

NRFC
WEBINAR

COPARENTING 201

Tips for Fatherhood Programs & Fathers

May 27, 2020



Chat (Everyone)

Everyone

Downloadable Resources

Name	Size

Ask a Question

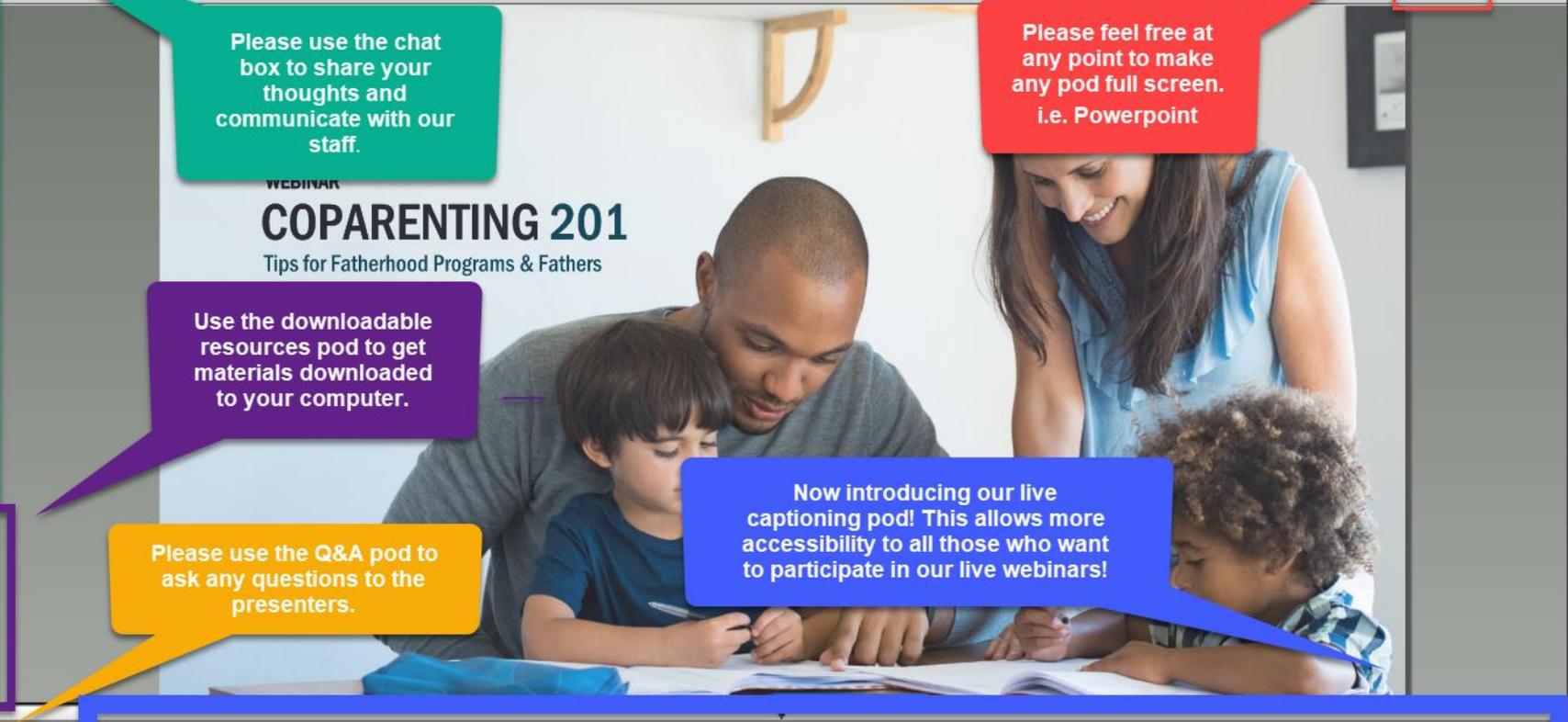
Please use the chat box to share your thoughts and communicate with our staff.

Please feel free at any point to make any pod full screen. i.e. Powerpoint

Use the downloadable resources pod to get materials downloaded to your computer.

Please use the Q&A pod to ask any questions to the presenters.

