

Start a new chapter in fathers reading to their children

Bedtime stories improve children's educational attainment, and it has even more impact when Dad reads it, write **David Lammy** and **Steve Double**

Evidence shows that reading with children at home from an early age has a major impact not only on their reading ability, vocabulary and language skills but also on their attentiveness in the classroom. Reading with children enhances their imagination and expands their cultural horizons.

Many of us take reading for granted. It is essential to educational attainment, yet a quarter of children (and two-fifths of children from the poorest backgrounds) are unable to read well by the time they leave primary school.

Reading with children is important for any carer, but evidence shows that the impact of fathers reading to their children appears to be greater than mothers. However, research also shows that fathers are less likely to read to their children than mothers are, and that fathers read less to boys than to girls.

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Fathers from poorer backgrounds are also less likely to read to their children, whether it's because they lack confidence in their own literacy, don't have the resources to buy books, or are unaware of the importance of bedtime stories. Particularly for children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, being read

to by a parent or carer improves their life chances and can narrow the attainment gap.

As we approach Father's Day, the APPG on Fatherhood is calling for MPs to join in raising awareness of



the benefits of fathers reading to their young children every evening.

Involving fathers in their children's literacy development not only benefits children, but also fathers themselves; sharing a book promotes closeness and reading for fun, and alleviates the inevitable guilt of time-pressed carers. Even fathers not able to be present at bedtime can be encouraged to connect with their children through digital means, or record bedtime stories in advance.

This is just one initiative through which the APPG for Fatherhood aims to support the role of fathers. More broadly, the APPG promotes the wellbeing of children by ensuring that legal and policy frameworks keep up with the changing nature of family life, and that legislation encourages

active and responsible fatherhood.

The APPG for Fatherhood complements the work of other APPGs to achieve wider societal change to create a fairer society. Enabling the role of fathers not only impacts child wellbeing and development, but also gender equality both at home and at work, and improved social mobility.

Ideas around fatherhood have changed. There are greater social expectations for fathers to spend time with their children, younger fathers have fewer traditional gender-role expectations, and an increasing number of fathers are primary care-givers. We celebrate fathers becoming

more involved in their children's upbringing than they were a few generations ago.

That said, we know that personal, social and cultural barriers exist that continue to hinder a father's involvement in their children's upbringing.

Policies such

as shared parental leave and extensions to paternity leave have made modest advances in shifting cultural behaviour, but more work needs to be done.

Encouraging fathers to read to their young children is a positive step. So if you're sitting comfortably, let us help that to begin. 📖

MPs are invited to support the drive to get more fathers reading bedtime stories to their children by attending a photoshoot with author Alex Wheatle on 12 June 2019 at 5.45pm in Portcullis House, Room S.

David Lammy, Labour MP for Tottenham, and **Steve Double**, Conservative MP for St Austell and Newquay, are co-chairs of the APPG for Fatherhood