

My Dad Matters

Media kit

by John Hoffman

This kit is designed to help you promote involved fatherhood (and your programs) through the media in your area. It includes:

1. Do-it-yourself instructions for how to put together a father involvement media package which also includes: sample media advisories, how to stage a media conference and what to put in a media release.
2. Three fatherhood backgrounders. Short articles (on three separate pages) written by John Hoffman, which you or your local newspapers can use for whatever purposes you see fit.
3. Backgrounder on Dad Central Ontario for use with your media package.

■ Putting together a local Father Involvement Media Package

Obviously, Father's Day is a good time to promote involved fatherhood. The important thing about getting your local media to do a fatherhood story is to give them something to write about. They are always looking for story ideas and, around Father's Day, they will be wanting to do stories about Dads.

You can help your local media by offering story ideas and people to interview. If you make it easier for them to do the story, they will be more likely to do the story.

Newspapers may have their own ideas about what sort of Father's Day theme story they'd like to run, but if not, you can help them. One possibility is a story about your local program for fathers (if you have one) or a local event for fathers you may decide to run. However that, in itself, may not be enough to generate a full story and the media may be looking for more general fatherhood topics. Two obvious general story ideas are the benefits of father involvement and the changing roles of today's fathers. This kit contains two articles, written by John Hoffman, which you can provide to local media either to run as articles (the author's permission is granted) or to use as back grounders to help the reporters flesh out a local story.

If the reporter wishes to write a locally-based story you can help them by providing them with contact information for two or three local fathers who are willing to be interviewed and photographed with their children. Try to pick fathers you are familiar with and who you know to be relatively articulate and involved with their children. You should also provide the names of someone within your organization who can talk about how fathers are involved with your programs, and also a person who runs a program or group specifically for fathers, if you have one. For example.

Potential Interviews:

John Doe: father of Jasmine (five) and Tyler (two) - small business owner and active father Home: 835-2777 Business 835-1111 (willing to be photographed and to speak about his role as a father)

Dave Smith: full-time student and single father of Jamie (three) Home: 835-2222 (willing to be photographed and to speak about his experience as a single father)

Jane Doe: Executive Director, Duckburg Family Centre 835-7777 ext. 700 (willing to speak about increased father participation in family programs)

Phil Buck: Social Worker and facilitator of father-to-father support group. 835-6666 (willing to speak about support group)

■ Staging a Media Conference

Holding a media conference is not always necessary to gain media coverage, nor is it always appropriate. Sometimes you can just call a reporter and ask them to come and speak with you. The reason you would hold a media conference might be to make an announcement about the launch of a major new program, an announcement about a special event you may be running in conjunction with father's day or perhaps the launch of a publication, but it should be a fairly major kind of announcement. It takes a fair bit of work to organize a media conference, however, it's not as hard as people might think and it does not require any kind of sophisticated set-up. You can simply hold it in your drop-in centre, your board room or even outdoors in front of your building.

Send out a media advisory several days before your conference to all local newspapers, radio stations and television stations. If you don't already know, call each media outlet beforehand to determine the appropriate person to send the advisory to. If you don't have time to gather that information simply direct the release to the news director or assignment editor. After you've sent the advisory (emails work best), follow up with a phone call to make sure it was received.

Sample Media Advisory:

Media Advisory:

Duckburg Family Centre to Launch New Guide for Fathers.

On June 18 at 2 pm. a media conference will be held at the Duckburg Family Centre to announce the launch of a new Father's Guide to Family Services. Family Centre Executive Director, Jane Doe, and Bill Smith, author of the Father's Guide, will be on hand to talk about how the guide was created and how it will help fathers to locate family services in the Duckburg area.

What: Launch of Father's Guide to Family Services.

When: July 18, 2002, 2:00 pm

Where: Boardroom, Duckburg Family Centre offices, 201 Chestnut St.

For more information: Jane Doe 835-1111

Holding your conference

Keep it short: Don't feel compelled to entertain your media friends for half an hour. They are busy, task-oriented people. They are looking for the essential information and a chance to shoot some video or take a couple of photos. It's O.K. to talk for a little as five minutes and then open it up to questions. Most reporters will assume that the bulk of their story will come from the interview, not your speech. Television reporters will often want to hold a separate interview on camera during which they may ask you to repeat things you already have said.

Media Packages

You should provide reporters with media packages for media conferences. They can also be used in cases when a media conference is not appropriate. In that case, send a press package to local media. It should contain:

- a media release (one page, if possible) which includes essential information about whatever it is you are trying to promote, including who to contact for more information
- a list of potential interviewees (if appropriate)
- one page of basic background information about your program If you are looking for a general fatherhood story you can include:
 - fatherhood backgrounders (provided with this package)
 - media release about FII-ON

The Golden rule of media releases: Get it on the first page.

Make sure that the most important piece of information is easy to find and on the first page of your package. Don't try to be clever with your writing or to artfully lead up to your main point. It's better to be blunt. There's no bigger turn off for a reporter than having to wade through pages and pages of material to figure out where the essential information is. You can provide extra pages of material, as noted above, but don't assume it will even be looked at, that is, until the reporter decides to follow-up. Even then, additional material may be ignored, so put the important stuff on page one.

Fatherhood Backgrounders.

