

Handout 3: Interviews With Fathers

Instructions: On the following pages you will read interviews from three Head Start fathers: Stanley, Tomas, and Binh. Each father was asked to respond to the following questions:

- Tell me your story about becoming involved in Head Start. What got you "hooked" into coming?
- How has being involved in Head Start affected your relationship with your child(ren)?
- What advice would you give other Head Start programs about getting more fathers involved? How can they make the program more inviting for fathers?

As you read the interviews, think about the following discussion questions:

1. What feelings about parenting do these three fathers have?
2. How did their Head Start program support or discourage their involvement?
3. If these fathers were in your program, what could the program as a whole do to support and encourage their involvement?
4. How might your program's parenting education activities be modified to encourage greater male involvement?
5. How might greater male involvement, in turn, affect your program's parenting education activities?

Handout 3: Interviews With Fathers (Continued)

Stanley's Interview

Q. Tell me your story about becoming involved in Head Start. What got you "hooked" into coming?

A. My daughter asked me if I could come to school one day. She said, "We can bring our parents." I had thought of that as a mommy thing, but I went anyway. Basically that first day I was down on my knees with the children on the floor. About a week later the teachers asked me to come back. This time I brought hammers and nails and built things with the children. Then they asked me to come to a parents meeting (another mommy thing in my mind), but I did go and then I got involved.

Q. How did being involved with Head Start affect your relationship with your children?

A. I have three children at home. The oldest is fifteen and the youngest is four years old. I was what I call a stereotypical dad. I worked, came home, and took my own space. I see now that my space was empty. When I got involved with my daughter at Head Start, I began to take notice.

My older daughter became a camp counselor for the kids at Head Start because she saw her daddy was involved with young children and felt that she could do that, too. And now, my four-year-old sits on my lap and does everything that I do on the computer. She is getting so advanced it's almost scary!

My wife works during the day so I play the mommy role in the morning, getting the kids off to school. She plays the role at night getting dinner and the children ready for bed while I work. She sees that being a provider isn't that easy and I see that being a nurturer isn't that easy.

Q. What advice would you give Head Start programs about getting more fathers involved? How can they make the program more inviting to fathers?

A. When a man is involved at a meeting, let him present things from his perspective. Give him the floor and let him share about himself and see where there are commonalities with the women. Also, use humor at meetings. It helps to break the ice.

For men I think you have to focus in on a project that is going on. If staff can make it clear we need you - we need your truck and your help to make this move to a new center -anything to get them involved and to spend time with the children and with the agency.

Handout 3: Interviews With Fathers (Continued)

Stanley's Interview (Continued)

One thing that can be done is, if you know that mom bowls on Wednesday night, call that night. It's kind of sneaky but at least you'll talk with him directly and he'll hear what is going on. Or ask for him if she's at home and explain that you want him involved, too - whether he is the father, uncle, big brother, etc.

I think that repetition is one of the worst pitfalls. Let's say that you are having a family dinner and then later you have a bean and frank dinner and then a father/daughter dinner. It becomes the same old thing. Also when a program has parent meetings every third Wednesday yet parents don't really know what they are going to do until they get there, that becomes a problem.

I think that variety is very important. Have a father-child bean supper one night and a mother-child fashion show another. Ask fathers to participate as judges, supply prizes, or get involved in other ways. Get a variety of ideas from parents and use their ideas.

In terms of supporting the involvement of fathers, I think that it is important to ask questions. What do you think of the center? Your child's teacher? What can we do to improve things? The more information they get the more they will want. Remain open. One thing may not work for one father; another approach may work for him.

Handout 3: Interviews With Fathers (Continued)

Tomas' Interview

Q. Tell me your story about becoming involved in Head Start. What got you "hooked" into coming?

A. Head Start gave my son an opportunity to start his educational development at an early age and gave me an opportunity to work. I found out about the program through my mother. She told me to see if Head Start had a program he could get into.

Q. How has being involved in Head Start affected your relationship with your children?

A. First of all I love children. When I had free time I would sit with the children and observe the curriculum and how it met their basic needs. They were pretty good at helping my son with his motor skills-he was a slow learner and they helped a lot. Because I was interested in being involved with my son as much as I could and supporting other children, I realized that some children don't have a male figure around. I think I was inspiring to them.

I relate to my children somewhat differently than a mother, from a male perspective. I am overprotective of my son because his mother is not in his life as she should be. I do a lot to substitute for that missing parent. It is not easy trying to raise a child by yourself. Spending quality time and showing them love and guidance is important. Children love their moms, but they look up to their fathers for that male image and pattern themselves after their fathers.

Q. What advice would you give other Head Start programs about getting more fathers involved? How can they make the program more inviting to fathers?

A. I took some classes within the school system and with Head Start. I got a lot out of the classes. I learned how to be considerate of children's feelings and to be creative and communicate. I learned about discipline without harshness or making them feel bad about themselves. I also learned about keeping your self-esteem - if you are feeling bad how will you make your children feel good?

I would suggest that they should have male involvement in planning and participation with reference to the children - make it so that males feel comfortable. Give men the opportunity to be involved. Even if they have to hold separate fathers' meetings, etc.

Handout 3: Interviews With Fathers (Continued)

Tomas' Interview (Continued)

Most of the time, a lot of things are geared toward the mother. Society has stereotyped that a man is supposed to be the provider. At the meetings 90 percent are women. I participate at my children's schools, I don't think that it is fair that things aren't geared for the father. For example, we were at a meeting when they were discussing fund raising. When I made my suggestion they were like "whatever" and didn't write it down, like fathers don't know anything about raising children or how to plan.

Having more male staff also plays a very important role especially in discipline and character building for the children.

I also think you need to look at the resources you offer. Mostly the resources are for women. Even though there were resources there they acted like you don't really need them (as a man) and extended themselves more to the women. We would have to really dig for information. One lady had clothing resources for children and women. I told her that I wanted to go on an interview and I didn't have a nice suit to wear. When I asked her if she had anything to help me she said that basically everything they had was for women. When I asked why she said that she didn't know.

Handout 3: Interviews With Fathers (Continued)

Binh's Interview

Q. Tell me your story about becoming involved in Head Start. What got you "hooked" into coming?

A. As a parent they explained the philosophy of home based Head Start. I wanted to help my child achieve his development.

I also attended workshops on how to enroll my child in public school and one about child abuse. Those were different from my culture and I learned a lot. Later I attended the Significant Male Task Force meetings. Fathers from the Task Force visited and gave us advice on how to involve other fathers.

Then I was asked to apply for a position. Actually, I didn't want to work. I just wanted to volunteer. I accepted the position because of the need for a Vietnamese home visitor. I've been working at the program now for six years.

Q. How has being involved in Head Start affected your relationship with your child?

A. First there is a difference in our culture. In my culture we put the child in the teacher's hand. There is not much involvement of the parent.

I was told you are the first teacher of your child. I thought to myself, then why does the home visitor come to my house? I realized day by day over time that what they were saying was true.

I could sit down and do activities at home with him. If I was not in Head Start I would just let him go to school and listen to the teacher.

Q. What advice would you offer to Head Start Staff on involving fathers?

A. To Do: If it is home based, I would advise them to spend more time with their child and stress how he can help his child grow. I would also invite fathers to volunteer in the classroom and organize a retreat for parents.

Not to Do: I think scheduling is very important. We usually have the calendar for the whole month. We give it to the family at the first meeting of the month. That way, parents know what to plan for. The problem is, sometimes the father is working. He would need to leave his job to attend.