



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Administration for Children and Families  
Office of Family Assistance

National  
Responsible  
Fatherhood Clearinghouse



## NRFC Webinar Series

# *Strengthening Literacy and Father-Child Relationships through Reading*

## Transcript

**July 15, 2015**

**Moderator:**

- Nigel Vann, National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse (NRFC)

**Opening Remarks:**

- Lisa Washington-Thomas, Chief, Self-Sufficiency Branch, Office of Family Assistance, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

**Presenters:**

- Allison Hyra, Fellow, ICF International, Fairfax, VA
- Glen Palm, Professor Emeritus, Child & Family Studies, St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud, MN
- J. Michael Hall, President and Founder, Strong Fathers-Strong Families, Fort Worth, TX

**Operator:** Good day, and welcome to the NRFC “Strengthening Literacy and Father-Child Relationships through Reading” webinar. Please note that you may need to press F5 to refresh the seminar if you are unable to view the slides. Today’s call is being recorded. At this time I would like to turn the conference over to Nigel Vann. Please go ahead.

**Nigel Vann:** Thank you very much, and welcome, everybody. I apologize for the slight delay today. We actually have one of our presenters who is going to be speaking through his computer, which took a little while to get things set up. We’re here to talk about the benefits when dads read with their kids from a young age, and we’re going to talk about the benefits, not just for the kids, but for the dads, too, and we’ll be looking at ways that, in your work with fathers, you can talk about this with them.

Just a quick reminder of how you ask a question, particularly if you’re joining us for the first time. You’ll see on the right-hand side of your screen, there’s a Q-and-A box, so you can put any question in there for the presenters, and we’ll get to as many of those as we can at the end of the webinar. Questions that we don’t have time for, we will provide written responses on the website later. Next to that, there’s a link for some Web links of places you can go to see more information, and then there’s a helpful resources box where you can download a presenter bio, and also some helpful resources. In the other box, on the left-hand side of your screen, is a chat box that you can just use to chat among yourselves as you wish. We’ll go to the next slide.

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This is just an overview slide of the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse. If you've joined us before, you're familiar with this. I won't spend much time, but you can always see what we're doing on the Clearinghouse by going to [fatherhood.gov](http://fatherhood.gov). You can see any of the previous webinars, and you'll see the materials from this webinar there as well at [fatherhood.gov/webinars](http://fatherhood.gov/webinars). We always encourage you to email us with any questions or suggestions, particularly for future webinar topics. I'm at [info@fatherhood.gov](mailto:info@fatherhood.gov), and encourage fathers to call our national call center, and we have mediators and trained counselors on there who can provide information for local programs. You can also interact with us via Facebook and Twitter.

At the bottom of the screen, you see the names of our three leaders: Lisa Washington-Thomas at the Office of Family Assistance; Kenneth Braswell, who is the Director of the Clearinghouse; and Patrick Patterson, who is our Project Manager. So now I'm just going to turn to Lisa Washington-Thomas to say a few words of introduction and set the stage for us. Lisa?

Lisa Washington-Thomas: Thanks, Nigel. Again, I'm Lisa Washington-Thomas. I'm the Branch Chief of the Self-Sufficiency Branch in the Office of Family Assistance, and I want to thank Nigel for putting this together, and I also want to thank you for joining us today at today's webinar. We're going to talk about ways to encourage fathers to read to their children, and enhance outcomes for two generations. This might sound hokey, but the reason why this is so important to me is because it truly breaks my heart to know that our children's reading levels, at the third grade, decide how many prisons that they build. I think the children have so much future, and one way for us to preempt that is to strengthen their literacy and their reading before the third grade so that city officials and planning officials aren't using our children to decide how many jails that they are going to build.

Children who read well by the third grade are more likely than their peers to experience academic success and economic stability as adults. They're more likely to have parents who read to them. However, some fathers may not be aware of the benefits of reading to their children. If their own fathers did not read to them, they might not realize how much fun it can be for dads and their young kids to snuggle together with a book. Some dads don't read very well, or are not confident in their own reading ability, and they may feel uncomfortable talking about this. If we engage them in conversations about their own reading and writing abilities, we may also be able to find ways to help them improve their own literacy, which in turn, can help them improve their own employment skills and improve their children's literacy.

During this webinar you will see a couple of poll questions to get an idea about what you do in your programs. Please take a moment to respond to those questions, as it can help our presenters frame their comments to fit your experiences. Also, at the end of this webinar, we'll be asking you again for your ideas on topics that you would like us to cover in the coming year. Please provide us your input today, and always feel free to send ideas and questions to the Clearinghouse team at [info@fatherhood.gov](mailto:info@fatherhood.gov). Again, that's [info@fatherhood.gov](mailto:info@fatherhood.gov). Thanks very much, and thank you again for participating, and I'll turn this back over to you, Nigel.

Nigel Vann: Thank you very much, Lisa. It's a very interesting topic, for me in particular. It brings back memories of reading to my son when he was little—he's now 30. And one of the things I've often said when I've been to fatherhood programs is almost to challenge you. If you're a fatherhood program, have you got kids there, or are you talking about kids? If you go to a program for mothers, you generally see kids around, but you can go to a lot of fatherhood programs and you don't always see kids. These kind of activities that we're going to talk about today are ways that you can really try and change that. I think you become a stronger fatherhood program if you can have kids there, and if you can just talk to dads about ways they can read to their kids, or even just have them practice reading books, even when the kids aren't there.

On the screen here, these are the basic goals that we're going to be getting at today. The people who are going to help us meet these goals, you can see their names on the screen now. First of all, I'll be turning to Allison Hyra, who is a colleague of mine at ICF International and here at the National Responsible Fathers Clearinghouse. I'm going to

briefly introduce each person now so that we don't go over the bios again later, but you can also download the full bios in that box on the left.

Allison has been with ICF for about two years now, and she's been working on research to do with children, adolescents, marriage, family, fatherhood and various community projects. She's written about child support, paternity, non-custodial parent, toxic stress and father-child literacy for more than a decade now. The title of this webinar we actually stole from an article that Allison wrote a couple of years ago with Dr. Stacy Bouchet, so thank you for that, Allison.

Our second presenter, who is the gentleman who's joining us from Canada today, and he's speaking through his computer, and we really appreciate Glen taking the time. He's on vacation in Banff National Park at the moment up in Canada, and having a wonderful time. He's been involved in fatherhood work since the 1980s. He's held leadership positions with the Minnesota Council on Family Relations and the National Council on Family Relations. He used to be a board member of the National Practitioners Network from Fathers and Families back in the day, and has been heavily involved with the Minnesota Fathers and Families Leadership Network. He has written very extensively about fatherhood and parent education, and he recently had an article on fathers and early literacy that you'll see in the Resources Guide that you can download in that left-hand box.

Our final presenter is J. Michael Hall from Strong Fathers-Strong Families, Ft. Worth, Texas. I think this is the third time Mike has joined us for a webinar. He has in previous lifetimes been a special ed. teacher, a teacher of the gifted and talented, [and] a principal at intermediate and middle schools. Now, as the founder of Strong Fathers-Strong Families, he has made presentations to more than 160,000 fathers at local schools and Head Start programs, and you're going to hear a lot from him about how he does that. He has written a number of articles himself, he's considered one of the experts in the country on work with fathers in schools and Head Start programs, and was honored as a White House Champion of Change in 2012.