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The Changing Roles of Fathers

by John Hoffman

Not so long ago, a father's job was to bring home a pay cheque, cut the grass, fix things and tell the kids when they were misbehaving. There was a fairly strict dividing line between the roles of mothers and fathers. Now it's different. Families have changed in the past 25 years and male and female parenting roles are not as clear as they once were. While research shows that mothers still spend more time with children and working on domestic tasks than fathers do, the gap has narrowed. The idea that the average father spends only 20 minutes a day with his children has been exposed as a myth. Fathers are now involved in most aspects of child care, and on any given day, you can see fathers doing lots of things that once were considered the work of a mother — changing diapers, taking children to school and day care and even looking after children while their partner is at work. At the same time, more mothers are spending more time in the traditionally male domain of work outside the home.

While the roles of both fathers and mothers have changed, the two genders have experienced those changes in different ways. For mothers, the changes came about as a result of women wanting or needing to be more involved in the outside world of work and careers. For men, the changes came about partly as a result of what women were doing. With mothers spending more time away from home, they had less time for at-home work including child care. Therefore, fathers were needed to pick up the slack by spending more time looking after their children and doing housework. One growing phenomenon in Canadian families is off-shifting, where mothers and fathers stagger their work time so as to be able to keep at least one parent at home caring for children while having the benefits of a second income. This is one way in which significant numbers of fathers have found themselves in the position of primary caregiver for at least certain hours during the day or week. In fact a small, but gradually increasing number of men have taken on the role of stay-at-home parent while their spouse works full-time.

In some ways, the transition into these new roles has been a little slower and more difficult for men since, at first, they were adapting to changes initiated by women. However, many fathers have welcomed the opportunity to become more involved in all aspects of their children's lives and have done so eagerly, and many simply see involved fathering as a normal part of modern day parenting.

Father Involvement is Good For Children

by John Hoffman

In the past twenty to thirty years, social science researchers have finally paid some attention to fathers. Previously, psychologists and sociologists tended to look at parenting in terms of motherhood because mothers were usually the parents who spent the most time with children. More recently, two factors have caused researchers to take a closer look at fatherhood. One factor is the increasing involvement of fathers in the lives of children. The other is the phenomenon of fatherlessness. Recent figures published by the U.S.-based National Fatherhood Initiative indicate that 34 percent of American children do not live with their biological father. Of those children, 40 percent have not seen their father in the past year. (Unfortunately, there are no corresponding statistics for Canada although most observers believe that the fatherlessness problem is less acute in this country.)

Much of the early research on fatherhood tried to establish the kind of contributions that fathers make to child development. Some studies, which have looked at children's long term development, have found that children who grow up with positively involved fathers are more empathetic, more likely to do well in school and less likely to engage in violent behaviour as youths. Other studies have looked at father's parenting and play behaviour. Other researchers have documented (if we didn't already know from our own experience) that fathers and mothers hold babies differently and that fathers' style of playing with babies is different from that of mothers. Fathers tend to be more physical in their play, mothers more verbal. Some researchers have suggested that these differences are very important to children's overall development. Mothers provide security and keep children close to them while fathers encourage exploration and serve to bring children out into the world.

However, human development is very complex and it is always difficult to isolate one factor, such as how a father plays Peek-a-boo, and be able to say that it caused a certain outcome in a child's life. Moreover, this fascination with mother-father differences may have overlooked the most important contribution that involved fathers make to their children, and that's that positive, involved fathering seems to help with the overall effective functioning of families.

Two of the leading American researchers in the area of fatherhood are Kyle Pruett, of Yale University and Michael Lamb, of the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development in Bethesda, Maryland. Pruett is conducting a long-term study of stay-home fathers. He has found that there seems to be a significant benefit to having the father do most of the hands-on daily care in the early years. That's not because fathers do it better than mothers, it's because having a primary-caregiver father usually means that a child has two highly involved parents, which, Pruett

believes is good for children. In addition, Lamb suggests that having an involved father, whether he's the primary caregiver or not, contributes to good teamwork and mutual support between mothers and fathers. "The most important issues about good fatherhood have to do with marital harmony," Lamb noted in a 1998 article in Today's Parent magazine.

Therefore, the unheralded benefit of involved fathering may simply be that it helps to promote an effective parenting partnership: two partners who support each other and are able to share the ups and downs of the parenting experience. That has to be good for kids.

Dad Central Ontario

Dad Central Ontario (DCO) is a broad-based coalition of organizations and individuals who believe that the active involvement of caring, committed and responsible fathers promotes healthy development in children. It is clear that fathers are taking an increasingly active role in the lives of their children. As a result, organizations which provide services to families have seen an increasing number of fathers coming through their doors and also an increasing need for specialized services which meet the needs of fathers. This has required something of a shift in thinking since most family programs are staffed by women, most of their clients are women and most of their services were originally designed to meet the needs of mothers. DCO developed as professionals saw the need to reassess the way they offer services to families in light of increased participation by fathers.

One of DCO's goals is to increase public awareness about the important of involved fathering through social marketing. To this end DCO has produced six booklets about father involvement along with a series of posters which contain key messages about positive father involvement. Other resources include the 24 Hr Cribside Assistance for New Dads (newdadmanual.ca) and Dads, Renovate Your Relationship. For all the resources and training opportunities DCO has, please visit dadcentral.ca.

For more information contact:

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