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

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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
Fathers for School Readiness

• Play-based fathers engagement for child self-regulation
Fatherhood...what’s changed?
Noticing negative parts of fatherhood

Father bailed after allegedly slapping daughter at gym
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 ≠ Girls
• Fathering ≠ 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

Oxytocin and fathering

• Father-toddler play sessions

• Give nasal spray Oxytocin to half group

• Double blind experiment

• Videotape and Measure play

Oxytocin and fathering

Those fathers with Oxytocin

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

Men in steady partnership

Ox
Placebo

Ox
Placebo
Oxytocin keeps you married?
Distance chin to chin

- Category 1
- Category 2
- Category 3
- Category 4

Single Ox
Single P
Steady P
Steady Ox
What do kids need for a good start at school?

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<th>School Readiness</th>
<th>Dads have an impact</th>
<th>Brain development</th>
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<td>Physical Development</td>
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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

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)
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
Stayin on Track

- Website to draw young Aboriginal dads
- Short films linked to websites with information and support
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

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

SMS4dads
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
Resources

- Available in Spanish, German, Chinese and Korean