We have a great crew of presenters here for you. Before we move to Allison's presentation, as Lisa mentioned, we're going to ask you a quick poll question. This is something new that we're trying that will help us learn a little bit more about what you're currently doing, and help the presenters to frame their remarks a little bit, so if you could just take a quick look at the question on the screen: "Does your fatherhood program have services to help fathers who need assistance to improve their own reading and/or writing skills?" Just tell us one of those responses -- click it in there now. We'll just give you a minute to respond to that.

It looks like a majority of responses—the second one—the majority of you are referring out to an agency of men who need this assistance. There's a few people with the in-house resources, and a few people around planning it. We thank you for that, and with that, let me turn to Allison, again who is responsible for the name of this webinar, and Allison, take it away.

Allison Hyra: Thanks, Nigel. Good afternoon, everyone. I'm excited to talk with you today about something that I love to do, which is read. I just want to set the stage, so why are we talking about fathers and father-child literacy time? We know the quality of father involvement is more important for child well-being than the quantity of their time. Additionally, reading is a necessary skill for self-sufficiency, for parents and for children, and if you, as a fatherhood program, can increase father-child reading time, you are likely to improve father-child relationships, both fathers' and children's literacy, and increase the impact that father involvement has on children.

Additionally, a two-generation approach to providing human services has recently become popular, and evidence suggests that it may amplify your program's results. By building father-child reading time into your programs, this may be one way that you can begin to become more two-generation focused.

Reading skills are important for both children and parents. Educators have a saying: “Before third grade, children learn to read, but by third grade, children read to learn.” So, for example, they’re given science textbooks, and they need to be able to understand and comprehend the information included in that textbook. In fact, reading on grade level, which is what we call it when you’re reading at the appropriate skill level for your grade, is so important that it’s a significant driver of success at school, high school completion, and even future economic stability.

Additionally, we know from research that father involvement in literacy activities is associated with on-grade-level reading for kids. Finally, we know that men with better literacy skills earn more on average. Many dads may be embarrassed or unwilling to participate in an adult literacy program, but reading with [their] child may provide fathers an opportunity to practice and build his own reading skills.

But how prevalent are reading challenges? Well, unfortunately, only about a third of kids are reading at grade level in the fourth grade, and children of color are disproportionately less likely to be at grade level compared to their white counterparts. Exposure to books varies by household socioeconomic status [(SES)]. The average kid in a middle-class house owns 54 books, but the average kid in a low-income household has just two. Participating in one-on-one reading sessions also varies by SES. By age 6, the average low-income kid has been read to for about a hundred hours, while the average middle-income kid has received about a thousand hours, to a tenfold increase. Finally, these challenges do continue into adulthood. About two in five American adults have a basic or lower reading level.

How does father-child reading benefit children, particularly young children who aren’t able to read yet? Why should they be read to? Well, reading helps children understand the sounds of spoken language. It supports father-child attachment, and books introduce children to new ideas and concepts. Think about reading fairy tales, a book set in history, books about other cultures or other ways of life.

We also use language differently when we write. Reading written sentences out loud exposes children to proper sentence structure. When children enjoy reading with their fathers, they learn to associate reading as fun and enjoyment. Finally, if fathers and children cuddle during reading time, kids learn to find comfort and pleasure in reading.

If reading is so important and wonderful, why aren’t so many dads already doing it? There are a lot of reasons. Dads may be working long hours, or hours that overlap with their opportunities to read. They may have little free time, be tired at the end of the day, or have changing work schedules that make consistent reading difficult. Dads may be stressed out from work, family or money problems, and just not feel like reading to their kids.

Many dads live apart from their children and can’t work reading in as easy as folks who share a home with their kids. Some fathers may be uncomfortable reading out loud, or feel that they’re not good readers. Others may not have experience being read to by their parents, and just don’t see reading as something that parents do with kids. Finally, some fathers may be unaware of the benefits of reading to their children. This doesn’t mean they don’t think reading is important, but rather that dads may think that babies are too young to be read to, and that older kids who can read don’t need to be read to, and may also see other activities, such as doing a workbook or watching PBS as more likely to affect a child’s reading skills.

So what can you, as a fatherhood program, do to increase father-child reading? One way would be to form a partnership, or connect with organizations that specialize on focusing on building child literacy through parents. Many of these programs target parents without regard to gender, which typically means that moms participate at a higher rate, but some are father-specific. The organization Reach Out and Read uses pediatric well visits to provide parents with tips and education about the importance of reading, and sends families home with books to add to their library. HIPPIY’s home visitation program brings books and literacy activities into the home, and provides support and training for parents around reading and learning. Early Head Start provides direct child care and parent support for

families with children age zero to 3, in both home and center-based settings. Each of these first three programs have strong evaluations that actually demonstrate their effectiveness toward child literacy gains.

In addition to those programs, Fathers Reading Every Day, which we'll hear more about later, provides fathers with reading tips, suggested reading lists, and a reading log to document father-child reading activities. And both the Read to Me Daddy, and Hope House Father to Child Reading Program, record incarcerated fathers reading a book, either audio or visually, and then send the book and the recording to their child.

Beyond referring to or connecting with a formal literacy program, however, your program can start to infuse discussions or activities designed to increase father-child reading into your own work. You can help fathers to get comfortable with books. Bring children's books to the classroom, and ask folks that feel comfortable to read those books to the group. We can remind dads that children benefit from reading at any age, from birth through school age. Even when kids can read, fathers can help them read text beyond their own literacy level, or as a way to share a story and experience, like reading Harry Potter together.

To improve access to books, think about setting up a lending library inside your organization, or take a group trip to the library. A group trip can help fathers know where the library is, where various types of books are, how to interact with librarians, get a library card, and just generally get comfortable with an unfamiliar space. Non-resident or incarcerated fathers can participate in distance reading by recording themselves reading a story, or having a copy of a book and have their child follow along over the phone. Additionally, at the end of this presentation, and in the bottom left-hand corner, we have a list of resources that can help you infuse father-child reading focus into your own work.

I also wanted to offer some direct reading suggestions for all of you who are a parent, or for you to pass along to the parents that you work with. Although we've been talking about father-child literacy, people don't have to pick a time, a set chair and a book to engage in early reading activities. Dads can infuse literacy support in their child's daily lives. When they're out and about, in stores or on the street, dads can point out letters on signs, books, menus, etc. They can pick up picture books that don't even have any words, and narrate what's going on on each page. Dads can tell true or made-up stories to their children. They can sing songs, read nursery rhymes, talk in rhymes or use alliterations, like "My baby boy wears blue boots."

Dads and children should visit the library. In addition to looking at books, many libraries have kid play places, or programs when musical performers visit, or there's a story time read to kids by a librarian, or some places even have a Read to a Dog activity, where children who may be a little nervous about their own reading skills, rather than performing in front of an adult, actually sit down and read to a volunteer dog.

Additionally, some folks don't really know what to do while they're actually reading to kids. While any reading is good, children really benefit from activities that help them comprehend the information in a book. Dads should actually stop the story and ask questions: "Look at her face in that picture. Does she look sad or happy that the kittens lost their mittens? The dogs see a red light. Will they stop driving their cars? Why do you think that bunny is saying goodnight to everything in his room? How do you avoid going to bed each night?"

