



What About the Dads?

Contributed by [Brian Ketzner](#)

The next time you sit at an autism meeting, take a few moments to look around and see what you observe. How many parents do you see? More specifically, how many dads are present? It may be a matter of work schedules conflicting with meeting times. It may be a lack of interest in the processes regarding education. It may, however, be a matter of uneasiness as a male in a room of mostly moms discussing concerns that miss the concerns of dads.

These are some of the issues that have been discussed in support group meetings within the state for 'Dads Only'. An alternative to typical parent support groups, these meetings address the needs of the family from the male's perspective. Many of the concerns are common; however being in a room full of men allows emotions to accompany the discussion without concern of judgment by others. It is an opportunity for guys to get real and to come out of the meeting connected to other dads and to the issues faced by the group.

The concept of a Dads Only Session started several years ago at a National Autism Society of America conference. The time allotted for associating with other dads who felt pieces of what others there experienced was powerful. It was well received by all in attendance, so we decided to begin holding this type of meeting at the state level. Dads who were at the different conferences needed an opportunity to network with each other and to be given the encouragement to speak their view. Everyone who needed time to talk was given time. It once again proved a great success!

Observing results at these levels, IRCA decided it was time to provide the same support in the local support groups throughout the state. It has been a part of our offerings for the past couple years. A 'Dads Only' session is meant to start out as an open, facilitated session. As the discussion begins, each meeting builds into a personality of its own. It is amazing to see how every group that has met seemed to settle into one area of discussion or action. There may be a need to host only one meeting in an area to spur the interest or activity of dads within that area's regular support group. For others, it has become an outlet that is regularly scheduled.

Some groups settle in at the support level giving individuals time to voice concerns and be heard. This type of discussion may trigger a brainstorming session toward solutions. The meeting may lean more toward legislative concerns and what the group can be doing.

Legislative action groups contribute greatly within an area. If social development is a focus, some groups have organized periodic group activities for fathers and their child diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder. These create a win-win situation for everyone involved.

The Dads Only session was a selection on the IRCA Presentation Topic Choices form that was sent to all support groups in the late spring of 2007. There were many other choices. If you wish to do a Dads Only session in your area, contact Brian Ketzner at bketzner@indiana.edu to schedule a meeting for your area.

Locations where groups are currently meeting in Indiana include:

Location: Angie's Café

Address: 13190 Hazel Dell Parkway,

Carmel, IN

Time: 1st Saturday of the month at 8:00 a.m.

Contact: Joe Kemper at 1-317-908-5214

And

Location: St. Anthony's Catholic Church

Address: 310 N. Sherwood Avenue,

Clarksville, IN

Time: Last Thursday of the month: 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Contacts: Rob Ralston at 1-502-541-5038

Bill Thomas at 1-812-282-9900

For additional information for Dads, you may be able to access the following materials from the Center for Disability Information and Referral (CeDIR) at the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community (IIDC). You can contact CeDIR by calling 1-800-825-4733 (toll free in Indiana) or 1-812-855-9396 (voice/TT). You can also visit their website at www.iidc.indiana.edu. Only Indiana residents may check out materials from CeDIR.

White Noise Productions (Producer), & May, J. (Director) (2004). Fathers' voices: A journey of the heart [videorecording]. Bellevue, WA: Washington State Fathers Network.

Coulter, D. (Producer/Director) & Coulter, J. (Producer). (2004). Asperger syndrome dad: Becoming an even better father to your child with AS [Videorecording].-Salem, NC: Coulter Video.

Auer, C. (2006). Parenting a child with sensory processing disorder: A family guide to understanding & supporting your sensory-sensitive child. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

Ketzner, (2007). What about the Dads? The Reporter, 13(1), 7, 14.