

Engaging Men and Dads at WIC: A Toolkit



Why engage men & dads at WIC?

Research shows that children and families do better when fathers are involved. Kids exhibit better school performance, increased self-esteem and improved relationships with peers, while parents feel less stress when they support each other and co-parent.

TESTED TOOLS

This toolkit is based on a programmatic review of fatherhood involvement efforts in early childhood programs and is a collection of many tangible steps your WIC site can take to become more inclusive of men and dads.

Research indicates that having a commitment to including men and dads and creating a strategy to do so may be the most important thing and actually more important than what the strategy is.

There is not one 'right way' of implementing any of these practices. Rather, this toolkit will provide you with options and recommendations from previous program success.

DEFINING DAD

Many times in this toolkit the word Dad will be used, but it should be noted that 'Dad' can include biological fathers as well as grandfathers, uncles, mother's partner, etc. Dads may be the single head of a household, married, cohabitating, or non-residential.

KEEP IN MIND

A focus on Dads should not stigmatize children. Be sensitive to those kids who do not have a Dad or significant male figure in their lives if you hold special events or recognition for Dads.

Toolkit Sections



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Provide Dads with Opportunities for Peer Groups or Counseling



Provide Service Referrals to Dads and Build Community Partnerships



Engage and Train WIC Staff on Inclusion of Dads



THIS SECTION INCLUDES TIPS ON:

1. Reaching out to and training WIC staff on working with Dads
2. Promoting healthy working and client relationships between men and women at WIC
3. Being sensitive to the cultural diversity of Dads.

Did You Know?

This whole toolkit can be used as a guide for training your staff or you can use the resources that are linked at the end of this section!

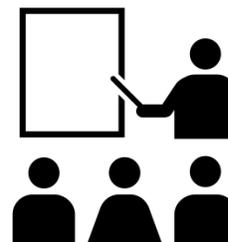
If you are downloading this toolkit, you may already be excited about including men and Dads more at WIC! Some of your coworkers may not be as excited, however. Either they have not given much thought to the idea, or they may feel resistant to working with Dads.

An important and effective strategy for including men and Dads in your program is to engage fellow staff and provide training on how to reach out to men and Dads.

1. Reach Out and Train your Staff on Involving Dads

Some strategies for getting your staff excited and engaged with including Dads are:

- ❖ Introducing the idea to your coworkers (or continuing the conversation if this issue has been talked about before).
- ❖ Reviewing or learning about the benefits of father involvement. (See more on this in the Communicate with Dads section.)
- ❖ Training staff members on ways to include and interact with Dads so that staff can develop positive, goal-oriented relationships with fathers.



Successful trainings may include:

- ❖ Improving staff's observation, communication, and assessment skills
- ❖ Reflecting and examining stereotypes about fathers held by staff
- ❖ Exploring ways to connect with and support fathers in their relationships with their children

Traits of a Father-Friendly Staff Member:

- *Passionate about the role dads play with their kids*
- *Friendly to men and Dads*
- *Considered approachable by Dads*
- *Aware of how they are interacting with and welcoming fathers*
- *Willing to share observations and helpful insights about the families they work with*

2. Promote Healthy Relationships between Women and Men at WIC



Some staff members may have difficult personal histories with men. Certain situations with fathers or families may stir up uncomfortable personal feelings. Dads are individuals, and it is important that the personal experience of staff do not get in the way of Dad's involvement. When feelings are overwhelming for staff, referrals to employee assistance or mental health professionals may be helpful.

- ❖ Have discussions in your office about concerns that staff may have about working more with Dads.
- ❖ Maintain open communication if new concerns arise.
- ❖ Review hiring practices and advertise new positions in a way that might attract men to the position.
 - Mention your new focus on fathers and include a phrase like “men strongly encouraged to apply”
- ❖ Help female staff to become comfortable working with fathers.
 - Hold trainings in an environment where staff will feel safe and comfortable expressing their concerns.
 - Be sensitive toward female staff who may have had negative personal experiences with men and provide additional training if needed.
- ❖ Although it is helpful to have male staff, female staff can also work well with Dads! (See the sidebar for suggestions.)



“Staff members need opportunities to develop empathy and respect for men and to build positive relationships that support fathers’ goals for themselves and their children. Men, too, benefit from having trusting relationships.

In programs that are predominantly female, building effective partnerships with fathers requires the ability and desire to build trust between female staff and men.”

- Engaging Fathers in Programs for Families

Suggestions from Women who have worked with Dads:

1. Hear men out. Find out their interests.
 2. Do more facilitation of discussions than teaching of content.
 3. Be prepared for some men to challenge your role in this work.
 4. Ask, “What do you think?” instead of “How do you feel?”
 5. Keep discussions solution-focused, rather than idea or sharing focused.
 6. Promote the message that dads can go to parent meetings, field trips, and volunteer at schools.
 7. Start with the assumption that dad is important to his family and really wants to be part of the group.
 8. Have a sense of humor.
- Adapted from Engaging Fathers in Programs for Families

3. Be Sensitive to the Cultural Diversity of Dads

Staff training on working with fathers should also include an emphasis on cultural sensitivity. Staff must have the ability and the desire to develop relationships with men from diverse backgrounds.



- ❖ Staff should try to have positive interactions with fathers about raising their children. These will be more helpful to families, rather than judgments on what is “right” or “wrong.”
 - Dads from different backgrounds may have different views than staff about discipline, nurturing, sleeping arrangements, and the dad’s role in raising children.
 - Consider language and other cultural and social barriers.
 - Cultural sensitivity may also include hiring staff that reflect the linguistic and cultural composition of families involved in the program.
- ❖ Program directors and managers should support the staff as they reflect on their own cultural experiences.
- ❖ There should be a directive from program leadership, supported by professional development, which encourages staff to show inclusive attitudes and behaviors.

“When staff members are open to fathers, affirm their diversity, and exhibit respectful curiosity about differences, fathers and families will feel accepted. Part of having open-minded attitudes means developing an awareness of your own biases based on first impressions of how fathers look, dress, or talk. Staff should avoid making assumptions about fathers in order to build trusting relationships and to help them feel welcome, respected, and understood.

- Head Start Father Engagement Programming Guide



ACTION ITEMS FOR WIC STAFF:

- Engage staff through training about including Dads.
- Examine your hiring practices to better include men.
- Focus on how female staff can better work with Dads.
- Be sensitive to staff who may have a hard time working with Dads and provide additional support.
- Be aware of and sensitive to the cultural diversity of fathers.
- Support your fellow staff in developing their cultural awareness.

“Father-staff relationships are key to successful father engagement. Fathers are willing to build relationships with staff when these relationships are grounded in respect and flexibility. With a clear vision for family engagement and with professional development support, staff can become skilled in goal setting with families and fathers. It is helpful fathers to see how their goals will positively impact their child and family and strengthen the child’s future success.

