

ParentBrief



When dads get involved, the sky's the limit for kids

In past generations, it was accepted that dad was the breadwinner. Dad worked 24/7, saw his kids only before bedtime or at weekends, and wasn't in the position, nor was he expected to be, to take a big role in his kids' education. But things have changed. Dads in this generation are more likely to be beating themselves up over what they can't do for their kids, than what they can... especially when it comes to their child's school achievement..

There's no denying the benefits when it comes to the involvement of fathers in their kids' lives. As dads, regardless of whether we're trying to juggle parenting and career, or we're sole parenting, or tied up with countless other commitments, the small choices we make to be involved with our kids on a daily basis can have long term benefits - for everyone in the family. We may not be able to make school meetings or working bees, nor help out in our kid's classroom, but it only takes five minutes to throw a ball, check the homework has been done, switch off from screen time or read a bedtime story.

What does research tell us?

When it comes to school achievement, the research speaks for itself¹. School aged children of involved fathers are better academic achievers - they are more likely to get higher grades, have better quantitative and verbal skills, obtain higher scores on reading achievement and learn more and perform better in school. They are also less likely to fail a grade, have poor attendance, be suspended or expelled, or have behaviour problems at school.

Father involvement is also positively correlated with children's overall life satisfaction and their experience of less depression, less emotional distress, less conduct problems, a greater sense of social competence and fewer anxiety symptoms. Kids of involved fathers are also more likely to have higher tolerance for stress and frustration and have better problem solving skills. In short, kids who have a dad on-side, are far more likely to enjoy life and school and be motivated to achieve.

¹Father Involvement Research Alliance : The Effects of Father Involvement : An Updated Research Summary of the Evidence, S. Allen, K. Daly, University of Gelfh, 2007.

Dads can be involved in many ways

- If you have a partner, discuss what 'involved' means given your employment situation, and realistic time available, especially for involvement at the school level.
- Ensure that you and your partner's expectations for involvement are realistic and achievable in ways that your child will benefit.
- If you're separated, divorced or co-parenting remotely, ensure that communication is clear and expectations for involvement are understood. Support for an ex-partner translates to support for your child.
- Talk to your child's teacher, make sure you know their name, what happens in class on a daily basis, how you can help reinforce learning on the home front.
- If you've picked up on problems at school, talk to your partner as well as the teacher. Teachers encourage the parent/school partnership.
- Organise for a half day of leave to visit the classroom, walk your child to or from school, attend a school event or sports day.
- Make time to spend time at weekends doing father/son or father/daughter stuff together. Catch a train, do the zoo, enjoy a sandwich together at the local eatery.
- Regularly check on homework, talk about school, ask about friends, listen to problems.
- Praise your kids when they've worked hard to achieve their best result. Encourage perseverance and role model ways to prioritise, organise, and self manage responsibilities.

Involvement with our kids works best on a daily basis. If we haven't got custody of our kids on a daily basis, we need to make the most of the time we do have. One of the greatest gifts of parenting is knowing our kids: their temperaments, hobbies, talents and dreams. Being involved in our kids' lives and education, also gives them the chance to know us, and that's a gift that will last a lifetime.