

Father Times

Fathers and the Magic of Reading

Issue 5

A newsletter for fathers and father figures of young children

Taking Time for Reading

Think of a favorite book that has touched your life. Remember *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak? Perhaps you enjoyed the nonsensical rhymes of Dr. Seuss in your childhood, or have encountered the ups and downs of the *Encyclopedia Brown* detective series. Reading can be magical. Teaching children to love reading hands down a special kind of magic — a gift that will enrich their lives as nothing else can do. Begin early to read with your children. Begin now!

Reading is such a valuable activity because it promotes child development, enriches relationships, and fosters creativity and imagination. Most children love the feeling of warmth and security they get from being close to a parent while listening to a story. Children are dependent upon parents and adults who can and will read to them in such a way that they will learn to love reading — we hope you will be that kind of parent.

Once Upon A Time . . .

Dads, Books, and Kids

Doug waited for the day that his son, Clay, would start to talk. Doug didn't really worry much about it as he waited, watched and wondered when it would happen.

At age 4, Doug was no longer waiting. He was now wondering if Clay would ever stop talking to take a breath between questions. "Why are the snows [snowflakes] cold?" "Where does the sun go at night?" "Do snails have eyes?" "Do baby birds fight in the nest house?"

Doug knew it was important to try to answer most of the questions and be patient, but it got tiresome. He found that some concepts are just beyond a 4-year-old's ability to understand, so lengthy explanations would get interrupted with the next question. Last but not least, Doug fretted, no human knows all the answers!

Doug knew that by ignoring Clay's questions, he was sending the message that his son's inquiries were not important. Doug knew that it was vital for Clay's brain development and his relationship with his son that he be attentive and answer the questions at a level Clay would understand.

After an especially trying Saturday morning of feeling like the winning contestant on the fictitious game show "Who Wants to be a Frustrated Father?" Doug realized that he no longer had to go it alone. He had a public library and wasn't afraid to find out how to use it to answer his son's most excellent and



sometimes tricky questions. So off they went to seek some knowledge and answers to Clay's questions.

From that day on, Doug and Clay made a habit of writing down any topics they wanted to know more about. Each Saturday morning they made their way to the library to look up children's books and sometimes even adult references to get their answers. They also became regular attenders of the children's story hour each week. And, of course, they checked out hundreds of books over the years. On evenings and weekends, they would sit together and read, seek answers to questions and share in the adventure of learning about everything from ponies to pioneers to planes.

Clay is now 12 years old and an excellent reader and student. He continues to be a weekly library companion to his father-mentor-teacher, Doug. The man who doesn't know all of the answers but knows where to find them.

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What Children Need

Fathers and Reading

Children, both boys and girls, need to have men read to them and with them from infancy through adolescence. Fathers, grandfathers, stepfathers, uncles, and brothers who read — all help children realize that reading is a “cool thing.”

Reading books to children has many benefits. Besides helping to calm a child, reading with children helps to expand vocabulary, build creativity, provide new ideas, develop visual memory and language skills, and enhance parent-child ties. Reading is one of the most valuable activities for strengthening parent-child relationships and stimulating a child's development. Some suggestions for fathers reading with young children include:

- Read books that relate to current events in the child's life such as *Miss Bindergarten Gets Ready for Kindergarten* for a child who is entering kindergarten. Or a book about losing a pet for a child whose best furry pal has died. There are countless books on sensitive topics that help open up discussion and give good ideas about how someone else in the same situation has handled it.
- Be a sensitive reader. The first time through a book, a child may not want to stop and discuss it. Follow your child's lead and cues. Be ready to read a book over and over again. Children love to have stories repeated until they become familiar friends. This repetition is great for building memory skills and other cognitive skills.
- Use the library. Introduce yourself and your child to the librarian. Tell the librarian the interests your

child has so she can watch for books you might like to read together. Sign him or her up for a library card as soon as he or she is old enough.

- Fill your home with print. Display books on shelves and magazines in baskets throughout the home to foster easy reading.
- Children need time in their father's lap each day. Sharing a book is a great way to unwind and get that special father time.

- The best stories come from the heart. Be a storyteller! Grandpa's famous stories always started with, “Well, I'll tell you something fellas.” However they start or end, they can be true life adventures of your own childhood or silly stories about Princess Daisy and Queen Tiger Lily. Children will remember these special tales far longer than book stories because it will be up to them to repeat them to their own children.

