Working with Fathers to Enhance Parenting Skills

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Notable Quotes

• “Live so that when your children think of fairness, caring and integrity, they think of you.”

• “Remember that children, marriages and flower gardens reflect the kind of care they get.”

H. Jackson Brown Jr “A Father’s Book of Wisdom” (also wrote “Life’s Little Instruction Book”)
Our Goals Today

Look at ways to help fathers:

• Increase their understanding of child development and age-appropriate behavior.

• Develop age-appropriate discipline strategies.

• Talk with their children.

Also, share some resources and lessons learned from current federal fatherhood grantees.
Federally Funded Fatherhood Programs – DHHS Office of Family Assistance (OFA)

• 5-year grants authorized by Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 to promote well-being of children and families

• 94 current “Responsible Fatherhood” grantees in final year of funding to conduct services in one or more of three allowable activities:
  1. Provide Healthy Marriage Activities
  2. Encourage Responsible Parenting
  3. Foster Economic Stability

(also approx. 120 “Healthy Marriage” grants)
What Does the Research Tell Us?

• “Research shows that even very young children who have experienced high father involvement show an increase in curiosity and in problem solving capacity. Fathers’ involvement seems to encourage children’s exploration of the world around them and confidence in their ability to solve problems.”

• Although mother-infant attachment is central to the development of infants, research shows that father-infant attachment security may have unique effects – and may be more influential on occasion.

• “Bottom line: the closer the connection between father and child, the better off they both are now and in the future”

(Kyle Pruett, Fatherneed, 2000)
Positive Father Engagement:

• Improves School Readiness.
• Lowers levels of disruptive behavior in boys.
• Improves girls self-esteem.
• Improves the cognitive development of children if the father is positively involved between birth and 24 months.
• Leads to less stress on mothers through shared parenting.
• Provides positive male role model for boys and girls.

Head Start Fatherhood Building Blocks, HHS; 2004
Fathers are not as informed about young children's social-emotional development. They are less aware of the kinds of experiences that have a strong or major influence on the social and emotional development of a young child.

They are also less likely to understand that young children can begin to sense whether their parents are angry or sad and can be affected by their parents' moods by 6 months of age.

Not as many fathers as mothers are aware that talking and singing to newborns have an important influence on the cognitive development of young children.
How do we get this message across to Head Start dads?

• Begin by examining our own experiences and biases (don’t assume dads are unconcerned or eager to avoid responsibility)

• Seek understanding of “where dads are coming from.” (recognize they may be suspicious of programs that offer help)

• Assume that dads do want to be involved.

• Encourage moms to invite dads in.

• Go to the dads.

• Engage dads in activities that engage, challenge, encourage reflection, provide knowledge, teach skills.
Use of video and internet

- **Rob Reiner’s “I am Your Child” Campaign** – PSAs and DVDs “the first years last forever” ([www.parentsactionstore.org](http://www.parentsactionstore.org))
- **NRFC PSAs** ([www.fatherhood.gov](http://www.fatherhood.gov)).
- **Work of REEL Fathers** (screening of short video clips to Dads and their children; followed by activities for kids, discussion with dads.)
- **Use of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube to reach dads.**
Working with Peer Support Groups: Sample Activity 1

Understanding Children’s Ages and Stages (developed by Pamela Wilson)

Contact Nigel Vann (nvann@fatherhood.org) for copy of activity
Sample Activity 2—from Parents as Teachers (OFA grantee)

- Reading With Your Child – activity from Parents as Teachers curriculum “Focus on Fathering” (available for free download at www.parentsasteachers.org)

- Curriculum topics:
  1) Child Development
  2) Choosing Child Care
  3) Connecting with Your Child
  4) Discipline
  5) Healthy Relationships for Me and My Child
  6) Helping Your Child Deal with Feelings
  7) Parenting Apart
  8) Places to Go
  9) Reading with Your Child
  10) Self-Esteem
  11) Siblings and Friends
  12) Ways to Play
Reading With Your Child

Reading aloud to children:

• Helps them hear the sounds of speech so they are able to speak them and later read them.
• Helps dads form attachments with kids.
• Introduces children to new ideas and concepts and exposes them to proper sentence structure, which is not always used in everyday language.
• Means they are more likely to enjoy reading themselves as they grow up.
• Associates reading with love, comfort and pleasure if you cuddle while you read.
Sample Handouts

From

- Healthy Families San Angelo, TX
  (hfsatx.com)
- National Fatherhood Initiative
  (www.fatherhood.org)
- Child Crisis Center, Mesa, AZ
  (www.childcrisis.org)
When dads spend time with their kids from the very beginning and work to keep close feelings between them, good things happen to the kids. Things like this:

- They are more likely to be active, healthy, and strong babies, toddlers, preschoolers and school-aged children.
Most of them do better than normal on developmental tests. They do better figuring out boy/girl roles. They are much less likely to be violent, anti-social, dangerous, and even criminal. Girls do better in math. Both boys and girls are better at being independent, having self-control, and being leaders. They are more successful in life. Teens wait longer before they start having sex. Children are more likely to go to school and stay in school. They are also less likely to repeat a grade.

