



Thursday, March 13, 2008

## Fathers reading to children strengthens bonds, boosts skills

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Tuesday night's gathering at the Faribault Senior Center dining hall emphasized two important things for a child: reading and dads.

The Fathers Reading Every Day event organized by the local Head Start program stressed the connection between the two, emphasizing the importance of dads reading to their children.

It was welcomed diversion from the image Hollywood paints of dads in movies and television. If you're a sitcom or movie dad, you are most likely a buffoon, clueless about marriage and fatherhood, immature, barely able to function and usually the butt of family jokes. Where once the primetime family patriarch was the with-it, loving and intelligent Dr. Huxtable, we now have 21st century dads such as Raymond (Everybody Loves Raymond), Homer (The Simpsons), Tim (Home Improvement) and Hal (Malcolm in the Middle). And we wonder why our children seek role models outside the family.

That's why a program that gets dads involved in any positive light is a good one.

Then there's reading. Reading is the essential foundation to a successful education and, ultimately, career. There is little that can be accomplished in this world without the ability to read and read well. But here's why dads doing the reading is a good thing.

- Variety of voice: Men talk differently than women and their approach to reading kids stories is different. Variety increases interest. If Mom is the one always reading, it becomes routine and easier to tune out. Add a different voice to the mix and reading becomes exciting again.
- Double reinforcement: If mom thinks reading is cool, kids might decide it's worthwhile. When dad also jumps in, kids are more likely to think there's something to this reading thing. Our kids, especially at a young age, often find enjoyable what we present as enjoyable. Mom and Dad presenting reading as enjoyable doubles the chances for this to happen.
- Bonding moment: It's hard to read to a child without them snuggling up in your lap. It must be something to do with gravity. But there's something about the physical closeness of reading to your child that leads to tickles, hugs and cuddles.
- Calm the waters: Dads are normally the ones associated with getting their kids riled up. They are typically the ones wrestling with, tickling and tossing them in the air. Reading with Dad helps kids learn that pops can also be the one to bring calm to their life and settle them down.

So kudos to Head Start for recognizing the importance of dads and the importance of reading and bringing the two together for the good of the child - and the family.

### The issue

Head Start reading program encourages fathers to read to their children.

### Our view

This program emphasized the importance of dads in a kids' life and linked it with the vital skill of reading. Kudos!