

# Fatherhood Support Project



## **Supporting Men with Parenting** (Learnings from the Fatherhood Support Project; Adelaide)

*Prepared for the purpose of increasing the awareness of  
issues facing fathers and to discuss approaches to  
service provision that may affect father engagement*

***By Stephen Sheehy***  
***Fatherhood Support Project***

**February 2004**

## **Supporting Men with Parenting**

### **Background**

The Fatherhood Project is a two year project aimed at supporting men in their role as a parent. The project originated from a submission made by the Parenting Network to the Australian Stronger Families and Communities Initiative. The submission outlined the need to have more services available for fathers in the Northern and Western Suburbs of Adelaide. Funding was granted in Dec 2001 which facilitated the employment of one full time male worker for two years to develop, promote and deliver services to men in the care of children within the Northern and Western suburbs of Adelaide. Services would include; community based groups for fathers, activities for fathers and their children, ante natal education for men who are becoming fathers, working within early childhood learning environments, working with fathers in prisons, the development and distribution of resource materials and the promotion of fatherhood within existing agencies as an issue for service delivery where existing agencies could invest energy and resources in order to promote sustainability. It should be noted at this point that the Fatherhood Support Project works from a strengths based philosophy and this is applied in the work with men directly as well as working together with existing agencies.

### **Background Literature**

Much of the literature around fatherhood is focused on how we measure father involvement. Methodology that measures the amount of time that fathers spend with children has provided the data and this has been used to determine how involved fathers are. Of recent times there has been some questioning regarding the quality of the information that these methods provide and that there is a need to broaden how father involvement is measured.

*'The social concern during the 1980s focused on whether children were getting enough fathering. That is, the emphasis was on the amount of fathering rather than the kind and quality of fathering' (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Lamb, Boller, 1999)*

*'Father involvement initially was viewed in rather narrow terms (e.g., father presence vs. father absence), and well-established paternal roles were ones that implied mainly indirect contact with children (e.g., father as financial provider). As implied by Lamb's typology, more recently the concept of father involvement has been expanded to encompass a multitude of roles and activities that include both direct and indirect engagement with children' (cited in Measuring Father Involvement In Young Children's Lives: Dungee Greene et al, 2001).*

Other literature has focused on the impact of fathers roles in the early years of life and into the education years. The literature points to children having greater emotional regulation when fathers engage with and are emotionally available to children. This also promotes greater social adaptability and more desirable educational outcomes (Allen, Daly, 2002)

*'So far as fathers are concerned, it is well established that they are important attachment figures for most young children, and may be the child's most preferred person, despite the fact that fathers generally spend much less time than mothers with the infant (Kotelchuk, M., 1976).*

*The intensity of the infant's attachment to her father seems to depend on a complex of factors, including the father's sensitivity to the baby's signals, his playfulness with the baby, and the amount of time he spends in face-to-face interaction with the baby.* (Chibucos, Kail, 1981).

*'Most researchers have found consistent and striking differences between the patterns of mother-child and father-child interaction'* (Belsky, Gilstrap, Rovine, 1984).

The quality of the time that fathers spend with children can be measured by the types of communication, activities and behaviours that occur during interaction between fathers and children. The quality of this interaction can be largely dependent on how fathers see their role. It is therefore important to encourage open discussion about parenting roles so as to broaden and develop further our own perspective on what it means to be an involved father. This may help to develop more insightful questions that may act as a catalyst and lead to further research that looks at the effects of role perception on fathers' parenting behaviours.

### **Thinking about roles**

Becoming a parent is a major transition period for men. Depending on the expectations of the man becoming a parent and his perception of himself in the father role, the transition into parenthood can range from anticipation to indifference, feelings of intense inadequacy, resentment and denial. Often it is women who are placed in the position of having to take on the greater responsibility of caring for the child. Role distinctions, role models, systemic culture and a variety of media forms reinforce the notion that women naturally take on the role of primary care giver and that they have some inherent ability to cope with the parenting process while on the other hand men are portrayed as clumsy, out of their depth, and unable to connect with the needs of the child perpetuating the notion that men can never quite cut it in a primary parenting role. The effects of this overarching culture include, firstly, an underlying message that men are incompetent in parenting resulting in men withdrawing or at least having a limited perception of their affect in their parenting role. Secondly, mothers are placed under enormous pressure to perform due to the assumption that 'it should come naturally' to them and if it doesn't then there is something fundamentally wrong with that particular mother.

Most of us grow up in an environment where we see mothers doing most of the caring and nurturing, and it naturally follows that as boys and girls we interpret parenting as gender and role specific. The effect of role models is therefore profound on the development of children's attitudes and ideation about parenthood and more specifically, the appropriate role of each parent (Berk 2003).

