Framing our messages to fathers in the first 1000 days

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Please note: The views expressed in this webinar are those of the presenters, and may not reflect those of the Australian Institute of Family Studies, or the Australian Government.
Acknowledgement of country

Craig Hammond who is unable to be with us

The team of academics, researchers, IT support, fathers and mothers who have been essential to developing this work
Starting questions

• What messages about their role would you like to give fathers?
• What aspects of the dads are you thinking of when you design your messages?
• How well does your service deliver these messages?
“Our Kids need dads who…” poster project with Aboriginal communities.

– Young Aboriginal Fathers comments
– Finding the right words
– Finding the right images
Our kids need dads who...

in heart

in spirit

stay STRONG

when we are sad

for myself
OUR KIDS NEED DADS WHO...

take an interest

'cause I care

in things they like

any time

in us
“Our Kids need dads who…”

“Being an Aboriginal man living and working in the community I see the images that are out there of us (Aboriginal men). The brother in the park drinking, fighting with his wife, our kids seeing their father being taken away by the police, these are the images that we see and the media portrays of us...

When I asked the community how they felt about the negative issues, I could not stop them saying all these negative things; not a lot of positive things to talk about, they said. It did not feel good for me to hear these things and to think that these negative things are happening in many Aboriginal communities. When I then asked them about some positive things that the men are doing, they had to stop to think about it at first, then they would answer, but they had to search hard for the answer.”

Craig Hammond
“Our Kids need dads who…”

“We would like the posters to talk to our men instead of everyone else telling them what they should do with or for their kids. We want the men to look at the posters and make their own decision on what they should do so they feel it is their own decision, so they can feel the emotion, hurt, sadness, happiness and all the things that go with being an Indigenous father. If a father makes a decision from looking at the posters, if it’s the right one or not, he then can’t blame anyone for his decision and then he feels the posters are talking to him and not people judging him”. Craig Hammond
OUR KIDS NEED DADS WHO...

having fun

with my family

'smile'

'cause i can
OUR KIDS NEED DADS WHO...

ARE THERE FOR US

JUST TO BE WITH

'CAUSE YOU CARE

FOR THEM

TO HELP
Points

• Starting with what children need from their fathers can gain fathers’ attention

• Avoiding judgement is key

• Pay attention to the messages that these fathers will already have heard
What messages are fathers already hearing from services?

Connecting with families

Bringing the Early Years Learning Framework to life in your community
Connecting with Families
20 page booklet, 11 adult pics
Who is missing from this picture?
Points

• Check for unintended messages implying that dads are irrelevant
• Don’t assume that when you say ‘Parent’ or ‘Family’ that the dads feel included in the message
• Keep in mind how many times dads have been told “It’s mum who is responsible for the baby and child, not you”
The evidence on fatherhood

- Biological factors
- Father’s special influence
- Fathers as partners in parenting
Study Oxytocin and Fathering

- Two father-toddler play sessions of 15 minutes one week apart
- Give nasal spray Oxytocin to half group
- Double blind experiment
- Videotape and Measure play

Study Oxytocin and fathering

Those fathers with Oxytocin

1. Encouraged exploration more
2. Were less hostile in play
What is special about fathers?

What messages about their role would you like to give to fathers?

Fathers’ care and play

- actively promotes brain development
- helps his child master their new world
- builds strong bond between father and child
What do we need to do?

1) Foster a wider view of attachment

2) Activate fathers’ strengths, skills and knowledge

The child–parent attachment relationship is at the core of improving child developmental outcomes.
Step 1
Foster a wider view of attachment

Complementary parenting

Secure base
  • Sensitive
  • Responsive
  • Warmth

  +

Secure exploration:
  • Sensitive
  • Physically challenging
  • Psychologically challenging
Child and father interaction

Child’s secure exploration

- Curious
- Playful
- Persistent
- Spontaneous
- Interested
- Eager

Father’s sensitive challenging play

- Playful
- Sensitive
- Cooperative
- Challenging
- Stimulating
- Limit-setting
- Scaffolded

Secure exploration support...
Father as companion when child wary or fearful:
Safe-haven-seeking decreases, exploration continues.
Sensitive, challenging play-dough with Dad → child’s sense of security

** Not mothers

Grossman et al, Bielefeld & Regensburg Longitudinal studies
Step 2
Activate fathers’ strengths & skills

What do they do already?

• Challenge & scaffold
• Rough & tumble
• Tease & joke
• Monitor & limit set
Evidence...
Cognitive & psychological simulation

• 4,200 children & their dads
• Amount of joint reading, singing & storytelling at 9 months
• Predicted memory, problem solving & reasoning at 2 years.

How does this work?

