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## Enabling Fathers of Preterm Infants

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### Introduction

Infants born between 34 and 36 weeks gestation ("late" preterm) constitute 74% of all preterm infants and are at risk of developmental delays. An optimal environment enhances the development of preterm infants. Helping men, an often forgotten component of a child's environment, adjust to the occupation of fathering is important. Father-infant interactions provide unique learning opportunities to complement mothers' contributions.

### Objectives

- 1. Describe a strength-based intervention to enhance fathers' interaction skills with infants
- 2. Determine the impact of the intervention on fathers' interaction skills, parenting stress and parenting self-perceptions.
- 3. Consider occupational therapists' role.

### Methods

Fifty first-time Canadian fathers of late preterm babies were randomly assigned to receive an intervention (two home visits) or a control condition (one home visit). When infants were 4 months (baseline) and 8 months old (outcome), fathers completed questionnaires measuring parenting stress and parenting self-perceptions and were videotaped playing with their infant to measure interaction skills. For intervention, 25 fathers reviewed their videotaped play interaction with a home visitor who provided positive feedback, indicating behaviours that fostered child development even if behaviours were low frequency (e.g., speaking once to baby, positioning baby safely). Handouts reinforced the feedback and fathers could review the videotape with feedback online after the home visit. Fathers (n=25) in the control condition did not review the videotape and received a handout about child development.

### Results

Using a repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance, interaction skills and parenting self-perceptions of fathers in the intervention are expected to improve more and parenting stress decrease more than for fathers in the control group. Utilization of the on-line feedback and perceptions of the intervention are also reported.

### Conclusion

Results will indicate the utility of a brief strength-based intervention that enables development of the occupation of fathering for first-time fathers and ultimately promotes the health and development of late preterm infants.

### Contribution to practice/evidence base

This study adds to the very sparse evidence base for interventions for fathers of young children and increases our understanding of health promotion for fathers and late preterm infants.