Head Start Father Engagement Birth to Five Programming Guide

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ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES

Office of Head Start | 8th Floor Portals Building, 1250 Maryland Ave, SW, Washington DC 20024 | eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov

June 4, 2013

Dear Head Start Colleagues,

Since its inception in 1965, Head Start has been partnering with families and encouraging them to be their children's best and most powerful advocates. Head Start is dedicated to helping fathers, mothers, and other family members become lifelong educators and supporters of their children. The benefits are many – strong families and children ready to learn and succeed in school.

In 2004, the Office of Head Start (OHS) introduced *Building Blocks for Father Involvement* to the Head Start community. This resource was developed with the goal of improving services for fathers and increasing father involvement in Head Start. In 2013, OHS is introducing the *Head Start Father Engagement Birth to Five Programming Guide.* This is a new resource that aligns with our Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework. This Guide is designed to make father engagement live and breathe in every part of your program. It offers many ideas for implementing father engagement strategies across systems and services as a part of your everyday work.

We hope that this new resource will build upon the collaborations you've already established with fathers, families, and community partners. It is intended to support your work with mothers as well as with fathers because children benefit from positive, strong, and cooperative relationships between their caregivers.

Thank you for all you do to promote and sustain family and father engagement in your programs.

Sincerely,

Yvette Sanchez Fuentes
Director
Office of Head Start

Introduction

The Early Head Start fathering program is like a life support to me.

~ Early Head Start Father

Head Start has a long history of acknowledging that male family members and father figures are important contributors to the school readiness of children and to the well-being of families. Head Start and Early Head Start (EHS) programs consistently engage fathers as advocates, lifelong educators, and first teachers of their children. Programs also engage fathers in developing their own skills and interests and in achieving their personal goals. Male family members and father figures have important and unique contributions to make to their Head Start communities. Everyone benefits when their wish to make a positive difference is welcomed.

There are a variety of father engagement activities that go on in programs. Many programs have examined cultural perspectives to improve their ongoing understanding of the unique needs and strengths of fathers. Other programs have enlisted fathers' ideas to ensure father-friendly environments. Some programs have prioritized efforts to support the relationship between fathers and their children. In all cases, the work is critical to engagement and successful outcomes for children. Ideally, father engagement should not be a stand-alone initiative but rather a vital and integrated aspect of parent, family, and community work in Head Start and EHS.

Understanding Father Involvement and Engagement in Head Start

Father "involvement" often refers to bringing fathers into the program to participate in different activities. It also refers to helping fathers become more involved in child rearing and in their child's life.

Father "engagement" includes participation and child rearing but goes a step further. Father engagement means making a commitment to a partnership. Engagement is rooted in positive relationships. With involvement, there is an emphasis on being present. With engagement, there is a focus on creating and sustaining ongoing relationships. The intent is to support families and to benefit children's learning and development.

In Head Start, father engagement means that fathers and staff work as partners to promote the child's best interest, to exchange knowledge about the child, and to share in program governance. They also work together to establish child and family goals that are motivating and fulfilling.

Successful engagement of fathers requires staff to demonstrate genuine curiosity and respect for the unique strengths, talents, cultures, goals, and circumstances of fathers. Building a trusting relationship based on knowledge and acceptance of the individual opens the door for meaningful communication. A trusting relationship can lead to positive changes for families and for your program.

Research Update: The Importance of Fathers to Child Development and Family Well-Being

I think the research…has shown that the stereotype of the uninvolved, disinterested low-income father is really misleading. That contrary to that stereotype, the research shows us that these fathers have the same motivation and are as committed to doing whatever they can to promote their children's welfare.

~ Dr. Michael E. Lamb, Professor of Psychology in the Social Sciences, Cambridge University (2002)

It is exciting that Head Start programs now can use research to guide and improve their father engagement efforts. Research on fathers from different socioeconomic, cultural, and ethnic groups reports similar findings. When fathers are involved in their children's lives, they

- are competent caregivers of infants
- interact differently with their children than mothers do
- contribute to their child's development, including school readiness
- support the positive parenting of mothers
- contribute to the well-being of the family
- show positive gains in their own development and life decisions

Engaged fathers—whether they live with their children or not—contribute to the well-being of their children, their families, and their communities. Research findings about father-child interactions, the effects of father engagement, and how to get fathers involved are highlighted in this section.

Interactions

Men demonstrate the capacity to nurture and care for young children. Generations of parents attest to this fact, and so does research. Fathers of newborns show the same emotional responses as mothers. For example, fathers use a higher-pitched voice when talking with babies just like mothers do (Yogman, 1981). The brains of both fathers and mothers react the same way when a baby cries, although mothers are typically more expressive in their responses (Frodi, Lamb, Hwang, & Frodi, 1983). A more recent study shows that regions of a father's brain associated with sensitivity to infant's cues are activated more by their own babies than by other infants (Kuo, Carp, Light, & Grewen, 2012). Research also indicates that by two weeks, babies have learned their father's voice and distinguish it from other males (Brazelton & Sparrow, 2006). Father-baby bonding is intense and begins early.

Studies consistently show mothers and fathers have different styles of playing and communicating. Fathers promote more exploratory, independent behavior on the part of their young children and also engage them in more physical and stimulating play than mothers do (Parke & Tinsley, 1987). When speaking to young children, mothers are more likely to simplify their words and speak on the child's level. Fathers speak in ways that stretch and challenge the child's language competency (Lamb, 2002). Discipline styles also vary. Mothers are more likely to exhibit warmth and reasoning with their preschoolers and fathers tend to be more strict and demanding (Russell, et al., 1998). Exposure to different parenting styles helps prepare a child for a variety of experiences outside the home.

Research indicates that the quality of the father-child relationship is demonstrated by how fathers play with children. Rich play between fathers and children seems to help both fathers and children, though this may vary by culture. In comparison, the quality of the mother-child relationship often is demonstrated by how the mother offers the child security when stressed (K.Grossman, K.E.Grossman, Fremmer-Bombik, Scheuerer-English, & Zimmerman, 2002). Of course, both mothers and fathers can display a variety of parenting styles, including those considered "typical" for parents. Children benefit from different and complimentary styles of parenting.

Just as with mothers, some interactions between fathers and children are not positive experiences for children. For example, when fathers are engaged in high levels of antisocial behavior while living with their children, their children may display conduct problems (Jaffee, Moffitt, Caspi, & Taylor, 2003). Accordingly, programs should support positive father-child relationships. In fact, research with families in EHS demonstrates that when fathers are involved in the program, they show more complex social play with their toddlers. (Roggman, Boyce, Cook, Christiansen, & Jones, 2004). This study also found that fathers' social play is associated with their children's language and cognitive gains.

Effects on children

There are long-term benefits to children when their fathers are engaged parents. Analysis of more than 100 studies on parent-child relationships found that having a loving and nurturing father was as important for a child's happiness, well-being, and social and academic success as having a loving and nurturing mother (Rohner & Venziano, 2001). These positive outcomes also hold true for children who grow up with non-resident but involved fathers (Fogarty & Evans, 2009).

If fathers are involved caregivers of their babies, there are positive gains in early language and exploratory behavior (Bronte-Tinkew, Carrano, Horowitz, & Kinukawa, 2008). Father's language input when a child is 24 months old has been found to contribute to language development later in life (Pancsofar & Vernon-Feagens, 2006).

In a study of families in EHS programs, a father's presence in the family promoted cognitive outcomes (Cook, Roggman,& Boyce, 2012). The toddlers with involved fathers were more secure and more likely to explore the world with enthusiasm. They are well on their way to becoming independent and learning new skills. The fathers' presence also increased the mothers' cognitive stimulation of their toddlers. There also were long-term cognitive effects, namely higher math and reading skills in fifth grade.

Other research indicates that fathers' active play style promotes problem-solving skills (Pruett, 2000). Children of involved fathers are better able to manage their emotions and impulses (Allen & Daly, 2007). Older children who have close relationships with their fathers have higher self-esteem and are less likely to be depressed (Dubowitz et al., 2001).

Fathers can indirectly influence the physical well-being of their children by facilitating positive health outcomes for mothers (Allen & Daly, 2007). For example, fathers can help support the breast feeding practices of the mothers (Wolfberg et al., 2004). Fathers' own health makes a difference to their children's health; more active toddlers are more likely to have fathers with a lower BMI (Body Mass Index) than less active children (Finn, Johannsen, & Specker, 2002).

In sum, numerous research studies indicate that engaged fathers have positive effects on children's well-being and development. The result is healthy children ready for success in school and life.

Effects on families and society

Fathers who take an active role in their children's lives feel better about themselves, find more meaning, and have greater pride and enjoy life (Palkowitz, 2002). They commit fewer crimes and abuse substances less often (Kerr, Capaldi, Owen, Wiesner, & Pears, 2011). When fathers are involved parents, their children's mothers show more positive, nurturing behaviors with their children (Tamis-LaMonda, Shannon, Cabrera, & Lamb, 2004). Moreover, families with involved fathers are typically better off economically, which has positive effects on child development outcomes (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997).

Getting fathers involved

A father's presence may be related to a mother's capacity to nurture. But this dynamic goes both ways. When a father perceives that his partner has confidence in his parenting ability, he feels motivated and competent as a parent. These feelings of motivation and confidence reinforce his involvement and his satisfaction with the parental role (Bouchard, Lee, Asgary, & Pelletier, 2007).

It is critical that programs understand this point. When mothers and program staff convey to fathers that they are capable of parenting, the fathers accept the parental role. Fathers will be involved when given the opportunity for appropriate engagement. Promising findings indicate that most EHS children have a father involved in their lives, and that the programs support their effectiveness (Raikes & Bellott, 2006).

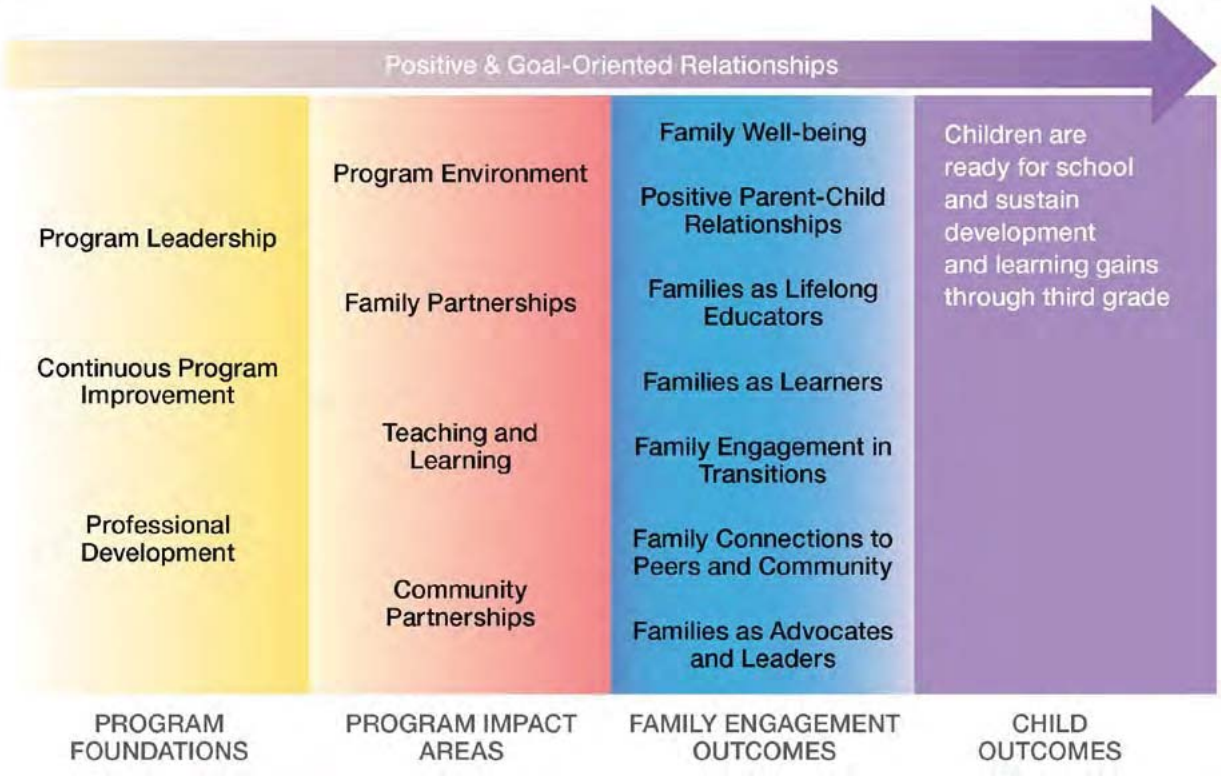
At the same time, other research with EHS fathers suggests that the fathers who most need support also are the most difficult to engage (Roggman, Boyce, G.A. Cook, & J. Cook, 2002). If that is so, then staff, programs, and mothers should find ways to stand alongside fathers to help them establish positive ways of fathering their children and supporting their families.

Finally, a note of caution—researchers, as well as practitioners, warn that a uniform picture of how fathers should interact with children or play their roles in families does not reflect the diversity of families that are served by Head Start and EHS. "No single definition of 'successful fatherhood' and no ideal 'father's role' can claim universal acceptance or empirical support" (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000). There are cultural differences in father-child relationships, as well as individual differences that have to be respected and valued in order for children, families, and communities to benefit.

How To Use the Father Engagement Guide

How is this Guide organized?

The Father Engagement Guide is organized around the Parent, Family and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework. **The PFCE Framework** is a road map for progress in achieving outcomes that lead to positive and enduring change for children and families. It is a research-based approach to program change that shows how Head Start and EHS programs can work across systems (program foundations) and service areas (program impact areas) to promote parent and family engagement and children's learning and development. Throughout this Guide, the magnifying glass symbol indicates connections in the text to the PFCE Framework.



Part I: Program Foundations

The first section of this Guide focuses on the three Program Foundations:

- Leadership
- Continuous Improvement
- Professional Development

For family engagement to thrive, program leadership must be fully committed to program-wide efforts at family engagement, and inspire every staff member to make the same commitment. This includes a specific focus on father engagement. As part of the continuous program improvement cycle, programs embrace learning and see shortfalls in performance and outcomes as opportunities for learning and improvement. They continuously review and improve their father-focused practices. Program leaders ensure that staff members have sufficient professional development support to develop their skills in their father engagement work. They ensure that staff feel safe and encouraged to reflect on whatever personal challenges may influence their ability to work effectively with fathers. Program foundations are the basis for successful father engagement programming.

Part II: Program Impact Areas

The second section of this Guide is about the four Program Impact Areas:

- Program Environment
- Family Partnerships
- Teaching and Learning
- Community Partnerships

When the Foundations for working with fathers are in place and ongoing relationships are nurtured, programs can align their father engagement strategies across the Program Impact Areas.

Programs create a father-friendly environment where fathers are welcomed, valued and respected. Partnering with staff, fathers identify their goals and how to reach them. They also partner to promote their child's learning and development by sharing information and setting goals for the child. Finally, community partnerships support fathers' interests and needs, offer opportunities for fathers to make personally meaningful contributions, and foster parent and father engagement in children's learning.

Part III: Toolkit

Multiple resources are included in the Toolkit:

- assessment tools
- an action plan
- a Memorandum of Understanding
- weblinks

Additional training tools and resources can help programs achieve effective father engagement.
Note: A Table of PFCE Framework Elements and Related Head Start Performance Standards is included at the end of the Toolkit.

Who is this Guide designed for?

Father engagement is an integral part of family engagement. This Guide provides information about serving expectant fathers and fathers of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, as well as other men who play a significant role in the lives of young children. It is designed for all Head Start staff, starting with program leaders and managers who shape program policy. It also is designed for direct service staff who interact with fathers, including teachers, family service workers, home visitors, health staff, and transportation providers. This Guide is useful for parent leaders.

