

Engaging, Empowering, and Supporting Young Fathers

While they face the same demands as all new fathers, young fathers in their teens and early twenties face additional challenges as they move into adulthood. They may have disconnected from education and lacking a high school diploma, often are struggling with employment and may not be living with the mother of their child or even in a relationship. Young fathers may feel excluded by the mother or the mother's family. In some cases, a young father's own family may try to discourage him from being involved due to financial or other concerns.

In general, young parents, and fathers, tend to be emotionally and financially unprepared for parenthood. Additionally, young fathers involved with the child protection system often have been exposed to trauma, lack extended support systems and role models and are dealing with complex identity changes. They require extra support, guidance and mentorship to develop parenting skills while navigating the transition to adulthood.

One of the most significant barriers is child welfare systems' historical view of the mother as the primary parent. Fathers may be stigmatized and alienated by the agencies making decisions about their children's lives. This general disposition is exacerbated by implicit bias, especially toward young fathers of color, which often predisposes child welfare workers to view these young men as absentee parents or potentially violent partners. Young fathers who interact with child welfare systems face significant barriers to fulfilling their paternal responsibilities and playing a meaningful role in their children's lives. Child welfare systems are in a unique position to create opportunities, reduce risk and positively change life trajectories for multiple generations: young fathers, their children and their extended families

Helpful resources: (Primus, L., 2017). Changing Systems & Practices to Improve Outcomes for Young Fathers, Their Children & Their Families. Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Social Policy.)

Young Father Facts

Likelihood of fathering a child rises dramatically during the transitional years. About [2% of male teens \(age 15-19\) have fathered a child, compared to 14% of young men in their early twenties \(age 20-24\)](#). Young men of color are disproportionately more likely to become a young father. Hispanic and black teens are more than twice as likely to be fathers compared to their white peers. About [25% of Hispanic men and 20% of black men between the ages of 20 and 24](#) are fathers, compared to roughly 10% of their white counterparts.

When fathers are involved during pregnancy, teen mothers are more likely to receive [adequate prenatal care, especially during the critical first trimester, are less likely to smoke,](#) and report [fewer depressive symptoms.](#)

Frequently Asked Questions

How can I support an Adolescent Father While He is in Care?

- Encourage him to take an active role in child's life from pregnancy
- Emphasize natural family supports
- Connect an adolescent father with opportunity for mentorship from experienced fathers
- Collaborate with schools, community providers for opportunities for parent skill development

Encourage and prepare father to be involved from the beginning

Encourage this mindset in the adolescent father:

You are helping to bring a baby into the world, so you have already made a difference. Being there for your baby will give her a better chance to grow up healthy, strong and smart. Not being there will make a difference because she will grow up missing out on what dads can do. What kind of difference do you want to make? 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, such as:

- They are more likely to be active, healthy and strong.
- They are more likely to do better in school and stay in school.
- They do better at being independent, having self-control, and being leaders.
- They are more successful in life.

Prepare

One way to start is by going with your partner to prenatal visits. They are very important for keeping track of how the baby is growing and whether Mom and baby are both healthy. If there's a problem, you want to know it as soon as possible. Your partner and the baby will be examined by her OB/GYN. The doctor asks questions about how your partner is doing and checks her and the baby by feeling her tummy and checking her internally to find out how the baby is growing. He may use a special scope for this or even do a sonogram. Ask your doctor if he can give you a copy of your baby's sonogram.

Assist

Ensure father has transportation to doctors' visits, child visits

Support access to baby supplies

Establish Paternity

Why does it matter if paternity is established? A lot of important things happen when paternity is established. Here's what it may do:

- She knows who she belongs to.
- It makes her feel better about herself.
- She'll be able to get the medical history from your side of the family.
- She can get Social Security, Medicare, and

disability benefits if something happens to you. Once paternity is established, fathers have rights in adoption hearings.

Services for Adolescent Fathers

Fatherhood Engagement Services- The purpose of this DCF-contracted program is to enhance the level of involvement of fathers in their DCF case planning and provision of services, strengthen fathers' positive parenting skills (See Appendix)

MST EA- The Multisystemic Therapy for Emerging Adults (MST-EA) provides intensive individual treatment for young adults who are aging out of the child welfare system to transition to the adult treatment system for their serious mental illness and/or substance misuse treatment.

Workforce Development

The Academy offers numerous of trainings pertaining to fathers: Highlighted trainings may be of value for adolescent father approaches

- Fatherhood Engagement with Simulation Portion
- Engaging Fathers and Other Men Who Offend
- Fatherhood Gatekeeper Tool Training
- Effects of Parental Incarceration
- Working with Incarcerated Fathers
- Fathers & Children Affects Each Other's Development
- Prison Tours (male prisons)
- Engaging Fathers-More than Mailing a Letter: The Leadership Role
- Working with Adolescent Fathers

In addition to our In-Service Trainings, the Academy also adds fatherhood engagement training components in our Pre-Service Trainings; for example:

- Engaging Families (Simulation Role Play)
- Worker Safety (Simulation Role Play)
- Case Planning
- IPV (Intimate Partner Violence)

Resources

Department of Public Health (DPH) The Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention/Young Parents Program. Counseling and peer mentoring services provide support for teens who are confronting psychosocial and other obstacles in their progress through pregnancy and/or parenting. Educational services, provided within a peer support group context, impart essential

information about health issues, parenting skills, and other information deemed critical for pregnant and parenting teens.

