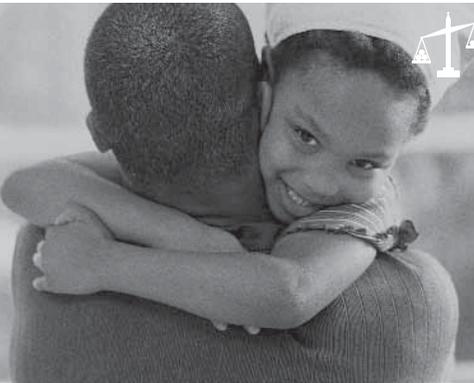


Reaching Out

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WHAT'S INSIDE:

Introduction: Exploring Bias	Cover
Promoting Father Involvement	2
Strengthening the Role of Fathers	4
Defining Paternity	5
Fathers in Family-Centered Practice	6
Demographic Information	7
Identifying Barriers Men Face in CW	8
Tips on Engaging Fathers in CW Work	9
Why Dads Matter	10
North State Dads Programs	11
Social Worker Self-Reflection	12
12 Ways to Be a Better Dad	14
Additional Resources	15
Announcements	Back Cover

Exploring the Bias against Fathers in the Child Welfare System

By Susan Brooks, Director, Northern California Training Academy, Center for Human Services, UC Davis Extension

Child welfare agencies and fathers of the families they serve have an uneasy, almost underground, relationship. While the majority of caseworkers believe involving non-resident fathers enhances a child's well-being in practice, it is not a regular occurrence. Reasons abound: workload size, difficulty locating fathers, discomfort in working with men and lack of institutional support.

Child welfare agencies historically have focused on the relationship between mothers and their children. This institutional bias is supported by the fact that mothers are recognized as the primary caregivers/nurturers and compounded by the fact that child welfare staff are predominantly women. Ironically, in the majority of child abuse cases the mother is the perpetrator while often the father is an absent, non-residential parent. Engaging absent fathers, while challenging, presents significant positive gains for children in the child welfare system.

Social workers must challenge misconceptions about why these fathers have stepped back from parenting. Fathers often believe they are not

necessary in their children's lives or avoid their children because they cannot comply with child support agreements. They may not have good relationships with their children's mothers or may be the father of just one of several children in a household. Also, these men may be incarcerated. Regardless of the reason, social workers need to separate the misconceptions from the reality in each situation.

It is easy to understand why these men are not engaged; however, fathers have a profound impact on their children. As both the data and anecdotal evidence in this *Reaching Out* issue make clear, children fare better when they have a relationship with their father. In the 1990s, fatherhood initiatives sprouted, both statewide and nationwide. Encouraged by the Administration of Health and Human Services, child welfare agencies evaluate how they engage fathers. Caseworkers receive training on how to engage fathers. Models like Family Decision Making encourage fathers to become part of the case planning team for their child in the child welfare system.

This issue of *Reaching Out* is devoted to looking at the subject of Fatherhood and Child Welfare. Along with several articles that spotlight current research and statistics, a number of articles give concrete tips to dads, administrators and social workers. Enjoy!

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Promoting Father Involvement in Child Welfare

There are many reasons why fathers and men are “missing” when it comes to child welfare. These reasons are often magnified by the distressed circumstances characteristic of the child welfare population. To address this absence of fathers, with the goal of creating greater accountability and responsibility on all sides, we need to begin with this cornerstone fact: Fathers and men are excluded within the policy, programs and practice of child welfare. To address the challenges of involving fathers in child welfare, we must understand the following:

Fatherhood is fragile. Non-residential fathers in child welfare are at very high risk for noninvolvement with their children. All child welfare professionals need to recognize the many possible reasons for this and not view it as either a father’s lack of interest in the children, the removal of a “risk factor,” or a means to streamline case planning. Instead, we need to shore up these fragile relationships.

Father involvement is closely connected to his relationship with the mother. The father’s relationship with the mother is the single greatest determinant of successful father involvement. Mothers exercise disproportionate control over parenting. Because of this, they need to understand and participate in a family system that is more open to male involvement but in ways that do not threaten their mother role. Mediation and negotiation to promote the advantages of a father’s involvement need to be ongoing for both mother and father.

Grandparents and extended family influence father involvement. The mother’s parents and kin also influence access to children. The mother’s parents’ acceptance or rejection

of the father can be critical to sustaining, rebuilding or eliminating a father’s role, and a father’s parents and kin are a resource for helping him develop a “father identity.”

We need to understand the dynamics of the intergenerational family. Service models, such as child and family team meetings, need to incorporate the knowledge and skills necessary to work with intergenerational dynamics to help fathers gain and maintain access to their children.

Father involvement requires understanding and using life transitions. Many fathers have difficulty sustaining emotional ties and social commitments when they experience risk factors such as substance abuse, poverty, mental health issues and unemployment. To keep them involved requires understanding and emphasizing life transitions. We need to give both residential and non-residential fathers opportunities to understand the changing roles that accompany major milestones such as pregnancy, birth and rearing a child. Not surprisingly, men may also need help with the transition from married or residential fatherhood to divorced or non-residential fatherhood, particularly with how to build continuity in the relationships that become fragile at these times.

Father involvement relies on integrating an employment dimension into child welfare. Successful father involvement depends on a practice based on a solid understanding of the difficulties and challenges of balancing work and family, especially within economically distressed circumstances.

We need to reconsider the link between a father’s unemployment and emotional disengagement and the tendency toward “punitive fathering” or tying a fathers’ involvement to his ability to meet child support payments. The highest risk factor for loss of fathers’ support and contact comes from the combined effects of unemployment and non-residential status.



Father involvement requires assistance in building relationships with community systems. Fathers whose families are involved with child welfare have the additional burdens of meeting the terms and complying with many community systems: the courts, child support agencies, child welfare, social/health/mental health services and schools. Without adequate community-based resources for coaching, brokering, advocating and supporting fathers, adding these tasks to a father's everyday life can be highly stressful. This stress often affects a father's relationship within the family.

Father involvement depends on fathers working with fathers. In the literature and program reviews on which these recommendations are based, peer support—fathers working with fathers—is the glue holding programs together. Child welfare workers who are male and have the knowledge and skills can also make a big difference. Father-to-father support within community-based partnerships works.

Conclusion

Addressing father and male involvement is not an easy task. The issue of father and male involvement is a deeply systemic one that touches on multiple points of the child welfare system. However, with thoughtful efforts, child welfare can improve father involvement enhancing safety, permanency and well being for children—and their fathers.

