

# Engaging fathers in the early childhood space; Why and how?

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**Early Childhood Australia**  
A voice for young children

Early Childhood Australia National Conference 2016  
**THIS IS CHILDHOOD** Pedagogy and practice  
in the early years

# Groups for fathers



- Nuts & Bolts of Kids and School

# Aboriginal dads

- **Brothers Inside**
- **Whose ya Mob**
- **Our kids need  
dads who**



# Antenatal work with fathers



# Rough and Tumble play

- Healthy Dads  
Healthy Kids





# Dads Kids Connect Video Feedback with Dads



# Fathers for School Readiness

- **Play-based fathers engagement for child self-regulation**



# Fatherhood...what's changed?

The video player shows a 30-second advertisement for Bonds Australia. Two men are sitting on a white bench in a modern, brightly lit room. The man on the left is older, with glasses and a mustache, wearing dark Bonds underwear. The man on the right is younger, with curly hair, wearing striped Bonds underwear. They are both looking towards the right side of the frame. The text 'THINK OF FATHERS' and '04.09.16' is overlaid in the center. The video player interface includes a title bar, a progress bar, and various control icons.

**BONDS** Think of Fathers - 30sec  
by Bonds Australia

**THINK OF FATHERS**  
04.09.16

Skip Ad ▶

Ad · 0:05 ⓘ bonds.com.au ↗

▶ ⏮ 🔊 0:25 / 0:30

CC ⚙️ 📺 🗖



# Noticing negative parts of fatherhood





# A generation of new fathers?

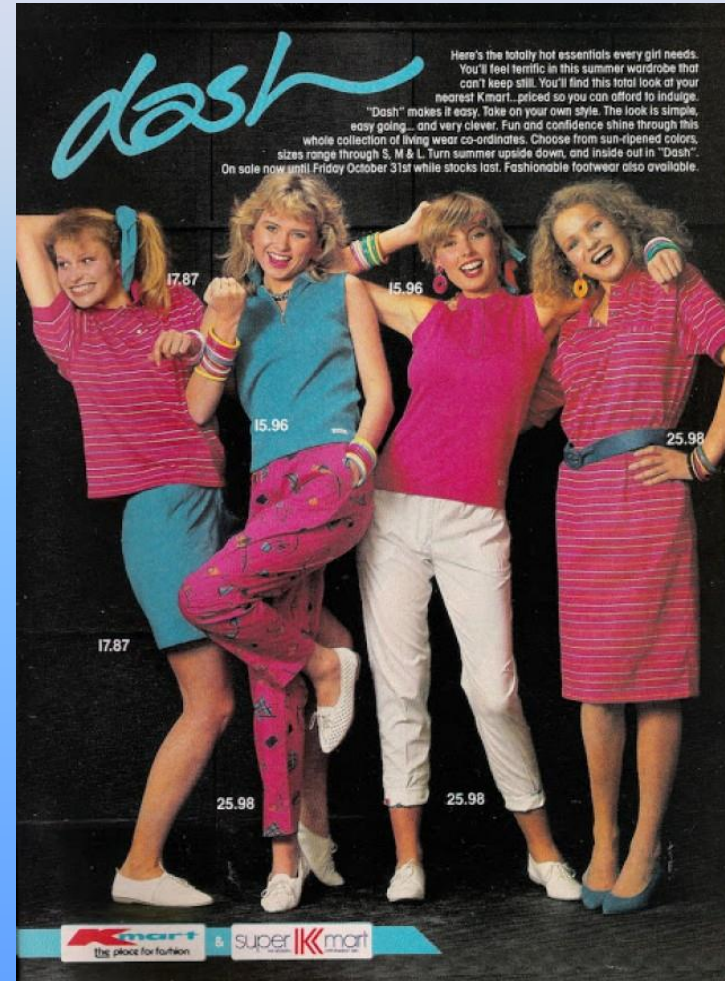
Average age of first time fathers

**33**

So most were born around **1983**



# 1983





# A generation of new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fathers?

Average age of first time Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fathers

**27**

So most were born around **1989**

# 1989 Kevin Kichener, Michael Long, Royal Commission



# What do the dads say?

**I ask them**

***Why do it different to your own dad?***

**They say**

- ***Community expectation***
- ***“She’ll kill me”***
- ***Because I want the connection***