Programs have contributed their varied and rich experiences to the development of this Guide. They have shared their father engagement strategies, challenges, and successes in order to benefit your program. Reflections from engaged fathers and grandfathers are included; they speak to the benefits for their children, families, and communities, and for themselves as individuals.

There is no "one size fits all" approach. Rather, father engagement efforts will reflect the needs and interests of fathers; the skills and expertise of program staff; and the resources in the community. Keep track of the changes you make and of what works and what doesn't. Share what you learn with the Head Start and EHS communities at your local, state, and federal levels.

Throughout this Guide, there are references to related resources. They are meant to extend the discussion by offering additional information and tools on a particular topic.

Use of terminology

In the Father Engagement Guide, the term fathers is used to mean father figures, male family members, or men that play a significant caregiving role in children's lives. The word Head Start encompasses Early Head Start, Migrant and Seasonal Head Start, and all program options. Information specific to expectant parents and the birth to three age group is noted.

PART I: Program Foundations for Father Engagement Programming

What makes me happy every day is that I know that he knows I'm his father … he's like, "Hi dad, you coming to get me?"

~ Head Start Father

Program Foundations for Father Engagement includes three elements that influence every aspect of father engagement in your program:

- Program Leadership
- Continuous Improvement
- Professional Development

These foundations are related to each other in different ways. Plans and decisions made in one area enhance or reinforce plans and decisions made in another area. For example, program leadership can promote professional development strategies to create a program environment that respects the strengths and cultural backgrounds of fathers. Making these kinds of "connections" in your organization will help ensure that your practices are program-wide, sustained over time, and lead to the well-being of children and their families.

Father engagement strategies tied to program systems and services with targeted outcomes have the potential to impact many fathers and families. A focus on special events or activities may be helpful to those fathers who participate, but not reach others. Another way of thinking about this is to implement father engagement plans and provide services that are systemic, integrated, and comprehensive.

Systemic father engagement is anchored in leadership priorities, program management, continuous improvement systems, and staff development.

Integrated father engagement activities are carried out throughout the entire program, among all staff and through a broad variety of program activities. Children and fathers are appreciated for who they are as individuals, family members, and community members.

Comprehensive father engagement reflects the full range of strengths, interests, and needs of fathers. Staff support families by connecting them with diverse and individualized services and resources to achieve their goals and to support children's learning and development.

This section of the Father Engagement Guide includes a discussion of the elements of program foundations —program leadership, continuous improvement, and professional development—with program examples throughout.

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

Program Leadership: Prioritizing Father Engagement

> *I've been involved with my daughter from day one which is not something you see in a lot of adolescents. I came to a few Policy Council meetings and I liked what I saw. It's not too often that someone wants to hear what a parent thinks, let alone an adolescent parent. A year later, I was Vice-Chair of the Policy Council. I learned to advocate for my daughter and make decisions that affected all of the children in the program.*
>
> *~ Head Start Father*

Establishing a vision

Program leaders are at the forefront of determining how their programs promote and achieve father engagement. They set a vision and establish priorities. They create a collaborative environment, and affirm the value in engaging fathers and supporting the whole family. The director, the Governing Board, the Policy Council, parent committees, and management teams can set the tone and foster commitment to building a father-friendly organization.

Although there are leadership positions and structures that play a critical role in establishing a vision and setting forth priorities, everyone has a role to play in prioritizing fathers. You can inspire staff to make fathers a priority by including fathers in your program strategic planning, in your overall family and community engagement program operations, and in the positive and welcoming way you relate to fathers on a daily basis. Regardless of the position staff hold in your program, each one of them can positively influence the way your program engages fathers, families, and the community.

> *It's important to immerse our staff in the world of fatherhood. So they can hear firsthand and understand dads and how much they love their children.*
>
> *~ Head Start Director*

Family engagement programs can establish visions that recognize the individuality of fathers and honor them as members of cultural and ethnic groups in the community. Fathers in one program, or even one classroom, may have many different backgrounds, experiences, and home languages. Fathers from similar racial and/or ethnic groups have many differences that make each of them unique. For example, they may come from different regions of a country; they may have been born in the United States or arrived only recently; and their families may have belonged to very different socio-economic classes in their country of origin. Leaders can encourage staff to become informed about the groups represented in the community but, most importantly, to know each father as an individual.

> *Part of the vision of fatherhood programming at Red Cliff is to use cultural traditions as a means to engage fathers in the Head Start program. In this program, tribal elders serve as important role models to fathers.*
>
> *~ Head Start Fatherhood Coordinator*

Understanding where you are

There are different ways to assess where your program is on the journey toward effective father engagement. Conversations with staff and fathers are a critical part of understanding how things are going. Together, review your community assessment and self-assessment data and discuss how well you are meeting the needs of fathers in your community. When you interpret your community and program information accurately, your vision is informed by fathers' strengths and aspirations. Also, your goals and plans are more likely to respond to the serious needs of fathers and children in the community.

You can begin by reflecting on your program's day-to-day practices. How do teachers greet fathers? What do they say to fathers about their child's progress? How are fathers invited to be in classrooms? Are home visits scheduled when fathers are available? Is information sent home directed to both fathers and mothers? These are the kinds of initial questions that leaders can explore with fathers, mothers, and staff to get a better understanding of how well their programs are engaging fathers.

Related Resource:

Substitute the word father for families when doing this assessment, and this resource can help determine whether your program is at a starting point, is progressing, or is innovating.

Using the Head Start PFCE Framework in your Program: Markers of Progress

Reflecting on where you have been

After conducting father-focused services for several years, a Head Start director described his program's father engagement services as a series of developmental stages. In stage one, he asked his program to give more consideration to the father's role in the family. He led key staff and fathers in a collaborative process to determine the what, how, and why of particular service approaches for fathers in the program.

He thought his program reached a second stage when it provided more father-focused services, evaluated them, and made adjustments and modifications based on what they learned. Once he started to see

systemic transformations, he felt the program was at a third stage. Not only were fathers receiving more individualized services, but all staff members were interacting with, engaging, and supporting fathers similarly across all program service options. Furthermore, the program had established training and supervisory supports.

With this level of program-wide commitment, the program went from becoming more father-friendly, to providing enhanced services with thoughtful training and support for staff. For example, staff first had to appreciate the role of fathers and then commit to engaging fathers in new ways. This resulted in their finding new ways to include fathers in individual meetings, home visits, parent-teacher meetings, policy council and self-assessment processes. Over time, this program began to embody systemic, integrated, and comprehensive father engagement.

Putting the vision into action

Once a vision for father engagement is established within your leadership team and you have a general sense of what your program is doing, think about the next steps: setting goals to reach targeted outcomes. A goal is what you seek to accomplish and an outcome is the final result achieved after you have implemented your goals and plans. Leadership plays a key role in developing strategic goals and plans that bring systems, people, and activities together in a way that values staff and fathers and supports family and child outcomes. The following scenario provides an example of how one program put their vision into action.

Program Leadership: Father Engagement Program Scenario

At the beginning of the program year, the director of Trinity Head Start and Early Head Start forms a working committee that includes program staff, fathers, and expectant fathers. The goals of the committee are first to offer feedback on last year's family engagement efforts. Next the committee will help establish and prioritize an agenda and timeline for this year's father engagement activities.

Based on information from last year's surveys and other sources, the working committee decides to focus on two outcomes from the PFCE Framework: strengthening fathers' relationships with their children and supporting fathers as lifelong educators of their children. To achieve these outcomes, they decide to set goals to improve their human resources and communications systems.

First, they pick two strategies to enhance the human resources system:

1. Professional development service plans that include staff development and training to ensure staff build relationships with fathers and share individual child information with fathers.

2. Staff performance appraisals that include objectives connected to the programs' overall goal to enhance father engagement.

How do these strategies target the outcomes the program is striving for? Changing the human resources policies will improve staff knowledge and motivation to engage fathers. This can result in fathers becoming more comfortable in the environment and fostering partnerships with staff. When this happens, fathers may communicate more with staff about their concerns and goals for their children. Supportive staff-father partnerships may motivate fathers to spend more time with their children and use what they learn from staff to support their children's learning and development. This supports fathers as lifelong educators of their children.

As a second program goal, the working committee also decides to focus on enhancing the communication system because there were recent challenges around pick-up and dropoffs. A number of fathers felt disrespected when attempting to pick up their children because center staff would not send the children

home with them. These fathers were listed on the emergency contact card. However, due to conflicts between the mother and father, the mothers asked that the children not be sent home with their fathers.

This raised challenges for staff who wanted to preserve their relationships with each parent. The fathers felt that their rights were being denied by the staff, which caused conflict between the staff and the fathers. (Note: These were not instances of domestic abuse nor situations involving court protective orders).

In support of the goal to improve communication around pick-up and drop-offs, the program decides to develop and enact the following policies and procedures when there is conflict or confusion between parents:

- Professional development plans will include training in how to support parents during periods of conflict so that staff preserve their relationships.
- Staff will communicate with parents individually and/or together, as appropriate, to explain the program's commitment to supporting both parents and to review the authorized pick-up policy.
- Staff will explain the program's position and will provide support to both parents or involve a mental health consultant, as appropriate, to help the family deal with the conflict.
- Staff will utilize internal and external resources to provide support for parents when domestic violence is present.
- Staff and parents will follow up at an agreed-upon time to assess the need for continuing support.

How do these communication strategies promote the outcomes the program has targeted? The policies and procedures support staff-parent relationships by keeping communication channels open with both parents. They also help parents to address conflict that may be affecting their relationship with their child and their child's social and emotional well-being. These strategies are intended to support fathers' relationships with their children.

Trinity Head Start captures information in their recordkeeping and reporting systems about staff support of father-child interactions. Staff describe increased ease and more thoughtful communications with fathers about their children's development. Fathers report that they feel more comfortable bringing questions and concerns to staff about how to best support their children's learning and development.

In reviewing the progress toward the communication goal, the program finds that the number of challenging pickups and drop offs steadily decrease. When they do occur, they are immediately addressed by using new policies and procedures to support both parents. Over time, fathers report feeling more supported, and staff feel they have more skills to deal with parental conflicts and to preserve relationships with both parents.

Program Leadership: Organizational Design

> ***Father, family, and community engagement training is important for all staff. Professional development focuses on how staff members in different roles can contribute to program-wide father engagement efforts in complimentary ways.***
>
> ***~ Head Start Director***

Staffing Options

When father engagement is an established leadership priority, it becomes part of a program's overall training and service delivery plan. When all staff collaborate to engage fathers, success is inevitable. Depending upon what your program seeks to accomplish, there are different staffing options to consider.

A program with limited resources can tackle conversations about gender roles and cross-gender professional relationships through training and reflective supervision. Staff can receive training that improves their observation, communication, and assessment skills in order to develop positive goal-oriented relationships with fathers. Family partnership staff, home visitors, and teachers typically will carry the primary responsibility for these efforts with some oversight and support from program administrators.

Some programs develop a fatherhood team of staff and parents. The team plans and manages father-specific programming, such as fathers' groups and father-child activities. Engaged fathers of enrolled children can help with recruitment and outreach to new fathers. They also may be interested in volunteering for parent orientations, Policy Council, parent meetings, and community forums.

Some Head Start programs that have integrated father engagement activities across their systems and services want to further expand their efforts by creating a part-time or full-time fatherhood coordinator. This staff member helps to organize and coordinate fatherhood services and communicates with the program director and the administrative team. The coordinator can facilitate program-wide staff development, and family engagement trainings and can meet with family partnership staff to discuss service delivery, referrals, and family partnership agreements. Many programs also hire family services staff to play a lead role in working with fathers. These approaches take more resources in terms of funding and staffing.

Male staff or consultants play a pivotal role in supporting systemic, integrated, and comprehensive father engagement. When qualified and experienced male staff are hired to manage overall fatherhood programming and service delivery, they should be integrated into the Head Start team and connected to program services. They should participate in professional development activities and meetings with mid-level managers to ensure their activities are connected to the program's overall family and father

engagement goals. They should also maintain ongoing communication with teachers, home visitors, and other members of the father engagement team.

In organizations that are predominantly female, it is important that program leadership create opportunities for the fatherhood coordinator and other staff to work together and learn from each other. Together, they may need to address any concerns or misunderstandings that arise when an organization is becoming more father-focused and male integrated.

Funding for additional staffing and services

Leaders interested in offering a wider or more in-depth range of services may want to seek additional funding through grants and in-kind donations. After providing and evaluating services for fathers, you can show funders you have the knowledge, experience and results to expand fatherhood programming. You can summarize these results in reports and share them with potential funders. Father engagement staff can use this data to help funders better understand how your program arrived at successful outcomes.

When seeking additional funding, where do you begin? Some programs have a development office to assist with grant writing. Successful grant writing includes a well-developed understanding of your population of fathers and of effective father engagement. Competitive grants usually include a summary of program activities, program results, and fathers' testimony about their experiences. In addition, many foundations look favorably on creative community collaborations.

Possible funding sources available through state, tribal and federal governments may include but are not limited to:

- **http://www.grants.gov**
- Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)
- discretionary grants
- foundation support
- special improvement grants from the Office of Child Support Enforcement

TANF and state funds are among the most flexible funding sources. However, it is wise to watch for other funding announcements, even those that may not specifically focus on the topic of fatherhood. Service enhancements for fathers and father figures often can be funded with awards targeting other priorities, such as child abuse prevention, school readiness, minority male and mentoring initiatives, family restoration and strengthening projects, marriage and relationship education, and crime prevention services.

As a program leader interested in creating, promoting, and sustaining father engagement, it will help if you develop a local network with supportive individuals, organizations, and agencies. Consider asking local businesses and corporations, including faith-based institutions, fraternities, sororities, and other collaborative partners for contributions of goods, services, and incentives for participating fathers. You might receive tickets to museums or community events, gift cards, clothing, toys, books, or other educational materials. Corporate sponsorships also provide meaningful incentives and can be an excellent way to market enhanced services for fathers and to create a reservoir of community goodwill.

CONTINUOUS PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

Continuous Program Improvement: A Philosophy and a Process

Head Start programs focused on program improvement can demonstrate their commitment to continuous learning practices by investing in children, parents and staff, with the ultimate goal of becoming a learning organization. Refer to the **Advisory Committee on Head Start Research and Evaluation: Final Report** (August 2012). Learning organizations provide a safe environment to assess and critique performance data and to make changes in order to improve outcomes.

Like all program strategies that are intended to enhance services, fatherhood strategies and activities should be grounded in a continuous improvement process. Continuous improvement includes ways of working with information to support the goals and plans of your Head Start program.

The seven-stage planning cycle is a helpful tool for thinking about continuous improvement. It applies to overall program planning and can be adapted for use with any content or activity within the program. Applied to father engagement, this is what the planning cycle might look like.

Continuous Program Improvement: The Planning Cycle

Step 1: Conducting a community assessment

You can better understand fathers in your community by including them in focus group discussions. You also can gather demographic information from local and state databases. See the Toolkit for questions you may wish to incorporate in your next community assessment to inform your planning and service delivery.

Refer to the Toolkit: B. Father Engagement Assessment Questions: Key Questions for Community Assessment and Program Self-Assessment Processes

Step 2: Gathering and reviewing self-assessment data

A self-assessment is an important part of the continuous improvement process. See the Toolkit for questions you may wish to incorporate in your next self-assessment or your ongoing monitoring to inform your planning and service delivery for fathers.

