

# Engaging fathers in the early childhood space; Why and how?

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**Early Childhood Australia**  
A voice for young children

Early Childhood Australia National Conference 2016  
**THIS IS CHILDHOOD** Pedagogy and practice  
in the early years

# Groups for fathers



- Nuts & Bolts of Kids and School

# Aboriginal dads

- **Brothers Inside**
- **Whose ya Mob**
- **Our kids need  
dads who**



# Antenatal work with fathers



# Rough and Tumble play

- Healthy Dads  
Healthy Kids





# Dads Kids Connect Video Feedback with Dads



# Fathers for School Readiness

- **Play-based fathers engagement for child self-regulation**



# Fatherhood...what's changed?

**BONDS** Think of Fathers - 30sec  
by Bonds Australia

**THINK OF FATHERS**  
04.09.16

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0:25 / 0:30

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# Noticing negative parts of fatherhood





# A generation of new fathers?

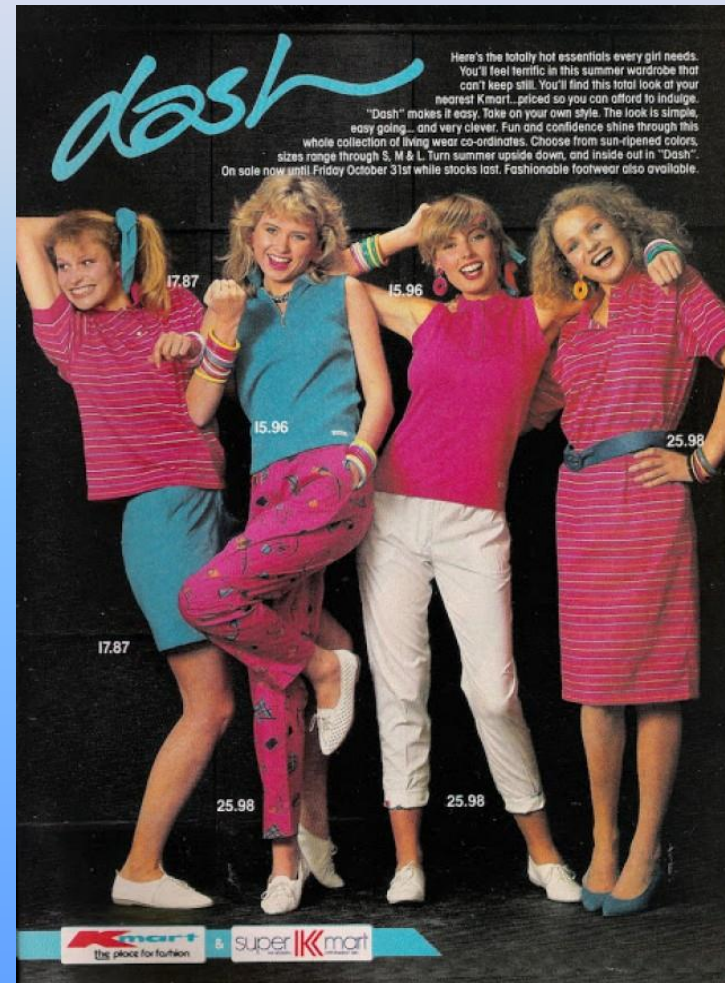
Average age of first time fathers

**33**

So most were born around **1983**



# 1983





# A generation of new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fathers?

Average age of first time Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fathers

**27**

So most were born around **1989**

# 1989 Kevin Kichener, Michael Long, Royal Commission



# What do the dads say?

**I ask them**

***Why do it different to your own dad?***

**They say**

- ***Community expectation***
- ***“She’ll kill me”***
- ***Because I want the connection***

***“Because I want the connection”***

- **Their dads didn't do it**
- **They want to do it**

**BUT**

- **No understanding of exactly how or why**
- **No one to 'hold' them while they learn?**



