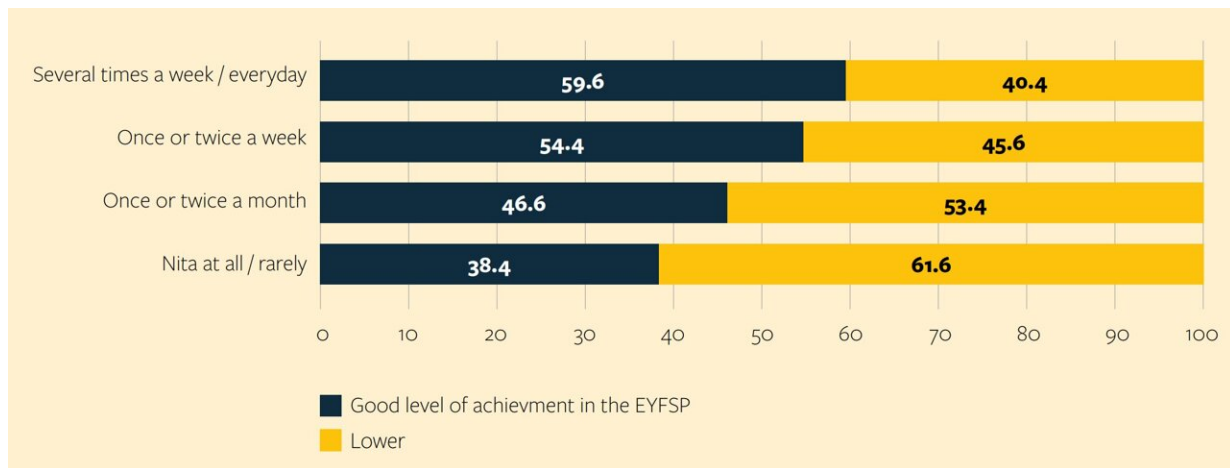


# Young children found to do better at school if their dads read and play with them

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The proportion of children who achieved a good level of achievement in the EYFSP or lower according to how often fathers read to them at home. Credit: *What a difference a dad makes: Paternal Involvement and its Effects on Children's Education (PIECE) (2023)*.

Fathers can give their children an educational advantage at primary school by reading, drawing and playing with them, according to a newly published report.

Research led by the University of Leeds has found that children do better at [primary school](#) if their fathers regularly spend time with them on interactive engagement activities like reading, playing, telling stories,

drawing and singing.

Analyzing primary [school](#) test scores for five- and seven-year-olds, the researchers used a representative sample of nearly 5,000 mother-father households in England from the [Millenium Cohort Study](#)—which collected data on children born 2000-02 as they grew up.

According to the research, dads who regularly drew, played and read with their three-year-olds helped their children do better at school by age five. Dads being involved at age five also helped improve scores in seven-year-olds' Key Stage Assessments.

Dr. Helen Norman, Research Fellow at Leeds University Business School, who led the [research](#), said, "Mothers still tend to assume the primary caregiver role and therefore tend to do the most childcare, but if fathers actively engage in childcare too, it significantly increases the likelihood of children getting better grades in primary school. This is why encouraging and supporting fathers to share childcare with the mother, from an early stage in the child's life, is critical."

Dads' involvement impacted positively on their children's school achievement regardless of the child's gender, ethnicity, age in the [school year](#) and household income, according to the report.

There were different effects when mums and dads took part in the same activities—the data showed that mums had more of an impact on young children's emotional and social behaviors than educational achievement.

The researchers recommend that dads carve out as much time as they can to engage in interactive activities with their children each week. For busy, working dads, even just ten minutes a day could potentially have educational benefits.

They also recommend that schools and early years education providers routinely take both parents' contact details (where possible) and develop strategies to engage fathers—and that Ofsted take explicit account of father-engagement in inspections.

This study shows that even small changes in what fathers do, and in how schools and early years settings engage with parents, can have a lasting impact on children's learning. It's absolutely crucial that that fathers aren't treated as an afterthought.

Dr. Jeremy Davies, Head of Impact and Communications at the Fatherhood Institute, who co-authored the report, said, "Our analysis has shown that fathers have an important, direct impact on their children's learning. We should be recognizing this and actively finding ways to support dads to play their part, rather than engaging only with mothers, or taking a gender-neutral approach."

Andrew Gwynne MP, Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Fatherhood, said, "This study shows that even small changes in what fathers do, and in how schools and early years settings engage with parents, can have a lasting impact on children's learning. It's absolutely crucial that fathers aren't treated as an afterthought."

**More information:** Report: [business.leeds.ac.uk/download/ ...  
476/piece-report.pdf](https://business.leeds.ac.uk/download/.../476/piece-report.pdf)

Provided by University of Leeds

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