# The Role of the Father

There is a lot of competing research in this area. Some studies have found the father plays a critical role in attachment, while others have concluded that either the father role is less important than the mother – or at least different in nature (i.e. less about emotional involvement, more about play / stimulation).

Read the material on the photocopy, and summarise the findings presented there in the following boxes. Some of the studies might fit on both sides. The photocopy has been highlighted with the sections you need.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Research that suggests fathers are important attachment figures (or have another important role instead) and why? | Research that suggests fathers are not important attachment figures and why? |
| Schaffer and Emerson (1964) |  |
| Grossman et al. (2002) | Grossman et al. (2002) |
| Field (1978) | McCallum and Golombok (2004) |

Conclusion – what overall conclusions can you draw from the research you’ve looked above and the discussions we’ve had?

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# The Role of the Father – possible answers

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| Research that suggests fathers are important attachment figures (or have another important role instead) and why? | Research that suggests fathers are not important attachment figures and why? |
| Schaffer and Emerson (1964)*found that the majority of babies became attached to their mother first (primary attachment) and then formed a secondary attachment to their father (75% by 18 months).* |  |
| Grossman et al. (2002)*Suggest that fathers play a greater role in play and stimulation and less of a role in emotional development. This shows that fathers are important to attachment but in a different way from mothers.* | Grossman et al. (2002)*suggest that the quality of a baby’s attachment with its mother but not its father was related to attachments in adolescence. This suggests that attachment to fathers is less important than attachment to mothers.* |
| Field (1978)*found that fathers can be the more emotion-focused primary attachment figure. The key to the attachment relationship is the level of responsiveness not the gender of the parent.* | McCallum and Golombok (2004)*have found that children growing up in single or same-sex parent families do not develop any differently from those in two-parent heterosexual families. This suggests that fathers do not have a distinctive role.* |

Conclusion – what overall conclusions can you draw from the research you’ve looked above and the discussions we’ve had?

*Fathers play an important role in a child’s social and emotional development, often contributing through play and stimulation rather than as primary attachment figures. However, research shows that children in single-parent or same-sex families can develop just as well, suggesting that fathers are not essential but can enhance a child’s upbringing. Ultimately, while fathers offer unique benefits, other caregivers can fulfil similar roles in supporting healthy development.*