Finally, I want to close with my most important point. Dads, whether they're reading with their kids or by themselves, should read what makes them happy. There is no bad reading, whether that's a romance book, nonfiction, a sports magazine, a comic book, short stories or religious text. As an example, my 7-year-old son and my husband got into reading joke books. These books are great because you really engage with the other person sitting with you. They tend to be relatively short, or you can stop in various spots, and they help children not only learn words but teach fluency. They have to learn how to pause and use correct inflections so that they're telling the story correctly, rather than robotically pounding out each word.

As a warning, nothing gets a young boy more excited than slightly crass potty humor, so I'm going to leave you with their favorite joke to date: "What's the last thing that goes through a bug's mind when he hits a car's windshield? His bottom." That's a bad joke, I know, but when those two read that book together, they were laughing and rolling on the ground, and bonding and practicing reading, and that's really what this discussion is all about. At this time, I would like to turn it back to Nigel.

Nigel Vann: Thank you very much, Allison. You certainly set the stage for Glen and Mike, who are going to expand on a lot of these ideas, and I also want to say, Allison, at this time at the end, I would like to tell the knock-knock joke that you shared with us a while ago as well, but we'll come back to that. You'll see on your screen at the moment that there's a couple of resources that Allison has listed. You'll find those, and the other resources in that resources list in the box on the left.

Let me just take a minute and tell you what we've got in the Web link box. Allison mentioned the Fathers Reading Every Day program, FRED, which is a family literacy program from Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service. They have some great tips on there for ways you can put together activities with dads. There's a list of suggested books. There's also the Web links, so you can just click that during this webinar, or you can download the full resource list, and we've got the links in there as well. The Dad's Playbook comes from the National Institute for Literacy, and they've got a number of games that you can play with kids, and stories from dads about the way they read to their kids. It's just interesting to read that and see how we all do these things differently. There's a Department of Education site that has some really good resources as well. That was just a few samples that we pulled from the resources list to put in the Web links box for you today. And you'll also see [fatherhood.gov](http://fatherhood.gov) and [strongfathers.com](http://strongfathers.com), which is Michael's page.

Let me now turn to Glen Palm, coming to us from Banff National Park in Canada. Glen?

Glen Palm: Good morning or afternoon, whatever it is for you. I'm pleased to be able to share some of the lessons that I have learned about dads and early literacy. The topic of fathers and early literacy is a passion of mine that really comes from my early beginnings as a early childhood teacher. I especially liked reading to toddlers who would back into your lap when they were ready to have a story read to them. I also enjoy reading with my own three children who are also grown, and we continue to share books that we are reading together.

I also worked as a local program evaluator for Evenstar Programs for about 20 years, and certainly learned a lot about two-generation programs and family literacy from being engaged in that particular activity. Then a few years ago, I was involved in starting a program called Dad and Kids Book Club, and I've also worked with fathers in prison for about 20 years, and at the end of each class, we do some work recording books. Initially, that was audio books, and we jumped from audio tapes into videotape very quickly because the medium changed, and it was lot easier to do videotape than it was audio tape.

I want to start with this picture, and when I look at the picture, it expresses some of the things that Allison was just talking about, a dad and a child who are just enjoying a book together, a funny story together, and you see and get the feel of both how enjoyable it is and the closeness, the emotional closeness of the dad and child. In my work with dads over the years, one of the things that's clear is that dads want to be close to their kids, so reading is one of the ways that dads can become close to their kids.

I think that also, dads are an underutilized resource for addressing some of our concerns about the achievement gap that we often hear about. Nobody ever talks about dads as a potential solution, so I think dads, in connection to early literacy, [have] some real profound impacts on what we can do with the achievement gap.

Ways that dads promote literacy -- we know from years of research, primarily about mothers, how parents promote early literacy skills. This picture illustrates, in some ways, a very stereotypic picture of a dad reading the newspaper

as an activity that most young children would really like to interrupt. However, in this picture, the son looks on and there's a clear message that comes across, and that is that reading is important, and secondly, that reading is often a way that dads have connected to the outside world, and sort of modeled that for their children.

In addition to modeling reading as important, dads support early literacy by reading to their children, beginning in infancy and continuing into the school-age years, and even beyond that sometimes. Dads promote language development and early literacy through their everyday conversations at mealtimes, while walking to the park or riding in the car. These are times to share stories, information about the world, values and feelings that add to a young child's vocabulary.

Fathers are often seen also as setting high expectations for children, and I think that they play that role, and that can be successful, especially when they are able to support that at a level that's really appropriate for children. Lastly, dads may also bring materials into the home. I was fortunate when my children were young to be able to have a library that was about four blocks from my house. What I learned quickly was that I liked to go there on a regular basis to return some of the books that we had read over and over again, and I was ready for some new books.

The heading to this slide really summarizes the main points that I wanted to make, that the preschool years are really a critical time for fathers to be reading to their children. The chart summarizes data from three different sources that I took a look at. They were surveys of fathers reading to their kids at different ages. The Early Longitudinal Study was from children around 9 months old, and reported the least amount of daily reading, so that's the column that's on your far left. Eight percent of dads read to their infants. When we looked at dads during the preschool years, it went up to 45 percent, and then when we went to dads at age 5 to 12, it went down to 24 percent. That, to me, was sort of a clear indication. I had looked at a number of sources about the percentage of dads who read to their children on a daily basis. I wanted to disaggregate the information a little bit, so that's what the chart is attempting to do.

The next page is really looking at the research on dads and reading, and it's been pretty sparse. The few descriptions that we have sort of fits with other research that we know about father involvement. Fathers who are more involved in sharing care of their children would also be more likely to include reading to their children as part of this involvement. Fathers are more likely to be involved in reading when mothers are working and when mother-father relationships are positive. The third point [shows] that fathers who live with their children read to their children five times more frequently than fathers who are not living with their children, which makes common sense. If dads are not living with their children, the opportunities to read are just going to be much more limited. The last point is that fathers with more education are more likely to value reading, are more comfortable reading out loud to their children and, thus, enjoy reading to their children on a regular basis and are more likely to do that more often.

There are multiple benefits of fathers reading to their children that have been identified in the research literature. This slide really summarizes some of the possible benefits of fathers reading to their children. Most of the photos that depict men reading to young children show the close physical contact that supports an emotional bond, and can be a relaxing, quiet time activity for both dads and for kids, just like the picture in the slide here.

Reading books to children is a way to also pass on important values. For example, the love and respect of nature in a book like "Owl Moon," which is a classic, where a dad brings his young daughter out into the woods at night to see if they can spot an owl. The long-term impact of fathers reading to their young children and supporting early literacy is that children become better readers and become more successful in school.

What do fathers model reading? One of the things I took a look at while I was doing research was, what is it that fathers read to their children? This slide summarizes and describes the types of reading materials fathers reported reading in Robert Ortiz's study of fathers and literacy. The list illustrates reading for information as a primary focus, not necessarily reading for pleasure. You'll notice there are no novels in this list. I decided to create a parallel list of

how fathers today might be getting the same information through their smart phones, tablets or computers. I just thought it was an interesting parallel, and put it down so that we could think about what this change means.

