

# Fastbreak For Fathers

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**a monthly e-mail to help you be the kind of dad your child needs you to be.**

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by Rich Batten, Family and Consumer Science Agent, Douglas County  
Colorado State University Cooperative Extension

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**In this issue: *Playing with your children is serious business.***

Children seem to develop the best social skills when their dads play with them, while maintaining a positive tone and allowing their kids to take part in directing the course of play.

- *Dad was a lot of fun!*
- Fathers' play sensitivity and children's attachment development
- Plays the thing – ideas for playing with your kids.
- Upcoming FatherWork Connection classes in Douglas County.

## **Observations**

I remember reading an interview of a famous politician and found myself pleasantly surprised by the answer he gave when asked about his legacy. Rather than talking about his policy decisions or legislative successes, the man said he wanted to be remembered most as a one who loved his wife and had fun with his children. "Gee, **dad was a lot of fun**" –what an epitaph that would be!

That could have been Theodore Roosevelt's epitaph. Historian and author, David McCullough, writes that Roosevelt was arguably the youngest in spirit of all our Presidents. "He joined in pillow fights, picnics, relished ghost stories in the dark, bedtime stories, stories of any kind . . . . He was the kind of father who, at the dinner table, would serve the youngest child first, or who, when their mother was not looking, would cut the icing off his own cake and slip it to the nearest child. 'I love all these children and have great fun with them,' he wrote to his sister-in-law, 'and I am touched by the way in which they feel I am their special friend, champion and companion.'"

One of the most frequently mentioned differences between moms and dads is how much more time dads engage in active play with their children. In fact, it is not uncommon for dads to turn a child-care task or household chore into some kind of game with their children. Such activities shouldn't be dismissed as "just goofing off," playing with dad – when conducted with a positive tone and allowing for kids to take part in directing the course of play – can help children develop social skills necessary for successful peer relationships.

I propose that playing together – laughter, fun and joy – is the canvas upon which a rich, meaningful father-child relationship is created and explored. "Dad was a lot of fun," may sound like a frivolous epitaph, but I'm convinced that, if true, they would be but the opening words to countless stories of depth and meaning.

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## Research

A longitudinal study conducted in Germany with forty-four families explored fathers' as compared to mothers' specific contribution to their children's attachment representation at ages 6, 10, and 16 years. Attachment theory seeks to describe and explain people's enduring patterns of relationships beginning with the first years of life. Studies have consistently demonstrated that mothers' influences seem to rest on their functioning as a haven of safety and a secure base from which to explore. This study introduces and confirms the hypothesis that **fathers' play sensitivity** (sensitive, supporting and gently challenging companion during explorative play with their toddlers) is a better predictor of the child's **long-term attachment** with fathers than the early infant security of attachment measures found with mothers. Grossmann, K. et al (2002). The Uniqueness of the Child-Father Attachment Relationship: Fathers' Sensitive and Challenging Play as a Pivotal Variable in a 16-year Longitudinal Study. *Social Development*, 11(3), 307-331.

## Ideas

- Make time to play with your kids.
- Follow their lead.
- Be a role model.
- Ask open-ended questions.

## Connections (specific to Douglas County Colorado)

**Dads and Daughters** (class for fathers of daughters ages 10-15) Tuesday, January 27. 6:30 – 8:30 PM at Ranch View Middle School – Highlands Ranch. Call 303.387.0128 to register. Cost \$10.00

**Spirited Kids Need Confident Parents** Thursdays February 12 & 26. 6:30 – 8:30 PM at Northridge Elementary School – Highlands Ranch Call 303.387.0128 to register. Cost \$15.00

**Beside Every Great Dad: Insights to help your husband (or grown son) succeed as a father.** (This 45 minute workshop for women is a part of the Douglas County Women's Health and Wellness Day.) 8 AM – 1 PM Saturday March 6 Call 720.733.6926 to register.

**Father Fraternity** (Parker Adventist Hospital) Tuesday, February 17 (dads and infants), Tuesday, March 2 (dads and infants), Tuesday, March 16 (Dads, moms and infants) All classes are from 7:00 – 8:30 PM. Call 303.269.4390 for more information and to register.

**"You can't be the kind of dad that you want to be. You can't be the kind of dad that you wanted to have. You've got to be the kind of dad that your child needs you to be."**

**-Roland Warren, The National Fatherhood Initiative**

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**Fastbreak for Fathers** is a publication of the Douglas County FatherWork Connection, a countywide, research-based, fathering education and advocacy initiative committed to increasing the probability of every child in Douglas County Colorado being intimately connected to an involved, responsible and loving father or father figure.

**The Douglas County FatherWork Connection is facilitated by  
Rich Batten, Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Agent - Douglas County  
Colorado State University Cooperative Extension  
720.733.6926 [rbatten@douglas.co.us](mailto:rbatten@douglas.co.us)**

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