'difficult-to raise' pre-schoolers is related to fewer problems in the children later.

School readiness in young children is associated with the sensitivity of their father, over and above that of their mothers.

A fathers' authoritative parenting style, combined with help with school work at home, has a positive influence on children's social behaviours.

A father's sensitivity in playing with his two-year-old predicts the child's security at age 10 and adjustment at age 16.

The quality of the father's relationship with his baby has a greater effect than the mother-baby relationship on problematic behaviour at ages 5 and 6.

When fathers display anger with their 3-5 year olds and engage in negative 'tit for tat' interactions, their children are later rated by teachers as more aggressive, less likely to share and less accepted by their peers.

With benefits also for mothers and for fathers themselves

Teenage mothers with positive partner support are less rejecting and punitive towards their children.

Fathers who undertake a significant amount of care bond more quickly with their babies and are likely to enjoy fatherhood more.

Early father involvement is associated with continued involvement throughout childhood and adolescence.

Anti-social behaviour

The long term impact of fathers on behaviour is important for girls as well as boys

A good relationship between fathers and their young daughters reduces the girl's risk of anti-social behaviour in early adolescence.

The quality of a boy's relationship with his father at seven-and-a-half years old predicts his likelihood of engaging in anti-social behaviours in childhood and adolescence.

Children at risk of social problems, poverty and maternal drug abuse, talk and learn better when their fathers provide financial support, engage in nurturing play and are satisfied with parenting.

Parenting education

Fathers can learn parenting skills just as mothers do

Fathers are as responsive to parent education as mothers.

Delivering a parent education programme to both parents is significantly more effective than delivering it to just one.

Intellectual development in six-month-old babies is greater when both mothers and fathers are trained in baby communication.

Participation by low income fathers in parenting programmes is associated with improved behaviour, increased understanding of child development, increased confidence in parenting skills, more sensitive and positive parenting, greater involvement in child care and greater interaction with children.

Sources

FI Research Summary: [Fathers' Influence Over Children's Education](#)

FI Research Summary: [Maternal and Infant Health in the Perinatal Period: The Father's Role](#)

FI Research Summary: [Anti-social Behaviour and Fatherhood](#)

[National Literacy Trust research summary on fathers and children's literacy](#)

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