Refer to the Toolkit: B. Father Engagement Assessment Questions: Key Questions for Community Assessment and Program Self-Assessment Processes

Refer to the Toolkit: C. Markers of Progress (Digital and PDF Versions)

Step 3: Deciding on program goals

Many programs refer to information gathered during their community and program assessments to build on identified strengths, correct weaknesses of service delivery and develop goals. Which family outcomes are important to fathers and families in your community? What are the program's priorities for working toward these outcomes? For example, are family well-being and parent leadership important outcomes for fathers in your community? Set program goals to reach these outcomes, and think about how these will connect to individual family goals. If goals are both relevant and realistic for fathers, families and children, it is important to make sure your program has the capacity to provide the right services. It also is important to make sure your activities are not too difficult to track, measure, and analyze.

To ensure your outcomes connect to your father engagement goals and strategies, it may help to use a fatherhood logic model or theory of change. If your father-focused outcome is to support father engagement around transitions, then make sure your program goals and strategies are the right ones to achieve that outcome. Use the resources in the Toolkit to think about these connections and consider how to measure progress toward these goals and outcomes.

Refer to the Toolkit: A. Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Fillable Framework

Step 4: Developing a plan of action and budget that reflects goals

Once leadership (including parents) has established program goals, you can develop an action plan, make a budget, and figure out your data collection methods. In other words, what are you going to do to meet these goals, and what do you want to learn about these goals? Action plans vary from program to program, because each program has unique families, resources, demands, participants, partners, and needs. Identify some key action steps and strategies across your program systems and services.

Refer to the Toolkit: D. Sample Action Plan

Step 5: Implementing a plan of action

Because program goals cross different systems and services, it is important to ensure that all staff members are briefed and informed about the role they will play in implementing the plan. To understand whether you are reaching family outcomes and, more specifically, father outcomes, it is important for your program to develop ways to collect, analyze, and aggregate information about individual families and program level efforts.

To guide your data collection, first choose the questions you want to answer. As you develop record-keeping and reporting systems to collect data, do periodic spot checks to make sure the information is being collected in a way that leads to analysis and can help evaluate your progress.

Step 6: Evaluating progress through ongoing monitoring

It is important to assess fathers' progress on an ongoing basis and at key points throughout the year. Your program can encourage families to share goals and updates regularly. You can administer parent/family questionnaires and/or surveys. Whenever possible, use tools that are valid and reliable. Using valid tools ensures a more accurate understanding of progress. Reliable tools yield consistent responses when used multiple times.

Related Resource:

Dads' Parent Interactions With Children—Checklist of Observations Linked to Outcomes (Piccolo-D). This tool is designed for home visitors to identify fathering strengths that support child development**.** **Checklist.**

It is useful to have regular conversations with fathers and families to gather data about the progress of your program's plans. Their insights will be important to making sure that your program is on the right track.

Compile individual father and family data in different ways to determine patterns and trends with fathers and families in the program. For example, you can group fathers by age (teens vs. older fathers) or by rates of participation in various Head Start activities. Then analyze the data along these lines: What father engagement efforts were more successful with teen fathers? Why? Which activities are more likely to engage fathers who are new to the program vs. those who have been involved for two to three years? Consider the answers to these questions when evaluating fathers' progress and the value of father engagement activities.

Having an ongoing assessment process in place is an opportunity to make timely adjustments or changes to plans while focusing on outcomes. Gathering data along the way informs programs about fathers' and families' progress. If you have systems for aggregating or pulling together individual father and family data, you can use the results to make program-wide improvements.

Step 7: Revising/continually responding with course corrections

The data gathered through the continuous improvement process can help programs better understand how fathers and children are doing. For example, you may use the information to make service changes or to eliminate activities that are not having an impact or to provide more targeted interventions. The data might suggest staffing changes or more professional development. The data also can alter your program's vision and its short- and long-range program goals related to fathers.

Communicating results, successes, and challenges is an important step in the continuous improvement process. Groups of fathers, staff, and community partners will be interested in the success of your program's action plan. When you discuss the results and findings from your work with fathers, you can gather feedback that will help the program either recommit to or redefine father engagement goals and strategies.

Continuous Program Improvement: Program Scenario

Step 1: Conducting community assessments

Centro de Niños' Migrant and Seasonal Head Start program learns through its community assessment that there are no father-focused parenting services in one of their communities where a center is open for a nine-month growing season.

Step 2: Gathering and reviewing self-assessment data

Although there is great participation by mothers and fathers in Centro de Niños Policy Council and parent meetings, an annual self-assessment reveals that fathers want to know more about their child's development. In addition, a review of available parenting materials shows that they primarily focus on mothering.

Step 3: Deciding on program goals

Centro de Niños forms a workgroup to discuss these findings. The workgroup includes the director, key managers, and parent leaders who invite other fathers and mothers. Together, they decide to focus on Positive Parent-Child Relationships as a targeted outcome in the PFCE Framework. They also decide to improve fathers' access to father-friendly parenting services and to increase fathers' knowledge about children's learning and development.

Step 4: Developing a plan of action and budget that reflects goals

The workgroup discusses the lack of father-friendly material available to support fathers in their parenting role. They also discuss the shortage of community father-friendly parenting supports in the evening when fathers can attend. As a result, the program identifies three strategies:

- Reach out to facilitators to provide parent trainings using the Abriendo Puertas curriculum and identify the cost of implementing this curriculum for parents in the center.
- Train staff to provide more consistent opportunities to share information about child development. Include fathers in communications, parent teacher conferences, and family goal setting as often as possible.
- Invite community providers of parenting groups and resources to discuss program goals. Invite community partners to join Centro de Niños to assess the father friendliness of all their services, including the availability of services at night.

Step 5: Implementing a plan of action

Centro de Niños puts an extensive plan into place to respond to the needs of fathers.

- Identify key staff for implementation of Abriendo Puertas and develop a workplan for implementation.

- Identify action steps for supervisors to collect data based on staff interactions with fathers.
- Set up a schedule of meetings with community partners. Share information and track strategies to improve father friendliness.

Step 6: Evaluating progress through ongoing monitoring

Centro de Niños identifies ways to determine whether their strategies meet their goals. The goals include increasing fathers' access to parenting services and increasing their child development knowledge to support father-child relationships. They decide to take the following steps:

- Staff evaluate what fathers (and mothers) learn from Abriendo Puertas lessons to determine if there are changes in fathers' knowledge and in how they behave with their children.
- Supervisors review staff interactions with families to determine if there are changes in staff inclusion of fathers in child development conversations.
- Staff meet periodically with community providers to identify any changes in community practice for supporting fathers. They track the number of fathers engaged in these services over a specified period of time.

In addition, the workgroup designs a pre- and post-survey for fathers. They plan to use this survey to obtain fathers' input on the quality of their communications with staff, their knowledge of their children's learning and development, and the activities they engage in with their children. They plan to share these findings with all fathers in the program to see if the findings are accurate and meaningful.

Step 7: Revising/continually responding with course corrections

The Centro de Niños workgroup meets quarterly to review sources of data related to their goals. They make changes in the strategies that are least effective and add new strategies. They also plan to take the time to share their program's successes with community partners and to celebrate family successes at an evening family carnival.

The seven steps of this continuous improvement process includes strategies related to the following elements of the PFCE Framework: Leadership, Professional Development, Program Environment, Family Partnerships, Teaching and Learning, and Community Partnerships. This scenario from Centro de Niños' Migrant and Seasonal Head Start program highlights a systemic and integrated approach for father engagement. This scenario also demonstrates how Centro de Niños is evolving into a learning organization that relies on continuous data gathering and analysis to improve its system and services.

Related Resources:

These resources will help you think about using data in Head Start. **Related Resources**

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional Development: Program Leadership

Prioritizing effective professional development

Program leaders create a climate of learning in the organization. They model curiosity, humility about the limitations of what they know, ongoing desire for new knowledge, and offer a structure of training and support for staff, fathers, and community partners.

Program plans for professional development should be well-coordinated and include training, supervision, coaching, recognition for accomplishments, and information for staff about related career options.

Training about father engagement needs to be in-depth, strategic, and followed-up by more learning experiences. It is often helpful to have a training session conclude with "take-aways"—a few points that participants can take back and put into action. The more that fathers can plan staff training, contribute content, or co-facilitate, the more likely it is to be authentic, focused, and relevant. They also may want to participate as learners and benefit from the training.

Staff need regular opportunities to come together and learn about how they can improve their own knowledge and father engagement skills. Professional development can take place in staff meetings, reflective practice team sessions, and data review teams. Regardless of the method of professional development, it is important to obtain information that will help your program track the impact of professional development strategies to promote Head Start as a learning organization.

Professional Development: Father Engagement is Everyone's Business

Program roles and professional development

All staff members need a solid foundation for family engagement and father engagement. Professional development about father engagement should include training and experiences for directors, education managers, home visitors, teachers, family services staff, disability and health coordinators, nutrition and transportation staff, mental health consultants, Policy Council members, and board members.

To support systemic, integrated, and comprehensive father engagement, professional development should focus on the roles that staff members play when partnering with fathers. For example, home visitors whose role is to prepare and to build meaningful relationships with fathers may need coaching and supervision. Family services staff and home visitors who focus on goal setting and building trusting partnerships with fathers may benefit from reflective supervision. Taken together, professional development strategies like these foster a collaborative team approach.

Take note of staff roles that you may tend to overlook. For example, centers' receptionists help set the tone of the program environment because they are the point of entry for the agency. They are in a unique position to begin the relationship-building process with fathers. Focusing on high-quality customer service is critical because it sets a positive tone and creates the potential for further father engagement. Ensure receptionists receive appropriate training and realize the importance of their work, the reasons why services are being enhanced for fathers, and how they can contribute. Welcoming fathers warmly and recognizing them by name also helps.

Transportation staff—bus drivers and bus aides—are instrumental in the outreach and recruitment process for fathers. When picking up and dropping off children, they can build relationships and engage fathers in conversations about their children. They also can learn about fathers' needs and readiness for participation and reinforce fathers' connections with other staff in your agency. The information they gather during these informal conversations can be shared with family service workers, home visitors, and teaching staff. All program staff can work together to support fathers and engage them in the program.

Inviting fathers to serve on a hiring committee acknowledges how important fathers are in the program and how invested they are in its success. Also, invite them to volunteer or apply for employment with your agency, if they qualify.

Professional Development: Father Engagement and Staff Competencies

The Relationship-Based Competencies for Staff and Supervisors Who Work with Families is an important guide for developing competencies that support effective father engagement. Your program's professional development plans can incorporate the guide and target the material to meet staff needs.

Relationship-Based Competencies (RBCs)

COMPETENCY	RESULT
1. POSITIVE, GOAL-ORENTED RELATIONSHIPS	Engages in mutually respectful goal-oriented partnerships with families to promote parent-child relationships and family well-being.
2. SELF-AWARE AND CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE RELATIONSHIPS	Respects and responds appropriately to the culture, language, values, and family structures of each family served.
3. FAMILY WELL-BEING AND FAMILIES AS LEARNERS	Supports families' safety, health, financial stability, life goals, and aspirations.
4. PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS AND FAMILIES AS LIFELONG EDUCATORS	Enhances parent-child relationship and supports parents' role as the first and lifelong educators of their children.
5. FAMILY CONNECTIONS TO PEERS AND COMMUNITY	Facilitates networks and group activities that support families' strengths, interests, and needs.
6. FAMILY ACCESS TO COMMUNITY RESOURCES	Supports families in using community resources that enhance family well-being and children's learning and development
7. COORDINATED, INTEGRATED AND COMPREHENSIVE SERVICES	Acts as member of a comprehensive services team so that family service activities are coordinated and integrated throughout the program.
8. DATA-DRIVEN SERVICES AND CONTINUEOUS IMPROVEMENT	Collects and analyzes information to find new solutions to challenges as part of ongoing monitoring in order to continuously improve services.
9. FOUNDATIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL GROWTH	Participates actively in opportunities for continuous professional development.

RBC 1: Positive and goal-oriented relationships with fathers

Staff members need opportunities to develop empathy and respect for men and to build positive relationships that support fathers' goals for themselves and their children. Men, too, benefit from having trusting relationships. In programs that are predominantly female, building effective partnerships with fathers requires the ability and desire to build trust between female staff and men.

In many programs, the majority of staff are women. Over the years, many female staff have led the way in acknowledging the important role of fathers in the lives of their children and families. Many women have examined their work with men, at both a personal and professional level, and have learned how to develop effective partnerships with fathers.

At the same time, there are many women who have not worked with men in a helping relationship. These staff members need opportunities to reflect and expand their knowledge and skill. Regardless of the level of experience women have in working with fathers, learning more about father engagement takes time and staff will benefit from ongoing professional development.

In some cases, female staff may not be aware that they prefer to work with women and mothers. They may inadvertently dismiss opportunities to engage fathers. These staff members may need to explore working beyond their comfort level and address their anxieties about working with men. To do this, staff need to feel safe and that they are in a trusting environment. Your program can use peer reflection, reflective supervision, and mental health consultation to support professional development.

Some women have had difficult personal histories with men. Particular situations with fathers or families in your program may stir up uncomfortable personal feelings. Fathers are individuals, and it is important that the personal experiences of staff do not get in the way of fathers' engagement with the program. When feelings are overwhelming for staff, referrals to employee assistance or other mental health professionals may be helpful. This type of support may be useful for all staff who work closely with families, not just those working with fathers.

A female staff person from a Head Start program reflects on how she improved her ability to engage fathers:

> ***…To me, fathers were always looked at as secondary caregivers. In my eyes, they were good enough to drop off and pick up their children and attend a parent/teacher conference or two, but for serious matters, I thought that it was best to speak with the children's mothers, grandmothers or aunts….It was not until these issues were addressed and discussed during weekly staff developments that my outlook on fatherhood began to change. The staff developments were focused on the meaning of fatherhood and the important roles that fathers play in the lives of their young children. I had to not only pay attention to the positive interactions that the fathers in the program had with their children, but to my own interactions with the fathers when they came into the center. I became more self-aware and realized that I was rarely welcoming or engaging with the fathers and gave them the sense that they didn't truly belong in the center. The trainings and meaningful discussions that I had with my colleagues changed how I saw fathers and their children. It gave me a safe environment to tap into deep emotions that caused me to disregard fathers and I was taught how to overcome the results of negative past experiences so that I could move forward in a healthy way, serving both the mothers and fathers in the program.***
>
> ***~ EHS Head Teacher***

Ultimately, it is important for all staff to develop self-awareness in their relationship-rooted work with both men and women. Many benefits result, including family goal accomplishment and stronger relationships between parents and their children. Respectful, working partnerships with female or male staff can be a healing experience for men who have had difficult relationships in their families of origin, and can lead to opportunities for more positive relationships in the future. Conducting self-assessment, in professional development activities, can help staff become more self-aware. Staff can assess their ability to engage fathers and to support fully the unique and vital contributions that mothers and fathers make to their children's well-being.

Refer to Toolkit: E. STAFF DEVELOPMENT LEARNING EXTENSIONS: REFLECTIVE ACTIVITIES

RBC 2: Self-aware and culturally responsive relationships

Working with fathers means that staff must have the ability and the desire to develop relationships with men from diverse and possibly unfamiliar backgrounds. It is important for program leaders and managers to support the staff as they reflect on their own cultural experiences. Fathers may have different views than staff about discipline, nurturance, sleeping arrangements, and fathers' roles in raising children if they come from different backgrounds than the staff.

Staff beliefs about what is "right" or "wrong" in childrearing are based on their education, personal, and professional experience. Sometimes judgments can stem from those beliefs that interfere with their efforts to support fathers and their children. Observant, respectful, sensitive, and willing interactions with fathers about child rearing will be most helpful to fathers and their children.

