

Facilitator Guide

Partnering with Fathers

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Note to facilitator:

The online training module "Partnering with Fathers" provides an excellent opportunity for home visitors who appreciate the flexibility of distance learning.

The pairing of the online training with a facilitated discussion provides added value. The discussion allows for the sharing of personal experiences that help to illuminate the information in the module. It also provides opportunities to use and practice skills that are essential for communication – “serve and return,” active listening, use of facial expressions, vocal intonation, and eye contact – which are crucial for building effective partnerships with families.

Home visitors spend time with families that have an array of gifts, skills, cultures and many times challenges. The opportunity to share experiences, strategies, solutions, and successes with other family workers is much more powerful than completing the online education alone.

This Guide provides some ideas for a trainer or supervisor wishing to facilitate a follow-up discussion with a group of home visitors who have completed the module. It assumes that the facilitator has also completed the module and is familiar with its contents and resources.

If it is not feasible to conduct this session in person, there are alternative strategies (indicated by blue text) provided to support facilitation of the conversation virtually. In either case, opportunities to share stories, discuss challenges, and practice strategies through role-plays, provide for meaningful learning. These types of elements are incorporated into this Facilitator Guide.

You don't necessarily have to be a content expert to lead the activities and discussions. Feel free to adjust and add your own creative ideas. We hope you enjoy the process!

Introduction/Icebreaker

Begin the session by organizing participants into small groups. Ask each of them to share within those groups their responses to this question:

What were some of your earliest experiences with a father or father figure when you were a child?

Ask them to consider what factors might account for the similarities and differences in their experiences. As a follow-up, provide this prompt for large group discussion:

How have fathering practices changed since you were a child?

Pose questions to the whole group. Participants could type their responses to the first question in chat.

Optional: Invite them to share images of their fathers or other men who were influential in their lives.

Use the raise hand feature to indicate those who would like to answer aloud.

Review Learning Objectives

After having completed this module, home visitors should be able to:

- Understand the value that fathers and other “family men” bring to the lives of children.
- Articulate how fathers positively impact child development.
- Recognize barriers to participation in family life that men may face.
- Understand the specific challenges facing teen fathers.
- Reflect on their personal fatherhood stories and deepen their awareness of how their own life experiences may affect their views of, and interactions with fathers.
- Appreciate parenting style differences that often exist between mothers and fathers and adjust their approaches and expectations accordingly.
- Develop strategies for talking with families about the inclusion of fathers.
- Explore ideas about the involvement of other positive role models.

Show objectives on screen and verbally highlight the main points.

Poster Activity

Preparation:

Print several Just the Facts posters (emphasizing positive statistics) from the [National Fatherhood Initiative](#). Post them around the room where the discussion group will meet. Prepare a list of questions about fatherhood statistics.

Invite each participant to find one poster to read and stand by within a small group. Read aloud the prepared questions one at a time, pausing after each for those participants to identify that they have the answer to that question. Have someone from that group read the poster for all to hear.

Use this opportunity to celebrate the many contributions fathers make to their families.

Share screen and go to this web page. Select a few of the posters to show full screen and choose a volunteer to read each aloud. Then, ask participants if they found any of the statistics surprising. Emphasize that engaged fathers make important contributions to their families.

Personal Reflection

After they've returned to their seats, provide a minute for home visitors to ponder some of the strengths they bring to their work with fathers.

Use a visual timer and verbally prompt to reflect.

Whole Group Discussion

Prompt home visitors to share what's working:

- What are some things you are doing to engage fathers?
- While working with your families, in what ways do you see men fathering?
- What are ways that family members support father involvement?

Invite them to share some favorite stories about the father-child interactions they've observed while conducting their home visits.

Facilitate a verbal conversation using the raise hand feature.

Survey the group about their greatest challenges

Provide each home visitor with a blank slip of paper. Ask them to anonymously write down one thing that they find most challenging about this work. Then, while they are engaged in the following activity, read the slips so you can make any needed adjustments to the focus of the training.

Ask participants to submit their responses directly to you through the chat feature.

Walk About

Write each of the following three items on chart papers and provide markers. Post each chart on walls throughout the room. Divide the group into 3 and have each group begin at a different paper. Allow 10 minutes for each discussion of the item and then rotate. Have each group add their responses/ideas to the paper as they go. Do one final rotation so the groups end up at their initial question. Allow a few minutes for each group to read the list of responses. Then ask each group to choose one idea to report out on.

Divide group into 3 breakout rooms. Have them use and share white boards to capture their discussion notes.

To save time, you could have each group tackle only one topic each and then discuss each in turn after reconvening the whole group.

1. A father's contribution

A father can make significant contributions to the life of his child from conception through adolescence. His help and support for Mom will have a meaningful impact on his child's development.

How might you raise the awareness with parents about a mother and child's need for nurturance and affirmation from a man?

How do you support dads to be included in caring for the child and making decisions about early childhood programs?

2. A father's involvement

While some fathers will be excited to try new things with their children, others may not be as comfortable, especially if there wasn't someone in their childhood who played with them in a similar way. What are the benefits of a father's playful interactions with his child? If playing with his child is a new idea for dad, how do you approach the conversation?

3. Expression of differences in parenting

Although gender roles are not set in stone, men and women often bring different strengths to the job of parenting. Areas where fathers and mothers might differ in their approach to parenting include:

- Engagement in active and/or outdoor play
- Boundary setting
- Communication
- Emotional expression

Choose one of these items and discuss how you might provide parents with insight and affirmation about the benefits of each of their approaches.