• Fathers’ challenge embedded in conversation – Who? Why? What?
  Rowe, Leech & Cabrera, 2016

• Fathers’ speech more unpredictable in tone & speed
  Benders, Fletcher & StGeorge, 2016

Cabrera, Fagan, Wight & Schadler, 2011
Evidence... 
Playful physical interaction

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<th>Toddlers</th>
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<td>• Tickling</td>
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1000 days
Evidence:
Rough and Tumble Play

- 1,500 father-child dyads
- Aggression, $r = .08$
- Social competence, $r = .44$

StGeorge & Freeman, 2017

Higher quality play $\rightarrow$ better social & emotional skills

Anderson, StGeorge, Wheeler, & Roggman (2016)
What messages would you like to give fathers?

- Inform
- Encourage
- Validate
Parenting in Partnership?

- A new relationship that develops between parents
- The relationship they share in the business of raising children
- This is different to their romantic relationship
Parenting Partnerships Important for Most Children AIFS - 2010

78% Australian 15 year olds live with...

This does not appear to be significantly influenced by childhood disability.

Including Autism

Other partnerships
- Step parents
- Grandparents
- LGBTIQ
- Foster parents
- Adopting parents
Parenting Partnership Influence

• For Children
  • Social development
  • Emotional Development
    Tuebert & Pinquart, 2010 – Systematic Review

• For Parents
  • Parenting stress
  • Sense of parenting competence
    May et al., 2014 – FAC research

• Romantic relationship.
Explored links between Parenting Stress and Parenting Partnership Quality

Parents of children with ASD have high levels of parenting stress

Surveyed mothers and fathers (N=151 parents, 69 couples)

In depth interview (n=11 couples)
  • Mothers and fathers interviewed separately
Importance of Parenting Partnerships
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)- Results

• Parenting Stress = High across the cohort
  • Mean stress in clinical (risky) range
    • Same for mothers and fathers
    • Mother and father stress strongly linked = couple stress

• Parenting Partnership Quality = Strongest predictor of Parenting Stress
  • Fathers ($r = -0.515, p < .001$), Mothers ($r = -0.357, p < .001$)
Importance of Spousal Support Parents of child with ASD

May et al 2014
What did the parents say about…
Roles and Responsibilities?

“I think when you disagree there has always someone that’s got to be the right person in the situation, someone whose decision you have to go with.”

Who said this - mum or a dad?

Parenting a child with ASD influenced parenting roles, responsibilities & the sense of authority.
“If we didn’t agree on what our goals were, and ... have that understanding of roles. ... I don’t think Toby would have the opportunities to develop.”

Mum or dad?

Mothers took on a more central role but this didn’t appear to diminish the importance of their partnership.
Parenting Partnership Competence  May et al., 2017

“Having the knowledge yeh, you’ve got to have the knowledge how to do it, but if you don’t have the teamwork then it is not going to work very well.”

Mum or dad?

Parents valued a sense of parenting partnership competence that...

• Had helped them to cope with the diagnosis,
• Was supporting their child to achieve developmental potential
• Would enable them to develop shared expectations for their child’s future.
Partnership messaging in the first 1000 days

• When mums and dads are laying the foundations on which their parenting partnerships will stand in the coming years

• Messages can ...
  • Alert parents to the importance of their parenting partnership
  • Encourage supportive behaviours
  • Acknowledge different roles and responsibilities
  • Promote cooperation, communication and coordination
  • Inspire tolerance/appreciation & potentially minimise conflict
I learn from your touch, your voice, your warmth, your strong arms, your mood. Everything you do matters to me dad

JOIN UP

www.sms4dads.com

SMS4dads

INFO TO YOUR PHONE FOR DADS-ON-THE-GO
Who can enrol

• From anywhere in Australia
• Partner (married or not) is pregnant
• Infant is less than three months of age at the time of enrolment
• The messages are sent until the baby is 12 months of age or until the dad opts out
Messages

• It is important for me to sleep in a safe place and in a safe position dad. Get more info on safe sleeping from … [*Static Link*]

• So I pass a lot of wind. Well I am growing fast and I have to eat a lot so my gut is very busy. What’s your excuse dad? [Txt STOP to OptOut]
• If you’ve been at work all day you might be able to support mum by taking me out for a walk dad. This will also give us more bonding time.

• Working together in these early months is important. How can you find agreement on the best thing to do when caring for your baby? [Txt STOP to OptOut]
MOOD tracker

CLICK A FACE to rate how you are going today

awesome
cool
ok
shaky
bad

SMS4dads
From exit interviews

Any messages you recall?

• “Just a baby… Will usually cry if there is something wrong. A reminder that they are not trying to annoy you”

• Yes- One message about regular physical touching to connect with my partner

• About her need to rest and breastfeeding and that she has no time off. ..To help with the chores and supporting her.
FOLLOW ON FROM THIS WEBINAR

• Discuss the messages that you want to send to dads with others in your workplace

• Sign up for the Fatherhood Research Bulletin (it’s free)

• Think about our Masters in Family Studies online courses “Working with fathers in vulnerable families” and “Father-infant attachment and coparenting”

• And tell all the new mums and dads about SMS4dads and send them to the website www.sms4dads.com to register.
Questions?

Join the conversation & access key resources

Continue the conversation started here today and access related resources on the CFCA website: www.aifs.gov.au/cfca/news-discussion