Fathers bring their cultural, family, and individual beliefs, values, attitudes, and interests to their relationships with their children, other family members, and those in the community, including Head

Start staff. They also have their own personal experiences of their culture. For example, some fathers are connected to their culture through history and the experiences and stories of respected elders. Other fathers from the same cultural tradition may not feel as strongly connected to this history. Conversations with fathers about their interests, beliefs, and personal aspirations can help staff overcome their own assumptions, biases, and stereotypes and build new understandings of individual fathers.

RBC 3: Family well-being and fathers as learners

Staff members need opportunities to develop competence in partnering with fathers to discuss their interests and concerns. They need to demonstrate appreciation for fathers' strengths and their individuality. There are multiple strategies they can use.

- Talk with fathers about their interests and concerns related to the fatherhood role.
- Engage fathers in learning experiences that deepen their commitment to their child, family, and the program.
- Inform fathers about program involvement opportunities, like parent meetings and Policy Council.
- Refer fathers to their first work experience or to a better paying job.
- Hire fathers to work in Head Start, whenever possible.

RBC 4: Father-child relationships and fathers as lifelong learners

> ***Fatherhood and school readiness are inseparable…When we're talking about things like school readiness, if we really want to help our children we really need to help their dads be part of their lives.***
>
> ***~ Head Start Director***

Staff play an important role in supporting this connection between expectant fathers and their babies. Babies often recognize the father's voice in utero if he reads, sings, or talks, and they may move and kick when they hear their father's voice. These connections can lead to a deeper commitment for new fathers leading to further involvement in infancy and early chidlhood.

Having knowledge about the feelings men may be experiencing in the prenatal period is also important. During the first half of the pregnancy, the baby may not yet feel real to fathers. In addition to excitement, there may be feelings of loss or impending loss about a change in lifestyle. It also is normal for fathers to experience feelings of ambivalence and reluctance.

Many prenatal classes do not focus on the needs of male partners. Staff can help expectant fathers by honoring their struggles with their feelings and their relationships and by helping them adjust to being a father (for first-time fathers). Your program must be ready to deal with fathers who are at varying levels of acceptance of this role and its related responsibilities.

Refer to Toolkit: E. STAFF DEVELOPMENT LEARNING EXTENSIONS: REFLECTIVE ACTIVITIES

There are many staff skills and actions that support fathers' relationships with their children.

- Let fathers know the strengths you see in their relationships with their children. Help fathers relate to their children by following their children's lead during a socialization, home visit, or play activity.
- Partner with fathers to identify their children's cues and discuss the meaning of children's behavior during socializations, home visits, or play activities.
- Ask additional questions about a father's perception of his child and share information to build a common understanding about his child's progress.

- Look for opportunities to support fathers' mastery of their roles as fathers and to reinforce positive father-child interactions.
- Affirm that when fathers share their culture and home language with their children, they are helping their children get ready for school.

RBC 5: Family Connections to Peers and Community

Fathers need to feel like valued members of a community. Building the facilitation and coordination skills of staff can help them connect fathers with one another. Staff can offer these opportunities:

- Father-to-father mentoring activities support personal and professional growth.
- Support groups co-facilitated by staff and fathers allow fathers to tell their stories, lean on each other, and learn more about themselves and their children.
- Outreach and recruitment activities enable fathers to discuss the benefits of the program and to inspire others to have a similar experience.

> ***Through Head Start I learned about support for fathers. I recruited several friends to join me at the fathers' support center, where we were taught about accountability and responsible relationships.***
>
> ***~ Head Start Administrator, former Head Start Father***

RBC 6: Fathers access to community resources

Staff needs an extensive knowledge of social and educational resources for fathers in the community to help them make referrals. For example, survey data from one program indicated that 36 percent of the fathers were interested in advancing their education to improve their employment. This common concern became a major focus of the fathers' group, and staff contacted their community partners for assistance.

Representatives from the local community college and technical schools were invited to speak at the fathers' group. They conducted individual assessments to determine each father's specific talents and educational needs. The fathers learned about creative ways to pay for college, such as incentive programs, grants, and loans. A special program for low income fathers allowed them to earn college credit while they completed their General Equivalency Diploma (GED).

RBC 7: Coordinated, integrated, and comprehensive services

Staff needs to coordinate services for mothers, fathers, and children and to communicate with both parents about their child's development. It is important that fathers not be left out of the equation, even if they are not readily available. One staff member expressed the views of many staff. She described her challenges about engaging fathers but said she had learned and had accepted father engagement. However, she added that fathers often have limited roles compared to mothers, grandmothers, and aunts. This view of limited roles can stand in the way of effective communication and planning. Although staff might not regularly see every child's father, fathers often want to be involved in important decisions that affect their children.

In families with co-parenting relationships, coordination may be difficult. Staff may need time for individual meetings with each parent before they can agree on a plan for the family and the child. It may be necessary to correspond with one parent in person and to speak with another parent over the phone. Regardless of family circumstances, staff need to be knowledgeable about protecting parent confidentiality.

RBC 8: Data-driven services and systems for continuous improvement

It is important to be able to use data effectively to support father engagement. Verbal and written feedback from fathers can provide data about their interests, suggestions, and concerns. Staff can collect and analyze many types of data. The following strategies can assist staff:

- Establish procedures to protect the confidentiality of fathers who want to offer feedback. This may mean having one-on-one, informal discussions or offering opportunities to obtain written information.
- Incorporate family partnership goal-setting data with fathers into the program's continuous improvement/ongoing monitoring process.
- Create and use brief, easy-to-use forms or questionnaires to gather feedback from fathers on services, trainings, classes, their feelings about the program environment, and their thoughts about how well they are relating to staff.
- Review and modify plans based on fathers' feedback. For example, some fathers may want to switch from a focus on literacy to a focus on relationship challenges with their child's mother.

A father-focused data collection and review process adds to staff knowledge about effective activities. It also helps your program evaluate if its program goals are consistent with services provided for fathers.

RBC 9: Foundations for professional growth

Reflective supervision is collaborative, supportive supervision that occurs on a regular basis. It involves a supervisor and staff person engaging in safe, trusting communication that supports individual professional development and the continuing quality improvement of the program. Research shows that reflective supervision supports staff in establishing and maintaining healthy relationships with families (Eggbeer, Mann, & Seibel, 2008).

Reflective practice and reflective supervision are important components of a learning organization. Staff can build on their strengths and identify and overcome the challenges in their work to engage fathers effectively. The program will move closer to achieving father-focused outcomes.

SUMMARY

Program leadership sets the vision and ensures that father engagement is systemic, integrated and comprehensive across program systems and services. With a focus on continuous program improvement and meaningful outcomes, programs can meet the diverse interests, needs and goals of fathers and families. Investments in professional development help staff improve their ability to develop trusting and effective relationships with fathers and families. Building strong program foundations are the first steps to achieving effective father engagement results.

PART II: Program Impact Areas of Father Engagement Programming

"I can help other people now. I like helping the new guys."

~ Head Start Father

The four Program Impact Areas of the PFCE Framework affect father engagement:

- Program Environment
- Family Partnerships
- Teaching and Learning
- Community Partnerships

Service strategies in one impact area affect service strategies in the others. For example, the strategies a program uses to create a father-friendly environment may affect the engagement of fathers in relationships with their child's teacher, the goal-setting process, and the types of community partnerships that will contribute to goal achievement. Program foundations drive these services. The elements across the PFCE Framework interact to make high-quality father engagement a reality.

PROGRAM ENVIRONMENT

Fathers are looking for unconditional positive regard. Programs historically have provided positive regard to mothers. Father-friendly environments set the stage for valuing the father's role in his child's life. Some signs of a welcoming and inviting setting are visible; other signs are attitudinal and behavioral. To create a father friendly-environment, focus on what fathers might like to see and feel when they walk in the door.

Program Environment: Creating a Welcoming Space

A welcoming physical environment

Fathers will see themselves as welcomed partners when they find interesting reading materials, and photographs and posters of fathers with children in your program. Positive materials create a feeling of love and possibility. On the other hand, posters that focus on how to obtain child support do not send a welcoming message.

Program leadership can work collaboratively with staff—and fathers—to make sure that furniture choice, color schemes, and other aspects of the space are usable and appeal to both women and men. For example, make sure that chairs that fit large frames are available and use inviting colors. Many programs have family rooms where fathers can gather and talk and use computers for job searches. Some offer lending libraries with space for reading to children. Here, young children can engage in positive interactions with men, adding another dimension to a welcoming environment.

Related Resource:

These links provides resources for making the physical environment father-friendly

Fatherhood First Posters

FatherhoodFirst.org

Welcoming attitudes and behaviors

In addition to seeing an inviting environment, fathers will *feel* welcomed when staff partner with them on behalf of their child's learning and development. Staff can be responsive by talking with each parent and family member about how they perceive their roles and honoring those perspectives. This happens when staff get to know fathers as individuals and as family members.

Inclusive attitudes and behaviors help fathers to feel welcome. A program culture of inclusion means that all Head Start opportunities for family engagement include fathers. This begins with a directive from program leadership and is supported by professional development that encourages staff to show inclusive attitudes and behaviors. Inclusive program actions include encouraging mothers to advocate for the inclusion of fathers and holding evening meetings and home visits. In this way, fathers and other family members who work during the day are more likely to participate.

In some community service agencies, repeated lateness for appointments can result in the denial of services. Being late or absent can be perceived as disinterest or lack of commitment. In welcoming environments, staff work with families to determine why they are late and develop strategies for them to succeed. Fathers will appreciate respectful conversations that include opportunities to problem solve transportation and other challenges that interfere with their participation.

> ***When the program makes the effort to connect with fathers and with parents, a partnership between the staff and the father is formed. This partnership is a powerful bond and is an opportunity to do amazing things and go amazing places with children.***
>
> ***~ Head Start Father***

Program Environment: Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Environments

Head Start fathers are diverse. In any one program, fathers may come from many different cultures and speak different languages. Their ages vary and they may be at many different stages in their lives. If your program's physical environment reflects the cultures of participating families, they will feel more at home. If staff composition reflects their cultures and languages that, too, will help parents feel welcome. When staff do not speak the languages of families and fathers, consider using interpreters.

When staff are open to fathers, affirm their diversity, and exhibit respectful curiosity about differences, fathers and families will feel accepted. Part of having open-minded attitudes means developing an awareness of your own biases based on first impressions of how fathers look, dress, or talk. Help staff avoid making assumptions about fathers in order to build trusting relationships and to help them feel welcome, respected, and understood.

Your program can use inclusive language on its forms. For example, family intake forms can include spaces for "caregiver" or "parent/guardian" rather than "mother" and "father." This wording acknowledges that children have other caregivers, such as grandfathers, uncles, boyfriends, and in the case of gay fathers, husbands. Staff can help gay fathers feel welcome by asking all fathers gender-neutral questions about their child's other parent, such as "Who are the people in your life who also are responsible for your child's care?"

Related Resource:

This website describes a program for Latino fathers in Head Start and Early Head Start.

Las Manos de Apá: The Hands of My Father

Program Environment:Inclusive Communications

Here we really work on addressing not just the needs of the child but the needs of the whole family. So we try to make sure we talk to both parents in the morning and not just talk to mom and sort of ignore dad off to the side.

~ EHS Staff

Communicating with mothers and fathers

Depending on the families' circumstances, communications with fathers may be simple or challenging. For example, many fathers have busy schedules and may not be living with their children due to work, military service, or incarceration. In other cases, fathers may not be involved, or there may be conflicts between parents that are unresolved and inhibit communication.

Some programs have policies that prioritize communicating with both parents when possible and ensure that attempts are made to communicate with fathers about services and opportunities. Other programs have policies and procedures that explicitly state that they provide support for both custodial and non-custodial fathers. In these programs, staff may be required to make an extra effort to reach out to non-residential fathers. Leadership support such as additional time and appropriate case loads helps staff engage with these fathers. The staff also ensures that fathers who lack access, support or preparation, have opportunities to receive periodic information about their child and about opportunities to participate in the Head Start program.

Some program policies prioritize practices that support inclusive communication. In one program, home visitors invite father engagement staff to accompany them on home visits. Other programs use orientations and intakes that specifically request father participation and support inclusive communication. Professional development that provides staff with education, training, and supportive supervision can help expand these practices to welcome fathers.

As father engagement program plans are developed, it is important to be thoughtful about supporting mothers and soliciting their advice and input. An unintended consequence of focusing on fathers is that mothers may feel left out. Some mothers resent that programs celebrate father engagement because fathers may not have been as engaged as mothers in the child's life from the beginning. Offer mothers opportunities to explore their feelings in their role as a co-parent. This may help mothers appreciate how their child benefits when fathers become more engaged.

When the announcement was made that our program was going to do more with fathers it hurt. I've been here since day one doing everything. But then it hit me when I looked at how excited my child became when her father showed up. How she listened to him in ways that she would not listen to me. I started to look at him differently.

~ EHS Mother

Inclusive policies and procedures are important, but recognize that every father's parenting journey is different. Some fathers may need emotional support or other kinds of help to more confidently engage in decision making about their child's learning and development. It might take time for a father to become interested in program communications and opportunities.

To help you evaluate your environment for optimal father engagement, use the toolkit. ***Refer to Toolkit: B. Father Engagement Assessment Questions: Key Questions for Community Assessment and Program Self-Assessment Processes.*** You can build these questions into your assessment. Include front line service providers, parents, especially fathers, and community partners. At the conclusion of the assessment, your team can use the data to make decisions about how to adapt your program's environment.

If I had known about Head Start like I know about it now, all the kids would have been Head Start babies. The camaraderie, the warmth—it is a breath of fresh air because you know your child is getting everything that they have. The teachers are giving it 100 percent.

~ Head Start Grandfather

FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

Family Partnerships: Respectful, Trusting Relationships

Reaching out to fathers

There are many reasons that fathers may feel hesitant or reluctant during their first contact with Head Start staff. Sometimes the hesitancy stems from past experiences with educational and social service systems. This also may be a father's first invitation to participate with his child in a family-centered program. Many fathers are unaware that programs are interested in having them engaged in family activities and in their children's learning and development. They may wonder if they are really welcome, particularly if the program is just beginning to create a more father- friendly environment. They may be accustomed to having the mother take the lead in the care and education of their children. Finally, there may be conflicts between parents that result in a reluctance to engage.

Listen actively to a father and ask respectful, clarifying questions. One way to open communication is to share your observations of his child's growth and learning. Head Start fathers often talk about how much they appreciate staff persistence and authenticity when they are feeling reluctant or unsure. Focus on a father's relationship with his child, affirm his strengths as a parent, and value how much he loves his child.

Make it clear to fathers how vital they are to their child's development and success. At the same time, be careful not to either patronize or over compliment men for fulfilling their responsibilities as parents. Instead, help them feel a sense of shared responsibility for Head Start in the community. Discuss opportunities for engagement and request their advice about upcoming events. Staff can ensure that fathers are invited to all the family activities and to the ones targeted to fathers. Some programs offer appealing activities like "Donuts for Dads" or "Fishing with Fathers." Remember that for many fathers, the greatest joy is being included in their child's everyday activities.

> ***I am fine to repair a chair, assist with maintenance on the playground, or move heavy boxes. But I also want to interact with my daughter as she learns and grows. Let me read, dance in circle time, and play with blocks. Give me the opportunity. I just want to be there for my daughter.***
>
> ***~ Head Start Father***

Working with both parents

Fathers are members of families. They may be the single head of household, married, cohabiting, or non-residential. Their relationship with the co-parent might be strong, developing, stressed, or no longer intact. Regardless of the family constellation, balancing the needs of both parents is an important part of family partnership work. Ideally, partnerships include staff members, fathers, mothers, or co-parents who work together toward personal and family goals.