Excerpted from the article "Father Involvement in Child Welfare: Estrangement and Reconciliation." Best Practices/Next Practices. National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice, Summer 2002.

Study Reveals Dads are Marginalized in Child Welfare

In a national study looking at the participation of non-resident fathers whose children were involved in the child welfare system, the researchers found the following:

Most children removed from their homes by child welfare staff are not living with their fathers.

Only **88 percent** of non-resident fathers were identified in the child welfare case file.

In **63 percent** of the cases, paternity was established.

Caseworkers had contacted **55 percent** of the non-resident fathers at least once.

30 percent of the non-resident fathers had visited their child since placement.

28 percent of the non-resident fathers expressed an interest in assuming custody of their child.

Source: Issue Brief. "Child Welfare Casework with Nonresident Fathers of Children in Foster Care," prepared for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, December 2006. This Issue Brief is available online at: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/06/CW-involve-dads/ib.htm>



Strengthening the Role of Fathers in Child Welfare

When we talk about fathers and child welfare, we are primarily talking about fathers who don't live with their children—termed non-residential fathers. Most children in the child welfare system are living apart from their fathers at the time of intervention. According to the Urban Institute, approximately 72 percent of children served by child welfare agencies have non-custodial fathers, and approximately 80 percent of children in foster care have non-custodial fathers.¹

In regard to the issues of abuse and neglect, the majority of perpetrators are not fathers. According to Wilcox and Dew,² 18.3 percent of men were the sole perpetrators of the child abuse, and an additional 17.3 percent were co-perpetrators with the child's mother (citation "Protectors or Perpetrators? Fathers, Mothers, and Child Abuse and Neglect"). One percent of fathers abused their children with someone other than the children's mother for a total of 36.7 percent. In contrast, 64 percent of mothers were the perpetrators of abuse.

Furthermore, fathers may lose contact with their children while they are in the child welfare system. Although paternity is known for more than 80 percent of foster children with non-custodial fathers, only 54 percent of these children have had contact with their fathers in the year following placement.³

Yet the impact of fathers' continued contact with their children has a tremendous effect on the outcomes for these children as the following statements from the 2008 report "More About the Dads" attest⁴:

- Non-resident fathers' involvement with their children is associated with a higher likelihood of reunification and a lower likelihood of adoption. Children with highly involved non-resident fathers are also discharged from foster care more quickly than those with less or no involvement.
- Children with highly involved non-resident fathers have shorter case lengths than children whose non-resident fathers were less involved or not involved.
- Despite the focus put on men's role as providers, this is not the area where men have the most influence on their children. Children whose non-resident fathers provide non-financial support (i.e., emotional support) appear most likely to experience a reunification.

Also, contrary to the expressed fears of some caseworkers and child welfare administrators, non-resident fathers' contact with the child welfare agency and involvement with their children is not, in the aggregate, associated with subsequent maltreatment allegations. In fact, among children whose case outcome is reunification, usually with their mothers, higher levels of non-resident father involvement are associated with a substantially lower likelihood of subsequent maltreatment allegations.⁵

Establishing laws, tackling biases

With children's well-being so closely tied to father involvement, we might expect that the child welfare system would work hard to engage fathers, involve them in case planning and service provision, and provide them with the skills necessary to parent effectively. Unfortunately, the limited studies on this subject show that this is not usually the case.⁶

According to Kieran O'Hagan, "Men are sometimes avoided or ignored in all the specific phases of child protection work (i.e., in referral, investigation, intervention, case conference, care proceedings and fostering)." Other studies have shown that fathers had to demonstrate to caseworkers their connection to their children; whereas, the mothers' connection to their children was taken for granted. These same studies showed that birth fathers often were ignored as resources for discharge planning.⁷

In recognition of the value of working with fathers as an important piece of resolving permanency issues for children in placement with child welfare, the federal government passed the 1997 Adoptions and Safe Families Act that mandates including fathers in case planning as a way of broadening options for children in child welfare.⁸

Besides being required by law, including fathers supports the goals of improving a child's safety, permanency and well-being at every stage of the process.

¹ "Getting Non-Custodial Dads Involved In the Lives of Foster Children." Author Malm, Karin E. for Urban Institute Caring For Children Brief No. 3, November 2003.

² Research Brief. "Protectors or Perpetrators? Fathers, Mothers, and Child Abuse and Neglect." Authors Wilcox, W. Bradford, and Dew, Jeffrey for the Center for Marriage and Families, No. 7, January 2008.

³ "Getting Non-Custodial Dads Involved In the Lives of Foster Children." Author Malm, Karin E. for Urban Institute Caring For Children Brief No. 3, November 2003.

⁴ "More About the Dads: Exploring Associations between Nonresident Father Involvement and Child Welfare Case Outcomes." Authors Malm, K., Zielewski, E. and Chen, H. for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, 2008

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ "Father Involvement in Child Welfare: Estrangement and Reconciliation." Best Practices/Next Practices. National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice, Summer 2002.

⁷ "The problem of engaging men in child protection work." Author O'Hagan, K., *British Journal of Social Work*, 1997, No. 27, p.25-42.

⁸ Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare. *Practice Notes. Issue No. 15, March 2004.*



Defining Paternity

In the dependency courts, one of the very first questions that the bench officer must ask the parties is, Who is the father?

Questions to establish paternity

Welfare & Institutions Code section 316.2 sets forth seven specific questions that the juvenile court must ask at the detention hearing:

- Does a judgment of paternity already exist?
- Was the mother married or thought she was married at the time of conception or anytime thereafter?
- Was the mother living with a man at the time of conception or birth of the child?
- Has the mother received support payments or promises of support with respect to the child or in connection with the pregnancy?
- Has any man formally or informally acknowledged or declared his possible paternity including signing a Voluntary Declaration of Paternity?
- Have paternity tests been administered, and what were the results?
- Does any man otherwise qualify as a presumed father pursuant to Family Code?

Why these particular questions? The California Legislature enacted the Uniform Parentage Act in 1992 as part of the California Family Code. Sections 7611-7613 define who qualifies under the law as a father entitled to all of the rights and subject to all of the obligations of a parent. The questions that the juvenile court must ask are designed to elicit information relevant to the Family Code definitions.

Family Code definition of “natural” father

A “natural” father is one who is presumed to be the father by virtue of one of the following:

- His marriage or attempted marriage to the mother and the child’s birth during that marriage or within 300 days of the end of the marriage. This presumed status is conclusive (it cannot be subject to legal challenge) if the husband is not sterile or impotent. (California Family Code section 7540).
- After the child’s birth, the man and the natural mother have married or attempted to marry and either, with his consent, he is named on the birth certificate, or he is obligated to support the child under a voluntary promise or court order.
- He receives the child into his home and openly holds out the child as his natural child.

