

Why Father Inclusive Practice?

Involving fathers in program provision is essential if the best outcomes for children are to be achieved.



The impact of time with and closeness between children and their fathers is well recognised. Recent studies indicate similar messages across different contexts:

- Closeness to fathers (resident or non-resident) across the whole lifespan is beneficial for all the physical health/ social/ psychological/ emotional/ educational factors.
- Adolescents who are close to their father report higher self-esteem, less delinquency, and fewer depressive symptoms, better grades, less substance use than adolescents who are not close to their father.
- It is also recognised that closeness to fathers reduces violence in families.

Increased attention on efforts to foster and support father-child relationships will improve Program outcomes. *Read more*

A meta-analysis of studies on attachment interventions designed to enhance positive parenting behaviours found that those that included fathers were, on average, more effective than those that involved mothers only. Including fathers in such interventions will be more effective if the unique trajectories of father-child relationships are well understood and taken into account. Training for practitioners should include material specific to father-child attachment and relationships. However, it is important to focus not only on areas of difference between mothers and fathers but also on areas of commonality.

Prenatal and early parenting educational materials focusing on father-child relationships are important sources of information for parents. *Read more*

Both mothers and fathers need to understand that father-child attachment is important, that it may develop more slowly than mother-child attachment and that fathers (with the support of mothers) will likely need to make conscious efforts to hold and interact with their babies. While it makes sense to honour and support the role of play in father-child attachment, it may be a mistake to focus exclusively on fathers as “playmates.” Families and fathers are very diverse, and play may be more central for some fathers than others. It is also important to educate mothers and fathers about the role of holding and caring.

Interventions that promote physical contact or help fathers learn to understand their babies' cues are likely to promote father-child attachment. *Read more*

As noted earlier, fathers tend to have fewer interactions with young children. While they often begin to catch up to mothers when babies are a little older, some fathers may need extra support to interact with their children in ways that support secure relationships. Interventions that enable fathers to develop care-giving skills may have the “side effect” of facilitating early father-child attachment.

Interventions that promote and support sensitive father-child play will most likely enhance or protect father-child attachment. *Read more*

Many programs for fathers are activity based. Dads and kids playgroups offer a “soft” entry point to people eager to improve fathers' parenting skills. Enabling enjoyable father-child interaction in a supportive environment is likely to be beneficial to father-child relationships and fathers' interaction skills.

Play also tends to be something that fathers are comfortable with and good at, and children usually love to play with their fathers. In other words, the unique kind of responsiveness to fathers that children develop through father-child play is an asset to work with in programs and interventions designed to promote father-child relationships.