# Close the Knowledge Gap – fathers don't know about

- Brain growth
- Fathers' effect on development
- Coparenting
- Attachment



# The evidence about fathers as men

- Men are different to women
- Boys  $\neq$  Girls
- Fathering  $\neq$  Mothering

Ideal from 1980s  
men (dads) = women (mums)

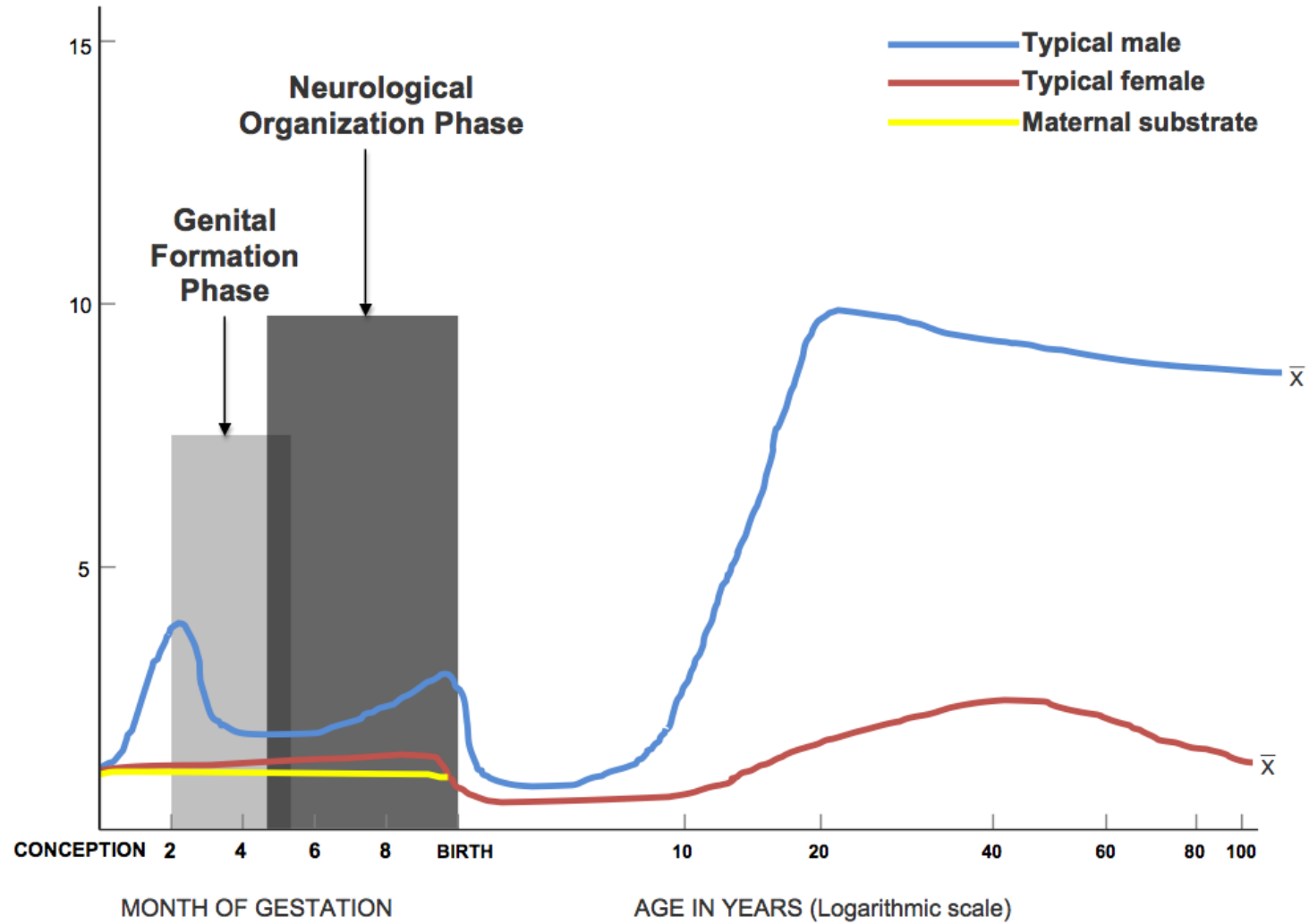


# But really?





# Brain architecture



# Testosterone level and baby cries

- Crying raises T level
- But with soothing lowers T level



Chapman, E., Baron-Cohen, S., Auyeung, B., Knickmeyer, R., Taylor, K., & Hackett, G. (2006). Fetal testosterone and empathy: evidence from the empathy quotient (EQ) and the “reading the mind in the eyes” test. *Social Neuroscience*, 1(2), 135-148.

# Oxytocin and fathering

- **Father-toddler play sessions**
- **Give nasal spray Oxytocin to half group**
- **Double blind experiment**
- **Videotape and Measure play**



- Naber, F., van IJzendoorn M.H., Deschamps, P., van Engeland, H., & Bakermans-Kranenburg, M.J. (2010) Intranasal oxytocin increases fathers' observed responsiveness during play with their children: A double-blind within-subject experiment *Psychoneuroendocrinology* 35, 1583—1586

