

Getting fathers involved

Fathers' involvement in their children's early learning and development leads to improved educational, social and emotional outcomes for children.

Early years services are increasingly developing strategies to encourage more fathers to become actively involved in their children's learning.

Peter Pan Nursery is a pre-school in Surrey. It has always encouraged the participation of fathers as well as mothers.

Manager Sue Lewis says, 'We don't do anything special; we just recognise that children benefit from the involvement of both parents.'

What they do may not be special to Sue, but working with fathers is embedded 'naturally' in a positive way – something not always apparent in other settings.

When parents first contact the pre-school for information, invitations are sent out that name both parents individually. Fathers, not just mothers, are expected to attend open days; it is considered unusual if they do not. So, right from the start, fathers are actively made to feel included and welcome.

Dads' week

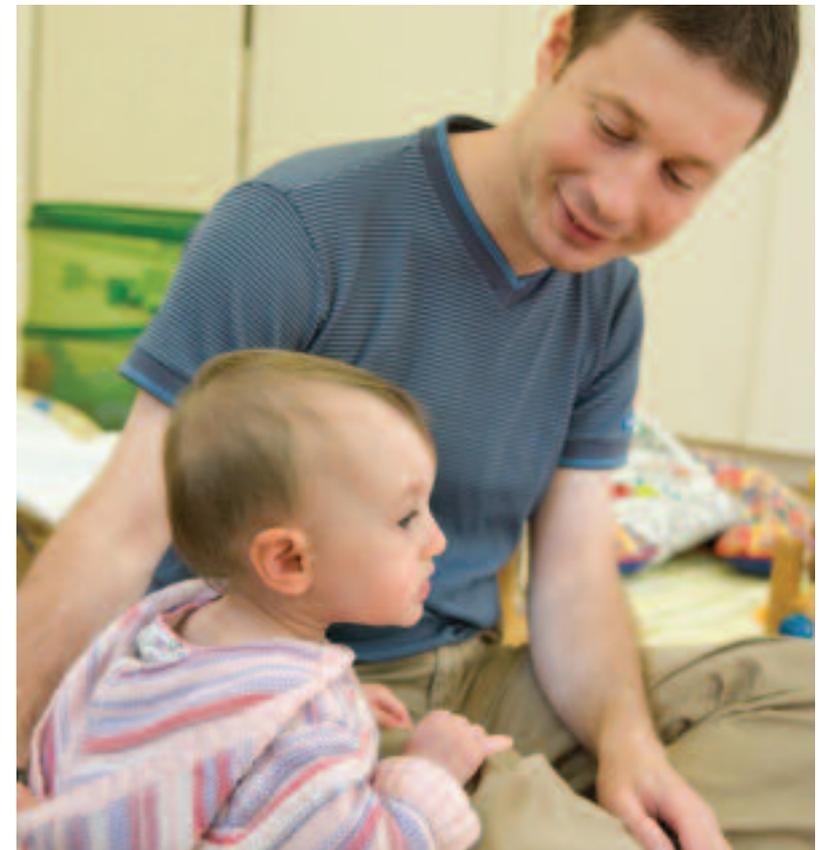
The pre-school also realised that a specific event for fathers would help. Sue and her staff team set up a 'Dads' week' during which all the fathers were invited to a regular pre-school session of their choosing. Giving this choice meant that more working fathers were

“My son was able to show me all the things he most enjoys doing.”

able to negotiate some time off. The week was such a success that it ran for three weeks to meet the demand and has taken place every year since.

The pre-school caters for 20 children; and three-quarters of fathers attended 'Dads' week' in the first two years. The evaluation is overwhelmingly positive. Many dads comment that they value the fact they are able to come into a 'female space' together, rather than being the sole man.

“It was not that easy to get time off work, but absolutely worth it.”



☺ *My little lad is delighted when I say we are going to play school on Saturday and I'm going to stay all morning.* ☺

Croydon Pre-school Learning Alliance worked in partnership with other local early years services and established a Saturday morning group in a Sure Start centre in West Croydon, supported by the Local Network Fund.

The group has been very successful in attracting 30 fathers, with an average of 15 attending every week. It has now expanded and continues through children's centre funding. It attracts a diverse group of dads from different ethnic groups and social classes. Most live with their children, although two or three dads who live apart also attend. Play activities on offer are similar to those that the children would experience during the week in pre-school, and practitioners have noted that dads spend a majority of their time actively engaged and playing with their children.

A summer Fathers' Funday event was also held to promote the importance of a father's role in the lives of their children and the following week four new fathers joined the regular Saturday morning group.



Wayne Robson runs the group, which is managed by Terrie Martyn. Terrie says, 'More fathers now attend Sure Start groups during the week. The word seems to be getting out that we really are a father-friendly place. People may think that a separate group for fathers is exclusive, but we believe it is an important step in helping fathers know that family services exist to serve the whole family and not just mothers with their children.'

What gets fathers* involved:

- positive attitudes, welcoming fathers personally
- targeting publicity directly at fathers and sending personal invitations by post
- children giving personal invitations to fathers
- emphasising how a father's involvement will help a child's education
- inviting non-resident fathers to events and sending regular information to them
- consulting fathers – what would they like to do?
- short-term projects with fathers and children, e.g. ICT, outings, videos, sport
- asking fathers to help in practical ways that make use of their skills
- flexible timings which will suit all work patterns
- holding specific fathers' groups or events
- ensuring displays and materials reflect images of fathers and young children.

*fathers' denotes all those acting as a father figure

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