the fathering project
Changing Children's Lives

Top Strategies to Engage Fathers and Build a Stronger School Community in 2026

Fathers in Australia are increasingly taking more of a role in caring for their children on a day-to-day basis, so it only makes sense that they are going to engage more with their children's schools.

Effective strategies will differ from community to community and should be tailored to meet the needs of your school's fathers and father figures. It is also important to understand that father engagement does not always require the father's presence in the school. A father may not be able to attend school events, however, can still be highly engaged in supporting their child's learning in a successful partnership between home and school.

Top Strategies to use in 2026

Children are the biggest motivator

- The best way to engage fathers is to provide and encourage the opportunity to do something with their children.
- Have children write invitations and give them to their fathers, inviting them to come to the school for an event or activity.

Fathers like to know "Why this is important"

- Provide fathers with evidence to show what the benefits will be for their children when they engage with the school activities and support their child's education at school.

Catch them from the start

- An ideal time to connect with and engage fathers with the school is when their children first start, whether that be early years, primary or secondary.
- The transition and orientation time is ideal for setting expectations around family partnerships with fathers as well as mothers. The good news is that fathers who engage with the school early are more likely to stay engaged with their child's education.

> We appoint a dad as the Father Engagement Representative to advise our Family Partnerships Team, so fathers would always be considered in our activity to engage and partner with families in our school.

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Top Strategies to use in 2025

Fathers are more likely to attend if they are specifically invited

- You need to make it clear that the event or activity you wish the fathers to attend is relevant for them and they feel welcomed and comfortable in the environment.

Communicate to fathers directly

- Events labelled for 'parents' or 'families' tend to attract mothers. Address letters to fathers and find out what other media fathers are using in your community: text messages, e-mails, WhatsApp or a website.

Get the mums and/or partner onboard

- Many mothers act as gatekeepers for their child's contact with the school. This is neither the fault of the mothers or the school. It is just the way it has been historically, that mothers have tended to be the one that received and consumed the communication from the school and dealt with organisation or return correspondence. Mothers can be your best avenue for encouraging the dads to get on board. Separated mothers may also still be happy to encourage dads to engage for the sake of their children.

Check the Timing

- As many fathers (as well as mothers) may be at work during the day, think about when they might be available, early mornings, evenings, or after school if they are doing the pick-ups. It may be possible for fathers to leave work early on a weekday for special events if you give them plenty of notice.

Use planners and/or calendars

- Dads say they like to know what is going on early so they can plan around special days or events on the calendar. They are more likely to be able to arrange work schedules and take special leave if they have plenty of notice.
- Make sure your website calendar is updated and dates are posted well in advance.
- Include information with the planners on how fathers can be a volunteer or support the upcoming events.

Fathers say they prefer to do something, not just talk about it

- Try using activities as part of your engagement of fathers: quizzes, interactive games, workshops, the internet, puzzles, and storytellers — anything that mixes listening with doing something. (This is good advice for any family activity).
- Use your Dads Group activities as opportunities to inject some fathering information such as the Fathering thoughts ideas.
- Engage fathers informally, create opportunities for positive experiences: Many dads are more likely to engage in hands-on and physical activities in the school environment.

Use a hook to get them in

- Using something fathers might be interested in is a good way of connecting with dads who might be a bit reluctant or nervous. Sport is a great place to start, particularly (although not exclusively) AFL, basketball, or soccer. Technology is also a very popular topic to get dads in. The Fathering Project provides these sorts of ideas through the Dads Group leader's portal.

Engaging Kindy Dads in Your School Community

Starting school is a big moment – not just for children, but for their dads and father figures too. The early school years set the tone for how families connect with the school community. When schools take the first step to actively engage and welcome fathers, it builds trust, belonging and stronger partnerships that benefit everyone.

Simple, intentional efforts at this stage can help dads feel valued, confident and connected – laying the foundation for long-term involvement in their child's learning journey.

Key Principles for Effective Engagement

Use father-inclusive language and visuals

- Address "dads and father figures" explicitly. Visuals, invitations and communication should reflect men caring, playing and learning alongside children.

Build from strengths and make it accessible

- Encourage involvement through practical, low-barrier opportunities – not more "meetings". Choose fun, hands-on activities that let dads engage confidently.

Design a multi-stage engagement plan

- Engagement doesn't happen overnight. Plan for awareness –> involvement –> leadership over 1–3 years. Early momentum will support sustainable culture change.

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Six Tips to Engage Kindy Dads

1. Focus on the transition to school

The first year of school is a key transition for both children and their parents. Fathers who feel welcomed at this stage are more likely to stay engaged throughout their child's schooling.

Invite dads to orientation days, school tours, or "Meet the Teacher" sessions that include hands-on activities.
Even small gestures – like a "Dad and Me Classroom Tour" or a "First Day Coffee for Dads" – create a sense of belonging and partnership from day one.

2. Tap into children's pride in their dads

Kindy-aged children are eager to show off their parents. Give children a role in inviting their dads – through drawings, personal invitations, or class-made posters.
When the invitation comes from their child rather than the school, fathers report feeling more motivated and emotionally connected to attend.

3. Emphasise learning through play

Frame engagement as "playing and learning together" rather than "parent education."

For example, hold "STEM Play Nights" or "Nature Builders" sessions where dads explore simple play-based learning linked to the curriculum.

4. Celebrate diverse father figures

Kindy families include step-dads, uncles, grandfathers, foster-dads and more. Use inclusive visuals and language –say "Dads and Father Figures Welcome."

You might host a "Father Figures Morning Tea" during Kindy Week, inviting all who play a fathering role.
Inclusive messaging helps every child feel represented.

5. Make reflection part of the routine

After each activity, encourage dads to reflect briefly on the experience – e.g., "What did your child teach you today?" or "What did you enjoy most?"

Reflection deepens connection, reinforces learning, and encouragevs return engagement. Schools can share a one-line "dad tip" in newsletters to keep that reflection going at home.

"The school sent me a personal invite to a 'Dads and Kids Play Morning'. It made me feel like I belonged there too. I met other dads, had a laugh, and realised we all want the same thing – to be part of our kids' world. **That one invite made all the difference.**"

Best Practice Advice From Schools

- We appoint a dad as the Father Engagement Representative to advise our Family Partnerships Team, so fathers would always be considered in our activity to engage and partner with families in our school.

- Ourschool staff identified the engagement of fathers as a priority for our Family Partnerships strategy. We decided to draw up a **"father inclusion" plan.** Our first action was to find out what barriers there might be to fathers' involvement in school by running discussion groups with some of the fathers. We invited a diverse range of fathers as representatives of the school community. They were very enthusiastic and expressed gratitude at being asked for their feedback and advice. We have developed a plan based on their recommendations and have begun to implement the first strategies to engage more fathers to engage with their child's education at the school and at home.

- We found that using class parent representatives to contact fathers directly helped to encourage them to engage in school events and activities.

- When I arrived at this school as Deputy Principal and Wellbeing Coordinator, I found we had a strong Dads Group who run a range of activities throughout the year. However, we felt the school was probably not making the most of this opportunity to engage and partner with these fathers more in their children's education.

  In speaking to the Dads Group Leaders Team, I found they were very keen to partner in some information sharing and activities with the fathers to encourage them to become more connected with what their children were doing in the classroom and around the school. After we started doing these activities, I noticed more dads coming into the school and helping out in the classes and with school activities. The Dads Group Leaders said they had received a lot of positive messages from the fathers about them feeling more valued by the school.

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Book a call or learn more about the program by scanning the QR code.

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