Voluntary declaration of paternity

This document, signed by both parents, establishes a presumption of paternity, unless a blood test proves otherwise (see California Family Code sections 7570-7577).

This presumption that a particular man is indeed the child’s natural father is subject to challenge (except the man who was married and was not impotent or sterile). If there is more than one man entitled to a presumption, then the court must give greater weight to the man whose facts demonstrate a furtherance of logic or public policy. According to the great numbers of cases interpreting paternity determinations, the greater public policy good is founded on the relationship, not the biological connection. In fact, biology does not even enter into the presumed father definitions. *A man may in fact be the biological father, but if he was not married to the mother, he cannot achieve the status of “natural” father without falling into one of the section 7611 categories.*

There is much litigation in the courts regarding paternity; therefore, the question should be resolved very early (between the filing of a petition and the Jurisdiction/Disposition phase of the dependency proceedings). This should be a priority for good social work practice.



Fathers in Family-Centered Child Welfare Practices

Fathers can reasonably be included in every stage of child welfare practice. Besides being required, this inclusion, in fact, enhances this practice. What follows is a father-friendly version of procedures for the stages of good casework.¹

Assessment. Comprehensive assessments include all family members; therefore, fathers and paternal family are an active part in the ongoing assessment process. Initial assessments include the strengths, needs, resources/assets and supports of the father and paternal family. Services and/or supports needed by the father are also identified. Assessments explore fathers' and paternal family members' willingness and ability to ensure the safety, permanency and well-being of the child. The assessment process is ongoing, and information is continually gathered and regularly updated.

Safety planning. Fathers and paternal family are actively involved in the development of a safety plan based on information and support of team members. Fathers and paternal family members should be considered as informal service providers in the safety plan, for example, as relative (kinship) placement providers or to supervise visits between child and parent(s).

Out-of-home placement. Before placing a child in an unrelated home, fathers' and paternal family members' homes are assessed for placement. Fathers are included in the discussion and in determining the best placement for the child. Foster parents, group home staff, residential treatment staff, hospital staff and adoptive parents are encouraged to build and maintain partnerships with birth or adoptive fathers. The child welfare agency provides services and supports to establish and maintain father-child relations through telephone and mail contact, visitation and case planning activities.

Implementation of service plan. Fathers are actively involved in setting goals, and they are encouraged to express their opinions, concerns, requests or questions about the services needed. Services are created and provided to meet the individualized needs of the father and/or paternal family members. Services must be accessible to working fathers. Father support groups address issues related to fatherhood such as empowering men to take an active role in parenting, emotional issues, child development and developing key skills such as anger management, positive discipline and basic parenting techniques. Service providers emphasize the importance of child relationships with both mother and father.

Permanency planning. Fathers are involved in all reviews of the service plan and in the development of the child's permanency plan including concurrent planning. Caseworkers ensure that fathers have a clear understanding of the permanency plan and emphasize the importance of their role in the development and implementation of the plan. Fathers not only receive court notices regarding permanency hearing but are also contacted by their caseworker to discuss the hearing and the agency's recommendations to the court.

Re-evaluation of service plan. Fathers are included in the sharing of information among other family members,

children, support teams and service providers to ensure that intervention strategies can be modified as needed to support positive outcomes. Fathers help monitor service provision and provide continuous feedback to the team so progress and modifications to services are made.

Worker training. Research shows that training on engaging male clients makes a big difference. Workers who received training on how to engage and work with fathers were better able to both locate and involve fathers in their cases.²

Other implications for effective casework³

- Search for fathers early in the case. When caseworkers learned both the name and location of the father at the time of the case opening, there was an 80 percent chance the caseworker would make contact with the father. This dropped to 13 percent if the worker found out the father's name and location after the case had been opened for more than 30 days.⁴
- Consult a wide variety of information sources in order to identify and locate fathers. No single information source (other than the child's mother) was likely to consistently provide contact information for the father. Caseworkers need to know what steps they should consider when mothers do not know or share information about the child's father.
- Assess safety issues individually. Caseworkers and administrators express sincere and legitimate concerns about the safety of the children and mothers they work with, as well as for their own safety, when dealing with fathers with histories of violence. Such concerns must be acknowledged and assessed at the case level. However, the fact that nearly half of the fathers were never contacted by the agency suggests that fathers are often excluded without an assessment of the actual risk presented.
- Consider a range of ways non-resident fathers could be involved in the lives of children in foster care. There is considerable room for improvement in activities that engage non-resident fathers on behalf of their children in ways that could extend beyond the child's stay in foster care and support whatever permanency goal is in the child's best interest.

Including fathers in their children's child welfare case may entail some extra work for caseworkers, but it is vital for putting together a complete team and giving these children the best chance at growing up in a safe, healthy and permanent home.

¹ "A Snapshot: Including Fathers in Family-Centered Child Welfare Services." *Best Practice/Next Practice*, National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice, Summer 2002.

² "What About the Dads? Child Welfare Agencies' Efforts to Identify, Locate and Involve Nonresident Fathers." Authors Malm K., Murray J. and Geen R., for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, 2006.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

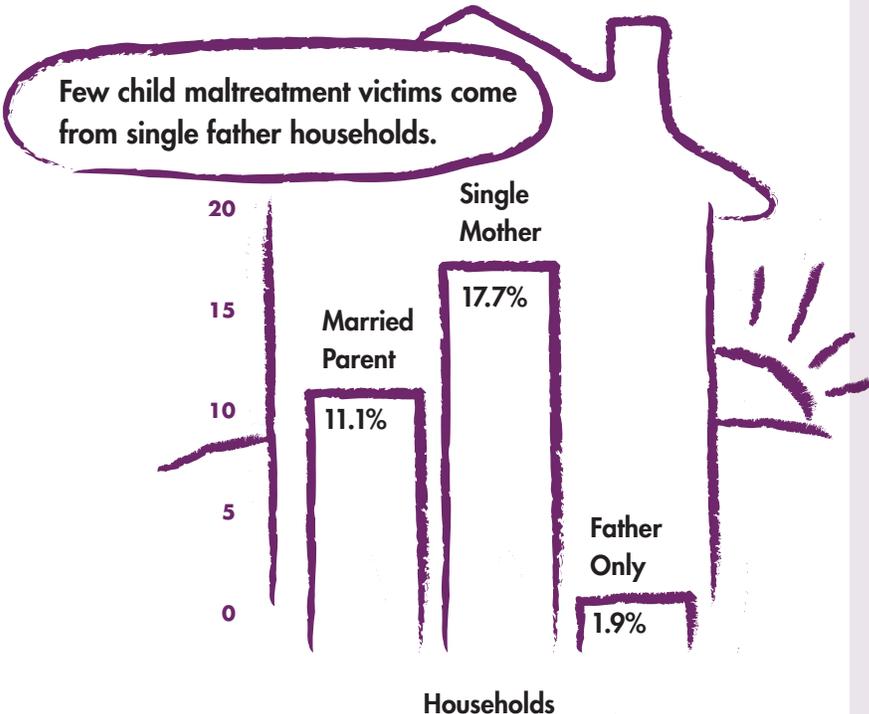
Demographic Information on Non-Resident Fathers