Whole Group Discussion

Building Relationships with Fathers

Invite a conversation with this prompt:

What are some partnering strategies for building relationships with fathers and other family men who are a significant presence in the child's life?

Begin with a recall of some of the strategies they learned from the module. Ask to share additional ideas that they have used. On chart paper, record their responses.

Facilitate verbal conversations using the raise hand feature. Share your screen and type a list of responses in a document.

Review the document:

"Key Terms for Partnering with Fathers"

This document includes many terms or expressions that are used by professionals or others in the care of infants. These terms may be either unfamiliar for those without experience or difficult to understand.

Explain that we shouldn't assume fathers won't already know these terms but it's important to assure that they do if we will be using them in our dialogue. (That goes for first time mothers as well.) By helping parents understand the lingo they will encounter in their role, you'll not only educate them but enable them to more fully engage in the conversations about their child's care and development.

Think-Pair-Share

Prompt each participant to think about the following and then share with a partner.

How might you use the Key Terms document as a tool in your work with fathers?

Invite a few teams to share their ideas.

Prompt the whole group to ponder and use the raise hand feature to allow sharing of ideas.

Partner Conversations

Sharing stories levels the playing field and helps the parents see you more like themselves, rather than a "professional." For those who are comfortable doing so, invite participants to share a brief story with a partner about fathering from their own experience.

They might respond to the following:

- What was your experience about your own father, whether he was present or absent?
- How does that experience impact your work as a home visitor?

Invite a few teams to share their insights with the group.

Use break out rooms to partner people up.

Role Play

Divide participants into small groups. Have one person in each group share an experience about their work with a mother where the child's father wasn't involved. Then ask volunteers in each to group to role play (one person to take the role of home visitor, and one to take the role of a mother) one of the following scenarios (or more if time allows):

- Explore the reason the father isn't involved in the child's life.
- Affirm the mother's decision to protect herself and her children from a father that isn't a positive influence.
- Explore the reason the mother may be excluding a "good" dad.
- Explore ways to broach idea with mom about identifying a "family man" (positive male role model).

Then, other group members can provide feedback and share insights.

Use break out rooms to organize into small groups. After this exercise, reconvene to the large group and debrief.

Large Group

Summarize the previous activity with a conversation about Maternal Gatekeeping. Help participants explore why it occurs, the function it might serve, and the negative impacts on father engagement.

Small Groups

Activity

A family man (male who assists in the upbringing of a child) may play a significant role in a child's life. In many cases, these are extended family members who may live in the same home. When feasible, involving these men in home visits can improve outcomes for the child.

Invite small groups of participants to identify the benefits and challenges for including family men in their visits. Have them share the strategies they are already using. If there's time, they could brainstorm additional ideas. Have each group share one strategy with the whole group.

Return to break out rooms for small group discussions.

Reconvene group.

Whole Group

(View Video)

Barriers to participation

Even when fathers are aware of the impact they have on their child, they still may face societal and institutional barriers that prevent their involvement. Reflecting about barriers should result in overcoming them in order to partner more effectively with dads.

Play video “When Fathers Are Treated Differently” from Part 4 of the module.

Have participants describe additional barriers that fathers may experience. Then lead a discussion about the following:

- Ways to help both fathers and mothers reflect on and overcome barriers.
- Ways to help them work on partnering.

Share your screen to show the video.

Use the raise hand feature to allow conversation.

Whole Group

(Optional Topics)

Depending on the needs of the group, choose one of the following topics to explore together. (See discussion notes on following page.)

1. Systemic Racism
2. Various Family Configurations
3. Supporting Teen Fathers

Facilitate verbal conversations using the raise hand feature.

Additional Discussion Topics

Systemic Racism

Even though “race” is a social construct, persistent beliefs, attitudes, and policies have impacted employment, community, government, housing, and education, creating barriers for members of minority groups.

There is no “one size fits all” conversation, but it’s important to reflect on this inequality and how current racial tensions may affect your work and your relationships with families.

Acknowledge challenges and facilitate a sharing of success stories about attitude changes and resilience.

Various Family Configurations

Home visitors may have the most experience supporting single mothers or households with a mother and father present. What about other family configurations? How should the strategies we’ve discussed be adjusted to ensure we’re supporting all families including those with:

- single fathers,
- two mothers,
- two fathers,
- grandmothers, *

Supporting Teen Fathers

Teen fathers face a unique set of challenges. Home visitors need to consider the relationship these dads have with their child’s mother, their level of maturity and preparedness for this role, the lack of resources they likely bring to the situation, and the feelings and wishes of the grandparents.

Individual Reflection

Ask participants to take a few quiet moments reflecting on how fatherhood has impacted their own life in the past and how they imagine it will impact their family in the future.

Then prompt them to consider:

- How they can support others to accept evolving ideas about what it means to be a father.
- How their work with fathers can impact the communities where they live.

Display visual timer and verbally prompt to reflect.

Action Plan

Reconvene with the whole group and verbally prompt participants to develop action plans.

- *What 3 things from this session will you try?*
- *Also, set one goal for your own self-care.*

Closing

Acknowledge the great work that home visitors are already doing to partner with fathers. Highlight a few of the examples that were provided during the session. Encourage participants to continue to increase their efforts in this area, reminding them of the positive impacts that engaged fathers have on their children. Suggest that they utilize the support of their colleagues and supervisors in order to strengthen their effectiveness in partnering with all fathers.

This document was created for the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood by the Center for Early Childhood Education at Eastern Connecticut State University in collaboration with Doug Edwards. The document is meant to support facilitated discussion groups for home visitors who have completed the online learning module.