This change in how we read may also change interactions between fathers and children, and what children see modeled. I remember during the early days, I did a program on Saturday morning for dads and young children, and the first time that a dad actually came to the program with a cell phone in his holster, and how that really changed what was going on at the program. Before that, dads had oftentimes said that this was really wonderful to come to a program on Saturday morning where they didn't have to do chores at home, and they didn't have to worry about the telephone or any interruptions; they could just be with their kids. So it's just interesting to think about how technology maybe changes our connection of parents and children together.

One question that often comes up when talking about father involvement is how moms and dads are different, and how gender differences interact with individual differences. I'm not sure if you can read this cartoon, but I'll read it to you:

"...and they lived happily ever after. The end."

The little girl says, "Whenever Daddy reads that fairy tale to me, he says that they lived happily ever after until she gets fed up with having to always pick up after him, as well as the crude body noises that he makes."

"Your father says that?"

"Yeah, and he even makes sound effects to go along with it."

So fathers oftentimes read to their children in different ways.

The summary here comes from an Australian researcher that lists some of the differences that dads may have less time than moms, but are more involved in different ways. He also notes that moms tended to take more responsibility for early literacy development, even to the extent of directing how dads did their reading.

The next slide, I wanted to just present the Dads and Kids Book Club format to use so you would get a sense of what we were doing. I was working with three other early childhood and parent educators in our community in St. Cloud, Minnesota, and we wanted to create an opportunity for dads to really learn a little bit more about reading with their children. We created something called Dads and Kids Book Club, and we have the goals down there. The goals are similar to what we've talked about so far, but the format was a six-week format. It was an hour and a half, and we did some in the evening, and we did some on Saturday mornings, depending on what seemed to work best for dads. We tried both of those timeframes.

We did a warm-in time, which was really a scavenger hunt, and part of that was to get dads comfortable with the environment we were in. Oftentimes, men are not familiar with spending a lot of time in early childhood settings, and this was in an early childhood classroom. We wanted them to be able to go around with their child and find things around the room, and sort of keep them engaged right away and keep them busy.

We did a circle time with children, where we would have the early childhood teacher actually read the book to the dads and the kids, and we would then do a song somehow related to the book afterwards.

Then we followed up with some dads' and kids' activities. We always had a dramatic play, we had cooking, we had crafts, we had art, and we had literacy activities. At the very end we spent 15 to 20 minutes in discussion with dads, and during that time, we actually shared a tip sheet with them. The tip sheet went according to the book that we had

for the week. Each week we had a different book that we selected. All of the dads and kids who came got a copy of the book to keep.

The discussion was around the book, and we had a tip sheet that really talked about tips for helping the child enjoy the story, tips for helping the child understand the story, and tips for talking about vocabulary that was presented in the story.

The next page is just a summary. I wanted to touch upon other lessons from practice literature. When recruiting dads, you have to feel confident that dads want to participate, and are actually waiting for an invitation. When you invite them, they come. Dads may feel unsure of what is most important to do, so provide a number of ways, in addition to just reading, to support early literacy development. There's more than reading, although reading is certainly a primary activity.

If possible, communicate with dads, or use a connection to early childhood teachers and mothers to make those initial contacts. I know that we had to do some of that when we worked with Head Start where we didn't have specific connections to dads to work through the teachers. Then, introduce books that may feel familiar to dads, and have dads as main characters. In the next slide, I'll talk briefly about a book called "Night Driving." Also, use hands-on activities as part of literacy. Recently, we had an activity where we were working with immigrant dads in our community. We asked them to come in and share with their child what their first day of school was like by making a book about their first day at school.

"Night Driving" is one of the books that we use in the Dads and Kids Book Club. What I liked so much about the book was that it was really a very warm story about a dad and his son driving all night together. I've used it a number of times as well for activities that I've done with dads. It also is an interesting book in that it's a book that you're reading, but it talks about activities to do in a car that also support early literacy, whether it's telling stories, which they did in the car, singing along with the radio, playing an alphabet game, reading signs as they went along. It was a wonderful way to say to dads that there are things you can also do while you're in the car that promote literacy.

Then, just a summary of lessons that I gleaned from both my own experience, and from the literature. One is to just target reading activities during the early childhood years. It can be early childhood [that] can go from zero to 5, or here, I put 2 to 6 years. It's a great time to really engage dads, because that's a time when kids are most likely to also want to be engaged. Communicate directly with dads when you go to recruit them. Use books that are familiar with fathers and really reflect things that may be of interest to them. In one of the resources that is included at the very last slide, we created a Reading with Dads book list, which is picture books that a number of us, librarians, early childhood teachers [and] fatherhood practitioners put together. We had a lot of fun reading through a number of books, and deciding which ones we wanted to put on our list. We have a nice list of books to use for that purpose.

Using hands-on activities is also something that I think is important with dads. Like I said, in the Dads and Kids Book Club, we did that in a number of ways. We always had dramatic play activities—we have crafts such as making paddle boats together. Those were things that also brought dads and kids together in a great way. Providing children's books to keep and share at home is also an important thing to do. In our community, we have the Imagination Library, which is a Dolly Parton program. There's 10,000 kids under age 5 in our community who get books every month from that source, books that they can keep, and they're excellent books.

Lastly, and I think this is the really important point, is modeling interactive reading strategies for dads. In our experience with Dads and Kids Book Club, one of the things that seemed to be most important was having an early childhood teacher who was a man actually read to children and model some of the ways of engaging children in the story.

The last slide brings us back to the very beginning, and it's the dad reading to his two kids, and the kid says, "Read us another story."

Dad says, "My eyes are tired."

"You can close them."

He says, "I can't read with my eyes closed."

They say, "We don't care about the story. We're here for the cuddling." Sort of Allison's point earlier on, that reading is about not just reading, but also the relationship that goes on between dads and kids.

My final slide is really some information about the Dads and Kids Book Club. There's a manual that's there, and there's also lesson plans for about a dozen different books, lessons for what to do with parent-child activities or father-child activities, tips, and also the dad's discussion time. The Reading with Dad Booklist is the last resource that I put on here. And that's it.

Nigel Vann: Thank you very much, Glen. We remind everyone again that those resources [are] the same as the ones that Allison shared on the resources list that you can download in the left-hand box. I just want to say that, I don't know about the rest of you, but Glen's ending there with that little cartoon, it gave me this sort of warm fuzzy feeling that you get from reading with your kids, the same way that Allison's ending did with her little jokes. I think that's what it's all about. This is a great time for dads to spend with their kids, although, as Allison has pointed out, a lot of dads don't realize that. That's where fatherhood programs can really bring a gift to these families where dads aren't necessarily reading to kids as much.

Let me just quickly mention one program that I had the privilege of attending a few years ago. This was in Vermont, and they brought in books along the lines of Glen's book club, and asked the guys to each choose a book. Then everybody had to read it. Some guys were not comfortable doing that, but they weren't forced to do it. Everybody who wanted to participate in the staff model [were] doing that, but there were no kids there. It was just dads having fun with the books.

That "Night Driving" book that Glen mentioned, I did go and look at the reviews of that. One of the things they mentioned in there was that it's actually two books. It's the text and the pictures.

I think, what a lot of dads can do with these books, you don't have to tell the story that's necessarily in the book. You can sometimes just read from those pictures, and I know Mike's going to expand on those kind of thoughts.

