Reading Dads Lead The Way

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Children learn by example. We rely on this fact – we are created as latent beings ready to soak up all that we need to function as fully grown human beings.

Boys are naturally programmed to learn how to be men from their fathers. Ever notice a young boy and how he mirrors his dad (or father figure)?

The way that their dads occupy themselves, play, work and operate in relationships – all this is being absorbed and taken in from infancy. This applies to the way they brush their hair, how they cross their legs and how they read!

Reading of course is closely tied to academic success, and some studies point to longer and healthier lives as well.1

It’s not surprising then, that boys who are read to by their fathers (who are recreational readers themselves) score significantly higher on tests of reading achievement, than boys whose Dads who do little or none, according to a study out of Modesto California2.

A reluctance to read amongst fathers is not isolated to any particular class or group3. So it can’t be assumed that children in well-heeled families will do any better with early reading – their results are very much influenced by the active nurturing of their reading by both parents from early in life no matter the class!

With boys’ academic performance tending to lag behind girls4, modelling of reading for pleasure by fathers (which is a key skill in developing critical thinking) is so very important as a strategy to reverse the trend of falling academic performance of boys in comparison to girls4.

It’s not that mothers’ reading is not valuable for developing literacy, but research5 seems to indicate that combining with Dad’s reading, children (both boys and girls) develop stronger comprehension skills and wider vocabularies (at least early in life). It’s a case of giving them the best of both worlds!

It’s thought this might be because fathers are more likely to talk about related elements that are not found in the book being read – thus stretching those young minds further.

Researchers such as Dr Stephen Green from the FRED Program at The Texas A&M University System tell us that children whose fathers take an active nurturing role in parenting have better outcomes in areas including better school performance, increased self-esteem, healthier relationships with peers, healthier sex-role development, and access to greater financial resources. Learning to read for enjoyment is associated with the same outcomes6,7.

If you’re not a keen reader, this can be a daunting idea, to read everyday to your child, that’s why [The FRED Program](https://thedadpad.co.uk/ask-dadpad/dads-reading-every-day/)(Fathers Reading Every Day) was created. It’s a great resource to help fathers and father figures get reading with the children in their lives. Since 2002, over 20,000 fathers and children have participated in the program around the world. It’s currently being pilot-tested in over 40 schools by the Fatherhood Institute in London, England – it’s well worth visiting. In the meantime, here are some simple ways to get started:

Library Days

In our house, my husband is in charge of Library visits – he and my son pore over the catalogue at home, reserve books and support each other’s reading habits. It sure works for me – I’m included sometimes, but it’s definitely a dad & son activity!

Relax, Enjoy & Have Fun!

It’s not about being perfect and there is no absolute right or wrong way to do it – the more fun it is the more likely everyone will want to repeat it.

Reading time can be scheduled but it doesn’t have to be. A “Hey! Check this out!” approach helps too.

The research tells us dads read differently to mothers, they are naturally more active readers – to extend this especially with reluctant readers you can use an [active reading strategy](https://www.lifespanfundamentals.com/2016/03/24/active-reading-a-pathway-to-developing-relationship-skills-with-stories/).

Books, Comics, Magazines and More!

It might seem like an increasingly old fashioned notion, but there really is no substitute for the physical experience of reading in print.

Just like having a variety of toys, a variety of books and other reading materials both electronic and paper enrich the learning experience. Basically, whatever grabs your child’s attention and you’re comfortable reading is the place to start.

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