Boys and girls see their fathers less than they do their mothers (Cabrera, et al, 1999) due to culture, societal expectations and established roles. Paid work is valued by society to a much greater degree than work done at home resulting in women perceiving their parenting role to be a support for the man in paid work while the man in paid work has the perception that he is supporting his unpaid partner to parent his children.

From a service provision perspective, women and motherhood have been treated as unique to parenting and this is evident in the delivery of services surrounding parenting as well as the production of parenting resource materials in which the language used is more often than not exclusive of men and fatherhood. In the same way men and employment have been treated as unique in relation to productivity and this is historically evident in discriminatory industrial policies and processes as well as income discrepancies between men and women. Effectively,

men have been more highly valued than women in the work place while women have been more highly valued than men in parenting. Ground has been made towards valuing women in the workplace and this is an ongoing process. Similarly, men are being recognised more for their contribution to parenting though there is still much more to be done in this area.

## **Talking to dads and ‘dads to be’**

**Learnings of the project:** *(for the purposes of this paper the word father includes biological fathers, those men who are not the biological parent and any man who has children under his care eg. step fathers, Grandfathers, foster carers).*

The fathers perception of his role is an important factor in predicting his behaviour as well as the depth of his involvement with his children (Marsigero, W. (1995). If men are valued within the employment context then men invest energy into their work. Valuing the role of men within the parenting context is a first step towards men investing their energy in the parenting role. Similarly if fathers are expected to be the disciplinarian or “trouble shooter” then this is likely to frame the way that fathers approach parenting.

In recent times there has been some focus on encouraging fathers to take an active role in their child’s life through activities that guide, nurture and protect the child. Fathers who have been encouraged to participate in a nurturing role, have commented on the benefits that this has had for their children as well as their own well being (see appendix Fatherhood Support Project evaluation fathers workshops).

**In consulting directly with fathers the project has gained some valuable insights related to the following areas of interest:**

### **1. Importance of role perception**

Firstly, the project has learned that there is a need to explore the role of fathers in families, recognising the impact that they have on children. It has been essential that the project looks at how men perceive their role as a father. Men need to be motivated by understanding that their contribution to parenting is important and valued. Men need to be aware of the potential emotional impact that they can have on their children if they are to invest time and energy into the nurturing of children. Fathers need to know that their relationship with their children is of unique importance to the development of their child’s physical, cognitive, emotional and social competencies. *(See Appendix B for comments from fathers about their role).*

### **2. Barriers to active father involvement**

Using questioning has been important in engaging fathers in discussions around their role and their perceived barriers to father involvement, such as; ‘what are the barriers for men in their parenting role?’ By asking this question in a variety of settings (eg. individual, group) the project hopes to assist men in being able to identify for themselves those barriers that prevent them from investing time and energy with their children. Men are also able to then discuss ways to address these barriers with other men, professionals, friends, or family. Men are able to see that their suggestions can help other fathers as well as the ideas of other fathers assisting them in discovering strategies to confront their own personal concerns in their parenting role *(See some examples of barriers affecting father involvement can be seen in Appendix A).*

### **3. The need for community based activities for dads and children**

The project has learned that it is important to provide opportunities for fathers and their children to engage in activities that will serve to strengthen the relationship between fathers and their children. The use of activity based strategies is an effective

way to build bridges between fathers and children where there has been tension or a break down in communication as well as a way of facilitating the development of confidence in children. Memories are the building blocks for the self assessment of our childhood. By fathers being involved in activities with their children they are creating memories and impacting on the child's own perception of their childhood experience.

#### **4. The need for a 'First point of call'**

The project has learned that there needs to be a first point of call for fathers and fathers to be, to encourage men to address personal issues and to promote access to further services. The project therefore has a primary health, early intervention, outreach focus. An important factor in engaging men is the need for a positive, non problem focused approach. Talking enthusiastically to men about Fatherhood is an ideal way in which to engage men in open and honest discussion about a whole range of issues relating to men's health, family dynamics, personal and social change. The project emphasises that parenting must be focused on meeting the needs of children and in particular how fathers can help to meet those needs in order to encourage normal development and better health outcomes for children.