- Head Start Father Engagement Programming Guide

Resources:

- [Head Start Father Engagement Birth to Five Programming Guide](#), especially the “Staff Development Learning Extensions” (p. 55-58) and “Professional Development” (p.19-25)
- [Step by Step: Engaging Fathers in Programs for Families](#) from Best Start Resource Centre, especially “Women Working with Men” p.20
- [Las Manos de Apá: The Hands of My Father: Staff Training Materials](#) – Staff training materials for working with Latino fathers from Head Start
- [Las Manos de Apá Project: Creating Programs that Respect the Unique Language & Culture of Latino Fathers](#) – Tip Sheet from Head Start



Make the Environment Friendly to Dads



THIS SECTION INCLUDES TIPS ON:

1. Making the WIC office more 'Dad-friendly.'
2. Having men present at the office.
3. Considering Dads' time conflicts.
4. Including Dads through creative techniques.

Did You Know?

WIC staff can make small changes to the physical environment that will make your WIC office feel more "Dad-friendly!"

1) MAKE THE OFFICE LOOK WELCOMING TO DADS

To better include Dads, WIC staff can:

- ❖ Display positive and nurturing images of men with their children in the office.
 - Hang posters that talk about the importance of fathers and fatherhood.
 - Display pictures of breastfeeding where Dad is included.
 - Consider having a "Dad" bulletin board where clients can post pictures of children with their Dads.
 - Be mindful of posters about child support or domestic violence. These messages are important but should not overpower positive images of Dads.
- ❖ If you have magazines in the waiting area, include ones that men would feel comfortable reading.
- ❖ Put resources, booklets, and pamphlets that deal with issues Dads may face in waiting areas.
- ❖ If you make materials advertising your WIC office or special events, include images of Dads on those materials.
- ❖ Have neutral colors and furnishings in the office.
- ❖ Provide chairs that are large enough for men in waiting areas and have two chairs stationed at each counseling desk.
- ❖ Offer books for children to read that feature male characters in nurturing roles
- ❖ Be sure to have a men's restroom or a co-ed restroom and ensure that it has a diaper changing station.



"Feeling welcome, feeling accepted, feeling invited... I think that's the most important thing. Acknowledging that fathers do matter, that we want them involved, is the first clear step.

-Samuel Nuñez, Fathers and Families of San Joaquin

2) HAVE MEN PRESENT IN THE OFFICE

Research has shown that men and Dads feel more comfortable if there are other men at the WIC office. The current WIC staff could consider:

- ❖ Hiring male staff
- ❖ Inviting men to be peer counselors or group facilitators
- ❖ Looking to community partners for men who may be interested in being involved
- ❖ Asking board members or other stakeholders who may be able to help out
- ❖ Approaching partners of staff who may be able to step into the role of facilitator
- ❖ Finding Dads who are committed and consistent in the program to volunteer and reach out to other Dads
- ❖ Making a list of different ways that Dads can volunteer if they want to be involved in the program

3) THINK ABOUT DAD'S TIME CONFLICTS

Research done by the Minnesota Fathers and Families network (linked in Resources below) found that the largest perceived barrier to father involvement in early childhood programs was fathers' lack of time. WIC staff can:

- ❖ Try to schedule appointments at times when the father or father figure can attend.
- ❖ Have flexible or extended hours when possible.
- ❖ Offer evening or weekend classes and activities or explore early morning (before Dads go to work) as a possibility.
- ❖ When planning a special event, send out a brief survey or poll to see when would be the best time so more Dads can attend. Offer three different time and date options.
 - If your Dads are computer savvy, use a website like Doodle or NeedToMeet to find a good time for the event.
- ❖ Let families know of special events well in advance so Dads can schedule around them if they have any flexibility in their work schedules.

4) BE CREATIVE!

If your WIC site wants to take things a step further, consider trying some of these innovative ideas:

- ❖ Put in a shelf in the waiting room where people can donate or borrow books. Provide space for Dads to read to their children while they wait for their class or appointment.

Checklist for a Dad-Friendly Office

- Walls:** Do the walls contain positive images of Dads?
- Reading materials:** Are there fliers and magazines that Dads can read?
- Chairs:** Are the chairs big enough for Dad? Are there two chairs at every counseling desk?
- Restroom:** Is there a men's restroom with a diaper changing station?
- Men:** Are men present in the office in some capacity –other Dads, staff, facilitators or community partners?
- Scheduling:** Do you offer flexible times so that Dads can attend appointments? Do you get Dads' input when planning special events?



- ❖ Offer “Stay and Play” or “Dads Time” if your office has the capacity. Have days when children can stay and play and make sure you specifically invite Dads.
- ❖ If you have the space and an extra computer, consider offering a Career Corner where Dads can search for jobs.
- ❖ Have an open house for Dads or a Father-Child event where you provide food and refreshments. Consider reaching out to community partners for the food.
- ❖ Have a special orientation event for men and Dads in the lives of your WIC families.
 - Ask Dads for ideas on how they would like to be involved.
 - Ask Dads about what might prevent them from being involved at WIC and what would support them. Conduct a brief survey.
- ❖ Go beyond acknowledging Father’s Day: have a Dads’ month where the focus is positive father-child relationships.
- ❖ (See the Community Partnership section of this toolkit for more fun and innovative ways to reach out to Dads.)



ACTION ITEMS FOR WIC STAFF:

- **Make the WIC office “Dad-friendly” by including pictures, books and reading materials that show Dads in a positive light.**
- **Make sure that the office is comfortable and accessible for Dads.**
- **Encourage the presence of men at the office by hiring men or having men as facilitators and volunteers.**
- **Plan around Dads’ schedules when possible.**
- **Be creative when reaching out to Dads and try different kinds of events.**

Resources:

- [Key Concepts: Including Dads in a WIC Setting](#) from Texas WIC
- [WIC Watch: Preparing Men to be Fathers](#) from California WIC Association
- [Involving Fathers](#) from National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
- [Dedicated to Dads: Lessons from Early Head Start](#)
- [Fatherhood First](#) (Register for the site to access lots of resources)
- [Step by Step: Engaging Fathers in Programs for Families](#) from Best Start Resource Centre
- [Sector Analysis: Linking Fathers: Father Involvement in Early Childhood Programs](#) from Minnesota Fathers & Families Network
- [Involving Men in Nurturing](#) from Prevent Child Abuse Vermont
- [Fathers Matter](#) from Preschool Learning Alliance
- [Fathers in Sure Start](#) from Sure Start (UK)
- [Promoting Father Involvement in Early Childhood](#) from FRIENDS National Resource Center



Communicate Directly with Dads



THIS SECTION INCLUDES TIPS ON:

1. Building relationships with Dads by talking to them and making them feel welcome.
2. Reaching out and inviting Dads to be a part of WIC activities.
3. Targeting information toward Dads.
4. Providing Dads with resources and support to learn about parenting.

