

MODULE FOUR: THE IMPORTANCE OF FATHERS' INVOLVEMENT AND EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Learning Objectives

- Explain the importance of father involvement
- Describe techniques and strategies for engaging resistant fathers
- Identify components of successful father engagement
- Identify program components to engage young and incarcerated fathers
- Outline effective strategies for engaging fathers in services

Time: 4 hours

Materials:

Digital Stories:

Hasan: <https://youtu.be/99mowu60uDI>

Calvin: <https://youtu.be/05bJ0sXY-yc>

Video: "Knock, Knock"

<https://youtu.be/LxpO9KkRkGg>

PowerPoint

Recommended Textbook:

Cabrera, N.J., & Tamis-LeMonda, C.S. (Eds.). (2013). *Handbook of father involvement: Multidisciplinary perspectives 2nd Edition*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Supplemental Resource:

Mazza, C., & Perry, A.R. (Eds.). (2017). *Fatherhood in America: Social work perspectives on a changing society*. Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas.

Readings:

Brito, N., Barr, R., Rodriguez, J., & Shauffer, C. (2012). *Developing an effective intervention for incarcerated teen fathers*. Zero to Three.

Retrieved from <http://elp.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Britoetal2012ZTT.pdf>

	<p>Farrel, B. (2015). <i>Engaging fathers in services</i>. National Abandoned Infants Resource Center, University of California, Berkeley. Retrieved from http://aia.berkeley.edu/publications/research-to-practice-briefs/</p> <p>Fleming, J., King, A., & Hunt, T. (2014). Just call me dad: Health and social benefits to fathers and their children. <i>Children Australia</i>, 39(1), 34-41.</p> <p>(Optional) Project Design Exercise and Discussion Questions</p>
<p>Importance of Father Involvement</p>	<p>Review current research on the importance of father involvement (Coakley, Kelley, & Bartlett, 2014):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research shows that when children have a secure, supportive, sensitive, warm, and reciprocal relationship with their fathers, they are more likely to be well adjusted and to have other positive psychosocial and behavioral outcomes. • Father involvement also contributes to overall family well-being and leads to less domestic violence and less maternal involvement in Child Protective Services. <p>According to Farrel (2015), a mother also benefits when a father or father figure is more engaged in the home and the life of her children. She experiences an increase in patience, flexibility and emotional responsiveness toward her children, and sees overall positive outcomes for her children and their well-being.</p> <p>Benefits to fathers from greater involvement include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A more positive father-child relationship • Increased self-confidence and satisfaction from parenting • A higher level of empathy and understanding towards others • Increased resiliency in stressful situations • The ability to feel greater pride and find more meaning and joy from life <p>Involved fathers are also more likely to engage in community and service oriented activities, and to be more social and involved in extended family interactions.</p> <p>What are specific stressors and life circumstances that impact fathers' abilities to engage and build relationships with their children?</p>

**Engaging
Resistant Fathers**

- Spousal conflict, separation, and divorce
- Previously modeled father-son relationships
- Adverse circumstances such as unemployment, mental illness, substance use, and domestic violence
- Incarceration
- Child welfare
- Financial circumstances and child support

Pose the following discussion questions to the class, recording some of their responses:

- What are some reasons fathers may be resistant to engaging in services?
- What are some strategies that could be used to relax a father's resistance?

Using a cultural humility perspective, there are four skills that may be useful in engaging resistant fathers:

1. Active Listening
2. Reflecting
3. Reserving Judgment
4. Enter the Client's World Journey

According to Martinez et al. (2013), group work with fathers has also been shown to have a more positive impact than one-to-one counseling sessions or generic parenting programs, such as Triple P, on a father's wellbeing, particularly during times of stress and change in the family structure. Further, there is evidence that there is greater benefit for working in combination with couples than solely with fathers.

Social service systems are already overburdened and not necessarily family friendly. Men are often dismissed or have their role minimized more than women do when attempting to involve themselves in the lives of their children. Support fathers just as you would mothers.

**Digital Story:
Hasan**

Show Hasan's digital story. Use the following questions to promote discussion:

- How did the absence of a father figure impact Hasan?
- How has that experience influenced the way he is raising his children?
- How does Hasan's story relate to the difficulties fathers have when they seek assistance?

Components of Successful Engagement

- What are some strategies that programs can implement to dissipate the “where’s mom” perspective?

