

## Most Ordinary Men

### The Importance of Fathers During the Perinatal Period (and Beyond)

Nicholas Kasovac, MSOT, OTR, IMH-E®

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## Land Acknowledgement

"I would like to acknowledge and honor that we are on the unceded ancestral lands and traditional territory of the Coast Salish peoples, specifically the Puyallup tribe (spuyaləpabš). Even today the tribes continue to fight for their rights to exist throughout their traditional homelands. I express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to ancestors past, present elders, and future generations of these people that are still here continuing to honor, illuminate, and share their ancient heritage."



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## POLL

Which 3 words describe your perspective on fatherhood or the father role?

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“Dads are most ordinary men  
turned by love  
into heroes,  
adventurers,  
story-tellers,  
and singers of song.”

~ Pam Brown, Australian Poet ~

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### Starfish Parable



“Made a difference for that one.”

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### Butterfly Effect

“....the concept that small causes can have large effects.”



Changing one thing.....can change everything.

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## Reflection Exercise

- Earliest memory of your father
- What do you remember most about him?
- If he was a good father, what made him good?
- If he was not a good father, what did you “miss?”

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## POLL

“You can never dig deep enough to bury your father.”

~ Romani Proverb ~

from *Embracing Your Father* by Dr. Linda Nielsen

What 3 words describes your perspective of YOUR father?

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What assumptions do you have about fathers?

When I think of Fathers, this comes to mind...

***Write down 3 assumptions***



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What assumptions do you have about this father?



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## My Assumptions

### Most Fathers.....

- Are influenced by how they were raised, especially toward traditional roles, and may not be conscious of this
- Don't know how to be involved with their infant
- Don't like to feel or look incompetent
- Feel obligated to provide basics for family (eg, food, clothing, shelter, money)
- Are "edged out" by mom (mom as gatekeeper)
- Don't have moral "guy" support
- Don't know the *value* of their relationship with their infant
- Don't know their contribution to their child's development *via their relationship*
- Give up or give in when they are criticized when caring for their baby
- Don't respond to "educational" offerings, including classes, brochures and handouts
- Need to be personally invited and/or reminded
- Will have to be "bribed" (enticed?) with food and/or prizes to attend
- Are attracted to competition
- Prefer to "take action," IE to *do* something to solve the problem
- Will learn better with more unconventional methods (eg, visual, kinesthetic, metaphor, analogy, symbolism, experience)

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Question your assumptions....  
....*They can be useful*

1. Is it a stereotype? ("*Everybody knows fathers...*")
2. Is it an over-generalization? ("*ALL fathers...*")
3. Will it inform my approach with fathers? (food)
4. Does it provide me with a perspective?

*Example: Teen Father*

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What influences our perception of fathers?

- What are our expectations of fathers?
- Do we expect them to know how to parent their infant?
- When and how does a father learn to care for infants? Children?
- Do we encourage fathers to "wait on the sidelines" until the child is old enough to engage physically when the child may need more behavioral control?
- Is it convenient for US to encourage fathers to avoid engagement with infants so we don't have to work as hard?
- After all that, do we then chastise and castigate fathers for not knowing what to do or how to do it when it comes to caring for babies?

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"Did you have a Father or Father Figure growing up?"

- Is this a question you ask of fathers with whom you work?
  - Why? What's your assumption?
- Will they be a better father if they had a father or father figure in their life?
  - Why? What's your assumption?
- Will they NOT be a better father if they did NOT have a father or father figure in their life?
  - Why? What's your assumption?

