

FATHERS FORWARD FACTOR

Fathers Forward, a project of the Alabama Parent Education Center

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Fathers Involvement

Socioeconomic, ethnic and cultural variations among fathers and differences in family structure may affect father's roles and their level of involvement with their children.

In this "Fathers Factor" we focus on key research findings on the ways in which various factors influence "Father Involvement" in children's lives.

Socioeconomic Influences

Socioeconomic indicators such as education level, income, and social class have been found to be linked to father involvement.

National-level studies have consistently found strong links between socioeconomic status and father involvement. For instance, two national studies reveal that fathers with higher levels of education are more accessible to and engaged with their school-age children. Fathers who are able to provide economically for their children are more likely to stay invested in their marriages or partner relationships, and are more likely to be engaged with and nurturing of their children -- even if they live apart from their children. Conversely, fathers who are unemployed or underemployed are more likely to limit their involvement with their families. This may be due in part to the high societal value placed on fathers as economic providers; some men may feel that if they are not able to provide financially for their family they should not (or cannot) be involved in other ways. Unemployed fathers are less likely to form families or assume responsibility for their children born outside of marriage.

Racial and Ethnic Variations

Research has revealed variations in the amount and type of father involvement based

on the racial/ethnic background of the father. It is important to bear in mind that some of these variations may reflect socioeconomic and residential status more than race or ethnicity. Several national surveys have found that African American fathers who do not live with their children are more likely than their Caucasian or Hispanic counterparts to share in housework and childcare tasks, participate in childrearing decisions, and visit their children. African American fathers have been found to be less likely than Caucasian fathers to read to their children, but are more likely than Caucasian fathers to play with them. Despite these variations, there are perhaps as many or more similarities as there are differences in father involvement across racial/ethnic groups. Certain fathering roles seem to cross cultures. These include fathers as economic providers, protectors, caregivers, and teachers. Low-income fathers from African American, Mexican American, and Caucasian backgrounds express similar concerns for their children and care for them in similar ways. Small-scale studies have found that middle-income Mexican American fathers are similar to middle-income Caucasian fathers with regard to their emphasis on the role of economic provider, and middle-income African American fathers have been found to be similar to middle-income European American fathers in terms of their attitudes toward childrearing and levels of involvement. We still do not know much about the childrearing attitudes and practices of fathers in understudied groups (such as, American Indians, Hispanics, Asians, recent immigrants, low-income Caucasians, and middle-income, married African Americans).

FATHER'S FORWARD IS HERE TO HELP

If you are a father in Elmore County seeking skills and resources to become a better father allow us at **FATHER'S FORWARD** to serve you. (334)-567-2252

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Children Benefit From Positive Relationships With Their Fathers

As rates of divorce and no marital childbearing have increased in recent decades, the percentage of children and fathers who live apart from one another has also increased. Yet our knowledge of how father involvement affects children's well-being in these situations is quite limited, since most research on fathers and children has focused on intact families. Closeness, and nurturance are important aspects of a healthy parent child relationship regardless of whether the parent is a mother or father. But research also suggests that fathers contribute to their children's healthy development in ways that are unique from mothers. For example, in one study of young children's cognitive development, fathers promoted their child's intellectual development and social competence through physical play, whereas mothers promoted these skills through verbal expressions and teaching activities. Fathers can positively influence their children's development by assuming a significant amount of the child care tasks. Several studies have found that when fathers spend more time on child care tasks, children benefit. For instance, in one study, preschool-age children whose fathers were responsible for 40 percent or more of the family's child care tasks had higher scores on assessments of cognitive development, had more of a sense of mastery over their environments, and exhibited more empathy than those children whose fathers were less involved. Care by fathers may be particularly influential in the first year of life. In another study, children who were cared for by their father in their first year had higher scores on assessments of cognitive development than those children who were cared for in child care centers.

On the other hand, children who were cared for by their fathers during their second and third years had lower scores than children in child care centers on the same child outcomes measures. A father's parenting style has implications for a child's well-being. A warm but firm parenting style benefits children. For example, in one study of preschoolers, boys whose fathers offered praise and compliments performed better on tests of cognitive achievement than boys whose fathers were distant and standoffish. Higher levels of father involvement in activities with their children, such as eating meals together, going on outings, and helping with homework, are associated with fewer behavior problems, higher levels of sociability, and a high level of school performance among children and adolescents.

Father Involvement Is Key

Father involvement has been found to be a more important predictor than mother involvement of the likelihood of getting high grades. For children in first through twelfth grades living in single-father families, higher father involvement is associated with getting high grades and enjoying school, and a lower chance of suspension or expulsion from school. Some research suggests that contact between children and fathers who do not live together is associated with fewer behavior problems and improved psychological well-being. However, other studies have found that father contact has a detrimental effect on children's math scores, delinquency, and behavior problems. This suggests that frequency of contact may be less important to a child's well-being than the quality of the father child relationship.

*This Fathers Factor has been adapted from Child Trend May 1999



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