Discussion Questions:

- Think about engaging fathers in individual work. What are some engagement strategies you would use?
- What do you think organizations (e.g., CBOs, schools, private child welfare agencies and city agencies) need to do to be more inclusive in engaging fathers?

Programs have documented some components of successful engagement:

Emphasis needs to be on services delivered in a manner that conveys that fathers are worthy, the agency is on their side, and fathers can be hopeful they will remain in their children’s lives.

Use the following material in the discussion of components of successful engagement (Farrel, 2015).

Father engagement and responsible fatherhood programs generally revolve around creating and maintaining ongoing father-child relationships with the intention of achieving better outcomes for fathers, families, and the overall well-being of children. Programs can vary depending on the population being served; many programs target non-custodial fathers, while others focus on improving relationships and co-parenting skills between married or cohabitating couples or former partners.

Typical outcomes targeted by various programs may include (Farrel, 2015):

- Securing employment
- Promoting self-sufficiency
- Developing healthy relationships
- Becoming responsible fathers
- Improving mental health
- Reducing risky behaviors
- Reducing recidivism

According to the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse (n.d.), model fatherhood programs should include the following components:

- Use of culturally appropriate teaching methods and materials, and when possible hire staff members who are similar to the

target population

- Have a low staff to participation ratio, and establish clear program and goals and targeted curriculum (e.g., Cowan evidenced based curriculum Supporting Father Involvement)
- Use different teaching methods that are focused on addressing fathers as individuals
- Allocate enough time to complete core program activities
- One-on-one interaction between staff and participating fathers
- Offer incentives to encourage participation by fathers

When developing fatherhood programs, it is important to consider specific populations that may require additional engagement components (e.g., young fathers and incarcerated fathers).

Engagement Components for Services for Specific Populations:

Young Fathers (16-25 years of age)

A central focus of fatherhood programs during the 1980s and 1990s was helping young fathers (ages 16–25) deal with the challenges of parenthood. This work, which built on efforts to assist teenage mothers, demonstrated that contrary to stereotypes, many young fathers are involved in the lives of their families and will participate in fatherhood programs if the services are designed to meet their needs. Assisting young fathers remains a key, even primary, component of many fatherhood programs (National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse, n.d.).

Developing programs for young fathers should incorporate a strengths-based perspective, recognizing that each participant begins the program from a different place and supports should be tailored to address the individual's needs.

Review tenets of strengths-based social work.

Use the following information from to discuss engagement in services for young fathers (Martinez et al., 2013):

- When seeking the involvement of this population, it is important to recognize the differences between the two main subgroups: (1) youth who are receiving services and who are fathers, (2) fathers of children receiving services who are young adults.
- These two groups may require different methods of engagement and expect different levels of support for their engagement. Many approaches used for engaging youth in both groupings

may be similar, but with subtle differences.

- Communities also need to recognize that young fathers come from various socio-economic, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. In addition, their age impacts interactions with the system. Promising and model programs for young fathers often have a component focusing on relationships between the youth and program staff, peers, and/or mentors.
- Research suggests, and practice confirms, that one major element of a successful young fatherhood program is the presence of a one-on-one relationship between the young father and program staff. This relationship building must include the youth, staff, and partners.
- It is also critical to explore the relationship between the young father and the mother and consider her role in the relationship-building process as well. Building a relationship shows young fathers that the system can be compassionate and committed to them and their families.
- Although relationship-building is important to young fathers, other issues may become more pressing in their lives, and, if not addressed, may ultimately prevent young fathers from becoming involved or maintaining their involvement. When engaging young fathers, be sure that you listen to the needs that they express and be sure to develop opportunities for these youth to meet their needs. In some cases, the need is as simple as providing a platform for having their voices heard and their struggles identified.
- For others, there may be more pressing needs related to housing, food, and employment. Quality involvement tactics will benefit the youth as a father and as a person through his participation.
- Think about building tailored training and employment opportunities into your engagement practices that emphasize youth and fatherhood. More specific needs will arise if young fathers are involved in helping develop the engagement programs with the program organizers.

Discussion questions:

- How would you begin to engage a young father in services?
- What are some techniques that could promote engagement

(e.g., eco maps, genograms, mobility mapping, etc.)?

- How might an organization design their program to engage young fathers?

