
Engaging Fathers: Tips and Ideas



Try these ideas when working with families to show how easy it can be for dads to offer support to children and how much of a difference they can make.

- ❁ Children are often the biggest motivator — give dads the opportunity to do something with or for their children. It can help to spell out what the benefits will be for their children, such as boosting their brainpower.
- ❁ Connect with the moms — many moms act as gatekeepers for their child's development, so involve them in encouraging the dads to get on board. Separated moms may still be happy for dads to be contacted, if you just ask.
- ❁ Timing — as dads may be more likely to be at work during the day, think about when they might be available — early mornings, evenings, or weekends perhaps.
- ❁ Know your background — be persistent, creative, patient, and sensitive in the recruitment of fathers, as it can be challenging and time-consuming.
- ❁ They like to do something, not talk about it — use activities as part of the sessions: quizzes, interactive games, workshops, the internet, puzzles, and visits from celebrity authors, poets, dramatists, and storytellers — anything that mixes reading with doing something.
- ❁ Look at the whole organization's attitude — there may be mistrust on both sides of the fence and any good work you do can be undone in a moment if you do not have everybody on board or at least aware of what you are doing. Allow time for staff training and discussion of the issues.
- ❁ Plan for long-term commitment — don't get hung up on numbers: word of mouth will become a great asset.
- ❁ Speak to them directly — events labeled for 'parents' tend to attract mothers. Address letters to fathers. Try other media too: text messages, e-mails or a website. Are there other organizations that can help you reach dads — libraries, schools, sports clubs, community groups, or even a local employer?
- ❁ Consult them — ask fathers for their advice on factors such as content, design, publicity, recruitment, themes, timing, and venue.
- ❁ Use a dad-friendly hook — sports, automobiles, tools, airport tours, etc. are great places to start. Your local clubs and community connections may be able to help. Technology is also very popular.
- ❁ Not all dads are the same — their life histories, experiences, situations, and expectations will be varied so try not to lump them all under the same label. Value the diversity that is part of different families' cultures.
- ❁ It's not just books — consider what reading materials fathers will enjoy, including subjects such as sports, travel, sci-fi, as well as other non-fiction, magazines, manuals, websites, and newspapers. Find some that feature dads in a positive light.

Events

Holding a one-off event to grab attention can work well, but you need to have a retention strategy in place or numbers will fall off dramatically. Use the event to give dads the opportunity to spend some time with their children, have some fun and feel useful, and to show them that they can get more involved. Have an informal chat as part of the session to find out what they would like to do in the future.

Dads Into School Day — if you work in a school, ask dads to come in and find out about what their children are up to all day.

Beer and Books — organize a reading group in the local pub for dads.

Business breakfasts — provide a local speaker and networking opportunities.

Weekend Clubs — organize clubs and trips so dads can play a nurturing role that empowers them in their role with their kids.

Football Match Evenings — have a quick session of quizzes, etc. before settling down to watch a game.

An Auction of Promises — ask dads to donate time to their kids, such as five hours of bedtime reading or 10 walks in a park. Offer them resources that support their fathering choices.

A Man Who Can — ask dads for help around your organization: BBQs at a book fair or providing help with a building or maintenance project.

Skill Swap — offer dads the services of their children to design business cards, posters, flyers on the computer etc, in return for dads giving time in a program or school.

Activities

Turn one of your events into a longer course, giving dads a clear purpose and offering them the chance to walk away with something.

Practical courses — organize a healthy food campaign where dads prepare food and sell it to parents and staff or learn to cook a special dinner with the help of sons for Mothers' Day.

Storytelling workshops — offer advice on how to read with children at home.

Ambassador dads — nurture one or two enthusiastic dads and build up their confidence so they can help develop a larger group. Have a Dad Monitor: someone alert to regional or national opportunities for reaching out to male parents, such as Fathers' Day or sporting tournaments.

Produce a radio show — involve dads through making radio programs that can be podcast.

Movie making — lend out digital video cameras and get children to make videos with their dads. Have an award evening for the videos.

Building something — provide practical sessions, be it a robot, a computer, a remote- controlled car, or a go-cart.

Use your creativity and the resources you have around you.

And be sure to share your stories with Dad Central Canada. #thingsdadsdo

For more information about this document or anything else regarding Dads, please contact us through our website:

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