#### **5. The need for discussions that value and validate the father role**

The project engages fathers in discussions on a range of issues. Those issues include; the role of fathers, communicating with children, helping children to develop confidence, the father's role in attachment, dealing with children's behaviour, dealing with our own behaviour, coping with stress and taking responsibility for our own anger, discipline – assisting children to learn about themselves and others, the importance of empathy towards children and how this contributes to the child's normal social, psychological and emotional development, child development, relationships, respect for others and their rights, and self development. The intention is to assist men in gaining a broader perspective and context of their parenting role where fathers can be empowered to make choices that benefit their family, their children and themselves. By having parenting goals, where the intention is to strengthen the relationship with children, fathers are supported to change from a reactive or impulsive style of parenting to a more considered one whereby fathers are able to ask themselves the following questions; 'how can I strengthen my relationship with my child even in this situation'? or 'what are the needs of my child in this situation'? The project, through group work in particular, provides an environment where fathers can discuss strategies that can help them to get some control over a reactive style of communication in their parenting. This can only be effective if fathers understand and believe that their role is important to the normal development of their children. The Fatherhood Project therefore sees it's role as the valuing and validating of the father's role in parenting and this provides a foundation to address issues such as parenting skills, behaviour and communication with children as well as personal change.

#### **6. Ante natal education that engages 'dads to be'**

Role models are of real importance in this issue. If men have had male role models that have been nurturing then there tends to be an inherent understanding of how to develop a nurturing role with their children. For those men that have had limited input and nurturing from men in a father's role it is necessary to have open discussion about the 'role of the father' and that this discussion emphasises the importance of the relationship between father and child. Often a discussion around the role of fathers in attachment or in the emotional development of children can help to provide a context

for the need for nurturing in the father/child relationship. Another important point here is the affect of men and their discussions on each other and how this serves to support and encourage men to aspire to be active loving fathers. The interaction between men in ante natal and other parenting discussions is as important, if not more, than the education content of the session. It is interesting to observe that when men and their experiences are valued and validated by other men they become open to new ideas and change as well as developing the courage to aspire to greater things than they would have otherwise. (*See Appendix C for comments by fathers about personal change*).

## **Talking with agencies**

The Fatherhood Support Project has worked to ensure the sustainability of a Fatherhood focus across agencies and communities. Strategies employed to achieve this include consultation about the aims of the project, looking at strategies that can meet the needs of all the agencies involved, connecting agencies around events and services, sharing resources to enable efficient delivery of service, the establishment of strong working relationships with key people in key agencies, a broad criteria for father involvement as well as the project worker acting as a catalyst and a resource for agencies around fatherhood issues.

### **Project insights into working with agencies.**

#### **1. Meeting the needs of agencies**

Fortunately, many agencies provide a service to families but this is often geared towards mothers and children. Often men will not attend 'generic' parenting groups believing that they are either set up for mothers or that there will be few if any fathers in attendance. It is therefore important to encourage agencies that that have a parenting focus to work to address fatherhood specifically. Many agencies have attempted to run groups or deliver services to fathers but due to low attendance or minimal outcomes and significant cost to the agency those programmes have been dropped. Often there are few male workers who could deliver a service to fathers and therefore limited resources to meet the needs of fathers. The Fatherhood Support Project employs a male worker who works with agencies to facilitate groups and workshops as well as providing training to staff around working with fathers. Knowing the aims, meeting the staff and focusing on the service delivery strengths of individual agencies is an important factor in the development of services to fathers if there is to be successful inter-agency collaboration. It is essential that there is flexibility in service delivery so as to place minimal strain on existing resources as well as working with the skills and strengths of the staff employed by the agency. The goal of such collaboration is firstly to meet the needs of fathers and secondly, to address the aims of all agencies participating through measurable outcomes. Evaluation of collaborative programmes can then serve to support further funding.

#### **2. Challenging Ownership**

Often projects are agency specific with staff, finances and other resources being a drain on the agency delivering the service. When there is low attendance and a reliance on a limited client base this puts pressure on the agency to provide justification to funding bodies as to why they are engaged in activities that produce minimal outcomes. It has been the experience of the Fatherhood Support Project that an important factor in planning and delivering services that are sustainable is the broadening of a client base across agencies and communities. This can be achieved by

delivering the service at a neutral site such as a community center and the facilitation and co-facilitation are taken on by more than one agency. This in effect means that at least three agencies are involved in delivering the service and the base from which potential attendees come from is much broader. The ownership therefore is a partnership which benefits the community and all the agencies involved.

Collaboration from the planning process through to service delivery and evaluation, spreads the responsibilities and resources and provides a means for a more sustained and consistent approach. Ownership can be a barrier to working more effectively in the community and it can also be a barrier to being successful in applying for further funding. The need to have sole credit for the outcomes gained from service delivery can prevent agency collaboration, isolate the efforts of community based services as well as duplication of service.

### **3. Connecting agencies through common objectives**

Through consultation with other agencies and the clear communication of project objectives, effective collaborative planning can result in outcomes that meet the objectives of all interested agencies. Understanding the aims, philosophies and the service approach of potential agency partners has been an important factor in the success of the Fatherhood Support Project's ability to work in partnership with other agencies. This has highlighted the importance of the need for a flexible and creative approach to working within the structures and with the strengths of service providers.