# Oxytocin and fathering



Those fathers with Oxytocin

1. Encouraged exploration more
2. Were less hostile in play



## Single men

Ox



Placebo



## Men in steady partnership

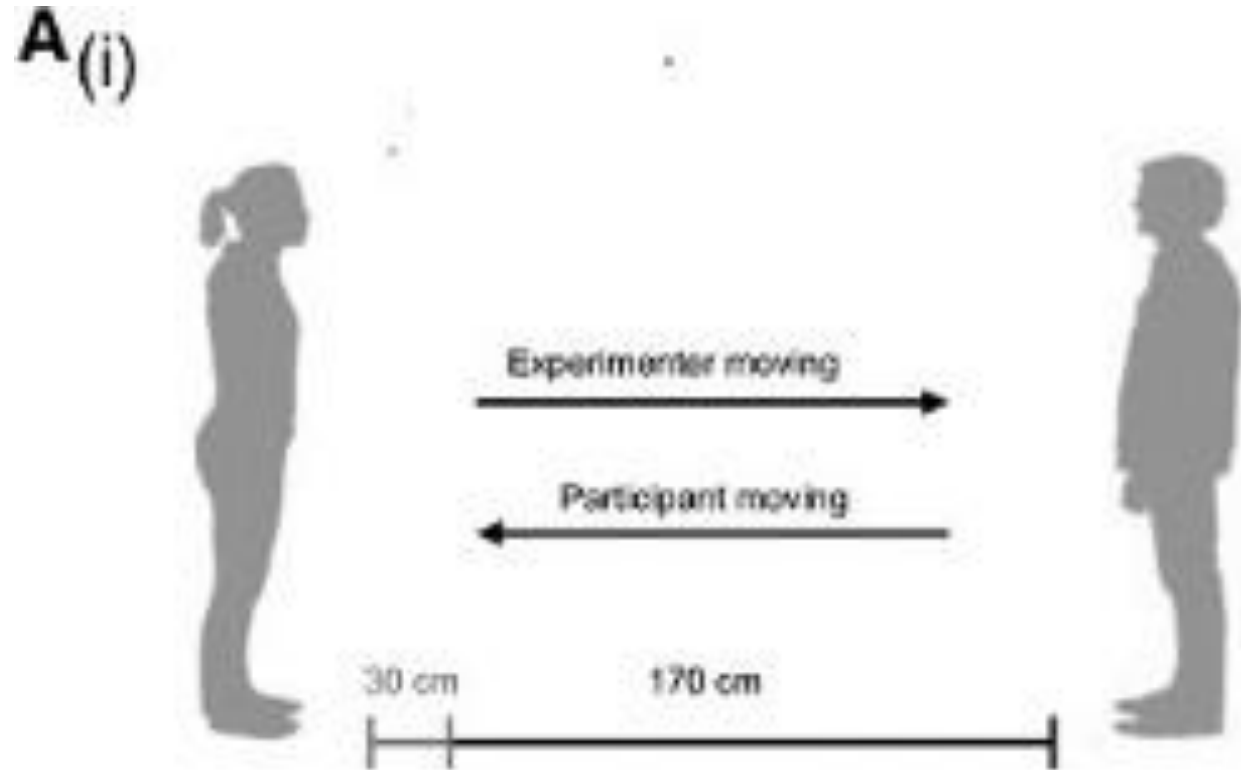
Ox



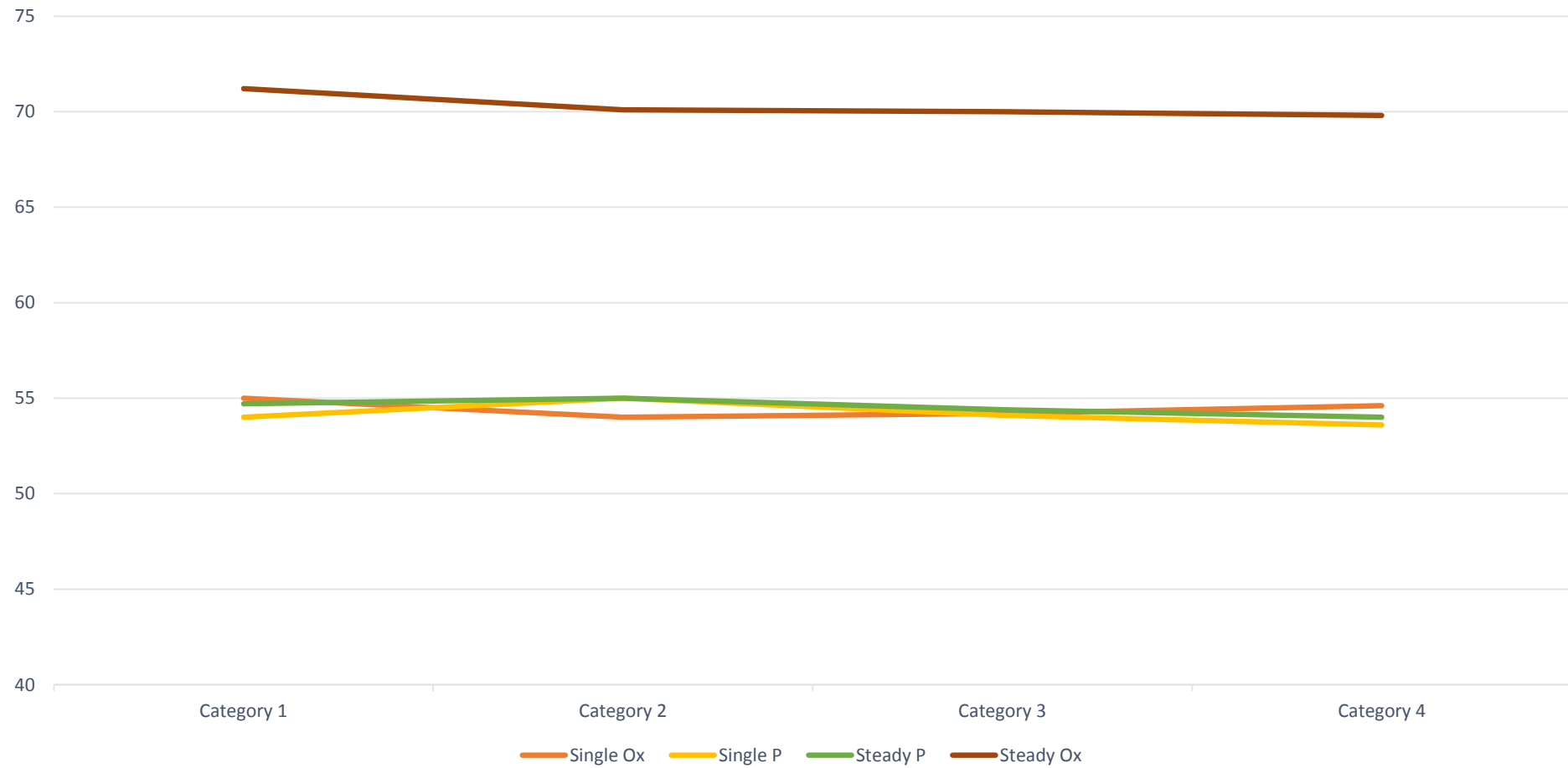
Placebo









# Oxytocin keeps you married?



# Distance chin to chin



# What do kids need for a good start at school?

School Readiness	Dads have an impact	Brain development
Physical Development		
Listening and explaining		
Self-control and co-operation		

# Dads and Physical Development





# Is it Overweight Dads OR Overweight Mums?

- The risk of child becoming obese?