State Department of Education (CSDE) Young Parents Program (YPP) provides day care services for the infants/toddlers of students who are enrolled in and attending a comprehensive high school program leading to graduation from high school.

Department of Social Services (DSS) CT Fatherhood Initiative (CFI)

See the accompanying Appendix- Supporting Literacy Development in Fathers

Appendix

Supporting Literacy Development in Fathers

Fatherhood.gov offers five tips to help fathers enjoy reading with their children and find other creative ways to support early literacy development through daily activities (Palm, G., 2015):

1. Help fathers understand their importance in promoting early literacy development

Provide examples of fathers interacting with children and how children look up to them as models for behavior. Children look to their fathers for approval of their interests and activities. When fathers listen and pay attention to their children's interests, they can explore these interests together by reading or looking up information to help answer questions. A children's book like *Night Driving* is a wonderful example of how a father can support literacy during a long car ride.

2. Share information about typical development of early literacy skills in young children

Provide information about how young children learn to talk, read, and write through interactive experiences. Examples of this type of information are available from the [Centers for Disease Control Child Development website](#), Zero to Three ([Early Literacy](#)), and Iowa Library Services ([Six Early Literacy Skills](#)).

3. Talk with dads about ways to make reading fun and instructive

Programs can share general tips or create tip sheets for specific books. For example, the Dads and Kids Book Club in Minnesota created a [tip sheet](#) that dads could refer to before reading the book *Night Driving* with their children. Tip sheets like this can help fathers focus on four important goals related to early literacy: enjoying reading; following the story sequence of events; understanding the story; and, learning new words through reading.

4. Introduce fathers to good books for young children

This can be done in a variety of ways. Programs can share books with dads as part of a regular group session, display examples of picture books at parent events, give away books at father-child events, or provide a list of books appropriate for different age and ability levels. For a list of books to consider, see Minnesota Humanities Council's [A Book List for Reading With Dad](#), which was developed by a group of librarians, early childhood teachers, and fatherhood practitioners to highlight positive father involvement. Additionally, program staff can model reading aloud and encourage dads to follow their example. Some programs have invited professional storytellers to participate in father-child or family events to provide additional examples and encouragement.

5. Introduce the idea of simple, everyday activities that support literacy skills and are related to father's interests

Help fathers identify everyday activities that provide opportunities for boosting literacy skills. For example, reading newspapers and talking about the cartoons, following sports teams by looking at pictures and talking about specific players, telling stories in the car or at bedtime, fixing something around the house, preparing a meal or snack together, playing games with letters, or talking about signs while walking in the neighborhood.

Appendix 2

Fatherhood Engagement Services (FES)

The purpose of this DCF-contracted program is to enhance the level of involvement of fathers in their DCF case planning and provision of services, strengthen fathers' positive parenting skills and to assist DCF with refining best practices working with fathers. DCF data highlights insufficient engagement of fathers resulting in unmet standards for assessment and needs met. While the department's family strengthening practices are inclusive of fathers, intentional focus is needed to ensure that fathers are encouraged and supported to be as involved as mothers.

There are six contracted FES providers, one for each region, covering the entire state. Capacity is 290 fathers per year, with each father participating for approximately 6 months. Fatherhood Engagement Services ("FES") provides intensive outreach, case management services and 24/7 Dad© group programming. Case management services will help to mitigate barriers to more effective engagement through assessment of needs, advocacy and linkage to supports and services, while 24/7 Dad© services will teach skills and characteristics to strengthen the father's parenting relationship. There is an additional FES team providing outreach to incarcerated fathers designed to link them to their local FES provider.

Case Management: Fathers will be provided one-on-one case management, not less than once per week, as needed to address needs emerging during intervention. Essential services include:

- Assessment of basic needs and parenting capacity.
- Linkage and advocacy to assist fathers with achieving basic needs (housing, employment, supplies, etc.).
- Attendance with and support of fathers in meetings with DCF social work staff and at DCF required meetings: ACR; Permanency Teaming; Considered Removal; Juvenile Court.
- Assistance in improving parenting capacity, co-parenting mechanisms, active participation in their child's life and skill development through teaching, coaching, modeling, and supporting fathers.
- Assistance and support to fathers in building and utilizing natural supports with extended family and non-familial community members.

24/7 Dad©: The Contractor will provide a minimum of one 24/7 Dad© group per DCF Area Office. Evening and weekend hours will be offered as needed to meet fathers' scheduling needs.

Each group session shall run at least once per week. The 24/7 Dad© curriculum is twelve 2-hour sessions and will focus on teaching the 24/7 Dad© program to up to 12 fathers participating in the group at a time, with rolling open enrollment. Contractors may adjust delivery of the

curriculum to meet fathers' needs, such as providing makeup in one-on-one sessions or combining sessions to shorten the length of the program. Such modifications will be documented by the contractor and reported to DCF.