### **4. Sharing Resources**

Money, time and energy represent both potential barriers and potential success in providing meaningful services to the community. The financial costs and time restraints of providing a service to the community is effectively reduced when agencies work together towards providing a service to meet the needs of a broader client base. Shared responsibility, resources and expertise make more things possible and importantly creates the opportunity to build an efficient sustainable service. Working together also encourages greater accountability as each agency has the opportunity to give input on quality assurance, distribution of resources, community needs, organisational objectives as well as future planning. Finally, working together and sharing resources provides the opportunity to approach funding bodies with runs on the board and a coordinated inter agency approach to service provision provides the funding body with more good reasons to fund such projects.

### **5. The need for a catalyst**

When working with other agencies the Fatherhood Project has needed to maintain a level of energy necessary to support the ongoing involvement of those agencies. This has meant that it has been important to maintain strong working relationships with key people in those agencies. It has also meant that the energy required to promote collaboration between agencies has been the role of the Fatherhood Support Project worker through organising meetings, applying for grants, training co-facilitators and promoting fatherhood as focus within those agencies. Due to the complex needs and demands on agencies, it is not easy to maintain a fatherhood focus if this is not the core business of the agency. The Fatherhood Project has worked to connect fatherhood with the core business of service providers and this has required ongoing development. As long as fatherhood remains an issue that is overlooked it will be necessary for a Fatherhood worker to act as a catalyst until services for fathers attract appropriate ongoing funding, are supported by a commitment that is expressed in agency and government policy making the issue of support for fathers a mainstream area of service provision.

## **Tips for Engaging Fathers**

- One of the most important things when seeking to engage fathers is the language that we use when promoting a service. Resources need to be designed as if we are talking to men directly and not as an extra. Often in parenting we address the mother or the mother/child relationship and then make mention of how the father can fit into this as well. This is off putting for men.
- Try to meet the men before the commencement of the group or service to be provided. Men need their issues to be acknowledged as important and they need to know that their knowledge and parenting experiences are valuable to other men, in particular in a group setting. If it is not possible to meet with the men, a phone call may be helpful as a way to assist him in committing further (he has already committed by contacting the agency). Some questions that may help to connect with fathers are: How many children do you have? What ages are they? What are the main parenting issues for you? 'I have similar concerns with my children, it would be good to get your perspective on that'.
- It is important to connect the father's responses with the service or group being provided by letting them know that their comments and experiences are important and relevant to those attending. Giving some feedback about one's own experience with children at a similar age is helpful in connecting with the dad and acknowledges the value of his thoughts and experience as a parent.
- Value fathers comments, they represent their experiences, feelings and thoughts. Avoid trying to correct attitudes or jumping in to clarify what they are saying. When men are heard they are more likely to be open to learning and listening to other ideas and strategies. Acknowledgement is the first step in engaging fathers.
- Ask questions about their children, about work or interests. The footy is a good one, if you can connect on one level then it is easier to connect on another level. Don't underestimate the value of 'small talk' it provides a way for men to assess their own position in relation to others and it normalises what we are about to talk about.
- Engaging men to attend a community based group can take time. Regular advertising and a commitment that is sustained over at least 12 months is needed to see results. It is necessary to accept small numbers as a matter of course while promoting the service in the local newspaper, local agencies and referring bodies, clubs and other forms of media. A successful group is usually an established one that has been committed over time and prepared to accept that there are times when numbers will be down.
- Continuity of service is another important issue in engaging fathers. Those men that are met in the ante natal stage and are involved in discussion around the role of fathers, have gone on later to reconnect around parenting when the baby is older. Having met the fatherhood support project worker already in the ante-natal classes made it easier for those men to engage in further parenting

services. This was evident through self referral to community based Fatherhood courses.

## **Summary**

Working with men around parenting has been the primary role of the Fatherhood Support Project but this could not be done without working with agencies that are community based and hospital based. Advocating for fathers with those agencies has promoted systemic change, a greater flexibility in meeting the needs of fathers and ‘fathers to be’, and assessment of current practices and service provision. It is clear that not only the father’s perception of his role has a profound effect on his behaviour with his children but also societal and organisational perception plays a significant role in the way that service provision is delivered which ultimately sends it’s own message about how the role of fathers is defined.

The validation of fathers as uniquely significant in child development and the encouragement for fathers to take a primary nurturing role in their child’s life effectively reframes the father’s role from one of peripheral importance to one that is centrally important. A child who has the availability of both parents who see themselves as important and unique to the child will benefit from the secure attachment within those relationships.

The nurturing father can focus on the relationship between himself and his child rather than his role as the ‘behaviour modifier’ or the disciplinarian. The Fatherhood Project has sought to assist fathers to see themselves as being able to address the needs of children and to find ways of strengthening the father/child relationship without reference to or comparison with the mother/child relationship. Both are unique to the child and parent and should not be compared.

