

## Importance of Dad!

*"He teaches me the important things in life, like how to take care of myself, how to use tools, and which gas stations sell the best Starpees."* Father of the Year Essay Contest Entry

"This research discovers that children—especially daughters—benefit considerably when the parent they are not living with nevertheless does everyday things with the child, from shopping, reading, visiting, doing homework, watching TV together, to spending holidays together.... for a school-age daughter, this doing everyday-type things together with the parent she is not living with is the only predictor of psychological well-being."<sup>2</sup>

...those [inner-city boys] with the highest aspirations were those living with their biological fathers. "Having a biological father at home... is associated with a preference for higher quality jobs. Having a biological father around may be particularly important, then, in protecting inner-city boys from the consequences of their surroundings."<sup>3</sup>

Father absence and depressed IQ scores were statistically linked ( $p < .01$ ) among children at age four and also at age thirteen.<sup>4</sup>

A study of preschool children admitted to... hospitals as psychiatric patients... found that nearly 80 percent came from fatherless homes.<sup>5</sup>

When Fathers do not visit after divorce:

- Girl children show signs of being hyperactive, headstrong, and antisocial.
- Both boys and girls showed signs of over-dependency on the mother.<sup>6</sup>

Like children in single-parent families, children in step families show elevated risks of maladjustment and school failure.<sup>7</sup>

Children who received regular father care in the year, 5 years prior to schooling, were more likely to have higher levels of cooperation and social skills and lower levels of hyperactivity and problem behaviours. Children who experienced regular care by their fathers and more days of father care per week in the years prior to schooling showed higher levels of cooperative behaviour.<sup>8</sup>

## What School Administrators Can Do!

- Student registration forms should include separate lines for stepparent names and parent contact information.
- Specifically ask separated or divorced parents at time of registration for contact information for the other parent. Make it clear that, by law, the only way to prevent this contact is to get a court restraining order and bring it to the school. A paragraph to this effect on the registration forms is a good idea.
- Make good-faith efforts to contact nonresident parent at beginning of year and in any emergency.
- Include nonresident parents in all mailings. Keep most mailings short but informative.
- Keep an up-to-date school website with a calendar of events.
- Ensure that nonresident parents have a timely opportunity to order student photos.
- Have limited power-of-attorney forms or standardized permission slips available for granting stepparent or grandparent authorization to access school records or to pick up child.
- Know the applicable statutes, including FERPA and State Statutes. See <http://www.deltabravo.net/custody/access.htm>
- Make brochures available to parents describing the benefits of nonresidential parent involvement and what residential parents can do to encourage this.
- Make brochures available to nonresidential parents informing them of the benefits to the child of their involvement, and things they can do to become more involved.
- MA schools should, at the beginning of each school year, provide nonresident parents with information on the law, and what they must do to receive copies of report cards and school papers.
- Work with local or national programs promoting father involvement, such as Watch D.O.G.S. ([www.watchdogs.net](http://www.watchdogs.net)).

# Working with Non-Resident Fathers

## A Guide for Educators of Children

*The odds that children in grades 1 through 12 have ever repeated a grade are 39% less if their nonresident fathers have participated in one activity at school and 48% less if their nonresident fathers have participated in at least two activities at their schools.<sup>1</sup>*

**Teachers who recognize the importance of nonresident father involvement and actively work to encourage that involvement can make a real difference in the lives of their students.**

This pamphlet is published and distributed by the  
**Separated Parenting  
Access and Resource Center  
(SPARC)**  
as a public service.



<http://www.deltabravo.net>

SPARC is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to promoting the best interests of children in custody and divorce proceedings.