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## Ghosts in the Nursery

**Ghosts in the Nursery** – <http://www.imh4pnp.com/Ghosts-in-the-Nursery.html>

- *Ghosts in the nursery is apt descriptor for the "emotional baggage" vulnerabilities parents (and other caregivers) may carry from their own experiences of being parented including conflicted feelings about their parents, a sense of being unsupported in childhood, and traumatizing memories. These ghosts often negatively impact feeding, sleep, toilet training, discipline, and other areas of current parenting abilities by influencing the way parents interpret their infants behavior. Parents with histories of child abuse may find certain aspects of appropriate early childhood development as purposeful acts of threat and aggression.*

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## Ghosts in the Nursery (Parallel Process)

- *Ghosts in the nursery is apt descriptor for the "emotional baggage" vulnerabilities **providers** (and other **professionals**) may carry from their own experiences of being parented including conflicted feelings about their parents, a sense of being unsupported in childhood, and traumatizing memories. These ghosts often negatively impact **interaction, communication, non-judgment, collaboration, empathy**, and other areas of current **skilled** abilities by influencing the way **providers** interpret their **client's** behavior. **Providers** with histories of child abuse **[and/or less than adequate parenting]** may find certain aspects of appropriate **parenting practices** as purposeful acts of **threat and aggression [or possibly negligence]***

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## Angels in the Nursery

“Angels in the nursery,” representing the repetition of benevolent past experiences in the present, can serve as agents of positive influence in the lives of parents and children. Within the therapeutic context, these benevolent early experiences can be used to foster loving parent-child relationships in the face of adversity by supporting a sense of self-worth and facilitating an unencumbered engagement in caregiving interactions.

(Lieberman, Padron, Van Horn, & Harris, 2005)

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## Angel in the Nursery



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What else might influence the father and offer support for his new role?  
Or not?

- Professionals
  - Healthcare
  - Agencies
  - Judicial
  - Government (DHS, DES, DCYF)
  - Research
- Society
  - Co-workers
  - Friends
  - Family (and in laws)
  - Partner/ Baby Mama

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## Mothering and Fathering

### • To Mother - (transitive verb):

1. take care of somebody with tenderness

- To look after somebody with great care and affection, sometimes to an excessive degree

### • To Father - (transitive verb):

1. become father of offspring

- To cause a woman or female animal to produce offspring

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### Father Question

Is this best for baby.....  
.....or convenient for me?

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### Parallel Question (Parallel Process)

Is this best for the father-infant relationship...  
.....or convenient for me?

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### Transition to Fatherhood

Seth Meyers – a new father

*“The weirdest thing about being a father is how - because I think, you know, mothers, like....their body for nine months tells them it's coming.*

*And then you just, you aren't a dad and then you just are...*

*...Like, the very next day.”*

*“I was - this is a true story. I was filling out paperwork after our baby was born. And it said, mother's name. And I wrote my wife's name. And it said, father's name. And I wrote my wife's father's name.*

*And then it said, father's phone number. And I thought, who knows their father-in-law's phone number? And then I realized, oh, I'm the father!”*

Transcript from

For Our 30th Anniversary, Fresh Air Tapes Live With Seth Meyers Of "Late Night" - interviewed by Terry Gross

**Have you wondered what men think or feel when their partner becomes pregnant?**

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### First Fatherhood Moments (Prenatal)



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### Examples of “Potential” Father Exclusion/Father-Infant Disruption

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prenatal</li> <li>• Labor &amp; Delivery</li> <li>• Couplet Care/Postpartum</li> <li>• Breastfeeding Support</li> <li>• Postpartum Follow Up</li> <li>• Infant/Parent/Family Research</li> <li>• Professional Articles/Research</li> <li>• Pediatrics</li> <li>• Early Childhood Organizations</li> <li>• Programs</li> <li>• Agencies</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policies</li> <li>• Peers</li> <li>• Work</li> <li>• Government (DHS, DES, DCYF, Courts)</li> <li>• Maternal Gatekeeping</li> <li>• Grandmothers</li> <li>• Refusal of Visitation (especially Teens)</li> <li>• Artwork/Photography</li> <li>• Print Media</li> <li>• Social Media</li> </ul> |
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### Prenatal

- OB/Midwife Appointments
  - Ultrasound Appointments
  - Child Birth, Breastfeeding, Newborn Care Classes
  - Hospital Orientation
  - Doula Services
  - Maternal Child Clinic
- \* Registration Example*
- Even if services are not directly for Dad, can you still make him feel welcome?
  - Can you include him in the conversation?
  - Can you find meaning and usefulness for his role as a new father?
  - Do you realize he will probably be the best, and most available resource for Mum?
  - If he makes statements to the contrary, can you “guide” him to a new perspective?

