

**HOW TO ORGANIZE AND MAINTAIN A MEN'S PROGRAM**  
by  
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Child care has traditionally been the dominion of women. Making arrangements for the care of children usually falls to mothers, who are most often the applicants for services. Child care programs are generally staffed by women and they tend to relate most comfortably to the mothers of the children. Procedures in child care centers tend to focus on the needs of the scheduling conferences, meetings and family activities. As a result, it is not uncommon to find men at a child care center who look and feel ill-at-ease and who, in some cases are even treated with suspicion.

And this state of affairs can exist even in centers that see themselves as having an active and positive parent involvement program because their definition of parent involvement usually means mother involvement.

Leaving aside the question of why change this situation by involving men, let's examine the process of how to change the traditional child care environment and make it a more male friendly one. The primary and overriding concept here is that it must take a conscious and active effort to make such changes take place. It will not happen simply by good intentions or by giving lip service to the idea. These intentions must be backed up with a plan of action, effort and energy. Most centers do appreciate the concept and would like to make some changes; often they are stymied by not having

enough information , not knowing how to begin or simply by setting unrealistic expectations.

## **1. EXAMINE THE BARRIERS TO MALE INVOLVEMENT AND TRY TO REMOVE THEM.**

This can be as simple as requiring both parents to attend the initial application interview and scheduling it so that they both can be there. Or, redesigning the application form to allow the name, address and telephone number of the non-custodial parent to be listed. Or, similarly, the mother's significant other. Or, making certain that the men are on the mailing list and receive all the announcements, invitations, questionnaires and bulletins. And that parent-teacher conferences involve both parents and not just the mother. Recognize the hidden resistance from mothers and staff. No matter how much they say about wanting to get fathers or other males involved with their children, those who have had bad experiences with men often have very mixed feeling in this areas. This ambivalence is rarely discussed, but it is very understandable. Many women have had bad experiences with their own fathers, husbands, brothers, or other men in their lives. They may have been abused, and fear that their children will be abused. They may have been abandoned, and fear their children will form close attachments with men and then be left wanting. This hidden resistance from mothers is very real, very powerful, and very important for those who want to involve men. The best way to identify and begin dealing with hidden resistance is in a series of discussion groups or workshops for women, for example "common problems in motherhood".

Recognize the hidden fears of men. Be aware of the paradox, some men will be drawn to and others pushed away by your appeals to them as fathers. If you really want to reach all men, you'll have to recognize the difference and be prepared to use different approaches. The first group can be reached with father-child activities; the second has to be reached first with men's activities, which will lead to father-child activities.

Tip:

**LIMIT THE NUMBER OF WEEKS THE GROUP WILL MEET, THEN EXTEND IT IF NECESSARY. People may sign more readily if they don't feel they have to make an ongoing commitment.**

## **2. CREATE A MALE PRESENCE.**

Men will tend to feel more comfortable as they see and interact with men at the center. Finding male teachers can be difficult, but it can be done. One program utilizes its bus drivers, most of whom are men, as classroom aides. Another program invites men in the community - service clubs, business groups, college and university students and faculty, police and fire departments - to spend time at the center with volunteer time as part of various class assignments. The environment, bulletin board, display cases, newsletters, photo displays, etc., can also emphasize men and children together, doing things, having fun, sharing affectionate moments. Make sure that all mailings go out to both parents if they are not living together. Provide books and magazines directed at men in offices and waiting rooms. Train staff to recognize and avoid subtle practices which convey reduced expectations of fathers. (For example, staff should show genuine interest in hearing a father's impressions of his child' limited custody does not suggest less valid opinions.)

Tip:

**IN YOUR ATTEMPT TO REACH MORE MEN, DON'T ACCIDENTALLY SLIGHT WOMEN. MAKE SURE THEY UNDERSTAND YOU ARE MAKING SOME SPECIAL EFFORTS SO THAT BOTH MEN AND WOMEN CAN FEEL MORE COMFORTABLE WITH YOUR PROGRAM.**

