

KNOWLEDGE TO ACTION BRIEF

Engaging Fathers and Communities



Fathers who are engaged and present make a real difference in their children's lives. Children who are raised by involved fathers are "60% less likely to be suspended or expelled from school, 2x as likely to go to college and find stable employment after high school, 75% less likely to have a teen birth, and 80% less likely to spend time in jail" (Child and Family Partnership, 2017). Fathers who are present in their child's life are capable caretakers of their young toddlers who support the development of their children, collaborate in their partner's positive parenting efforts, add to the overall health and wellness of the family, and experience beneficial improvements in their own developments and life (Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center, n.d.).

Fatherhood programs have varying goals and priorities that support the father, children, and family as a whole. These goals should include helping dads to explore and engage in positive parenting techniques, supporting men in strengthening their relationships with their children, and helping men to become more self-sufficient in supporting their families (The Office of Child Abuse Prevention, n.d.). Likewise, programs should encourage fathers to support their partner in co-parenting to care for the family as a whole. Successful programs support fathers to develop their own competency caring for infants and develop their own style of parenting and interaction with their children.



Barriers that prevent successful efforts to engage fathers include a lack of support surrounding the program or initiative and its importance among staff and a lack of interest from fathers in seeking help. It is important that all staff members are dedicated to the fatherhood initiative at their organization. This means ensuring staff are committed and understand first, the importance of supportive, present fathers in children's lives, and second, that it is possible to engage

with and work with fathers. It is also important to ensure staff receive proper training and are able to support fathers.

Fathers may not want to talk or may be reluctant to engage in a program or with workers in the beginning for various reasons. However, once rapport and trust has been established, fathers are likely to engage and participate fully and often in programs and discussions. Thus, it is important for staff to clarify expectations, recognize biases, and be deliberate about their effort in engaging fathers.

It is the collective responsibility of all program staff, including leadership and direct service providers to create a healthy and welcoming environment for all parents and caregivers, including fathers. In order to provide a father-friendly environment and engage fathers in programs, staff must:

- acknowledge the father's presence,
- offer groups and activities at nighttime or over the weekend to better meet the needs and schedules of fathers, and
- develop an advisory committee of fathers to get their advice and feedback and provide opportunities for leadership.

When being mindful about engaging fathers, it is important to ensure that your program works to make fathers feel included, valued, and respected.

Take Action

- 1) Organize activities for moms to do separately to allow fathers to engage fully with their children and with the program.
- 2) Ensure all program forms include all possible caretakers and language does not imply that caretaking is provided by only the mother.
- 3) Invite male facilitators and instructors from the community to conduct program meetings or workshops so fathers hear from someone who they have similarities with and can relate to.

Resources

The [Father Friendly Check-Up](#) is a tool provided by the National Fatherhood Initiative to assess the degree to which an organization's operations encourage father involvement in the services and programs it offers. It can be used as a starting off point to engage staff in delivering a new program for fathers or a check-in for fresh ideas to incorporate into an existing father program.

References

- Child and Family Research Partnership. (2017). Dads make a big difference. [Infographic]. Texas Fatherhood Summit.
- Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center. (n.d.). *Father Engagement Strategies*. Family Engagement. <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/family-engagement/father-engagement-strategies/father-engagement-strategies>
- The Office of Child Abuse Prevention. (n.d.). *Supporting father involvement*. California Department of Social Services. <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/ocap/about-ocap/supporting-father-involvement>



Strategies 2.0

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We train, support, and link professionals and organizations together to more effectively support families as well as build power to advance equity and opportunity in our communities.