Did You Know?

Techniques for including men and fathers at WIC can be pretty simple and straightforward but effective at the same time!

1. Build Relationships with Men and Dads

- ❖ Learn Dad's name. A simple "Good Morning, Michael" can go a long way in making Dad feel welcome!
- ❖ Engage Dads in short conversations. (See Conversation Starters in the sidebar.)
- ❖ If Dad answers the phone, talk to him before asking to speak to Mom.
- ❖ Encourage Dad to come to at least one office visit.
 - Engage Dad by asking if he has any questions or concerns.
 - Listen to and answer Dad's questions.
- ❖ Welcome Dads with enthusiasm,
 - But treat Dad's presence as normal, instead of something unusual.
 - Welcome Dads and Moms with the same body language and eye contact.
- ❖ Make Dads feel like they are equals in the "parenting equation."
 - Let Dad know that you see him as important to family development.
 - Control your biases when talking with Dad. He can tell when he is seen as an optional extra rather than a key part of the family and parenting team.

Conversation Starters

Here are some ideas for getting dads to talk about what is important to them in their relationship with their child:

1. What has your infant/child taught you?
2. When did something really special happen between the two of you?
3. Have you changed something about yourself because of your infant/child?
4. What have you done to make things better for your infant/child?
5. What habits help you and your partner raise your infant/child together?
6. What would your partner say are your special skills that you contribute to the family?
7. When things look rough, what keeps you going?

- adapted from *Engaging Fathers in Programs for Families*

- Do not assume that only mothers are in charge of certain things such as parent-teacher conferences, doctor visits, child care, cooking, etc.

2. Reach out and Invite Dads to be Involved in WIC

- ❖ Invite Dads individually in person or by phone to special events. This is more effective in getting Dads involved than general announcements to all the parents, or using flyers and posters.
 - Get a Dad who is involved already to reach out to other Dads
 - Follow up with Dad if you have not seen him in a while.
 - Send something home with the child for Dad or about the father-child relationship.
 - Emphasize how excited his child will be to have him involved.
- ❖ Take advantage of social media (especially if you have a lot of younger Dads):
 - Send email updates about scheduled, dad-friendly events.
 - Consider using websites like Facebook or Twitter to remind Dads about special events.
- ❖ Send copies of information to Dad if he lives separately.
 - Write Dad a short note about the office visit.
 - Encourage Dad to send along his questions to the next visit.
- ❖ Include a space for information about father/partner/father figure on contact information forms.
 - Consider creating a separate form for Dad’s contact information, especially if Dad lives apart from the children.
 - If Mom does not feel comfortable providing that information, encourage her to provide information on another significant male figure.
- ❖ Specify **dad** or **father** when you want to reach out to or include Dads. ‘Parent’ is often interpreted as ‘mother.’
 - For example, invite “Moms, Dads and Caregivers” to an event rather than just “Parents.”
- ❖ **What about same-sex couples?** Consider adding inclusive or gender neutral language to your forms:
 - Parent/guardian(s)
 - Parent 1 and Parent 2
 - Caregiver(s)
 - Questions such as: “Who are the people responsible for your child’s care?”



“Many programs have learned that building trust, developing relationships and making personal contacts are the most successful methods in getting fathers more involved.”

- Sector Analysis: Linking Fathers from Minnesota Fathers & Families Network

3. Target Information to Dads:

- ❖ Describe your program using dad-friendly language. For example, focus on **'opinions,' 'ideas,' 'techniques'** and **'solutions'** rather than *'sharing concerns or feelings'* or *'getting help.'*
 - Make clear the goal or utility of activities. Men may respond better when they see an activity as providing practical information or solutions.
 - Aim for dad-inclusive activities to be well-organized and the leadership clearly in charge.

“Marketing to men begins with understanding how men shop. They tend to not do much grazing or looking around. Usually, guys will know what they want and go and get it. Reaching fathers is the same. They must see the program as practical, to the point, having a clear purpose, and of value to themselves and their families. They are less likely to respond to something that seems too self-reflective or sounds like a support group. So keep titles and descriptions short but accurate and focused on the children or the family.”

- *Engaging Fathers in Programs for Families*

- ❖ Explain to Dads that their involvement is vital for their child’s development and success. See sidebar for benefits that children gain from father involvement.
- ❖ Make clear that information is for fathers by providing leaflets and information that specifically mention and include pictures of Dads.
- ❖ Suggest concrete activities and explain how the activity will benefit the child’s growth. Many fathers are more comfortable participating in child development when they are given clear and defined tasks.
- ❖ Consider including some material targeted specifically toward Dads in your regular prenatal classes.



Benefits to Children with Involved Dads:

Social Benefits:

- Greater empathy
- Healthier relationships with peers
- Higher self-esteem
- More self-control and less impulsive behavior
- More generous

Intellectual Benefits:

- Increased curiosity and less fear in new situations
- Greater tolerance for stress and frustration
- Higher verbal skills
- Better school performance

Dads also benefit from being involved with their children!

Dads gain self-confidence, have a greater sense of overall wellbeing and are better able to express their emotions.

- adapted from **“Positive Father Involvement”** by **Minnesota Fathers & Families Network**

4. Encourage or Provide Opportunities for Dads to Learn about Parenting

- ❖ Encourage new Dads to seek out information and support related to fathering.
 - Provide Dad with online resources that he can turn to for help. (Use the 'Resources for Dads' list that is an appendix to this toolkit.)
 - Suggest that Dads join parenting or peer groups to gain support and knowledge.
- ❖ Provide peer groups or parenting classes if your WIC site has the capacity.
- ❖ Support men in their development as fathers or father figures. (See the sidebar for the various roles a Dad can play. Each father will have strengths in some areas and need to work on developing others.)



ACTION ITEMS FOR WIC

STAFF:

- Build positive relationships with Dads.
- Invite Dads to be a part of WIC activities.
- Use dad-friendly language.
- Tell them about how their child benefits from their involvement.
- Provide Dads with resources to learn about parenting.
- Encourage Dads to join parenting support groups or classes.



Important Roles Played by Dads

1. The Provider Father

Providing the basics – food, clothing and shelter – by contributing to the family's economic well-being is an important part of fatherhood.

2. The Interactive Father

Spending time with their dad gives children a chance to learn communication skills, social rules, and the values that are important to their family.

3. The Nurturing Father

Dads should provide an environment where children feel important and cared for.

4. The Affectionate Father

A child's first relationships need to be filled with love and warmth. Dads should give kisses, smiles, hugs and affirming words to their children.

5. The Responsible Father

Dads show they are responsible by giving their children guidance, keeping them safe, and teaching them about the world.

6. The Committed Father

Commitment shows children that they belong. They learn that their dad will look out for their best interests.