The project has also recognized that the parenting experience of men is significant in the development of masculinity and if this fatherhood experience is rich and fulfilling then this will have a profound affect on the man’s perception of his identity as well as leading to a more helpful and more complete societal view of masculinity.

## References

- Allen, Sarah. Daly, Kerry. *The Effects of Father Involvement: A Summary of the Research Evidence*, University of Guelph, 2002.
- Belsky, J., Gilstrap, B. and Rovine, M. (1984) The Pennsylvanian Infant and Family Development Project. *Child Development*, 65, 692-705.
- Berk, Laura. *Child Development*,. Sixth edition. New York: Allyn and Bacon, 2003.
- Cabrera, N., C. Tamis-LeMonda, M. Lamb, K. Boller, and the Early Head Start Research Consortium Father Studies Workgroup. "*Measuring Father Involvement in Early Head Start: A Multidimensional Conceptualization*." Paper presented at the National Center for Health Statistics Meetings, Washington, DC, July 1999.
- Cabrera, N., K. Moore, J. West, J. Bronte-Tinkew, T. Halle, J. Brooks-Gunn, N. Reichman, J. Teitler, K. Ellingsen, C. W. Nord, and K. Boller. "The DADS Initiative: *Measuring Father Involvement in Large-Scale Surveys*." In *Measuring Father Involvement*, edited by R. Day and M. Lamb. New York: Lawrence Erlbaum, forthcoming 2002.
- Dungee Greene, Angela. Halle, Tamara. G. Le Menestrel, Suzanne. M. Moore, Kristin. A., *Measuring Father Involvement In Young Children's Lives: Recommendations for a Fatherhood Module for the ECLS-B.*, 2001, National center for education statistics a working paper, Prepared for: U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement National Center for Education Statistics
- Chibucos, T. and Kail, P. (1981) Longitudinal examination of father infant interaction and infant-father interaction. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 27, 81-96).
- Dudley, J. (1991). Increasing our understanding of divorced fathers who have infrequent contact with their children. *Family Relations*, 40, 279-285.
- Marsigero, W. (Ed.). (1995). *Fatherhood. Contemporary theory, research, and social policy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

## Background Reading

- Clarke-Stewart, K.A. (1978) And Daddy Makes -Three: the father's impact on mother and young child. *Child. Dev.*, 49, 466-478; LAMB, M.E. (1977) Father-infant and mother- infant interaction in the first year of life. *Child Dev.*, 48, 167-181.
- Furstenberg, F., & Nord, C. (1985). Parenting apart: Patterns of childrearing after marital disruption. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 47, 893-904.
- Gadsden, V., K. Rethemeyer, and M. Iannozzi. 2000. Bay Area Fatherhood Initiatives: Portraits and Possibilities. Philadelphia, PA: National Center on Fathers and Families, University of Pennsylvania.
- Holland, A. (1995). Fatherhood in transition: Men finding their feet as fathers. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 20 (2), 7-12.
- Kotelchuk, M. (1976) The infant's relationship to the father: Experimental Evidence. In Lamb, M. (Ed) *The Role of the Father in Child Development*. John Wiley & Sons, New York.
- Lamb, M.E. (1981) –The development of father-infant relationships. In Lamb, M.E. (Ed.) *The role of the father in Child Development*. New York: John Wiley.
- Lamb, M.E. Frodi, A.M., Hevang, C.P., Frodi, M. and Steinberg, J. (1982) Mother- and father-infant interaction involving play and holding in traditional and non-traditional Swedish families. *Develop. Psychol.*, 18, 215-221.
- Nichols, S. (1994). Fathers and literacy. *The Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 17 (4), 301-312.
- Ortiz, R., Stile, S., & Brown, C. (1999). Early literacy activities of fathers: Reading and writing with young children. *Young Children*, 54 (5), 16-18.
- Pederson, F.A., Cairn, R. and Zaslow, M. (1982) Variation in infant experience associated with alternative family roles. In LAOSA, L. and SIGEL, I. (Eds) *The Family as a Learning Environment*. Plenum Press: New York.
- Pederson, F. A., Yarrow, L .J., Anderson, B. J., Cairn, R.L. (1979) Conceptualisation of father influences in the infancy period. In Lewis, M. and Rosenblum, L., *The Child and its Family*. Plenum Press: New York.
- Pleck, J. (1983). Husbands' paid work and family roles. In H. Lopata & J. Pleck (Eds.), *Research in the interweave of social roles* (vol. 3) (pp. 251-333). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Pleck, J. (1985). *Working wives, working husbands*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.
- Pleck, J., Lamb, M., & Levine, J. (1985-1986). Epilog: Facilitating future changes in men's family roles. *Marriage and Family Review*, 11-16.
- Pruett, K., (1989). The nurturing male. In S. Cath, A. Gurwitt, & L. Gunsberg (Eds.),

*Fathers and their families* (pp. 389-405). Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press.

