Are We Really Doing All We Can To Engage Fathers in Our Programs?

Closing Remarks By:
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Saturday, January 27, 2001
About NPCL

- NPCL is a national intermediary organization established in 1996 by the Ford Foundation and several public funders for the purpose of building the capacity of organizations to work in low-income communities to serve families more effectively. This is done by high quality technical assistance and training services to those organizations.

- Since 1996 NPCL has provided services to more than 500 public agencies and 300 non-profit organizations. Additionally, NPCL activities have been attended by more than 5000 public officials, organizational heads, community representatives and parents.

- NPCL is nationally recognized as one of the top organizations in America for its work on fatherhood and welfare issues.
NPCL Activities

1. Launched the Partners for Fragile Families demonstration which is the largest social welfare demonstration focused on poor fathers in United States history.

2. Provided expert testimony that led to passage of the Fathers Count Bill (HR 3073) in the United States House of Representatives.

3. Formed a national partnership with the National Head Start Association called **Fatherhood Partners** to create new opportunities for Head Start Programs to work with both mothers and fathers.

4. Has been contracted to train project staff as part of the new Early Head Start Fatherhood Demonstration.

5. Sponsors the annual International Fatherhood Conference.

6. Convenes the Youth Opportunities Leadership Institute.

7. Launched the Fathers at Work Initiative demonstration in collaboration with Public/Private Ventures and supported by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.
How Do Men See Themselves and Their Role as Fathers?

- Most men take their roles as fathers very seriously. Fatherhood is seen as the growing up part of manhood. Fathers see their role as provider first, nurturer second. Both roles are essential.

- Fathers have to be understood in the context of their diversity. They vary by age, marital status, employment level, race, education level. Understanding this diversity will influence the approach and intervention.

- EHS staff should assume that fathers are more involved, than not involved, in the lives of their children.

- Contrary to popular belief, promising new research findings show that fathers with young children 0-3 years of age are either living with, or are actively involved in the lives of their children.
Fathers Involvement Among Children Born Outside of Marriage Under the Age of Two

- Parents Are Cohabiting: 38%
- Child Lives With Mom, Dad Visits Frequently: 30%
- Other: 32%

Source: National Survey of America’s Families, 1997
**Family Types Among Poor Children By Child’s Age**

*Children Living in Fragile Families Are Born Outside of Marriage and Live With Both of Their Natural Parents or Live With Their Mom and Have a Father Who Visits Frequently.*

Source: National Survey of America’s Families, 1997
Given How Men See Their Role(s) as Fathers, What Does This Mean For How EHS Programs Should Approach Engaging Fathers or Other Important Male Figures The Family?

- The largely female staff of EHS should assess and acknowledge their biases in working with men and fathers.
- NPCL has developed a father-friendly assessment tool for early childhood development programs. The goal of the assessment is for programs to identify their readiness for working with fathers. This includes the level of buy-in from the agency administration, resource commitment, communications materials, etc.
- The father-friendly assessment tool is available on the National Head Start Association Web-Site.
What Specific Strategies Should Programs Incorporate to Get Fathers Involved?

Overtime, how can they work to make sure these activities and strategies are meaningful and appropriate, more than just invitations?
A Checklist

- Believe in the value and importance of both parents in the lives of children.
- Recognize that there is no “one size fits all” approach to working with and involving fathers.
- Implement a father-friendly atmosphere.
- Hire male staff. Solicit ideas and suggestions from men and fathers on how the program can work best for them.
- Involve fathers “holistically” in the program. Assume they want to be involved.
- Develop a community resource list for men and father services.
- Document and maintain good records regarding your work with men and fathers.
- Form strong partnerships and community collaborations that seek to strengthen fragile families and sustain father involvement.
Fragmented Public and Private Family Support System
Building Partnerships for Fragile Families

Foundation for Building Partnership Between

Public and Private Family Support Systems

TRUST

COLLABORATION

COOPERATION

COORDINATION

CREDIBILITY
Reaching out and Providing Service to Fathers and Fragile Families
A Partnership-Based Public and Private Family Support System

Target

Father Involvement and a Strengthened Family
What are the sensitivities around women working with men in early childhood settings, especially when parental relationships are tense?

- Safety and security must always be top priority.
- Employ a “case by case” methodology.
- Identify counseling resources for families. Including crisis counseling, domestic violence services for women and batterers education for men.
What is lost when a program doesn’t take work with men/fathers seriously?

- Research shows that children lose when they don’t have the active involvement of adult males and loving fathers in their lives.
- Children need as many positive role models as we can give them.
- Responsible men and fathers should be viewed as assets to the program, not liabilities.
- EHS programs should do all they can to engage men and fathers.
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