

Dads' Activities Pack

Storytelling

It is estimated that around a third of fathers of young children read to them at least several times a week, but as many as a fifth (a much higher proportion than of mothers) may not be reading to their children at all. Work commitments are likely to help explain this – but whatever the reason, there is a strong case for supporting more dads to tell stories to their children.

Researchers have shown that frequency of fathers' reading to 1-2 year olds is linked with their greater interest in books later, and that time spent by fathers in reading to very young children is the strategy most consistently associated with their emergent literacy outcomes. One very sophisticated study – of low-income rural US families - found fathers' education and vocabulary when reading picture books related to their infants' more advanced language development at 15 and 36 months (mother vocabulary was less influential).

Find out more about why fathers matter to their children's literacy and education
<http://bit.ly/jTclPm>

What's the activity?

An hour-long session or sessions, focusing on dads and children sharing and making up stories.

Detailed description

You may want to arrange for some kind of professional to facilitate the sessions. Your 'expert' may be trained early years staff and/or library staff – or someone with a real enthusiasm for stories and storytelling, and who as well as 'modelling' creative storytelling, can support dads who may be nervous about the activity. Perhaps you know a dad who's a school teacher – or a granddad who's retired from teaching but might have some time to spare.

It's not essential to have an 'expert' though – if one or a few of the dads are confident readers who know how to keep a small group of children enthralled with a story, perhaps with a few acting skills and funny voices thrown in, that could work too.

Story sacks can work well; this requires participants to choose an object from a selection in a cloth bag, and to use it to start a story beginning 'Once there was a magic...X'...then each person has to add a sentence (or more) until the story reaches an end. A variant on this is to write 'story starters' on index cards, and participants draw these from an envelope. An early years or library worker might read a story and ask dads and children to finish it off or create a similar one of their own. Your storytelling expert might tell a story and get dads and children to act out particular characters.



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What is so good about it?

The sessions can help dads become more confident at storytelling, and get them into the habit of telling stories with their children – which in turn can have a significant positive impact on the children's learning outcomes. This might also help get them more involved in reading with the children, and/or may encourage disclosure about literacy problems that can be followed up with offers of adult literacy support.

Who is it for?

Up to ten people (dads/mums and children); the children might be aged up to 16, but it's most likely to work with younger children, so long as they are used to contributing in a classroom setting.

Resources / skills required

Knowledge and understanding of how children learn, and how to get them excited by books and stories, using resources such as story sacks, puppets and finger puppets and dressing up clothes. Whoever it is who's running the sessions will need knowledge and understanding of how to involve and support fathers to participate in group activities, especially around family learning.

How to publicise it

Evidence suggests that dads respond best to invitations which make clear an activity's benefits for their children. So emphasise how big an effect dads' involvement in their kids' learning can have. For evidence you can use in your publicity, check out our Five minute guides here: <http://bit.ly/ViqOd>

Preparation time

Time required to decide on themes or stories with which to get the dads and children to make up stories, and to gather objects for story sacks, or write 'story starters' if necessary. Time to organise venue and/or professional input.

When?

Anytime, according to what works for the families; could be run as one-off sessions or a weekly event.

Where?

These sorts of sessions have been run successfully in libraries and children's centres, but could work in any venue, including outdoors. Sometimes the venue itself might help create themes for storytelling – for example woodland might translate as 'enchanted woods'.

Top tips

1. Remember that some dads struggle with literacy, so helping them create their own stories, rather than putting them in a position of having to read in public, may work best
2. Depending on how many families and staff are present, each dad and child could have their own story sack and develop their own story, rather than this being done as a bigger group
3. If the session is held in a library, staff could help the dad and child choose a related picture book, so they could do more storytelling at home.

Useful links

Although it is no longer a 'live' project, Bookstart Dads produced lots of useful information about how to literacy-based projects with dads: www.bookstartdads.org.uk

The Scottish Storytelling Centre has all sorts of useful tips and resources to help you work on your storytelling ideas and skills. Find out more at www.scottishstorytellingcentre.co.uk

Dangerous Dads has run storytelling events in the woods: www.dangerousdads.org

John McCormick's website and book about reviving the art of storytelling with your children: www.dadtellmeastory.com

Jane Baskwill's book 'Getting dads on board – fostering literacy partnerships for successful student learning': <http://amzn.to/kDuOBt>

Fathers Network Scotland has run storytelling events. Find out more at <http://bit.ly/k9tK2K>

Activ-Dads has run storytelling sessions for dads and male carers in North Solihull; for more information see www.activ-dads.org.uk, or www.nch.org.uk or call 0121-770-7737.

