



# Engaging fathers

Children and young people's mental health and wellbeing is enhanced when fathers take a strong interest in their development and learning.

## The role of fathers

When fathers feel good about being a dad, and are sensitive and responsive to children's needs, this contributes to children and young people's development of social and emotional learning skills.

Children and young people thrive on the feelings of belonging and affection that come from caring and supportive families. Whether families have one parent or two, include step-parents, grandparents or other carers, they can build strong, positive relationships that support children and young people's mental health.

### **A father is a male parent or carer of a child or young person**

A father may not be biologically related to his child or young person or live with them all the time. Some individuals have contact with a father, while others don't. He may be a grandfather, step-father, foster father or adoptive father of a child or young person. Some children and young people might have more than one father or relationships with other males who undertake a significant portion of parenting.

### **There is no single 'right' way to be a father**

Each father brings unique ideas and experience to being a supportive adult, and has a lot to contribute

to the mental health and wellbeing of his child or young person and family. There are lots of ways to be a good father. Supporting a child or young person and having their best interests in mind is what's important, as this has a positive impact on their mental health and wellbeing.

### **There are different ways fathers can be involved**

Fathers can be involved with their children and young people through:

- engagement (direct contact)
- accessibility (being available to their child or young person even when they're not in physical contact)
- responsibility (taking a role in looking out for their children and young people's care and welfare).

There are many ways fathers' involvement with their child or young person, and the early learning service or school, can benefit children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.

## Why are fathers important for children and young people's health and development?

### **The involvement of supportive, significant adults in their lives is positively linked with children and young people's overall life satisfaction and wellbeing.**

As a significant adult, a connected father may, for example, help increase a child or young person's happiness and confidence, and reduce feelings of fear and guilt, emotional distress and upset.

Children and young people whose fathers are emotionally involved (for instance, acknowledging their child or young person's feelings and helping them deal with difficult times), are more likely to feel emotionally connected themselves and have more positive relationships with other children and young people. They're more likely to embrace turn-taking and sharing, and likely to behave less aggressively towards their peers.

When dads are affectionate and helpful, children and young people are more likely to get on well with their siblings. When they're involved in their child or young person's everyday activities (for example, eating meals together, reading and helping with homework), children and young people also tend to have fewer behaviour difficulties and better social skills.

Babies whose fathers are involved in their care are more likely to feel connected to them as a parent, and, therefore, be better able to handle new and unfamiliar situations, to manage stressful situations, and are more curious and eager to explore their environment.

### **Children and young people benefit from quality interactions, where fathers engage and bond with them.**

Young children who receive lots of affection from their dad should have a more secure relationship with him. Fathers can give children a person to trust, to bond with and feel secure around. Boys who feel connected with their dads often have more self-control, while girls connected with their dads often have strong feelings of being confident and capable, and have a positive sense of identity.

Fathers also parent their child in different ways from other family members – for example, dads can provide special experiences through rough-and-tumble play, which helps develop children's physical abilities and helps them to manage new and exciting experiences. Good father-child relationships in early childhood are also associated with good relationships between fathers and children in adolescence.

Read more about how you can [support fathers to get involved](#) in their child or young person's learning community.

## Getting involved is good for fathers too

### **Spending time being involved and taking care of children and young people provides fathers with opportunities to display affection and to nurture them.**

Involved fathers are more likely to see interactions with their children and young people positively, be more attentive to child and adolescent development, better understand and be more accepting of their children and young people, and enjoy closer, richer father-child relationships.

Fathers who are involved in their children and young people's lives are more likely to be more satisfied with their own lives, feel less psychological distress, and be more able to understand themselves and empathically understand others.

Feeling involved is also good for dads because they have a greater sense of self, greater general wellbeing, marital stability and relationship happiness. This is because being involved increases a sense of connectedness and inclusion. Involved fathers also have a strong sense of how important they are to their child or young person who can, in turn, be a very important catalyst in men's lives.

### **Be You Professional Learning**

Check out tips for creating and maintaining strong partnerships with families in the [Family Partnerships](#) domain.

## References

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