

NRFC
COPARENTING 201: TIPS FOR
FATHERHOOD PROGRAMS AND FATHERS
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>> Good day and welcome to Co-parenting 201: Tips for Fatherhood Programs & Fathers hosted by NRFC incorporated. Today's webinar is being recorded. At this time, I would like to turn the webinar over to Nigel Vann, please go ahead.

>> Welcome to today's National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse webinar, Co-parenting 201: Tips for Fatherhood Programs & Fathers, this is a follow-up to the co-parenting webinar we did in July of 2019 which is well received and we wanted to continue that conversation. Co parenting is a big issue for mothers, fathers and children. And a big issue over the last couple months with the current health situation for some couples. I think most programs do a good job of creating a safe space to talk about feelings and concerns to talk about co-parent skills. But it can be harder to engage, so trying to include the mothers but also stepdads or other new partners they may have, as well as grandparents, parents, aunts uncles and others that may be involved in the child's life. We'll extend the conversation from 2019 and talk about the roles of stepdads and the ways programs can engage with mothers. All across with increasing child well being by helping and strengthening co-parenting teams.

I'm going to move our slides along a little bit here. You'll see, of course, we've got a slightly different setup here today. This is because for the first time afternooon, we're doing closed captioning as you see at the bottom of your screen. We're doing the closed captioning for a number of reasons. Before we can post these recordings, we have to add closed captions for the hearing impaired so, that can take a while. So today, we are doing this, which we hope will speed up the process of getting these posted to the website. And also, if you have any issues on your end, which I know can happen depending on internet connections, it may also help with that.

Again, the webinar is being recorded, we're the recording, transcript and all presentation materials will be posted to fatherhood.gov, and we hope sooner than usual. To accommodate the closed caption screen there, we changed things a bit. If you've joined us before, you'll see it looks a little different. You'll see the chat box in the top left-hand corner. We encourage you to introduce yourself and share about yourself. But if you have questions for the presenters you would like us to address at the webinar, please post those in the box at the bottom which is in a slightly different position you might be used to. The question box, that's where you put questions for the presenters. And in the middle, which is in a slightly different place, is the downloadable resources box. There, you can download bios for today's presenters. You can download a PDF of all the slides. And you can have a

source -- a resource list. And at the top, the spotlight, which is a new product we only just completed the last few days. It's an infographic summary. And Armon is going to talk about that research on today's webinar.

Now I lost the -- I'm not seeing the slides. Has something gone wrong here?

>> I'm reloading just in case.

>> Okay. I'll carry on while we wait. I don't know if you can see the slides on your screens, but I can't see them on mine. I'll carry on. The first slide is to give you information about who we are. We're the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse and funded by the office of family assistance, and we provide resources for fathers, programs and those who are working with families. Then we have a slide -- can anybody see the slides or not?

>> I lost track of it, too. We're reloading.

>> Okay. Just to save a little bit of time, I'll go over the information that you'll see on the slides. Again, you can download all the slides. It does have our e-mail address, Help@FatherhoodGov.info. You also have the phone number for our national call center, which is 1-877-4DAD411, and you can use that national call center number to talk to a live person. We particularly encourage that if you're working with father or mother who may be having some co-parenting issues. Because we actually have trained mediators on that line to arrange to talk to one or both parents.

We have another slide that would be coming up after

that one and that tells you about some of the resources can you download on the helpful resources box. We were just particularly highlighting some of the recent publications on co parenting, and that includes the video and all materials from the co-parenting webinar we did in July 2019. An information brief we did in 2019, and a co-parenting tip card for fathers we did at the turn of the year. And two new products, a blog that was just written by Ken, our leader here at the clearing house. He's wrote about good ways how to co parent together when you're not in a relationship. We also list on there the research spotlight I mentioned. That's not on the helpful resources list but you can download it today.

There's another slide where I'm highlighting a video from a TED Talk. I would encourage you to look for in the resource list. There's two there, and the one we highlighted was how to co-parent as allies, not adversaries and feature ebony Roberts and [indiscernible]. It's too long to show today but you can click on the video in the resource list. It may be something to share with your fathers to spark conversations. Here we go, we have the slides. Let me move us to that one. This is a list of the resources.

This is showing you the two to discuss their relationship. It's not an easy ride and it's not the kind of relationship everybody can develop, but the message is important. They're close to being allies and far from being adversaries if you stay until the end of the 14-minute

video, you'll get to meet them.

This is the presenters you'll be hearing from today. You'll hear from Brian Higginbotham first of all, professor and extension specialist from Utah State University. And we'll hear from Armon Perry, the author of father and co-parenting research study, he's co-author, we featured in our research spotlight. And you'll hear from Cheri Tillis, Fathers & Families Support Center in St. Louis. And Demetrice Davis who is an alumni on that program. He'll share insights how that program helped him and tips for other fathers.

Before I introduce Brian, we'll do a quick poll question. If you can bring that up. We're just interested to know how many of you actually attended last year's webinar. If you could say yes or no. Looks like a good bit of you did. I think I said at the beginning, it was one of our best ever attended webinars. And I see already we've got another very high number of folk on the line today that seems to be going up as I'm speaking. It helps me recognize this is a very important conversation.

It looks like about 80% of you were actually on that previous webinar, so that's good to know. And we may have mentioned on our previous webinar that we are in the process of developing a virtual collaborative community, and we encourage you to continue the conversation on co-parenting there. So with that, I will give you to a brief introduction to Brian.

As I said, Brian is a professor, extension specialist

at Utah State University. And he's worked with the extension program. He provides services around parenting and relationship skills across the state. And he leads various research projects in the state. For those of you that don't know, extension programs are provided in all states, and their role is to provide vital and practical information for local residents. Those are noncredit classes. A lot of state are doing fatherhood and relationship, things like that.

You can see a whole list of some of the resources Brian had mentioned in this presentation in the helpful resources list. With that, I'll turn it over to Brian. The time is yours, Brian.

>> Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity to share some of the lessons we have learned providing relationship education here in Utah. We have been fortunate to have received funding from the office of family assistance through various grant cycles. And our programming has included services for dating couples, nondating individuals, people who are interested in relationships and learning -- wanting to learn skills that would help them.

Currently, running some fatherhood programs. We also run divorce education programs for the state. Today, I'm going to focus on one of our curricula lessons we've learned called smart steps for step families. It was developed by Dr. Bader who is currently at the Auburn University.

Over the last many years, we had been providing this service and partnership with community agencies around the

state. And just since 2012 served approximately 7,000 adults. So about 10% of the overall number of individuals we serve as part of our broader healthy relationships Utah initiative.

The two studies that I'm going to talk about today really focus in on stepfathers and the men in these step relationships. The reason why, increasingly, more and more men are experiencing stepfamily relationships either through re-marriage or co habitation. And there's a growing literature that shows impact of male involvement on youth development can be very positive. But there's been this kind of gap in the literature as to how that plays out in stepfamilies. And whether relationship education and stepfamily education in particular, can help engage those men and help empower those men to be positive influences and to help the youth that are in those households. Or may be coming in and out of their households in the case of joint custody arrangements.