Now introducing our live captioning pod! This allows more accessibility to all those who want to participate in our live webinars!





About Us

- HHS/ACF Office of Family Assistance provides funds to support fathers and families through the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse.
- Resources are available for dads, fatherhood programs, researchers, and policy makers.



National
Responsible
Fatherhood Clearinghouse

Contact

Visit the NRFC: [Fatherhood.gov](https://fatherhood.gov)

- [Fatherhood.gov/toolkit](https://fatherhood.gov/toolkit) for *Responsible Fatherhood Toolkit*.
- [Fatherhood.gov/webinars](https://fatherhood.gov/webinars) for archives of all our webinars.

Contact us: Help@FatherhoodGov.info

Encourage fathers or practitioners to contact our national call center toll-free at:

- **1-877-4DAD411** (877-432-3411)

Engage with us via social media:

- Facebook - @Fatherhoodgov
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Recent NRFC Resources*

Webinar (July 2019)

- The Importance of Co-Parenting and Relationship Skills: Helping Fathers Help Their Children

Information Brief (2019)

- Promoting Positive Coparenting Relationships: Tips for Fatherhood Programs and Fathers

Tip Card (2019)

- Coparenting Tips for Dads

NEW Blog Post (May 20, 2020)

- *Raising Her Together, But Apart*

Spotlight on Research (May 27, 2020)

- Fatherhood and Coparenting (quick look at research findings from Perry, Rollins, & Perez (2020))

*See **Helpful Resources** list for links to these and other resources.



VIDEO RESOURCE

'How to Co-parent as Allies, Not Adversaries'

 See, Ted Talks: Ebony Roberts and Shaka Senghor. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2X4nAjW>



Today's Webinar

- As a follow-up to our 2019 coparenting webinar, today's presenters will focus on tips for programs that work mainly with non-residential fathers, including a look at the role of stepfathers in a coparenting team.
 - **Brian Higginbotham**
Professor and Extension Specialist, Utah State University, Logan, UT.
 - **Armon Perry**
Associate Professor, University of Louisville and Project Director, 4 Your Child, Louisville, KY.
 - **Cheri Tillis**
Executive Vice-President and COO, Fathers & Families Support Center, St. Louis, MO.
 - **Demetrice Davis**
Technician/Strategist, Father, and Alumni of Fathers & Families Support Center, St. Louis, MO.
- Presenter handouts and list of helpful resources available for download during the webinar.
- "Question and Answer" session at end of the webinar.



Brian Higginbotham, Ph.D., LMFT

**Professor and Extension Specialist
Utah State University**

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Stepfathers & Stepfamily Education

HealthyRelationshipsUtah.org

- Courses: Dating, Couples, Fatherhood, Divorce
- Served over 70,000 since 2012

Smart Steps

- For couples with children from prior relationships
- Optional family activities
- 175 courses since 2012, serving over 7,000 adults

Lessons Learned

- See Higgingbotham et al (2012) and Reck et al (2013) in Helpful Resources (available for download during today's webinar) for source information.

HRU ANNUAL PARTICIPANT TOTALS (2012–2019)



Stepfathers & Stepfamily Education

- Qualitative study:
Experiences of 14 European-American stepfathers who participated in a 12-hour course.
 - Most of the stepfathers needed encouragement to attend.
 - Afterwards, they all felt the experience was worthwhile.
- "My wife heard about it and said, 'Let's take it, it can't hurt.'"
 - "Someone from the agency [...] said it would be good to come."
 - "My wife decided for me."
 - "My wife said, 'You know, it would probably be good for us, too.'"
 - "I thought it would help with family and look good for a court case."

Perceived Benefits – Family Bonding

Increased Family Bonding

“

I think there is a greater camaraderie within the family, especially with the children, and I think the classes helped break down some of the defensiveness between my wife and I that was starting to build up.

”

Perceived Benefits – Empathy

Improved Empathy

“

[The] best part was getting more of an understanding of the children ... and the problems that they perceive in the family and how they react to it. I kind of always worry about myself, and what's going on in my world. I figure kids are kids. I didn't realize how much impact my coming into the picture potentially played in their reactions and acceptance.