Consider the following:

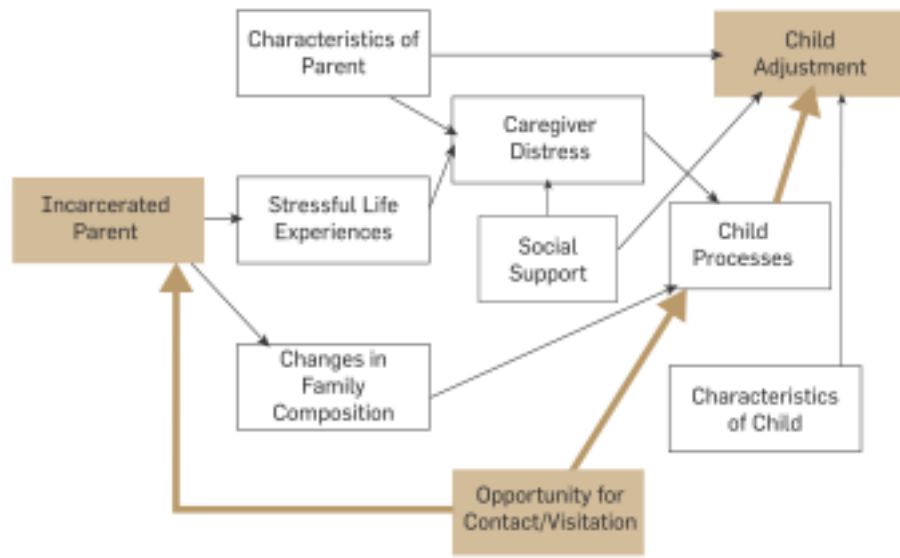
- Change language in all written documents from “teen parents” to “young mothers and fathers.”
- Send a letter of engagement directly to the fathers rather than, or in addition to, their parents/caregivers.
- Provide childcare for events designed for youth who are not parents to encourage young mothers and fathers to participate.
- Encourage gatherings of young fathers to foster father/child play time.
- Place father- and youth-friendly messages, pictures, and reading materials in the lobby,
- Consider ways to encourage the parents/caregivers of young fathers to become engaged as mentors and coaches rather than “parents.”
- Young fathers may have legal needs related to custody of their children, in addition to seeking their own independence. Consider provisions for helping them to understand and navigate the judicial system.

Incarcerated Fathers

Approximately 7.4 million children have a parent in prison, in jail, or under correctional supervision (Herman-Stahl, Kan, & McKay, 2008).

Discussion of factors that influence outcomes for children with incarcerated parents:

**Video:
“Knock, Knock”**



Source: Brito, N., Barr, R., Rodriguez, J., & Shauffer, C. (2012). *Developing an effective intervention for incarcerated teen fathers*. Zero to Three. Retrieved from <http://elp.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Britoetal2012ZTT.pdf>

Show Daniel Beaty’s spoken word video Knock, Knock. Use the following questions to guide the class discussion:

- What are some feelings you took away from this spoken word piece?
- What messages do you take away from the spoken word piece?

Discussion of The Baby Elmo Program designed for incarcerated teen fathers to build relationships with their children through visitation (Brito, Barr, Rodriguez, & Shauffer, 2012):

The absence of a father figure has been linked to very poor developmental outcomes. The Baby Elmo Program, a parenting and structured visitation program, aims to form and maintain bonds between children and their incarcerated teen fathers. The program is taught and supervised by probation staff in juvenile detention facilities. This intervention is based on building a relationship between the teen and his child, rather than on increasing the teen’s abstract parenting knowledge. Because the intervention is conducted in the context of parent–child visits, it fosters hands-on learning and increases the opportunity for contact between these young fathers and their children, a benefit in itself.

Discussion Question:

What are some strategies that can be implemented to support

incarcerated fathers?

Use the following information to support the discussion of incarcerated fathers (Martinez et al., 2013).

