

Starting Dads Off on the Right Foot:  
Supporting the Inclusion of Fathers Before and After Birth in Healthcare

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Please enter in the chat:

*3 words or short phrases that you would use to describe  
the role of fathers in healthcare before and after birth*

# Before and after birth...



Fathers' support is associated with positive maternal and child outcomes

- Earlier entry into prenatal care
- Fewer health problems in pregnancy
- Fathers can help identify changes in their partner's mental health and offer important support
- Closer relationships are associated with lower levels of maternal stress – even when parents are not romantic partners
- The quality of the relationship between parents predicts how each will nurture and respond to the needs of their child

ACOG, 2009; Eboh et al., 2018; Garfield & Isacco, 2009; Guterman & Lee, 2005; Marsiglio, 2008; Walsh et al., in press; Yogman, M., Garfield, C. F., & Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, 2016

# Fathers and healthcare -- before and after birth

- Mothers and fathers want and expect fathers to be involved
  - Mothers are dissatisfied with their care when providers do not include fathers
  - Fathers can play a key role as advocates
- Participation is highly meaningful to fathers
- Dual role as parent and partner
- Some fathers feel marginalized or uncertain of how to engage
- Fathers identify specific knowledge needs related to engaging with infants / toddlers / very young children

# Beliefs and behaviors that act as barriers to father inclusion

- Father participation is not important
- Father participation is extra / optional
- Fathers are important but not essential
- Fathers as risk factors
- No active invitation to fathers to participate
- Biases, e.g., not considering father participation important
- Discomfort interacting with men
- Discomfort with inter-parental conflict
- Unsure when and how to involve fathers

Garfield & Isaaco, 2006; Minnesota Fathers and Families Network, 2011; O'Donnell et al., 2005; Phares, Fields, & Binitie, 2006; Yogman, Garfield, & AAP Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, 2016

# Father participation and inclusion

In a nationally representative sample of men aged 18-35 (N=1303):

- 88% of fathers attended at least one prenatal ultrasound
- 81% of fathers attend pediatric visits sometimes, often, or always
- Inclusion in prenatal care positively associated with participation in pediatric care
- Gaps in knowledge of early development

# ***Black Fathers: Equal Partners in Advancing Maternal and Infant Health***

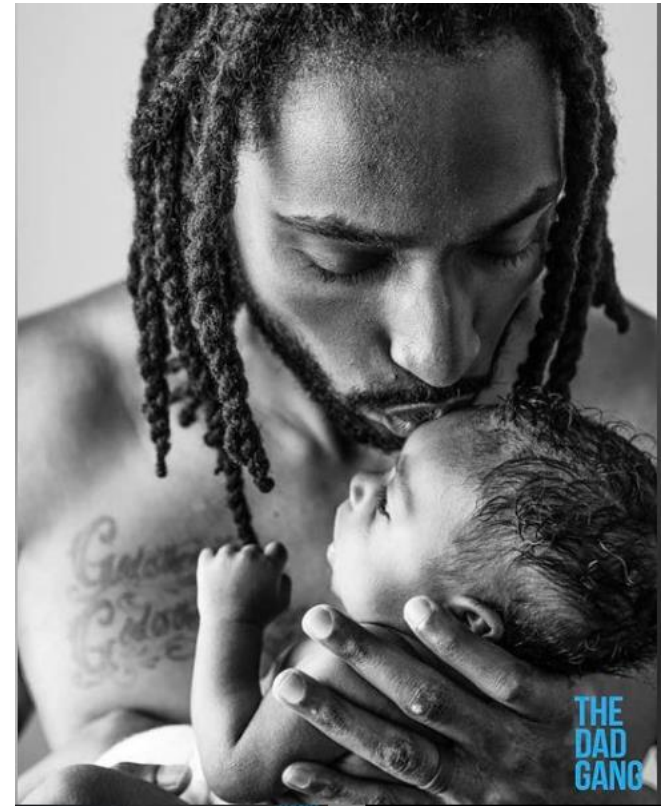
PIs: Tova Walsh and Alvin Thomas

This project **centers the voices of Black fathers** in conversations about maternal and infant health and is one of the first to do so. Resisting the cliché of absentee fathers, we find Black fathers as actively involved during pregnancy, including as a presence alongside mothers in perinatal healthcare.



# Findings

- Parents want fathers to be actively engaged by healthcare and family service providers, supported as partners and parents, and provided with education and resources to promote the health and well-being of mothers, babies, and families.
- Fathers identified the need for greater and more sustainable support across the transition to fatherhood.
- Paternal efforts to challenge racism in perinatal healthcare encounters was identified by mothers and fathers as an important element of father support for new and expectant Black mothers.





# Strategies for expanding inclusion of fathers

- Recognize the perinatal period as a moment of opportunity
- Communicate with fathers, including nonresident
- Address practical barriers to engagement
- Create a father-friendly environment
- Reinforce fathers' contributions
- Normalize screening and discussing father-centered health concerns (e.g., depression)
- Offer resources to achieve parenting & related goals
- Collaborate with other providers
- Advocate for family friendly policies

# Conversation Starters

Here are some ideas for getting dads to talk about what is important to them in their relationship with their child:

- *What has your infant/child taught you?*
- *When did something really special happen between the two of you?*
- *What have you changed about yourself because of your infant/child?*
- *What have you done to make things better for your infant/child?*
- *What tactics help you and your partner raise your infant/child together? Or on your own?*
- *What would your partner say is your unique contribution to the family?*
- *When things look rough, what keeps you going?*

# Acknowledgements

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<https://www.diversityoffatherhood.com/>

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**THANK YOU!**

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