

Engaging Young Fathers Through Support Groups

Prerequisites for Using This Video

The Engaging Young Fathers Through Support Groups video should be used as a reflective training session that is embedded in a larger program effort to engage fathers. Program leadership and staff have already established a commitment to working with fathers across systems and services. Leadership and staff are willing to explore program challenges to effective father engagement. For programs working specifically with younger parents, this can be a wonderful resource for discussion and reflection amongst staff.

Setting up the Video

Give participants the context and overview of this seven-minute video. A young man named Leon and an Early Head Start director reflect on Leon's experiences as a young dad engaged in an educational support group.

Setting up the Discussion

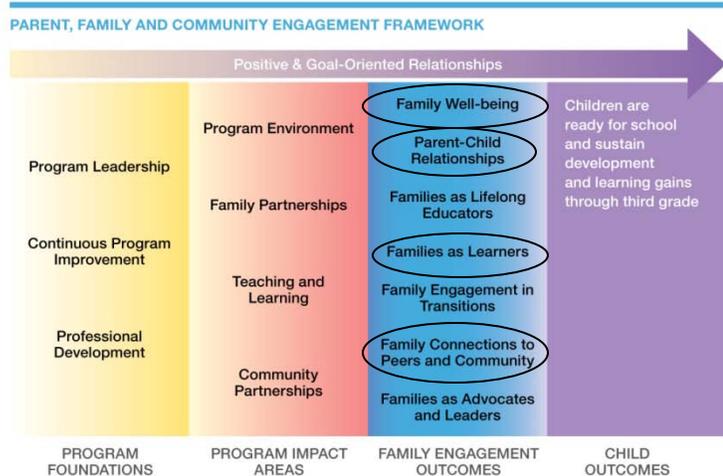
Allow enough time for staff to reflect on each of the following questions. Discuss each question as a group:

1. What strengths do you see in this young man? What is important to him?
2. What are some of the challenges that Leon had to face or will have to face?
3. What kinds of things did he learn from his father's group experience?
4. What thoughts or feelings do you have about how he responded to his friend initially? Eventually?
5. Is there anything about this video and group discussion that may change your attitudes, beliefs, or actions related to your work?

Facilitator Notes:

During the discussion, make sure to clarify these key points:

- In the Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework, these outcomes are observed in the video:



- It is important to provide services that are inclusive of all fathers or are individualized for groups of fathers.
“He went in to [talking about] the program about how the program was based on helping young fathers so it immediately drew my attention because I was a young father.” *(Video quote)*
- It is important to partner with parents and walk alongside them as they learn what is best for their child and themselves.
“One of the things he didn’t want was someone telling him how to be a father.” *(Video quote)*
- Fathers’ experiences of fathers’ group activities might be quite different than their initial impressions so don’t give up on your recruitment and engagement activities.
“You’re going to go in there and hold hands. You’re gonna sit together and sing camp songs and we’re going to have corny laughter.” *(Video quote)*
- Be patient with young fathers and honor their strengths as they are learning and growing in so many ways, right alongside their young children. In addition, staff can:
 - Believe in their capacity, regardless of their age.
 - Support them to reflect on how they were parented.
 - Provide parenting information as part of a series of comprehensive training topics.
 - Celebrate fathers’ accomplishments!
- Fathers benefit from meaningful learning experiences that influence parenting behaviors and daily decision-making. A fathers group is one way that programs

can help fathers learn about themselves, their child, and their role as parents.

Groups also provide opportunities for men to:

- Build friendships and support networks.
- Learn from each other.
- Consider new ways of dealing with interpersonal conflicts.
- Reflect on how their own childhood experiences influence their current parenting decisions.
- Reflect on co-parenting challenges and solutions.