Radin, N. (1981). The role of the father in cognitive/academic/intellectual development. In M. Lamb (Ed.), *The role of the father in child development* (2nd ed.) (pp. 379-427). New York: Wiley and Sons.

Radin, N. (1982a). Primary caregiving and role-sharing fathers. In M. Lamb (Ed.), *Nontraditional families* (pp. 173-204). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Ricks, S. (1985). Father-infant interactions: A review of empirical research. *Family Relations*, 34, 505-511.

Rutter, M. (1979) Protective factors in children's response to stress and disadvantage. In Kent, M.W. and Rolf, J.E. (Eds) *Primary Prevention of Psychopathology*, Vol.3, Social competence in children. University Press of New England.

Sander, J. (1993). Service programs to help unwed fathers. In R. Lerman & T. Ooms (Eds.), *Young unwed fathers: Changing roles and emerging policies* (pp. 297-315). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Williams, E., Radin, N., & Coggins, K. (1996). Paternal involvement in childrearing and school performance of Ojibwa children: An exploratory study. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 42 (4), 578-595.

### **Further reading**

Mark S. Kiselica, *Multicultural Counselling with Teenage Fathers: A Practical Guide* [Sage Publications 1995]

Joan D Koss-Chioino & Luis A. Vargas, *Working with Latino Youth: Culture, Development & Context* [Jossey-Bass 1999]

Aaron Kipnis, *Angry Young Men: How Parents, Teachers, Counselors Can Help "Bad Boys" Become Good Men* [Jossey-Bass 1999]

Ricardo Carrillo & Jerry Tello Editors *Family Violence and Men of Color: Healing the Wounded Male Spirit* [Springer 1998]

*Not Just for Girls: Involving Boys and Men in Teen Pregnancy Prevention*  
The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy

*Turning the Corner on Father Absence in Black America*  
Morehouse Research Institute & Institute for American Values [1999]

*Readings on Men: Family Planning Perspectives 1987-1995*  
The Alan Guttmacher Institute [1996]

## **Appendix A: Barriers affecting father involvement in early parenting.**

### **Bonding and breastfeeding**

Often breastfeeding and bonding are spoken of in the same sentence giving the impression that bonding happens exclusively with breastfeeding. Many men associate 'bonding' with breastfeeding and therefore see themselves as having a limited role in the 'bonding' process. The need for education at the ante natal stage that names the father as significant in the child's development is essential in promoting the father having a greater understanding of attachment and his role in developing a secure attachment with his child.

### **Coaching**

Many men talk about feeling supervised in their attempts to address the physical needs of the child, particularly early on. A feeling of incompetence can arise through this and the father may withdraw from the activity altogether. Having time and room to explore their own way of doing things is important for Dads. For Mum it may be a good strategy to avoid watching or coaching. Having time to develop confidence in caring for his baby allows the relationship to develop beyond how competent the father feels in his ability to address the physical needs of his child. The relationship can then become more important than completing the task adequately.

### **Lack of Male Role Models**

Many people talk about their experience of their fathers as being somewhat distant, away a lot, working, busy and the disciplinarian. These roles and attitudes have been identified with Dad. Removing the distance between men and children in terms of the role is about learning and identifying that there is something unique about the 'connection' between fathers and their children. If we have not experienced a nurturing father ourselves then it is more difficult to feel comfortable in a nurturing role. Here the domain of emotional development becomes an integral part of the father/Child experience, the beginnings of parental love take the man to uncharted territory, while the baby learns that the deep voice, the hairy face, the big hands and strong arms belong to someone who takes care of them.

### **Peripheral role**

The belief that, as a Dad my role is to act as a support for the Mother/Child relationship is not enough for the involved Father. Such a perception can lead to isolation if the Father does not feel competent or important. Jealousy and alienation can occur within the couple's relationship. The focus can become the relationship that we had before the child came along leading to grief associated with the loss of intimacy. The benefit of the perception that the Father has a direct relationship with the child leads to the experience of parental love and the focus of the couple relationship is more in line with each other. In other words, the future as parents fits with the future as a couple.

### **Exclusive language**

The perception of ante-natal and post-natal services about the father's role can also serve to communicate confusing messages to the father when the emphasis is solely on his support for the mother/child relationship. It is therefore important to be aware of the language we use when encouraging father involvement in the parenting process. In summary, the expectations of the father about his role can have a significant effect on the family as a whole. The inclusion of emotional development as a fundamental part of the father/child relationship promotes secure attachment for the child as well as ongoing development for the man in the father role. The expectations of the mother and her perception of the father's role can also have a significant effect on the family as a whole.

