

# THE PARENT LETTER



About Our Kids: A Letter for Parents by the NYU Child Study Center



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## **FATHERS: A CRUCIAL INGREDIENT IN ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

### **Introduction**

When parents are actively involved in their child's education, the child's academic performance and general achievement show positive gains. Additionally, parent involvement influences a child's attitude toward school and positively impacts a child's self-concept. As reported by the U.S. Department of Education, many studies show that early and active parent involvement reduces discipline problems in school, increases academic success, and leads to better outcomes in adult life.

Both mothers and fathers play meaningful roles in their children's development, and although maternal and paternal relationships differ, both are important and influential. Research has shown that children are more successful at school when at least one parent is involved in activities related to school. The best outcomes, however, are seen when *both* parents are highly involved with their children.

Historically, within the school setting, the word "parent" has often meant "mother" in our culture, leaving fathers somewhat removed. Recent research specifically demonstrates the crucial role of a father's participation and involvement in his child's academic success (Muller, 1998; Thompson, 1994; Green, 2002).

### **Why is Dad so Important?**

Fathers play a critical role in their children's development, and their involvement can have a lasting, positive impact on children's academic success. Whether a biological father or male role model (uncle, stepfather, grandfather, mentor), and whether or not the father resides in the same home as the child, all fathers or male role models can have a positive impact on children's academic success that is not observed when only the mother is involved.

Children who have regular contact with a warm, nurturing, actively involved father (or male role model) often demonstrate better school performance, increased self-esteem, more appropriate social and family relationships, and healthier gender role development than those without this support and modeling. Specifically, fathers who are more involved with academics have children with higher grades, more extracurricular activities, and more positive attitudes toward school.

According to Department of Education studies, fathers are uniquely qualified to impact children positively through modeling adult male behavior, making choices, solving problems, providing support, enhancing academic performance, and instilling enjoyment of school. This pattern is observed even when the father does not live with the child and even when mothers are not involved in schooling.

### **Current Trends**

Culturally, the traditional role of the father has been that of providing economic support, discipline, and guidance. Fathers often take on the role of overseeing their children rather than being immersed in the details of day-to-day activities. Many fathers are very active in the lives of their children but their involvement may feel limited to stereotypically "male" or "fatherly" activities such as building, hobbies, math, physical play, practical activities, and leisure pursuits.

Even when fathers are very active in important areas of their children's lives, studies show that fathers are typically less involved in matters related to learning both in and out of school. Specifically, fathers have been shown to be less likely than mothers to read with their children, attend school meetings, pick up and drop off from school, help with homework, volunteer at school, or attend parent-teacher conferences.

Fathers' roles are changing with the shifting landscape of the American family. More frequently, fathers have begun to take on the role of teacher, homework consultant, role model, and disciplinarian, as there is an increase in families with single parents, non-resident fathers, and both parents employed outside the home.

## **Fathers Can Have a Positive Impact by Increasing Their Involvement**

In current society there are many barriers to fathers' involvement in their children's schooling. Many adults face significant work demands, financial pressure, and often feel that there are not enough hours in the day. Additionally, fathers of today face a growing rate of parental separation and divorce, which can reduce contact with their children. Furthermore, schools and community programs are not always father-friendly and may not reach out to fathers as much as they do to mothers.

Here are some things that dads can do to increase their impact on their children's academic success and overall well-being:

- Read to or with your child
- Establish a daily routine where interaction is expected
- Attend school meetings
- Visit the school and meet your child's teachers
- Join the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) or other parent groups
- Participate in parent-teacher conferences
- Attend school or classroom events
- Volunteer at school
- Help with homework
- Give advice on courses and projects
- Monitor your child's school performance
- Get involved with community activities with your child
- Coach or play a game or sport with your child
- Make time for family outings to museums, libraries, zoos, or concerts

## **Mothers, Schools, and Community Centers Can Facilitate Father Involvement**

Research shows that when mothers are actively involved, regardless of family structure, they can play a large role in the support and encouragement of father involvement. In fact, the mutual support that parents provide to one another is a key factor in parental involvement in their children's academic lives.

Schools can create a father-friendly environment by reducing the assumption that the word "parent" typically refers to the child's mother in the school setting. Teachers and schools should invite fathers to be more active by communicating with fathers directly and providing opportunities for fathers to get involved. Additionally, it is important to reinforce fathers' contributions and to discuss with them what they need and want in order to be most effective in their child's education.

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## **ABOUT THE NYU CHILD STUDY CENTER**

The NYU Child Study Center is dedicated to the research, prevention, and treatment of child and adolescent psychiatric disorders. The Center offers evaluation and treatment for children and teenagers with various disorders including anxiety, depression, ADHD, learning or attention difficulties, Autism, eating disorders, and trauma and stress-related symptoms.

We offer a number of treatment studies at no cost for specific disorders and age groups. To see if your child would be appropriate for one of these studies, please call (212) 263-8916 or visit <http://www.aboutourkids.org/professionals/research>.

If you or your child needs immediate assistance, mental health professionals are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by calling 1-800-LIFENET (1-800-543-3638), a program of the Mental Health Association of New York City. Help is available in several languages: Spanish: 1-877-298-3373, Chinese: 1-877-990-8585. For other languages, ask for a translator.

For further information, guidelines, and practical suggestions on child mental health and parenting issues, please visit the NYU Child Study Center's website, [AboutOurKids.org](http://AboutOurKids.org).

ABOUTOURKIDS.ORG

**Giving Children Back Their Childhood**

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