

Fathers' Reading Matters

Research studies done across the globe have found a direct connection between fathers reading to their children and cognitive and language development, reading, school success, emotional health, and mental health. Many of studies have also suggested that fathers are more strongly linked to early language development and social emotional development in early childhood.

- In the fall of 2015, a Harvard study conducted over a year by Dr. Elisabeth Duursma, found that children benefit more from their father reading them bedtime stories than their mother. She suggested that questions posed by men when reading to children were found to have sparked challenging “imaginative discussions” and were better for the children’s language development. Girls in particular were found to have benefitted more when read to by a male. Dr Duursma commented, “The impact is huge, particularly if dads start reading to kids under the age of two. Dads were more likely to say something like, ‘Oh look, a ladder. Do you remember when I had that ladder in my truck?’ That is great for children’s language development because they have to use their brains more. It’s more cognitively challenging.”
- Another American study discovered that by reading regularly to their children (just 20 minutes a day!), fathers boost their child’s expressiveness and language development. This study and others have suggested that fathers are more strongly linked to early language development and social emotional development in their children at 24 and 36 months. Fathers tend to use bigger words and longer sentences, speaking in less rhythmic sequences than mothers, perhaps trying not to baby the child.
- A British study also found that when fathers read regularly to their school age children, the child’s reading level advances faster than children whose father reads to them just once a week. This finding is repeatedly found in studies across the globe. Children that are read to by their fathers, particularly boys, score higher in reading achievement and general academic development.
- A Swedish study found that when fathers read to their elementary aged girls and ask their teenage daughters about school, it helped to prevent depression and improve mental health later in life.
- And in addition to school success, researchers in Minnesota found that fathers’ reading helps children relax and build emotional security too!
- Another recently published study explored the relationship between postnatal parental depression and cognitive development in children born prematurely. Both mothers and fathers were assessed for depressive symptoms 9 months after the birth and their children’s cognitive function was measured at 24 months. The study results found that fathers’, but not mothers’, postnatal depressive symptoms negatively impact children’s early cognitive function. This study reinforces the previous findings that direct healthy father involvement is connected to early cognitive development in their children.