*“Because I want the connection”*

- Their dads didn't do it
- They want to do it

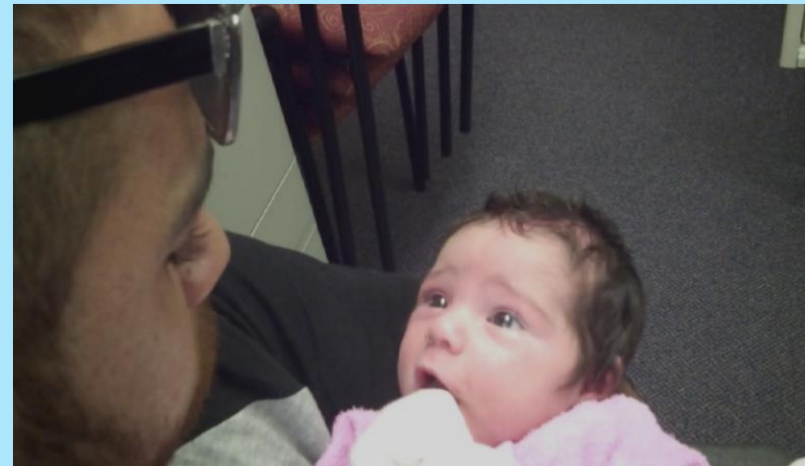
**BUT**

- No understanding of exactly how or why
- No one to 'hold' them while they learn?



# Close the Knowledge Gap – fathers don't know about

- Brain growth
- Fathers' effect on development
- Coparenting
- Attachment



# The evidence about fathers as men

- Men are different to women
- Boys  $\neq$  Girls
- Fathering  $\neq$  Mothering

Ideal from 1980s  
men (dads) = women (mums)