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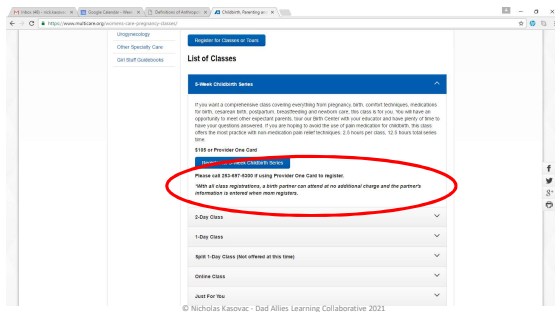
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### Childbirth Class Registration – Example #1



### Labor & Delivery

- Hopes, Dreams, Fantasies – Do Dads have them too?
- Going into the Unknown – Lack of control
- Unexpected Turn of Events – now TWO people he loves are in jeopardy of losing their lives (at least from his perspective).....because it's the unknown – which can lead to.....
- Trauma, PTSD – which can lead to PMAD, even months from the birth  
(Mark Williams, Reaching Out PMH – [www.reachingoutpmh.co.uk](http://www.reachingoutpmh.co.uk))

Have you considered the father's experience for any of the following:  
NICU? Stillborn? Miscarriage? Pregnancy termination? Rainbow baby?  
Where does he go for emotional support?  
With whom can he talk to about this?

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### L & D – Couplet Care

- Maternal Child Hospital - *Example*
- Emergency C-Section - *Example*
- Hospital "New Mother" Booklet - *Example*
- Even if Dad doesn't receive direct services, can you make him feel welcome and important?
- Can you find what is meaningful and important in his role as father?
- Can you include him in the conversation?
- Do you think he may feel responsible for baby and mom's well-being?

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## Discharged Home! Going Out!

- Return to Work - *Example*
- Grocery Store - *Example*
- Restaurant - *Example*

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## Publications

- Parenting Books – *Example*
- Zero to Three article for Mom support from physicians - *Example*
- Fatherhood Books
  - Are they accurate? Are they only humorous? Is it only one father's experience?
- Father Programs
  - Are they based on mother programs? What's the focus of the program? Is there an emphasis on the father and his infant?

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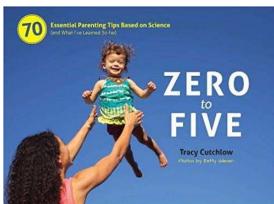
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## Example #3



Page 18  
Chores – first  
pic of Dad



Page 32  
First pic with  
Dad & Infant

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## Research and Program Funding

- Research uses “parenting” but only studies Moms – *Example*
- Research outcomes are typically financial support, or attributes of fathers, which becomes the only focus - *Example*
- Research that is about fathers but doesn’t include fathers
- Focus of Fatherhood programs (marriage, financial support, employment)
- Caution: *When referencing research about fathers, understand the studies are only focusing on definitive variables – it doesn’t include everything that fathers “are” nor everything that fathers “do”*

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## Bidirectional Associations Between Bedtime Parenting and Infant Sleep: Parenting Quality, Parenting Practices, and their Interaction

Lauren E. Philbrook and Douglas M. Teti  
J Fam Psychol. 2016 Jun; 30(4): 431–441.

# “parenting”

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## Abstract – (emphases mine)

In keeping with *transactional conceptualizations of infant sleep development* (Sadeh et al., 2010), the present study examined longitudinal, bidirectional linkages between bedtime *parenting* (direct observations of *parenting* practices and quality) and infant sleep across the first six months postpartum. In doing so, we also drew from Darling and Steinberg’s (1993) conceptual model to examine *parenting* quality as a moderator of linkages between *specific bedtime practices* and infant sleep. Multilevel model analyses revealed that the *strongest increases* in infant nighttime sleep across the first six months occurred among infants of *mothers* who engaged in *low levels of nursing* at bedtime. Within-person linkages between *mothers’* emotional availability (EA) at bedtime, infant distress, and infant sleep were found, such that at time points when *mothers* were more emotionally available, infants were less distressed and slept more throughout the night. Several moderating effects of *maternal* EA on linkages between *parenting* practices and infant sleep were obtained that were consistent with predictions from Darling and Steinberg (1993). Higher *maternal* EA in combination with less close contact at bedtime was associated with more infant sleep across the night on average, and higher EA in combination with fewer arousing bedtime activities predicted more rapid increases in infant sleep with age. Finally, there was evidence of infant-driven effects, as higher infant nighttime distress predicted lower EA at subsequent time points. Results showcased the *complex, reciprocal interplay* between *parents* and infants in the development of infant sleep patterns and *parenting* behavior during the first six months postpartum.