FROM: GHFSA Welcome to DADHOOD!: Prenatal (www.hfsatx.com)
YOUR BABY'S FAVORITE TOY

• Here's a heads-up. Before you go out and spend lots of money on expensive toys, answer this question:

• "What's the best toy far my baby to play with?"

(www.hfsatx.com)

• Nope, it's none of these things.

• IT'S YOU!
"How do I go about bonding?

• One of the best ways to bond is to find a private, peaceful time you can spend with your baby. Smile at him, look into his eyes, and talk to him.

• The earlier you start being with your baby and doing things with him the more bonded you will both feel.

• Learn the things he does that show you what he wants. Does he want to be picked up, played with, or just rocked to sleep?

• As time goes by, your baby learns that he can count on you. This makes him feel safe and helps him feel good about himself.

FROM: OHFSA   Doing the Dad Thing!: Birth to 36 Months (www.hfsatx.com)

• But bonding doesn't happen all at once.

• There's nothing wrong with you if you don't seem to hit it off with your baby right away. Don't worry. Pretty soon you will win his heart...

• ...AND HE WILL WIN YOURS!
Ways for dads to impart positive lessons to their kids – from NFI

• Respect your children’s mother
• Spend time with your children
• Earn the right to be heard
• Discipline with love
• Be a teacher

• Eat together as a family
• Read to your children
• Show affection
• Realize that a father’s job is never done

Developed by NFI, www.fatherhood.org
Parenting Tips for Men –
from Child Crisis Center, Mesa, AZ

• Show that you care
• Give Guidelines for Conduct
• Communicate with Care
• Become your Children’s Educator

www.childcrisis.org
Developing Age Appropriate Discipline Strategies

• The word “discipline” comes from a Latin word meaning “to teach” or “to guide.”
• Fathers are teachers; children are “disciples” of their fathers.
• See activities in two curricula: 24/7 Dad (www.fatherhood.org) and Responsible Fatherhood (www.mdrc.org)

• What’s the difference between “Punishment” and “Discipline?”
Punishment or Discipline?

- Punishment tells children only that they have been bad; not what to do instead
- Focuses on “control”
- Fear based (e.g. loss of privileges, love, safety, belongings)
- Often involves hitting, yelling, taking something away

- Discipline teaches children how to act
- Should make sense to children
- Connection with what they did wrong
- Chance to correct mistakes
- Puts kids in control of actions
- Needs to be clear, consistent, doable
- Can include praise, reinforcement of good behavior, correction of negative behavior
Lessons Learned: Circle of Parents
(OFA Fatherhood Grantee)

Program sites:
• Changed from using “mother’s name only” address labels to “father’s and mother’s name” labels.
• Became more successful in reaching Spanish-speaking fathers by inviting the entire family to an event, even though the family members broke out into separate groups for classes or groups.
• Developed marketing materials that reflected the population served. Their language changed from “parents” to “mothers and/or fathers.”
• Added posters in their reception area of fathers and children or family pictures that included fathers, as well as magazines and other informational materials that included fathers.

See newsletters at: www.circleofparents.org
Teaching Important Parenting Skills:  
**TIPS for Great Kids!**

Univ. of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (OFA grantee)

- The TIPS toolkit is an alternative to parenting classes.
- 4” x 6” parenting tip cards for staff and parents.
- Over 250 parenting tips on topics of interest to parents of infants, toddlers and preschoolers.
- Topics are organized into 12 domains research has shown to be important for child well-being.
- TIPS can be feasibly implemented in early childhood education settings.
- Teachers and teacher assistants gain knowledge and skill in child development and building positive relationships with parents.
- Family risk factors decrease over time.
- Contact: [http://psychiatry.uams.edu/tips](http://psychiatry.uams.edu/tips)
Important Advice about Fatherhood
Thompson Williams (Denver Indian Family Resource Center–OFA grantee)*

• My dad said: “if you raise your voice to your children, that is your fault not theirs. You are responsible for the way they act. You are their teacher. Teach them that when you tell them to do something it is because they are loved; stopping them from doing something harmful is to keep them safe.”

• One day, I was with some boys who were teasing another boy and throwing metal pop lids at him. One I threw hit him in the head. I jumped around like I had won some kind of contest.

• As I turned around, I saw my dad standing between my group of friends and the boy. They ran; I stood looking at my dad wondering what he would do.
• He stood quietly in front of me and then simply said, “Son I thought I taught you better than to pick on someone weaker than you. If not, I’m sorry.”

• I looked into his eyes and saw the pain I caused. I have seen my dad with broken bones and he never complained. But, with this, I hurt him worse than anything before. His simple act of compassion for others changed my life.

• We must teach our children what being a responsible father is all about. We must take responsibility for insuring our children grow up strong, safe and loved.

Adapted from interview at www.coloradodads.com