Co-parenting involves shared decision making about what is in the best interest of a child. Your program can support co-parenting by affirming each parent's knowledge and understanding of their child. At the same time, your program can identify the benefits to a child when two individuals, who love and care for them, work together to support the child's well-being. The unique contribution of each parent can result in improved communication and better overall outcomes for the child.

> ***I want to be involved with my daughter and her education, and just try to be there as much as I can despite all the differences between mom and I.***
>
> ***~ Head Start Father***

When parents are not working together or are in conflict, joint work is challenging and may require outreach and efforts to build relationships. Where there is family violence, it may be unsafe to work jointly with parents. However, conflict between parents is not necessarily a reason to discontinue reaching out to both parents. Use methods that are safe, honest and respectful. Establish policies and procedures for working with families who rely on court orders related to custody or protective orders involving child abuse or domestic violence. Staff who are trained to deal with these situations, can be intentional and proactive with parents to minimize stress that may adversely affect a child's school readiness.

Program leadership and management can take simple steps to ensure an inclusive approach is in place throughout the program's systems and services. Review your communication procedures to make sure that both mothers and fathers are invited to participate in family partnership goal setting. Create inclusive intake, enrollment, and family partnership forms with space for information about more than one parent.

Related Resources:

In this video, Head Start parents talk about the value of good communication with their co-parent, and the difference it makes with their child.

Healthy Marriage and Strengthening Families

Breaking the Cycle: Fathering after Violence

This website includes resources for working to prevent and end violence against women and children.

Caring Dads: Helping Fathers Value their Children
This manual is designed specifically to help men who have maltreated their children and/or exposed them to domestic violence. The manual draws from best practices in the fields of batterer intervention, parenting, child maltreatment, and behavior change.

View the website at **Caring Dads**.

Foundations for goal setting

Father-staff relationships are the key to successful father engagement. Fathers are willing to build relationships with staff when these relationships are grounded in respect and flexibility. With a clear vision for family engagement and with professional development supports, staff can become skilled in goal setting with families and fathers. It is helpful for fathers to see how their goals will positively impact their child and family and strengthen the child's future success.

True partnerships between staff and fathers follow the lead of the father and elicit his thoughts and ideas. At the same time, it is important to reflect on your own beliefs. For example, if you see a father

putting cereal in a bottle for his four-month-old during a home visit, what is the best way to approach a discussion? There may be cultural, health, and relationship factors involved. Be thoughtful about how you share your professional knowledge to ensure that you preserve a partnership with the father.

Setting goals

All enrolled families have the opportunity to establish goals. Fathers who have a positive relationship with staff will begin to open up about their interests, past successes, and challenges. As your relationships evolve, conversations can focus on short- and long-term goals. Each father will have different goals and different plans to reach them. The objective is to set the bar high, but not out of reach. Staff can work with fathers to break down big goals into manageable action steps.

Not all fathers have the interest and ability to engage in meaningful goal setting. Many fathers have not had opportunities to plan for their future. Goals are like dreams translated into action steps. Help fathers think about dreams for themselves and their families. Help them set goals that move the family in the right direction. Take the time to make goal setting a meaningful process for individual fathers. This will increase the potential for success and will enhance the family partnership.

Head Start fathers set goals that are similar as well as unique. Most fathers share a desire to be good parents and to understand more about their child's development. Some fathers, but not all, want to focus on improving their relationship with the co-parent. Many Head Start fathers also discuss being good providers for their families. This may involve setting goals related to education and financial security, such as enrolling in a high school equivalency program, vocational training, or studying for a certificate. Wherever possible, help fathers see the link between their goals and positive outcomes for children.

Making decisions and taking action

When fathers ask for assistance, involve them in the decision-making process and ensure that they take responsibility for some of the tasks. If they experience difficulty deciding what to do first, present them with options and help them make decisions about how to proceed. Assure them that your role is to provide them with support.

For example, a father may want to move to the community where his daughter lives to spend more time with her. One option is to request a job transfer, which could mean a cut in pay and a change in schedule. Staff could help him think this through and consider if this would impose a financial burden or impact job security. While affirming the importance of his relationship with his child, staff could help the father explore other ways to see more of his child without relocating.

Your father engagement work may involve helping fathers think about career choices. If a father says he wants to be a police officer, talk with him about why and how. Try to assess how much thought he has given to this decision and what he knows about how to prepare. Are college credits necessary before entering the police academy? Has he had experiences that might present barriers? Figure out a logical sequence of next steps such as obtaining study materials, planning a study schedule, and exploring transportation options to get to the test center on the day of the test.

Fathers who set their own goals and make progress toward them can feel inspired and empowered to help their young children define and reach their own goals. Imagine a father who is taking computer courses, sitting side-by-side with his three-year-old who is learning to write her name. Just as the father must practice and be patient as he studies computer systems, he can teach his child to try again and again. He can explain that making mistakes is part of learning, and take time to praise her writing efforts. Experiences like this can help parents understand that they have important roles as nurturers, educators, and mentors for their children.

Family Partnerships: Continuous Improvement

Revisiting goals and accomplishments

Staff can review family partnership work quarterly or more often, depending on caseload and the particular circumstances of the family. Record a father's progress and recommendations for continued success. Explore trouble spots or areas where the father may be getting stuck. Refine goals or set new goals that have become more urgent. Finally, agree upon a schedule for follow-up about his progress. This review and revising process with fathers is part of your program's broader continuous improvement effort.

Understanding progress

The family partnership process can include the use of tools (Family Partnership Agreement Tool) for measuring progress and accomplishments. If a father's goal is to engage in his child's learning and development, then his participating in a home visit is a step toward meeting his goal. If you were to count the number of home visits he participates in over time, this would give you information about father involvement, but don't stop there.

To think more about father engagement, it would also help to understand what a father feels he is gaining from the visits. Does he ask questions about how individual activities help his child. Has he learned new ways to support his child's development? Participation in visits is the first step, but changes in knowledge and behavior help fathers and home visitors to understand progress toward the father's ultimate goal.

Through the family partnership process, staff and fathers can make wonderful changes happen. A father may increase his level of participation in fun activities or enjoy observing his child as she problem solves. He may communicate with his co-parent more often and engage in activities modeled by the home visitor. Likely, he will feel deep satisfaction as these changes result in a closer relationship with his child.

When staff understand the data they collect about services, parent experiences, and goal accomplishment, their methods become part of a data-driven approach. This is how continuous improvement and family partnerships connect to create more effective father engagement.

Family Partnerships: Fathers' Groups

Creating community with fathers

Group activities can support goal setting and key father engagement outcomes. Support groups and activities provide opportunities for father-to-father connections, peer learning and support, and education on topics that interest fathers in your program. Groups also provide time for staff to strengthen relationships with fathers and learn more about their ideas, beliefs, and what is important to them as parents and men. These groups are an important way for staff to learn more about fathers' dreams for their children.

At first, some fathers may not be comfortable in group settings. Start by inviting their participation in the intake and orientation process to feel connected to the program. From there they may decide to join a group. As they open up and share vulnerabilities, support will come from other fathers and men in the group who "have been there and done that." This process might take time, but it can help fathers deepen their level of trust with their peers and with program staff.

It is also important to create safe and inclusive group environments for all fathers, father figures and male family members. For instance, when doing outreach and recruitment for participants, make sure that fathers can communicate in their home language, with the help of an interpreter if necessary. Establish group rules that foster respect for the individual differences of men in the group so that gay fathers, uncles, immigrant fathers, or grandfathers who are raising grandchildren know that they are welcome.

> ***I wanted to be a better person and Head Start opened the door for me to become more involved in my child's life. I was able to hear other stories, whether they were similar to mine or stories that I could relate to.***
>
> ***~ Head Start Father***

Group topics

In a safe group environment, there are an infinite number of topics fathers may wish to discuss. They may talk about how little they knew about being a father when their child was born. They may talk about feeling pressure to measure up to expectations about being a successful financial provider. They may draw on the companionship and connections with fathers and staff for information gathering and problem solving. For example, the group might discuss the price of diapers, how overwhelming their schedules are, how to discipline, the most effective way to burp a baby, breastfeeding, or their relationship with their significant other or co-parent.

In these groups, fathers can explore how they understand their role and eventually define their role in a way that works for them. When groups are well-facilitated, and fathers feel comfortable participating, the possibilities are endless!

Offer professional development activities to help staff become skilled facilitators in men's groups. Part of their learning process will involve taking a close look at their own experiences, opinions, and assumptions. When program foundations, including staff development, are in place, father engagement can flourish with positive results.

Refer to Toolkit: F. Father Focused Workshops and Support Groups: Getting Started Tip Sheet

Related Resource:

This website describes a program for Latino fathers in Head Start and Early Head Start.

Las Manos de Apá: The Hands of My Father

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching and Learning: Teacher-Father Partnerships

Teacher-father partnerships

There are many ways to engage fathers in a teaching and learning partnership with your program. Building on the program environment and family partnership work, staff can ensure that fathers are welcome and viewed as important partners in helping younger children in EHS get ready for preschool and older children in Head Start get ready for kindergarten. Teachers can reach out to fathers in many ways and invite them to share, learn new information, and support children's learning and development at home.

> ***Being a father is the most wonderful thing I will ever experience. If I hadn't been involved with the father program in Head Start, I would never have known this. The day I came to my daughter's classroom was the day that really changed my life.***
>
> ***~ Head Start Father***

Supporting father-child relationships

Father-child attachment begins prenatally as the baby hears the father's voice. The attachment continues when a father meets his baby for the first time, and as he helps care for his infant. It continues as fathers play with their babies, talk with them, read to them, and sing to them. These early interactions strengthen the father-child bond and promote healthy development. As their babies grow into toddlers and preschoolers, fathers will find new ways of relating. In the course of encouraging their children's growing independence, creativity, self-confidence, and competence, the father-child bond will deepen. Teacher-parent partnerships can encourage fathers to interact in ways that support the development of important pre-academic skills, especially language, and honor the child's individuality.

Fathers have different parenting styles than mothers and each parent contributes to learning and growing. When a child experiences both perspectives, there is a wonderful balance. This balance of different parenting perspectives can occur in same-sex co-parenting relationships as well. Sometimes the best way to support a father's unique role in supporting his child's growth and development is to comment on the learning that occurs as father and child interact.

Like everyone, fathers are more likely to make positive changes in their lives when they feel appreciated and encouraged for the things they already do well. Take time to praise fathers and give examples of how well they support their child. Point out how responsive their child is to them and how happy they are together. Staff can validate how complicated parenting can be and that successful parenting is a process that requires constant growth and adjustment. In support groups, fathers share this message over and over.

Getting ready to learn

Some fathers may easily and eagerly embrace their role of supporting their child's learning and development, especially as it pertains to later school success. They are concerned about their child's future; they know that academic success can equate to success in later life; and they want their child to have a better educational experience than they did. They want to be their child's first teacher.

Other fathers may not be ready or able to embrace that role. They may not have experienced positive relationships with their own fathers and need support to understand the role they can play in their child's development. Some may not be engaged because they had unsuccessful, unhappy educational experiences. For example, a father might resist discussing an early intervention referral if he had negative experiences with special education services when he was a child. Staff can help fathers consider ways that past family and school experiences might affect their present day parenting.

Some barriers to father engagement may be obvious to staff. Others will require that staff have trusting relationships with fathers to learn more about what they are thinking and feeling. In these situations, staff can start by noticing and commenting on something a father is doing that shows his potential. Talk about his attendance at a meeting or about hearing him describe a funny moment with his child. Staff might notice that he is concerned about his own needs because he wants to take good care of his family. By listening to fathers and establishing trust, staff are in a good position to address the fathers' most pressing needs.

Teaching and Learning: Sharing Information about Children's Progress

Gathering information

As teachers, family services staff, and home visitors get to know families and fathers, they will learn how much fathers know about their children. Show respect for their knowledge by asking them to share their observations of what their children are like and how they learn, and their goals for their children. Include them in discussions about their children's health and upcoming screenings or treatments. Find out their questions about their children's development, and provide child development information and insights whenever you can. Staff can ask questions about the child's behavior and use the fathers' responses to emphasize that children are individuals.

Sharing information

Conversations about children's learning can be formal and informal. For example, parents need opportunities to be informed about the purpose of child assessments and how services are individualized for their child. These conversations can happen during parent-teacher conferences and at regular meetings with fathers and home visitors, teachers, or family support staff. They offer opportunities to share information about children's progress.

Staff also can have informal conversations about children's learning when children are picked up and dropped off at the center. Sometimes these are the best moments to engage fathers. Staff can talk about how the child is learning something new or showing mastery in a skill. When staff share ongoing observations of the child, fathers get a sense of their child's progress and can be informed when they need to make decisions in their child's best interest. Remember that it is not just educational or family service staff who can exchange information with fathers. If bus drivers and the center's receptionist have trusting relationships, fathers may feel comfortable sharing observations about their children and insights with these staff members.

It is important to offer non-residential fathers opportunities to obtain and provide input about their child. Invite them to parent-teacher conferences whenever possible, or consider a conference call. If a father is absent during a home visit, written information can be left for him to review. Set up a process that makes it possible for him to contact staff to provide input or ask questions.

> ***Just making a simple phone call after school to find out what my daughter learned that day, what she did, made a difference and strengthened our father-daughter bond. I appreciate my Head Start experience of embracing the impact I have on my child's life.***
>
> ***~ Head Start Father***

It is not just ***what*** information is shared with families and fathers that matters, it is *how* that matters too. Be sensitive to each father's culture or cultures and to their own experiences which may be very different than yours. Find out what he thinks children at this age should be learning and how he thinks they learn. Ask him what roles teachers, fathers and other family members play in a child's learning. If a father's perspectives are different from staff perspectives, staff can reflect with supervisors about how to handle these differences. However, despite differences in opinion or perspective, staff goals are to maintain a positive, trusting relationship and to support the father's engagement.

The key is getting to know each father as an individual. Fathers have different styles of learning and interacting. Some may be more open on the phone; others may prefer face-to-face interactions in groups or individually. Some may like to read articles about child development; others may rely on the internet for information. No one size fits all, so follow their lead and you will discover the best ways to exchange information about their child.

Related Resource:

This resource helps programs share information about children's progress with families.

Family Engagement and Ongoing Child Assessment

Teaching and Learning: Bridging Home and School

Because school readiness is the overarching goal of Head Start, engage families and fathers in a discussion about school readiness and what that means for children in the program. Help them understand that school readiness means being ready across all five domains of development (**Child Development and Early Learning Framework**). Many fathers might focus only on learning academic skills. Staff can help them understand how all areas of development need to be nurtured and reassure them that it is normal for children to develop at different rates. Tell them about the curriculum and the learning opportunities that children can have in the course of a day.

To help families select learning activities for their children at home, start by finding out how they like to spend time with their children. Observe father-child interactions in the home, at pick-up and drop-off, or in the classroom setting to see what activities are most appealing and engaging. If children enjoy dancing, brainstorm ways that fathers can listen to music, sing, and dance at home. If a father likes to cook, help him plan some grocery shopping expeditions with his child and simple recipes they can do together. Remind him that counting spoons or wiping a table can be great fun for a young child.

Affirm the educational value of what fathers and families are doing, including speaking their home language with their children. Building on their everyday routines is a good starting point for thinking about activities that reinforce learning and development. For example, diaper changes and eating are daily routines that can be great opportunities to sing songs, learn new vocabulary, and count. In addition, many early learning curricula include take-home activities that staff can share with families.

Arrange situations and support interactions where fathers can help their children, enjoy new experiences, and develop new skills. For example, staff can share information with a father about how much his child likes picture books about construction, talks about trucks, and builds in the block area. Ask the father to notice construction sites in the community, watch what is going on with his child, and talk about the huge machines. If they come back again and again to the site, they will see many changes. This is science and social studies in action!

