

Fathers and Father-Figures: Their Important Role in Children's Social and Emotional Development

HANDOUT

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Why focus on fathers and father-figures?

- ✓ Fathers and mothers are children's first and primary teachers.
- ✓ Every parent has a unique way of caring for and interacting with his or her child.
- ✓ Bridging the gap between early childhood settings and home requires that teachers determine the unique strengths, wishes, and concerns of each parent.



What is known about how fathers impact children's development?

Engagement and interaction

- ✓ Play is the most frequent activity that fathers engage in with their children.
- ✓ The quality of interactions in a father-child relationship positively impacts children's cognitive, social, and moral development, including peer relationships.

Availability and accessibility

- ✓ Fathers can be both physically and emotionally present for their young children:
 - Physical presence refers to being in close proximity to the child doing things such as playing with puzzles, reading a book, or watching a video.
 - Emotional presence refers to being engaged with a child in a way that shows that the adult is truly listening to the child's story, paying attention to the artwork he is creating, or watching the "play" she is performing.

Responsibility for day-to-day care

- ✓ Fathers play a role in direct care and indirect care for their young children:
 - Direct care refers to attending to young children during routines such as feeding and toothbrushing.
 - Indirect care refers to activities that need to be done for the child such as arranging for a babysitter or child care and talking with early care providers about changes in a child's behavior at home.



What can early care providers do?

- ✓ Be clear about why involving fathers is important to program staff.
- ✓ Acknowledge fathers as skilled, knowledgeable, and important caregivers.
- ✓ Recognize that fathers have an impact on cognitive, emotional, and social development, as well as child health.
- ✓ Make a conscious effort to reach out to fathers, seeking their feedback on how they would like to be involved.
- ✓ Actively demonstrate to fathers how they can have a positive impact. For example, use role play, video tapes, or handouts describing activities that young children enjoy.
- ✓ Systematically evaluate the needs that fathers have and the programs developed in response to these needs.
- ✓ Realize that each father has strengths, needs, and concerns — individualizing is key.