- Adapted from Engaging Fathers in Programs for Families

Resources

- [Key Concepts: Including Dads in a WIC Setting](#) from Texas WIC
- [WIC Watch: Preparing Men to be Fathers](#) from California WIC Association
- [Step by Step: Engaging Fathers in Programs for Families](#) from Best Start Resource Centre: “Conversation Starters” p. 26
- [Involving Fathers](#) by National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
- [Involving Fathers: Getting Fathers Involved](#) by National Childbirth Trust
- [Reaching out to Fathers: An Examination of Staff Efforts that Lead to Greater Father Involvement in Early Childhood Programs](#) by Stephen Green/Early Childhood Research & Practice
- [Sector Analysis: Linking Fathers: Father Involvement in Early Childhood Programs](#) from Minnesota Fathers & Families Network
- [InfoSheet 3: Positive Father Involvement](#) from Minnesota Fathers & Families Network
- [Involving Men in Nurturing](#) from Prevent Child Abuse Vermont
- [Involving Fathers in Early Years Settings: Evaluating Four Models for Effective Practice Development](#) from the Department for Education and Skills (UK)
- [Fathers Matter](#) from Preschool Learning Alliance





Help Dads to Support Moms and Breastfeeding



THIS SECTION INCLUDES TIPS ON:

1. Teaching Dad about the benefits of breastfeeding.
2. Addressing Dad's concerns related to his partner breastfeeding.
3. Encouraging Dad to support Mom during pregnancy.
4. Supporting Dad to support Mom after pregnancy and while breastfeeding.

Did You Know?

Research tells us that support from her partner is an important factor in a woman's decision to breastfeed her baby! Since their support is so important, Dads (or Dads-to-be) should be educated on the benefits of breastfeeding.

1. Educate Dads about the Many Benefits of Breastfeeding

Dad may not have heard the many reasons to breastfeed. WIC staff can teach Dad about the benefits to his baby. You may want to talk about some of the following benefits:

- Breastfeeding stimulates brain growth. Mom's milk helps the baby's IQ reach full potential.
- It may mean fewer doctor visits. Mom's milk lowers the baby's risk of allergies, asthma and infections.
- Breastfeeding is less expensive than formula.
- It helps Mom stay calm and bond with the baby. The hormones produced while nursing help Mom relax.
- Breastfeeding helps Mom to lose the baby weight.
- It protects Mom against excessive bleeding after delivery, delays the return of her period, and lowers her risk of cancer.



"Getting started breastfeeding and keeping it up for the first year of the baby's life - as the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends - is so much easier when the new mother and father act as a team, encouraging each other and helping each other to be supportive, involved parents, nursing experts agree. First-time parents, especially, need to remember that they need to work together to learn how to become good parents...A new mother is just as scared as the father is of doing the wrong thing. Confidence comes with spending time with the baby ... and with practice."

"Breastfeeding: How Can Dad Help?" by Robina Riccitiello

2. Listen to and Address Dad's Concerns about Breastfeeding

Dads may have concerns about his partner breastfeeding. WIC staff should:

- ❖ Listen to Dad and acknowledge his concerns as valid.
- ❖ Respond to Dad's concerns in a supportive way. You can use the table following table as a guide:



Dad's Concern about Breastfeeding	Reassure Dad...
Feeling left out if his partner breastfeeds	Dad's support is so important while Mom is breastfeeding, and there are lots of ways he can help (see the next page). There are also lots of ways Dad can bond with baby without being involved with feeding! Soothing, bathing, playing, etc.
Pain his partner may experience with breastfeeding	In general, there should be little or no pain with breastfeeding. If Mom and baby are having a hard time, Dad can take Mom to WIC or her doctor for help.
Whether his partner will make enough milk	In most cases, if Mom is eating healthily and drinking plenty of water, she will make the amount of milk that baby needs.
That breastfeeding will interfere with his relationship or sex life with his partner	Having a baby changes your sex life whether the baby is given Mom's milk or formula. The first 6 weeks are tiring for Mom. Her body needs time to heal from the trauma of birth. Both of you will need to adjust to the big change in your home life. You will need to plan for time alone with each other. This will be true no matter how the baby is fed.
That breastfeeding will ruin his partner's breasts	Breastfeeding does not damage Mom's breasts! Any changes in her breasts' appearance are caused by pregnancy itself, whether or not she breastfeeds.
Whether breastfeeding will be too difficult for Mom	Dad can make things much easier on Mom by providing the support outlined in the next few pages.

3. Encourage Dad to Support Mom before the Baby is Born

Once the couple knows they are expecting a baby, Dad's main role is providing support to Mom during the pregnancy. A father's early involvement will strengthen the bond between baby and Dad and ease the transition into fatherhood.

WIC staff can recommend that Dad:

- ❖ Attend prenatal classes to learn about breastfeeding and how to be supportive during labor.
- ❖ Pack the hospital bag (including a change of clothes and toiletries for himself).
- ❖ Prepare for the baby by getting items like a crib, car seat and stroller.
- ❖ Care for Mom by doing things such as household chores or rubbing her feet or back.
- ❖ Make sure that Mom can get the rest she needs.



4. Help Dad to Support Mom while she is Breastfeeding

When the baby is born, WIC staff can suggest to Dad that he:

- ❖ Encourage Mom to breastfeed:
 - Reassure Mom that he has lots of ways to bond with baby besides feeding.
 - Ask Mom what she would like him to do for her and the baby.
 - Praise Mom for doing a great job.
 - Be vocal in his support. Tell Mom how much he appreciates what she is doing.

- ❖ Be a part of the feeding team:
 - Watch baby for early signs of hunger (turning toward Mom's breast, sucking on a fist or making sucking noises) and bring baby to Mom to breastfeed.
 - Bring Mom water and a healthy snack while she breastfeeds – it is important she eats healthy foods and stays hydrated in order to make enough milk.
 - Make sure Mom is comfortable and has all the things she needs like a pillow for support, nipple cream, burp cloths, etc.
 - Keep her company or entertained while she is breastfeeding.
 - Help set up the breast pump if Mom pumps.

- ❖ Take on other baby care duties and make sure Mom gets enough rest:
 - Hold, cuddle and bathe the baby.
 - Be in charge of diaper duty.
 - Get up with the baby at night (for non-feeding related awakenings) so Mom can get a little more sleep.
 - Play with the baby or take him/her on a walk so that Mom can take a shower.

- ❖ Help out by taking on household duties:
 - Help with chores and prepare healthy meals.
 - Care for the other children while Mom is breastfeeding.

- ❖ Join a peer Dad group where men discuss and learn about supporting their partners to breastfeed. (See more about this in the “Peer Groups” section of toolkit.)



Tips on How “Dad Can Help, Too”

- Limit visitors and visiting times, especially at the hospital when mom and baby are learning to breastfeed.
- Get to know normal baby behavior, especially for crying and sleeping.
- Encourage mom with words of support; things will get easier after about 6 weeks.
- Speak up for mom's wishes.
- Take mom to get breastfeeding help, if she needs it.
- Ask grandma to pick the kids up from school or ask a friend to bring over a meal.
- Help with cleaning, laundry and other chores.
- Help make healthy meals.
- Play with or care for baby while mom gets some rest.