Staff also can schedule program activities for fathers and children that relate to what children are learning. One Head Start graduate fondly recalls his first fire station visit with his four-year old class. He tried on the huge fire boots and his dad slid down the fire pole. When fathers and children enjoy fun and interesting activities together, their relationship grows stronger.

Related Resource:

This resource helps teachers and parents expand conversations and helps children with language development.

Language Modeling and Conversation: Asking Questions and Ways to Ask Children Questions

Teaching and Learning: Supporting Transitions

Early learning transitions

In the course of early development, children make many transitions, from crawling to walking, from speaking single words to full sentences. All transitions are opportunities for growth, but they can pose challenges.

When children make transitions from an EHS to Head Start, or into kindergarten, parents are affected, too. Meet with families to discuss what happens for children (and parents) during transitions and what they might expect in their next learning environment. Encourage families to connect with teachers and other staff in the new setting. If fathers want to participate in meetings related to transitions, find out if they need support. Do they need help writing a letter to their employer to request a work schedule adjustment? Do they need an interpreter?

As programs build in processes to ease children's transitions, and fathers gain confidence in knowing how to support their children's growth, fathers become greater advocates for their children. Ideally, their successful engagement in their child's early years will lead them to lifelong involvement.

Life transitions

Families also experience transitions that affect family well-being and family members' learning and development. Transitions for fathers may include changing a residence or job; starting a learning experience; loss of a loved one; developing new relationships; and coping with changes in relationships with other adults or children.

Many of the families who come to Head Start face challenging transitions. Sometimes there are transitions that cause disruption to the parent-child relationship, such as long or permanent absences. If parents return from a military assignment, from living or working at a distance, or from prison, your program can help them re-connect and renew their bonds with their children. Your program also can promote positive parent-child relationships when parents have gained or regained custody of their child.

Invite them to talk about their feelings. They may be wondering, "Is my child going to remember me? Accept me? Be angry with me?" There also may be feelings of loss over the time the parents missed with the child. If a parent left when the child was an infant and the child is now a preschooler, staff can share

information with the parent about their child's current development. A father who returns after an absence can observe the child and discuss the child's progress with a co-parent or a grandparent to gain insight into the child's new likes and dislikes.

> ***I've made mistakes, too many mistakes to mention. The one thing I did not want was to get locked up after my daughter was born. I left when she was four months old. While I was away my mom complained a lot about how my girlfriend was taking care of her. So when my girlfriend and I talked on the phone I'd spend the few minutes I had arguing, telling her she needed to do better. When I came home I said, "okay, I'll show her how things should be done." After spending a couple of days with my daughter, my opinion changed. I had mad love for my baby's mom because taking care of a 16-month-old is not easy. In fact it's really hard. I was a stranger to my daughter so we had to reconnect. I had support, and it was still hard, and she was doing it on her own. I have so much love and respect for her now. I can't ever put her in that position again.***
>
> ***~ Head Start Father***

There are other life transitions that can cause painful parental absences that hurt children, families and communities. For example, parents may make poor decisions that result in periods of incarceration. Sometimes children are removed from their parents because of child abuse or neglect. Program staff frequently find themselves in situations where they are providing a holding environment for children who are separated from parents because of these circumstances.

These disruptions can adversely impact children's physical, cognitive, and social and emotional development and cause confusion and behavior changes. To help children cope, teachers, home visitors, mental health consultants, and family services staff can be creative in how they work to support relationships between children and their absent parents. They can help children process their feelings and support parent-child relationships through letters, phone calls and visits, when possible. One program periodically makes necklaces with pictures of absent parents that children can wear to remind them of their parent. Programs also can make sure to provide highly nurturing environments, expert mental health consultation, and strong social and emotional components for young children.

On several occasions when I visited with a family, dad has been on the phone with mom. I have never met or seen dad, aside from a picture of him at grandma's house. On a visit I did shortly after the child enrolled, dad was on the phone, and he told mom to tell me that he was very pleased with the growth and development he has seen in his son since he began in the center. He thanked me and the program. In more recent visits dad has been on the phone asking questions regarding his son's development. This has given me an opportunity to discuss the curriculum and how their child is doing. I have also been able to address a couple of concerns of dad's and by the time the visit was complete, he felt much better and was not as concerned. This dad has become a regular part of our home visits.

~ EHS Teacher/Home Visitor

Regardless of the reason for the disrupted parent-child relationship, teaching and family services staff, home visitors, and mental health consultants, all have an important role to play in helping parents transition back into their child's life and their family and community. Program leadership also must recognize the importance of providing staff with resources and links to community organizations that can support families in transitions.

Related Resources:

This resource can help programs and military families care for very young children.

Zero to Three Military Family Projects

This resource can help programs and communities strengthen relationships of families with infants, toddlers and preschool-aged children who have an incarcerated father or a father on probation or parole.

Fathers for Life

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Community Partnerships: Community Leadership and Father Engagement

Creating communities of support

Head Start provides leadership, inspiration and critical services and supports for families with young children. Local partners offer important resources and community supports to Head Start families. Head Start also participates in community-wide networks that assist communities to overcome challenges. Working with community networks, Head Start and partners make good things happen.

Going to the Center, going through the fatherhood classes, I realized how important Head Start is to the neighborhood.

~ Head Start Father

When staff build respectful, trusting relationships and integrate father engagement strategies across the systems and services of your program, Head Start can become a catalyst for community change. As programs learn from community partners about their best practices, they, in turn, will learn from Head Start. Together, Head Start and its partners can work to provide continuity of services and seamless transitions for families. As a result, fathers will feel more comfortable in your program and in the settings and organizations to which they are referred.

Head Start can play a leadership role in the community for other organizations interested in becoming more father-friendly. For example, your program can share assessment and resource materials with libraries, health settings, and public schools. As Head Start programs build their own expertise, they also can provide training for police precincts and parole or corrections officers about the importance of positive father-child relationships. This can help shift perceptions about the importance of fathers, increase support for father engagement, and contribute to common goals across multiple organizations.

The success of father engagement efforts with other organizations, institutions of higher learning, and other child and family service programs can create a community of support for fathers. As community partnerships that support fathers are solidified, consider establishing a Fatherhood Advisory Group or Father Engagement Community Network. A network including fathers and community agencies can be strengths-based and culturally informed. Parents' passion for their children can galvanize such a network. In fact, a network of community representatives can become a force for change by working to establish father-focused, community-wide standards of practice to share with all family-serving organizations.

Community Partnerships: Building Partnerships

It is important to understand the needs and motivations of other agencies, and how they, too, might benefit from a partnership with Head Start. Invite current and potential partners to visit your program for scheduled events. Use this opportunity to help them understand what your program does to engage and support fathers, and talk with them about the importance of fathers in the lives of children.

Regardless of the mechanism for communication, it is important to establish regular opportunities to discuss partnerships. Include fathers in these meetings, and use this time to agree on and revisit your program goals. Listen carefully and establish goals that also will be important to your partners. Then decide what data you will collect and review to monitor the effectiveness of the partnership. A jointly-prepared memorandum of understanding can establish the agreements and expectations of each partner.

Refer to Toolkit: G. Sample Memorandum of Understanding

Meeting regularly with community partners creates time to work toward goals and to review successful and unsuccessful referrals. This is part of your program's continuous improvement process, one of the foundations of successful family and father engagement. Have representatives from partner organizations present at a parent meeting or fathers' group. This will help fathers learn about your community partners and consider how their family might benefit. When there are successes in your partnerships, celebrate them with fathers. Acknowledge your good work and honor the fathers' hard work and ongoing progress.

Community Partnerships: Effective Referrals

Effective referrals begin with effective, trusting relationships between programs and parents. Get to know the fathers' strengths, the diversity of their needs, and the tough challenges that they face. These relationships and this knowledge drive the referral process.

Effective referrals include fathers at every step of the referral process. Fathers may have had unhappy experiences with social services agencies in the past. For example, they may have been excluded as part of the family unit. As a result, many men may be reluctant to engage with family service and support programs. By setting expectations with fathers and with community partners during the referral process, your staff can serve as both partners with and advocates for fathers.

Before referring fathers to an agency, know the agency's process, how the father will be treated, and prepare fathers for what to expect. Check with fathers about whether or not referrals are helpful. Work with them to understand roadblocks to address with other agencies. When your program successfully refers to external services, ask fathers to share their referral experiences with other fathers and families. Through successful referrals, you and your community partners can help fathers expand their support network.

Community Partnerships: Community Resources

In addition to accessing community services, fathers can deepen their own sense of purpose when they contribute to their communities. Many organizations welcome fathers as mentors; they may also have community-based projects that make good use of fathers' skills. In one community, Head Start fathers became involved in rehabbing houses for low-income families and cleaning up a neighborhood playground. The fathers were pleased to be making a difference in their community.

Participating in the range of activities taking place in communities can help fathers improve their fathering skills. Community activities and services provide opportunities for fathers to continue to grow as adults by expanding their learning. This will help them nurture and guide their children. The following are examples of ways to foster community coordination and collaboration and to support fathers and father engagement.

Education and vocation

Fathers may be looking for support to gain education and job skills. To meet these goals, consider partnerships with high schools, alternative schools, adult education, GED, English as a second language programs, community colleges, four-year colleges, technical schools, and vocational schools.

Faith institutions

Many faith communities help meet basic needs, such as food, clothing and housing, and educational opportunities. They offer support for reading and language skills and developing relationship skills. Faith-based institutions that support personal and spiritual growth also provide a social network for fathers to meet other fathers and learn from them.

Housing

Fathers who need housing assistance benefit from partnerships with housing authorities, public housing, community development agencies, community development financial institutions, halfway houses, shelters, and other affordable housing programs. These partnerships can offer housing access for homeless fathers who need a place to live and visit with their children.

Access and visitation services

For parents experiencing relationship disputes, community partnerships with mediation service providers, family rights organizations, state and local bar associations, legal aid societies, and prepaid legal services can help resolve conflict among family members. These resources also are important for parents involved with the child welfare system.

Employment services

Collaborations with employment agencies that provide fathers with entry level jobs so they have the means to support their families are helpful along with partnerships with workforce agencies, unions, career centers and employment associations are helpful. Employment agencies that support fathers' participation in programs that provide needed job skills are particularly helpful. If fathers bring memoranda of understanding or letters of recommendation indicating they are engaging in and benefiting from Head Start services, the agencies may be more responsive.

Health services

During conversations with fathers, it is important to engage them in discussions about their physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional health. Help them understand that they need to take care of themselves in order to be able to take care of their children and family. Establishing a medical home for families is important and can result in finding a medical home for their children. Some fathers may have physical and mental health challenges. In these cases, partnerships with state and local departments of health and human services, community clinics, university hospitals, city and county hospitals, wellness centers, and community mental health agencies can increase access to adequate health care. By helping fathers recognize their importance to their children, Head Start also can help motivate them to accept and follow through on referrals for treatment.

Mental health services

When fathers have mental health difficulties, programs with licensed mental health clinicians can work with the fathers to help them cope with life stressors that affect their daily functioning. For example, 18 percent of fathers reported enough symptoms to be considered depressed in the EHS research (Raikes & Bellott, 2006).

When fathers and families need specific mental health services or when mental health services in the community are not available, community partners often can provide intermediate interventions until families can be referred. Community mental health providers, school-based mental health clinics (for programs serving younger populations), substance abuse programs, family violence programs, mobile crisis units, and hospital emergency departments are organizations that are likely partners.

Mentoring

Community-based agencies and other grassroots organizations, such as Big Brothers and Big Sisters, can provide mentors for young fathers. Experienced Head Start fathers are often willing to mentor young fathers as well.

Substance abuse services

Some fathers have substance use and abuse disorders. Partnerships with substance abuse counseling and treatment agencies (both inpatient and outpatient), community mental health services, and wellness centers are important resources for these men. These offer critical supports for family well-being (family safety, health, and mental health) and father-child relationships. Some fathers may be motivated to seek treatment for the sake of their children's well-being.

Neighborhood organizations

Libraries, YMCAs, and neighborhood groups can provide literacy, recreational and neighborhood activities that support social connectedness, confidence and family well-being. For example, neighborhood organizations may work together to build a playground. It is important to introduce fathers to neighborhood or community organizations where they can meet other fathers.

Domestic violence and batterer intervention services

Partnerships with community domestic violence programs including batterer intervention programs can assist program staff to identify signs of domestic violence. These partnerships also can prepare program staff to respond when it is necessary to protect the safety of women (and, in some cases, men) and children. They can support referrals for parents dealing with or responsible for domestic violence. For example, community programs can assist local Head Start programs to develop and refine domestic

violence protocols; conduct training on how to handle incidence or threats of personal and intra-personal violence; and refer abusers to programs designed to address battering.

Child support enforcement

Partnership with state and local child support agencies can assist fathers to manage their child support payments. The agencies can help fathers appreciate the importance of self-initiated child support payments, how this can result in improved family well-being, and how contributing to a child's support can raise self-respect and a sense of worth for their child.

Department of Justice

The Department of Justice serves the purpose of keeping communities safe. Head Start can explain to fathers the importance of safety for children and families. Community partnerships with courts, law enforcement agencies, probation and parole, and legal aid services may help fathers understand the role of justice in community life, their involvement in the justice system, and how best to prepare if they are facing court or legal action.

SUMMARY

The *Head Start Father Engagement Birth to Five Programming Guide* is designed to help programs move from father involvement to systemic, integrated, and comprehensive father engagement. As program staff and fathers join together, many fathers report feeling more self-assured, capable, and confident. Mothers and fathers work together realizing that the decisions they make on a daily basis affect their children.

When programs align father engagement strategies across program foundations (systems) and program impact areas (services), families and children benefit. When fathers benefit from a solid foundation or work through challenging past experiences, they are able to give back to their families and communities. Fathers are empowered when they share information at local and national conferences about their meaningful experiences in Head Start and EHS programs.

Effective father engagement leads to the personal gratification and happiness that comes when fathers experience closer connections with their children. It is the simple, ordinary things that fathers do for and with their children that matter. Every child should have "Daddy Days" that create lasting memories they can draw from if they decide to become parents one day.

DADDY DAYS
by David Jones, Fatherhood Specialist

I sat on daddy's lap
Every chance I could get
He'd make silly faces
Until my face was wet

Giggling with joy
Tears streaming down my face
I cherished this special time
The kitchen table his favorite place

He'd lean back in his chair
Head slightly touching the wall
I was always worried
At any second he might fall

He'd take cherry tobacco
A smell that filled the room
Impact it deep into his pipe
Each and every afternoon

After he was settled
He'd had time to relax
He drank his favorite coffee
As momma scratched his back

After she had finished
And he was satisfied
He'd sit next to the fireplace
And call me to his side

He'd pull a book from the shelf
Sometimes he let me read
He'd always tell a story
And then he would proceed

To take me to many places
In faraway lands
Sometimes when I was scared
He'd gently take my hand

Each night before he finished
And momma would tuck me in
He'd sneak into the room
And tickle me again

I hugged his neck so tight
Sometimes he couldn't breathe
A relationship with my father
Fulfilled a special need!

PART III: Toolkit for Father Engagement Programming

A. PFCE Fillable Framework

B. Father Engagement Assessment Questions: Key Questions for Community Assessment and Program Self-Assessment Processes

C. Markers of Progress (Digital and PDF versions)

D. Sample Action Plan

E. Staff Development Learning Extensions: Reflective Activities
   E1. Reflective Activity: Testing Assumptions
   E2. Reflective Activity: Past Experiences Reflection
   E3. Reflective Activity: Understanding Adolescent and Young Expectant Fathers and the Prenatal Experience.

