



# Ten Ways to Involve Fathers in Their Children's Education

By Leah Davies, M.Ed.

Parent involvement in schools has traditionally been carried out by mothers. Yet boys and girls need positive, male role models. When fathers take an active role in education, schools report an increase in student achievement.

However, there are many barriers to participation by fathers such as:

- The belief that a child's education is a mother's responsibility
- A tendency for schools to communicate primarily with mothers
- Divorced or separated mothers having sole custody of children
- A lack of awareness on how to help
- Fathers' often overwhelming work schedules
- A failure to recognize the importance of becoming involved
- Literacy and language difficulties

## How can educators foster involvement?

1. Make sure specific information concerning the mother and father is completed on the school enrollment form. Address all communication to both parents when appropriate. If the parents are divorced or separated, send student progress reports and other related information to the absent parent unless the separation exists to protect family members. When calling the home ask to speak to the father as well as the mother. Keep both parents informed through newsletters, e-mail and notes concerning their child's progress.
2. Maintain a father-friendly environment. Have welcoming signs near the front door in all languages represented in the school. Make a special effort to involve males in leadership positions on advisory councils or in parent-teacher organizations. Encourage fathers to personally invite other adult males to become active.
3. Request that both parents attend teacher-parent conferences. Provide child care and offer an interpreter when needed. Involve the father in a discussion concerning the child by asking non-threatening questions like, "What do you and your child enjoy doing together?" (See "[Guidelines for Educator-Parent Conferences Concerning Angry Children](#)" under Teacher Ideals at [www.kellybear.com](http://www.kellybear.com).) If time permits, give both parents a survey form concerning their careers, hobbies, interests, and schedule. Include space where parents can write concerns and list their specific needs. (See "[Inviting Parental Involvement through Survey Forms](#)" under Teacher Ideals at [www.kellybear.com](http://www.kellybear.com).) If completion of the form appears to be difficult for the parents, interview them. Collect the forms and if possible, address their comments before they leave.
4. Search for opportunities to include fathers in school activities. Encourage them to attend school events and to observe in their child's classroom. Have a "Father Night" where fathers or other males such as grandfathers, uncles, or family friends are invited to bring the child to school. Have adult-child teams play simple relay games or participate in other enjoyable activities that require little skill. Serve refreshments and provide parenting information in a non-threatening way.
5. Have a "Dad Lunch" or "Father Breakfast" where students from certain classrooms are invited to bring a father, male relative, "Big Brother," or other "dad figure" to be honored. Ask some dads to include an additional child, so that no child is left out. After eating together have a father-only discussion on ways to help their child learn.
6. Sponsor a Saturday work day where fathers are asked to bring their child to school to clean up the grounds and/or make needed repairs. Provide T-shirts for those who help.
7. Involve fathers in a day or weekend retreat in the community where bonding can take place. Provide activities that promote fellowship and leadership. Based on expressed interests of the

- fathers, create useful committees and/or support groups. Formulate a Father-to-Father Program during which experienced dads mentor young fathers.
8. Provide classes at the school on fatherhood, English as a second language, GED certification, computers or other requested topics.
  9. Recognize the special role fathers play during family events such as plays, programs or other activities. Have them stand to receive applause and point out ways they can participate in their child's education. Pass out volunteer sign-up sheets for various activities such as art, science or cultural enrichment projects.
  10. Inform fathers that volunteering in school is not the only way to enhance their child's learning. Active involvement with their child at home is a form of participation. Stress that maintaining an open, sensitive father-child relationship will have a positive impact on their child's growth. Encourage the following behaviors in fathers:
    - Telling childhood stories
    - Reading with their child
    - Modeling reading behaviors
    - Using the library
    - Playing games and/or sports
    - Taking the child on outings to a park, zoo, museum, and/or participate in cultural activities.
    - Completing routine jobs together
    - Teaching the child a skill
    - Watching educational television
    - Having a weekly family night
    - Modeling perseverance
    - Exploring interests
    - Eating family meals together and encourage discussion. During the meal, have each family member tell about the best thing that happened to them that day or an important thing they learned.
    - Most of all, express love and pleasure in being with your child.