Before we do that, we're just going to do one more quick poll. You'll see it up on your screen now, so if you could just respond to this for us briefly. "Do you work with fathers to encourage them to read with their young children on a regular basis?"

[Pause]

That's great to see these responses coming in, because it looks like the majority of you are doing this, either in a structured way or unstructured way. Hopefully you are going to be able to pick up some ideas today to add to what you're already doing.

With that, we'll close the poll. Thank you very much, and now we get to hear from Michael. He's going to tell us about the very interactive work that he does with dads around reading. Mike?

J. Michael Hall: All right, can you hear me?

Nigel Vann: We've got ya.

J. Michael Hall: All right, I just want to make sure. We're up here in the mountains, and it's a good spot to be in, but it's not great for technology.

Nigel Vann: It's great that he and Glen have taken time out from their vacation, so thanks, Mike.

J. Michael Hall: Yeah, we went about 12 hours north of where we are in Texas, and I think that's probably what Glen -- you've got to go that far north. It's got to be the 10 to 12 hours, but you've got to go farther.

I appreciate everything that's been said, and it really ties into what we're going to finish up with here, on the programs that we do. I want to make sure, if I can keep the slides going -- I'm looking for my button here, that way, you don't have to look at my face all the time. If we can go to the next slide.

We have worked with a lot of dads, and so the things we are going to talk about today are based on our experience from that. There are a lot of great programs out there, and the program that we built has been based on a lot of time and a lot of miles, some failures and a lot of successes. We try to repeat the successes, and try not to repeat the failures, but we've definitely had those. What we're going to talk about today is what we found works, and works not only over time, but works in all kinds of environments. The program we're going to talk about today works in inner-city schools and Head Start. It works in suburban schools and Head Start. It's worked on reservations. It's worked with all types of populations.

A lot of the work we do is in public schools, which are typically Title I, which are low-income schools and in the Head Start program. A lot of times you'll hear that "our dads don't do this" or "our dads don't have this going." These are the dads that a lot of you are targeting in your programs and, just like Glen said, if you invite them, they'll show up. We either personally facilitate, or we train organizations to facilitate a set of programs which are typically academic, and reading is one of those programs.

Our programs are Bring Your Dad to School Day, or Bring Your Dad to Head Start Day, where the dads actually go in the class a good part of the morning where they actually see how kids are learning in those classrooms, whether it be a school or Head Start. We do Dad and Kids Science Night, Dad and Kids Math Night, Dad and Kids Reading Night, or Reading Morning. The mornings are actually very successful programs as well, even though people would probably project that dads won't come because of work. We found that a lot of dads come out. We probably have better numbers in the morning than we do in the evening programs, even though we feel like our evening programs are very successful.

Three things that we do in our programs -- they've got these three qualities every time, the very grassroots -- if you notice, everything we're doing is with dads and kids. We have found that we can teach dads a lot more through the activities they do with the kids than we ever can with just having the dads by themselves. We know some programs don't always have that choice. We have a ten-week program for guys that are on probation for child support. That's a dad-only program, because they don't all have access to their kids. But when we go to the schools or Head Starts, we actually get the dads because of the kids, so they're available.

This is nose-to-nose with dads and kids, so it's very much grassroots. It's very much action-oriented, strength-based. We do not sit around and talk about where dads have, maybe, dropped the ball. We talk about what they can do, what their strengths are, and what they offer to their kids. Then, not only because we work with schools and Head Starts to help pay the bills, but we really are focused as Strong Father-Strong Family. We're focused on child outcomes. We see men make great changes, but we're focusing on the dad, for them to do things that impact kids.

We don't do job services. We don't do addiction services. We have had dads more likely to seek those out because of the work we do with them and their kids, but we're really focused on what dads can do with those kids. If we can go to the next slide.

The three keys that we find in every program, and it really works with dads -- no matter what program we're doing, whether we're doing a weekend retreat, whether we're doing a Math Night, Reading Night or Science Night, everything we do is interactive. It's dads and kids interacting with each other, which is where our teaching comes from. It's also interactive between dad and kids and other dads and kids. Because we really facilitate the event and make it happen, but they are learning -- and not that we don't teach, we teach during that -- but they're learning a lot from the dads around them as well. If you've got a guy that's not doing much [or] not real sure what to do, instead of having some person in the program tell him -- when he watches the reaction that another dad gets because of what he does, he's way more likely to emulate that, as opposed to maybe do what we're talking about.

It's also very relational, just the dads relating to their kids. That snuggle time -- we'll show you some pictures in a minute -- we have guys and kids walk into the room, just kind of not very connected at the time. But, by the time we're done, you can't peel them off of each other. That's a wonderful part of the end of the program.

The other thing that's relevant -- dads want their kids to be successful. Most parents know they want their kids to read. Some of the dads that have struggled with reading, they know the challenges that's presented to them. We want to make sure it's relevant, and the dads see that it's relevant as well. We can go to the next slide.

This is not my picture, this is a book. This is one of the books that we use. We use three to four books in each program, and these programs are either for zero to 3- year-olds in early Head Start, 3- to 5-year-olds in the Head Start, and then usually pre-K to grade three. We have fourth and fifth graders participate in these programs, but they're really built for that younger set. The books that we use -- this is "Head to Toe" with Eric Carle -- one of the components is, it's got to be an activity book. They've got to be able to do something with it. And then the other piece, it's got to be a book that we've got available in English and Spanish. All of our programs that we do, not just in Texas, but really around the country, have to at least be available in English and Spanish. Some of these titles we know are available in Vietnamese and a couple of other ones we're looking for, because of some of the schools we work with.

This book is what we would call a warm-up book, because you get the dads and the kids to act like first, a penguin, then a giraffe, and you kind of work up to this monkey. When you first get to monkey, there's a few dads who are not really down with acting like a monkey. But when they see the other dads doing it, and see the reaction the kids get, by the time you get to acting like a donkey, and then acting like a gorilla, 99 percent of your dads realize that all these other guys are down with it. They're cool, they look and smell like me, so if they can do it, I can do it. And what we do is read the books to the dads and kids, and we model masculine reading and show them how you can use these books to have fun with your kid. If we go to the next slide --

The "Head to Toe" book absolutely riles the whole room up. It actually brings up the heart rate, brings up the noise level, brings up everything, all kinds of crazy stuff going on. Then we go to this book, which is a very sweet book, "Guess How Much I Love You," but it's full of lots of activities. The kid stands up in the book, the baby hare raises his hands and says, "I love you as high as I can reach." We have the kids stand up in front of their dads and say "I love you this much." Then we have the dad stand up and do it. You've got to be pretty heartless not to get a little bit of a tear in your eye when you see that happening in a school or Head Start.

As we run through a lot of these crazy activities with dads and kids, the book finally winds down to where the dad is putting the kid into bed, and give him a goodnight kiss, which is something we promote, because not all the dads know that's something they should do. By the end of it, we're pretty calm, and we show the dads and give them permission with the first book to be really interactive and crazy even. We also show them [that] you can use the

book also to bring down the level, to do that relaxation that Glen talked about earlier, and that it's okay to be interactive and to look for those books too, that can lower the level, the heart rate and the breathing level. Let's go to the next one.

