

# Section 4

## Dads Matter

This 2-hour session is designed to help professionals explore the importance of nurturing father involvement in children's lives, as well as understanding how it positively affects moms, dads and children. Participants will review the impact of fathers and the impact of positive mother/father relationships on young children. Those who have previously attended the sessions reported that the training was very valuable.<sup>3</sup> During this workshop, participants will gain the following:

- A greater understanding of fatherhood and the role of fathers in the lives of children;
- An opportunity to explore one's own biases related to fathers and families;
- An opportunity to discuss ways to demonstrate empathy and respect when working with fathers; and
- An opportunity to discuss strategies that promote father involvement.

### **Audience:**

This 2-hour session was designed for professional staff from agencies that work with fathers and families, such as Probation and Parole, Child Support, and Head Start. Each session will accommodate between 30 and 40 people.

### **Room Set Up:**

The room should be arranged to accommodate a presenter/facilitator at the front of the room. Participant seating should consist of round tables that will accommodate approximately 6 people.

### **Facilitators/Presenters:**

The Dads Matter professional development session can be successfully managed by one facilitator. It is recommended that Head Start agencies select a facilitator with a background in fatherhood/parenting and experience facilitating small and large group discussions. The facilitator should demonstrate a deep and genuine understanding of the importance of fathers in the lives of children.

### **Supplies/Materials:**

Name Tags Flip Chart

Markers

Dads Matter Handout (1 copy for each participant)

Note Cards (1 per participant)

Feelings about Fathers Handout (1 half-sheet per participant)

Fathering Pictures for each Table (We have provided a set of fathering pictures to be used in the opening icebreaker. Each table should have a set of 10-12 images. Pictures should be cut out. You may also choose to find fathering images from magazines or other media)

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<sup>3</sup> Fuger, K.L et.al. (2008). Strengthening families and fatherhood: Children of fathers in the criminal justice system project: Final evaluation report July 1, 2005 – June 30, 2008. University of Missouri-Kansas City, Institute for Human Development. Kansas City, MO.





# Fathers for Life

*A Head Start Innovation and Improvement Grant Project*

**Professional Development Session #4  
Dads Matter**

## Session Guide

### **Welcome and Introductions (15 Minutes)**

Goal:	To welcome the professionals and create a comfortable atmosphere as they engage in the sessions
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Facilitator Procedures:

As participants enter the room, greet them and invite them to make a nametag and be seated. Once all participants have arrived, begin the session by introducing yourself and welcoming them to the session. Give participants a brief overview of the training and provide them with directions to the restroom facilities.

Icebreaker:

In the middle of each table you will find a number of pictures and images featuring fathers and children. Take a moment to glance at the pictures on your table. Choose a picture that represents a positive image you have of fathers or male role models. This could be an image you have of your own father, an image of the type of father you wish that you had, or a depiction of a father you have witnessed in your work with children.

(Give participants several minutes to glance at images and choose a picture)

Now I am going to ask you to introduce yourself, share your image and tell us briefly why you made that choice.

(Allow each participant the opportunity to introduce themselves and describe the image they have chosen)

## The Importance of Nurturing, Involved Fathers (45 Minutes)

Goal: To allow participants the opportunity to explore the importance of a nurturing fatherhood environment for children, mothers and fathers

Facilitator Procedures:

Make sure that each table has flip chart paper and markers.

Thank you so much for sharing your images with the group. It's always so nice to hear about the wonderful ways that dads can impact their families. Today we are going to talk about how important it is to have nurturing and involved fathers. Professionals in a variety of fields from classrooms to social service agencies, continue to be committed to family-centered approaches to working with and serving children. In recent times, these professionals have also become increasingly aware of the important role fathers play in the lives of their children.

Historically, fathers were often defined by the financial contributions they made to the family and their children. What we know is that the role of the father is much broader both for the child and the family as a whole.

Let's talk about the types of roles fathers can play in the lives of their children.

