

Father Times

Fathers and the Magic of Reading

Issue 5

A newsletter for fathers and father figures of young children

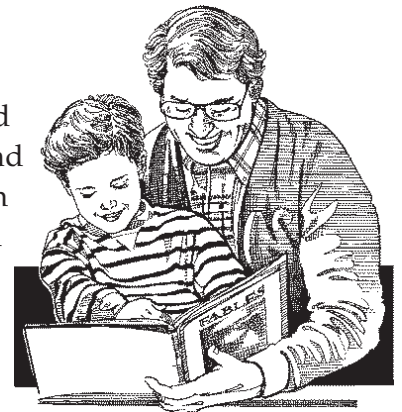
Taking Time for Reading

Think of a favorite book that has touched your life. Remember *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak? How about *Where the Red Fern Grows*? 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. Physical contact combined with the sound of a parent's voice creates a precious memory for a child. 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. Clay had a cousin that was about the same that he lagged behind in the “words” department when they were younger. 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!

continued

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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. He also knew that Clay would learn to distrust him if he simply made up answers that weren't true.

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 figured that he could win the frustration contest. 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.



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.

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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.” Fathers and mothers who read for enjoyment have children who imitate that habit.

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. Or a book like *Dinosaurs Divorce* if you’ve experienced a marital breakup. 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. Talk about what it means to have the card. Be sure to return books on time to teach responsibility.
- Fill your home with print. Display books on shelves and magazines in baskets throughout the home to foster easy reading. Make your home a “print rich” environment, or a place where books, words, and ideas are all around.

- Take in puppet shows, children’s plays and concerts. It’s good for the imagination. Give your child related books as gifts. Buy books for your children to give as gifts.
- 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.

Nobody remembers all of the great stories, poetry and fingerplays from childhood. That’s why they are captured on paper and waiting for you in the library! Share them with your children through reading so they can carry them in their hearts.

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.

(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 aloud while your child plays on the floor close by. Be sure he knows you enjoy reading to him. “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”!
- ❑ Make your own puzzle for your child. Place two or three safe and simple household objects on a large sheet of paper. Trace around them with a thick marker. Have the child line up the object over its shape on the paper. Tell her the item’s name as she places it. For example, “You found the spot where the wooden spoon goes!”
- ❑ 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.).

Books for Dads and Kids

This book list is from Motherread/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. Mark your favorites to read again and again. Children learn from repetition. They learn to love reading from you.

For Younger Children

Baby Dance

by Ann Taylor - 1999

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 Car Wash

by Harry Sutherland - 1988

Dad's Dinosaur Day

by Diane Dawson Heard - 1993

If I Were Your Father

by Margaret Park Bridges - 1999

Just Like Daddy

by Frank Asch - 1981

Kevin and His Dad

by Irene Smalls - 1999

Let's Play Rough

by Lynne Honell - 2000

My Dad

by Debbie Bailey - 1991

My Dad

by Anthony Browne - 2000

My Daddy And I...

by Eloise Greenfield - 1991

Night Shift Daddy

by Eileen Spinelli - 2000

The Night Worker

by Kate Banks - 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

Ten, Nine, Eight

by Molly Bang - 1983

Tom and Pippo Read a Story

by Helen Oxenbury - 1988

Two Homes

by Claire Masurel - 2001

Vroomaloom Zoom

by John Coy - 2000

What Daddies Do Best

by Laura Numeroff - 1998

What Dads Can't Do

by Douglas Wood - 2000

For Older Children

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

Animal Dads

by Sneed B. Collard III - 1997

Boundless Grace

by Mary Hoffman - 1995

Carlos and the Cornfield

by Jan Romero Stevens - 1995

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

Daddy Played Music for the Cows

by Maryann Weidt - 1995

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 Joosse - 1998

Loon Summer
by Barbara Santucci - 2001

My Father's Boat
by Sherry Garland - 1998

Night Driving
by John Coy - 1996

Owl Moon
by Jane Yolen - 1987

Papa's Stories
by Delores Johnson - 1994

Reading with Dad
by Richard Jorgensen - 2000

The Summer My Father Was Ten
by Pat Brisson - 1998

Tight Times
by Barbara Shook Hazen -
1979

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

Five Little Puppies

Five Little Puppies were playing in the sun.
(hold up one hand, all fingers extended)

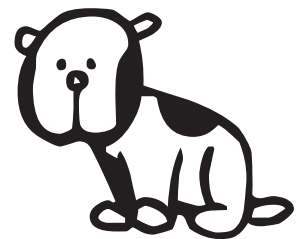
This one saw a rabbit, and he began to run.
(bend down first finger)

This one saw a butterfly, and he began to race.
(bend down second finger)

This one saw a cat, and he began to chase.
(bend down third finger)

This one tried to catch his tail,
and he went round and round.
(bend down fourth finger)

This one was so quiet,
he never made a sound.
(bend down thumb)



*(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.)*

Further Information on Reading

Books and Pamphlets

Raising a Reader, Raising a Writer: How Parents Can Help (pamphlet), 1998. Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children. This can be ordered by contacting the National Association for the Education of Young Children on-line at www.naeyc.org or calling 800-424-2460.

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

The RIF Guide to Encouraging Young Readers by Ruth Graves, 1987. New York: Doubleday and Company. To order, send \$9.95 to Reading is Fundamental, Inc., Publications Department, Smithsonian Institution, 600 Maryland Avenue SW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20024.

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 Children's Book Council

<http://www.cbcbooks.org/html/showcase.html>

The International Reading Association

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

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

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

The National Education Association — Reading Matters Initiative

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

Reading is Fundamental, Inc.

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

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

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