- from *A WIC Guide to Breastfeeding*



ACTION ITEMS FOR WIC STAFF:

- Listen to and acknowledge Dads' concerns around breastfeeding.
- Educate and/or reassure Dads about the benefits of breastfeeding.
- Provide suggestions of how Dad can support Mom during pregnancy.
- Provide suggestions of how Dad can support Mom after the baby is born and while she is breastfeeding.

“When the baby’s dad wants mom to breastfeed, she is more likely to breastfeed, be successful at it and breastfeed for a longer amount of time. Daddy’s support is so important.”

–“Breastfeeding and Dads” from Maryland WIC

Resources

- [Using Loving Support to Grow and Glow in WIC: Breastfeeding Training for Local WIC Staff](#) (Module 4: Barriers to Breastfeeding, p.8-11)
- [Loving Support© Through Peer Counseling: A Journey Together](#) (p.51)
- [Breastfeeding: How Can Dad Help?](#) from Oregon WIC
- [A WIC Guide to Breastfeeding](#) from California WIC
- [Breastfeeding Duties for Dads](#) from Mama Say What!?
- [Mother’s Milk for Daddy’s Baby](#) – Posters from Pennsylvania WIC
- [“What If Dad Feels Left Out”](#) – Informational flyer from Pennsylvania WIC
- [Fathers Supporting Breastfeeding](#) – Brochures and posters from USDA
- [Give a Breastfeeding Mom your Love and Support: \(10 Tips for Dad](#) brochure and Encouragement [poster/brochure](#)) from USDA
- [Magical Bond of Love: “Dads Play an Important Role”](#) brochure in [English](#) and [Spanish](#)
- [Breastfeeding and Dads](#) – Informational flyer from Maryland WIC
- [Mommy Help](#) from Pennsylvania WIC
- Project: Breastfeeding: [TIME article](#) and their [Facebook page](#)



Encourage Moms to Include Dads



THIS SECTION INCLUDES TIPS ON:

1. Addressing the barriers to Mom including Dad.
2. Being sensitive to Moms' feelings and addressing Moms' concerns about including Dads.
3. Encouraging co-parenting.

1) ADDRESS THE BARRIERS TO MOM INCLUDING DAD

In some families, Dad's relationship with Mom and Mom's perception of Dad's role may be barriers to Dad becoming more involved in his children's lives. Mom may act as a "gatekeeper" by regulating Dad's contact with the child(ren). While this is sometimes due to a bad relationship between Mom and Dad, it can occur for many other reasons (see sidebar).

WIC staff should talk to mothers about their influence on Dad's involvement and discuss how they can facilitate their partner's involvement in ways that will be helpful not only for Dad, but for Mom and the baby as well. Moms are very important for getting Dads involved, because, even with fatherhood outreach, they are the parent most likely to be present at WIC.

To support Moms in including Dads, WIC staff can:

- ❖ Talk to mothers in your office about the importance and the benefits of Dad's involvement. Explain to Moms that you depend on them to get Dad more involved.
- ❖ Work to address Moms' concerns and encourage them to cooperate with Dads.
- ❖ Get suggestions from Moms on how to best involve Dads in WIC activities.
- ❖ Ask Mom to schedule her next office visit for a time when Dad can come in, too.
- ❖ If delivering positive parenting programs, specifically invite both Mom and Dad.

Remember:

Fathers tend to be more involved in parenting when their partners are supportive and encouraging!

Main reasons why Mom may resist Dad's involvement:

- Efficiency – "It's faster if I feed the kids myself."
 - Quality – "I do a better job of changing the babies' diapers."
 - Sympathy – "I don't want to bother him while he's watching TV."
 - Admiration – "He works so hard...he shouldn't have to come home and feed the kids, too."
 - Anger – (This happens a lot when Mom and Dad are no longer romantically involved.)
 - Cultural beliefs about gender roles – "Men don't prepare meals or change diapers...that's women's work."
- Adapted from *Key Concepts: Including Dads in a WIC Setting*

- ❖ Encourage Mom to:
 - Give Dad time with the baby to learn how to comfort him/her. This will improve his confidence as a parent and give Mom a break.
 - Encourage Dad to be involved. Mom’s encouragement will help Dad become the skilled and engaged parenting partner she needs.
 - Give Dad the benefit of the doubt: don’t assume that he does not want to be involved.
 - Share and discuss with Dad the information that she learns at WIC.

2) BE SENSITIVE TO MOMS’ FEELINGS AND CONCERNS



An unintended consequence of including Dads in programming is that Moms may feel left out. Moms may be concerned that they will lose ownership over the program if Dad gets involved. Some Moms may resent the program celebrating father engagement because Dad may not have been as engaged as Mom in the child’s life from the beginning.

“When the announcement was made that our program was going to do more with fathers it hurt. I’ve been here since day one doing everything. But it hit me when I looked at how excited my child became when her father showed up... I started to look at him differently.”

-Head Start Mom, Head Start Father Engagement Programming Guide

To ease tension regarding special events or services for Dads:

- ❖ Make sure there are parallel activities and groups for Moms.
- ❖ Ask for Moms’ advice and input on father involvement.
- ❖ Offer Moms the opportunity to explore their feelings about being a co-parent. (See more on co-parenting below.)
- ❖ Remind Moms of the benefits to their children when Dad is involved.
- ❖ Be sensitive when suggesting mixed parenting groups as many women may feel uncomfortable expressing their opinions in a group with men or vice versa. You may want to have separate male and female parent groups. However, it depends on the needs of your participants. (See section on parenting groups and benefits of couples groups below.)

3) WHEN APPROPRIATE, FOCUS ON CO-PARENTING:

Co-parenting is shared decision making about what is in the best interest of a child. Each parent still contributes their unique strengths to the child-parent relationship but work together to make child rearing decisions.

Recent research has shown that the single strongest predictor of whether a father will be involved with his child is the quality of his relationship with the child’s mother. This is true whether or not the parents are in a romantic relationship with



each other. Conflicts around child rearing are a primary source of marital/relationship problems. Therefore, an emphasis on co-parenting, where parents work together and agree on the best ways to raise their child, has positive outcomes for the family as a whole.

WIC staff can encourage co-parenting and improved communication by:

- ❖ Suggesting to parents that it can strengthen the couple's relationship if both are "on the same page" when it comes to parenting.
- ❖ Considering the feelings of both parents when making suggestions.
- ❖ Affirming each parent's knowledge and understanding of their child and acknowledging their unique contributions as a parent.
- ❖ Explaining the benefits a child receives when two parents are both supporting the child's well-being.
- ❖ Reminding parents that it takes time and effort to become an effective co-parenting team, so they should not feel discouraged if it is difficult at first.
- ❖ Promoting parenting classes and support groups either at WIC or at other community organizations.