(On a flip chart, record the responses given by participants that describe the roles fathers can play. Responses may include caregivers, role models, playmates, mentors, coaches and protectors)

It seems clear that there are a number of important roles that fathers can play in the lives of their children. The reality is that men and women parent in very different ways and children can benefit from experiencing both types of parenting. *And...* the benefits of nurturing fathers extend farther than that! Who benefits when fathers are nurturing and involved?

(Record responses from participants. Responses may include fathers, mothers, children and communities)

It should be clear now that many people benefit when fathers are involved in positive ways. Today we are going to focus on the positive impact father involvement has on fathers, mothers and children.

I am going to ask you to participate in an exercise that will help us explore a variety of benefits. On each of your tables you will find copies of a handout entitled "Dads Matter". I would like you to individually take 3-5 minutes to jot down some benefits of nurturing fathers as it relates to moms, children and the fathers themselves.

(Allow 3-5 minutes for individual participants to record responses)

Now that you have responded individually, take a few minutes and share your responses at your individual tables. Please designate someone from your table to record responses on flip chart paper and someone to share your responses with the large group.

(Allow 10-15 minutes for groups to share responses. Next, ask groups to take turns sharing their responses. You may want to ask each group to share benefits for mothers. Then ask each group to share responses for children and then for fathers.)

As an alternative to the exercise above you may want to create a Gallery Wall. After everyone has individually completed the Dad's Matter handout, give the group 10 minutes to walk around the room. On different walls of the room, post chart paper. The chart paper should be labeled: Benefits for Children, Benefits for Mothers, Benefits for Fathers. As individuals circulate around the room, they should record some of their individual responses on the chart paper. Use the remaining time to share some of the responses aloud.

Great job! Thanks for participating! Isn't it so clear that when fathers are involved in positive ways... everyone wins? It is obvious from this exercise that our gut tell us this is true and research supports this as well. Let me take just a few moments to show you some of the benefits that have been demonstrated in research. Most of these are things that you as professionals may have also identified.

(These benefits are outlined in a handout and overhead format. You may use either or both as a visual while you are discussing these benefits)

Let's begin with children. I don't think it's any big secret that children benefit when they have nurturing and involved fathers. But, how?

- **Improved Educational Outcomes** – Children with nurturing and playful fathers have children with higher IQ's and better linguistic and cognitive capabilities. They start school with more advanced academic readiness and tend to exhibit higher levels of patience when handling academic stressors. In fact, the cognitive advantages of involved fatherhood extend into adolescence and early adulthood.
- **Psychological and Social Well-being** – Children with nurturing fathers tend to be more emotionally secure both as infants and as they grow older. They demonstrate better social connections with peers and tend to be better able to regulate their feelings and behaviors. Why? Well, fathers tend to spend a greater percentage of their interactions with their children engaging in playful and stimulating

activity, teaching them to control impulses and emotions. These interactions promote independence and achievement. Children with involved fathers tend to demonstrate higher self-esteem and a decreased likelihood of experiencing depression.

- **Fewer High Risk Behaviors** – Children with involved nurturing fathers tend to exhibit higher levels of self-control and tend to avoid high risk behaviors.
- **Greater Likelihood of Receiving Appropriate Prenatal and Infant Medical Care** – When fathers are involved in the lives of their children they are more likely to receive appropriate healthcare both prior to and following birth
- **Greater Economic Well-being** – When children have fathers that are not actively involved in their lives, they are 5 times more likely to live in poverty. Father involvement often contributes to positive financial outcomes for children.

Clearly children benefit when their fathers are involved in positive ways. But, what we have learned from our exercise is that other people benefit as well. Let's take a look at the benefits to mothers.

- **Better Prenatal Care** – As we mentioned when outlining child outcomes, mothers are more likely to get appropriate prenatal care when fathers are involved.
- **Socioeconomic Benefits** – When fathers are involved, they are also more likely to provide support for their children, thus reducing the number of mothers and children that live in poverty.
- **Mental Health Benefits** – Mothers experience less depression when the fathers of their children are actively involved in positive ways. This is especially true for adolescent and young mothers.