More than 25 million American children (or 34 percent of children in the U.S.) live without their biological father (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). These numbers are higher among some minority groups. Half of all African-American children (50.3 percent), one in four Hispanic children (24.1 percent) and one in six white children (17.5 percent) live with single mothers (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

National changes in children's living arrangements have also caused a shift in the traditional paradigm of the mother, father and child household. Of the 74.1 million children under 18 years old living in the United States in 2008, 69.9 percent (51.8 million) were living with two parents (not necessarily biological), 62.7 percent (46.4 million) were living with both biological parents, 22.8 percent (16.9 million) were living with their mother only, 3.5 percent (2.6 million) were living with their father only and 3.8 percent (2.8 million) were living with neither parent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

Father Facts: Fifth Edition, a publication from the National Fatherhood Initiative in 2007, discusses how these living situations may impact children:

- Compared to living with both parents, living in a single-parent home doubles the risk that a child will suffer physical, emotional or educational neglect (America's Children, 1997).
- Analyzing a group of 8th graders who initially resided with both biological parents, children in households that had experienced a change in family structure had school dropout rates two to three times higher than peers whose families did not change (Pong, 2000).
- Children in father-absent homes are nearly five times more likely to be poor. In 2008, 6.7 percent of children in married-couple families were living in poverty compared to 31.4 percent of children in female-only households (U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2009 Annual Social and Economic Supplement).
- In an analysis of data collected from 26,023 adolescents ages 13 to 18, the teens living in single-parent households were more likely to engage in premarital sex than those living in two parent households (Lammers, 2000).
- Few child abuse and/or neglect victims came from single father households. Of the 28 states reporting, 11.1 percent of child victims of abuse, neglect or abandonment were from married parent households while 17.7 percent of victims came from single mother households and 1.9 percent of victims came from father only households. (Data collected by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for Child Maltreatment 2005).



Excepted and updated from "Non-Resident Fathers, Paternal Kin and the Child Welfare System," a 2007 Literature Review by the American Humane Association, American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law, and the National Fatherhood Initiative. Available online at Northern California Training Academy website at www.humanservices.ucdavis.edu/academy/resources.asp



Identifying and Overcoming Barriers Men Face When Working with Child Welfare

Child welfare agencies have a poor track record for successfully reaching and engaging the fathers of the families they serve. Fathers encounter numerous barriers when their families are involved with child welfare including workers' lack of skill in how to work with dads.

There are two types of barriers to men working with child welfare agencies: personal and institutional.

Personal Barriers Men May Face when Working with Child Welfare Agencies

- Many men whose families are involved with child welfare also struggle with multiple problems in their lives such as financial insecurity, unstable housing or substance abuse.
- Fathers may be concerned with the relationship they imagine between child welfare and child support. They may be behind on child support payments or have an order that is more than they can regularly pay. Because they are in arrears, they stay away from child welfare.
- Fathers may be incarcerated and have a difficult time staying in regular contact with their children.
- Ex-offenders also may avoid professionals who they see as asking too many questions because they associate frequent questioning with law enforcement. They may be more likely to believe that contacting child welfare will get them in trouble with the law.
- Mothers are often the gatekeepers of information for child welfare. They may not want child welfare to find and work with their children's fathers.
- A father may not have confidence in his own parenting skills and may have relinquished his parenting responsibilities to his child's mother.
- The stereotypes of masculinity deter men who adhere to traditional gender roles from seeking help. Many tasks associated with help seeking, such as relying on others, admitting that one needs help and presenting oneself as vulnerable, conflict with traditional concepts of what it means to be a man.

Institutional Barriers Men May Face When Working with Child Welfare

- Due to the strong female orientation of the child welfare system, fathers may feel the entire system lacks a male perspective on how to approach and resolve problems. For example, they may see the system as focusing on feelings instead of on problem solving.
- Men may be less trusting of institutions like child welfare because they have such a poor track record of working with them. They may also see them as favoring mothers over fathers. They don't see child welfare as valuing their role with their children nor do they feel that child welfare will take their interests seriously. Like most people, fathers have great difficulty trusting and participating in systems in which they don't feel valued.
- Fathers are more likely to have work commitments during the day and so cannot get to the child welfare office when it is open.
- Distrust of the child welfare system is also fueled by negative biases many professionals have about fathers. Fathers who sense these derogatory attitudes about them during their first meetings with child welfare staff are unlikely to cooperate in the future.
- There may be no father-specific programming offered or appropriate outreach to dads.

Given these barriers to men getting involved with child welfare, some practical tips for how to engage men are presented here.



Tips on How to Engage Fathers in Child Welfare Work

Recognize the father's life circumstances, perform thoughtful and targeted outreach, and remove the barriers to his meeting with you.

- Look into additional services, such as job placement and substance abuse counseling either through the agency or in the community.
- Explain how criminal charges, immigration status and child support payments may affect the case. Help alleviate any fears the father may have about getting involved because of these issues.

Use the strengths of traditional masculinity while addressing self-defeating beliefs about getting help.

- Discuss with the father his beliefs about what it means to be a good man and father.
- Help him understand how a father's absence affects a child's life and the positive impact when a father is present and involved with his child.
- Affirm those aspects of traditional masculinity that will enhance his performance as a father, such as his desire to protect his children and his willingness to work hard for long hours (and in difficult conditions) to be a good provider.
- Point out that it takes guts to seek and accept help and that it takes courage to deal with the child welfare system.
- Point out that every man needs help from time to time and that you can help "cover his back" as he works with the system.
- Explore with him the problems that can occur if he decides to go it alone or to attack the system in an overly macho fashion.
- If he is a very traditional male, he is likely to set aside his strong need to address his problems on his own if he feels he is part of a team because traditional men are used to forming friendships and completing tasks in groups. Invite him to form a team with you, suggesting that the two of you will tackle the issues that arise in his case together.
- Explore with him his hopes and dreams for his children, and then explain how you can help him devise a plan for working with the child welfare system to help make those hopes and dreams a reality.

