

Building Blocks for Father Involvement: Planning for Success

Tyrone Mebane: [Reading in background: She chopped, she grated, she grated, she sliced.] There are things in life that people try to hide and in our minds we think we hidin' it but in essence we're the only ones that don't know that everybody sees it. We had been like using drugs and livin' that kind of life. I stayed off drugs and she didn't and it wasn't really working for me to be in a household like that and so I left.

Denota Watson: He said "I want to keep them together." So he took those seven, six kids and brought them with him in a one-room apartment.

Child 1: [Reading from book: Goodnight the to the old lady
Tyrone Mebane and Child 1: whispering hush.]

Denota Watson: That part of his life was to me was the masterpiece of really of Dad stepping forward. Child 1:
Goodnight comb...

Tyrone Mebane: I got to the center and that teacher of my daughter kept asking me to do things. She asked me if I had a - a screwdriver or a pliers or something and she said that the table was a little shaky.

Tyrone Mebane and Child 1: [Laughter]

Tyrone Mebane: She must have reminded me once or twice a week that I told her that I would bring something in to fix the table and eventually, I - I did. I came into the classroom that day and all those little kids just kind of like drew to me like - they're like - they're so needy. So anyway, I came into the classroom with my little couple of tools and fixed tables and the little boys were there trying to see how to do stuff. The little girls were there trying to see how to do stuff.

I guess I hadn't really thought about this kind of stuff for quite a while. But, I looked over at my daughter and she's just kind of - proud to have her Dad come in the classroom. Fatherhood Program trainer: Name me the most important person in your life.

Tyrone Mebane: I went to the training up in the Poconos somewhere and when I learned a little bit more, I learned that - there's a lot that I could do. That there's a lot. Remember my life had just started to be of value to me. Woo - Water Works! Child 2: You owe me..

Tyrone Mebane: Now I started to see it being of value to others so it made a dramatic impact in my life. Being a father is - is probably the the most wonderful thing I would ever experience in my short time here on this planet. If I hadn't been involved with the Father Program in our Head Start Program and things of that nature, I would probably never know that. And then the day I came and fixed those tables was - was the day that really changed my life.

Man 1: I want to share with you a - two techniques, okay, that I utilize and have been very helpful (Spanish) in my personal life that has helped me out as a father, okay?

Narrator: Now you are at the point where you can start working with dads, meeting them, learning about their goals, their dreams and their struggles with their children or you are ready to improve your existing fatherhood program. Either way, now you get to start doing all the things you have been thinking about and planning.

Trainer: (Spanish) at their level. Denota: Having the fathers come in and then transition to really want to get involved with their children and then see them almost transition to another level of family - involvement and family evolution. It's just a sort of a self - self-pride.

Narrator: As you start working with fathers or seek ways to strengthen your current work with dads, keep in mind some of the components that make up a successful Head Start Fatherhood Program.

Man 1: You want to go from this line to this line which is this one.

Narrator: Successful programs help dads understand the irreplaceable role they play in the lives of their children. This will help them understand that this is a job that cannot be done by a substitute, only they can be in the game.

Lady and children: [Singing] I love you, you love me..

Narrator: And to properly coach your entire staff from the director to the teachers, family specialists, bus drivers, even the attendant at the front desk will have to understand the extent to which fathers make unique contributions to their child's development.

Successful programs are aware of the power of the mother/father relationship and how it affects the emotional stability of a child. Parents with a strong relationship provide their children with a stable emotional foundation. Children with parents in troubled relationships often have problems themselves.

Man 2: And this is an old traditional song we're singing here and so this is called the "White Wolf Song."

Narrator: Successful programs celebrate the diversity of fathers in the community. Staff are aware of the various ethnic, cultural and religious groups and all fathers are approached with an open mind and attitude.

Robert Goslin: Our traditions talk about four common values of honesty, respect, sharing and kindness. And so what I find in my work that if what I can focus on those most common values that we share within our tribal group, I then take those in to working with my dads.

Narrator: Successful programs evaluate themselves constantly, keeping track of the progress that has been made. They do so in many ways, like keeping logs at meetings containing information about each dad, getting regular feedback...

Trainer: A - a good criticism is good constructive criticism okay, and that allows me to be better at what I am doing, okay?

Narrator: ...and talking about even the smallest indicators of success and sharing stories at staff meetings.

Windy Hill: We think of assessments of programs in much the same way you think about the dials on the dash of a car. They're there to give you information on the vital operation of that vehicle, of that car. Assessment allows us to know about the quality and this then of the services that are being provided in much the same way that that dial tells you that your car is running as it should.

Man 2: And I want to welcome you to be a part of our group discussion today...

Narrator: Successful programs learn the nuts and bolts of running a good father discussion group, whether it's a group of dads talking amongst themselves with or without a facilitator or a speaker-led parenting discussion, or even discussions conducted in more subtle ways.

These programs have figured out how these father groups will help them achieve their goals. There are lots of places you can go to get ideas and develop the content of your group activity. The 21st Century Exploring Parenting Program is specifically designed for Head Start parents and it includes a group leader's guide. And finally, successful programs know how to encourage a dad to really connect with his child.

Man 3: Do your best.

Narrator: By teaching him how to learn about his children and interact with them while doing age-appropriate activities.

Child: Can I cut the blue out?

Narrator: Sometimes all it takes is for a father to ask a child some simple questions, like "What is your favorite food, animal or game?"

Man 3: Have you got a favorite animal?

Child: A sharp tooth.

Man 3: A sharp tooth, that's a type of dinosaur isn't it?

Child: Yeah and it's it's wild.

Narrator: Questions like these build confidence in a child and bring the father and the child closer together. Thinking of creative and interesting things fathers can do with their children will be one of your best investments. Try to arrange situations where fathers can help their children enjoy new experiences and develop new skills. Reading to, cuddling

with and talking to an infant, toddler or preschooler are three of the most important activities a dad can do to stimulate healthy development.

Windy Hill: Read, read, read. It is so important that moms and dad read to their children at infancy and on, it and to have conversations with children, to read books to talk about the books and talk about the pictures in the books. All of this is very important to supporting their child's growth and cognitive development.

Narrator: Even dads who are not strong readers can make up stories and talk about the pictures in books.

Man 4: Remember when we went on the hayride, and went to the farm...

Narrator: Kids four and older love to be asked about their day.

Child: And you know what my big story is?

Narrator: Often they will convey exciting and unusual things that they have seen and done. Probably the most important thing dads can do is share positive experiences with their young children that they can talk about together. Embedded in everyday life these can be rich learning experiences for young children. It helps children to hear about mistakes their dad made...

Man 3: Did I tell you kids about the time I broke a window out my dad's car?

Narrator: ...and consequences that resulted, as well as things dad did right. Family stories are a very important way to help children understand where they came from, who their people are, and who they are.

And once a dad starts telling these stories he will be pleased to hear over and over, "Tell me about when you were little Dad." And finally, let dads know that these activities, telling stories, reading and asking questions can be done anywhere and anytime, not just during a planned outing or an event at the Head Start Center. And the best most meaningful interactions often just happen.

Your Head Start Program works hard to improve the lives of children and get them ready for school. You work hard to help children become life-long learners and productive members of society. Fathers help your program be more effective. Be proud of what you have done.

Man 1: Good night.

Narrator: Any time a child has a loving and involved mother and father they have an incredible head start in life.

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