## Children Need Their Dads!

"Indeed, a large body of research overwhelmingly suggests children do best when they have both a mother and a father in their lives. Specifically, children whose fathers are involved in raising them do better in school, are less likely to get into trouble with the law, and are more likely to be better parents themselves."<sup>9</sup>

"The involvement of nonresident fathers in their children's schools appears to be particularly important for children in grades 6 through 12, reducing the likelihood that the children have ever been suspended or expelled from school or repeated a grade. This association remains even after controlling for resident mothers' involvement in the schools, education, household income, and other potentially confounding factors. Nonresident fathers' involvement is also associated with a greater likelihood that children in grades 1 through 5 and in grades 6 through 12 participate in extracurricular activities. There is also evidence that the involvement of nonresident fathers increases the likelihood that children in grades 6 through 12 get mostly A's and that they enjoy school...."<sup>10</sup>

## The Problem

- Non-Resident fathers often do not feel welcome or needed in their children's school.
- Non-Resident parents often do not know of events, activities, or conferences at their children's school.
- Even when they do know of events at the school, distance or work schedules often make it difficult to attend these events.
- Schools often send flyers and information home with the children to inform parents of activities, upcoming events, class pictures, and other things that parents need to know, leaving nonresident parents out of the loop!
- Many schools or teachers seek the mother's permission before responding to nonresident fathers' requests for information, this is true even in states where the statutes give both parents equal access.

- Some states have statutes (e.g. MA) or guidelines (e.g. NC) that require teachers or schools to check with the custodial parent before responding to a request from a nonresident parent.

- Hostile divorcees or custody situations often have parents who, consciously or unconsciously, want to "enlist" third parties such as teachers and school officials to their side or point of view, often leaving the school personnel feeling trapped in the middle.
- If you, as a school administrator or teacher feel caught up in the dispute, imagine how the child feels.

## What Teachers Can Do

- It's important to remain a neutral party in any dispute, to reserve your opinion and not be trapped into exhibiting undue sympathy with either parent.
- By keeping a fair perspective, you can be there for the child caught in the middle, instead of becoming embroiled and adding to the pressures on the child.
- Let resident and nonresident fathers know that you value their input and participation in their child's education.
- Have career days where parents can come tell the class about their work. Encourage or specifically ask individual fathers to participate.
- E-mail is an excellent tool for contacting both resident and nonresident parents.
- Consider web conferencing or using a speaker phone for parent-teacher conferences.
- Take lots of classroom photos. Attach them to newsletters, e-mails, etc.
- Consider mailing copies for nonresident parents when sending papers home with the child.
- Contact resident and nonresident parent if attendance, homework completion, or behavior become an issue.

## References

1. National Center for Education Statistics, Fathers' Involvement in Their Children's Schools, October 1997, page 74.
2. K. Alison Clarke-Stewart and Craig Hayward, "Advantages of Father Custody and Contact for the Psychological Well-Being of School-Age Children," *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, Vol. 17, No. 2, April-June 1996, p. 239.
3. Thomas Cook, *The Development of Occupational Aspirations and Expectations among Inner-City Boys*, Child Development, Vol. 67, 1996. Page(s) 3368-3385
4. Arnold J. Sameroff et al., "Stability of Intelligence from Preschool to Adolescence: The Influence of Social and Family Risk Factors", *Child Development*, Vol. 64, Number ., 1993. Page(s) 80-97.
5. Jack Block, et al. "Parental Functioning and the Home Environment in Families of Divorce", *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 27 (1988)
6. Frank Mott, "When Is a Father Really Gone? Paternal-Child Contact in Father-Absent Homes," *Dermography*, Vol 27, No. 4, November 1990, pp. 499-518. Quoted by Warren Farrell, Ph.D., *Father and Child Reunion. How to Bring the Dads We Need to the Children We Love*, Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, New York, 2001, p. 35.
7. National Center for Education Statistics, Fathers' Involvement in Their Children's Schools, October 1997, page 5.
8. Kay Margets, "Starting school matters: Supporting children's transition to school", extract from a paper presented at the Early Childhood Matters Conference, Melbourne, 4-5 October 2002.
9. Jayne Keedle, "Fathers Matter", *The Harford Advocate* -
10. National Center for Education Statistics, Fathers' Involvement in Their Children's Schools, October 1997