



Recruitment and Retention: Preparing for and Following Through on Group Connections

By William Scott

Recruitment can be the hardest part of organizing a fatherhood group connection program. If your recruitment and retention efforts are successful, eventually your clients and former participants will make this task easier, but starting from scratch is a challenge.

Putting in legwork before and after group connections is crucial to establishing a successful program. Well-planned events and personalized follow-up can help capture fathers' full attention and keep them engaged.

Preparation

- > Start with yourself. Look for trainings in your area on the subject of male or father involvement.
- > Take an assessment of your environment or classroom. Are there pictures of men with children? What colors are themes are used?
- > Operate on a schedule that is flexible for fathers who work or go to school.
- > Survey prospective participants to see what their own interests are and what they want their children to learn.
- > Ask dads in your program to help during upcoming group connections. For example, find out where their talents lie, then ask them to come in and demonstrate a "how-to" for the children. Or invite dads to read a favorite book or tell a story.
- > Invite participants' children to sing a song or recite a poem at meetings.
- > Providing a meal is a good way to attract the whole family, especially dads!

Reaching out

- > Get other staff members on board. Ask them to share ideas and receive training on providing opportunities for involving dads.
- > Recruit program staff who can relate to fathers, be caring, and gain fathers' trust. Important background requirements include training in working with fathers and an understanding of the importance of fathers. Recruits should be strong role models with the attributes your program is promoting.
- > Your staff should have an ample amount of time, flexibility, and resources to recruit. Train them to address any excuse that fathers can come up with for not attending group connections.
- > Mothers are a great way to find and involve fathers. Contact the department of social services, schools, or other local organizations that offer programs for mothers and teen mothers. Learn what they offer and share ideas about how your program can connect with theirs. When you speak with mothers, start by explaining how your group will be beneficial to their whole family.





- > Contact agencies who work specifically with men and fathers and ask them for tips and strategies. They may also be willing to talk to their clients about your program. For example, having family support workers recruit in a center-based program adds a trust factor that's very important.
- > Get acquainted with probation and parole officers, health clinic workers, school guidance counselors, coaches, and after-school program coordinators. Try to meet with each person individually – this will make a stronger impression than sending them a letter or placing a phone call. Leave them with written information they can pass on to their clients.
- > Local celebrities and sports figures are good resources for spreading awareness of your program, as are local television and radio personalities. Don't forget about minor league teams too.
- > If you operate in a center-based program, the children are a secret weapon. Have the kids make invitations and give them to their dads personally.
- > Don't be disappointed if you only get a few commitments from fathers at first.

At the group connection

- > It's OK if you have fewer fathers at your first meeting than you thought you would. Show the same enthusiasm with two fathers as you would have with 20. Your concern should be the fathers who are there, not the ones who aren't.
- > Greet the dads (or granddads or uncles) when they hit the door. Invite them to enter the classroom or meeting space and hang out for an extra minute or two.
- > Learning to communicate with fathers takes time and practice. Don't start out trying to be someone you are not. Be genuine. You may not be able to relate to the experiences that are shared, but non-judgmental attitudes and understanding are what fathers are looking for from you.
- > Providing everything you promised when you were recruiting is very important. The program's credibility could be ruined if you and your staff fail to come through.
- > Allow dads to have some ownership of the group connections. Give them opportunities to facilitate meetings, help create the agendas, and discuss special topics of interest to them.
- > Encourage fathers to think about and establish personal goals for the next year or two. Have them put these down in writing and include a timeframe and steps for meeting their goals.
- > Inform dads about opportunities to volunteer on field trips (if your program is center-based), as well as program advisory boards, local policy councils, or community committees.
- > Allow fathers to provide feedback on a regular basis.

Afterward

- > A positive response to your first group connection is good. However, that means it's time for the hard work of follow-through to begin. Contact each participant and welcome him to the group.



- > Find out about each father's support system (this will help you reach out to him if he disappears). If a father misses a group connection, get in touch to find out what is going on and offer support.
- > Be accepting of those who drop out. When they come back, welcome them. Tell them you have missed them.
- > Ask dads to become ambassadors for the program, recruiting and encouraging other dads to engage with it and with their children. This will be natural if your participants are satisfied with the program and believe you have followed through on what you promised when you recruited them.

Remember, there are many ways to recruit and retain dads. Use a variety of strategies and, most importantly, don't give up.

Stories of Impact David is a loving military father of two children (ages 3 years and 6 months). He cherishes the time he spends with his family, yet there are times when he doesn't know how to handle his emotions. The program has given David the tools to express his emotions in a healthy, comfortable way, thus allowing him to positively engage his children on a more consistent basis.

David really enjoyed an activity we did that showed how unexpressed emotions can hinder one's performance. David mentioned that seeing this and understanding how it affects our relationship with our children has encouraged him to express his emotions effectively. David also noted that talking with his daughter at her level has been an effective tool him helping him create more of an authoritative dialogue rather than being authoritarian.

David is a genuinely nice person who had problems understanding and expressing his emotions. During the early part of the program David's issue with his emotions would cause him to withdraw from the group and from his daughter. Over the course of the program, however, David's ability to understand and express his emotions led to visible changes in his interactions with the group as well as with his daughter.

David is now better able to sustain a calm mood, thus allowing for more positive involvement with his children. David shared, "Not only am I better able to recognize my anger, but I'm also able to help myself calm down."

By Joe Buehrle

[SAY San Diego's Healthy Start Military Family Resource Center](#)



References

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William Scott was born in University City, Mo. After the separation of his parents, his mother moved to St. Louis, where he attended the Head Start program and was educated through the St. Louis Public School system.

He continued his education at Fontbonne University, receiving B.A. and M.A. degrees in family and consumer science. While at Fontbonne, William served on the Appeals Committee on Student Affairs and the Young Alumni's Committee, and he received a scholarship from the local chapter of The Greater St. Louis Home Economists in Home and Community. Currently, William works for the National Center for Parents as Teachers as a national trainer and program coordinator, with a special emphasis in working with fathers and Head Start programs.

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