

Below are some ideas that can be incorporated into a father involvement program, divided by age appropriateness.

## Activities fathers can do with infants and toddlers:

- Babies love to be held close to their father's chest. Holding a baby close and rocking her helps the baby to feel secure. Develop experiences that are physical.
- Babies also love to be lifted and gently tickled by daddy. It can be thrilling for them and they also learn, as daddy holds them safely, that daddy is there to take care of them. They learn trust and security.
- Talk to your baby. Father's voice is different from mother's voice, and children can detect the difference from the earliest weeks. They learn to trust you by hearing your voice. Name objects that you and your child encounter. This helps your child learn the connection between names and objects. Develop experiences that are verbal.
- Sing favorite songs to your child. Your baby loves to hear familiar songs over and over again. Make up your own special songs. Young children enjoy songs with motions and finger-plays.
- Babies are fascinated by faces. Make sure that yours is very expressive when you interact with your child. Let them touch your face as you make funny faces. Create activities that involve real "face-to-face" interaction.
- Say "I love you" often! Let your child, from earliest days, know why she or he is special to you. Encourage dads to never stop doing this. Create activities that help you find ways to say "I love you," realizing that the best way is just to say it. Don't be like the man who explained to his wife after she complained he never says "I love you," "For goodness sakes, I told you I loved you 20 years ago...and I'll let you know if that ever changes!"
- Babies love to watch you and mimic what you are doing. Get down on the floor with them and do some funny movements. Encourage them to copy you.
- Talk to your baby as you go outside for walks. Point to things and name them. Talk about what you see in your neighborhood.
- Let your child see you interacting with other children and adults. This builds confidence in interacting with others.
- Read! One of the most important things you can do with your child, even the day you bring her home from the hospital, is to read to her. Put your child in your lap and cuddle her. Choose simple hard-board books with bright pictures. Point out objects and name them. Tell what is happening in the story. You are teaching your little newborn in this exercise that reading books can be a great way of being close with daddy. You are also getting him or her comfortable with books. Children will learn instinctively that books are a very good part of their lives. As your child gets closer to one year of age, she or he will start developing language skills, and reading is one of the best ways to promote this.
- Reading to, cuddling, and talking to your child are three of the most important activities to do with your infant and toddler to stimulate healthy development.

## Activities fathers can do with two-to-three-year-olds:

- Provide a safe place where your child can play and run. Take your child outside as much as possible to run in the yard or park. Encourage her or him to jump, climb and roll down hills in

ways appropriate for his or her age. Encourage children to push limits, BUT in healthy, reasonable ways. This builds confidence and good judgment in taking reasonable risks in life.

- Read to your child everyday. Read books, magazines, signs you see on the street. Help your child learn that reading is a normal and natural part of life. Even fathers who are not strong readers can make up stories to go along with pictures. The important experiences are closeness, hearing language, and seeing that words correspond to pictures and make a story.
- Play ball with your child. Teach him or her to catch, throw and kick a ball in age-appropriate ways. This teaches coordination, and it's fun to play with dad. This can be worked into organized outside play time.
- Help your child learn to use the potty. Help her or him understand that everyone makes mistakes when they are potty training. Never punish a child for an accident.
- Continue saying "I love you." (Find creative ways to help fathers understand why they are special.)
- Encourage your child to ask questions. Answer them with short, simple answers. Father/child groups can encourage such questioning interaction.
- Teach your child what words are acceptable and which are not, when they are heard.
- Teach your child that being kind, gracious, and honest are some of the most important things in the world.
- Let children know what you expect and why. Let children know what they should strive to live up to. (A father peer group is a good place to stimulate thinking about proper expectations for children. Give fathers an opportunity to communicate these expectations to their children.)
- Create small, silly or fun secrets with your child. Have a special place that just you two like, and no one else knows about. Share a secret handshake or joke. This private sharing builds a strong bond between father and child and makes the child feel special and important.
- Participate in the child's favorite activities, whether it is splashing in puddles, drawing with crayons, playing dress-up, or examining bugs on the ground.

## Activities fathers can do with four-year-olds and older:

- During meals, ask your child the best thing about their day. Answer the question yourself in return.
- Keep going for walks and throwing balls together.
- Meet and be interested in your child's friends.
- Really watch your child as he or she plays. Help fathers learn how to give encouragement and compliments on how well the child does.
- Ask your child about things he or she would like to learn and then make plans to learn them together.
- Teach your son and daughter how to do "man jobs," for example, fixing the car or hammering.
- Make regular visits to the library and to discuss favorite books. (Help father and child know how empowering it feels to have a library card.)
- Let your child see you enjoying books or magazines.
- Talk to your child about goals and dreams. (Let fathers talk about their own goals to their children.)
- Initiate discussions with children about what they want to do when they grow up and visit appropriate workplaces.

- Listen to your child's favorite music. Help children develop a taste for and understanding of many different kinds of music.
- Do activities where you can laugh together.
- Tell your child stories about when you were little. Let children know about mistakes you made and things you did right!
- Help build your child's imagination and language by making up creative stories with them. Start a story and let children add in key parts: "The horses were all the color of \_\_\_\_\_ and the best part is they could all \_\_\_\_\_ whenever they wanted. And after the horses left the magic mountain, they all started to \_\_\_\_\_, which really made everyone laugh!"
- Be creative in developing activities that fathers can do with their children. Help fathers understand that these things can be done at home, while driving, or anywhere. Encourage fathers to come up with ideas and activities of their own.
- Encourage fathers to get involved in their child's everyday routines, such as bathing, dressing, eating, and taking a nap. Often, these are opportunities for intimate, close interactions that include a lot of physical nurturing and verbal exchange.