With that opening, let me go right into the first study, which is a qualitative study we did with European American step fathers. And they all participated in one of our 12-hour courses. And there are several themes that I would like to highlight today. The first is why they attended in the first place.

As you can see from some of these quotes, and I can read them for those who may not be able to see the screen, they say things like, my wife heard about it and said let's take it. It can't hurt. Or someone from the agency said it

would be good to comment or my wife decided for me. Or my wife said, you know, it would be good for us, too. One of them said, I thought it would be helpful with my family and look good for a court case.

As these responses indicate, for majority of step fathers, it was their wives or partners that initiated the discussion about attending a stepfamily education course. Even though most of them were either pushed or pulled into coming, all of them found that they benefited from the experience.

And let's talk a little about what some of those benefits were. The first theme that we observe from these interviews, this is born out through quantitative research cited later on in the reference list. But in terms of the qualitative quotes I thought might bring these principals home, the first theme was around a perception of increased family bonding.

Almost all of the fathers talked about one of the reasons for attending was because they wanted to have increased unity in their homes. So you would hear them say things like, you know, I think that greater camaraderie within the family, especially the children increased. I think the classes help break down some defensiveness between my wife that was starting to build-up.

You would also see -- hear them talking about the perception of increased empathy as another benefit. Step fathers consistently indicated that because of the course, they became more aware of the feelings of their children and

that their spouses or partners were experiencing. The following quote illustrates this awareness: The best part of getting more of an understanding was getting more understanding of the children and problems they perceive in the families and how they react to it. I always worry about myself and what's going on in my world. I figured kids are kids. I didn't realize how much impact my coming into the picture potentially played into their reaction and acceptance.

Another theme was -- another perceived benefit was improved communication. For many participants attending these courses open to communication between various members of the family system. For example, one reported the best part for me was the fact that just come together class opened up dialogue in our home. I just think it opened a door for us that haven't -- that we hadn't been able to crack before.

Participants felt they learned to communicate more effectively. The next quote refers to a father who is referring to his wife and how they now are able to avoid the criticism and belittling that was fairly present before hand. And there also was several individuals who talked about improvement with communication with the children that were coming in and out of their home.

The next theme had to do with increased skills and development of stepfather practices. 11 of the 14 participants described how the course helped them improve their parenting skills. And this is important because

receiving basic parenting information was viewed as particularly helpful because they had not had prior parenting experience when they joined this union, they became instant father figures. And had missed out on some of the things that people learn about kids as they change diapers and watch their kids take their first steps so this quote highlights that perspective. Quote, they're giving information that most biological parents understand. You don't have the information when they started to walk. You don't have what was the first thing they fell on. Having that course is just, I don't know how to explain it, it's just amazing.

Others talked about patience, and that was a skill that was taught and also practiced in the course. They also talked about the skill of relationship building and the time that it takes to build a relationship with a child. And how that plays into the timing of discipline.

Next, another skill was cooperative parenting. And this final quote highlights that skill. He said, I know my fiancé and I have gotten closer together. We talk a lot more and make a list of our top five discipline things and define consequences for those top five things. They say pick your battles so we pick five battles together and say these are five things we won't tolerate because before we didn't know how to handle them because this is all new.

We did a follow-up study with a different sample within this to multi-hundred couple database of participants. And this time, we decided to interview Latino

men, trying to find out whether or not the experiences in the stepfamily education classes was different. What were some of the similarities and particularly here in Utah, with the changing demographics and the increasing number of Latinos, we really feel it's important to be culturally sensitive in our programming.

So let me just share briefly some of the themes that emerged from this sample. The first was a similar question that we asked, which was why did they choose to attend. And as you can see, again, half were recruited through personal invitations by the facilitator and the remaining were trusted sources like counselors, friends or family members. The most prevalent reasons stem from the desire to have better relationships in their home. Particularly with their step children, wanting to learn how to treat the stepchildren and have good relationships with them.

And similar to the last study, because they didn't know how to do that, it was a new experience. They, too, also very interested in developing positive relationships and acknowledge that they were able to improve those key relationships including relationships -- feeling like they had increased skills to be a parent and father, around communication, developing stronger, positive couples relationship skills and skills with their parent and/or stepchild relationships.

Let me read this quote, because I don't have an extension i relationship with my daughter. I need to be with her in places she doesn't feel so much pressure. And

places that won't cause her stress when she returns back home to her mother's house. Perhaps it's better I go down to her on Saturdays, take her to eat, enjoy the weekend, talk and then take her home. If further in the future she wants to be with me, great. A great example of somebody that learned some skills to meet the child where she was at and to take time to develop a relationship in a way that -- without facilitator assistance.

A common theme in these interviews had to do with importance of family. And the appreciation that the Latino fathers had in being able to participate in groups of family education that included other family members. There was also a sub theme about the terminology that is often used in curricula, as well as in general culture around step families, step fathers and step relationships and there was quite a bit of discomfort as this individual shared.

One thing as far as me and my wife, my daughter is not my stepdaughter, she's any daughter. She's my son's sister, not stepsister. We've always been that way, she, his would have, had two from her first marriage and I had three and two babies we had together. When my daughter comes over, they don't say this is my stepsister. They say this is my brother and sister. They don't distinguish stepbrother and sister because we're not. We are a family.

A final theme was normalization of stepfamily situations. This was really comforting to stepfathers who we interviewed it's not something you go and talk about a lot, apparently. At least the ones we visited with. For

them to be able to get together and see that other people were going through some of the same situations is what made it such a great experience for them.

In closing, let me maybe share a couple implications for practice. The first is, if you're trying to reach out and include step fathers, nonresidential parents, which I would highly recommend from assistance theory perspective, it's important to utilize personal invitations. Broad advertising is often viewed as, that's not for us, or not relevant or I don't know what they'll say. I'll send the biological parent but I'm not the bio parent so I don't need or want to go. Leveraging people that have vested interest in that relationship and encouraging their partner to come along can really help.

As you do advertise, make sure to emphasize what is being taught in the class and the skills that can impact their family outcomes. And I think we all do that, but the skills we teach in this class, are targeting the problems and elephants in the rooms. The ex, and finances and how the finances are being shared across households. Tricky relationships with step kids you want to love, but you're feeling tough feelings towards them. Or kids coming in and out and not having that consistency that is often conducive to family traditions and the culture they may want.

And so, not being shy about hey, these are real issues and these classes teach about these things. And focusing particularly when it comes to Latinos, on improving that stepchild, and stepparent relationship. We would

advise being cautious with step terms. Some people don't know or appreciate that, and trying to develop relationships based on skills, not necessarily legal terms or previous relationships.

In closing, here's some funding that's supported us over the years. You're certainly welcome to direct any questions to myself or the manager. And with that I'll turn it back over to the next speaker.

