



EARLY RELATIONSHIPS MATTER

Advancing Practice, Policy & Research in
Infant Mental Health

A potentially universal perinatal digital support service for fathers

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



We acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands on which we live and work and we pay our respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their elders past, present and emerging.



Up to 1 in 10 fathers are depressed &/or anxious which impacts mothers' and infants' health

DADS MATTER

IF THE FATHER IS UNSUPPORTIVE

- Mothers risk of premature birth increases
- Mothers risk of depression increases

IF FATHER IS DEPRESSED OR WITHDRAWN

- Infants risk of emotional problems increase
- Infants risk of behavioural problems increase
- Infants risk of psychiatric diagnosis increase

**BUT HOW DO WE
REACH DADS?**



A way to communicate with fathers



- That **avoids deficit models**
- That **speaks to his identity**
- That demands **little time**
- That is **keyed to his needs** along the fatherhood journey

SMS4dads

AUSTRALIA



SMS4dads TEXT PROGRAM

Dads can join up from 12 weeks into a pregnancy
up until to 48 weeks after the birth

They receive 3 messages a week

Some messages are in the “voice of the baby”

It's easy for dads to exit if they wish

ATTACHMENT

Looking into each other's eyes and exploring each other's faces will help us get to know each other dad. This time is important.

Talk to me about anything dad. Your words will help my brain develop. See why language is so important for me here

TEAMWORK

If you've been at work all day you might be able to support mum by taking me out for a walk dad. This will also give us more bonding time.

Find ways to tell your partner she is doing an amazing job. This could be really important to her.

SELF-CARE

Hey dad! I am going to triple my weight in the first year of life. Don't let this happen to you too. Find out more [here](#)

Tell a mate how it is going. Even if they don't have kids. Having a mate who knows what is happening can help to keep you on track.

DEVELOPING THE MODEL

7 years & 12,000 enrolments later...

1 MILLION texts have been delivered

Over 80% of dads stay until the end

SMS4dads is now a national program

HIGH INCOME COUNTRIES

Messages include K6 & Mood Checker Screening

Connections are made with online/telephone mental health support

CODESIGNER TEXTS SPECIFICALLY FOR:

Maternal distress | Baby in NICU | Stillbirth | Indigenous dads

Low cost



SMS4dads

EARLY ARRIVALS



NICU MESSAGES

It's OK to get emotional dad.
This is not what you were
expecting and you're
probably worried about me.
[THIS LINK](#) is just for you dad

I know I look really small
dad but if I'm well enough
I'd love you to touch or
hold me. Let the staff
know its important to you.

LOW/MIDDLE INCOME COUNTRIES

Messages include language and cultural translations

Pilots have been completed in Kenya (Swahili) and Colombia (Spanish)

Relevant message links are being explored

Very low dropout

Low cost

SMS4baba



CHILD DEVELOPMENT

I used a different approach of narrating stories to my baby. My wife asked me, *'how come you are telling the baby story?'* I showed her the messages and when she read them she was happy that I was getting these messages.

NUTRITION FOR BABY & LACTATING MOTHER

The messages helped change our mind-sets. I used to think we leave all the work for women to do... I came to learn I need to help with the work. When she is washing clothes I could take the baby, and if the baby is hungry I help out with feeding the baby. I saw this was a good thing...

SHARING WITH OTHERS

I recommend this program to others because it reminds fathers how they are supposed to take care of their family (children). They need these SMS's to give them hope.

SMS4PAPÁS (COLOMBIA)

It helped me understand my wife, through the nights with the tiredness and stress. The truth is that it helped us a lot. I put into practice all the messages, and what they said.

When she is breastfeeding you should bring her water because that helps with her hydration. I can help her by paying attention to her... to give her recognition when she is doing things right.

OPPOSITE RISER KEY-
SLOT, CABLE OVER
POST HOOK, AND
TIGHTEN WINCH

WARNING
DO NOT
CAR UN
TIEDOW
SECUR
KEY



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SMS4DADS TEAM

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SMS4baba (Kiswahili) with Prof. Amina Abubakar, Dr Vibian Angwenyi, Aga Khan University, Nairobi, Kenya

SMS4PAPÁS (Spanish) with Dra. Laura Ospina Pinillos, Dr. Henry Esteban Porras Rosero, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Bogotá, Colombia