



# The Fathering Project

*A Review of Australian Evidence of the Impact of  
Fathering*

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This report contains a review of available Australian data which describe the impact of fathers on their children's development. The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) dataset contains measures of key fathering characteristics measured over regular time intervals within a cohort of 10,000 families and includes measures of parental warmth, hostility, anger and consistency as well as parental inductive reasoning, efficacy, involvement and over-protectiveness and the relationship between fathers and mothers. Each of these factors are explored in this longitudinal sample, and are also modelled on the Fathering Projects key child outcomes of Learning; Health, Development and Problem Behaviours; and Mental Health and Social Skills.

## Main findings

Effective fathers display warmth toward their child, behave consistently, believe in their ability to parent well, are able to reason with their child, are involved in their child's life and parent well with their partner. Ineffective parents are over-protective, hostile toward their child, angry and have argumentative relationships with their partners. Each of these characteristics has a unique influence on a child's health, social, emotional and academic outcomes.

The main findings of this report are:

- 1: Fathers matter in children's wellbeing
- 2: Fathers self-efficacy and warmth in parenting are the most powerful predictors of children's improved health, academic, social and emotional outcomes
- 3: Fathers who are younger are more consistent with their parenting and have fewer argumentative relationships however they have greatly problems with anger and hostility. Men with trade and production occupations appear to be less skilled in their fathering.
- 4: Children who have a father or father figure that lives with them throughout their life have better learning outcomes, general health, emotional wellbeing and fewer problem behaviours.
- 5: While mothers have a significant influence on their child's health, academic, social and emotional outcomes, after accounting for this, fathers have a unique and diverse role in improving outcomes for their child.
- 6: A father's influence on their child's outcomes becomes most prominent when children reach school age
- 7: Fathers who consistently parent well over time have children who perform better academically, socially, emotionally and enjoy better health and development.

## Summary of Australian Based evidence statements

### *Australian evidence-based statement*

*1 in 4 Australian children live in a one parent family and 80% of these children live without their father<sup>1</sup>*

1: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015

### *Australian evidence-based statement*

*1 in 5 prison entrants in 2012 had one or more of their parents imprisoned when they were a child*

*Australian evidence-based statement*

*Children who do not live with their father or a father figure are significantly more likely to have a higher BMI than children who live with their father*

*Australian evidence-based statement*

*Four year olds whose fathers are overweight or obese are up to 15 times more likely to be overweight or obese at aged eight.*

*Australian evidence-based statement*

*Having a father or father figure live with a child from the age of 4 to 12 significantly increases a child's learning outcomes (as measured by NAPLAN), their emotional wellbeing and leads to fewer problem behaviours.*

*Australian evidence-based statement*

*Children who do not live with their father or father figure are at significantly increased risk of facing financial hardship.*

*Australian evidence-based statement*

*Children who do not live with their father or father figure are significantly more likely to be absent from school.*

*Australian evidence-based statement*

*Fathers influence their children through the quality of relationship with the mother of their child*

*Australian evidence-based statement*

*Children with fathers who provide warm, supportive parenting have better educational outcomes*

*Australian evidence-based statement*

*Children have significantly better health, academic, social and emotional outcomes when their fathers' have a consistently warm parenting style.*

*Australian evidence-based statement*

*Fathers' who have consistently high levels of self-belief in their parenting style over time have children with significantly better health, academic, social and emotional outcomes.*

*Australian evidence-based statement*

*Fathers' who have ongoing high levels of consistency in their parenting have children with significantly better health, academic, social and emotional outcomes..*

*Australian evidence-based statement*

*For children whose parents argue consistently even moderately, their general health and pro-social behaviours are lower and their emotional and social skills poorer than children whose parents rarely argue.*

*Australian evidence-based statement*

*While mothers have a significant influence on their child's health, academic, social and emotional outcomes, after accounting for this, fathers' self-efficacy consistently predicts improved health and social outcomes for their child.*