Address any negative biases you might have about fathers.

- Recognize that fathers are complex. Although some fit the stereotype of the man who is unconcerned about his children, many others care deeply about their children's well-being and have the capacity to be outstanding fathers.
- Maintain an open mind and a positive perspective with each new father you meet.

- Look for and affirm fathers who want to be a constructive presence in their children's lives.

Learn and practice male-friendly, rapport-building tactics.

- Although your work with fathers involves serious matters, try to make your early conversations warm, friendly and informal.
- If possible, have all phone calls held until your session with the father is over, which lets you give him your undivided attention while communicating that his concerns are your priority.
- Greet him with a firm handshake and a reassuring smile.
- Offer him a soft drink or a snack to help him relax.
- Sit or take a walk with him side-by-side, rather than face-to-face, as you get to know him.
- Share a little bit about your own life and background.
- Ask him about his work and interests and respond positively.
- Be knowledgeable about and prepared to discuss important events in his community.
- If appropriate, use slang that is common in the community, and ask him to explain any local expressions you might not understand.
- Try infusing a joke into your conversations with him from time to time, which is a common tactic men use with each other to diffuse tension (e.g., make a humorous, self-deprecating comment about yourself or engage him in some good-natured ribbing to loosen him up).

Request in-service workshops on fathers which promote awareness, knowledge and skills.

- Encourage child welfare and court administrators to provide training about fathers and their needs. Workshops should cover: a) awareness-raising activities designed to help professionals examine their biases about fathers and explore how any personal issues with men might affect their work with fathers; b) information about the characteristics, hardships and needs of fathers; and c) education about how to help fathers in a male-friendly manner.
- Since ethnic-minority populations are overrepresented among fathers whose children are in the child welfare system, diversity training is an essential part of continuing education workshops.

Advocate for father-supportive policies.

- Support or promote legislative or policy reforms that increase involvement of fathers in child welfare cases. These may include funding for programs specifically targeting fathers, child support reform and support for incarcerated fathers so they can stay in touch with their children.

Excerpted from "Understanding Male Help-Seeking Behaviors," Author Mark S. Kinselica. Chapter Two of Advocating for Non-Resident Fathers in Child Welfare Court Cases, 2009. American Bar Association and the American Humane Association. Available online at www.abanet.org/child/fathers/advocatingfornon-residenfathersbook.pdf.



Why Dads Matter in Their Children's Lives

Sociologist David Popenoe stated, "Fathers are far more than just 'second adults' in the home. Involved fathers bring positive benefits to their children that no other person is as likely to bring."¹ Specifically, fathers impact their children's healthy development in the following areas:

Cognitive development and educational achievement:

Children with involved, caring fathers have better educational outcomes than those who don't. Toddlers with involved fathers start school with higher levels of academic readiness. They are more patient and can handle the stresses and frustrations associated with schooling more readily than children with less involved fathers. The influence of an active and nurturing style of fathering extends into adolescence and young adulthood.²

Psychological well-being and social behavior: Even from birth, children who have an involved father are more likely to be emotionally secure, be confident to explore their surroundings and, as they grow older, have better social connections with peers. These children also are less likely to get in trouble at home, school or in the neighborhood.³

The way fathers play with their children also has an important impact on a child's emotional and social development. Fathers spend a much higher percentage of their one-on-one interaction in stimulating, playful activity than do mothers. From these interactions, children learn how to regulate their feelings and behavior. Rough-housing with dad, for example, can teach children how to deal with aggressive impulses and physical contact without losing control of their emotions.⁴

One study of school-aged children found that children with good relationships with their fathers were less likely to experience depression, to exhibit disruptive behavior or to lie and were more likely to exhibit pro-social behavior. In addition, numerous studies have found that children who live with their fathers are more likely to have good physical and emotional health, to achieve academically and to avoid drugs, violence and delinquent behavior.⁵

Financial security: Family self-sufficiency is greatly enhanced, even in poorly paid sectors of the economy, where father involvement is strong.⁶

The mother/father relationship: Finally, when fathers have a respectful, productive relationship with their children's mothers, even if they are no longer partners, their children will grow up happier and more secure.⁷

Fathers greatly enhance the quality of their children's lives. Understanding the positive impact that fathers have on their children is an important tool in a child welfare worker's toolbox. It will help caseworkers overcome some of the challenges they may face when working with families to help them protect their children's well-being and ensure they have safe, permanent homes.

1 *Life without father: Compelling new evidence that fatherhood and marriage are indispensable for the good of children and society.* Author Popenoe, D., 1996. (p. 163).

2 "The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children," *The Fatherhood User Manual.* Child Welfare Information Gateway. Authors Rosenberg, Jeffrey and Wilcox, W. Bradford for Office on Child Abuse and Neglect, U.S. Children's Bureau, 2006.

3 *Ibid*, (p. 12).

4 *Ibid*, (p. 13).

5 *Ibid*, (p. 13).

6 "Father Involvement in Child Welfare: Estrangement and Reconciliation." *Best Practices/Next Practices.* National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice, Summer 2002.

<http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/downloads/newsletter/BPNPSummer02.pdf>.

7 "The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children," *The Fatherhood User Manual.* Child Welfare Information Gateway. Authors Rosenberg, Jeffrey and Wilcox, W. Bradford for Office on Child Abuse and Neglect, U.S. Children's Bureau, 2006. (p. 11).

North State Dads Programs Help Struggling Fathers

Caring for young children is a challenge for any parent. For those parents struggling with substance abuse issues, taking responsibility for a child's well-being may not even seem possible. Standard parenting classes are not a realistic option for those parents, particularly fathers, who are recovering from addiction.

Most assistance programs designed for fathers are centered on improving the father's ability to care for his children financially. While this is, of course, vitally important to a child's well-being, teaching fathers how to be engaged parents is equally important, if not more.

Counties like Tehama and Trinity have developed programs that help fathers with substance abuse issues successfully care for their children.

Tehama Dads Program

Tehama County Health Services Agency's Drug and Alcohol Division has been running its Dads Program since 2004. The program provides services to parenting men (primarily fathers, step-fathers and grandfathers) who have substance abuse issues and are parenting children ages zero to five. The program focuses on helping parenting men recognize that the mental, physical and emotional health of their children will improve if these same areas improve in themselves.

According to Sue McVean, director of Tehama County's Drug and Alcohol Division, "Men play a very important role in the lives of the children they are parenting. They have been left out of the family equation for far too long."

