

## GETTING THEM IN

### FIVE RULES FOR ATTRACTING FATHERS AND FATHER FIGURES

#### 1. START POSITIVE (and keep it that way)

When you look at your publicity to fathers, what is your invitation really saying? If dads get the sense that the service thinks they are important for narrow reasons, then they will respond accordingly.

<b>If your publicity stresses</b>	<b>Then dads will probably think</b>
The staff need more help, any adult will do	<i>I hope they get lots of volunteers.</i>
Mums need help. Men need to do their share	<i>Sounds familiar and I probably should go, but...</i>
The service needs your money	<i>I'll send something later</i>
We need men to build things	<i>I wonder if Ernie is going...</i>
Fathers are important for the well being of all our children	<i>Well that sounds good, but what exactly do they want me to do?</i>
This is an invitation from your own son/daughter to come with them to play	<i>Well, that's something I can probably handle.</i>

Start with a father-son event. Among many fathers there is a recognition that they have a responsibility and a special role with boys' growth to manhood. This need not be seen as anti-women. Running a father-son event for dads will emphasise their special role. Just having the name "Father Son" in the title will convey that "fathers", not just competent adults, are needed. Father-daughter events should follow because, while the father son caption will be most effective in attracting men to the service for the first time, we don't want to limit the fathers' role to the sons. Father daughter events, held after the first father son night, have been just as popular.

#### 2. GO SLOWLY (and build the contact)

Maybe you have been thinking about all the things that fathers could get involved in if they really wanted to. Staff are used to planning ahead, and keen to see change. For dads, however, just turning up at the service may be a big step. The

stronger the informal contacts, the more natural it will seem to get involved. Just the staff member saying “Hello” as they pass, or addressing them by name when they come to pick up kids can make a difference. And having opportunities to talk with other dads will help too. Some services have special flyers for dads or columns in their newsletters.

### **3. MAKE THE TASK CLEAR (avoid setting men up to look stupid)**

If you want them to start reading stories to the children, or to help run an outdoor activity, make it clear what is to be done. Have written instructions setting out the task and someone to explain what the informal rules are “We don’t let them go behind the storage shed when they are hiding”. Child protection statutes are being introduced in most states. While there is plenty of publicity about paedophilia, there is still a need to address the safety measures in place in early childhood settings. This can be done positively if the starting point is “How safe do you feel when your child is at the service and what measures would help you be assured?” Men, in our experience, are keen for their children to be protected and readily see the point of police checks and care around being alone with children.

### **4. MAKE IT ACTIVE (for the dads and the kids)**

Sitting still and having to rely on language are often not so comfortable for men. Being active doesn’t have to mean frenetic activity, it can simply mean movement. It also means taking the focus away from the talking. Talking while working together is often more comfortable for males than sitting face to face because the focus is on the activity not on the language or the inter-personal communication. Working bee’s make a lot of sense as an introduction for men. Father’s interactions with children, should also be active. Having dads come and watch an activity is often a safe way for men to participate but it will be more meaningful and enjoyable to them if they are able to do something active with their children. Put the focus on the activity. Fathers playing with bats, balls, hoops and other games equipment with children is a way to participate together.

### **5. INCLUDE MUMS AND KIDS (from the beginning)**

Single mums, and others who feel like they might as well be single, will notice publicity directed to fathers. While it is essential to be specific in inviting fathers, mothers should be acknowledged for their work too. What is often lacking is recognition that single mums, in particular, have been doing the work of dads too.

Kids may be a bit puzzled about all the fuss about fathers, but they are usually very clear that playing games with dads (or father figures) sounds like a good time. Children are the most effective recruiters – they provide the best reason for dads to be involved and will motivate their chosen father figure to attend.