Fathering Facts

On Fathers and Reading

A child's learning is enhanced as fathers and other adults sit down and read books, tell stories, engage in word play, and help children explore the world through language. Reading is magical for young children. It transports them to new worlds and gives them new ideas. But it also provides the cornerstone for much of a child's learning. It furthers brain development, increases creativity, assists school performance, and strengthens father-child ties. What does research say about fathers or father figures and reading? Here are some key findings:

- Parental involvement is considered the single most important thing that public schools need to help children learn, according to teachers in the United States.
- 96 percent of respondents in a 1992 National Center for Fathering Gallup Survey agreed that fathers need to be more involved in their children's education through reading and helping with homework.



- Involved fathers are as important to a young child's academic success as mothers, and can have a positive impact on a child's academic achievement whether they live in the home or outside the home.
- Children with involved fathers who read with them are less likely to repeat a grade, and more likely to perform well in school, enjoy school, and participate in outside activities.
- The older a child becomes, the more important a father's involvement becomes to the child's success in school and outside activities.
- A 1999 national survey of fathers showed that over 40 percent of fathers interviewed had never read to their school-age children!
- Fathers or father figures can be involved through reading with children as they: read themselves, tell stories, go with children to the library, work with children on homework or school projects, and have a reading time each night before children go to bed.



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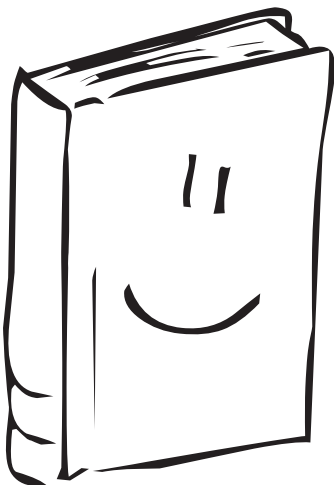
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(Source: *A Call to Commitment: Fathers' Involvement in Children's Learning*, 2000. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.)

Activities for Fathers and Children – Reading Magic!

This section provides a variety of activities that you can do to pursue reading and word games with your kids. Have fun as you read with your children!

- Babies enjoy chewing on a good book. Buy books specifically made for infants. Purchase sturdy books and check them often for safety. Babies and toddlers will not sit long, so try reading a page or two at a time. “Read” by pointing out pictures and making the sounds each picture might make. Let him turn the page.
- Would your toddler enjoy a “book-nic”? It’s a picnic with books instead of food. Spread a blanket on the ground on a warm day, lay down sunny side up and find pictures in the clouds, then read Eric Carle’s *Little Cloud*. For dessert, read something delicious before nodding off to nap time. You might even try an indoor “book-nic”!
- Say the name of something that usually comes with a partner such as salt and _____ (*pepper*), bread and _____ (*butter*). See what creative answers he may come up with for each pair.
- Preschoolers will enjoy a game of nursery rhyme charades. Act out a rhyme and see if she can guess correctly. Make up actions to nursery rhymes or new words to songs and finger plays.
- Grocery stores often carry letter-shaped pasta; these can be glued on paper or tossed into a can of the child’s favorite soup. Help him find the letters that make up his name and yours.
- Hold a “read-a-thon” with your child. Gather a pile of favorite books, some pillows and blankets, and settle down to spend the day reading together. Throw in some snack breaks and some activity time as well, such as visiting a place you are reading about.
- Your young child might like to be somebody new today. Pick a book character’s name and personality to pretend to be. Some children like having their parent pretend, too; others are scared by it. Do what is fun for your child. Another twist on this is to think of a book character and then give clues about the character until your child guesses who you are describing. Take turns. This is a good travel game.
- Write a book together about your adventures. Take a notebook in at bedtime and record a story or two from your child’s day. Add your slant on it in another paragraph, and each of you can illustrate your own rendition another day.
- Provide book making materials as simple as a glue stick, paper or notebook, blunt scissors and catalogs. Help your child make a book about a topic they have an interest in (astronauts, dogs, seashells, etc.).



Reading Tips

Read to a child when:

- The child needs calming or comforting.
- Making a transition to another activity.
- Getting the child ready for bed with a bedtime routine.
- Waking your hard-to-wake child — sit near his bed and read a favorite book.
- Getting ready for a bath, eating a meal, or preparing to nap.
- Trying to learn about a new topic or building a skill.
- Helping to tackle a tough issue or prepare for a new experience.
- Waiting for a meal in a restaurant, a bus to come, or in the doctor’s office.