What about dads? Does the act of being an involved father improve the outcomes for fathers themselves? Your instincts said yes and your instincts are supported by current research. Many experts would tell you that the act of functioning as nurturing and involved fathers makes dads better men. Let's take a look at some of the positive outcomes experienced by men who are also caring fathers.

- **Improved Social Emotional Outcomes** - Active fathers learn to express their emotions in more positive ways. They demonstrate increased levels of empathy, greater psychosocial maturity and less psychological distress.
- **Increased Levels of Community Involvement** – Involved fathers are also more involved in their communities. They tend to be more actively involved in socializing, more likely to serve in civic organizations and choose more service oriented activities.

- **Fewer High Risk Behaviors** – Active fatherhood seems to be correlated to lower levels of high risk behaviors. Thus dads who are choosing to be actively involved with their children also exhibit lower levels of substance abuse and less than average contact with the criminal justice system.
- **Greater Self-Confidence and Overall Well-Being** – Fathers who are actively involved with their children report higher levels of self confidence and greater life satisfaction. They also report fewer illnesses and accidents.
- **More Positive Relationships** – Fatherhood encourages men to increase interactions with extended families. Some evidence even links involved fatherhood to marital stability and marital satisfaction. Overall, men who are involved fathers during young adulthood often turn out to be better spouses, workers and citizens in midlife.

## Promoting Fathering Involvement (40 Minutes)

Goal: To provide an opportunity for participants to discuss effective methods for involving fathers.

Facilitator Procedures:

For this portion of the workshop, you will need to begin with a flipchart and markers so that you can record responses related to father involvement.

Facilitator preparation notes: A flipchart titled: Barriers to Father Involvement

It probably seems obvious by now that when fathers are involved with their children in positive, effective ways, all family members benefit. So, the question you may be asking now is, “How do I support that?” As professionals we are all interested in how we can improve outcomes for the families that we work with. So, let’s begin to take a look at ways we can encourage active involvement on the part of fathers. Let’s start by brainstorming a little bit. I would like you to think about the barriers to father involvement. What do you think really keeps some fathers from choosing to be involved with their children or with their children’s schools?

(Facilitator should record participant responses on flip chart paper labeled “Barriers to Father Involvement”)

As you can see from your own list, there are a wide variety of factors that can serve as barriers to a father’s involvement whether it is work schedules or a

mother's reluctance to encourage involvement. If we truly want to impact the level of father involvement in our centers and agencies, we will have to address these types of barriers and create an inviting environment for these men. Perhaps one of the most significant steps we can take toward this goal is to explore our own biases about fatherhood and fine tune the ways in which we work respectfully and empathetically with fathers. Let's do a little exercise to explore our feelings about fathers. On your table you will find some half-sheets of paper. There should be enough for each person at your table to have one. This is an exercise that I want you to do completely on your own. At the end, I will ask if anyone would like to share what they wrote. No one will be required to share, so please feel free to be openly honest as you write your responses. Now, I would like you to take a few minutes to think about your perceptions of fathers. What are your own experiences? What have you learned about fathers from your family and the media? What perceptions have you developed through your work with moms who are involved in your programs? As you are thinking jot down any experiences and feelings you have that positively impact your work with fathers on the left side of the paper. Next, list experiences and feelings that negatively impact your work with fathers.

(Give participants 3-6 minutes to jot down their thoughts.)

The thoughts you have recorded are your own private feelings and experiences. Beginning to explore those feelings can help us to improve the ways in which we interact and communicate with the fathers we serve. At this time, is there anyone who would like to share some of the things they recorded?

(Allow time for 3-5 people to share their experiences and process briefly with the group.)