To date, more than 120 men have participated in the Tehama County program which now meets three days each week. Parenting men participate in outpatient treatment groups on Wednesdays and Fridays and parenting classes and a parent/child lab on Mondays. Transportation is provided all three days.

The parenting classes and parent/child lab are taught by a parent educator through a contract with Head Start, McVean explains. "The sessions are designed to introduce fathers to best practices derived from the latest research on early childhood development."

And in the parent/child lab, dads and their children enjoy bonding activities such as playing soccer, building cardboard racecars and racing them, cooking and building stick ponies to ride in a "rodeo."

In addition to participating in the program's education and treatment sessions, fathers receive intensive case management to assist them in overcoming barriers to recovery and, for some, successful reunification with their children. Some of the other case management services fathers receive include linkage to community resources, assistance with scheduling appointments and transportation to appointments.

McVean takes pride in the success of the program and notes that her greatest challenge at the moment is expansion. "We have parenting men who work during the day and are unable to participate in the day program. If additional funding became available, we would expand the program to a second track held during the early evening to meet the needs of working dads and their children."

Trinity Fathers Group

In January, Trinity County launched its first Nurturing Parenting for Fathers Group. Unlike in Tehama County where there is a need to expand its dads program, Trinity's biggest challenge has been launching such a highly specialized program in a county of fewer than 15,000 residents.

"We need a minimum number of dads to hold the classes and have had struggles getting a large enough group together," explains Jessica Iford of Trinity County Child Protective Services.

The fathers group is open to custodial and non-custodial fathers in inactive or aftercare cases. Classes will focus on learning how to be a father and improving father-child interaction.

Despite the existing need, Trinity County has never had classes specifically for fathers—thus its administrators look forward to getting the program off the ground and watching it grow.

Tehama and other counties are seeing firsthand how programs and services that assist parenting men have a profoundly positive impact not only on the fathers, but on the entire family.

Parenting programs for incarcerated fathers

A collaborative effort between Prevent Child Abuse Kentucky and the Blackburn Correctional Complex, the **F.A.C.T. Program** teaches incarcerated fathers responsible parenthood and abuse prevention. Participants and graduates of the program are entitled to special visits with their children in less restrictive environments. For more information, visit the Prevent Child Abuse Kentucky website at www.pcaky.org/fact.html

The Long Distance Dads Program in Pennsylvania helps incarcerated men develop skills to become more involved and supportive fathers and empowers them to assume responsibility for their children during and after incarceration.

Storybook programs offered in prisons throughout the country are another positive way to foster a father's engagement with his children.

Self-Reflection for Workers in Child Welfare

The child welfare system has been focused on mothers to the exclusion of fathers for most of its history. An important step toward changing this culture and becoming more inclusive of fathers is for child welfare workers to reflect on their own attitudes, beliefs and actions about including fathers in their casework. Here are some statements devised by the Butler Institute for Families in Denver, Colorado, to help workers with this process of reflection.

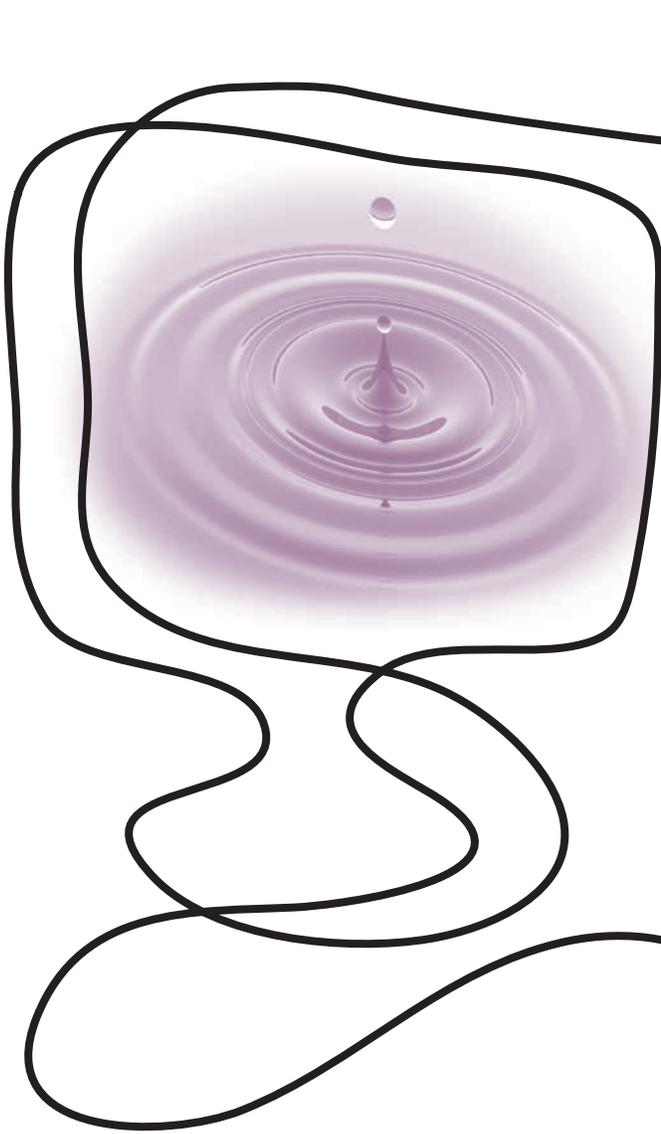
- I think about the ways my personal family experiences influence my work with fathers.
- I seek to understand the stereotypes and biases that I may have and how those affect my work with fathers.
- I counsel children whose fathers are not involved in their lives to adjust and move on. I think that is best.
- I feel relieved when I learn that the bio-dads are absent and won't be involved in a case.
- I believe that the mother's role and continued presence is far more important than the father's.
- I believe that it is important for children to have some connection to non-custodial fathers even if they are incarcerated.
- I am familiar with the statistics regarding the incidence of abuse and neglect perpetrated by fathers.

- I make decisions about when and how to nurture relationships between absent fathers and children based on research and best practice rather than assumption and stereotypes.
- I understand that fathers parent differently from mothers.
- I can articulate the legal requirements for and best practice benefits of establishing paternity at birth.
- I know which resources and services in my community are father friendly.
- I can articulate agency and institutional barriers that prevent fathers from remaining involved in children's lives.
- I can list several strategies that qualify as "diligent search" when it comes to locating absent fathers.
- I seek out education, consultation and training to improve my effectiveness in working with fathers.
- I know how to communicate with mothers so that they share accurate information about absent fathers, and I help them to understand the importance of fathers in the lives of their children.
- I use different skills to engage fathers than I use to engage mothers.
- I assist fathers in negotiating system barriers.
- I advocate for changes that will better serve fathers and their families.
- I educate the fathers with whom I work regarding the child welfare system, goals, expectations and legal rights.
- I facilitate the involvement of extended family in case planning regardless of whether a father is incarcerated, remote or otherwise removed.

