Self-regulation is an important component of school readiness. When educators and researchers talk about self-regulation, they usually mean a person’s ability to control and manage thinking and feeling as part of the learning process. Children who display flexible and consistent self-regulation have higher achievement, language and social outcomes (NICHD, 2003).

Various studies have confirmed that positive parenting practices, such as supporting children’s curiosity and expressing affection for the child, are linked to their capacity to self-regulate their behaviors and emotions, as well as to their cognitive and intellectual development (Deater-Deckard & Petrill, 2004).

Interestingly, most of these studies have focused on mothers’ influences, yet there is now increasing acceptance that fathers are central to children’s development, and that their influence may be separate to that of mothers’ (Paquette, 2004).

So, given that being ready to cope with school life depends on social-emotional competence, language skills and physical ability, what do fathers do that helps their child move successfully from home to school?

**Fathers’ Role and Contribution to School Readiness**

**BUILDING SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE**

A key component of school readiness is the child’s ability to recognise and manage their own emotions. Children who throw tantrums or have emotional outbursts have not learned how to do this! Children also need to be able to recognise and understand other people’s emotions.

Research has shown that Dads’ interactions with their children are particularly important in learning to regulate emotions. Fathers’ attentiveness and support can enhance infants’ positive social interactions with people they do not know (Goldstein-Ferber, 2009), and it also helps older children create good relationships with peers and teachers (NICHD, 2004). An important factor here is Dads’ use of humour. Teasing, humour and physical rough-and-tumble all may help the child to develop mental strategies such as perspective-taking and emotion management.
LANGUAGE AND LITERACY
Reading skills are important to children’s academic skills. Reading builds language, literacy, knowledge - and it can be fun! In fact, when fathers share book reading with their children, they tend to use more humour and unusual words. Dads also tend to ask more questions and be more direct in their talk; all these interactions can improve toddlers’ vocabulary, reading skills and language development (Pancsofar & Vernon-Feagans, 2010). Additionally, children seem to use language that is more sophisticated when they tell stories or explain things to their fathers (Abkarian, Dworkin, & Abkarian, 2003). Dads can also influence children’s enjoyment of reading just by modelling; not just books or educational material: newspapers, magazines, maps, or instruction manuals will all do.

PHYSICAL HEALTH AND MOTOR COORDINATION
While it is common knowledge that Dads are usually more involved physically with their children than mothers, what effect might this have on their children’s school readiness and physical health? Dads can influence their children’s activity levels and even their eating habits just by spending more time with them (Morgan et al., 2011). All that batting, bowling and biking helps children’s gross motor development. And how Dads play matters too, as sensitive, responsive play also affects motor development. Furthermore, Dads’ involvement in physical play may help stimulate children’s pretend play, and it is well recognised that pretend play contributes to children’s cognitive competence.
What Can Educators Do?

Many parents regard educators as experts in child development and education: they value your knowledge. If you have a strong belief in parents’ capacity to contribute to children’s learning, then messages about the benefits of father involvement will be an important resource for your families. So it is important to ensure that this knowledge is communicated to the parent community. You can facilitate this by:

- building connections with Dads
- addressing Dads by their first names
- inviting fathers to Dad events
- creating collaborative learning activities for Dads and children
- keeping it active
- designing learning activities that draw on fathers’ interests and strengths.

Good practice in knowledge transfer is to understand your ‘targets’ and to send a clear message! Get to know the fathers in your centre and help them understand the developmental and educational needs of their children; this will help them to activate their own strengths and resources.

References:


See web page for more details: http://www.newcastle.edu.au/research-centre/fac/research/fathers/fathers-for-school-readiness.html