>> Okay, thank you very much, Brian. And before we move to Armon, we are going to have just some -- three more short poll questions. We'll ask them to bring up the first poll question. We just want to know if you, or your program -- if you do provide co-parenting services to fathers, do you also provide co-parenting services to the mothers of the children? Give a few seconds to respond to that. So it looks like close to 70% of you are doing that, yes. So if we could have the next question. Lorenzo is bringing up the next one, I have to apologize for giving the wrong information on the first poll question, because the majority of you had not attended the previous webinar. I do apologize for not saying that right.

If you are providing services to mothers around co-parenting, which of the following do you provide? This is going to particularly help Armon I think in terms of his remarks. Okay so, it looks like the one you are doing the most is providing educational classes on co-parenting skills for the mothers so that's very interesting.

50% of you are providing outreach on one of those two

categories and we have smaller numbers for the others. Okay, let's go to the final poll question. Here, we just want to know if you reached out to mothers, approximately what proportion have been receptive to attend any kind of co-parenting services? Looks like quite a few of you are having success here. I would say close to half of you are saying more than half of the mothers or most. Share in the chat box what you're doing there.

Let's move on and give Armon his time here. It's a great pleasure to introduce Armon. He's doing a lot of good work out there. He's a professor at the University of Louisville, and he's research factors, men's involvement in the lives of their children. He's highlighted the relationship between provision of roles and fathers and outcomes to families. He's been recognized as an emerging scholar by the scholar's network on black masculinity and he's a busy man. Doing research, leading the four-year program and also teaches social work courses. He's also written an information brief for the clearing house on tips to help dads build their social [inaudible]. Today, he'll tell a little about his recent co-parenting research. I eluded to this, it's an infographic of his research study, Armon will give us the nitty-gritty so tell us all about it, Armon.

>> Thank you, I'm a professor here at the University of Louisville in Louisville Kentucky. Most of my work resolves around fathers and their children. I'll talk about three projects but emphasize on one of them. The first one

is we run a fatherhood program called 4 Your Child. We enroll nonresident dads to a program that features education and up to six-month of case management services. Until to point in the project, we've enrolled a little over than 1100 dads and four different counties in the State of Kentucky. The education work shops, they consist of modules from the national fatherhood initiatives 24/7 dad curriculum, which I imagine many of you are familiar with.

Given we serve nonresident fathers, we supplement the co-parenting modules with a handful of modules from a curriculum called, together we can. That was developed out of Michigan State University extension office. So we've been at that work since October of 2015. And one of the things that our dads told us, and tell us regularly and repeatedly, is that although they find themselves being transformed after going through the work shops, participating in a program, it was sometimes difficult to apply what they learned in a program because they had to negotiate access to their children with a custodial mom who had not gone through any intervention.

And so given we had some restrictions on the extent to which we could serve or use grant resources to serve mothers, we were looking for supplemental finding sources to try to honor and recognize what it was that dad's were telling us. The research and practice network had some opportunities for small, mini grants about two or three years ago when our time put together one and fortunate enough to have it funded.

What we did with that project is we trimmed down some of what we were teaching our dads and enrolled custodial mothers into a one-time workshop that was an attempt to give them highlights of what it was we were teaching dads. What we were looking to do with that is we were looking to introduce mothers to some of the content we were teaching dads but trying to manufacture the idea of co-parenting and increase the window of opportunity dads would have to apply what it was they were learning in our fatherhood project. That's the project I want to talk the most about, and I'll give you a preview for some of the things we have going on coming up next.

As I mentioned, the father program, we enrolled over 1100 dad with a combination of parent education work shops and services. With our co-parenting project, it's a smaller project. With it, we enrolled 153 custodial mothers. These are mothers attached to, or co-parenting with, the fathers in our fatherhood program.

And what they received was a brief low dosage intervention containing one parent education workshop and the opportunity to participate in focus groups, and mediated co-parenting session, if they were willing and able to. We'll talk more about that in a second.

Of that 153 mothers, we split them into an intervention group and control group based on random assignment. You see from the slides that 84 of those mothers ended up in the controlling group and 69 ended up in the intervention group. We had three ways we collected data

before it started, as well as three months post intervention and six months post intervention.

There were three outcomes, conflict resolution skills, mother's report of father's involvement, as well as mother's report of co-parenting relationship quality. On the qualitative side, as mentioned, we had immediate post workshop. The groups got a sense from the mothers how it was they received the intervention, what if any thoughts that had about how it could be improved. And what, if any, ways were they influenced or impacted by what they had received. We came back six months later and did follow-up interviews to see how things had gone in the period of time that lasted between when they went to the workshop and when it was we were following up with them.

And there was really, really good sort of parallels between the time the dads were in the programs, when the mothers were going through it. So it was an opportunity for us to check in to see how things had gone.

To give you a quick summary of the quantitative results. Over the six-month period, what we found was there was statistically significant improvements in the intervention group on reports of conflict resolution skills, as well as co-parenting relationship quality. We noticed we were trending in the right direction with mothers in the intervention group reporting increased level of father involvement, but those results did not reach statistical significance.

On both the conflict resolution skills and

co-parenting relationship quality, it was relatively small but nevertheless, those results were statistically significant. I mentioned that the mothers also had an opportunity to participate in a mediated co-parenting session, and they were very, very few mothers who took us up on that opportunity. We'll talk more about why that's the case in a minute or two.

Here, we focus a little on qualitative results. These are data that came out of our focus groups. They were five emergent things. What makes a good dad, co-parenting outlook, co-parenting challenges, as well as program improvement and finally mother's reflections. As we go back and think through the theme around what makes a good dad, the mothers here we're talking about, how it was they felt like dads could improve and become more active in their children's lives. And talk a lot about dads who are good fathers are people who make sacrifices. They are folks who allow their kids schedules to dictate to them how their day goes.

Many of them talked about mothers as primary caregivers, that's what their days looked a lot like. Depending on what the plans were, the kids schedules and emergencies that popped up, would dictate how their day went. They talked about dads are people who follow suit and allow their children's schedule to dictate how things went as opposed to passing those things off or delegating them to other people. And not being willing to make those types of sacrifices.

The phrase "being there" came up a lot. When people talked about being there, they had different definitions. For many folks, being there meant having a physical presence. Whether it be from a residential status standpoint or having an emotional connection with a kid that transcended geography or resident status. Other cases, it talked about extent to which children felt comfortable reaching out to their dads, if and when, they had an issue or problem. We wanted to talk through and process things.

Again, this idea of what it takes to be a good dad being there became salient there and being there took on a number of different definitions depending on the mother who was sharing that perspective. With the co-parenting outlook, mothers there were talking about whether or not, again, they felt like, having gone through the workshop, talked about whether or not they felt as though things -- prognosis of the co-parenting relationship was either positive or negative.

The data was basically split. Half of the mothers were like, I'm encouraged by what I've seen. They were encouraged recognizing changes with what was going on with their children's father based on the enrollment in the program. Some of the mothers didn't know the dad was in the program and were only made aware when we reached out to them to have them participate. And then it became sort of -- it illuminated for them how and why they were seeing changes they were seeing. Some of the mothers were skeptical by the behavior of the changed dads but it made sense when they

realized he was in a fatherhood program.

