

RESEARCH BRIEF



The North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University

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In the last few decades, a body of literature has emerged looking at the father's role in a child's life and the adverse effects of fatherlessness. In general, the research suggests that involved fathers play an integral role, positively affecting children, while those from father-absent homes are at a higher risk for experiencing negative outcomes. Specifically, teen suicide rates are much higher in father-absent homes. Also, young men that grow up in a fatherless home are twice as likely to end up in jail as those who come from tradition two-parent households. Further, children from father-absent homes suffer from behavioral disorders and involvement in the juvenile justice system at much higher rates.

To help combat fatherlessness and its deleterious effects, several steps should be taken to promote responsible fathering. Generally, fathers must be supported and encouraged in their fathering roles. Also, the impacts of intergenera-

tional parenting should be explored to see how a man's experiences with his own father are affecting him currently. Next, dads must be allowed to be dads by being helped to fulfill their unique roles, as well as complementing the roles of the mother. Research has demonstrated that fathers are just as likely as mothers to be attentive, sensitive and skillful in their interactions with their infant. In contrast, fathers have been found to be more likely than mothers to be involved in social activities and physical play with their children. Lastly, fostering positive father-child relationships are a key component to combating serious issues relating to fatherlessness across all age ranges.

Social workers have a unique opportunity to help in promoting responsible fathering and developing healthy father-child relationships. Social workers play an important part in ensuring that fathers have access, voice, and choice. Also, social workers have the responsibility to reach out to fathers and engage them in the process which may require some level of creativity and increased effort. It is imperative that social workers be aware of the need to be inviting and non-judgmental when engaging fathers, recognizing that they have a



unique world view. Further, researchers have formulated tips for social workers to consider before engaging with fathers. For example, social workers should have knowledge of masculinity theories in order to better understand the motivations behind men's behaviors. Also, social workers should avoid placing full responsibility of protection and provision on mothers. Assigning some of this responsibility to fathers can help combat the stereotype that fathers lack responsibility. When thinking about educating fathers about their roles, it is important to remember that men respond best to clear information about defined paternal roles. Social workers should be aware of fathers' integral role in families and communities and the rich perspective they can provide. Utilizing these tips can help social workers begin the process of successfully engaging fathers.



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When considering the importance of father engagement in the field of child welfare, one should remember that involved fathers positively impact child outcomes. The lack of these positive father-child relationships might influence later adolescent aggressive behaviors, school performance, risky sexual attitudes, and poverty. Therefore, it is vital that fathers integrated into the plan and solution for meeting a child's needs. Fathers can provide additional perspectives on their child's needs and strengths.

Based on research concerning the importance of including fathers in the working relationship, suggestions have been formulated to guide social workers in the process. During the identification process, social workers should encourage mothers to identify fathers and use alternative means to locate and include fathers in the process. Next, during the initial contact social workers should attempt to engage fathers in ways that coincide with their current situation. Also, it is important to address any barriers resulting from negativity in the mother-father relationship that could discourage father involvement. Social workers should assess any supports that the father might need as well. In the service delivery process, social workers should involve fathers when setting goals and establishing service needs. In addition, workers need to offer



fathers the opportunity to participate in support groups that address issues related to fatherhood. Further, the service plan needs to emphasize the relationship between the child and both parents.

In helping to develop healthy father-child relationships, social workers can take several steps to facilitate this process. This process may look different for relationship with sons and daughters. When dealing with father-son relationships, fathers should be encouraged to help foster effective communication and encourage healthy relationships. Contrarily, social workers may need to provide additional support for fathers who are working to develop their relationship with their daughter. These additional support areas could include: understanding "female issues," communication barriers, and lack of shared interests.

In conclusion, social workers need to be aware of the importance that fathers have for children, the differences in the way fathers communicate and respond to motivation, and the special skills needed to engage fathers in the case-management process. Social workers should continue to promote and support fathers, remembering that fathers are important to the lives of children in unique ways. Social workers should use their skills and knowledge to persistently advocate for and encourage fathers to have an equal role in the working relationship. A social worker's journey in bettering their proficiency and confidence in engaging and working with fathers is an ongoing journey and vital for the success of children.