If we can go to the next slide, there we go. "Going on a Bear Hunt" is another one. It's available in English and Spanish. The Spanish book is very hard to find. We're actually looking at possibly publishing it ourselves if we can get the license. Not only because we think it's a great book but as you can tell with the dad on it, it's a great book. A lot of programs use it. A lot of early childhood programs and kindergarten programs use the story or the song, so the kids are familiar with it, and it's a great way for us to do things. The other thing that's going on with this book is it's got predictive text, it's got rhyming text, and it's got [no audio] not only unpredicted text, so the kids know what's coming. They're repeating it, and that's one of the ways we learn language.

Most dads love and hate "Green Eggs and Ham," because it's a fun book to read, but by the 27th time, you're kind of [unintelligible] but it helps with words. "Bear Hunt" does the same thing. We also read this book in English and Spanish [unintelligible] even if we don't have a Spanish-speaking population with us in the room at that time, which is very rare for us, but if that happens to work. We still read it in English and Spanish to show our English-speaking dads how much Spanish they just learned from the repetitive text and rhyming text. Because it goes over and over and over again, they begin to learn these phrases.

Our last book that we want to show you in the next slide is "Octopus Hug." "Octopus" is a great book. It's a lot like "Night Driving" in the fact that it's almost like a textbook for dads. It's a very sweet story. Dad's at home with the kids while mom goes to dinner. This book gives us an opportunity to tell dads that they do not babysit their own children; they father their children when mom's not there. They don't babysit, unless, of course, they're getting paid. This dad is home with the kids, who are not real happy with each other, as kids with brothers and sisters do. He goes through about seven or eight activities in this book, and we emulate these activities. The dads get to wrestle with the kids. And an octopus hug is being hugged with eight arms -- it's one, two -- so you've got all this hugging going on, these games that dads can play without any props, without any money to spend. They leave not only really having a good time, and showing that dads have permission to act this way, but also it's a really great resource. My own son who is actually 19, I'm here in Colorado with him, [unintelligible] this book that we've used for years. I think if we did it now, it'd be a little weird, since he's 19, but it was a great [no audio].

Nigel Vann: Sounds like we may have lost Mike. I know he had a --

J. Michael Hall: I'm right here. Can you hear me?

[Nigel Vann]: No, you faded out for a minute, Mike.

J. Michael Hall: Okay, I don't know. Maybe my headphone faded away or something. Let's go to the next slide. I'm glad you guys got a break from that.

Like we talked about, we use these books to model masculine reading, and just like you've heard already, a lot of these guys lack a good example. They may have only seen how women read, which is very different than dads like to read, and even like kids want them to read. My wife was an elementary teacher [and] now teaches middle school. She read to our boys, and I read to our boys, and there were certain books they'd rather me read than mom because of the way I read it. I learned a lot from them, and what they asked of me when we read books.

Dads need permission to read like they really desire, and when we kind of model this masculine reading, I've had dads say, how do I learn to read like that? I say, do you make up stories to your kids? Yes. Do you make up the wrong words to songs? Well, of course, I'm a dad. Do you wrestle with your children? Yes. Do you ever make funny noises?

Yes. I say, well, you already know how to do it. Just put all those things together. They don't always know that they're able to do that.

Then also, if the dad is not literate, because we're modeling the reading, it's safe for them to participate. A lot of dads show up at this program expecting to have to read to their kids, and it's amazing how many dads that really struggle with reading still will come out. If you're really thinking that our dads won't show up because they're scared, we've just not seen that. They'll show up if they're invited, just like Glen said. One of the reasons we read the stories to the dads and kids is not only so they can interact with the stories, but to give that dad permission to tell stories if he can't read them.

Also, to give dads permission to read in Spanish if they do not read well in English, or even read in English at all. Because kids don't learn to read English and learn to read Spanish. They learn to read one time, so that's one thing we want them to know. Whatever your home language is, we want you reading in that language, because that's what you're comfortable with, it is part of the language your kids are learning, and it's a great way for those kids to learn how to read. Let's go to the next slide.

The quality of the reading materials, like we've said, everything we're reading is interactive and male-themed. There's a lot of sweet books out there, even sweet books with dads, but if they don't give you an activity to do, I think you lose a lot of dads. And this is, as much as people say, well, we want them to have this sweet moment, we want them to have to cuddle, believe me, if you get them active, they're going to have that. Again, we try to find books available in English and Spanish.

We also try to find books not too long, even when they're interactive. We want to model that. I tell the dads I'm not a fan personally, and I don't think most practitioners are fans of Golden Books. Golden Books are too long to read to most kids. I tell dads, they're longer than Russian novels. A lot of time they're propaganda for different movies and things. The other thing is, most teachers, particularly in early childhood, will tell you, a lot of those books that we've promoted to families aren't really good for building a sustaining literacy in kids. We try to show them the fact that these Dr. Seuss books are good. These books that are shorter have certain things, because we have rhyming text, predictive text. It's okay to have a sentence a page. It's okay to read more than one book a night, so you don't have to do that.

Then we can condition a lesson based on the age group that we have. Sometimes we have a kid that will get up and walk away from the dad, like a lot of small children do, and we just continue with the program. And almost every time, that kid finds their way back to Dad. That's one of the lessons we give them is, just because your kid gets out of your lap, don't stop reading. Keep reading, and most of the time, that kid will come back to your lap. You can't let them leave the room necessarily, but just keep reading, because they are listening. As we well know, they listen to a lot of things we don't think they're listening to sometimes. Let's go to the next slide.

We are focused on that relationship. That relationship is the impetus for reading. Dads want to spend time with their kids, kids want to spend time with their dads. One strengthens the other. The better the relationship, the more likely they are to read. The more they read, the stronger the relationship. The other thing is, by having a dad and kids together, they both have knowledge of the activities. The dads and kids both know how to read those same books, know how to interact, know how to do those games. That's one thing that keeps dads accountable, because what Glen talks about, and I've had programs that have had just the dads, a lot of them will take it home and do that, but if they kid's in the room when dad gets home, he doesn't have a choice. The kid's like, "No, Dad, remember we read that book?" or "We learned that game from that book," so it's another reason, another way to keep dads accountable. That's a lot of reasons we keep the kids involved as well. Let's go to the next slide.

The way we do our programs, because we work with schools and we work with Head Start, that's where the kids are. Our work at Strong Fathers is to impact outcomes for kids by working with dads. Public schools, that's where all the

kids are. Head Starts and pre-Ks, that's where the kids are. That's one of the reasons when we say we worked with 162,000 dads, it's because a lot of times, we'll get them at 100 to 200 dads a pop, particularly in elementary schools. Of course, what we found in our Head Start programs, whether it's one classroom or 10 classrooms in a site, about 65 percent of the kids will bring a father or father figure to any one of our programs. You are reaching a lot of dads.

We've also done these programs in libraries and community centers. We've also done these in churches, but mainly, in church preschools or Mother's Day Out programs. The funny part about doing that, because it's in a church, a lot of times we'll use Bible-based stories. One of my favorite things to do when we have a church group like that, is we read David and Goliath. We have children's books that retell the Bible story, and after we read the story, we tell the dads to go stand on one side of the room and act like giants. Then we pass out five tiny marshmallows to the kids, miniature marshmallows, and tell them: "These are the stones like David had, and go throw them at your giant." They just go pelt their dads with marshmallows. You just can't beat that. I don't know if the dads like it, but I like watching it.