- **Fathers**
  - **4.18** (95% CI:1.01–17.33 ) If your father was overweight
  - **14.88**, (95% CI: 2.61–84.77) If your father was obese
- **Mothers no effect**

# Dads listening and explaining



- Vocabulary

# Father's contribution to school success

- Fathers teaching at age 2 predicts children's reading and maths scores
- Example tasks: threading beads or standing on one leg
- Father-child interaction predicts
  - Vocabularies at ages 5, 7, and 10
  - Maths skills at ages 5 and 7



- McKelvey, et al (2011). Father teaching interactions with toddlers at risk: Associations with later child academic outcomes. *Family Science*, 2(2), 146-155.

# Father's contribution to school success

- Code videotapes for:
  - 1. Sensitivity to their child's cues
    - Do they notice what the child is doing?
    - Do they encourage child
  - 2. Follow the child
    - Do they let the child suggest things
    - Do they ask the child

# Dads and Self regulation



- Self control





# ROUGH AND TUMBLE IN MAMMALS

- Wrestling, grappling, kicking, tumbling
- Dominance swapping
- Play signals
- Different from fighting



# ROUGH AND TUMBLE PLAY EXPERIMENTS WITH RATS

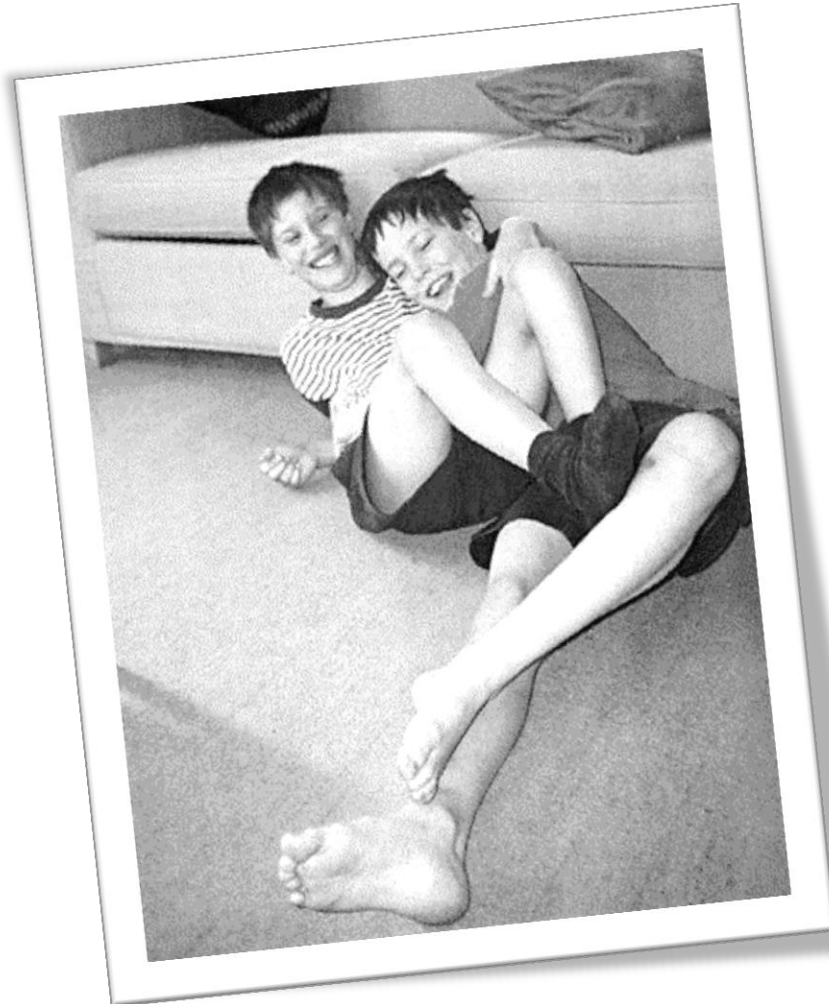
Can touch and smell  
but no RTP leads to..

