

5 Things You Should Know about the Importance of Fathers

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Father involvement has increased dramatically over the past several decades, and simultaneously, the role of fathers in their families has evolved from conceptions of fathers as distant breadwinners to a more holistic recognition that they are equal co-parents. Accompanying these changes has been a growing interest among researchers in studying the role that fathers play in the lives of their children. Below are some highlights of the current landscape of what the research says about today's dads.

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1. INVOLVED DADS HAVE A DIRECT IMPACT ON THEIR CHILDREN'S

FUTURE. Involved fatherhood is linked to better outcomes on nearly every measure of child wellbeing, from cognitive development and educational achievement to self-esteem and pro-social behavior.ⁱ Children who grow up with involved fathers are: 39% more likely to earn mostly A's in school, 45% less likely to repeat a grade, 60% less likely to be suspended or expelled from school,

twice as likely to go to college and find stable employment after high school, 75% less likely to have a teen birth, and 80% less likely to spend time in jail.ⁱⁱ Share these stats illustrated in our [Dads Make a Big Difference](#) infographic.

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2. FAMILIES ARE STRENGTHENED BY SUPPORTING FATHERS. Providing services and programming that aim to increase fathers' positive parenting skills, appropriate discipline, effective communication, emotional support, and stress management can have a double effect, reducing risk factors for child abuse and increasing protective factors. As a result, not only can children face a reduced risk of maltreatment, but they can also benefit from positive father involvement.

Learn more about the link between involved fatherhood and protective factors in families in policy brief, [Supporting Fathers and Strengthening Families](#).

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3. POLICIES AND PROGRAMS SPECIFICALLY FOR DADS ARE ON THE RISE. Federal and state investments in promoting the positive impact fathers have on their children and families continue to increase significantly. Several cities and counties have also developed innovative fatherhood programming. A majority of states now have some sort of state or local efforts targeting dads in the form of government initiatives, professional and practitioner networks, and nonprofit and community collaborations.

Learn more, including highlights of state initiatives in Texas, Connecticut, Ohio, Hawaii, Illinois, and Pennsylvania, in policy brief, [Federal, State, and Local Efforts Supporting Father Involvement](#).



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4. DADS FIND IMMENSE VALUE FROM THEIR PARTICIPATION IN PROGRAMS.

Fathers who attend fatherhood programs find great value in them. The support they find among other fathers, the guidance they receive from the program facilitators, and the community resources and supports that they access keep them coming back. Additionally, fathers report knowing how to communicate better with their children and the mother(s) of their children, and having an increased sense of confidence and efficacy as a father because of their participation. Hear directly from some dads in powerful [video testimonies](#) produced for the [2017 Texas Fatherhood Summit](#) about what motivates them to join fatherhood programs, why they stay, and what they gain.



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Several small-scale studies have found fatherhood initiatives showing promise, while other programs have registered impacts under more rigorous evaluation designs. Several large evaluations of fatherhood programs are currently underway,ⁱⁱⁱ including CFRP's evaluation of the state-wide [Texas Fatherhood EFFECT Program](#). Federal funds also support projects that promote rigorous evaluation of fatherhood programs throughout the country, like the national [Fatherhood Research and Practice Network](#), of which CFRP director Dr. Cynthia Osborne serves as Chair of the Responsible Fatherhood working group. For more research on father involvement, go to the [Office of Planning, Research & Evaluation](#).

Online version: <http://childandfamilyresearch.org/publications/b0320617>

ⁱ Rosenberg, Jeffrey, and Wilcox, W. Bradford. United States Department of Health and Human Services. Administration for Children and Families. Child Welfare Information Gateway. *The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children*. Office on Child Abuse and Neglect, U.S. Children's Bureau, 2006. Retrieved from <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/fatherhood/chaptertwo.cfm>; Bronte-Tinkew, Jacinta et al. *Involvement Among Resident Fathers and Links to Infant Cognitive Outcomes*. Journal of Family Issues. Volume 29 Number 9. September, 2008. 1211-1244.; Cabrera, N. J., Shannon, J. D., & Tamis-LeMonda, C. (2007). Fathers' Influence on Their Children's Cognitive and Emotional Development: From Toddlers to Pre-K. *Applied Developmental Science*, 11(4), 208-213; Black, M. M., Dubowitz, H., & Starr, R. H., Jr. (1999). African American Fathers in Low Income, Urban Families: Development, Behavior, and Home Environment of Their Three-Year-Old Children. *Child Development*, 70 (4), 967-978.; Carlson, Marcia J. and Katherine Magnuson. (2011) Low-Income Fathers' Influence on Children. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. 635:95. 95-116.; Carlson, Marcia J., Sara S. McLanahan, and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn. (2007, September) Fathers' Involvement and Young Children's Behavior in Fragile Families. Extended Abstract.; Carlson, Marcia J., Sara S. McLanahan. (2009, May 11) Fathers in Fragile Families. Center for Research on Child Wellbeing. Working Paper WP09-14-FF.; Harris, Kathleen Mullan, Frank F. Furstenberg, and Jeremy K. Marmar. (1998). Paternal involvement with adolescents in intact families: The influence of fathers over the life course. *Demography*. 35 (2), 201-216.; Carlson, M. J. (2006), Family Structure, Father Involvement, and Adolescent Behavioral Outcomes. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 68: 137-154.

ⁱⁱ Rosenberg, Jeffrey, and Wilcox, W. Bradford. United States Department of Health and Human Services. Administration for Children and Families. Child Welfare Information Gateway. *The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children*. Office on Child Abuse and Neglect, U.S. Children's Bureau, 2006. Retrieved from <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/fatherhood/chaptertwo.cfm>; Bronte-Tinkew, Jacinta et al. *Involvement Among Resident Fathers and Links to Infant Cognitive Outcomes*. Journal of Family Issues. Volume 29 Number 9. September, 2008. 1211-1244.; Cabrera, N. J., Shannon, J. D., & Tamis-LeMonda, C. (2007). Fathers' Influence on Their Children's Cognitive and Emotional Development: From Toddlers to Pre-K. *Applied Developmental Science*, 11(4), 208-213; Black, M. M., Dubowitz, H., & Starr, R. H., Jr. (1999). African American Fathers in Low Income, Urban Families: Development, Behavior, and Home Environment of Their Three-Year-Old Children. *Child Development*, 70 (4), 967-978.; Carlson, Marcia J. and Katherine Magnuson. (2011) Low-Income Fathers' Influence on Children. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. 635:95. 95-116.; Carlson, Marcia J., Sara S. McLanahan, and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn. (2007, September) Fathers' Involvement and Young Children's Behavior in Fragile Families. Extended Abstract.; Carlson, Marcia J., Sara S. McLanahan. (2009, May 11) Fathers in Fragile Families. Center for Research on Child Wellbeing. Working Paper WP09-14-FF.; Harris, Kathleen Mullan, Frank F. Furstenberg, and Jeremy K. Marmar. (1998). Paternal involvement with adolescents in intact families: The influence of fathers over the life course. *Demography*. 35 (2), 201-216.; Carlson, M. J. (2006), Family Structure, Father Involvement, and Adolescent Behavioral Outcomes. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 68: 137-154.

ⁱⁱⁱ Osborne, C., Dillon, D., Winter Craver, J., and Hovey, I. (2016). Making good on fatherhood; A review of the fatherhood program research. Child and Family Research Partnership Report. Retrieved from: http://childandfamilyresearch.org/content/uploads/CFRPRReport_R0070116_MakingGoodonFathers.pdf