Then we read a book about the story of the Good Samaritan, and we actually give each kid, usually a 3, 4, 5-year-old, we give them a roll of toilet paper and say: "Use this to bandage your dad." And we have had them use a whole roll of toilet paper on dad's head. We've had them wrap his whole body. We've had them lay it out on each limb, and it's just been a lot of fun. But you can use these same activities in a lot of different ways. Let's go to the next slide.

Resources we have – and we'll send these to you. You also have these as links. A lot of the research that you've heard today, and also some other research we have available is an article we wrote for the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory called "Opening Books to Fathers and Children," and we'll have that available as well to you on our email list. A couple [in the] PTA National Magazine "Our Children," we wrote articles for them, and then one of our blog posts, which ties in some of this information. We've also put some of this information up just today on our Facebook page, and if you go to [facebook.com/strongfathers](https://facebook.com/strongfathers) you can find these resources. Let's go to the next page.

This is my information. We'd love for you to get hold of us and let us know. We do charge money to come train people, we do charge money for curriculum, but phone calls and emails are absolutely free. We would love to help you any way we can. One of the ways we'd love to help you is provide you with some of these resources in a more in-depth manner, and we have a sign-up at [strongfathers.com/NRFC](https://strongfathers.com/NRFC), just a page about this webinar so I know where you're coming from and what we've talked about. If you sign up there and let us know what your area of working with fathers is -- we have several choices at that page -- we'll send you pertinent information, but we don't have time to spam you.

We do have some videos to share with you, some other resources that we've found. Some resources we produce, and you can opt out at any time, but if you like the resources, there's always going to be more, because we're putting more out as we either build them or find them. One of the things that we have available for some of you that would be pertinent really in the community or in early childhood programs, we have what we call an Early Childhood Activity Calendar, available in English and Spanish, and every week, there is a literacy activity in that calendar.

We also have what we call our Check-In Calendar for Kids, elementary through middle school, where the dad gets a question to ask your kid each day, instead of "What did you do at school today?" Because the universal answer for what did you do at school today is "nothing." According to most children in elementary schools and middle schools across our country, they don't do anything but stare at the wall all day if you ask them. Those are available to you. Again, it's up to you to sign up if you want at [strongfathers.com/NRFC](https://strongfathers.com/NRFC).

So I'll turn it back over to Nigel, and see if we can answer any questions for you.

Nigel Vann: Thank you very much, Mike. I love the questions that we've had coming in that concerned how you involve dads who haven't got as much education, or have lower literacy levels. I think Mike, the way he described a lot of those interactive activities, really answered a lot of those questions because you can make reading fun, you can look at pictures [and] you can tell stories.

One other idea I wanted just to share quickly, I've seen some programs that will have kids, unless it's maybe in an early childhood program, where the kids are reading the book at school. Then they'll show a movie based on that book and invite the dads in, maybe the moms too, and you all watch the movie, but everybody's been reading it, so they know the story and it just makes it another fun way of going through that.

We've got a few minutes of questions here. Let me begin with a question for Allison. Also, let me remind you, we've got the screen up here now. If you have any more questions, do type them in here. If we don't get to them all, we will post answers after the webinar. Allison, you talked about the fact that you should really encourage dads to read what they like, and read what they like with their kids. Somebody asked, do comic books count?

Allison Hyra: Yeah, I think that they do. I think that any time you are seeing the printed word -- And I think comic books can be really exciting, particularly for little boys, because there are action, sounds and movements, and the story line is more action-based than character-based. I know at least when our little guy was learning to read, some of those level readers, where they start very simplistic, tend to focus on a story that was maybe stereotypically feminine, and it was hard for us to find sort of those bridges. Now he's reading the choose-your-own-adventure books, and "Star Wars" books. I don't think there's anything wrong with sitting down and reading "A Guide to Programming Minecraft," or identifying the 42 characters in Skylanders. The point is spending time together, and really comprehending that these marks that we have on a page confers language and information to another person.

Nigel Vann: Okay. Somebody asked -- and let me ask you to respond to this, Glen -- "When we talk about literacy, what do we actually mean by that? Is that the same as knowing how to read, or is it different?"

Glen Palm: I think that when we think about literacy, it's bigger than just reading. It's really being able to communicate on all different kinds of levels. That's why stories are important. They certainly are a way of stretching vocabulary. When we talk about literacy, it tends to be, to me, a lot bigger than just reading. Reading is sort of the technical part of how we convey messages through the written word, but literacy also includes writing as well as being able to read. It's bigger than just reading.

Nigel Vann: Okay. Let me sort of pursue this, because again, we have had a few questions about, how do you work with dads who have got low education or reading comprehension levels? And this is more of a general question. Let me ask Mike to respond to this first, but then Allison and Glen, sort of chime in. This is not just talking about reading necessarily, but when you're working with dads in a group: If you're using a curriculum that's got pen and paper activities, or if you've got a handout, that you hand them out for people to read, or a PowerPoint that you're using, any recommendations or any sort of ways you've seen programs deal with the dad who does struggle to understand what the words actually say? Can you respond to that just briefly, Mike?

J. Michael Hall: Yeah, one of the things that we have -- like we will pass out an evaluation at the end of each program, and that's how we've learned what's working for dads and what's not. We really approach our work kind of as anthropologists, and we watch those reactions and we build off of that. But we definitely read those evaluations. If you're watching your guys, there'll be guys that just kind of stare at the paper. They'll wait for somebody to turn it in, and then they'll get up and turn in a blank page. The challenges we've seen is that people push it. It's like, hey, could I get you to fill this out? There's a reason the guy didn't fill it out. A lot of times, we try to build in what we would call a safety factor.

The reason that we read the books to the dads and kids is so that everybody feels safe. And then, when we're talking to these dads, we tell them, if you don't read well in English, but can read in Spanish, read in Spanish. If you struggle with reading at all, please continue to tell your kids stories. As a joke, and really kind of not as a joke, just because dads don't always know, we say, "Don't tell them stories about when you were 19, but tell them stories about when you were a kid." They love to hear those stories. Make up stories. It's okay as well. That's giving them kind of a safety net, because kids need to hear their voice, even if they are not reading as a great orator.

We've had -- and I think a lot of programs have experienced this -- when dads are told that they have such a value in reading to their kids, they're more likely to seek out adult literacy programs and such as that. On almost a monthly basis, I have had dads come up to me, and we cite some research done by Norma Raden that says, when moms read to kids, all these great things happen. When dads read to kids, the same great things happen, plus when dads read to kids, the kids' verbal skills can increase by up to 15 percent.

It doesn't mean that moms aren't doing a great job. It means that dad is doing something different. When you tell a man that, that what you're doing is different than mom, and it has specific value because you're the dad reading to the kid, they walk out of there with their head held high. They can't wait to get back to reading. I have had dads that have found me in parking lots, they've found me at school events. I've just met dads that have in our program all over the community, and because we've been in so many places, I find them in lots of different spots, and they will tell me that research back to me. They'll recite that back to me, and they heard it two years ago, three years ago, seven years ago. They said, because of that, I've been reading to my kid every night, or I've been reading to my kid every week.