”

Perceived Benefits – Communication

Improved Communication

“ The best part [of the course] for me was the fact that just coming to the class ... opened up dialogue in our own home ... I just think it opened a door for us that we hadn't been able to crack open before. ”

“ We're communicating with each other instead of taking it as belittling or criticism. [Now] it's more of, these are her feelings, these are my feelings, let's see if we can meet in the middle. So, in the last 2 weeks it's about 100% better. ”

Perceived Benefits – Stepfather Practices

Improved Stepfather Practices

“ They’re giving the information that most biological parents understand ... but being a stepparent you don’t have that information. You don’t have what they clung to when they were trying to learn to walk; you don’t have what was the first thing they fell on. So having that information ... from the course is just, I don’t know how to explain it, it’s just amazing. ”

“ I know [my fiancée] and I have gotten closer together ... we talk a lot more and made a list of our top five discipline things. Then we defined the consequences for the top five things. They say pick your battles, so we pick five battles together and say, ‘Okay, these are the things that we are not going to tolerate.’ Because before we didn’t really know how to handle them, because this is all new. ”

Latino Men in Stepfamily Education

- Qualitative study of 16 Latino men who participated in a 12-hour course.
- Four themes:
 - Class Recruitment and Participation
 - Developing Positive Relationships
 - Value and Importance of the Family
 - Normalization of the Stepfamily Situation

Class Recruitment & Participation

- Half were recruited through personal invitation by a facilitator. The remaining participants were recruited through referrals by individuals (e.g., a counselor, friends from church, previous class participants, a family friend).
- The most prevalent reason for attending the course was to gain information and understanding on how to deal with (step)children.
 - “ I wanted to learn how to treat my stepchildren and have a good relationship with them. I wasn't prepared for any of this because it was something totally unknown to me. ”

Developing Positive Relationships

Improved Parenting and Fathering

“ I have to change the way I communicate ... We have the tools given to us by the people who taught this course. ”

Developing a Positive Couple Relationship

Positive Parent-(Step)Child Relationship

“ Because I don't have an extensive relationship with my daughter, I need to be with her in places where 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 is better that 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 more, great! ”

Value and Importance of the Family

- Inclusion of immediate and extended family members
- Discomfort with labels

“ One thing, as far as me and my wife, my daughter is not my stepdaughter, she is my daughter. She is my son’s sister, not their stepsister. We’ve always been that way. She [wife] had two from her first marriage; I had three from my first marriage . . . and two babies that we’ve had together. When my daughter comes over they don’t say, ‘Hey, there is my stepsister.’ [Rather it’s] ‘This is my sister,’ ‘This is my brother.’ They don’t distinguish stepbrother and stepsister because we are not, we are a family. ”

Normalization of the Stepfamily Situation

Normalizing is comforting

“ [Throughout the course] you get to meet other people and see that we are not the only ones. ”

“ The stepfamilies [in the course] have made this a great experience. ”

Implications for Practice

- Utilize personal invitations by program staff and family to gain trust.
- Recruit with an emphasis on what is being taught in the class and how the skills learned can impact family outcomes.
- Focus on improved fathering, particularly when dealing with stepchildren.
- Use inclusive language and be cautious with “step” terms, particularly when working with Latino audiences.
- Normalize diverse family types and roles.

Acknowledgements

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- 10/15 – 09/20* *Steps to Healthy Fatherhood (90FK0072)*. Office of Family Assistance, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- 07/14 – 06/17* *Stepfamily Education*. Utah Department of Workforce Services.
- 10/07 – 09/12* *Teaching Healthy Marriage Skills to Latino, Low-Income Couples in Stepfamilies (90YD0227)*. Office of Head Start, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. L. Skogrand Co-Investigator.
- 10/06 – 09/11* *Teaching Healthy Marriage Skills to Ethnically Diverse, Low-Income Couples in Stepfamilies (90FE0129)*. Office of Family Assistance, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. S. Allgood and L. Skogrand Co-Investigators.