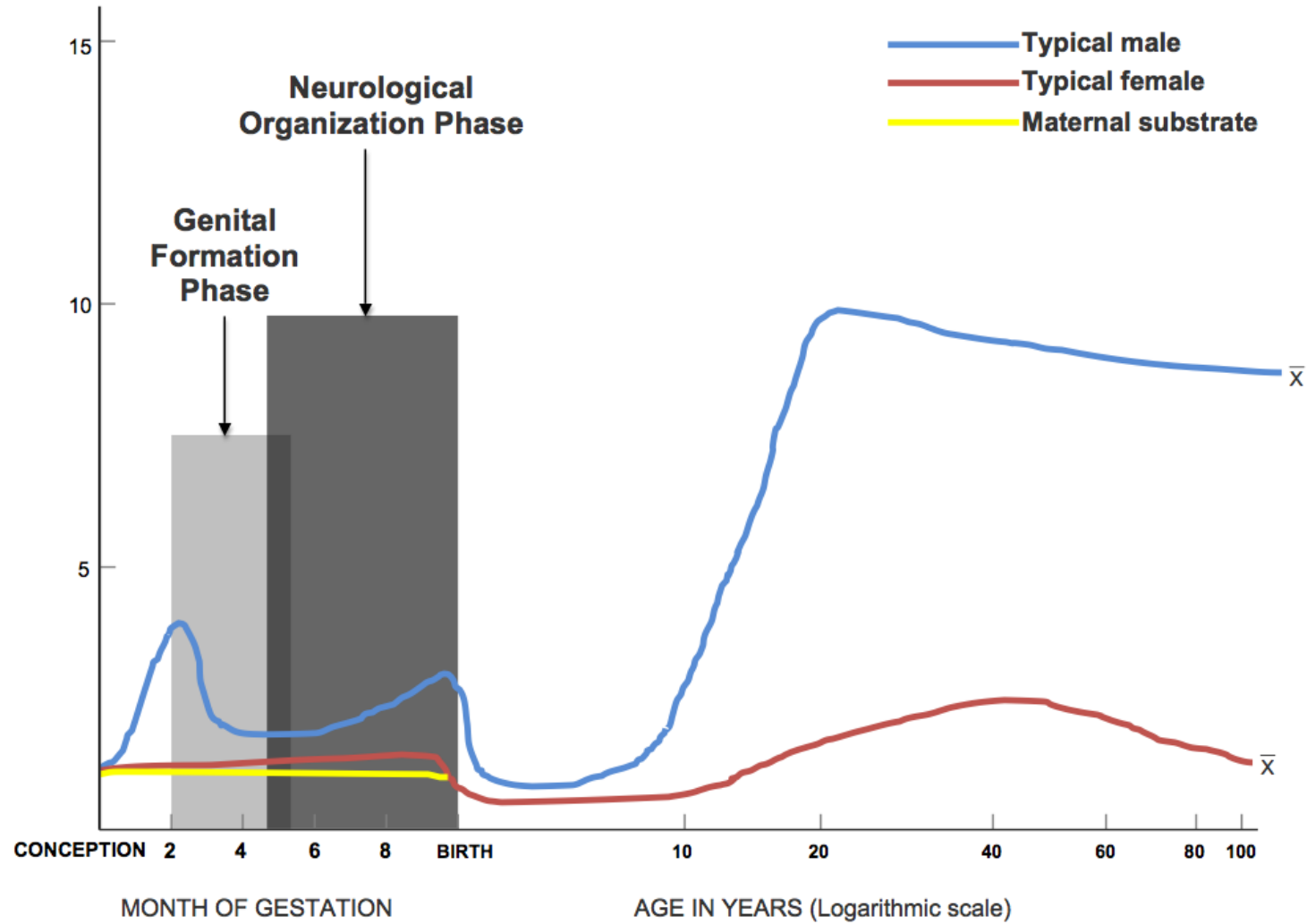


# But really?





# Brain architecture



# Testosterone level and baby cries

- Crying raises T level
- But with soothing lowers T level



Chapman, E., Baron-Cohen, S., Auyeung, B., Knickmeyer, R., Taylor, K., & Hackett, G. (2006). Fetal testosterone and empathy: evidence from the empathy quotient (EQ) and the “reading the mind in the eyes” test. *Social Neuroscience*, 1(2), 135-148.

# Oxytocin and fathering

- **Father-toddler play sessions**
- **Give nasal spray Oxytocin to half group**
- **Double blind experiment**
- **Videotape and Measure play**



- Naber, F., van IJzendoorn M.H., Deschamps, P., van Engeland, H., & Bakermans-Kranenburg, M.J. (2010) Intranasal oxytocin increases fathers' observed responsiveness during play with their children: A double-blind within-subject experiment *Psychoneuroendocrinology* 35, 1583—1586