They were mothers who were pessimistic even though they knew the child's father was in the program, they felt he's only making these changes temporarily. It's not sustainable. Or he's attending for the incentives and once the incentives go away, he'll go back to the normal M.O. Of parenting. There were others skeptical of whether any intervention could be impactful or influential in modifying them. One mother said with all due respect, you can't teach a man to have a heart based on her experience with her child's father. There was a great variability in co-parenting outlook.

As it relates to co-parenting challenges, mothers were talking about issues and challenges that served as obstacles and barriers to dads taking more roles in their children's lives. This ran from micro individual issues up to macro economics and structural racism and things along those lines. Mothers talked about substance abuse issues, mental health challenges, fathers being incarcerated, fathers being on probation or history of incarceration. Mothers talked about socialization in terms of many of the dads not having a socialization around. Nurturing or care giving. Not having a lot of experience being around children. And some concerns about whether or not it was safe to leave their children with a dad, for whatever reason, had not had large amounts of experience there.

Mothers were concerned about will it be the dad's peer groups, obviously new partners girlfriends, and things

of that nature, caused mother some concern about how it was the children could be guaranteed to be safe, if and when, dads came to pick the kid up for visits, particularly overnight visits. So there were a number of challenges mothers talked about as it relates to influence and impacting the co-parenting relationship.

Next up is mothers advice on fathers behavior and program improvement. There, the mothers talked about seeing -- having an interest in fatherhood programs placing more and more emphasis on communication, conflict resolution. Things we were doing but mothers felt like she should be emphasized more.

Mothers talked about emphasis on being willing to listen and listen not only to children but them as the custodial parents. And how it was in many cases, the idea that message versus messenger conflated some of the issues mothers and dads were dealing with. In other words, mothers were talking about idea that dads were receptive hearing the message from other people but if the same message came from her, the child's mother, it somehow turned into negative or criticism or received as such. So as a result, it would lead to arguments or conflict. And a stagnant co-parenting relationship and not being able to move forward and not dealing with both parents independently, which is putting aside what the challenges were to focus on the best interest of the child.

The last thing here -- there's one more if you can go back. The last theme related to mother's reflections was --

there we go. The last thing related to mothers reflexes was particularly interesting because here, mothers talked about how it was, they, themselves, had been impacted by participated in the intervention.

And I would not have predicted this going into the study, but many of the mothers talked about how they, themselves, recognized they that had challenges they needed to work on. Oftentimes, as it relates to communication or conflict resolution or even empathy. When outlining the co-parenting challenges, many times they didn't see dads as equipped to think through and put themselves in mother's situations. But in these reflections, many of the mothers admitted they had never given thought what parenting looked like from anyone's perspective than anyone other than their own. When compelled to do that they were more receptive to the idea of co-parenting because they empathize with dads who were, in many ways, power less. To activate or act on their intentions to have a more active role in their children's lives because they necessarily had to negotiate access with someone other than themselves:

But custodial parents never gave the thought or want or interest in being able to be with the child and not being able to follow through on that that was particularly the interesting way it was that mothers talked about reflecting on being more empathetic in the future. And talking about how they had not given much thought, time and attention what parenting looked like from father's perspective.

Implications for practice, a couple bullet points

here. One, I think it's important that fatherhood programs end great mothers and fathers. People's family constellations look more complex every day. Oftentimes, we have situations and scenarios where we have blend families. I saw in the chat someone used bundled families. I like that as well. In addition, we have large numbers of nonmarital childbirth. Stepfamilies, bundle families, bonus families, so on and so forth. Necessarily what that means is there are fathers out there, whether they be biological fathers, stepfathers or father figures or social fathers in many cases, out there trying to negotiate access to their children with varying levels of receptivity on the other end of that.

So necessarily, in order for fatherhood programs to see the outcomes many want to see, we have to come up with ways to integrate mothers into co-parenting. Next is recruiting mothers in co-parenting interventions and requires careful messaging.

Early on in the process, we were tempted to recruit mothers by sharing the opportunity to improve their co-parenting knowledge, and we weren't getting very far with that. Oftentimes because mothers felt they didn't need assistance that that regard, it was the fathers that needed it. When we changed the recruiting pitch and talked about giving mother's opportunity to share interest and learning from their expertise, we started getting more receptivity. So messaging matters in terms of programs and how to recruit people to them.

Obviously, early intervention is a great thing. It's been said that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. And if we could get people early on before conflict in the relationship, they'll be in a much better position to go in a positive direction rather than doing what we have to do. Which is undo years of conflict parenting and scar tissue to get to any real meaningful change.

Last here is the idea that empathy was highlighted and emphasized in the discussions with mothers. I think there's overlap between what we found and what Brian talked about in his presentation where empathy again takes center stage. That was our co-parenting study.

The next step for us is, we want to try to focus in on this issue of empathy and distill down from people who are doing this well to maybe their that with the field and other parents who may be similarly situated. The slide I'll end with now speaks to a small qualitative study we are early on in the process of doing. We're looking to identify 15 unmarried couples who were not romantically involved yet have a successful functioning co-parenting relationship. We're interviewing them to see how it is they've been able to maintain a functional co-parenting relationship absent any romantic connection or any shared residence or history of marriage or anything along those lines.

We're one-third of the way through this terms of recruitment. Obviously, the pandemic slowed things down but early returns provide us with an opportunity to share tips with you. First, parents are talking about identifying

shared values, discussion around shared values. Those are source for mothers and fathers to guide their decisions even when they don't necessarily agree. Two is treat your co parent as a business partner. They talk about communicating through e-mail or text message so there's a record of communication.

And reducing or removing for things to take things out of context. In terms of tone of voice, or how it is that people sound when they say what they say. Are they agitated or elevated, keeping things business like and making sure there's a record of communication has been helpful to some folks. The third tip is leaning on support networks. And rather than express anger or resentment towards the participant, have people in your circle to share your thoughts and feelings with them and coming back to the co parent when you're at an even please. Having someone to send a draft to say, does this sound weird or sound okay? Having a person to go through to filter out or edit so that the communication can be as positive and unusual and benign as possible. Hopefully that sheds some light on some of the things we have going on. I'll be around if people have questions and comments later on in the chat. Thank you all.

>> You've got a few questions, Armon. We'll save those for the end. I did want to let people know the presenters agreed to stay for an extra ten or 15 minutes after time because we're getting tight on time but we'll stay another ten or 15 minutes after the top of the hour to get to as many questions as we can.

With that, we'll bring up Cheri Tillis. Part of the one of the largest programs in the country going a long time. She's been with Fathers & Families Support Center since 2003 and responsible for all sorts of things there. I think this is your third appearance on one of our webinars so we're looking forward to hearing from you. Tell us about what you've been doing to address co-parenting issues.

>> Well, good afternoon, everyone. I wanted to say thank you so much for joining this afternoon. I want to say thank you to a number of staff at the Fathers & Families Support Center I see on the line as well. They have completed their classes this morning and joined us this afternoon. I want to extend my heartfelt sentiment to all of you. You're all brothers and sisters in fatherhood, I hope you're doing well in the interesting time we find ourselves in.