- Poor social skills
- Poor problem solving





# OBSERVING CHILDREN'S ROUGH AND TUMBLE



- Children think it's fun
- Differences between aggression and play-fighting
- Children generally know the difference
- Teachers tend to interpret play-fighting as aggression
- Play intensity related to deprivation

# FOCUS ON DADS



Significant treatment effects for **children** for

- ✓ physical activity ( $d=0.74$ )
- ✓ resting heart rate ( $d=0.51$ )
- ✓ dietary intake ( $d=0.84$ )

(Morgan et al, 2011)

Fathers said....

- ✓ Improved father-child bond
- ✓ Good for their child's development
- ✓ Some risk not bad

(Fletcher et al. 2011)



## DADS CONNECTING

When we play, I let her initiate a bit more, less structure, I'm a bit more giving of my time



Was good for bringing my son and I closer

# Father-inclusive practice

- Get a grip on the research about dads
- Benchmark dads involvement
- Discuss dads involvement
- Use social proof
- Keeping fathers in mind





*I learn from your touch, your voice, your warmth, your strong arms, your mood. Everything you do matters to me dad*

JOIN UP

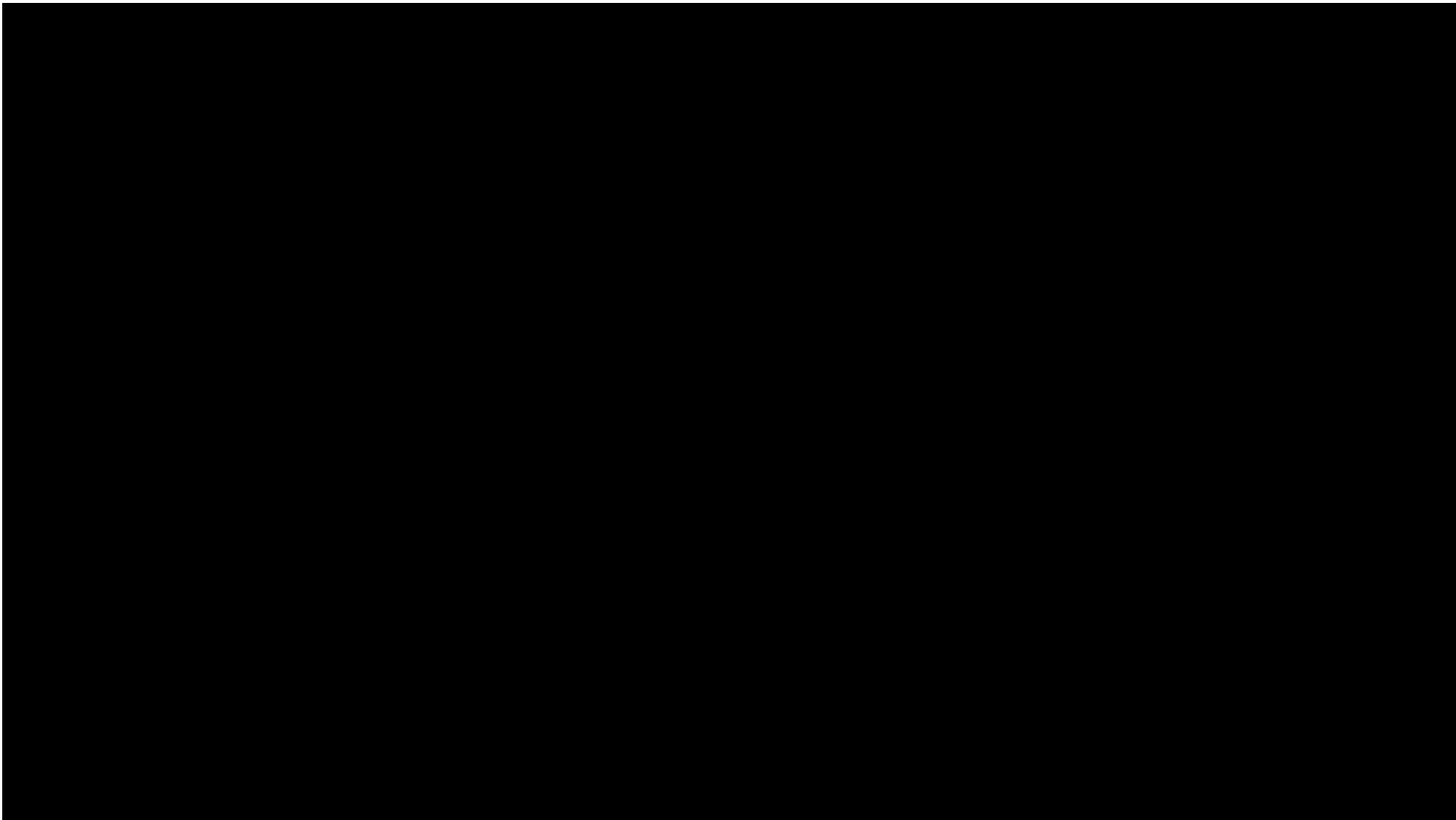
[www.sms4dads.com](http://www.sms4dads.com)



**SMS4dads**

INFO TO YOUR PHONE FOR DADS-ON-THE GO





# Who can enrol

- From anywhere in Australia
- Partner (married or not) is pregnant
- Infant is less than three months of age at the time of enrolment
- The messages are sent until the baby is 12 months of age or until the dad opts out



# Messages

- It is important for me to sleep in a safe place and in a safe position dad. Get more info on safe sleeping from ... [\*Static Link\*]
- So I pass a lot of wind. Well I am growing fast and I have to eat a lot so my gut is very busy. What's your excuse dad? [Txt STOP to OptOut]

# Messages

- If you've been at work all day you might be able to support mum by taking me out for a walk dad. This will also give us more bonding time.
- Working together in these early months is important. How can you find agreement on the best thing to do when caring for your baby? [Txt STOP to OptOut]

# Messages

- Hey dad. I am going to double triple my weight in the first year of life. Don't let this happen to you too.[\* Static Link\*]
- Good food, sleep and exercise can really help at this time. If you can't get all of these then try to get what you can.[\*Static Link\*]