# Oxytocin and fathering



Those fathers with Oxytocin

1. Encouraged exploration more
2. Were less hostile in play

## Single men

**Ox**



**Placebo**



## Men in steady partnership

**Ox**

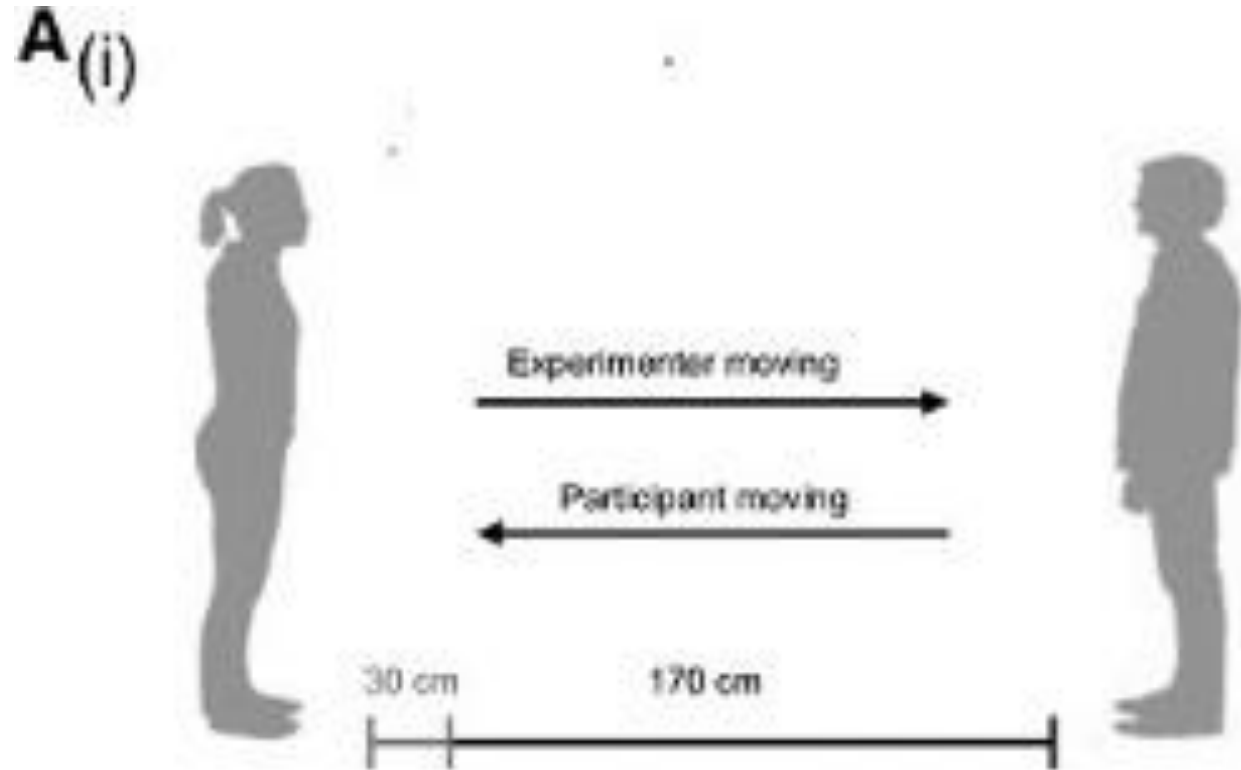


**Placebo**

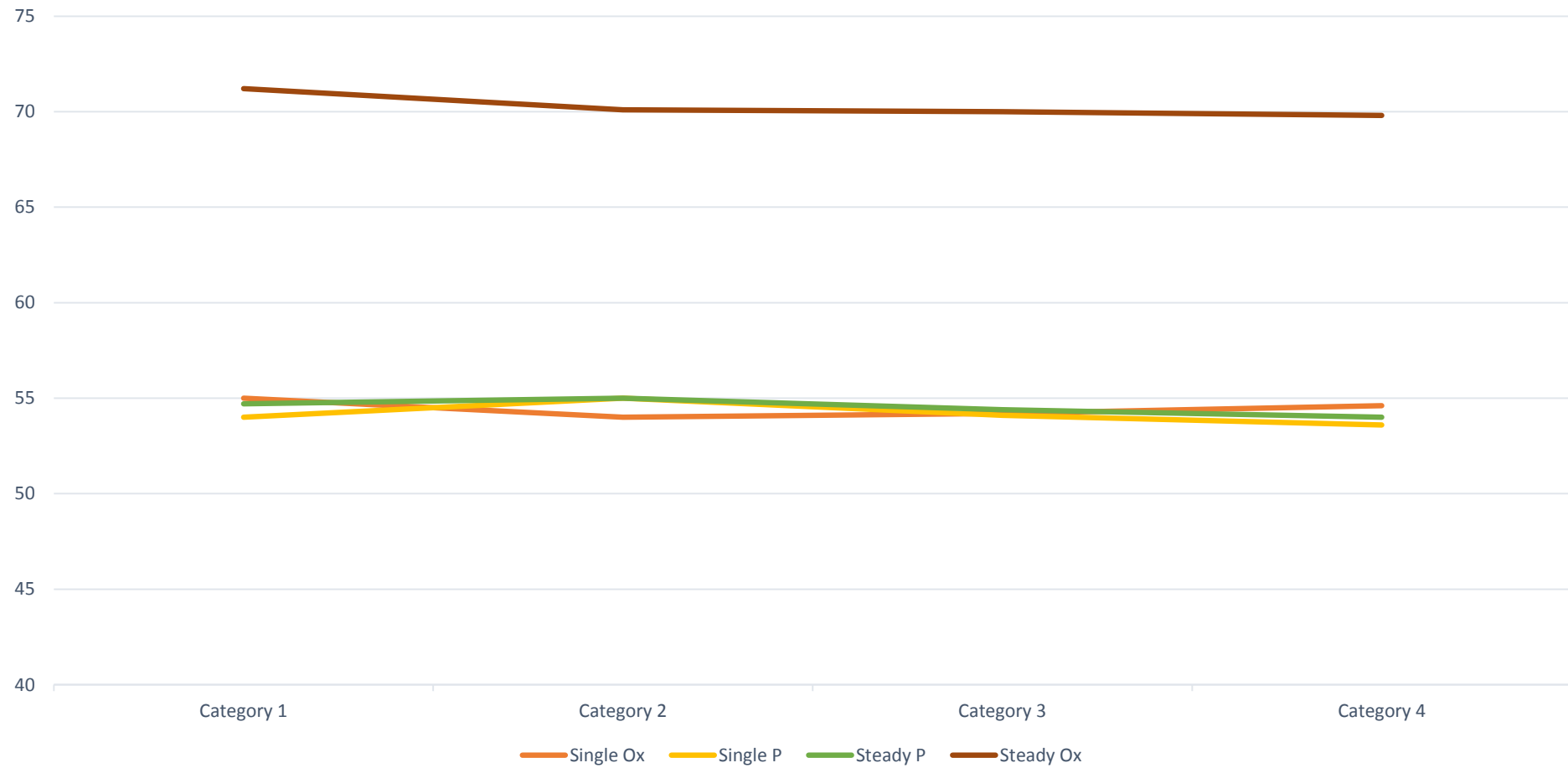










# Oxytocin keeps you married?



# Distance chin to chin



# What do kids need for a good start at school?

School Readiness	Dads have an impact	Brain development
Physical Development		
Listening and explaining		
Self-control and co-operation		

# Dads and Physical Development



# Is it Overweight Dads OR Overweight Mums?

- The risk of child becoming obese?



- **Fathers**
  - **4.18** (95% CI:1.01–17.33 ) If your father was overweight
  - **14.88**, (95% CI: 2.61–84.77) If your father was obese
- **Mothers no effect**



# Dads listening and explaining



- Vocabulary

# Father's contribution to school success

- Fathers teaching at age 2 predicts children's reading and maths scores
- Example tasks: threading beads or standing on one leg
- Father-child interaction predicts
  - Vocabularies at ages 5, 7, and 10
  - Maths skills at ages 5 and 7



- McKelvey, et al (2011). Father teaching interactions with toddlers at risk: Associations with later child academic outcomes. *Family Science*, 2(2), 146-155.

# Father's contribution to school success

- Code videotapes for:
  - 1. Sensitivity to their child's cues
    - Do they notice what the child is doing?
    - Do they encourage child
  - 2. Follow the child
    - Do they let the child suggest things
    - Do they ask the child

# Dads and Self regulation



- Self control





# ROUGH AND TUMBLE IN MAMMALS

- Wrestling, grappling, kicking, tumbling
- Dominance swapping
- Play signals
- Different from fighting