**Keywords:** *Parenting*, infants, sleep, emotional availability, bedtime

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## From Introduction

The current study used observational measures to study how **parenting** quality and practices at bedtime are uniquely and interactively associated with infant nighttime sleep across the first six months, and further, how infant nighttime sleep may predict **parenting** behaviors and quality. As **mothers** were the primary caregiver at bedtime in most study families, we specifically examined **mothers' parenting**.

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## Current Study

The current study examined how bedtime **parenting** practices and quality were associated with infant sleep quality across the first 6 months. This study adds to the existing literature in several ways. First, **parenting** and infant sleep quality were assessed via behavioral coding of video recordings, rather than **parental** report. Additionally, **parenting** and infant sleep quality were studied longitudinally, which allowed for examination of bidirectional linkages between **parenting** and infant sleep and of within-person associations between variations in **parenting** and in infant sleep. We also incorporated a measure of arousing activities at bedtime, which has not been studied previously. Finally, the present study examined theoretically based (Darling & Steinberg, 1993) interactive influences of **parenting** practices and quality on infant sleep quality.

In order to isolate the associations between **parenting** and infant sleep quality, three covariates were also considered. **Maternal** depressive symptomatology was entered in all analyses because it has been linked to more intrusive nighttime **parenting** behavior (Teti & Crosby, 2012) well as lower **parenting** sensitivity (Gelfand & Teti, 1990). Infant co-sleeping with a **parent** was considered as a covariate in the analyses predicting infant sleep because co-sleeping has been associated with more infant nighttime awakenings (Mao et al., 2004). Lastly, **maternal** sleep was examined as a covariate in the analyses predicting **parenting** because poorer sleep quality or duration may compromise **parents'** ability to be responsive and sensitive to their infants.

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## Method - Participants

Participants were part of a longitudinal study of **parenting**, infant sleep, and infant development at a university in the Northeast U.S. All procedures were reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board. **Mothers** were recruited from local hospitals following the birth of their infants. **Parents** provided informed consent at the first home visit. One hundred sixty seven infants and their **parents** participated in the study when they were 1 month old.

This resulted in a final sample of 109 **mothers** and infants (46% male) who had data for at least one time point on all study variables and therefore could be included in the analyses. Infants were firstborns in 31% of the families. Eighty-four percent of **mothers** were married and living with their infant's **father**.

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## Mother Involvement as defined in a research study

“The general term *mother involvement* has been used to encompass the many ways that mothers participate in child rearing. This term has become particularly relevant for policy and programmatic efforts describing the various ways that nonresidential, low-income mothers maintain connections with their children that are presumed to be beneficial to the child. *Financial contribution* has long been, and still is, a central aspect of mother involvement, but many have argued for a definition of involvement that gives attention to the role mothers play in other domains, especially *caregiving* and *decision making*.”

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## Domain-Specific Trajectories of Involvement Among Fathers of Children Born to Young, Low-Income, African American Mothers

The general term *father involvement* has been used to encompass the many ways that fathers participate in child rearing (Lamb, 2000). This term has become particularly relevant for policy and programmatic efforts describing the various ways that nonresidential, low-income fathers maintain connections with their children that are presumed to be beneficial to the child (Mincy & Dupree, 2001). Financial contribution has long been, and still is, a central aspect of father involvement, but many have argued for a definition of involvement that gives attention to the role fathers play in other domains, especially caregiving and decision making (Krishnakumar & Black, 2003; Lamb, 2000). (Thullen et al, p. 130)

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## Domain-Specific Trajectories of Involvement Among Fathers of Children Born to Young, Low-Income, African American Mothers

**Dependent variables:** Domains of father involvement.

**Financial support.** Mothers were asked at 4, 12, and 24 months, “How much of the child’s expenses does your child’s father pay for?” Mothers responded on a 5-point scale (5 = all, 4 = more than half, 3 = half, 2 = less than half, 1 = none).

