

parent

# Power!

Engaging mums and dads in their children's learning should be one of your highest priorities, says charity 4Children...

**M**ums and dads have an enormous impact on their children's development and future outcome. The interactions that take place in the home have more influence on achievement than innate ability, material circumstances or even the quality of early years or school provision. As such, it is vital

that early years staff make every effort to involve them in supporting their children's education from the earliest possible opportunity. The vast majority of parents will welcome the chance to support their child's development and will be keen to find out how they can reinforce the learning that takes place inside your setting at home.

It's important to think of ways in which parents can help their child to continue to develop at home by considering each child's individual needs. For example, if a child is uncomfortable getting messy, encourage parents to introduce more messy activities in the home; or if a child prefers to play by themselves, suggest the parents invite other

children round to the house more frequently.

You should try to emphasise the importance of mums and dads talking to their child and encouraging them to be inquisitive about their environment, particularly when they go on any outings or visit new places.

Finally, remember to be sensitive when delivering difficult messages to parents. Always tell the truth, but be sure to say something positive and encouraging about their child too. Where you have broached a difficult issue with a parent, make an effort to see them more frequently and support them in trying to address the challenge. You should also be sensitive to the busy lives of parents and ensure that timings for parent meetings and discussions are flexible and do not alienate those who work full time.

## Looking beyond mum

Whilst most people recognise the vital role mothers play in a young child's development, the importance of fathers' involvement can be overlooked. From attending ante-natal classes to getting involved in their child's development and education, evidence shows that when dads are involved, a child's educational attainment, behaviour, wellbeing and relationships thrive.

As some dads may feel less comfortable spending time in early years settings than mums, it is important that staff do all that they can to help them feel at ease:

★ Think about your environment. Could you change your décor, posters and noticeboards

to make them more appealing to dads? Make sure you display positive images of a diverse range of dads with their children.

★ Address dads directly. If you want to provide a service where dads are welcome, write to 'Mum and Dad' rather than to 'Parents'.

★ Think about your record-keeping. Your registration forms should have a space for 'father' and another for 'other key carers', which could include stepfathers, amongst others. Make sure you know who has Parental Responsibility. If you only have contact with the mum, you should routinely explore the possible benefits to her and the children of dad engaging with the service. Legally you can record any information the mother gives you about him, and then contact him to verify it and introduce yourselves.

★ Make sure all your staff understand the fathers' importance to their children, and build

## find out more

4Children is a national charity supporting children and their families. Visit [foundationyears.org.uk](http://foundationyears.org.uk) for more information on encouraging parental involvement, and [fatherhoodinstitute.org](http://fatherhoodinstitute.org) for more tips on engaging dads.

## Case Study: Leam Lane Nursery, Knowsley

The Leam Lane Nursery in Gateshead, a nursery recently taken over by 4Children, is working hard to engage mums and dads in their children's learning. Efforts are being made to understand children's home routines so their introduction to the nursery takes place as smoothly as possible. Parents and children are made aware who their key worker is before they start, to ensure continuity and smooth transition from home to the setting.

Staff feel strongly about the importance of face to face communication with parents. The team host two parents meetings each year with members of staff who spend time with each child on a regular basis. Staff aim to speak to all parents and carers as they come into the nursery at the beginning and end of the day. On coming into the nursery, parents are also invited to take home a story sack, popular reading materials and activities which encourage parents to continue children's learning at home.

A Record of Achievement is kept for each child. The nursery recognises that asking parents to contribute regularly to the record is a great way to increase their involvement. At the end of each day, parents and carers are encouraged to take

home and update a daily diary of their child (0-2) which is completed during the day by a member of the nursery team. The diary forms part of the record of achievement and details the main activities each child has experienced at the nursery. It often includes personal notes or messages for the parents. Mums and dads can enhance the record of achievement by including photos from any holidays or activities that take place outside of the nursery. They also have a basket in the reception area which encourages parents to write down what the children have been doing at home.

As well as the parents meetings, mums and dads are kept 'in the know' about community and fundraising events and activities via a noticeboard displayed prominently. There is also a comments box where parents can share comments or ask questions they may not feel comfortable addressing face to face.

The team is also planning to ramp up its efforts to keep parents informed about how the activities their child experiences in the nursery link into the Early Years Foundation Stage framework.

this knowledge into your job descriptions, person specifications and appraisal processes – just as you would with equality and diversity awareness.

★ Help your staff work through any concerns (expressed or otherwise) they have about working with fathers, and support them to develop their skills, via whole-team training on working with fathers.

★ Don't assume you know what dads will want from your service – ask them! You could develop a questionnaire to find out what they like to do with their children and what kinds of things they'd like your service to offer. Then promote it in places you know dads go to; you could even hold a dads' event to get the ball rolling.

★ Don't just set up a dads' group. This is what many settings do, thinking that by doing so they are providing a father-inclusive service. Dad-only activities can work, but so can mixed sessions; and also don't assume that dads will only come on a weekend. Many fathers will be in full-time employment, but so will many mothers... Others won't be. A truly father-inclusive service offers mums and dads a range of provision, including mixed sessions, held during weekdays, evenings and weekends.

Source: The Fatherhood Institute