THE BENEFITS OF PARENTING GROUPS:

Both men and women benefit from guidance and support during the transition to parenthood. This is where **parenting support groups** can help:

Recent research from the 'Supporting Father Involvement Project' shows that parenting group participants were found to be warmer, more encouraging, and more responsive to their child's needs, as well as better at setting limits than those parents who did not attend a group. These benefits lasted for years after attending the parenting group.

Parenting support groups can involve both parents or be for fathers only and mothers only. Based on the research, father involvement increased whether Dads attended father groups **or** couple groups. Couples groups have some additional benefits as well (see box on the next page).

Potential Guide for WIC Staff to Encourage Co-Parenting

- Schedule Mom and Dad for an office visit at a time that works for the both of them.
- Let Mom and Dad know that you see them as a team and that you want to work with both of them on their family's health goals.
- Politely explore both parents' feelings about parenthood and how they each see their role in the family.
- Remember to actively engage Dad in the office visit by asking him if he has any questions or concerns. Ask him about his opinions or beliefs about his child or about parenting in general.
- Adapted from *Key Concepts: Including Dad in a WIC setting*

“When a father perceives that his partner has confidence in his parenting ability, he feels motivated and competent as a parent. These feelings of motivation and confidence reinforce his involvement and his satisfaction with the parent role.”

-Head Start Father Engagement Programming Guide

Some additional benefits specific to couples' parenting groups are:

- Both parents can experience and learn the same material, which helps parents to feel like a team while parenting.
- Sharing the experience of the parenting group reduces the likelihood that one parent will be seen as the expert with more knowledge and parenting ability than the other.
- Parents experience increased satisfaction with their relationship with each other and decreased conflict and parenting stress.



If the biological father is not around, or if Mom does not feel comfortable naming him, WIC staff can suggest that Mom provide WIC with contact information for a supportive male family member or friend who is involved in the child's life.

- ❖ For example, in situations where there is family violence, it may be better for Mom and child(ren) to not involve Dad.
- ❖ If you do not already have them, establish policies and procedures for working with families who have court orders, custody issues or abuse/domestic violence.
- ❖ Staff should use methods that are safe, honest and respectful when communicating with Dads in complicated family circumstances.



ACTION ITEMS FOR WIC STAFF:

- Explain to Moms the benefits of father involvement.
- Encourage Moms to include Dads and to facilitate their involvement with WIC.
- Be sensitive to Moms' feelings and address Moms' concerns about including Dads.
- Ask for Moms' input on how Dads could be involved.
- Encourage co-parenting.
- If possible, offer parenting groups at your WIC clinic or refer participants to parenting groups in the community.

Resources

- [Dedicated to Dads: Lessons from Early Head Start](#) from Head Start
- [Key Concepts: Including Dads in a WIC Setting](#) from Texas WIC
- [Head Start Father Engagement Birth to Five Programming Guide](#)
- [Promoting Father Involvement in Early Childhood](#) from FRIENDS National Resource Center
- [Step by Step: Engaging Fathers in Programs for Families](#) from Best Start Resource Centre
- [Involving Men in Nurturing](#) from Prevent Child Abuse Vermont
- [The Daddy-Baby Connection](#) from Parenting Magazine
- [How to Get Dads Involved? It's a Family Affair](#) from Berkeley Greater Good Science Center
- [Supporting Father Involvement](#) from Family Resource Centers



Focus on ways Dads can Bond with Baby



THIS SECTION INCLUDES TIPS ON:

1. Encouraging Dads to bond with their children.
2. Teaching Dads how to start bonding with their baby early in life.
3. Suggesting tasks for Dads that help them to feel involved in and responsible for child rearing.

Remember:

There are plenty of ways that Dads can bond with their baby that provide support to Mom and do not interfere with breastfeeding!

1) Encourage Dads to Bond with their Children

WIC staff should encourage men and Dads to build relationships with their children. Use the following suggestions to support father-child relationships:

- ❖ Let Dads know the strengths you see in their relationships with their children.
- ❖ Suggest that Dads relate to their children by following their child's lead during play.
- ❖ Partner with Dads to identify what their children need and discuss the meaning of children's behavior.
- ❖ Ask questions about a Dad's perception of his child and share information to build a common understanding about his child's development.
- ❖ Look for opportunities to support Dad's mastery of their parenting role and to reinforce positive father-child interactions. - *Adapted from Engaging Fathers in Programs for Families*



2) Teach Dads Ways to Bond with their Children

WIC staff can also offer specific suggestions of how Dads can bond with their children.

- ❖ WIC staff can explain to men that Dads can start bonding with their baby before he or she is even born! Suggest that Dads can:
 - Attend prenatal doctor's appointments.
 - Listen to the baby's heartbeat and feel the baby kick.
 - Talk, sing or read to the baby while s/he is still in Mom's belly. This might seem cheesy, but the baby can hear you!
 - Help Mom get ready for the baby: get things like a crib and car seat.



❖ After the baby is born, WIC staff can suggest that Dad bond with him/her by:

- Providing comfort, perhaps by holding baby skin-to-skin or doing infant massage.
- Singing or talking to the baby.
- Cuddling and soothing the baby when s/he is upset. This might include waking up with the baby at night for non feeding-related awakenings.
- Gently rocking baby to sleep.
- Burping the baby after breastfeeding.
- Changing diapers or dressing the baby.
- Giving baby a bath.
- Playing with the baby with toys or simple hand games.
- Taking baby for a walk.
- Wearing a carrier that holds baby close to his body.
- Trying to make the baby laugh with funny faces or voices.
- Taking baby to a doctor's appointment.



❖ As children get older, Dad can bond and help out by:

- Teaching a new activity.
- Listening to their child talk and responding to them.
- Taking the child to daycare/preschool.
- After 6 months, introducing solid foods.
- Doing inexpensive and fun activities with his child(ren) like craft projects, going to the playground or flying kites.
- Including his child in his own activities at an age-appropriate level, such as giving kid-safe tasks in the kitchen or having kids help out with yard work and gardening.



“Many fathers appear to be more comfortable participating in child development services when they are given clearly delineated roles. When working with fathers who hesitate to interact with children, teachers and home visitors can try to direct fathers toward concrete activities while explaining how the activity will benefit their children's growth. Such activities can include developmentally appropriate play, arts and crafts, help with meals, and reading books.”