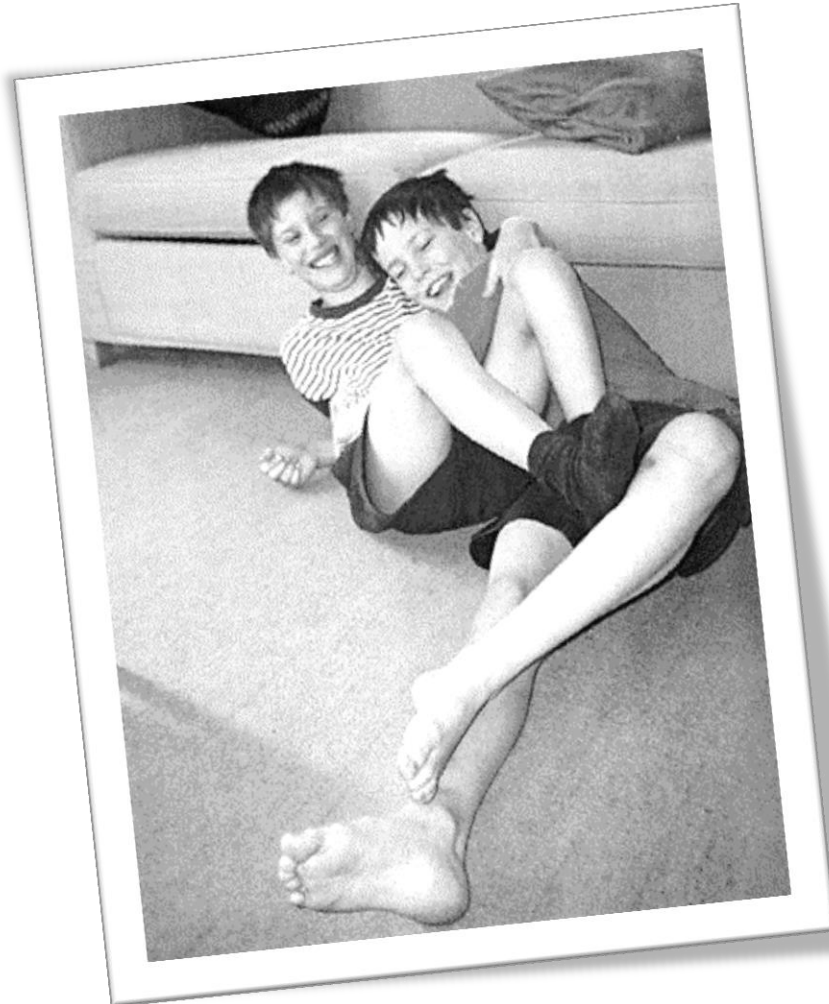
# ROUGH AND TUMBLE PLAY EXPERIMENTS WITH RATS

Can touch and smell  
but no RTP leads to..

- Poor social skills
- Poor problem solving



# OBSERVING CHILDREN'S ROUGH AND TUMBLE



- Children think it's fun
- Differences between aggression and play-fighting
- Children generally know the difference
- Teachers tend to interpret play-fighting as aggression
- Play intensity related to deprivation

# FOCUS ON DADS



Significant treatment effects for **children** for

- ✓ physical activity ( $d=0.74$ )
- ✓ resting heart rate ( $d=0.51$ )
- ✓ dietary intake ( $d=0.84$ )

(Morgan et al, 2011)

Fathers said....

- ✓ Improved father-child bond
- ✓ Good for their child's development
- ✓ Some risk not bad

(Fletcher et al. 2011)



## DADS CONNECTING

When we play, I let her initiate a bit more, less structure, I'm a bit more giving of my time



Was good for bringing my son and I closer



# Father-inclusive practice

- Get a grip on the research about dads
- Benchmark dads involvement
- Discuss dads involvement
- Use social proof
- Keeping fathers in mind





*I learn from your touch, your voice, your warmth, your strong arms, your mood. Everything you do matters to me dad*

