

In Relief of Fatherlessness

Connecticut Fatherhood Task Force
with Speaker Amman, Dr. Cosby, et al
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How do children experience men?

- 'Fatherlessness' means ____ to kids?
- Men don't 'women' / fathers don't 'mother'
- Women don't 'men' / mothers don't 'father'
- Strongest predictor of language competence at 36 mos.?

Distinguishing Paternal Behaviors

- Preference for activation/stimulation vs. soothing
- Unpredictable vs. predictable/regulating style
- Preparation for place in the world vs. relationships; 'real world' discipline vs. relational
- Frustration tolerance vs. facilitating
- Strong support for autonomy and independence
 - Especially from mother

(are these good things?)

Moral to this Story

- Coparenting theory and knowledge can be enlisted to guide program and policy efforts on behalf of *all* types of families
- Why this matters? **9 + 36 = 90**

Child outcomes of involved fathering

Behavioral

- Reduced contact with Juvenile Justice
- Delay in initial sexual activity, reduced teen pregnancy
- Reduced rate of divorce
- Less reliance on aggressive conflict resolution

Educational

- Higher grade completion and income
- Math competence in girls
- Verbal strength in boys and girls

Emotional

- Greater problem-solving competence, and stress tolerance
- Greater empathy, moral sensitivity and reduced gender stereotyping - *Fatherhood* (Pruett, 2001)

CT's place on the 'fatherhood curve'

- Rep. John Martinez/ Commissioner Pat Wilson-Coker and CT Fatherhood Advisory Council
- National Practitioner Tool to assess father-friendly protocols in CT state agencies
- Children's Trust Fund/Nurturing Families' father inclusion
- DOC parenting curriculum
- DSS Child Support Arrearage Program
- Centering Pregnancy (Lisa Davis/pre-natal father inclusion)
- Legislative Fatherhood Taskforce; Chairs Rep. Morris and Sen. LeBeau

A good start...

- But what about fatherlessness?
- We now have an answer...

Supporting Father Involvement

A research and preventive intervention project
Funded by the California Department of Social Services,
Office of Child Abuse Prevention

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Carolyn & Phil Cowan (UC Berkeley)
Linda Hockman/Teresa Contreras- California DSS (OCAP)

Risks for child abuse and neglect will be reduced if we affect family life in the following ways:

- 1) *Parenting*: Increase positive father involvement, decrease parenting stress, increase the range of age-appropriate parenting strategies
- 2) *Individual Adjustment*: Reduce anxiety, depression, and stress, increase coping with internal stressors, find ways to meet individual needs

3) *Couple Relationship*: Increase or maintain satisfaction with the relationship, increase collaborative problem-solving, decrease conflict

4) *Family of Origin*: Break negative intergenerational cycles of adversity, harsh treatment, exclusion, and abuse

5) *Stressors and Supports*: Develop strategies to cope with external stressors associated with poverty and underemployment, increase social supports

Father Involvement?

- Direct care (feeding, dressing, soothing)
- Indirect care (preparing meals, arranging doctors' appointments)
- Active thinking, feeling, planning for child
- Play and recreation with the child
- Financial support

What have we learned from this intervention?

- Low income families + skilled, respectful group leaders = participation and retention
- Mothers' help fathers' attendance (2x)
- Pre-literacy a favorite among dads
- Control conditions are necessary evils that are acceptable to staff & families

How significant is paternal engagement in pre-literacy?

- 2nd grade reading trouble critical moment
- 4th grade cut-off nearly impossible to overcome, and high school failed 76%
- Role of men in illiteracy prevention
- War on drugs? Or a War on literacy?
- Are men the new recruits?

Worth the trouble?

- Findings to date:
 - Reduced parenting stress and conflict
 - Improved communication, problem solving
 - Reduced parental depression and anxiety
 - Reduced harsh discipline

Worth the trouble 2

- * Findings in children:
 - Reduced hyperactivity
 - Reduced aggression
- * Findings in institutions:
 - Improved overall 'Father Friendliness' for the life of grant

Bottom line teachables; 80% kids need to know...

- How *absolutely* essential parents are to kids
- Parenting skills are *supposed* to be learned
- The early years matter a *lot*, but so does time
- *How* children are treated is as critical to outcome as *what* they are taught
- Fix troubles early; it gets more complex, expensive, and harder to change later

Margaret Mead and today's last word..

- *"It is the primary role of society to teach men how to father".*
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