F. Father-Focused Workshops and Support Groups: Getting Started Tip Sheet

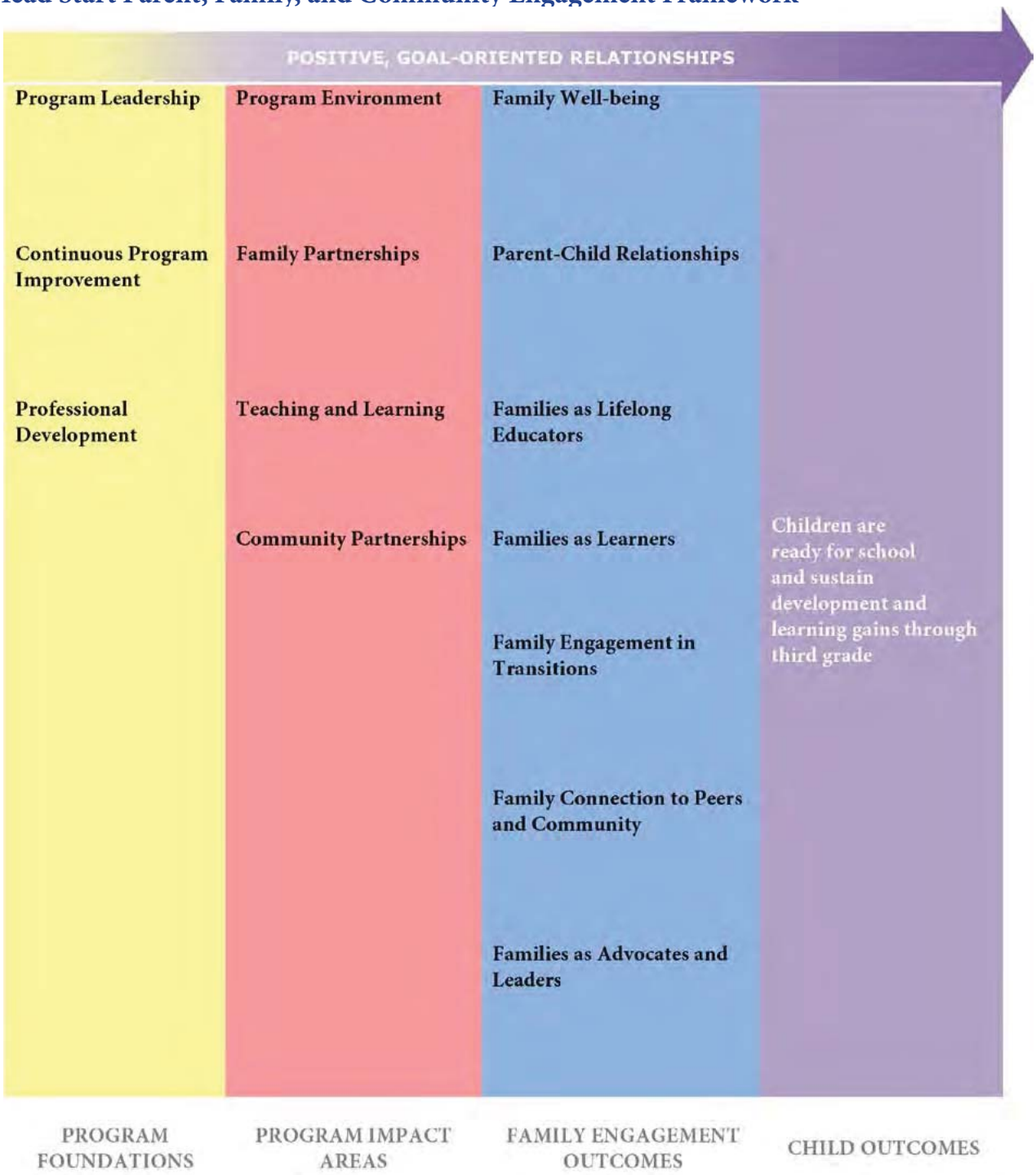
G. Sample Memorandum of Understanding

H. Elements of PFCE Framework and Related Head Start Program Performance Standards

A. PFCE Fillable Framework

Use this fillable PFCE Framework to see how your strategies link across your systems and services to reach key outcomes with fathers. For example, ask what strategies do you need in the Program Foundations (yellow column) and Program Impact Areas (red column) to work toward supporting Fathers As Lifelong Educators. (You can refer to the Program Foundations and Program Impact Areas of this Guide for ideas.)

Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework



B. Father Engagement Assessment Questions: Key Questions for the Community Assessment and Program Self-Assessment Processes

The responses to these questions provide assessment teams with a solid understanding of fathers' experiences within the community, issues that are important to fathers, and the availability and quality of supports in the program and community. Choose questions from this tool that will be most useful for your assessment. Plan and adapt questions for different audiences. Gather this information from community collaborators, community databases, program staff, focus groups with enrolled fathers, focus groups with fathers who live in the community, and other data sources (see below).

1. Understanding the Needs of Fathers in the Community

- What is the geographic area being served, what makes it distinctive, and what are the racial and ethnic groups in the community?
- What are the fathers' cultures? Are they newcomers to the United States?
- What are fathers' attitudes and perceptions of Head Start or early childhood programs? (Note: A lack of knowledge about programs' services should not be interpreted as a negative attitude.)
- What kind of experiences have fathers had relating to each other?
- What are fathers' beliefs about their fatherhood role?
- What activities or services might interest or benefit groups of fathers?
- What kind of work opportunities for fathers? What are available shifts and schedules? How many fathers are out of work and in need of employment?
- How many fathers are struggling with special issues, such as substance abuse, domestic violence, depression, probation and parole, and relationship problems?
- Do the fathers have literacy concerns?
- What services are needed by fathers and father figures in the community that the community lacks?
- What attributes of the community make it easy or difficult to address fathers' needs?

2. Understanding the Needs of Fathers with Enrolled Children

- What are the numbers of single, married, cohabiting, residential, and non-residential fathers?
- How many are custodial fathers?
- What percent of the total number of fathers are participating in some aspect of program services?
- Describe three things that encourage father engagement in your program.
- Describe three things that may discourage father engagement in your program.
- Describe the most common challenges fathers feel they are facing in their lives.
- Describe what fathers find to be most helpful about the program.
- What would the fathers like to see? What would the fathers like the program to do better? What supports are needed to further engage fathers and father figures in the program?

3. Understanding Program Practices Related to Father Engagement and Program Foundations (Program Leadership, Continuous Improvement, and Professional Development)

- Is there a vision for father engagement in the program?
- Are fathers systematically encouraged to participate during intakes, orientations, home-visits, parent teacher conferences, Policy Council, and transition planning?

- Are there policies and procedures in place that support integration of father-focused efforts across the organization? Review the program intake and enrollment process to ensure questions are asked about fathers.
- Is there a process for gathering information on fathers who do not live with their children?
- Are fathers included in written communications?Are there specific mailing lists for non- residential fathers? Is information conveyed in the father's primary language?
- Are there policies and procedures in place that address conflicts between mothers and fathers? Do they aim to create positive relationships with both parents so that both parents have opportunities to engage in supportive and productive ways?
- Is the program actively promoting its father engagement efforts in the community?
- Are there male staff members? Do they interact with parents and children? Are there men on staff who are visible and accessible to fathers?
- Are there competent staff who are committed to building positive relationships with fathers and who have a foundational understanding of what it takes to engage and support fathers?
- Evaluate whether or not there is a need to hire additional staff to support father engagement. Are there resources that would support a part-time or full-time position? Are there interested fathers who, with training and support, could fulfill staff positions?
- Do staff have opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills for working with fathers?
- How do you gather input from fathers when planning, implementing and evaluating father-focused programming and activities?
- How do you know if you are meeting targeted outcomes and goals in your partnerships with fathers?

4. Understanding Program Practices Related to Father Engagement and Program Impact Areas (Program Environment, Family Partnerships, Teaching and Learning, and Community Partnerships)

- Are men and women welcomed into centers and greeted with warmth and enthusiasm?
- Describe the physical environment. Is the receptionist area friendly and inviting to women and men? Are there pictures of fathers/men from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds interacting with children in developmentally appropriate ways? Are brochures relevant to both men and women and available in languages spoken by enrolled families? What about magazines and other print materials?
- Are equipment, resources, referral lists, publications, and types of parenting activities diverse and relevant for both fathers and mothers?
- Are books reflective of fathers and families, their cultures, and the languages they speak?
- Do program staff recognize and respect differences in male and female parenting styles and do they get equal attention from staff?
- Are program staff considerate of the confidential nature of the work they engage in with fathers/families?Are men in the agency, whether staff or fathers, listened to with open minds and are their ideas thoughtfully considered?
- Are men appreciated in both traditional and non-traditional roles? How are their interactions with young children recognized and supported?
- Are fathers or father figures personally invited and encouraged to participate in the program in ways that connect with them as individuals? What kinds of opportunities are there for fathers to participate in program activities?
- Describe your efforts to support married and cohabitating couples in your program.
- Describe your efforts to promote healthy co-parenting relationships in your program.

- Are you currently using a fatherhood curriculum for groups? Is it an evidence-based curriculum? How do you measure its effectiveness in meeting targeted outcomes and goals with fathers?
- How do you work with fathers to explain their children's learning and development?
- Describe your teaching, learning, and caregiving environments. Do they include books with stories of issues related to fathers that are not stereotypical images of men? Do these environments include visual materials showing fathers at work and home, materials for fathers to use in play with their children, and curriculum topics and learning experiences that are appealing to both women and men?
- What other services are available to fathers in the community (groups, workforce development, etc.)?

5. Data Sources to Support Community Assessment, Self–Assessment, and Ongoing Monitoring

A program may access a variety of data sources using the existing recordkeeping and reporting system or by looking at other sources of data. This will help programs understand the needs of the community and program progress achieving father engagement. Programs can look at current and past data in the areas listed below and also can explore other data sources.

External Sources	Program Sources
School graduation and drop-out rates	Fathers input—formal/informal
WIC usage	PIR family information
Arrest and incarceration rates	Progress notes/case notes
Unemployment rates	Fathers' group notes
Related newspaper articles	Intake forms
Probation and parole rates	Mailing lists
Medicaid usage	Family Partnership Agreements
Housing services data	Reporting systems
Ministerial coalition data	Child performance tracking
Child Support agency data	Enrollment information
Web Sites (ACF, HRSA, DOL, DOE, USDA)	Advisory Group minutes
Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES), BABY FACES, and other relevant research	Enrollment and transition records
	Policy Council minutes
	Social service logs

C. Markers of Progress (Digital and PDF versions)

The text is available as a digital version and a PDF version. Both versions allow programs to track progress on Parent, Family and Community Engagement. You can use the tool with a particular focus on fathers. For example, track your program's progress on developing and implementing father engagement goals. Generate reports to share your progress. Use your findings to celebrate your program's successes and take steps to enhance your father engagement practices to reach positive goals for children and families.

Refer to: **Markers of Progress**

D. Sample Action Plan from the Digital Markers of Progress

This plan is taken from the Digital Markers of Progress (DMOP) and can be used for action planning on father engagement. Programs can go through the Markers of Progress using the digital or paper process and then conduct related action planning. As an alternative, there is a fillable PDF version in the DMOP that programs can print out to use for specific planning on father engagement. Go to the DMOP, set up an account, and click on Create Action Plan.

Refer to: **Action Plan**

A Sample Template of a PFCE Action Plan

A DESIRED FAMILY ENGAGEMENT OUTCOME(S) *(from PFCE Framework, Blue Column)*:

B GOAL(S):

C ELEMENT	D INDICATOR	E ACTION STEP	F RESOURCE(S)	G PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE	H TIME FRAME(S)	I MEASURE(S) OF SUCCESS

- A *Desired Family Engagement Outcome* (from PFCE Framework, Blue Column)
- B *Your Goal(s)*
- C *Element(s)* (from the PFCE Framework Foundations and Program Impact Areas)
- D *PFCE indicators* (from Indicator Column of the Assess Section)
- E *Action step(s)*
- F *Resources available*
- G *Person(s) responsible*
- H *Time frame(s)*
- I *Measure(s) of success*

E. Staff Development Learning Extensions: Reflective Activities

E1. Reflective Activity: Testing Assumptions

The following reflectivity activity should be used by a trainer as a complement to broader staff training on father engagement.

This reflective activity tests assumptions about gender-based roles and behaviors. The purpose of this activity is to allow participants to explore their own beliefs, feelings, responses, and personal assumptions on gender-based roles and behaviors. The objective is to facilitate a discussion based upon staff responses to the scenario. Appropriateness or inappropriateness of parenting behavior is based upon perceptions that can lead to inappropriate assumptions. In most cases nurturing tasks are ascribed to mothers. Aggressive self-centered behaviors are considered male orientations. This reflective activity can be used as part of a larger training focused on helping staff understand their hidden biases.

The case scenario is followed by questions about the scenario for participants to consider, reflect, and respond to on their own and in a group discussion. The questions serve to support discussion of the case scenario and to draw out how participants may or may not be making assumptions about gender-based roles and behaviors.

Note to Trainer: Be aware that sensitive issues may arise during this activity and may bring up significant memories and powerful emotions, thoughts, and feelings for participants. As with all training, skilled facilitators need to ensure they have appropriate supports in place for staff participants. The names of parents in this case scenario are gender neutral to allow you, the trainer, to explore participants' feelings and assumptions about gender-prescribed parenting roles.

Suggested Order of Activities for the Trainer

1. Display these three questions so they are visible to the group during the reading of the case scenario.

    - What do you think is going on?
    - What were Ann Marie's feelings?
    - What do you think she is about to do?

2. Read the scenario aloud to the group. Then distribute copies of the scenario to individual participants or to small groups of participants.

    Case Scenario: Justice and Taylor were no different from any other parents. They were anxious and excited when Parker was born. After being referred by a friend, they enrolled in the Early Head Start home-based program option in their community. They each went about their business learning to care for Parker, and sharing the daily experiences of being new parents. Justice was consumed with making money, getting to work on time, down time with friends, and planning for the future. Playing pool was a favorite past time.

    Taylor was more laid back, nurturing, and attentive. After the initial intake, the case was assigned to Ann Marie, a diligent and experienced home visitor. When she knocked on the door the day of the initial home-visit, Taylor came to the door after a few minutes holding Parker. Ann Marie immediately noticed a huge bruise and swelling under Taylor's eye. Unsure about how to proceed, she entered the apartment, mentally preparing for what she would do next.

3. Allow seven to ten minutes for the group to consider the case scenario, reflect on what they have heard and read, and to respond to three questions, writing their answers on paper.

4. Walk through each question and have participants share their answers. Encourage staff to respond to each other's individual observations.

5. Facilitate the discussion on staff answers and direct the staff to other discussion points and questions.

6. Discussion Points and Questions:

   - Are there certain tasks associated only with mothers? Only with fathers? (How do assumptions that mothers are nurturers and fathers are disciplinarians contribute to perceptions?

   - What are the assumptions associated with observing physical bruises?

   - How can assumptions alter or change the home visit?

7. As the time for this activity comes to a close, ask participants what they are taking away from the discussion.

8. Final Take Away Points for Participants

   - Family composition and family member roles and practices have changed significantly.

   - Remember not to make assumptions about parenting practice based upon your beliefs about prescribed gender roles.

   - Listen carefully and ask questions to gather all the information about family circumstances so that you can support the family appropriately.

E2. Reflective Activity: Past Experiences Reflection

This activity is best done in a safe and supportive environment with a mental health consultant or supervisors with clinical training and/or training in reflective supervision. Staff should have the opportunity to explore these questions in trusted relationships outside of the work context, if they prefer. Some staff members may be sensitive or emotionally upset due to their individual experiences.