Caseworkers and child welfare agencies can use these reflective statements to identify attitudes that may be a barrier to fostering father involvement and those that promote the process of building a father-friendly agency.

Excerpted from Follow-Up Notes 05—Fatherhood and Child Welfare; Butler Institute for Families.





Policies and practices within the child welfare agency and the courts affect how much effort caseworkers make to identify and locate fathers.

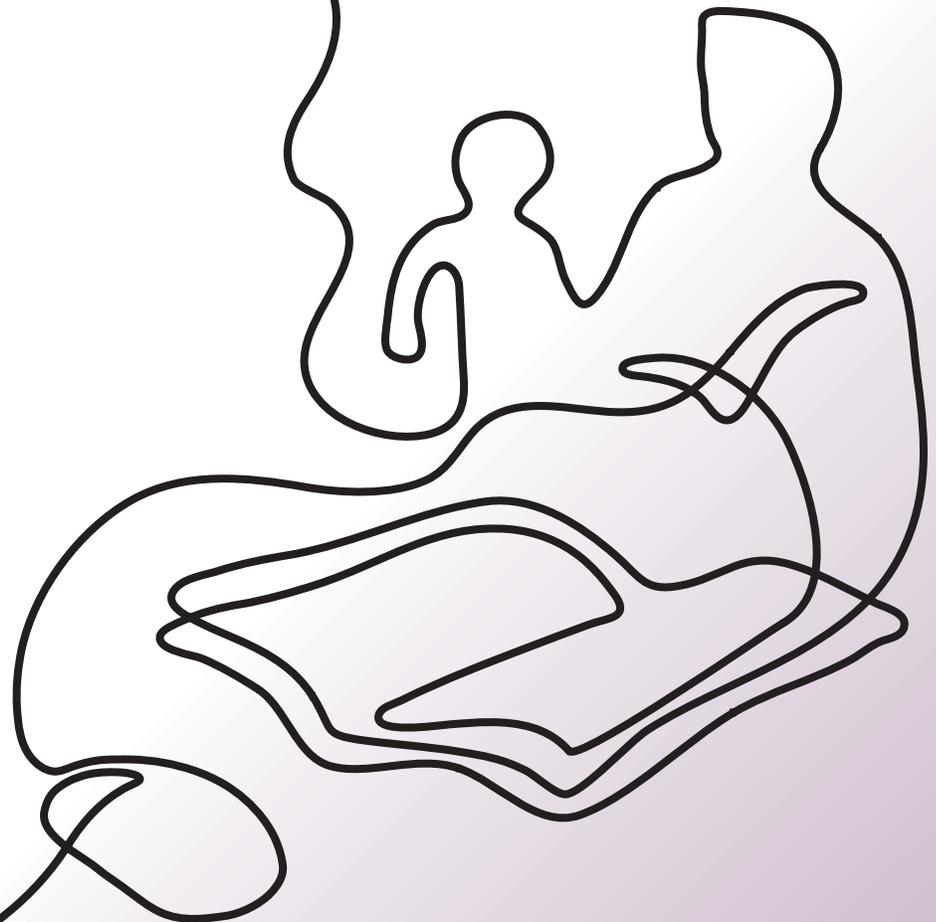
If the policies and practices reflect minimal commitment to father involvement, there is little likelihood that efforts will be made to locate and identify them. If policies and practices reflect more than minimal commitment, the ease or difficulty of identifying and locating the father could mean the difference between involvement and noninvolvement.

Source: "What About the Dads? Child Welfare Agencies' Efforts to Identify, Locate and Involve Non-resident Fathers." Authors Malm K., Murray J. and Geen R. for U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, 2006.

The Father Friendly Check-Up for Social Services and Programs

The National Fatherhood Initiative created the Father Friendly Check-Up for Social Services and Programs as a tool for agencies to use to assess how successfully they involve fathers in their programs. You can access the Check-Up, enter your agency's responses online and receive a score for how father-friendly your program services are. Your agency can then use the score from the Check-Up to set goals and identify priorities for improving how you provide services to children, fathers and families.

Access the Check-Up online at www.fatherhood.org/checkupsocial.asp



12

Ways to Be a Better Dad

Children need both their parents. Involved fathers can help children lead lives that are happier, healthier and more successful than children whose fathers are absent or uninvolved.

The following 12 tips are based on research results detailing the seven dimensions of effective fathering:

1. Respect your children's mother

One of the best things a father can do for his children is to respect their mother. If you live with your children's mother, respect and support her. If you don't live with her, regardless of how you may feel, you need to treat her with respect—for your children's sake. When children see their parents showing each other respect, they are more likely to feel they are also accepted and respected.

2. Spend time with your children

How you spend your time tells your children what is important to you. If you always seem too busy for your children, they will feel neglected no matter what you say.

If you don't live with your children, don't spend the time you have together doing just fun activities. Spend time doing ordinary things with them such as helping with homework or preparing meals together. Generally, you will discover more about your children doing the ordinary tasks of daily life than eating popcorn with them in a darkened movie theater.

3. Earn the right to be heard

All too often, the only time a father speaks to his children is when they have done something wrong. Begin talking with your kids when they are very young so that difficult subjects will be easier to handle as they get older. Take time and listen to their ideas and problems.

4. Discipline with love

All children need guidance and discipline, not as punishment, but to set reasonable limits. Remind your children of the consequences of their actions and provide meaningful rewards for desirable behavior. Fathers who discipline in a calm and fair manner show love for their children.

Non-residential fathers often feel they should go easy on their children when it comes to discipline. This is a big mistake. Children will take advantage of this by pushing the limit even more. If you don't live with your children, you should still be a firm, consistent disciplinarian. Children who are disciplined well are better behaved and more respectful of their fathers than children who aren't.

5. Be a role model

Fathers are role models for their kids whether they realize it or not. A girl who spends time with a loving father grows up knowing she deserves to be treated with respect by men. Fathers can teach sons what is important in life by demonstrating honesty, humility and responsibility.

6. Be a teacher

Teach your children about right and wrong. Encourage them to do their best. Involved fathers use everyday examples to help their children learn the basic lessons of life.