*Some comments from fathers about barriers to change*

- Blocking out outside influences
- Too busy, don't find time
- Lack of open communication with partner (going to group can help overcome this)
- Personality: 'I am right'. Enforce opinion on others
- Financial problems
- Drugs & alcohol etc
- Unwillingness to change
- Stereotyped – own personal view point
- Worries get in the way – stress affects the way you react
- Expectation of 'buck stops at me' – to take charge
- Hard to network. Networking not visible.
- Fathers not honest with themselves.
- Position in job often effects how honest men are about personal life.
- Own parenting experience.
- Distant parenting of own parents.
- Failure to engage media will restrict the influence – schooling – videos.
- Isolation of fathers in parenting.
- Non acceptance of change.
- Interaction essential.
- Guys NOT talking to each other about it.

## **Appendix B: Responses from ‘Focus group for Dads’ as a part of the Fatherhood Support Project Evaluation: How Father’s saw their role, before they participated in the Fatherhood workshops?**

- Dad is the:
- Breadwinner
- Role model - setting examples, passing it down
- Fixer of problems
- All responsibility without any training
- teacher
- Didn’t know where my role was – separated early
- Didn’t fit into traditional role
- Searching for some meaning
- ‘Take it on the chin’
- didn’t take as active a role as now
- passive acceptance
- hard to know what to do with kids
- unrealistic expectations
- my behaviour affected my kids behaviour
- I didn’t know enough about being a role model
- Mother was primary. I was secondary
- Before I was active with kids & tried to support partner in her role
- Support to wife in her role, basically primary carer
- My goal was for kids to be better person than I was (than my parents did for me)
- Had some practice, so more prepared than my wife
- To be a good dad (after could be a better dad)
- Less ability to think things through before and less knowledge
- Not comfortable in the role of father & what was expected
- Lack of practice (or exposure) leads to lack of confidence in parenting
- No opportunity before to talk & think about what ‘Fathering’ is.

### **1. Father’s Role – a Job Description (since attending a group).**

*What skills to we need?*

*ESSENTIAL:*

- Educator
- Adaptable
- Good listener
- Give & take
- Share responsibility
- Patience
- Leadership
- Role model
- Spend quality time
- Set aside specific quality time
- Love your kids & show them that love
- SAY you love them
- show affection
- give respect and you get it back

*DESIRABLE:*

- patience
- attentive
- participating in their activity
- responding & praising
- paying attention to their achievements
- play with your kids
- respond in their time frame
- be accountable
- be honest
- have an ability to say sorry & it teaches the child to say sorry

*What Training do we need?*

- Appropriate & timely training
- Course which are delivered to you in a way which encourages discussion with other Dads.
- Training which connects us with other guys
- Encouragement comes from the course – you don't get it out of a book
- Courses aimed at specific ages of children
- Groups which:
  - Provide a place to talk
  - Makes you more adaptable in thinking & parenting
  - Encourages you try other things
  - Male focused
- Ongoing training to provide support & information
- Some follow up sessions down the track
- Course for expectant fathers, so we can learn from experiences
- Start early, so we don't get too set in our ways
- 1000 year plan
- eventually no need for so much training because we will be better at it
- better understanding from training, will mean we will parent better / different than our own parents.

**3. What changes have happened at home, or when you are with your children?**

*What did you talk about? PARTNER - FRIENDS - CHILDREN*

- Feel more comfortable being at home with toddler
- Partner more comfortable with me at home with toddler
- Discussion with partner reinforced what I was doing
- Talked about the experiences of other group members
- Talked about handouts.
- Friends have noticed some change in the way I talk about parenting – more positive
- Friends open to doing course because of feedback that I have given them
- It's okay to talk to friends about being a Dad

- I have called my child 'son' for the first time. Son said 'what has come over you, spending more time with me'. Son now wants to spend more time with me.
- I talk more to my mates about parenting.
- For myself – ok to be a father
- Just as capable as a mother, to find out what children need
- Now talk more about being a father to friends / work mates
- More aware of rights of father
- No longer worried – more able to be adaptable in relating to child. More energy
- Prior to group, I was having difficulties in relationship so partner suggested I attend.
- Wife always wanted to know. She read handouts
- We discussed each time after the group & I started to put it into place
- Started to approach him differently – more proactive, less blaming. Learnt to ask questions (what, when, how) – conversing, not telling
- Was young, so it formed how I interacted with my daughter as she developed.