Consider the questions below. These questions also can be used for staff reflections on relationships with their mothers or other women in their lives. If you are comfortable, answer these reflection questions in a supervised setting or in a safe, well supported peer reflection group:

- Who were the important men in your life when you were growing up?
- As you think about it, were there many men in your life, or very few? What was your relationship like with these men?
- What did you learn about how fathers help their children learn and grow?
- What did you learn about manhood from these men? What did you learn about manhood from the important women in your life?
- What did you learn about the unique contributions men make to fathering?
- As you look back, what impact has your relationship (or lack of relationship) with your father had on your life in general? What impact has it had on your current attitudes and relationships with (other) men?
- How do you think your early experiences with your father or father figures might influence how you view fathers in Head Start?
- What are some things you would like to focus on as you think about developing supportive and engaging relationships with fathers in your program?

Keep in mind that for some staff, personal experiences may create roadblocks to working with fathers effectively. They may need to explore their problems in a supervised setting that offers a gentle gradual, non-intrusive approach. Program mental health consultants and employee assistance programs can be a good resource for staff.

E3. Reflective Activity: Understanding Adolescent and Young Expectant Fathers and the Prenatal Experience

Some fathers may experience difficulty fulfilling their roles and responsibilities as expectant fathers. This exercise will shed light on factors that influence an expectant father's experience. The factors are not meant to absolve fathers of their responsibility, but they may provide insight about the types of supports that will help fathers engage more readily.

- Begin by asking participants the following questions. Questions can be given as handout or placed on power-point slides, depending upon the size of the group.
- Are expectant mothers more responsive to the parenting role than expectant fathers?
- What enables mothers to respond in this way?
- In what ways do expectant fathers respond to the parenting role?
- What factors, if any, do you think inhibit fathers from responding the same way mothers do?

Have participants break up into groups and respond to the questions. Depending on group size, give each table one or more questions to answer. Ensure that each table has chart paper and markers to jot down their responses. Give them about five to seven minutes to discuss questions. Bring everyone back together to report out and then have a large group discussion Facilitators should record common themes or concerns on chart paper.

Show the Prenatal Experience slide. The chart below illustrates what may happen when parents learn they are having a baby. They may begin at a similar place (disbelief and shock) and then move through various stages of acceptance and denial, finally dealing with the reality of their newborn. Usually there are a few instances when parents may have the same feelings at the same time. The strength of their relationship and their ability to communicate effectively throughout these stages may affect how they cope with parenting.

FEMALE EXPERIENCE	MALE EXPERIENCE
Psychological	Psychological
Physiological	Vicarious
Ambivalence, excitement, fear	Ambivalence, fear, excitement
Acceptance	Acceptance, indifference, refusal
Primary Role	Secondary role
Prenatal Visits	Participation may be optional
Sonogram (excitement anticipation)	Sonogram (pregnancy becomes real)
Intimate Relationship with child	Supportive relationship with child

Ask the group to share their impressions based upon this chart. Assess whether or not they have a better understanding of the implications to consider when engaging fathers during the prenatal experience? Key considerations in working with expectant fathers include:

- Fathers sometimes require support in order to embrace their parenting responsibilities.
- The nature of the relationship between expectant parents. Discuss specific supports that may be helpful.
- How to work with expectant fathers to help them understand their role and responsibilities. Consider their level of acceptance, readiness and preparation.(Did they want to have the child?)
- What is appropriate support for expectant fathers?

F. Father-Focused Workshops and Support Groups: Getting Started Tip Sheet

Programs should assess whether they have the capacity to provide father groups or workshops, whether they will need to foster community partnerships for outside referrals, and whether they would like to conduct groups jointly as part of a collaborative community effort. Collaborating will provide father engagement staff an opportunity to learn the process and components of group facilitation and enable them to eventually conduct their own sessions.

When organizing fathers to participate in an external fathers group:

- Talk with group facilitators in the community to learn the options. Find out if it is possible to sit in on a group/workshop provided in the community to determine if it might be a good match for Head Start fathers.
- Meet with a small number of fathers with common support group or workshop needs. Invite the group facilitator(s) to meet with them to share group opportunities that exist in the community and to respond to questions they might have.
- If possible, accompany a small number of fathers to an organization to observe a group.
- Make referrals to community groups, as appropriate.
- Request feedback from the collaborating organization on the fathers' participation. Obtain feedback from fathers referred to the group.

When developing an internal fathers group:

- Talk with staff, hold a focus group, and review self-assessment data to identify fathers' interests and needs.

- Review available standardized curricula and use evidence-based curricula whenever possible.
    - Tailor curriculum materials to address specific content, cultural and linguistic needs and interests of participating fathers. Workshops can be structured to cover a range of topics, such as pregnancy, labor and delivery, newborn care, child development, fatherhood, responsible fatherhood, personal development, education and vocation, men's health, and accessing community resources.

- Initiate weekly support group meetings.
    - As a group, establish rules and standards of conduct for group participants and facilitators.
    - Sometimes fathers may share personal experiences in group that will alert facilitators that they may need more support. Make sure there is a process in place to follow-up.

- Invite outside experts to help conduct workshops on paternity, anger management, child support assistance, conflict resolution and mediation, family budgeting, mental health/wellness, domestic violence and substance abuse.

- Make appropriate referrals for men on an ongoing basis as new interests and needs emerge during the group process.

- Measure the effectiveness of the fathers' groups with pre- and post-test evaluations of group facilitation, group process, and workshop information.

- Bolster what men gain from fathers' groups by:
    - Supporting and guiding fathers in interactions with their children during home visits, socializations, and parent-teacher conferences.
    - Providing recreational activities for fathers and children including custodial and non-custodial fathers to support accomplishment of their goals.

- In collaboration with community partners, consider creating groups for specific populations of men based on community needs. Discuss group curricula available for formerly incarcerated fathers and fathers in the child welfare system who may need to take parenting classes for supervised visitation.

G. Sample Memorandum of Understanding

Strengthening Families in Head Start Centers Memorandum of Understanding

I. PARTIES: This is a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) among three parties: 1) the Head Start Center; 2) the Office of Child Support Services; and 3) the Office of Workforce Development. All parties to the MOU agree to work cooperatively on the Head Start Center's Responsible Father Engagement Program.

II. GOALS: 1) To promote, support, and maintain stable, strong and healthy families in local communities; 2) To provide comprehensive family-strengthening services in a culturally competent way, consistent with the beliefs, values, customs and traditions of the Head Start Center families; and 3) To increase access to parenting education for all Head Start parents.

III. PURPOSE: To build capacity within the local community service providers' collaborative system and the broader community to meet the multiple needs of Head Start fathers and their families in a systematic and cost effective way.

IV. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES: All parties to this Memorandum of Understanding agree to work in partnership with parents and respect their contribution to decision making. Each entity agrees to support the implementation this MOU by participating in good faith in the following agency specific activities:

The Head Start Center will:

- With concurrence from all parties to this MOU, work to implement policies and procedures to establish a strong working and mutually beneficial relationship for all members of the local community collaborative.
- Accept and expedite referrals from members of the collaborative.
- Provide training on working with fathers to all members of the local community partnership.
- Provide case management services for all referrals from Head Start to other community partners/ service providers.
- Work with other community partners to eliminate duplication of services where appropriate.
- Share marketing information, including brochures and advertising strategies to reach out to fathers in the community.
- Conduct father engagement activities and make them available, when possible to other community partners' clients.
- Participate in bi-monthly collaborative meetings to discuss mutual clients and development and to implement strategies for working with enrolled and community fathers.

Child Support Services will:

- Conduct Child Support workshops for Head Start fathers.
- Develop external communications /media strategies to develop positive community images for the local community partnership.
- Enter into cooperative agreements with members of the community collaborative for voluntary paternity establishment services.
- Provide recruitment and referral assistance.
- Help identify/leverage additional funding for the community partnership.
- Help all members and fathers better understand child support services.

- Identify dedicated staff to coordinate internally with the partnership.
- Help fathers who voluntarily declare paternity to obtain responsive child support orders.
- Provide assistance and guidance for fathers seeking arrears reduction.

Workforce Development Agency will provide:

- Access to career centers and one-stop shops
- Job training assistance
- Career counseling and planning
- Job readiness support
- Resume writing assistance
- Direct job placement
- Paid and unpaid internships
- Access to network job banks
- Other employment readiness and services to eligible participants
- Assessments of educational skill levels
- GED and Adult Basic Education services
- English as a second language training
- Other soft skills development

V. AMENDMENT REVIEW AND EFFECTIVE DATE: This MOU will be reviewed periodically but not less than annually, and it may be amended only as agreed to in writing by all three parties. This MOU will become effective upon the signature the authorized official of each of the three parties, and will remain in effect until terminated by mutual agreement or with thirty day advance written notice by one of the three parties. Services are all in-kind. No monies will be exchanged for services.

_____ (Date)

_____
Director, Head Start Center

_____(Date)

_____
Head, Office of Child Support Services

_____(Date)

_____
Director, Office of Workforce Development

H. Elements of PFCE Framework and Related Head Start Performance Standards

Program Leadership	Program Environment
1304.20 (e) Involving Parents 1304.21 (a)(1-4),(b-c) Child Development and education approach for all children 1304.23 (a),(b)(4) Identification of nutritional needs and nutritional services 1304.24 (a)(1) Child Mental health services 1304.40 (a), (e-g) Family partnerships 1304.40 (d, g) Parent involvement—general and Parent involvement in community advocacy 1304.41 (a, b) Partnerships and Advisory Committees 1304.50 (a-b), (d-f) Program governance 1304.51 (a) Program planning 1304.51 (b) Communications 1304.52 (a)(l) Organizational Structure 1306.20 (a-e) Program staffing 1306.22 (a) Volunteers 1306.23 (a-b) Training	1304.20 (b)(1) Screening for developmental, sensory, and behavioral concerns. 1304.20 (b)(3),(c)(1), (e)(1) and (3), (f)(1) Child Health & developmental services 1304.21 (a)(1)(i) Child Development and education approach for all children 1304.21 (a)(2)(ii) Child Development and education approach for all children 1304.22 (b)(3) Conditions of short-term exclusion and admittance 1304.23 (a) Identification of nutritional needs 1304.23 (b)(1) Nutritional Services 1304.24 (a) Child mental health services 1304.40 Family Partnerships 1304.51 (b-c) Communications – General and Communications with Families 1304.53 (b)(1) Head Start equipment, toys, materials and furniture 1306.22 (b) Volunteers 1306.23 (a-b) Training 1308.19 (d)(j) Developing IEPs 1308.21 (a) Parent participation & transition of children into HS and from HS to public school
Continuous Program Improvement	**Family Partnerships**
1304.20 (a-f) Child health &developmental services 1304.21 (a)(2) Child Development and education approach for all children 1304.40 (a), (b), (d-i) Family Partnerships 1304.41 (a-b) Partnerships and Advisory Committees 1304.51 (a)(1) Program Planning 1304.51 (i)(1), and (i)(2) Program Self-Assessment and Monitoring 1305.3 (a), (c-e) Determining community strengths and needs. 1306.23 (a-b) Training 1308.19 (a), (c), (e-j) Developing IEPs	1304.20 (a-f) Child health & developmental services 1304.24 (a) Child mental health services 1304.40 (a-b) Family goal setting and Assessing community services and resources 1304.41 (c) Transition services 1308.19 (a-f) Developing IEPs

Professional Development	Teaching and Learning
1301.31 (a) Personnel policies 1304.40 (a-i) Family partnerships 1304.41 (a-c) Partnerships, Advisory Committees, and Transition Services 1304.51 (a-f) Management systems & procedures 1304.52 (d), (h), (l) Qualifications of Content Area Experts and Family Child Care providers 1304.52 (j), (l), (2-3) Staff performance appraisals, Training and Development 1306.21 Staff qualification requirements 1306.22 Volunteers 1306.23 Training 1305.3 (c) Determining community strengths and needs 1308.6 (a),(c) Assessment of children 1308.18 (a-b) Disabilities/Health Services coordination 1308.19 (a), (c), (f-j) Developing IEPs 1308.21 (a-c) Parent participation & transition of children from Head Start into Public School	1304.20 (e)(2) and (4) Involving Parents 1304.21 (a)(1-5),(b)(1)-(3), (c)(1) Child Development and education approach for all children 1304.23 (d) Family Assistance with nutrition 1304.24 (a)(1)(iii), (a)(1)(v), (a)(1)(vi)(3) Child Mental Health services 1304.40 Family partnerships 1304.40 (h) Parent involvement in transition activities 1304.41 (c)(1) Transition services 1306.30 (b) Provisions of comprehensive child development services 1308.21 (a-b) Parent participation and transition of children into HS and from HS to public school
	Community Partnerships 1304.20 (a)(1)(iii) Determining child health status 1304.20 (b-f) Child health & developmental services 1304.24 (a)(3)(iv) Child mental health services 1304.40 (b-c),(g-h) Family partnerships 1304.40 (b), (d)(1), (e)(4),(g) Family partnerships 1304.41 (a) Community partnerships 1308.19 (f) Developing IEPs

Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 Section 641 (d)(2)(J) [42 USC 9836]

Related Resources

Breaking the Cycle: Fathering after Violence Website
http://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/

This website includes resources for working to prevent and end violence against women and children.

Caring Dads: Helping Fathers Value Their Children
http://caringdads.org/

This manual is designed specifically to help men who have maltreated their children and/or exposed them to domestic violence. The manual draws from best practices in the fields of batterer intervention, parenting, child maltreatment, and behavior change.

Dads' Parent Interactions with Children—Checklist of Observations Linked to Outcomes (PICCOLO-D).

http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2200&context=etd

This is a measure of parenting intended for use by home visiting practitioners in infant-toddler early childhood programs. PICCOLO-D is for identifying fathering strengths that support child development.

Data in Head Start and Early Head Start Resources
http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/operations/center/data/resources.html

The resources found on the landing page will help you think about using data in Head Start.

Family Engagement and Ongoing Child Assessment
http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/docs/family-engagement-and-ongoing-child-assessment-081111.pdf

This resource helps programs share information about children's progress with families.

Fathers for Life
http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/Family%20and%20Community%20Partnerships/New%20Parental%20Involvement/Fatherhood/FathersLife.htm

This resource can help programs and communities strengthen relationships of families with infants, toddlers, and preschool-aged children who have an incarcerated father or a father on probation or parole.

FatherhoodFirst.org Website
http://www.fatherhoodfirst.org

The Fatherhood First website provides resources for making the physical environment father-friendly.

Fatherhood Resources
http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/Family%20and%20Community%20Partnerships/New%20Parental%20Involvement/Fatherhood

The Fatherhood section of the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement provides resources for making the physical environment father-friendly.

Healthy Marriage and Strengthening Families ***Video***
http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/Family%20and%20Community%20Partnerships/New%20Parental%20Involvement/Healthy%20Marriage/HeadStartApproa.htm

In this video, Head Start parents talk about the value of good communication with their co-parent and the difference it makes with their child.

Language Modeling and Conversations: Asking Questions & Ways to Ask Children Questions
http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/center/practice/ISS/ask.html

This resource helps teachers and parents expand conversations and promotes children's language development.

Las Manos de Apá: The Hands of My Father
http://degrees.fhi360.org/2012/06/las-manos-de-apa-the-hands-of-my-father/

The Las Manos de Apá website describe a program for Latino fathers in Head Start and Early Head Start.

Using the Head Start PFCE Framework in Your Program: Markers of Progress
http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/docs/ncpfce-markers-of-progress.pdf

This resource can help determine whether your program is at a starting point, is progressing, or is innovating. Note: Substitute the word "father" for "families" when doing this assessment.

ZERO to THREE Military Family Projects
http://www.zerotothree.org/about-us/funded-projects/military-families/

This resource can help programs and military families care for very young children.

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