That's part of that empowerment. By telling a dad that you have a value, even if you don't read, maybe like your wife or maybe like the schoolteacher does, but if you'll tell your kid stories or read in a language you're comfortable in, it's still very valuable to your kid. The other thing is also, if I ever ask a dad to read, sometimes I'll have the dad read in Spanish. It's always based on volunteer. We never put a dad on the spot by making sure they fill something out, or taking it up. These dads don't need homework. If we hand out a handout, they take it and then go. Dads that don't read are not comfortable. They're not going to pick it up. Some will pick it up just out of pride. They don't want people to know they can't read, which is fine.

Once you build a relationship with a dad, and they know it's safe, they will tell you. "You know, I really struggle with reading," or "What can I do?" That gives you an opportunity, again, when you're in a safe environment, for them to talk about that.

Nigel Vann: Yeah, I think that's a great message, Mike. Thanks. That safety factor, I think, is key. You said at least two very important things there. One, I think, is the fact that you can run into guys several years later and realize you've had an impact that you didn't realize you were having at the time, which is something we all struggle with in this work. What you're doing is planting seeds that are going to come to fruition later, even if you don't see them. But to take things gently -- And it's almost a case management tool, I think, to be observant, and if you see a dad who's struggling with his own issues around reading or writing, then you can then make a general referral, perhaps.

Let me just pose one more question, and maybe Allison or Glen can respond to this. Then I want to do our evaluation question, and I'll come back and let the presenters have a final word for us. "In terms of a dad who didn't start reading when his kids were younger, is it too late to start reading when kids are older?" Any advice on that, Glen or Allison?

J. Michael Hall: I don't know that it's ever too late. I was trying to make the point that, the earlier, the better. I think that once kids start reading on their own, they like to do that, but I know that, with my kids and my family, I continue to read to them sometimes at bedtime. I think you can do that, but it gets harder for both dads and kids, because then you're probably looking at reading something that is going to be a little bit more complex, in terms of the

stories. Kids are going to be interested in things that are more complex than the simple kind of picture books that you might read between ages 3 and 8.

Allison Hyra: Nigel, I would say, if you're starting with somebody who's older, I think rather than the dad being the one to select the reading materials, it's probably better that he follow the lead of his child. Learn what his child is interested in reading, and maybe suggest something along the lines of, "I read a page and then you read a page," rather than, "climb into my lap and I'm going to read you a story at this point." It may be something that they actually just say, hey, I found this article in Sports Illustrated this week, or on msn.com, and I wanted to share it with you, and they start with just having read the same materials, and having a discussion about those materials.

Nigel Vann: Um-hmm. Yeah, great, yeah. Okay, let's move to our evaluation questions, if we could have those on the screen, Rebecca. While we're doing that, I'll just ask each of the presenters just to think about one final thought that you would like to leave us with when we come back.

This is just our regular evaluation question, to get your response to today's webinar: "I'll have a better understanding of ways to help dads bond with their young children through reading."

You can strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree. I would point out that the strongly disagree is at the top, so don't get confused.

[Pause]

I'll just give you a couple more seconds to respond to that. And then after this, we're actually going to go to another question, where we just want to get your input on topics for future webinars. If we can close this one out, and we'll go to the next one.

[Pause]

The reason we're pulling this next question up is that we just want to emphasize that when we do these webinars, we really want to make sure that we are responding to issues that you would like to hear about, and we encourage you to send us emails to [info@fatherhood.gov](mailto:info@fatherhood.gov) at any time with ideas. We've just put three specific ideas that we've been talking about as possibilities for future webinars. If you could just indicate which of these three, or you can indicate "Other" and then you can just send us the idea, either in the chat box or via [info@fatherhood.gov](mailto:info@fatherhood.gov). I just want to make sure that, as we plan for the next fiscal year, that we really start putting together ideas that you do want to hear about. I'll give you a couple more seconds to do that, and then I'll come back to the presenters.

[Pause]

Well, thank you very much. Mike, let me start with you. We'll sort of do reverse order on the way you were presented. So Mike, just a sentence of two, final thought you would leave people with?

J. Michael Hall: I think we at Strong Fathers are living proof that anybody can do this. We have had a lot of great success working with fathers, and the main reason we're successful is because we expect the fathers, we invite the fathers, to come, and we expect them to come, and they show up in big numbers. Don't be afraid to make the invite, and when you make the invite, get ready to be successful.

Nigel Vann: Great, thank you. Expect them to come, and they will. Glen, final thoughts from Canada?

Glen Palm: Final thoughts from Canada. I think that helping dads to understand that their role in early literacy is really, really critical—is important. The benefits from that are not only for their kids in later school success and doing well in life, but also for making that connection between the dads and the kids stronger.

Nigel Vann: Wonderful. Okay, so Allison, final thoughts? Feel free to share the knock-knock joke if you want, or not.

Allison Hyra: Sure, I'll share that one, too. I would just say one other thing that is really prevalent in the media right now is how much screen time children get, and how easy it is for parents to sort of, at the end of the day, give a kid an iPhone or iPad to just give yourself some space and quiet. I find sometimes doing a craft or board game is just too much and too overwhelming, but getting out just the five-minute book and settling down and calming down is a nice way to build a relationship with your kid without getting a huge commitment like Play-Doh out. Just give the kid a couple more minutes away from that screen.

The knock-knock joke that Nigel is talking about is the other joke my husband and my son was really cracking up about: What is the loudest herb in the vegetable garden? The Elvis Parsley. They're bad jokes, guys.

Nigel Vann: I don't think that's the one you shared last time, Allison, but never mind. It was good. On the screen time, one thing I had thought about mentioning earlier was, there was an article in the New York Times yesterday, actually, that was talking about that. It really emphasizes what Glen was saying about how kids see what we read, because kids also see what we do with screen time. The article in the New York Times was just talking about the fact that parents would come into a restaurant with their kids, and immediately start looking at the smart phone. They're modeling that kind of behavior. The kids are seeing it, so we really have to catch ourselves in not looking at these things all the time, not responding to email all the time when the kids are there.

With that, let me turn to Lisa for any final thoughts, and then we'll wrap up here.

Lisa Washington-Thomas: Thank you, Nigel, and thank Allison, Glen and Michael for your insights. I think this has given us a lot of great strategies to take back to our programs and share with our dads, and to use in our personal lives. I think our children and our communities will be better for it, so thank you so much, and thanks, Nigel, and everyone behind the scenes who put this together.

Nigel Vann: Thank you very much, Lisa. You see on the screen the [info@fatherhood.gov](mailto:info@fatherhood.gov) again, and contact information for each of the presenters. If you do have suggestions for future webinars, please let us know at that email address. Also, if you have any suggestions for resources that we can add to the resources list for today. I realized when Glen was talking that we forgot to put the Imagination Library on there. We'll be adding that. So if anybody has any other resources that are pertinent, please let us know and we can add those. Just continue to send us your thoughts there.

Again, I want to thank Glen and Mike for taking time out from their vacation, and for Allison, who just came back from her vacation. I'm looking forward to mine in a month or two, and I hope everybody else is having a good summer, and getting a chance to enjoy their vacation. With that, we will join you again in September for our final webinar of the fiscal year. Thank you very much, and everybody have a good day. Bye-bye.