



Father Engagement Practice Bulletin April 2008



Expectation: Make concerted efforts to include fathers in all facets of case, from assessment to case closure, unless it is contrary to the safety and well being of the child. Father inclusion reflects a commitment to family-centered practice, not just a mother and child-centered practice. While children benefit from the positive, active involvement of their

fathers in their lives, mothers also benefit from increased support that paternal involvement brings. Did you Know? Most fathers and mothers want the fathers to be actively involved in their children's lives. Additionally, most children desire a loving relationship with their fathers. However, when fathers are not involved, there may be numerous reasons. Some reasons are related to the father's personal situation, such as health issues, mental health and/or substance abuse issues, domestic violence, or incarceration. Other reasons are more linked to the father's financial situation, such as under/unemployment, child support payment and collection issues, and lack of adequate food or housing. Still other reasons center on the quality of the relationship between the father and the mother, such as whether the relationship ended amicably and whether the parents are in dispute over custody or visitation.

During the "life of the case", there are questions or aspects of the father's involvement that the social worker needs to know or understand.

Table with 2 columns: Assessment, Case Planning, Case Closure and their corresponding questions for social workers to explore or understand regarding father involvement.

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children, available at http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/fatherhood/fatherhood.pdf



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Rules of Father Engagement: The following are foundational premises for engaging fathers.

- ❑ It's never too early or too late to involve fathers and men in families.
- ❑ Fathering, as a parenting style, uniquely contributes to the healthy development of children.
- ❑ It takes time for a relationship between the father and child to develop.
- ❑ Be patient but persistent in dealing with the mother's objections to the father's involvement, unless the safety and well being of the child or mother is at risk, such as in cases of domestic violence.
- ❑ Fathers can benefit from intensive services just as mothers can.
- ❑ Fathers need to be supported when their role changes to accommodate their new lifestyle as an involved parent.
- ❑ Look deeper than the anger.
- ❑ Communication styles are different between men and women.
- ❑ Engage fathers in ways that are relevant to their situation and sensitive to their culture. For example, tradition, the role of the forefathers and past generations, and spirituality, particularly the sacredness of fatherhood, are important to Native American fathers.

Strategies to Engage Fathers:

- ❑ Explore with the mother her issues regarding the father's involvement. Explore with the child the child's wishes, if age appropriate. Identify the benefits of father involvement for the mother and child. If father involvement is not advised, document why.
- ❑ During the "life of the case":
 - **Assessment:** Conduct comprehensive assessments that include fathers' and paternal family members' basic information, such as name, addresses, and phone numbers, strengths, needs, community resources to meet their needs, etc. Make sure to assess for domestic violence, the risk of father involvement to the child and mother, and determine appropriateness of father involvement. Consult Employee's Manual 17-B(3), pages 35-50, for practice guidance regarding assessment and domestic violence.
 - **Safety planning:** Actively involve fathers and paternal family members in the development of a safety plan based on information and support of everyone serving the child and family.
 - **Out-of-home placement:** Assess fathers and paternal family members as a placement option before placing the child in non-relative foster care.
 - **Service Plan:** Actively involve fathers in setting goals, encourage them to express their concerns or questions about services, and involve them in all reviews of the service plan as well as in the development of the child's permanency plan.
- ❑ When communicating with the father:

- Explain in detail the current situation, his role, your role, your expectations, DHS rules and procedures, juvenile court procedures, etc.,
- Explore his view of the child's mother and explain the importance of respecting her,
- Allow him to express his feelings and validate them through reflective listening,
- Exhibit empathy, respect, and genuineness,
- Reassure him you want to assist him in strengthening his relationship with his children, and
- Remind him of his influence on his children.
- ❑ Help the father to:
 - Identify major sources of family stress and ways to reduce or relieve the stress factors,
 - Assess and strengthen his coping skills, and
 - List his informal support networks.
- ❑ Refer the father to:
 - Community resources, preferably those that are geared to serve males, and
 - Activities or services that enhances the father-child relationship.
- ❑ To support father engagement, ensure that services to both parents address issues of co-parenting, effective communication between the parents, and avoidance of placing the children in the middle of the parental conflict.
- ❑ Accommodate the father's schedule when scheduling meetings.
- ❑ Collaborate with agencies that work extensively with fathers.

This article is adapted from material found on these websites:

- ❑ http://www.practicenotes.org/vol11_no1/do.htm
- ❑ <http://ssw.che.umn.edu/img/assets/4467/Neil%20Tift.pdf>
- ❑ <http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/downloads/newsletter/BPNPSummer02.pdf>