*What did you do?*

- Re-focussed. Realisation that I wasn't doing the things I knew I should be doing often enough. Spending quality time. Parenthood = sacrifice for your kids
- A small sacrifice can make a big difference in your child's life
- Balancing time for self, with time spent with your children.
- Tried to get to more sporting events
- Tried to get time off from work
- Focusing on needs of older children, as was focusing on younger children due to need
- More active with kids
- Kids not afraid to do things with me
- Do not talk down to kids – now talk more at kids level – eg: teenager
- Sharing more with kids about what I did as a kid
- More adventurous – willing to take risks
- More prepared to explore the relationship with the kids
- Took on board, the positives and to approach it in a positive way
- Overall approach is positive
- Shared with a friend what I'd learnt – honest to say I'd need improvement, so friend attended
- Did subsequent course to build on what was learnt.
- Domino effect to other friends who are Dads and to other families
- Some things too difficult to just pick up in a book
- Follow the child's curiosity and communication. Ask open questions – child responded and now so does niece

## **Appendix C: Responses from Focus group for Dads as a part of the Fatherhood Support Project Evaluation: Personal change**

### **What personal change does Dad now see in himself in his THINKING, since the attending fatherhood group?**

- Take time to listen
- Can change to suit the situation
- Not so selfish
- I now think out side the lines
- I'm less likely to judge people and their relationships with their children, as I am now able to view things differently.
- I now have changed my friendships with people and now associate with people with similar situations as me eg: they are involved with their own children
- Have thought seriously about a career relating to the training & mentoring of fathers
- Have put on a radio presentation on fathering
- Talk about fathering a lot more
- Went to the family court mediation service and 'accepted' their view that the access arrangement was fair '...very good access for a father' to realising (after the course) that I am equally capable.
- Positive, proactive as a father
- Positive interactions with my child
- Think more positively and less negatively
- Thinking in different view towards my family is big plus
- Look forward to being with them more
- Enjoy my role as a father more
- I am able
- Stress has been limited
- The need for absolute control over self has lessened
- I may indulge in whims, instincts and hunches unlike before
- Have learned to listen
- Learnt to ask open questions
- Now a better father
- Have confidence in myself
- Have a better understanding of child expectations
- Happy to be a Dad
- Want to be the best Dad I can be
- More positive about my role as father in general
- More structure / framework
- Somewhere to start from, when thinking about fatherhood
- Acceptance of change
- Taking a part in change
- That I am a good Dad
- Worry was a big part
- That I am a good person
- Frustration is lessened
- Realised my role as a father was important, not that I didn't think so before, but that society & how it view / treats fathers is not up to that level of importance.
- It should not be 'fathers' versus 'mothers' but the roles complimenting each other.
- More interested in how my actions (leadership) passes on skills to children
- Tend to be less 'docile' in having my role devalued.

- Understanding small sacrificing can bring about a huge difference for others
- Pushed the reset button. Thinking changed back to focus on my son before myself.
- Reinforced or validated belief that what I was doing was to a large extent a good job.
- I was thinking of my baby as an individual with complex needs
- Fatherhood group helped me relax into the T.L.C., warmth contact needs of my baby son.

### **What personal change Dad now experiences in his FEELINGS since the group?**

- Probably a lot calmer than before
- Changed my attitude
- More caring
- Able to let more people closer
- Look less stressed
- Partner understands me a bit more – we can relate more easily
- Have been so stressed out that I haven't noticed any comments or occurrences
- Family court is in progress & I notice stress more.
- That I am able to find out what is troubling the children
- Noticed that I am more affectionate with the children
- That the children have much better awareness of boundaries when with Dad
- Feel less stressed
- Less likely to get in tense / angry mood
- My wife has noticed the changes in me with dealing with the kids & compliments me for changing
- The only person to change in our house was me, and the change has affected everyone positively in the house
- Can relate with nieces & nephews better
- My partner said she noticed a change in myself and also in my son, in that there is a stronger bond between us both

### **What do others see in personal change of Dad since attending group?**

- Am happy with myself now
- See a future that is bright
- Anger (suppressed) is not a big player
- I am working through my feelings
- Excited
- Happy
- No longer think the kids are being naughty to get at me
- Approachable
- Loveable
- Can be my kids best mate
- Respected
- After I completed the course, I feel that I have as much support as I need and that no matter what happens, there are people there to help
- Feel more positive about my role as a father
- Feel more valued as a father
- Feel more confident with my child – able to deal with problems and not worried.
- More confident in my role
- Happier that my contribution is well focussed
- Much happier as a Dad

- More willing to share experiences
- Not as angry as before
- Don't get so stressed or anxious as before
- More positive and adventurous in relationship with children
- Enthusiastic about fathering
- Impatient / angry about stereotyping
- Curious to find out more; to seek more knowledge
- Feel more able to attack difficult issues that children may have
- More open with children about my feelings
- Feel more relaxed in the role
- Feel less stressed
- Able to show more emotion & affection