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Fathers' Involvement is Important in Children's Education

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There is overwhelming evidence that a parent's involvement in a child's education makes a very positive difference. In the past, often an unstated assumption was made that parent involvement meant mothers involvement. Research shows that the involvement of fathers, however, no matter their income or cultural background, can play a critical role in their children's education.

According to a publication, *A Call to Commitment: Fathers' Involvement in Children's Learning*, published by the U.S. Department of Education, when fathers are involved their children learn more, perform better in school and exhibit healthier behavior. Even when fathers do not share a home with their children, their active involvement can have a lasting and positive impact. The Education Department is working for fuller recognition and inclusion of fathers in all of their programs because of the huge impact fathers can have on their kids.

Children glean from their fathers a range of choices about everything from clothing to devotion to a great cause. This promotes positive moral values, conformity to rules, and the development of conscience. Our schools need kids that possess these traits and fathers are the key. The emotional, mental, and spiritual tools we help our children develop at home also help them at school.

In his book, *Fatherhood*, Kyle Pruett points to research that shows that even very young children who have experienced high father involvement show an increase in curiosity and in problem solving capacity. Father's involvement seems to encourage children's exploration of the world around them and confidence in their ability to solve problems. Fathers demonstrate to their children that male adults can take responsibility, help to establish appropriate conduct, provide a daily example of how to approach life, and the importance of achievement and productivity. Fathers, like mothers, should also serve as models in the area of spiritual life. If a father and mother don't take the lead in modeling their religious faith to their children, society will fill the void with its morals and spirituality.

Society sees the benefit of fathers to a family in financial terms, but tends to think that mothers should take care of the rest. In the book, *The Role of the Father in Child Development*, edited by Michael Lamb, fathers are shown as being much more important than just a "provider." Economic support is one significant part of a father's influence on his children. Another is the concrete forms of emotional support that he gives to the children's mother. That support enhances the overall quality of the mother-child relationship and eases workloads for mothers. For example, a father getting involved with the children's homework can allow mom

to get other things done in the home or just give her a much needed break that benefits the entire family.

According to Lamb, highly involved fathers also contribute to increased dexterity in children, increased empathy, less stereotyped sex role beliefs and greater self-control. When fathers are actively involved, children are more likely to have solid marriages of their own. Education reform really does begin at home.

Time factors for fathers are a major barrier to being more involved with their children. One of the recommendations from the Department of Education is for fathers to establish a daily routine with their kids. Fathers should try to set a time for their children's homework in which they can be there for support and information. Fathers should also commit to eat at least one meal with their family every day and to make the most of bedtime with their kids. Every moment he spends and every word he says builds a relationship with his child.

The ability to read well is known to be one of the most critical skills a child needs to be successful in school and in life. Years of research show that the best way to make a child a good reader is for a father to serve as a model reader. He can do this by frequently reading to the child and by reading himself.

This information isn't just important for families to know-but schools as well. If educators do not see a father involved with one of their students, it is natural for them to assume that the father doesn't want to be involved. However, it is often the case that fathers do not think the school wants him to be involved. According to the U.S. Department of Education, the best way to break out of this "chicken-and-egg" dilemma is to communicate clearly to all parents that fathers and mothers as well are expected to be involved.

There are many families today in which the father doesn't live with his children. The Department of Education suggests that a school should provide nonresident fathers with student progress reports and other important information as well as the mother. Policies like this will encourage fathers to be actively involved in their children's education and in supporting the school.

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