Building Family Strengths by Engaging Fathers on Home Visits

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Welcome!

In recent years, the field of home visiting has increasingly recognized the importance of fathers. More home visiting programs have begun to provide services to fathers in a conscious and culturally competent manner to ensure best outcomes for children. In order to do this, home visiting programs must make father engagement a key strategy. Given the legacy of home visiting programs in the maternal child health paradigm, not reaching out to fathers is still too common. Many programs in our field continue to ignore fathers to the detriment of the entire family.

In our Healthy Families Massachusetts home visiting model, we’ve worked vigorously to include fathers in all services and have documented several elements that allow a program to successfully engage fathers. As we continue to build in this area, we’re happy to share some of our success working with fathers. We’re confident that other programs can duplicate these successes with sincere effort!

In the service of families,

Becky, Haji, Mike

Goals for the Presentation

1. Share social science research on importance of fathers
2. Discuss evidence based strategies that engage fathers
3. Encourage participants to overcome barriers that prevent father engagement

Motivate Yourself to Include Fathers

![WHEN YOUR WHY IS BIG ENOUGH YOU WILL FIND YOUR HOW](image-url)
Caution: When considering the benefits of father involvement, remember a single parent – father or mother – is able to raise wonderful, successful children. Plus, if a father is involved with his children in a dangerous or abusive manner, there may be more harm done to a child than if the father was absent. However, in the aggregate, having a responsible father in a child’s life has demonstrated, in study after study, an array of positive outcomes for child, mother and father.

**Economic Benefits for Families**

In homes where a father is present, those in the household are less likely to be poor, especially for those in lower socio-economic brackets, having an engaged father is shown to decrease economic disadvantage.

**Social and Emotional Development Benefits**

Children also benefit developmentally and emotionally from the presence of fathers. Children of involved fathers are more likely to be emotionally secure, more securely attached to their caregivers, more comfortable about exploring their environment, more easily comforted after a brief separation from their parent and more socially connected to their peers.

Fathers tend to stress independence and self-sufficiency with an orientation to the outside world, in contrast to mothers, who tend to stress nurturing. School-aged children with strong attachments to their fathers are less likely to lie and to exhibit disruptive behavior.

**Academic Benefits**

Children who have a father in the household are more likely to finish high school and attend college, and are more likely to find and keep a steady job.

A study by the U.S. Department of Education found that highly involved fathers had children who were 33% less likely to repeat a grade and 43% more likely to earn mostly “A” grades.
Daughters in homes where their biological father is present are less likely to disrupt the completion of high school to become teen mothers. Girls with involved fathers have higher self-esteem; boys who have involved fathers have fewer behavioral problems at school.

Fathers as Role Models of Positive Adult Relationships

The quality of the adult relationships in the home has an impact on the parenting style of both mothers and fathers. Fathers tend to be more involved when they have a good relationship with the mother of their children and tend to spend more time with them, which is psychologically healthier for children.

Moms who have a good relationship with the father of their children tend to be better mothers: more confident; more responsive and affectionate with their infants; self-controlled in their behavior; and better able to give children their emotional support.

Fathers also have an impact on their child through their modeling of positive relationships with the child’s mother. Boys who witness their father treating their mother with respect and affection are more likely to treat women with the same respect, and girls who witness these positive relationships are more likely to look for that type of positive relationship.

Support the Well-being of Fathers with Home Visiting

Home visiting programs provide an opportunity to promote the health and well-being of fathers, including adolescent fathers, through screening, support and consistent reinforcement. Providers can build on relationships established for the care of the child to provide support for both parents. Young parents are capable of making positive choices if the necessary tools are available to them.

*The benefits we describe above were taken from many different research studies and compiled by the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy. Their brief called, “The Importance of Fathers in Home Visiting” was published in January 2012. Research study citations can be viewed at [www.scaany.org](http://www.scaany.org).*
## Healthy Families Massachusetts Father/Co-Parent Benchmark

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent of Visits with Father/Co-Parent Participating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>FY2011</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>State goal</td>
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<tr>
<td>State average</td>
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### What We’ve Discovered

- Wide range across programs from mid-20s to mid-60s percent
- Addressing benchmark highlighted a tendency to input poor data on fathers
- We’ve discovered an association between higher involvement by second parent with increased duration of family in program
- Our data acknowledges the importance of non-bio dads. Parents decide role.
- Programs that had higher rates of dad involvement tended to also have higher number of visits with co-parent.

### Home Visitor Strategies to Engage Dads on Home Visits

- Invite fathers to be present on home visits
- Address resistance from moms and others
- Advise parents how to divide childcare tasks
- Discuss benefits of father involvement
- Develop home visitor’s confidence
- Model communication for couples
- Use dad specific curricula and language
- Discuss any legacy of father absence and create positive vision
- Orientate new staff to engage fathers from the start
Program Strategies to Involve Fathers

- Implement participant focus groups with dads
- Update referral form to gather dad's info
- Create a dad curriculum box within our library
- Identify male role model for program planning
- System wide training to share best practices
- Sponsor Annual Father's Day Event
- Increase outreach to places where males gather, i.e., barber shops, sporting events, etc.

- Make sure all outreach material has mother and father focus

Create a specific fatherhood goal for yourself or your program

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Online Resources

PAT Fatherhood Toolkit

http://www.parentsasteachers.org/resources/promoting-responsible-fatherhood/fatherhood-toolkit

Fatherhood Clearinghouse Toolkit


Other curricula

ENCOURAGE FATHERS . . . EVERYONE WINS!

“We need fathers to realize that responsibility does not end at conception. We need them to realize that what makes you a man is not the ability to have a child - it's the courage to raise one.”
~ Barack Obama

“Women will never be completely equal in the workplace until men are completely equal in the home.”
~ Gloria Steinem

The best inheritance a parent can give his children is a few minutes of his time each day.
~ O. A. Battista
Bibliography