### **3. DEVELOP ACTIVITIES GEARED SPECIFICALLY TOWARDS MEN.**

Men are not always interested in the same kind of activities as women and therefore, if activities are not differentiated, men may lose interest. For example, discussions on child development or parenting tend not to motivate men to attend. Having a sports personality give a talk, however, would be of more interest to men. Activities that some programs had success with include father-son or father-daughter nights, attending a ball game, sports or entertainment guest speakers, fix-up days and BBQ's. Men, because of their traditional role as breadwinners, also enjoy raising funds for their child's programs. They will be quite active in fundraising events so long as their talents and interests can be called upon. As examples, they can build booths for a carnival; they can referee an athletic contest; they can sell ice cream from a mobile cart, etc. Large-Group Projects. Invite men to help out with fix-up or clean-up days. Playground Projects. It's hard to resist the call to create or repair a playground for kids. Small-Team Projects. Because they've grown up with sports -watching, playing, or being told they should be playing- most men are comfortable with being on (and competing on) a "teams" and assign a captain or team leader to each. One can be the bike repair team, another the playground team, and forth. Men will like the camaraderie, and they'll enjoy the friendly competition with other teams if you make it known how well each team is doing. Individual Projects, some guys don't like groups or teams, or their schedules won't allow them to participate when everyone else is. Try to find out about any particular

interest or skill a man may have, and then make room for an individual project. Hard Jobs, often there is a particularly hard job that nobody at the center wants to do.

Tips:

**MEN DON'T HAVE TO BE EXPERTS TO GET INVOLVED. ONE CAN LEARN FROM ANOTHER. SO YOU CAN PITCH THE BIKE-REPAIR DAY AS A CHANCE TO COME LEARN HOW TO REPAIR A BIKE.**

**ACKNOWLEDGE THE WORK MEN HAVE DONE. IN YOUR SIGNS, IN YOUR NEWSLETTER, AT YOUR PARENT MEETINGS. THAT WILL GET MORE MEN COMING NEXT TIME.**

**DON'T LEAVE WOMEN OUT. THERE'S NO REASON WHY WOMEN CAN'T FIX THINGS, AND IT'S IMPORTANT NOT TO LET YOUR RECRUITING TO TYPICALLY MALE INTERESTS BE TAKEN AS A SIGN OF EXCLUDING OR DISCRIMINATING AGAINST WOMEN.**

#### **4. CREATE A MEN'S GROUP.**

One program has had success creating and maintaining a Men's Group, which has met once a month for breakfast. This group got its start with the idea that the center was not a place that men felt comfortable at and therefore some special activity needed to be earmarked specifically for men. A planning committee met and decided upon a Saturday morning breakfast to which the men and their children would be invited. The committee would prepare and serve the food while the men and the children ate and got to know each other (of course, many of the children already knew each other). After breakfast and tidying up, child care workers would spend some time with the children, while the men would be taken on a tour of their child's classrooms where they were to have a personal orientation to what goes on in the classroom, what the routines were, how the toys were used to enhance the child's learning, how the teachers handled problems that came up, etc. The breakfast was well attended and to a man, they were very impressed and grateful for the information given to them. Most of them thought that child care was simply baby sitting. Their appreciation of what child care was providing for their child was increased enormously.

Over the years, it has evolved quite a bit. Attendance varies from month to month, but a core group remains loyal. Certain traditions have been implemented along the way. For example, the agenda for each meeting usually includes a look at the center, its current activities and funding. Then, there is time for general discussion among the men. Sometimes such

discussions can be quite personal and sometimes it can be simply networking, sharing information about someone who needs a job, housing, etc. Then there might be planning for some upcoming event, sponsored by the Men's Group, a picnic, camping trip, fundraising event, etc. Time is usually left for some project that only a group of men typically can do, such as, moving the sand in the sandbox, repairing some faucet, sanding the play structure, etc.

This group has faced and dealt with several issues that most men's groups will probably face at some point in their existence. Early on, for example, was the issue of the name of the group. Why not call it a "Father's Group?" At his particular center, the idea of a father's group felt too limiting. There were a couple of grandfathers, an uncle, several boyfriends, a couple of Big Brothers, and some male teachers involved in the early group meetings. "Men's Group" felt more inclusive and was selected. Another issue that arose very early on was the issue of children where no men existed in the child's home environment. Some mothers wanted their children not to miss the opportunity to be with men and their children. It was decided that all children would be welcome at these events and that all a mother had to do was indicate that her child would be coming a man would be assigned as the child's "father for the day". He would have responsibility to see that the child had breakfast and was looked after during the morning.

One of the most interesting and vexing issues was whether to have exclusively male activities or whether they could be open to women as well. The Men's Group had had 3 highly successful Spring Picnics to Angel Island, at which they BBQ'd, played volleyball, sang songs and watched their

children frolic on the beach and in the water at this wonderful park in the Bay. During the planning discussion of the 4<sup>th</sup> picnic, however, the issue arose, for the first time, of some of the wives and girlfriends wondering why they couldn't come along. This led to great discussion and soul searching, because it was obvious that the men enjoyed the role of planning, organizing and carrying out the activity; yet they could also see the injustice of excluding the women. Their very wise compromise was that the Men's Group would continue to "sponsor" the event, but that all families would now be invited to attend.

