

Dads matter!

What did we do?

We asked the views of 21 children and young people (CYP) aged 10 to 19, from various backgrounds, about their Dads!

We asked:

- What role do Dads play in your lives?
- How do Dads help with their schooling? What do CYP want from their Dads?
- How can Dads be supported to play a more active role?

What is an ideal Dad and why do Dads matter?

You thought of an ideal Dad as someone who contributes to the lives of his children, has a sense of humour and entertains you, but is also caring, kind, trustworthy, warm, affectionate, supportive and honest. He is there for you when you need him, *'always there helping me'*. He protects you when in danger, but is also interested in what you're doing and can be sensitive to your feelings and even-tempered: *'He don't shout at me for stupid reasons.'*

I've got friends, not a Dad. I get over it. Friends are more important.

I still love him, even if he is not around.

He loves you no matter what.

With great power comes great responsibility.



Your ideal Dad listens to you rather than talks at you, and is someone you feel comfortable talking to about anything, even personal issues: *'I can have emotional chats with my Dad.'* He asks how your day is, and goes out with you to activities: *'I like to go to the shop with my Daddy.'* He comes to parents evenings and helps out with cooking and housework. He lets you do things you want to do.

An ideal Dad stands up for you, making you feel secure, safe and protected. He is a role model, telling you life stories from his experience so you don't make the same mistakes: *'My Dad means the man of the house. He is important to me and taught me how to be a man... Good male role model in the house.'*

An ideal Dad is someone who schools contact, as well as Mums. An ideal Dad could be someone who wasn't brought up in ideal circumstances: *'A father could be brought up in a bad way and would react in a good way, or he could use past experiences in his life as an excuse for treating his children badly.'*



What makes a not so ideal Dad?

A not so ideal Dad is always working and doesn't have enough time for children: *'I'm scared of him and he is too strict.'* He never spends quality time with you, doesn't listen to what you have to say, and his behaviour is very dependent on what mood he's in. His expectations are too

high, he is *'not proud of me, always finds faults'* and he *'has his favorites.'*

Does having a Dad who helps you with homework and school stuff make you do better at school?

You said that with support, children and young people are more likely to succeed, and that *'kids with successful parents tend to be successful.'* You felt that parents gave you ambitions. Dads need to get the balance right, and help at school and at home. They need to want to help though - only those who want to will be likely to be supportive.

To you, support means encouraging you to do well. It means letting you make your own mistakes to learn from them, and giving you the belief that success means working hard for yourself: *'its gotta come from you.'* At the same time, supportive Dads are *'always there to pick up the pieces.'* *'My Dad is a role model, he always been there for me, he never misses a parents evening.'*

It doesn't have to be your actual Dad who supports you with school stuff: *'an older brother can be a father figure.'* Sometimes a step Dad can help you: *'he has more patience.'* Other people can replace a Dad, *'but emotional support is key. Someone who can sit down and help me by sitting with me and spending time'* is what really benefits you.

Sometimes you feel that Dads become more of a hindrance than a help, that school work is *'beyond them'* and they're *'not always up to date with education.'* Added to this, you feel some Dads think

they know best, and their work gets in the way of them being involved in your schooling.

But you also understand that sometimes not having a good role model in a Dad can spur you on to be better yourself, and become more independent by having to cope with things on your own: *'What if your Dad hurts you but influences you to be better than him? I didn't want to live on benefits like my parents.'*

What do CYP actually want from their Dads, and how can Dads be supported to play a significant and active role in their life?

Education and schooling

You generally agreed that it was *'really difficult'* getting Dads involved in school. They suggested schools could have a better father's day, and hold fetes for Dads *'with a BBQ and football games'*. You said it would be good to inform Dads about the British school system, and for Dads to attend school meetings so they could build a relationship with the school and with teachers. Teachers could make telephone calls and send letters about achievements to Dads as well as Mums, and could invite Dads to an *'achievement assembly'*. You also suggested schools invite someone in to talk about 'male role models' - mentors *'so that people with males in the house can see for themselves.'*

General support

Most of you could see that Dads wanted to be involved, and it was a case of finding *'something to help Dads be good Dads'*, not just while their partner was pregnant but throughout a child's life.

You suggested this could involve setting up target services for single Dads, creating a *'Dad pack'*, and giving examples of *'how it can go wrong.'* You also suggested a web forum for Dads, one-to-one classes *'for Dads that have never seen their child'*, a DVD with top tips, and a *'take your son to work'* day.

You felt that more bonding games and activities *'for Dad and child'* were needed, as well as *'groups for young Dads'*. So as not to alienate kids without Dads, you thought *'they could bring a male person – a supporter.'* Knowing it could be *'difficult for Mums to give the baby to the Dad to be at a group'*, you suggested Mums could be close by *'in a separate room.'*

Within the family, some of you thought Dads *'could help by being more supportive'*, and give feedback about what makes them proud or happy. Families could set up a *'father and son picnic'*, find more common ground between Dads and children, and try building a good relationship through activities like learning to ride a bike. They also felt the use of rewards was important. One of you said that *'adults could throw out a challenge individually to try out new things with a father figure.'*

On a social level, you thought more flexibility from employers would be helpful, *'but this has to be realistic.'* You felt that *'making places more family friendly'* would also help the relationship between fathers and their children.





Actions

- Training is being developed on working with boys and young men including young fathers exploring models of engagement with fathers.
- Oxfordshire Parenting Forum is piloting a young fathers' video project.
- The next Teenage Pregnancy Conference theme is working with young men/young Dads.
- We will follow up on your idea of having a fathers' champion within our services.
- We intend to use your views to make Children's Centres and Hubs more family friendly.
- We will feed your idea about website information into the OXME (New Website) Steering Group.
- We will forward your views about schools and the involvements of Dads to the appropriate authorities for discussion.

This is a Participation and Play publication. For more information on the Children and Young People's Sounding Board, please contact: james.collins@oxfordshire.gov.uk or call (01865) 256681



Who does most, mum or Dad?

We gave you a questionnaire when you came into the room for our meeting, asking you to give each parent marks out of ten for how much they contributed to everyday activities. Your results are in the table below.

According to you in this survey, Mums do at least twice as much as Dads, apart from 'car stuff' and 'playing'.

Who	Mum	Dad
cooks	101	49
cleans	109	46
does car stuff	36	73
looks after money	104	58
sorts out holidays	110	46
takes you to footie/clubs	71	17
helps with homework	71	21
reads you a story	65	10
takes you to school	60	15
talks to doctors for you/ makes appointments	113	11
plays with you	46	40