Books for Dads and Kids

This book list is from Motherhead/Fatheread Minnesota. It is a listing of "quality children's books featuring fathers," according to the brochure of the Minnesota Humanities Commission. Their web address is www.thinkmhc.org. Take this list with you to the library or bookstore and see how many you can find.

For Younger Children

- Daddy is a Doodlebug*
by Bruce Degen - 2000
- Daddy Makes the Best Spaghetti*
by Anna Grossnickle Hines - 1986
- Daddy Will Be There*
by Lois G. Grambling - 1998
- Dad's Dinosaur Day*
by Diane Dawson Heard - 1993
- If I Were Your Father*
by Margaret Park Bridges - 1999
- Kevin and His Dad*
by Irene Smalls - 1999
- Let's Play Rough*
by Lynne Honell - 2000
- My Dad*
by Anthony Browne - 2000
- My Daddy And I...*
by Eloise Greenfield - 1991
- Night Shift Daddy*
by Eileen Spinelli - 2000
- On a Wintry Morning*
by Dori Chaconas - 2000
- Rainy Day*
by Emma Haughton - 2000
- A Special Kind of Love*
by Stephen Michael King - 1995
- Two Homes*
by Claire Masurel - 2001

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- Vroomaloom Zoom*
by John Coy - 2000
- What Daddies Do Best*
by Laura Numeroff - 1998

For Older Children

(Please pre-read. Some of these books contain sensitive topics.)

- Animal Dads*
by Sneed B. Collard III - 1997
- Dad and Me in the Morning*
by Patricia Lakin - 1994
- Daddy and Me*
by Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe - 1993
- Daddy, Could I Have an Elephant?*
by Jake Wolf - 1996
- Everett Anderson's Goodbye*
by Lucille Clifton - 1983
- Faraway Home*
by Jane Kurtz - 2000
- Fly Away Home*
by Eve Bunting - 1991
- How Many Stars in the Sky?*
by Lenny Hort - 1991
- In Daddy's Arms I Am Tall*
by Javaka Steptoe
(Illustrator) - 1997
- Just the Two of Us*
by Will Smith - 2001
- Lewis and Papa*
by Barbara Jooose - 1998
- Loon Summer*
by Barbara Santucci - 2001
- My Father's Boat*
by Sherry Garland - 1998
- Papa's Stories*
by Delores Johnson - 1994
- Reading with Dad*
by Richard Jorgensen - 2000
- The Summer My Father Was Ten* by Pat
Brisson - 1998
- A Visit to the Big House*
by Oliver Butterworth - 1993
- The Wall*
by Eve Bunting - 1990
- Your Dad Was Just Like You*
by Dolores Johnson - 1993

(Source: Motherhead/Fatheread Minnesota, Minnesota Humanities Commission, 987 East Ivy Ave. St. Paul, MN, 55106. Individuals contributing to this list: Dan Dailey, Pat Downs-Reid, Tom Fitzpatrick, Shelly Hawkins, Roxie Markie, Kathleen Moriarty, Glen Palm, Todd Seabury-Kolod, Delene Thomas-Sanders, Wendy Woodfill.)

Books and Pamphlets

Read to Me: Raising Kids Who Love to Read
by Bernice Cullinan, 1992. New York: Scholastic, Inc.

The New Read-Aloud Handbook by
Jim Trelease, 1995. New York: Penguin.

Websites and Organizations

The American Library Association (ALA)

<http://www.ala.org/parentspage>

The International Reading Association

<http://www.reading.org/>

The National Education Association — Reading Matters Initiative

<http://www.nea.org/readingmatters/index.html>

Reading is Fundamental, Inc.

<http://www.rif.org/>

References

American Library Association at
<http://www.ala.org/parentspage>

Brotherson, S.E., Nilles, D.S., & Theurer, D. (2002). The magic of reading with young children. *Bright Beginnings Parenting Curriculum*, Lesson 8. Fargo, ND: NDSU Extension Service.

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (1998). *Raising a Reader, Raising a Writer: How Parents Can Help*. Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

National Center for Fathering. (2000). *A Call to Commitment: Fathers' Involvement in Children's Learning*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Quigg, C. (1993). *Read for Joy!*
Baby Talk Publications.

Trelease, J. (1995). *The New Read-Aloud Handbook*. New York: Penguin.

Well-Centered Child Newsletter. (May 1997, April 1996, and March 1996 issues). Naperville, IL: Willow Tree Publications.