The Men's Group has also evolved certain activities over the course of its existence that might be replicated by other groups. For example, at one time, there were informal discussions at each breakfast meeting on issues of custody, visiting, co-parenting, getting along or not getting along with the child's mother, etc. It was suggested that they would be interested in attending a parenting series geared to fathers. Out of this grew "Parenting for Pop", a series of 6 sessions that dealt, in more depth, with some of the issues that had been raised during their informal discussions.

They have held "work days", foregoing the breakfast and spending the entire morning fixing, painting, repairing, maintaining.

In addition to the Angel Island Picnic, they sponsor, in the fall, a Family Camping Weekend at the Russian River. Here, at a camping area among the redwoods, the Men's Group hosts 20 to 30 families for the weekend of camping. They provided breakfast and dinner on Saturday and

breakfast on Sunday. They also helped inexperienced campers with setting up tents, sleeping bags, air mattresses, lanterns and stoves, hold evening campfires and patrol the beach. This experience was highly valued by families who may had been frightened to "be in the woods", but who gained a sense of confidence that allowed them to try out an enjoyable and inexpensive vacation idea.

"For centers interested in male involvement, the goal reaches beyond getting more men to drive for field trips. It's about building relationships and support". (The Fairfax/San Anselmo Children's Center)

## GOALS FOR FATHER INVOLVEMENT

1. Create an atmosphere at the center that proclaims: "Men are welcome".
  - Meet and greet dads at the door
  - Praise children's progress. Not a day goes by without some small positive step -even when kids are having very difficult days. So pay attention, and pass it on. You'll find dads seeking you out when they expect to hear something good about their children.
  - Make your walls speak. Hang photos of center events where men have participated.
  
2. Have a designated place for men to come to meet other men who are concerned about and involved with their children.
  - Assume that all men can be reached no matter what their background, attitude, limitations or age.
  - Stick to the "men only" concept. The men will not feel intimidated and may open up better without the presence of women.

**IN ORDER TO SERVE AND SUPPORT THE DIVERSE POPULATION OF FATHERS AND THEIR FAMILIES, IT'S IMPORTANT TO ACHIEVE THE FOLLOWING G O A L S :**

1. Identify and minimize societal beliefs and behaviors that undermine the family by undermining the positive involvement of the father.
2. Support societal beliefs and behaviors that reinforce fathering as essential to building strong families.
3. Explore, understand, and educate the community about fatherhood issues.
4. Assist and encourage men in nurturing and supporting heir children.
5. Foster male mentoring relationships.
6. Foster respectful and caring relationships between mothers and fathers.
7. Foster healing of those wounds which interfere with the ability of me to father in a loving, committed, and joyful manner.

## READ-ALoud BOOKS FOR CHILDREN AND ADULTS.

Regarding relationships between children and the significant men in their lives.

### Abuelito Eats with His Fingers

Written by Janice Levy, Illustrated by Layne Johnson.

### Always My Dad

By Sharon Dennis Wyeth, and by Raul Colon.

### The Barefoot Book of Father and Daughter Tales

By Josephine Evetts-Secker, and by Helen Cann.

### When I Am Old With You

By Angela Johnson, and by David Soloman.

### My Man Blue

By Nikki Grimes, and by Jerome Lagarrigue, edited by Toby Sherry.

### Papa Tells Chita A Story

By Elizabeth Fitzgerald Howard, and by Floyd Cooper.

### I'll See You When The Moon Is Full

By Susi L. Fowler, and by Jim Fowler.

White Dynamite And Curly Kidd

Written by John Archambault and Bill Martin Jr., illustrated by Ted Rand.

My Ol'Man

Written and illustrated by Patricia Polacco.

Some Birthday!

Written and illustrated by Patricia Polacco.

Cecil's Story

Written by George Ella Lyon, illustrated by Peter Catalanotto.

Grandpa's Face

By Eloise Greenfield, and by Floyd Cooper

Daddy Will Be There

By Lois G. Granbling, and by Walter Gaffney-Kessell.

If I Were Your Father

By Margaret Park Bridges, and by Kady MacDonald.

I Love My Daddy Because

By Laurel Porter-Gaylord, and by Ashely Wolf

My Grandpa Is Amazing

Written and illustrated by Nick Butterworth

My Dad Is Awesome

Written and illustrated by Nick Butterworth.