7. Eat together as a family

Sharing a meal together can be an important part of healthy family life. In addition to providing some structure in a busy day, it gives kids the chance to talk about what they are doing. It is also a good time for you to listen and give advice. Finally, it is a time for you to be together.

8. Read to your children

In a world where children watch an average of four hours of television each day, it is important that you make the effort to read to your children. Reading to your children both nurtures their own love of reading and is a bonding activity you share. Reading to your children will also help them do better in school.

9. Show affection

Showing affection every day is the best way to let your children know that you love them. Children need the security that comes from knowing they are wanted, accepted and loved by their family. One of the best ways to do this is to hug your children.

10. Realize that a father's job is never done

Even after your children are grown and ready to leave home, they will still look to you for wisdom and advice. You will always play an essential part in your children's lives.

Additional tips for fathers who don't live with their children

11. Keep your promises

Children who have endured parent break-ups often feel abandoned and distrustful of the adults in their lives. You need to be careful to nurture or restore your children's faith in adults and in you, in particular. Be sure to keep the promises you make to your children. If this means promising less, fine, but you need to earn your children's trust by keeping your word.

12. Stay in regular contact

Even if you don't live with your children, stay in regular touch. If you live close by, see your kids regularly. If you live farther away or are incarcerated, be faithful about calling or sending a letter or email to your children every week. Children thrive on maintaining regular contact with their fathers.

Excerpted and adapted from "The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children." The Fatherhood User Manual. Authors Rosenberg, Jeffrey and Wilcox, W. Bradford. Office on Child Abuse and Neglect, U.S. Children's Bureau; 2006. Available on the web at: <http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/fatherhood>. Downloaded 9/17/09.

Additional Resources

ORGANIZATION WEBSITES

Administration for Children and Families
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
www.acf.hhs.gov

Administration on Children, Youth and Families
www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/acyf

Children's Bureau
www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb

National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning
www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/tta/nrcfcppp.htm

American Humane Society
www.americanhumane.org

Butler Institute for Families, University of Denver
Publishes "Fatherhood in Child Welfare." training handouts and bulletins
www.thebutlerinstitute.org/

Family-Centered Assessment
Child Welfare Information Gateway
www.childwelfare.gov/famcentered/casework/assessment.cfm

National Headstart Institute on Father Involvement
Has a series of practical chapters called "Building Blocks for Father Involvement" that can be adapted to child welfare.
www.hsnrc.org/fatherhood

National Family Preservation Network (NFPN)
Online course available on promoting father involvement
www.nfpn.org

National Fatherhood Initiative
www.fatherhood.org

National Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System
This is a collaborative effort among the American Humane Association, the American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law, and the National Fatherhood Initiative. It is funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau.
www.abanet.org/child/fathers

National Resource Center on Children and Families of the Incarcerated Family and Corrections Network
<http://fcnetwork.org>

National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections
Hunter College School of Social Work
<http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/>

Northern California Training Academy
Center for Human Services
UC Davis Extension, University of California
www.humanservices.ucdavis.edu/academy

Promoting Responsible Fatherhood Federal Resource Site
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
<http://fatherhood.hhs.gov>

REPORTS/ LITERATURE REVIEWS



“Non-Resident Fathers, Paternal Kin and the Child Welfare System”

2007 Literature Review by the American Humane Association, American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law, and the National Fatherhood Initiative. Available online at Northern California Training Academy website at www.humanservices.ucdavis.edu/academy/resources.asp

“The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children—The Fatherhood Manual; The Fatherhood User Manual”

Office on Child Abuse and Neglect, U.S. Children's Bureau, Authors Rosenberg, Jeffrey and Wilcox, W. Bradford. 2006.

Available online at www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/fatherhood/

“What About the Dads? Child Welfare Agencies' Efforts to Identify, Locate and Involve Nonresident Fathers”

Report prepared by The Urban Institute for U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation with funding from the Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, and Children's Bureau. April 2006. Full report located at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/06/CW-involve-dads/index.htm>

See also "More About the Dads" and "A Study of Fathers' Involvement in Permanency Planning and Child Welfare Casework" by the same office.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Fatherhood: Principles, Policies and Practices to Engage Fathers in their Children's Lives

This course teaches the Fatherhood Training Curriculum developed by the National Family Preservation Network. All aspects of increasing fathers involvement within the child welfare system are explored.

April 21 - Redding

May 19 - Davis

For more information, visit our website at www.humanservices.ucdavis.edu/academy

Family-Centered Child Welfare Practice FREE Webinars

The Academy is proud to present the following FREE webinars:

Team Decision Making, Family Group Decision Making, Family Team Meetings, Family Engagement, Participatory Case Planning: Help I am so Confused

Dates: February 10, February 24

Time: 10:30 a.m.-noon

Meeting the Specific Needs of Families, Part 1: Addressing Domestic Violence in Family Team Meetings

Date: February 10

Time: Noon-1:30 p.m.

Meeting the Specific Needs of Families, Part 2: Addressing Alcohol and Other Drug Issues in Family Team Meetings

Date: March 3, March 10

Time: 10:30 a.m. - noon

To learn more, visit our website at www.humanservices.ucdavis.edu/academy and click on the Webinars link.

About the Northern California Training Academy

As part of the Center for Human Services at UC Davis Extension, the Northern California Training Academy provides training, technical assistance and consultation for 29 Northern California counties. The counties include rural and urban counties with various training challenges for child welfare staff. The focus on integrated training across disciplines is a high priority in the region. This publication is supported by funds from the California Department of Social Services.

About The Center for Human Services

The Center for Human Services at UC Davis Extension began 30 years ago as a partnership between the University of California, Davis and state government to address the needs of rural counties in developing skills for their social workers. Through professional training, consultation and research, the Center has grown to serve human services organizations and professionals throughout California and across the nation in such practice areas as child welfare, tribal social services, probation, developmental disabilities and other mental health issues, early childhood education, adult protective services, public assistance eligibility, corrections and more.

In Our Next Issue

Look for more articles, research, success stories and resources in our next issue of *Reaching Out*.

Themes from Our Past Issues

Spring/Summer 2009 - Concurrent Planning: Existing Challenges and New Possibilities

Fall 2008 ~ Visiting: New Guidelines for Child Welfare Social Workers

Spring 2008 ~ Children and Incarcerated Parents

Fall 2007 ~ Permanency, Part II: Continuing Our Focus on Current Issues

Spring 2007 ~ Permanency, Part I

Fall 2006 ~ Alcohol and Drug Abuse in Today's Child Welfare System

Spring 2006 ~ Native American Communities and the Child Welfare System

Summer 2005 ~ What is Rural Practice, Anyway?

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