**Decision making.** Mothers were asked at 4, 12, and 24 months, “How involved is [child’s father] in making decisions about raising your child?” Mothers responded on a 4-point scale (4 = very involved, 3 = moderately involved, 2 = little involved, 1 = not at all involved).

**Child care.** Mothers were asked at 4, 12, and 24 months, “How frequently in the last 4 months their child’s father engaged in eight childcare behaviors, including fed child, dressed child, put the child to bed at night or for a nap, taken the child for walks or visits, played with or kept her/him occupied, changed the child’s diaper or helped with using the toilet, protected her/him from harmful things, gotten up at night with the child.” Mothers responded to each item on a 5-point scale (5 = daily, 4 = several times a week, 3 = once a week, 2 = once a month, 1 = less than once a month). The eight childcare behaviors were averaged to get one general indicator of the frequency with which the father engaged in child care behaviors with the child. The alpha for the eight items was .955 or greater at all three time points.

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## Father involvement – *and our expectations*

*It may be useful for research – BUT...what about fathers? And families?*

- What do we really mean by that phrase? What does it imply?
- What are the expectations of a father? (*Yours? His? Mother's?*)
- Do we consider the *QUALITY* of the involvement?
- Can we just call it “fathering?”
- Do we use the term “mother involvement?”
- Could it be insulting or marginalizing to fathers?
- Would you ever say “wife involvement” or “husband involvement?”

***It implies temporary and incidental engagement. Don't use it. Please.***

**It's a relationship.**

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## Father-Infant Relationship is Most Important!

- It underlies all the developmental domains
  - (social/emotional, gross motor, fine motor, language, cognitive)
- It is the precursor to lifelong physical and mental health (ACEs Study)
- It is the most important factor for resiliency as a skill (IE, self-regulation)
- It will be the basis for every relationship this child has for the rest of their life...  
..particularly relationships with men

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## Inclusivity.....attempted

- Mother and support person
- Mother and partner
- Mother and another chosen person
- Others?

### What about the Father???

- This may be appropriate in certain circumstances, but maybe it should not be the “norm” in communications
- *The focus and emphasis is a relationship between mother and another*

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## Why Don't We Include the Father?

- When generalized terms are used to be inclusive of other supporters for mother, the role of the father is usually excluded
- The message for fathers is "you're not needed, you're not important, we don't even recognize your role"
- The father may take that to mean "there's no space for me here"

*If we raise awareness to include fathers more often and in more ways:*

- It shifts the focus to the **relationship** between father and baby
- It acknowledges and values 50% of the baby's DNA
- The inclusion provides an expectation that he needs to be present
- His role of "father" is important and valued, even if he's still learning
- His presence is needed for both mother AND baby
- And most importantly.....

*It emphasizes the importance of father-infant relationship!*

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## Do providers disrupt the father-infant relationship?

"Note that professional gatekeeping is part of a « societal gatekeeping » as evidenced by the scarcity and the brevity of paternity leave after the birth of a child, which does not favor the early construction of the father-child bond." (Frascarolo, Feinberg, Albert-Sznitman, Favez; 2016)

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## Fathering Role

- Establish, nurture and maintain a mutually engaging and meaningful relationship with your child
- Respond and provide to your child's basic needs (eat, sleep, safety, hygiene, development) consistently, predictably, reliably
- Discuss and execute equitable agreements with child's mother
- Allow yourself to grow, change, and transform along with your child

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### Learning..... a 2-way street!



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### Have I mentioned the importance of the father-infant relationship yet?