As we work with families and fathers, it is always wise to be aware of our feelings and biases and how they impact our interactions. In working with fathers who may be facing barriers to involvement, it is particularly important for us to ensure that we are building trusting relationships. Two character traits that are important for professionals to possess and encourages father involvement:

1. **Empathy** – Empathy is the ability to perceive and communicate with sensitivity the feelings and experiences of someone else. If fathers feel like they are being judged poorly for things they have or haven't done as parents, we decrease the likelihood that they will seek involvement in our classrooms. If, on the other hand, we are empathetic to fathers and their situations, we are more likely to gain their trust and their involvement.
2. **Respect** – We all want to be respected by others but respect often has special meaning to men and fathers. Communicating our respect for fathers and their situations is an important way that we can get and keep fathers engaged. Today we have concluded that fathers are important in

the lives of their children. It is so important for dads to see that we truly believe it.

Being aware of our own experiences and perceptions is a very critical step toward expressing empathy and respect for the families and fathers we are serving. And, it is this empathy and respect that will set us on the path toward the levels of father involvement that we want for our agencies, our classrooms and our children. So, let's take a look at some of the strategies we can use to gain greater levels of involvement from fathers.

- **Find Out What Dads Want** –So often we plan programs and opportunities that we believe our participants need without even asking them about their interests and needs. By asking fathers how they want to be involved and what they would like to participate in, we are giving them some ownership of our programs and increasing the likelihood they will choose involvement. While a male interest survey could give you a comprehensive view of what fathers want, feel free to also use casual methods of collecting data. For instance, talk to fathers as they drop off and/or pick up their children.
- **Expect and Invite Father Involvement** – We are wise not to assume that fathers feel welcome and needed in our classrooms and programs. Many fathers may feel out of place in our classrooms. So, what we must do is ask them to be involved and welcome them when they are present. We must examine all aspects of our programming to ensure that we are rolling out the red carpet. Do our enrollment forms request mother and father information? When we call a child's home to discuss progress do we automatically ask for the mother? Do we meet and greet fathers as they drop off or pick up children? Do we send invitations to both moms and dads when they do not live together?
- **Recognize Contributions** – Parents in general feel more welcome when they are recognized for the roles they play in their children's lives. Recognize contributions in large and small ways. For instance, tell Susie's dad how she lights up when he comes to pick her up. Or, post a thank you sign in the entry way recognizing dads who read to children during storytime. This will send the message to other dads that they are welcomed and appreciated.
- **Father/Child Activities** – Fathers participate most in activities that involve their children. Think about activities you can plan and implement that allow dads to interact with their children. Could you host a father/child science night at your center? How about inviting dads to a short concert hosted by the children and followed by a quick parenting session? The possibilities are unlimited!

- **Get to Know the Dads** – Parents are more likely to become involved in programs and classrooms when they have a relationship with someone there. Take every opportunity to get to know the dads you interact with and encourage friendships between dads as well. Anytime a dad enters your center, you have a chance to learn something about him. His clothes may indicate the type of work he does for living. Casual questions may help you to uncover his interests or the goals he has for his child.
- **Provide Visual Evidence that you Welcome Father Involvement** – There is no better way to make dads feel comfortable than for them to see first hand that dads are a part of your environment. Do you have male staff members? Do you display pictures of fathers and children interacting? Do your program brochures feature pictures of dads? Are men involved in organizing and leading activities? Do you have fathers on your policy council?
- **Avoid Logistical Barriers** – Any time we expect to involve parents in programs, we have to work to overcome the logistical barriers that stand in the way. Be aware of parent schedules. Does child care improve your attendance? Do particular locations draw more attendance than others?
- **Be Prepared to Sell the Importance of Father Involvement** – Mothers are often the gatekeepers to father involvement in the lives of their children. Help them to understand the unique role that fathers play.

As you can see, there are a variety of things we can do in our agencies and classrooms to encourage father involvement. But, we know based on our own experiences that we will face resistance. We may face resistance from staff members and from the fathers. I want to spend a few minutes talking about resistance we might experience from the mothers of the children we serve. The reality is that mothers are often the gatekeepers to father involvement. What we know from research is that when mothers support father involvement, we see higher levels of involvement. So, let's talk for a minute about why we might see resistance from mothers. Think about the families you work with if that helps. From what you can see, what causes mothers to resist father involvement?