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Parenting and Coparenting Studies*

4 Your Child (ongoing)

- 1100+ non-resident fathers
- Parent education workshops, case management services

Fatherhood Research and Practice Network (FRPN)

- Fatherhood and Coparenting (completed)
- 153 custodial mothers
- Parent education workshop, focus groups, and mediation opportunity

* See *Presentation References* in **Helpful Resources** (available for download during today's webinar) for source information.

Fatherhood and Coparenting Study

Mixed methods study funded by FRPN

- Quantitative
 - 153 co-parents (84 control, 69 intervention) of fathers in *4 Your Child*
 - 3 data collection waves (pre-intervention, 3-month, 6-month)
 - Conflict Resolution Skills (Relationship Dynamics Scale)
 - Fathers' Involvement (Index of Father Involvement)
 - Coparenting Relationship Quality (Coparenting Questionnaire)
- Qualitative
 - Post-workshop focus groups, 6-month follow-up interviews



Quantitative Results

Statistically significant improvement in mothers'

- Conflict resolution skills.
- Coparenting relationship quality.

Mothers' reports of father involvement

- Although not statistically significant, results showed that mothers in the intervention group reported an increase in father involvement.

Parenting Plan/ Mediation Services

- As with similar initiatives, very few took advantage of these services.





Qualitative Study

Focus Group Discussions with Mothers

- What makes a good dad?
- Coparenting outlook.
- Coparenting challenges.
- Mothers' advice on fathers' behavior and program improvement.
- Mothers' reflections.

Implications for Practice

- Fatherhood programs can and should integrate mothers and coparenting.
- Recruiting mothers into coparenting interventions requires careful messaging.
- Early intervention with flexible delivery methods.
- Empathy should be highlighted and emphasized in coparenting interventions.

Coparenting Tips

from Coparenting Exemplars Study (ongoing)

15 unmarried couples who are not romantically involved but have a functional co-parenting relationship.

TIP 1:
Identify shared values; use them to make decisions and settle disagreements.

TIP 2:
Treat your co-parent like a business partner.

TIP 3:
Lean on support networks.

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Fathers & Families Support Center

Our name has changed!

Fathers' Support Center → Fathers & Families Support Center



Parenting in Partnership

- Serves mothers/grandmothers
- Parenting class, plus we offer legal services, employment services, family therapy, health & nutrition, financial literacy, and High School Equivalency Test (HiSET)
- Coparenting and mediation available
- 6-week classes with 1-year follow-up
- Sisterhood



Legal Support and Other Services for Non-resident Dads

- Paternity Actions
- Child Support
 - Expungements and Civil Restitution
 - Modifications
 - Civil Contempt
- Administrative Child Support Actions, Modifications, Abatements, Waivers, Emancipations
- Petitions for Review
- Visitation and Custody Actions, including Contempt*
- Juvenile Abuse and Neglect Cases**

*Full custody for father is available under limited circumstances

**Full custody for father is requested whenever there is a possibility of foster care due to mother's abuse and/or neglect

Top 5 Co-Parenting Tips for Dads

- Be patient ...all things are a process
- Be realistic in your expectations
- Remember that you must practice age-appropriate parenting
- Be prepared
- Have a strong support system



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Cordial Communication

- Positive energy towards the other parent is important.
- Adult issues should not become problems for the children.
- Work on communicating with your coparent's significant other (if there is one).
 - Positive parental interaction adds moral value to the upbringing of your children.

Parenting Plans

Parenting plans should support the needs of the child.

- Try to come up with a parenting plan together.
- Family Mediation.
- Not for profit program mediation.

Resources for Legal Aid

- Search for local agencies that might provide assistance.
- Ask as many questions as possible.
- Look for legal clinics inside local universities.



Child Support

Support for the Child

- Parents should collectively assess necessary finances for the child.
- Both parents should collectively provide for the child.
- Parents should not be stripped of their rights due to financial deficiencies.
 - The involvement of both parents = Support that is worth more than money.

Court

- Do not fear going to court.
- Parental rights should not be a fight.
- Make sure your focus is on the welfare of your child.
 - Make court a last resort.



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Q&A with Today's Presenters



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- Comments, questions, suggestions for future webinar topics, information or resources that you recommend.

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