



Involving Fathers

Fathers are often the forgotten ones in family-oriented programs. Mothers have traditionally been more involved in the schools and community organizations. But with more mothers in the labor force and a growing recognition of the father's importance for child development, there is new interest in meaningful ways of involving dads in their children's education.

Schools can reach out to fathers in at least three ways: their basic orientation, their in-school programs, and encouragement of out-of-school learning activities.

Basic Orientation

All forms of communication to families need to mention fathers as well as mothers, assume that both will be interested, and encourage both to participate in school-sponsored activities. Further, non-custodial parents, who are usually fathers, need to be informed of these activities too unless there are strong reasons for not doing so. (See *Involving Single and Working Parents* section also.)

In-School Activities

These should be scheduled at times when all parents can attend, such as before school, in the evenings, or on weekends. They could include:

- Father-child breakfasts or dinners could provide an informal setting to meet teachers and school staff where adult male friends or father substitutes are also encouraged to come.
- In parent-teacher conferences, draw out the views of fathers and give them suggestions on ways to help children learn more at home.
- For school leadership positions such as PTA officers or advisory committee members, seek a balance of fathers and mothers.
- Volunteer positions should be filled from among both fathers and mothers who are free during the school day to help with activities such as being classroom aides or chaperons for field

trips. The presence of fathers or even older men as hall monitors may help reduce school discipline problems.

- Fathers should be invited to help with special events such as constructing exhibit booths or judging contests.
- On career days ask fathers and mothers to tell how their education helped prepare them for their careers.

A special opportunity for fathers and mothers too is NetDay96. This is a nationwide effort to connect all classrooms to the Internet. Modeled on the successful California NetDay, every weekend in October volunteers will help hard-wire classrooms. For more information, contact NetDay96 by phone at (415) 553-2311 or by Internet at netday@kqed.org, <http://www.netday96.com/>

Out-of-School Activities

Fathers contribute to children's learning and development in many ways, and schools can assist them by:

- Making a point to invite fathers and make them feel welcome at workshops and courses on topics such as parenting skills, helping students learn non-violent ways to resolve conflicts, and exploring college and career opportunities.
 - Creating support groups for parents experiencing the death or departure of a spouse, a difficult or disabled child, alienated teenagers, and other traumatic events.
 - Providing training for fathers and other men as well as women to learn how to tutor students in basic subjects and mentor them in long-term relationships.
 - Working with major local employers to adopt family-friendly policies such as releasing workers to attend school conferences, allowing flexible work schedules, and creating lunchtime seminars on family and home-school relations topics.
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