

Large Group Activity

In the next portion of this training, we will be examining beliefs we have about fatherhood. We would like for you to participate in an exercise regarding our own personal beliefs.

This is not a test, so don't be shy. We would also like for you to be honest. This exercise will assist you in becoming clear about your beliefs of fatherhood.

There are three possible responses. On the right is the word "Yes"; on the left, the word "No"; and in between is the word "Unsure."

Everyone will stand in the middle. As we read each statement, move to the section that best describes your belief about this statement. There will be a brief discussion period between each belief. This exercise is designed to help us clarify some of our beliefs. Just use your gut feeling and try not to analyze the question and adjust it.

Note to Trainers

Conduct a *brief* discussion after each statement. You may wish to add other statements especially any of those that may be specific to certain states or areas.

Statement of Beliefs

- | NO | UNSURE | YES |
|--|--------|-----|
| 1. Fathers should always be involved with their children from birth. | | |
| 2. Angry people are violent people. | | |
| 3. Fathers with money make a better parent. | | |
| 4. Fathers who have a prison record should not have contact with their child(ren). | | |
| 5. Fathers who don't pay child support should not have contact with their child(ren). | | |
| 6. Fathers who use drugs should not have contact with their child(ren). | | |
| 7. Men often use anger to cover up their feelings. | | |
| 8. Mothers are very important in locating and involving fathers. | | |
| 9. Fathers involved with their child contributes to the child's well-being. | | |
| 10. Because of all the work and time involved in working with fathers out-of-state, they are rarely considered as a potential relative placement for their child(ren). | | |
| 12. Social workers can be a barrier to families. | | |
| 13. If a father has a criminal record, he should not have custody of his child(ren). | | |
| 14. As a social worker your relationship with your father can have an effect on how you work with other fathers in your work. | | |

My Relationship With My Father

At least one national fatherhood organization requires staff to resolve issues with their own fathers before trying to work with other fathers. Some child welfare staff may have many issues to resolve with their fathers. Other staff may have had a great relationship with their fathers. The point is that all staff bring their past into their work. Therefore, it is recommended that each staff person reflect on the relationship with his or her father to determine how it affects case practice.

In order to fully understand how to communicate with fathers, it is helpful to reflect on how you communicate with your own father. Spend some time thinking about your own father, using the following questions as a guide:

Questions For Reflection

- ◆ What is your earliest memory of your father?
- ◆ How would you describe your father's relationship with your mother?
- ◆ What type of activities did you enjoy doing with your father?
- ◆ What are some of your favorite memories regarding your father?
- ◆ Did your father have problems that negatively impacted your life (substance abuse, incarceration, spousal or child abuse, emotional distance)?
- ◆ How would you describe your relationship with your father?
- ◆ How has your relationship with your father affected your relationship with men—both personally and professionally?
- ◆ How have other fathers (friends' fathers, grandfathers, step-fathers, etc.) had an influence on you both professionally and personally?

The last question is critical in assessing how you communicate with fathers. Your personal relationship with your father directly affects your professional working relationship with fathers. Human nature is very good at transferring values, beliefs, and emotions from one set of circumstances to another. But doing so may perpetuate the opposite of what we want to accomplish with families when this transference results in stereotyping, false assumptions, marginalizing essential family members, refusing to accept that people can change, or hindering relationships among family members. Dedicated workers in the helping professions would never deliberately choose to do these things, but, unfortunately, it occurs on a regular basis when we do not attempt to engage and involve fathers in their children's lives.

Awareness is the first step to making needed changes. Take some time to honestly evaluate your relationship with your father and how it affects your professional life.

Consider writing a letter to your father, sharing anything you have always wanted to say to him but never have. Begin to think about how to go about making changes in your relationship with your father to improve and enhance it. Even if your father is no longer living, it is important to go through the process of thinking through your relationship with him.

You have qualities that reflect both your birth mother and father. The way that you relate to men, parent your own children, and respond to fathers in your professional life had its beginnings in your relationship with your father.

If you are willing to more closely examine your relationship with your own father, you may gain some insights into working with other fathers. A child's relationship with her father may depend on how well you have worked through your relationship with your own father.