Now at Fathers & Families Support Center, we're in a time of transition. Most of you all have known us as father support center St. Louis, and we have changed our name to Fathers & Families Support Center as well as our logo. We used to have the house and father, and that was a pictorial description of the services that agency provided. However, now you see the picture that's in front of you is more inclusive of what we actually do.

To go back step, we've been a 501(c) 3 in St. Louis Missouri, we've provided service more than 20 years in those area. And put a primary focus on our family formation program, which is a lot of you all have probably heard

about. It's our Monday through Friday 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. responsible fatherhood class. And we also provided one of follow-up with our families.

We continue to do our services, however, nine years ago, the agency expanded to also be more inclusive of the mothers of the children we were serving, as well as youth we serve in our St. Louis area. We've always included the moms in our project, however their participation had been limited in scope. After many conversations and planning and training and finding the right and perfect staff to be in those places. We were able to make those transitions. So now we're Fathers & Families Support Center and our slogan is help for fathers and hope for families.

We're also in our new space that some of you may be aware of, which we are able to provide fatherhood as well as mother hood trains to both practitioners as well as our families. So just wanted to give you all of that update before we get to the good stuff.

So Nigel called me up quite a while ago and asked about our mother's project as we used to refer to it as. I said, sure, Nigel, let's do this. Today, I'll be bringing forward some of the information about our parenting in partnership project, which serves and trains mothers, as well as grandmothers, in the services of responsible parenting.

Our parenting and partnership is a co-parenting component that is, for the most part, a spinoff of our family formation program. It was created to assist mothers

who have children who are 18 years or younger, and we believe serving those mothers and the fathers will render a better result for the children as it's always been our mission and our vision that children do better when they have both of their parents involved. And so we want to make sure that both parents are able to receive the services they need to appropriately co parent their children.

The services we offer are our parenting classes, but it's not limited to that. We also have legal services we provide in relationship to child support, custody and visitation. And we have our employment services as well as family therapy, healthy nutrition, financial literacy and our HiSET which is our adult based education classes.

Those who enroll and eligible for our projects, they are able to actually create co-parenting plans and/or receive mediation through our legal clinic. Our classes are held for six weeks. Tuesday through Friday, from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. This modification was made because in most cases, our moms are the custodial parents and so we modified that time to ensure that moms can get their children off to school in the morning, as well as be home when they are out of school. And each graduate receives a year of follow-up services, which is inclusive of the services we offer to our fathers. So the employment services, as well as follow-up with our family therapists and other staff within the agency.

Many of our participants, they have reported that they have made new friendships within the class, they have

individuals that can help them be accountable to what they have learned. They also have ally in our staff that are there to be supportive of them. They also just go on and on about the sisterhood they have made went sessions. Very similar to what we experience with our fathers. And most of our fathers saying, this is the first time they've had friends, other males, going through some of the same life lessons at the same time they could confide in. This is having similar effect, in that there's a sisterhood bond in the classes we've been able to have.

On the screen, you'll notice the pictures that are there, that's actually one of our graduations where we had both our mothers and fathers participating and also make sure the mothers are acknowledged first and go forward with the rest of the graduates. You'll see Ms. Simmons, our class facilitator for the moms.

She, herself, has shared her own story with our moms, which has made them also feel like they can do an amazing job at being a mother as well as co-parenting. I mentioned earlier our legal services that we provide. And I am very fortunate to have with me our attorney, attorney Lisa King Williams, who has been providing legal services at the Fathers & Families Support Center for approximately ten years now. She will share with you some of the services we provide to our families.

>> Good afternoon, thank you for having me. Basically what we do here is to educate parents, and education is different between the women's program and

father's program, so I'll spoke about the dad's first. Educate fathers, what it means to be a father legally. What rights you have as a father. Often in dealing with this particular client population, the mother is the gatekeeper with respect to custody of the children. And typically, there's a child support order, and dads don't understand, why do I have to pay this money and I cannot see my child? So there's an education component to that. And that will result in them having to actually paternity because in Missouri, as many states, if a child is born out of wedlock, the father has to go through a legal process or with consent of the mother to, get his name on the birth certificate.

Unlike a child who was born within a marriage or if they marry within 300 days after the child is born, they legally are presumed to be the father of the child. So we help guys accomplish paternity. We also help them establish they are not the father of the child. Here in Missouri we have a criminal felony statute called criminal nonsupport, and we have gentlemen would have taken a felony hit on their record for failure to pay child support for a child that's not biologically theirs. Most cases are trying to get dads court order custody and visitation with their children. Our focus on the agency is on the best interest of the child, to stop the cycle of poverty. Studies have shown, a lot of that has to do with a meaningful relationship with their father. And a lot of times, we have to go to the courts to make that happen.

Along with custody and visitation, our agency

promotes the payment of child support, the father should be emotionally as well as financially responsible for their child. We're not trying to avoid child support but at the same time, the order should be a right sized order. Meaning if it's entered five years ago and he had a great job making \$70,000 or \$80,000 a year, and now you're understand employed or minimum wage level, we need to come in and correct that child support order.

With respect to the mothers, there's a lot of education do I on the importance of establishing paternity. A lot of them seem to feel, if I don't want child support from him, what difference does it make? I explained a number of scenarios where establish scenarios where establishing paternity is important. If he gets run over by a bus and gets a wrongful death suit, your child won't get any if there's has not been established paternity.

We will, if the father and mother are willing, work with them to literally mediate a parenting plan they can then go file with the court. A lot of our mothers in the mothers program also have issues with juvenile court, guardianship, and adoptions of their children. And we work with them to either overturn the guardianship or to get visitation through the guardianship. We work with them in the juvenile court in order to avoid a termination of parental rights and things of that nature.

We are here to help our clients with any issue that they may have, and sometimes they have issues outside the framework of what we call domestic relation services, but

our main focus is the custody, visitation, establishment of paternity and child support. I'm fortunate to work with the father's support center and I have never lost a custody case.

>> We could do one of those infomercials and say we have the winningest legal clinics in St. Louis, Missouri. Just want to share a few co-parenting steps for dads. Some of the things we teach at the organization. First and foremost, I've heard it said on here a couple different times, just be patient with the process. All things are a process.

You just heard a few things from the legal clinic. When we first opened up the legal clinic, we thought things would be open and shut in six months. We've had cases that have taken up to two years so, you have to be dedicated. You have to be patient, and you have to be willing to run the race into the finish line. Also, just be realistic with the expectations. Communication is difficult for the healthiest couples. So just imagine what that is for a co-parenting situation when things are in turmoil. So communication is key. Making sure to keep the lines open. Whether it's text, online e-mails, whether it's face-to-face or phone calls. You have to talk about what your decisions will be.