While fathers are incarcerated, it is important to consider the following strategies to engage them:

- Motivate the father. Support linkages to his family, friends, and community to keep him optimistic about his future, which will also help the father be present in his child's life. If the father has a distant or strained relationship with his child, this is an optimal opportunity to strengthen that relationship.
- Invite the father to participate in meetings. Move child and family team meetings to the jail. Contact jail administrators to discuss the opportunity to have such meetings during visitation hours. Consider holding meetings during times when the father has access to the phone.
- Send the father copies of individual service plans, meeting notes, and other pertinent information about his child's care. Do not assume that because the father is not physically present he cannot or does not want to participate in his child's care.
- Create opportunities to discuss the father's needs to care for his child while incarcerated. Consider providing calling cards for weekly calls.
- Meeting the child's needs can include meeting the needs of the family. In addition to parenting classes, are there additional supports the family could benefit from, such as counseling to help with the loss of the father's presence, provide opportunities for positive outlets to cope with the additional stress of raising a child without a father, and assistance with transportation for visiting.
- Even if the parents are not in a relationship, they will always have a relationship because they are parents to a common child or children. Consider using technology such as video-conferencing to engage the father, even if briefly, in the family treatment process and promoting contact with his child.

Discuss the services and engagement strategies fathers need as they transition to the community:

**Digital Story-
Calvin**

- Work with the social worker that is employed by the jail, prison, and half-way house.
- Connect with the social worker before the transition period to discuss preparation for discharge.
- Offer your support and knowledge about resources.
- Consider employment, vocational, and educational opportunities, because these are often a father's first goals. Employment and vocational opportunities may be limited for a father with a criminal record, but they do exist.
- Consider being an advocate for that child and continue to promote the successful relationship rebuilding between the child and the father.

Show Calvin's Digital Story. Use the following questions to guide the discussion:

- How does Calvin view his role of father?
- What are some strengths Calvin presents in his story?
- What combination of services was Calvin involved in when he transitioned into the community?
- How have these services assisted him in his re-entry?

**Small Group
Activity: Project
Design Exercise
and Discussion
Questions**

Assign the project design exercise with discussion questions:

A small community based organization is writing a proposal to a foundation for a two-year grant in the amount \$400,000.00 to develop a fatherhood initiative. The foundation helps low-income, non-custodial fathers achieve two main outcomes: (1) increased engagement in their relationships with their child; and (2) increased material and financial support to their child. The foundation targets young fathers ages 16 to 24 and programs must be designed to address five core areas:

- (1) parenting skills,
- (2) effective co-parenting with the child's guardian,
- (3) visitation
- (4) employment and education,
- (5) child support

The foundation anticipates participation should be between six to eight months with two months of follow-up. The number of fathers between ages 16 -24 to be served by the initiative is 50 over the course of two years. The foundation defines program completion when a father has achieved 3 core skills.

Use the following discussion questions as you build your proposal:

<p>Overview of Module Five</p> <p>Engaging Non-Resident Fathers: Benefits and Barriers</p>	<p>How would the initiative be staffed? (part time, full time, staff with lived experience)</p> <p>What types of recruitment approaches would be used? What types of retention strategies would be used?</p> <p>How would the initiative address the parenting skills component?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shifting perspective on what it means to be a father • Developing key parenting skills – child development, quality time with children, proper discipline, forming emotional connections. <p>What techniques would be used to build effective co-parenting with the child’s guardian?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attitudes and behaviors that lead to improved relationships with their co-parent (e.g., improved communication, removing children from the argument, transitioning from a romantic relationship to a co-parenting relationship, letting go of trying to control the co-parent’s decisions). • How would the initiative find effective and appropriate ways to integrate co-parents into the program? <p>How would the initiative work with young fathers to increase visitation? (e.g. understanding the court system, custody agreements)</p> <p>How would the initiative work to address employment and education? (Job readiness evaluations, workshops, referrals, internships, education evaluation, etc.)</p> <p>How would the initiative address the obligations and processes related to child support payments? (Guest speakers from OCSS, learn to navigate and fulfill child support obligations, learn new ways to define their financial responsibilities, financial management skills)</p> <p>How would you measure success?</p> <p>What data would the program collect?</p> <p>Perry, A.R., Lewis, S.N., & Langley, C. (2017). Never married, nonresident fathers. In Mazza, C., & Perry, A.R. (Eds.). <i>Fatherhood in America: Social work perspectives on a changing society</i> (pp. 91-107). Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas.</p> <p>Roy, K., & Smith, J. (2013). Nonresident fathers, kin and intergenerational parenting. In Cabrera, N.J., & Tamis-LeMonda, C.S.</p>
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(Eds.), *Handbook of father involvement: Multidisciplinary perspectives 2nd Edition* (pp. 320-337). New York, NY: Routledge.

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