Family Engagement in Early Care and Education
Engaging Fathers

Overview

This module will focus on:

• Understanding the roles of fathers in children’s well-being and development

• Responsive ways to partner with fathers to foster children’s development and learning

• Strategies to create welcoming environments for fathers
The Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework

Where Does It Fit?

Which part of the Framework does this module topic, “Engaging Fathers”, relate to?

- Turn to, and exchange ideas with a partner
- Be ready to share your thoughts with the whole group
A Program-Wide Approach

- A focus on the quality of program-wide engagement
- Opportunities for educators and other program staff to further develop competence and confidence in partnering with fathers
Family Engagement in Early Care and Education
Engaging Fathers

By the end of this module you should be able to:

- Describe the impact of active, engaged fathers on their children’s lives
- Identify ways to encourage strong relationships between fathers and their children
- Use a variety of approaches to create a welcoming environment for fathers and other important men in children’s lives

Children’s Interactions with Fathers and Mothers

Image credit: Office of Head Start
Relationships Between Fathers and Their Children

Fathers Matter

• Children can benefit from relationships with fathers by . . .
• Mothers can benefit from relationships with fathers by . . .
• Families can benefit from fathers by . . .
• Programs can benefit from fathers by . . .
The quality of fathers’ engagement with their children is a key factor in promoting their children’s development.

Fathers’ Unique Roles

Father and mother parenting styles can overlap, but often have unique differences:

- Fathers tend to:
  - Encourage more exploration and independent behavior in young children
  - Use language that stretches and challenges children’s competence
  - Use complementary discipline and parenting strategies
The Influence of Culture

When Fathers Are More Involved . . .

More Positive Child Behavior
Fewer Overall Child Behavior Problems
Less Aggressive Behavior
Less Hyperactive Behavior
Impacts on Father-Child Interactions

- The father’s relationship with his own parents and his partner’s parents
- His partner’s attitude toward his role as a father
- The timing of fatherhood (life stage, career stage)
- The communities of support around the father
- The father’s residential status with his children

Recognizing and Encouraging

Educators can:

- Recognize and understand the influence of culture on male and father roles
- Encourage a father’s efforts to connect with, nurture, and enjoy his child at each developmental stage

Image credit: EarlyEdU
Ways to Support

- Observe and stay curious
- Find out how fathers and their children like to spend time together
- Acknowledge responsive interactions
- Explore which program activities allow fathers to contribute most to their children’s learning

Creating a Welcoming Environment for Fathers
Engaging and Welcoming Fathers

Program staff can engage fathers with welcoming attitudes and approaches to:

- Program environment
- Classroom spaces
- Everyday routines
- Events for fathers

Messages Matter

When mothers, teachers, and others in a child’s life show confidence in a father’s parenting, a father will feel more motivated, competent, involved, and satisfied in his parenting role.
How do you find out how fathers feel when they spend time in your program?

How Can You Welcome Fathers in Everyday Routines?

- Arrival
- Departure
- Volunteer opportunities
Arrival and Departure

- Greet fathers by name
- Ask about the child’s and father’s day
- Invite fathers to share about their children and parenting
- Recognize a father’s role as a primary caregiver and lifelong educator of his child
- Address fathers in all types of family structures equally
- When parents arrive together, make equal time for communication with both
- Be sensitive to fathers’ needs
- Consider the unique needs of fathers who do not live with their children

Volunteer Opportunities

- Invite fathers or male volunteers to take on roles they enjoy
- Support active play
- Notice and comment on connections between fathers and children
Images of Fathers

Ensure that images highlight men in a variety of roles, including ones that are caring and nurturing

- Posters
- Flyers
- Artwork

Inviting Program Spaces

- Open floor space or adult-size furniture
- Decor that is universally appealing to men and women
- Resource library that contains materials of interest to fathers, including books on fatherhood
- Staff includes men and male role models
- Images in environment show fathers favorably in a variety of family structures
Family Engagement in Early Care and Education
Engaging Fathers

Classroom Images

Include photos of fathers and other important men in children’s lives

Books and Learning Materials

Look at the learning materials in your environment

• In what ways do they represent men?

• How do they represent fathers?
**Program-Wide Practices**

- Be aware of and avoid stereotypes of men and fathers
- Offer fathers’ groups and father-focused workshops
- Explore fathers’ needs for services, support, and resources
- Focus on all adults promoting healthy child development and setting goals
- Ensure that staff composition reflects families’ cultures and languages

---

**Bringing It All Together**
The Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework

Revisiting “Where Does It Fit?”

Which part of the Framework does this module topic, “Engaging Fathers”, relate to?

- Turn to, and exchange ideas with a partner
- Be ready to share your thoughts with the whole group
• Fathers can play an important role in child development and family well-being
• Early childhood educators and program staff can adopt practices that promote strong father-child relationships
• Programs and educators can create welcoming environments for fathers that foster positive outcomes for fathers, children, and families

For more information about this resource, please contact us:
PFCE@ecetta.info | 1-866-763-6481a

This document was developed with funds from Grant #86HC0014 for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start, and Office of Child Care, by the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement. This resource may be duplicated for noncommercial uses without permission.