# MOOD*tracker*

CLICK A FACE to rate how you are going today

*awesome*



*cool*



*ok*



*shaky*



*bad*



**SMS**<sub>4</sub>dads

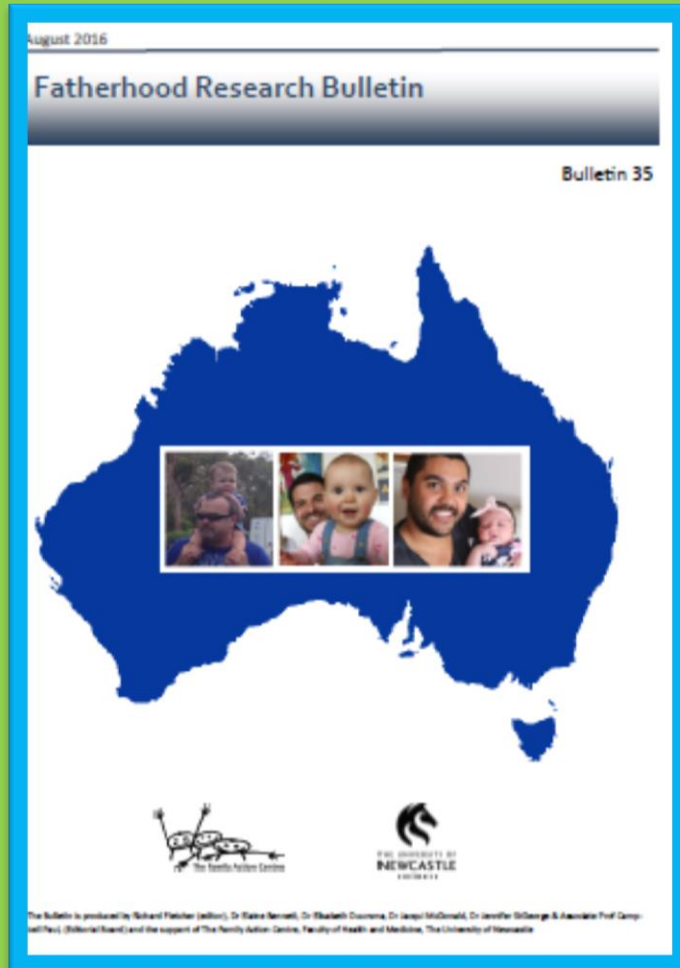


## From our most recent exit interviews

### Any messages you recall?

- *“a baby usually cry if there is something wrong. A reminder that they are not trying to annoy you”*
- *Yes- One message about regular physical touching to connect with my partner*
- *About her need to rest and breastfeeding and that she has no time off. ..To help with the chores and supporting her.*

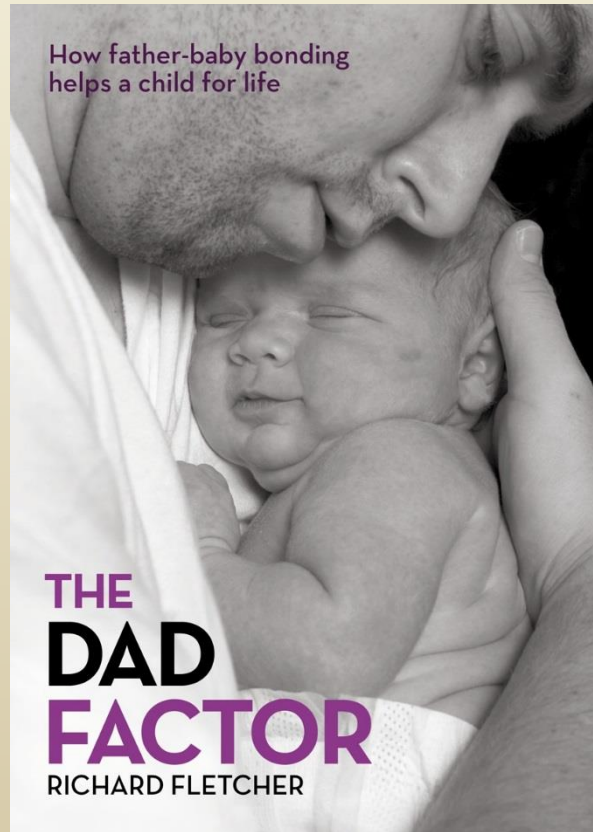
# Fatherhood Research Bulletin



- Free
  - Bimonthly
  - Research summaries
  - On the Web
  - Father-inclusive practice
- 
- Email me if you'd like to get the Bulletin
  - [richard.fletcher@Newcastle.edu.au](mailto:richard.fletcher@Newcastle.edu.au)



# Resources



- Available in Spanish, German, Chinese and Korean