-Dedicated to Dads: Lessons from Early Head Start

3) Give Dads Suggestions on How to Contribute to their Child's Development

Given that Dads may feel more comfortable interacting with their children when they have clearly defined roles, WIC staff could suggest that Dads take charge of some of the following areas of their child's development:

- ❖ Dads can be responsible for **interpreting baby behavior**.
 - WIC staff can introduce Dads to the California WIC Baby Behavior Campaign (linked in Resources below). Staff can explain to Dads some common behavioral cues, such as:
 - If your newborn is hungry, she might keep her hands near her mouth, bend her arms and legs or make sucking noises.
 - If your baby is full, she might suck slower or stop sucking, relax her hands and arms, push away or fall asleep.
 - If a baby wants to engage, she might have a relaxed face and body, stare at you or follow your voice and face.
 - If a baby wants a change in her environment, she might look away or arch her back, frown, or stiffen her hands, arms and legs.
 - Responding to cues quickly may help the baby to cry less.
 - It can be especially helpful when Mom is first recovering from giving birth for Dad to be knowledgeable about baby behavior.

- ❖ Dads can focus on **supporting healthy brain development** in their child.

- In order to stimulate their baby’s brain and help with language development, Dads can read, talk and sing to their child.
- Encourage Dads to take their children to their library and participate in choosing books.
- Reading programs (such as Little by Little described to the right) could have a special focus on involving Dads in their child’s reading.



Spotlight on a Program: “Little by Little”

The **Little by Little School Readiness Program** has been developed by PHFE WIC in Los Angeles, CA. Reading out loud to children is so important for building literacy and preparing children for school, so Little by Little provides age-appropriate children’s books 4 times a year, as well as home safety items. The program also gives developmentally-appropriate handouts that encourage parents to read to their children starting at the end of pregnancy up through the child’s 5th year.

- ❖ As their child gets a little bit older, Dads can **focus on active play**.
 - Dads can bring unique aspects to play: exploration, risk-taking, persistence, and independence.
 - Encourage Dad to gently roughhouse or use his body as a jungle gym.
 - Suggest active games like pillow fights or “sock wrestle” (see Toddlers Need their Dads linked below).
 - Dads can take their kids to parks, playgrounds or open gym time at children’s gyms. Supporting active play from an early age will set up healthy habits for the future.



Resources

- [Fatherhood First](#): Father Child Development Activities (Register for the site to access!)
- [Father/Child Development Activities](#) from Fatherhood First
- [Breastfeeding and Dads](#) from Maryland WIC
- [Brain Development with Dad](#) from text4baby
- [Top Tips for Dads on Bonding with your Baby](#) from BabyCenter
- [Step by Step: Engaging Fathers in Programs for Families](#) by Best Start Resource Centre: “Step 9: Consider Key Issues” p. 34
- [Little by Little](#) from PHFE WIC
- [Toddlers Need Their Dads](#) from Wisconsin WIC
- [Time for Dads](#) from Preschool Learning Alliance
- [Becoming More Involved as a Dad](#) from Preschool Learning Alliance
- [14 Ways for Dads to be Engaged](#) from Best for Babes
- [Getting to Know Your Baby](#) from California WIC Baby Behavior [Campaign](#)
- [Baby Feeding Signs](#) from Pennsylvania WIC



ACTION ITEMS FOR WIC STAFF:

- **Support Dads to build relationships with their children.**
- **Provide suggestions of ways that Dads can bond.**
- **Teach Dads about interpreting baby behavior.**
- **Encourage Dads to read to their children.**
- **Suggest that Dads focus on active play with their kids.**



Include Dads in Evaluation Efforts



THIS SECTION INCLUDES TIPS ON:

1. Assessing the needs of Dads.
2. Creating a tool to evaluate Dad-inclusion efforts.
3. Implementing your evaluation tool.
4. Continuing to provide opportunities for feedback.

Remember:

It is important to evaluate your efforts to include men and Dads. This will allow you to see what is working and what could be improved!

1) ASSESS THE NEEDS OF DADS BEFORE STARTING YOUR DAD-INCLUSION EFFORTS

Ideally, WIC staff will assess the needs of men and Dads before implementing efforts to see what they would find the most helpful.

- ❖ You can make a survey addressing some (or all) of the following questions:

Understanding the Needs of Fathers in the Community

- What is the geographic area being served, and what are the racial and ethnic groups in the community? What attributes of the community make it easy or difficult to address fathers' needs?
- What are the fathers' cultures? Are they newcomers to the United States?
- What are fathers' attitudes and perceptions of the WIC program? What are fathers' beliefs about their fatherhood role?
- What activities or services might interest or benefit fathers? What services are needed by fathers and father figures in the community that the community lacks?
- What kind of work opportunities are there for fathers?
- How many fathers are struggling with special issues, such as substance abuse, domestic violence, depression, probation and parole, and relationship problems?
- Do the fathers have literacy concerns?
- What would fathers like the program to do better? What support is needed to further engage fathers and father figures in the program?

-Adapted from "Father Engagement Assessment Questions," *Head Start Father Engagement Guide*

- ❖ You can also gather demographic information from local and state databases to get information about Dads in your area.
- ❖ Having information about the men and Dads in your community can help you choose activities that might be most effective in getting them involved!

2) CREATE A TOOL TO EVALUATE YOUR DAD-INCLUSION EFFORTS

After implementing some of the father-friendly strategies described in this toolkit, it is important that you evaluate to see how they are going. This type of assessment can give you insight into what may work best for your community and how best to improve your program.

- ❖ WIC staff can conduct a survey to evaluate the office for successful outreach to Dads.
 - You can use questions such as those to the right or from additional resources linked below.
- ❖ Think about surveying both staff members and parents, with a special focus on men and Dads.
 - You can also ask Dads and staff members for suggestions on how the program could be improved.
- ❖ After you choose your questions, decide how to get responses. This may include:
 - Phone calls
 - In person interviews
 - Written survey
 - Online survey

Evaluation Questions to Consider

1. Does the entire staff have an understanding of the role men play in children's lives?
 2. Do fathers believe there is value to using the program?
 3. Is there a male staff member that fathers are able to connect with? Is there a male volunteer or representative who is the point man for fathering activities?
 4. Is the physical environment welcoming to fathers?
 5. What biases may be influencing your efforts to engage men?
 6. Are there resources available that speak to fathers?
 7. Do promotion materials reflect fathers in the wording and images?
- Adapted from "Assess Your Father-Friendliness" *Step by Step*

3) IMPLEMENT YOUR TOOL TO EVALUATE HOW YOUR DAD-INCLUSION EFFORTS ARE GOING

- ❖ **Survey the staff.** Assess how staff members feel that the father-friendliness effort is going.
- ❖ **Evaluate staff on their work with fathers.** This sends a clear message to your staff that involving Dads is an important part of their jobs.
- ❖ **Pursue verbal and written feedback from Dads.**
 - Have focus groups or meetings with men to listen and see how they perceive your inclusiveness efforts.
- ❖ **Keep feedback from Dads anonymous and confidential.** Establish procedures to protect the confidentiality of a Dad's feedback such as using a written form or having one-on-one meetings.
- ❖ **Use the data** you have collected to fine-tune your father inclusion and outreach efforts.
 - Review and update plans based on feedback from Dads.
 - Monitoring should be ongoing or occur at key points during the year.