JOIN UP

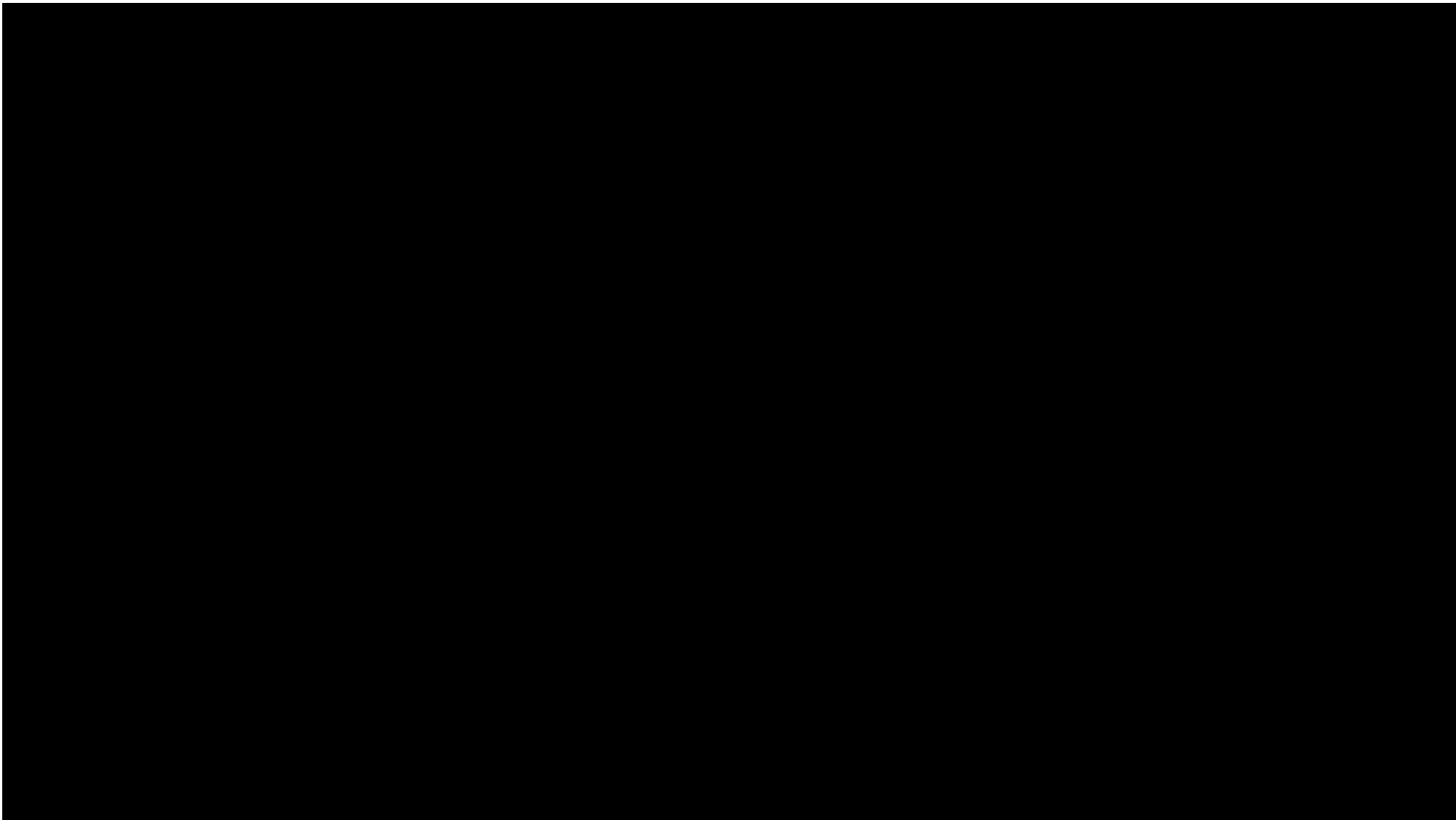
[www.sms4dads.com](http://www.sms4dads.com)



**SMS4dads**

INFO TO YOUR PHONE FOR DADS-ON-THE GO





# Who can enrol

- From anywhere in Australia
- Partner (married or not) is pregnant
- Infant is less than three months of age at the time of enrolment
- The messages are sent until the baby is 12 months of age or until the dad opts out

# Messages

- It is important for me to sleep in a safe place and in a safe position dad. Get more info on safe sleeping from ... [\*Static Link\*]
- So I pass a lot of wind. Well I am growing fast and I have to eat a lot so my gut is very busy. What's your excuse dad? [Txt STOP to OptOut]



# Messages

- If you've been at work all day you might be able to support mum by taking me out for a walk dad. This will also give us more bonding time.
- Working together in these early months is important. How can you find agreement on the best thing to do when caring for your baby? [Txt STOP to OptOut]

# Messages

- Hey dad. I am going to double triple my weight in the first year of life. Don't let this happen to you too.[\* Static Link\*]
- Good food, sleep and exercise can really help at this time. If you can't get all of these then try to get what you can.[\*Static Link\*]

