



***FATHER INVOLVEMENT AND CHILDREN'S WELL BEING:
A FOCUS ON LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT***

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Children's emerging skills in language and communicative development are undoubtedly the earliest, and perhaps most significant, benchmarks for successful integration into society. Language is both an expression of and catalyst for children's advances in cognitive development: It is a tool that enables children to share experiences with adults, family members, and peers, to participate in cultural routines, regulate emotions and behaviors, and meet the academic and learning requirements of school. Words represent the concepts that comprise an interconnected, hierarchical system of knowledge, and children with larger vocabularies in infancy and the toddler years show an advantage in object recognition, object sorting, processing speed, action imitation, and later reading achievement, grammatical development, phonological awareness and cognitive skills years later.

Sociocultural theories of language development (e.g., Vygotsky, Bruner) share a common focus on the ways in which parents "scaffold" children's development by accommodating their own language and communicative behaviors to meet the changing needs of their developing children. In this talk, we present research from our laboratory that highlights aspects of father involvement that promote children's early language and cognitive development, including supportiveness, responsiveness, language use with children, and participation in learning activities. We show that associations between father involvement and children's development are as strong as those seen for mothers, that father involvement in infancy and early childhood is stable over time, and that it predicts children's language and academic skills years later. We refer to both direct and indirect mechanisms of influence and end with broader implications.