My Daddy

Written and illustrated by Susan Paradis

Just My Dad & Me

Written by Leah Komaiko, illustrated by Jeffrey Greene.

Uncle Jed's Barbershop

By Margaree King Mitchell, and by James Ransome

Daddy, Daddy, Be There

By Candy Dawson Boyd, and by Floyd Cooper

Old Jake's Skirts

By C. Anne Scott, and by David Slonim

The Pirate Who Tried To Capture The Moon

By Dennis Haseley, and by Sue Truesdell

Love You Forever

By Robert Munsch, and by Sheila McGraw.

The Ant And The Elephant

Written and illustrated by Bill Peet

The Dream Keeper And Other Poems

Written by Langston Hughes, illustrated by Brian Pinkney

FOR TEACHERS AND PARENTS:

Hopscotch, Hangman, Hot Potatoe, & Ha Ha Ha: A Rulebook of Children's

Games

By Jack Maguire

Super Simple Paper Airplanes

By Nick Robinson

Fathers & Sons: Photographs, Quotes and Essays

Edited by Randy Snook

Teaching Children to Love

By Doc Lew Childre

## WHAT ARE THE REWARDS FOR BEING AN INVOLVED FATHER?

Yes, being an involved father can be difficult. But you may be surprised by how much you get out of the experience.

- You have an opportunity not only to create a baby, but to create a family.
- You'll be shaping a new human being.
- You will be your children's teacher and protector, and their link to your culture.
- Your self-esteem will grow.
- People will have a new respect for you.
- You'll feel better because you're making a contribution to your family and to society.
- You will grow and mature in ways you never expected and...
- YOU WOULD BE THE BEST FATHER YOU NEVER THOUGHT POSSIBLE!

(By Stanley Seiderman, *Becoming a Father* <2000 edition>)

## SUMMARY FOR SERVING FATHERS

### Assumptions in Serving Fathers:

- Dads love their children and their wives.
- Dads want to better themselves.
- The role of the father is a special and necessary one in the family.
- There is pride and honor in the role of the father.
- Male staff are needed to outreach and serve dads.

### Goals and Objectives:

- To strengthen the parental role of the father with new fatherhood information and activities.
- To enhance the parent-child relationship by involving fathers and their children in regularly scheduled joint activities.
- To support the mother-father relationship by involving whole families in positive, healthy family events.
- To provide opportunities for educational improvements through ESL, GED and college classes.

### Services Provided to Fathers:

- Weekly scouting activities which provide opportunities for dads to become involved with their children.
- Weekly men's parenting education classes.
- Regularly scheduled family outings.
- Counseling, referrals, and advocacy as needed.
- Culturally enriching field trips for the men and their families.
- Outings to sports events.
- Weekly ESL and GED classes.
- Assistance with enrolling in college classes.
- Child care if needed for fathers to attend.

### Recruiting the Fathers:

- Explain services for the dads to the moms during parenting class.
- Send flyers and schedules of classes for the dads home with the moms.
- Phone calls and home visits.
- Weekend family activities in a supportive setting.
- Offer a GED or ESL class alongside parenting class taught by same or other male staff.
- Initiate participation through scouting activities or other recreational activities for the children.

### Retention and Follow Up of the Fathers:

- Follow up
- Incentives
- Constantly adjusting to meet their schedules
- Maintaining an open door policy
- Maintaining an on-going relationship
- Welcoming atmosphere
- Provide meals when possible, provide a snack always.

### Elements of Success in Services to Fathers:

- Services are community based
- Classes are in evening to accommodate work schedules
- Staff is all male, bilingual, culturally sensitive, from the community, experienced, committed.
- Services are free
- Classes are male only (if it is possible)
- Classes are presented bilingually as needed
- Listen to what the men recommend and request
- Focus on needs of children.

Creating Change: (Short Term Changes for the Fathers)

- Fathers demonstrate more nurturing behaviors towards children.
- Fathers communicate better with their partners.
- Fathers are better able to control negative emotions.
- Fathers become better disciplinarians.

Creating Change: (Long Term Changes for the Fathers)

- Fathers are better able to fulfill their role as leader of the family
- Fathers learn to accept and encourage the more active role of their partners.
- Fathers develop stronger bonds with their children.

## THE REDIFINITION OF A MACHO

He who is:

dignified

protector

responsible

nurturing

spiritual

faithful

respectful

friendly

caring

sensitive

trustful

and who provides.

... Jerry Tello