# MOOD*tracker*

CLICK A FACE to rate how you are going today

*awesome*



*cool*



*ok*



*shaky*



*bad*



SMS*4*dads

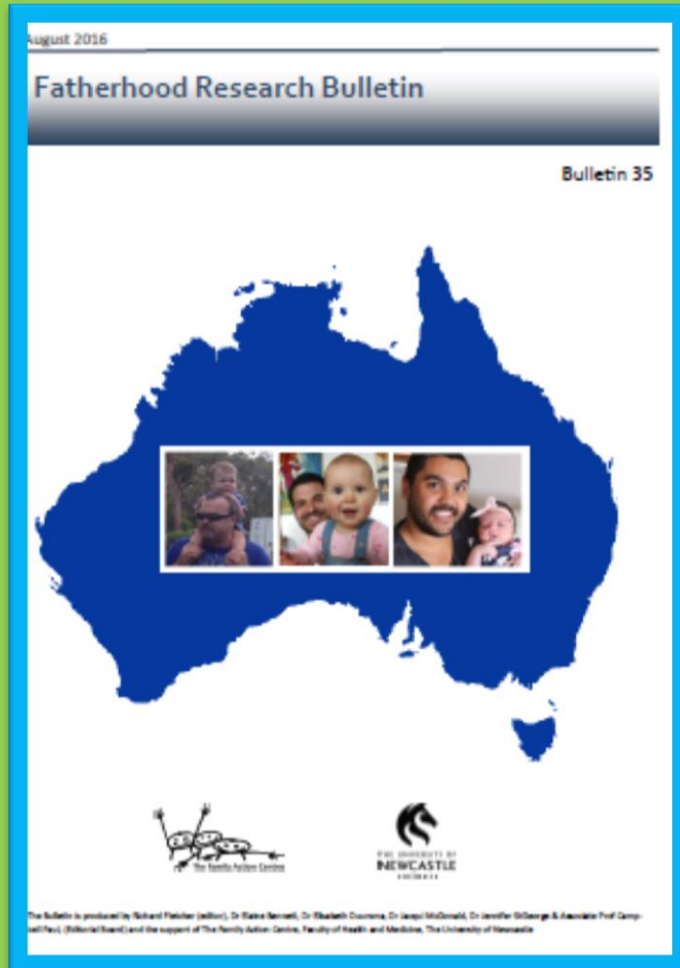


## From our most recent exit interviews

### Any messages you recall?

- *“a baby usually cry if there is something wrong. A reminder that they are not trying to annoy you”*
- *Yes- One message about regular physical touching to connect with my partner*
- *About her need to rest and breastfeeding and that she has no time off. ..To help with the chores and supporting her.*

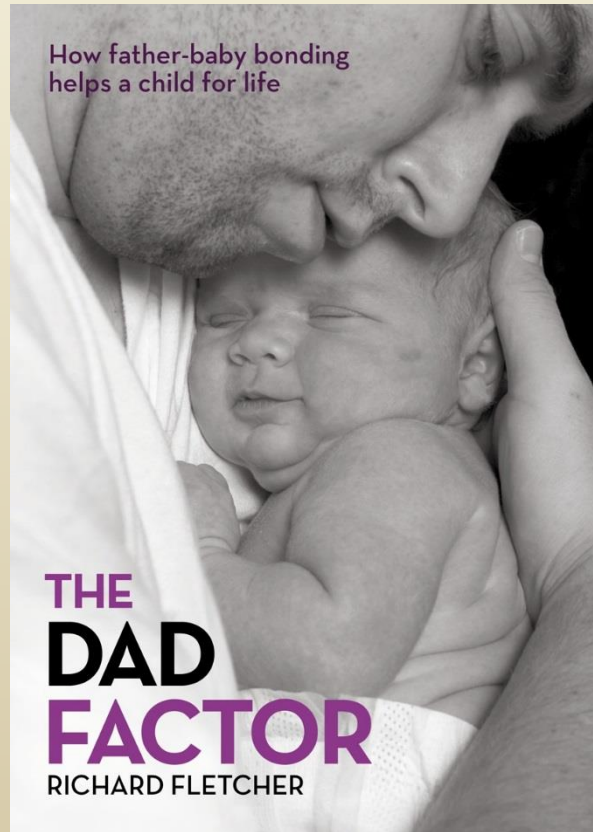
# Fatherhood Research Bulletin



- Free
  - Bimonthly
  - Research summaries
  - On the Web
  - Father-inclusive practice
- 
- Email me if you'd like to get the Bulletin
  - [richard.fletcher@Newcastle.edu.au](mailto:richard.fletcher@Newcastle.edu.au)



# Resources



- Available in Spanish, German, Chinese and Korean