One of my favorite lessons and one of the healthy marriage course is, you have to make a decision. You have to decide as opposed to sliding into situations. Things such as transportation of the children, who did going to

drop off? Who is going to pick up? Who is going to make sure they get to school every day? Those are things you have to consider so you have to be realistic. One of the funniest things online is hair combing. Who will comb the hair? Just small things about large things. So you have to be realistic with expectations and think of everything that could go well, as well as everything that could go sideways.

We also want to say, remember you must practice age appropriate parenting. One of the key components of our curriculum is ages and stages. You have to understand that if you have a 13-year-old that's coming to stay for the weekend, they may not need you to help them brush their teeth. No matter what the age or stage is for that child, you have to be able and ready to apply the appropriate parenting to the child you currently have, not the one in your mind or remember. It's the child in your face. You have to be able to communicate and share with them as well. Be ready to share with them your daily expectations.

Also, be prepared for your living conditions. We've often taught gentlemen, if you plan to get custody do, you have a bedroom for your child to be in once they come to your home? You have to make sure to have health coverage. Are you providing necessary things for daily living?

A co-worker and I joke about, if a young lady comes to stay with her dad, does he only have old spice deodorant. You have to maybe sure you have the things your child needs to make sure they're comfortable being in the space they're going to be in. And finally, we push to have a great

support system. All great things will fall apart any given time. The old saying is it takes a village, but the reality is, it does take a village. There are times you'll have to call on grandparents, aunts, et cetera, to help with the children.

When you're in a co-parenting situation or new to having custody, you have to make sure that you have these things thought off out ahead of time. Just wanted to express again about the picture that you see on your screen. This is Mr. And Ms. Davis. And Mr. Davis came to our foundation program for our fatherhood services and he graduated. And once he completed, he actually referred his wife to come over to the parenting in partnership classes. And this is them pictured at her graduation with their two daughters. So this is just one example of one of the families that we have been able to work with.

We are currently in class at this time, and we have both our mothers component as well as our father's component both meeting virtually and on our conference line currently. And our next class will be enrolling in a few weeks here. So I just wanted to wrap up by saying if you all had any questions about what I have presented, I will be on the call for later. Thank you Nigel

>> Thank you, Cheri, and yes, you have a few questions. So we'll stay on for e extra time to get as many questions as we can the clarification, the Mr. Davis you just showed is not the same Mr. Davis we're good to introduce, right?

>> It's a different Mr. Davis. [Laughing].

>> I thought we would clear that up. I'm now going to introduce Mr. Demetrice Davis who is, as you see, technician, strategist and father. He's a graduate of the -- what was the father support center when he was there of the he's got two daughters ages 14 and 3. He has a good co-parenting relationship with the mother of his older daughter, and he's working on the relationship with the second win: And he credits Ms. Lisa Williams, you just heard from, with a lot of help with that one. I believe I recently got a court order for joint custody now for the second one, Demetrice, right? Anyway I'll let you tell your story and turn the mic over to Demetrice and we'll come back and answer questions.

>> Hello, everyone. My name is Demetrice Davis. Thank you for the opportunity. As stated, I had the pleasure of working with Ms. Williams with the father support program. We basically went through the classes. Once the class was finish finished, I went through the process of filing court paperwork with the advice of Ms. Williams. I will go over a few things I learned in the class, and few things I think helps out a lot of parenting moving forward in a positive co-parenting relationship.

Cordial communication is very important. We have to make sure we think about the kids and the welfare of the child and put our differences aside. Work on communication and co-parent with the significant others, if there is one. Positive parent interaction morals and values for your

children.

I feel it's best to come up with a parenting plan together. I think no parent should have more rights over the other if both are stable. If the two parents are not come up with a plan together they should seek family mediation. There's a lot of mediation in cities and states that will help you pretty much establish good communication with the co-parent and establish a method of transportation and getting back and forth with the children. Of approximate first, the legal agencies that might provide assistance. If you're a parent and you are not getting the proper time with your child, you should definitely seek some help. If you cannot come to terms with the co-parent, you should seek legal advice or legal aid. There's a lot of programs out there to help everyone, male and female, as we're seeing in this presentation.

Ask as many questions as possible. I do not leave stones unturned. If I do not understand something, I definitely ask questions. I definitely call more numbers. I definitely search to get the answers that I need. Even with working with Ms. Williams, there was a lot of things I did not understand about the legal portion of getting joint custody. And I definitely asked her as many questions as I could, and it was a learning process for me.

Child support parents should collectively provide for the child. Parents should not be stripped of their rights due to financial deficiencies. The involvement of both parents equal support [inaudible]. From experience, and

speaking to a lot of fathers I attended the class with a lot of fathers I know, most guys fear going to court. Just a lot of the what ifs. I suggest to not fret if it's necessary. I do suggest to make court a last resort. But for the sake of the child if that's a must, we definitely must go through the process so both parents can be actively involved with the child.

Parental rights shouldn't be a fight. It's a child we both brought into the world. We should work together in bringing this child up and making sure the child has a meaningful relationship with both sides of the family. Make sure the focus is for the welfare of the child only. Unfortunately, we all experience relationships that do not work. And if there's a child involved, we must definitely move forward and keep the child in mind in a friendly environment.

I would like to finish up with saying thanks again for the opportunity. I met a lot of great people with the father support program. I met a lot of positive males that taught me how to be more of a man, be more patient, and as Ms. Williams said, trust the process. There's a process to this especially if you're determined to be a father and want to go all the way. You have to see it all the way through. And with the experience I had in representing myself with the advice of Ms. Williams, you have to file your own paperwork, you have to speak on your own behalf. It takes time, it takes experience, but you have to learn with the process and also it takes patience. I definitely recommend

being very patient and trusting the process, keep the focus on the child, and you will definitely prevail.

>> Thank you very much, Demetrice can I ask you to say a little bit about the relationship that you have with the two mothers?

>> Okay so, my oldest daughter is 14. We didn't have to go through a court process. We basically did some family mediation. We worked with each other's family and we sat down and came up with a plan that was suitable for everyone. She's also married at the time, so I had to co parent with her husband as well and we have definitely built a better relationship from the beginning to the end. We built great levels of respect for each other and communicate as needed to raise that child together.

My second, we just finished the process, and I'm thankful to say the judge granted 50/50 custody, joint, legal and physical. We're still working on our communication but it's a process, it takes time, I'll be patient with it, see it through and be there for my daughter.

>> Okay, thank you so much for sharing that. And we're now going to bring up the presenters on video. I'll let him do that and I'm looking at some of the questions here. Actually, one thing here, if you want to, if you see this box in the top right-hand corner, you can click on that and go full screen if you want to see all the presenters as they join. So everybody else can do what I just did and click on the cameras, and I hope I'm going to be joined in a

minute. In the meantime, let me ask the first question is for Brian. Brian's been sitting there patiently for a while. There was an early question for you, Brian, about the smart steps course. Is that available to do as an online web class? And is there a fee for that? Are you with us, Brian?

>> The curricula is available. It's coordinated through Auburn University's portal. I didn't -- I don't know off the top of my head what they're charging or if they're doing discounts through COVID-19. They're super easy to work with, and we have, for the last 13 years, done a face-to-face. But during COVID-19, we're given permission to do it online and that's worked out really well over the last couple of months as we've done it.

