Developing services that engage and meet the needs of fathers:
What we know from research and practice

Breakout 3, 11:00 AM – 12:00 PM
Wednesday, March 17, 2021
3rd Annual Washington Fatherhood Summit
• Strategies for involving and engaging fathers in programming
  
  Tova Walsh, University of Wisconsin – Madison

• Engaging Fathers and Mothers Together as Co-Parents in Home Visiting: Lessons from Dads Matter-HV
  
  Jennifer Bellamy, University of Denver

• Fatherhood Engagement with Boots on the Ground
  
  Keoki Kauanoe, Family Education and Support Services

• Questions and Discussion
Strategies for Involving and Engaging Fathers in Programming

Tova Walsh, PhD, MSW
University of Wisconsin-Madison

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Who are fathers?

- Biological
- Stepfather
- Father figure

...in families ranging from married to cohabiting, single parent, and re-combined.

Notions of the role of a father are diverse, and may be influenced by cultural and demographic factors.
Benefits to children of positive father involvement

Positive father involvement is associated with positive social, emotional, and cognitive outcomes for children from infancy to adolescence.

Amato, 1994; Deutsch, Servis, & Payne, 2001; Flouri & Buchanan, 2003; McBride, Schoppe-Sullivan, & Ho, 2005; Mosley & Thomson, 1995; Parke et al., 2002; Sarkadi, Kristiansson, Oberklaid, & Bremberg, 2007; Volling & Belsky, 1992; Yeung, Duncan, & Hill, 2000
Father involvement in child and family interventions

Father involvement in programming and services – including permanency planning and parenting training, Head Start, healthcare, and schools – is associated with improved child outcomes.

Bagner & Eyberg, 2003; Coakley, 2008; Eckenrode et al., 2000; Fals-Stewart, Fincham, & Kelley, 2004; Gervan, Granic, Solomon, Blokland, & Ferguson, 2012; Guterman, Bellamy, & Banman, 2018; Lindahl, Tollefson, Risser, & Lovejoy, 2008; Wysocki & Gavin, 2004; Yogman, Garfield, & AAP Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Heath, 2016
Father-inclusive and father-specific programming

**Father-inclusive** practice aims to actively encourage father participation and ensure that services are responsive and accessible to fathers as well as mothers and children.

**Father-specific** programming is designed specifically for fathers, with the needs and interests of fathers guiding service delivery.
What type of parenting support are fathers looking for?

- Accessible information from credible sources
- Father-focused resources
  - Guidance about how to be a supportive partner to an expectant / new mother
- Information about development
  - How to engage with young children to promote healthy development
  - Age expectations and behavior management
- Ways to access services that are non-stigmatizing and don’t make fathers feel they’re using resources intended for mothers
- Normalize the frustrations of parenting

Lee, Walsh, et al., 2013; ; Lee, Walsh, et al., Under Review; Walsh et al., 2014; Walsh, 2020
Barriers to father engagement

- Beliefs that act as barriers
- Provider barriers
- Practical barriers
- Competing responsibilities
- Tension between parents

Ahmann, 2006; Garfield & Isacco, 2006; Harknett, Manno, & Balu, 2017; Moore & Kotelchuk, 2004; O'Donnell et al., 2005; Phares, Fields, & Binitie, 2006; Yogman, Garfield, & AAP Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Heath, 2016
Strategies for involving and engaging fathers

• Presume high interest on the part of fathers

• Learn from mothers and fathers about their desire to be engaged independently or jointly

• Engage compassionately

• Target marketing and outreach to fathers

• Address practical barriers

• Create a father-friendly environment

• Reinforce fathers’ contributions and role as models for children
Strategies for involving and engaging fathers

• Male staff and father to father strategies
• Programming where fathers are not outnumbered
• Learn what fathers want …& offer it!
• Learn about and respond to fathers’ individual circumstances
• Offer resources to achieve parenting & related goals
• Collaborate with other providers
• Moments of opportunity
Acknowledgements and Resources

• Wisconsin Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board
  Father-focused webinar series:
  https://preventionboard.wi.gov/Pages/OurWork/OnlineLearningLibrary.aspx

• Photo credit: Alameda County Father Corps’ Fatherhood Photo Bank
  https://www.diversityoffatherhood.com/

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THANK YOU!

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References


References


References

Walsh, T., Jones, M., Tolman, R., Lee, S. & Singh, V. (Under review.). Early Service Experiences As a Barrier or Facilitator of Subsequent Service Engagement: An Examination of Father Engagement in Prenatal and Pediatric Care.


FATHERS AS A “MISSING PIECE” IN HOME VISITION

• Growth of home visitation
• Fathers and outcomes
• Importance of mother-father co-parenting relationship
• Few home visitors report engaging fathers and mothers together in services
Surveys with Home Visitors

- Workers espouse generally positive attitudes and expectations about working with fathers and mothers together in home visiting, but say:
  - Lack of time
  - Perception that fathers do not want to participate
  - Lack of training
  - Worry that if they work with fathers, it will take away from their work with mothers

....Prevents them from engaging fathers.
The Dads Matter-HV Model

**Engagement and Assessment**

- **Family Enrolled in Study**
- **Quick Assessment**
- **Father Presents Low Risk; Engageable?**

- **Reassess risk or capacity to engage at a later time**
- **High Risk; Unengageable**
- **Stop attempts with father; Services as usual with mother**

**Services/Modules**

- **Father Engagement and Assessment Modules**
  Father Engagement Modules support the level of engagement that will need to occur throughout services.

- **Co-Parenting Modules**
  Co-Parenting Modules are meant to focus on the relationship between the mother and father.
  - I. Role Expectations
  - II. Problem Solving
  - III. Communication
  - IV. Linking Assessment to Co-parenting

- **Individual Parent Support Modules (as necessary)**
  Individual Parent Support Modules focus on challenges commonly experienced by fathers.
  - I. Managing Stress
  - II. Help Seeking
  - III. Managing Emotions
FATHER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES - Control Group

- Incentives
- Leave him information
- Tell him he’s needed/important
- Communicate through mom
FATHER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES - Intervention Group

• Talk to him
• Make eye contact
• Leave things for him
• Communicate through Mom
• Specifically/explicitly invite him
• Tell him he’s needed/important
• Referrals (jobs etc.)
• Using hands-on activities
• Use technology

• Being there/consistent/building trust
• Giving him information
• Providing opportunities to interact with other dads
• Explaining benefits of his involvement
• Using “other” activities: holiday parties, family events, etc.
• Respect/acknowledge his expertise
• Consider schedules
Dads Matter-HV PRACTICE CHANGES

• More inclusion of fathers/paying attention to them and co-parenting in various aspects of services
• Reflection on their own perceptions and beliefs about fathers
• More of a family approach
• Getting over discomfort, uncertainty, hesitation
Take Aways

• Fathers and mothers can be engaged together in home visiting services, but it takes:
  • Flexibility
  • Creativity
  • Persistence

• Home visitors will state that they generally value fathers, but they need consistent support and encouragement to identify and address barriers
  • Practice
  • Training on specific strategies
  • Cueing/asking
  • Supervision/leadership
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