“Such gatekeeping [that limits the role of fathers] risks depriving the child of the specific contribution of his or her father, it undermines co-parenting (and as a result the family unit), and it reinforces views that children’s development and problems are the sole responsibility of the mother (mother blaming).”

(Frascarolo, Feinberg, Albert-Sznitman, Favez; 2016)

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### Fathers have emotional experiences too!

- Do we view Fathers more than just “mother-support” and “Sherpa”?
- Is the Father’s role reduced to merely caregiving TASKS or “maintenance?”
- Fathers may not want to show it.....but do we create the space for the relationship with baby?
- Do we allow emotional experiences and encourage it when it does surface?
- Have you considered the Father’s experience during a difficult delivery? An emergency C-section? After baby is discharged home?
- Has anyone asked the Father how he is doing with all the changes in his life?
- Have you asked the Father what the labor & delivery were like for him?
- Have you asked a stay-at-home Father what it’s been like for him to stay home?

*Be mindful about “how” you ask the questions – go for open-ended.*

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## Perinatal Mood & Anxiety Disorders (PMAD)

- Overall prevalence for Fathers and PMAD – **10%** (Paulson, Bazemore; 2010)
- Prevalence for Fathers during 3-6 months postnatally – **25.6%** (Paulson, Bazemore; 2010)
- If mother has PMAD, Father is up to **50%** more likely to also have PMAD (Earls et al, 2019)
- Within first year, it's estimated 20-30% or higher of NICU parents will experience a mental health disorder
- Some of those will also experience subclinical PTSD symptoms (Hynan et al, 2015)

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## Risk Factors for Fathers & PMAD

- Biological/Physiological
- Psychological
- Social/Relationship

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## Resources for PMAD

- PMAD Screening for Fathers (EPDS) - <http://postpartummen.com/postpartum-depression/>  
(Matthey, Barnett, Kavanagh, Howie; 2001)
- Perinatal Support of Washington – [www.PerinatalSupport.org](http://www.PerinatalSupport.org)
- Postpartum Support International – [www.Postpartum.net](http://www.Postpartum.net)

**Who is asking fathers how they are doing?**

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## Protective Factors for Father's Mental Health

- Providers asking fathers "how are you doing?"
- Awareness of PMAD for self and partner
- Knowledge and importance of resources
- Social Connections for himself ("buddies," Andy's Man Club UK)
- Work-Life Balance
- Time to himself, self care
- Normalizing PMAD for all parents

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## Why else might fathers be important?

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## Unintended Consequences

Moms can do it all!  
By themselves!  
And they should!

(Because it's easier for us providers?)

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## Reasons to Support Moms

What do new moms need? – *“Another wife”*

They are often dealing with or feel responsible for:

- Breastfeeding Baby
- Sleep deprivation
- Recovery/Rest
- General Care/ADLs (Bathing, Toileting, Dressing, Grooming, Bed Mobility, Eating)
- Domestic Duties - Meals, Groceries, Laundry, Cleaning, Bills, Pets

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## Who provides support for moms?

- Her mother
- Mother in Law
- Sister
- Friend
- Post-partum Doula
- OB
- IBCLC
- Support Groups

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## One more...

### FATHERS!

- They usually spend the most time with mom, living together
- They have a vested interest in the mother of his baby doing well
- They feel a sense of responsibility to care for his partner
- They may feel competent to provide support for mom, yet insecure about caring for baby
- They most likely view parenting as a partnership that they have been thinking about for months

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## Fathers need their learning curve

“The involvement of fathers is beneficial for him whether he has difficulties with fatherhood or not, but especially in the case that he does. However, in reproducing the model of the «absent» father, facilitated by professional gatekeeping, fathers are not supported in their exploration of how to father in their own way, but are rather led into repeating the absent-father model. Thus, if a father has, or has had, difficulties with his respective father or with fatherhood, restricting his involvement will not facilitate the construction of a relationship with his child.”

(Frascarolo, Feinberg, Albert-Sznitman, Favez; 2016)

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## The importance of the father-infant relationship!



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What will you do to promote the  
*father-infant relationship?*

What one change will you make  
that will change everything?

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Thank you!

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**Q & A**

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