>> Okay, thank you. Feel free to join us on the video if you've got that available, Brian. We'll go to you, Armon. I think you answered quite a few of these questions in the chat box. I haven't been checking that very well. Quite a few people wanted to know about -- let me start with a couple quick questions. What was the average age of the mothers in the study? And were there any noncustodial mothers in your study group?

>> So, one, part of the inclusion criteria was mom had to be the custodial parent. What we were looking to do, was trying to create an opportunity for dad to apply what he was learning to negotiate access directly with mom so all mothers were custodial mothers. Average age was around 34 years old.

>> The average age of the fathers was slightly older if I remember correctly, right?

>> Yeah, average age for dad was around 36.

>> What were the measures you used to include mothers and fathers? I guess to recruit the mothers and get them involved. You want to say about that? I know you talked about it a bit when you talked about messaging, but how did you reach out to the mothers?

>> Okay, yeah. When you said measures, I was thinking survey measurement tools. Yeah, so in terms of our recruitment, what we did was, we would go into our fatherhood work shops usually around the second week because we wanted to give the dads an opportunity, so we would go in the workshop around the second week and ask the dads if they were enjoying the experience. And if they were seeing value in what it was they were receiving. If they said yes, we would say, what do you think about giving your children's mother the opportunity to participate in something similar, would you see that as valuable? And almost inevitably, dads would say yes. And we said we had a project of where we trim down for the mothers what you are seeing. If you see value and think the kids mother would benefit from it, share the information and we would reach out to them. Basically referrals is what I would collect and we would reach out to mothers via telephone call or text message to share what it was we were doing. I mentioned in the chat, and also speak to it in the report, I think folks would get a link to, is originally what we were doing is asking mothers to

participate based on the opportunity to improve their parenting and co-parenting skills. We didn't get many takers on that.

So what we learned was that we had to switch up our messaging and say to mothers, what we're interested in doing is learning from you as an expert how it is we can do a better job of improving our project for dads. And mothers, they were much more receptive to sharing their expertise with us rather than quote-unquote being students in our workshop. Again, the messages matters and I think that's an important point there.

The other thing I mentioned really quickly is that, this is really, really difficult work. It was oftentimes the case reaching out to moms was met with, in some cases a down right hostility. But in many cases, if we were willing to take the initial hostility and stick in there, that gave mom an opportunity to get that off her chest. What we found, that was something she had she needed to purge. Oftentimes, that was a message she wanted to give to dad, but either reason hadn't, or hasn't landed well. What we end up doing is serving as sort of a buffer. Give mom an opportunity to get frustration off her chest. If it meant she was willing to sign up for intervention, then it was really well worth it.

>> Thank you. Cheri, let me come you to. A couple questions about the specifics of your program for the mothers. What curriculum are you using and how do you structure that for people who are working? Do you offer it

at different times? You're on mute, Cheri.

>> If I heard you correctly, you want to know what curriculum is and how we provide the curriculum?

>> Yes.

>> We use the mother hood curriculum that was developed by Dr. Jeffrey Johnson and Dr. Aerial Johnson that we know from the responsible fatherhood curriculum. And we took the exact same approach as our fathers project. We took and adapted the curriculum to make it condensed into the six weeks that were the most prevalent information we needed to provide so we condensed that into the six-week format over a 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. so they do the exact same six-week cycle as the father classes. It's a parallel universe. We have five fathers classes that beginning and then the one mother's class that begins and they all run for six weeks and they all have one of follow-up after their graduation from the project. So we can have anywhere from 35 to about 65 that are on that same class cycle that cycle from the six weeks to the one of follow-up.

However, when they receive services from the legal clinic, as well as the family therapist, those services can go on for approximately two years just depending on what are the issues that were presented? What we did observe, when we began to work closely with mothers, in some cases, we had to refer them for mental health services due to undiagnosed disabilities. And so their class cycle would have been a little bit longer because we would send them for those mental health services first and then invite them back to

come into the six-week cycle.

>> How did you accommodate any moms that were working at the time?

>> For the moms, most of them do not work. Here in Missouri, several of them were transitioning off TANIF services, that was the first round of referrals we had worked with. So the majority of them were unemployed. However, if they were working, we would ask them if they worked at the type of job where they can change their shift and if they could change their shift, we would ask them to do an evening shift and come to the classes in the morning.

One of the other things we were fortunate to have is through the state of Missouri, we were able to provide them with the child care that was paid for through benefits they were receiving from the state of Missouri. So they did have child care while they were participating, if they had children who were younger than school age.

>> Great. This is a question everybody can respond to but I'll start with you, Cheri. It's a totally relevant question where we're sitting now. After we got into this health situation, you started out doing classes by conference call. Have you moved to any online classes now?

>> Yeah. So the agency actually went online after March the 23rd. We were in our fourth week of class -- I'm sorry, our third week of class, I believe. The fortunate part was the first three weeks of class, they were able to have face-to-face and bond with each other. However we shifted March 23rd into the online services. And so what we

set up initially was a conference call line, which we already had at the agency. So the participants were able to call in and go through their class curriculum because they all had work books and were all familiar with what the daily regimen was. So they actually were able to share that over the phone.

When they received incentives, they would come to the organization, receive their incentive and go back home. So within that time frame from the time they completed there was a three-week lag in between because we had to do some very quick planning. And so our class cycle actually just began a couple weeks ago so they're about two weeks in this class cycle and they're doing that over the phone. We're currently setting up private Zooms and things like that so they can come on and see each other, but they also have times where they can call for the one-on-one so they still meet with all of the staff persons that were providing support. The class facilitator, the social worker, as well as the employment person call not we were fortunate our partners participating as well. Any outside presentation, such as nutrition classes, also called in and did their presentations.

So we're hopeful we'll be able to end in person or at least on a platform such as this so that they can see each other face-to-face at least for the ending of their class. And then we'll have our next class cycle. Normally, we would have six classes per year, which we're still on track to have. It's just some of them may be virtual in nature.

>> It definitely makes a difference. Brian, what do you do in Utah in terms of online stuff? Are you having groups meet virtually?

>> All of our programs right now are being handled virtually. We use WebEx as well as Zoom. And they have breakout room options and we've had classes with as many as 100 people signing up. We learned not everyone who signs up shows up, but that's not all that different than our face-to-face experiences. Time of the day impacts as well as Utah moved from red to orange and people started going back to work, we've noticed some attendance and attrition issues in some of our classes we didn't have for the first month.

But overall, the experience is actually been really positive. And our facilitators were a little bit uncertain how it was going to play out initially, but I met with them all this morning actually. And they reported once again that there's some kind of surprising camaraderie that occurs in these online classes. There's nobody sitting in the backseat or back row. Everyone is right there, and in some ways they are experiencing more connection and more intimacy and more sharing in classes of five to eight individuals that were not feeling as much in face-to-face. It's been positive. I think when we move forward we'll probably do more face-to-face and online, and hybrid. We need to be responsive for those that can't face-to-face and who prefer the online option.