(Facilitator should record responses on flip chart paper.)

As you can see, there are a number of reasons that a mother might put up this type of resistance. She might have been hurt emotionally by her own father. She may resent the father for how he has treated her. She may view parenting as “her territory” and a key part of her identity that she doesn't want to share.

She may be unwilling to change the standards she holds for housekeeping or childcare. This resistance can take place whether the parents live together or separately. Clearly, we may work with families where father involvement is not appropriate, especially if it endangers the children. When involvement is appropriate we can work to overcome resistance from mothers. Increasing a mother's support of father involvement will be different for each mother based on the reasons for her resistance. However, here are some things we can keep in mind as we work to eliminate this type of barrier.

- 1. Help Mothers Understand the Important Role of Fathers** – We have learned a great deal today about the positive impact fathers play in the lives of their children. As mothers gain a greater understanding of this role, they are more likely to encourage involvement.
- 2. Promote the Importance of Varied Parenting Styles** – As we mentioned earlier, moms and dads parent differently and children benefit from these different styles. When we promote the importance of a dad's style of parenting, we decrease the likelihood that mothers will judge that style as "wrong" and thus increase the chances for father involvement.
- 3. Recognize the Benefits to Everyone Involved** – You and I know that when fathers are involved in effective ways, moms benefit as well! Spread the word! Research has shown that when fathers are involved in effective and nurturing ways, women are able to be "better mothers."

Would anyone like to share a success story they have had in this area? A time when they have been able to encourage a mother to be an advocate for father involvement? A strategy they have used to assist moms in promoting father involvement?

(Give participants the opportunity to share some strategies they have used.)

### **Wrap-Up and Dismissal (5 Minutes)**

Goal:	To provide closure to the training experience and encourage participants to begin thinking about how they can utilize the information they have gained.
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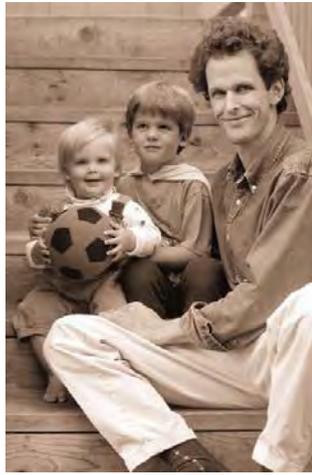
Facilitator Procedures:
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Facilitator should ensure that each participant has a note card.
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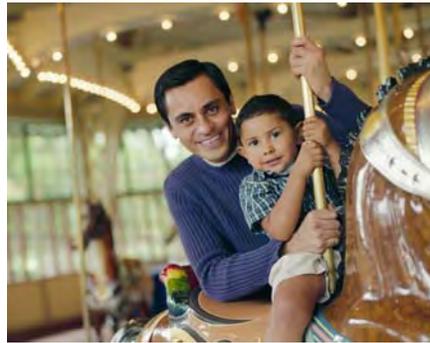
Today we have had an opportunity to explore the important role fathers play in the lives of children. In fact, we have worked together to illustrate the

positive impact on children, mothers and fathers. Finally, we have outlined strategies for promoting father involvement. Securing the type of ongoing involvement you desire is a long-term process that requires a commitment on the part of an entire agency. However, what we've learned today is that there are a lot of small things we can do to make a difference. I have provided one note card for each of you and as we close, I would like for you to take a few minutes to jot down one or two things you can do, starting today, to help involve fathers in your programs. Take these cards with you as a reminder of the steps you want to take toward improving the outcomes for your children.

(Thank participants for attending today's session and then dismiss)









# Fathers for Life

*A Head Start Innovation and Improvement Grant Project*

Professional Development Session #4

## Dads Matter Handout

Mother	Child	Father



## Perceptions of Fatherhood

Positive	Negative

## Perceptions of Fatherhood

Positive	Negative