>> It will be very interesting, yeah. What's been

happening in Kentucky, Dr. Perry? You were planning to do some things. Have you gotten it off the ground?

>> Yeah, we have. And just maybe two or three weeks ago, we started wrapping up a couple cohorts we had going on when the pandemic first hit. Now what we're doing is ramping up to do recruitment or completely online work shops or revamping our case management model so we can engage people using web conferencing and telephone calls and things of that nature. A lot like what Brian mentioned. What's interesting is particularly for the more introverted of our dads, the online format gave them a space and opportunity to use whether it be a chat feature or whatever the case may be, to actually engage across a little more than they would have, a little more than they were, in the live face-to-face sessions.

So we hope being in the online environment gives us an opportunity to reach out to folks who otherwise didn't have time or their schedule or their family responsibilities or lack of work family balance wouldn't allow them to participate in services before. We see it as an opportunity to connect with a new demographic. One that we've not engaged before but hopefully this will give us an opportunity to connect with them in ways we meant in the past so we're competed about it and see it as an opportunity.

>> That's great. It's almost like brave new world. For those of you that don't know, we did do a webinar last month on some tips for using virtual technology. And we are

planning a follow-up to that. We'll have two programs to share lessons learned like you guys just did and we don't have a date yet. It's going to be May, June or early July. We'll Demetrice, I have a couple questions to you and circle back to everybody and let people go. I appreciate everyone staying on the line for this. Demetrice, this question is asking what your feelings and beliefs are. Do you feel and believe you're an exception to the rule or are there many fathers with the same attitude as you? Just share your gut, this person says.

>> I'm not understanding.

>> Well, people tend to think the nonresident dad is not responsible. You, obviously, stepped up to the plate. You've been responsible, you worked out a relationship with the mothers of these two girls and you're moving ahead. Do you think that you have attributes other dads don't? What do you put that down to?

>> No. I think I should be considered 100% of a dad and 50% of a co parent. I definitely will always insert myself in my children's life and make sure they know they have an active, positive father.

>> What would you say is the one thing you got from the program that may be sort of helped you do this a little bit better?

>> Knowing I'm not the only person that's experiencing these issues. When we first walked into the class, we have what they call what's up? And we pretty much go around a circle introduce yourselves and we talk about

maybe an issue we had, or something on our mind, and give each other input. Some of the input I got from the brothers in the program helped me move forward what I was doing. And according to some of them, some of the input I gave them helped them move forward that what they were doing.

>> Together we're stronger, right.

>> Absolutely.

>> Just having the opportunity to share things with guys and bouncing things back and forth has to be a tremendous help I'm sure.

>> Absolutely.

>> So the next question is a lead in for everybody else to respond to as well. Somebody wanted to know, Demetrice, how the time you have had with your girls has been changed with the current situation, the pandemic. Can you spending as much time with them? How have you worked it out with the mothers?

>> Since the pandemic, I've actually been spending more time with my girls. We came to terms for me to get them more days and it's been working out pretty good for all of us.

>> Very interesting because we've heard, and had calls to our help line, for dads who don't have ability to see their kids at the moment for various reasons. Maybe they're not close to where the mothers are but maybe the mother is quote, taking advantage of the situation and not allowing the fathers to have access.

I would like for everybody to respond, what tips have

you been given. [Inaudible]

>> Are you talking about during the pandemic physically?

>> Yes.

>> There's been a lot of change in court order custody schedule because of COVID-19. I've been encouraging clients, the mothers and fathers to focus on the best interest of the child. Interestingly enough, it was a town hall meeting we had with one of our jurisdiction, St. Louis county court and the question came up, what do courts expect from parents for the parenting plans during COVID-19? And, of course, we expect you to comply with them. That being said, it's a case-by-case basis. I have some out of town parents, one is here, one is over on the east coast. And obviously with everything shutting down on the major highways, gas stations, restaurants, travel was not in the best interest of the child because you may not be able to find a place to use the bathroom. And focus what is in the best interest of your child?

I have to say 100% of the clients have done that and focused on the little ones. At the same time if you've been in the St. Louis or the county, I've been given you the impression by the court they want you to comply with it. It's viewed as a necessary something you have to do, like go together grocery store and you just make it as safe as possible with masks and things of that nature.

>> How about Kentucky? Have you had issues with fathers in your program that don't have as much access with

the kid?

>> Sure. We've experienced that. And unfortunately, until here recently, the courts were closed. And it required people to have certain levels of technology in terms of equipment or skills to be able to navigate that. A thing that's worked out well for us as well as can be expected anyway. Is the fact that since everyone has been home, it's created a space and opportunity for folks to be able to minimize the distractions and be able to engage in whether it be telephone communication, whether it even be letter writing, or scrapbooking about their thoughts, beliefs, ideas feelings about their kids and relationships with their kids. These are things in the past, we sort of rigmarole of day-to-day precluded folks from being able to do that. This has given them time to call and do those things. We've been encouraging them to reach out if they have technology, using FaceTime or web conferencing. If not, a text messages and telephone calls. And working with their co parents to be as patient as possible but being as safe as possible in hopes that everyone would be reasonable.

We've gotten some calls from dads who have been frustrated but overwhelmingly, most of the dads tell us they had opportunities to engage their kids not face-to-face or in person but at least via telephone and web conferencing, things of that nature

>> That's good to hear. Brian, I know you don't specifically address co parenting issues, but have there been any issues created by the pandemic situation?

>> We work with a lot of couples, so issues of going back and forth in the house olds and to go back to court to get that official or unofficially make things work out during this time or common questions. A lot of people are trying to use technology better to connect if they can't have their children in their home.

We're not doing anything programmatically about it, but I think those issues are going around the whole country, probably the whole world.

>> Yep. And conversation to be continued. So I really appreciate you everybody staying on. I appreciate everybody who has presented and people who attended. We call this is follow-up conversation. It's a conversation that still needs to be continued. Normally I would give everybody the chance to have final word but we've gone more than 15 minutes over. Demetrice, I would like to give you the opportunity to have the final word here. And we'll say good-bye. What would your final word of wisdom be to anybody out there listening in terms of secrets and importance of co-parenting? You're on mute, Demetrice. We can't hear you, sorry.

>> Sorry, my bad. [Laughing]. Okay, things again for having me. Stick with the process. It's definitely a process, and if you want to have a meaningful relationship with your children or with your co-parent, definitely stick with the process and go through these organizations or even the court system and make it work and be patient.

>> I would like to add on to that, the study that

Armon did, in terms of empathy and one of the things you do in the father's program is you help guys understand the situation and that makes things better [audio breaking up]. As Demetrice said and work towards that. After this, we would really like any feedback you can give us in the evaluation survey. That will pop up on your screen at the end of this and you'll get an e-mail so please tell us your thought. And clap your hands for these presenters. And we'll see you all next time. Thank you very much. Bye-bye.

>> This concludes the webinar. Thank you for your participation. You may now disconnect.

[End of webinar]