4) PROVIDE CONTINUED OPPORTUNITIES FOR EVALUATION

- ❖ When you have an event for or including Dads, set aside 10 minutes for fathers and staff to share ideas and get feedback. Staff can listen to how Dads would like to be involved.
- ❖ Create brief, easy-to-use forms or questionnaires asking men and Dads their feelings about the program environment, and their thoughts about how well they are relating to staff (See sidebar for an example).
 - Offer these forms to Dads periodically or whenever they want to give feedback.



Potential Questionnaire to Dads:

- Do Dads feel that the letters/notices that go to children's homes are aimed at them – as well as at their children's mothers?
- How comfortable do Dads feel when talking with staff members when they come for appointments or when they participate in activities?
- How successful is the office/program in engaging Dads?
- What could the program do to encourage more Dads to get involved?

-Adapted from *Involving Fathers in Early Years Settings*



ACTION ITEMS FOR WIC STAFF:

- **Think about and assess the needs of Dads before beginning your inclusion efforts.**
- **Consider the goals of your program and create a tool to evaluate those goals.**
- **Use your evaluation tool to question staff and parents, especially Dads.**
- **Incorporate feedback into future planning.**
- **Provide ongoing opportunities for Dads to give feedback on the program.**

Resources

- [Head Start Father Engagement Birth to Five Programming Guide](#): Father Engagement Assessment Questions (p.50)
- [Step by Step: Engaging Fathers in Programs for Families](#) by Best Start Resource Centre, "Outline Potential Strategies" p.29, "Signs of Success" p.33, "Assess your Father-friendliness" p.17
- [Dedicated to Dads: Lessons from Early Head Start](#)
- [Creating Paths to Father Involvement: Lessons from Early Head Start](#)
- [Involving Fathers: Getting Fathers Involved](#) by National Childbirth Trust
- [Involving Fathers in Early Years Settings: Evaluating Four Models for Effective Practice Development](#) from Department for Education and Skills (UK)



Provide Dads with Opportunities for Peer Groups or Counseling



THIS SECTION INCLUDES TIPS ON:

1. Designing peer groups to meet Dads' needs.
2. Encouraging Dads to get involved in peer groups.
3. Retaining Dads in peer activities.

Did You Know?

Peer groups can help staff to strengthen relationships with men and Dads and help them to feel more comfortable and included at WIC.

Your WIC office may decide to have peer groups or a peer counseling program especially for men and Dads. These can provide opportunities for father-to-father connections, peer learning and support, and education on topics that interest Dads in your program. Peer groups also provide time for staff to strengthen relationships with fathers and learn more about their ideas, beliefs, and what is important to them as parents and as men.

1) Design Peer Groups that meet the Needs of your Dads

- ❖ Find out what Dads want from a peer group and work to meet their needs. Some options to offer Dads:
 - Discussion/Support sessions
 - Child development concepts/Parenting skills
 - Job readiness classes
 - Workshop format where Dads can graduate from the program and receive a certificate of achievement
- ❖ Use group facilitators who are skilled at working with Dads (see sidebar for tips).
- ❖ Help Dads to develop trusting relationships with WIC staff:
 - Use your relationships with community partners to organize attending a sporting or musical event.
 - Offer dinner and time for conversation so that Dads can get to know staff.
 - Incorporate culturally relevant activities into peer groups.
- ❖ Target discussion topics to the particular interests of men within their community.

Effective facilitation of men's groups includes:

- Looking to the Dads' interests and keeping tips practical
- Knowing the uniqueness of how men parent
- Highlighting things that Dads do that show their strengths as a parent
- Doing more asking than telling
- Having conversations that encourage a balance between learning new information and building on existing strengths

- For example, in a group where many dads were migrant farm workers, Dads' groups covered topics such as pesticides and injury prevention, in addition to the common topics of nutrition, child development, physical health, and domestic violence.
- ❖ Talk about gender and masculinity. Work to develop healthier alternatives to existing notions of gender and masculinity in a safe place under the guidance of a positive role model.



“If we are serious about providing boys and girls with nurturing male role models, we will have to provide venues where men who haven’t had everyday heroes in their childhoods and who are starved for guidance, for friendship, for brotherhood,” can acquire the “knowledge of how to be strong and male without being... aggressive and abusive.”

- *Involving Men in Nurturing*

2) Encourage Dads to get involved with Peer Groups or Counseling

After developing peer groups or a peer counseling program, WIC staff can:

- ❖ Recruit interested fathers to mentor other fathers
- ❖ Use a buddy system that pairs more experienced parents with newer parents
- ❖ Let Dads know the benefits of peer groups:
 - Dads can receive social support from men who have experienced similar challenges.
 - Connecting Dads to one another can create a stronger sense of community.
 - It can be especially beneficial for men who do not have a supportive social network.
 - Dads can get information and build their parenting skills in a non-judgmental environment.
 - Groups provide a safe, private space for them to talk about parenting or relationship struggles.
 - Father to father mentoring supports personal and professional growth.
- ❖ Use word of mouth. If Dads are enjoying the group, suggest that they invite their friends or neighbors to join as well.

Three Steps to Engaging Dads in Peer Support Groups

1. Work with Moms to encourage fathers and male partners to attend existing parent events or classes.
 2. Hold break-out sessions for men during those meetings.
 3. Create separate support groups for men and Dads who are interested.
- Adapted from *Dedicated to Dads*

3) Retain Men in Peer Activities

To keep Dads engaged, WIC staff can:

- ❖ Alternate class topics or formats each week or invite guest speakers from the community.
- ❖ Consider offering some kind of incentive or prize as motivation for men to continue attending the group.
 - For example, T-shirts with a fatherhood logo or restaurant gift card upon completion of a group series. Utilize community partners to develop incentives.
- ❖ Listen to feedback from dads and adjust structure, content and timing of group meetings accordingly.
- ❖ Maintain a connection with Dads through social media, such as “Dads board” for posting questions.



Spotlight on a Program: “Peer Dads”

The City of Dallas WIC Peer Dad Program started in December 2008, with its mission to provide educational and promotional breastfeeding interventions targeting WIC fathers and future fathers. “We recruit peer dads who are fathers of successfully breastfed WIC infants. They are trained to assess a man’s general attitude about breastfeeding and provide practical tools that will empower him to participate in the baby feeding decision. Drawing from their own experience, they understand that breastfeeding success does not depend only on the clinical or medical aspect of nursing, but also on helping mothers and babies obtain the best health outcomes by teaching and inspiring their partners/fathers to fight and remove barriers that prevent successful breastfeeding...”

Peer Dads offer support in man-to-man classes, clinics, and hospitals.

- Muswamba Mwamba, Peer Dad Coordinator (*Peer Counselor Spotlight*)



ACTION ITEMS FOR WIC STAFF:

- Think about and discuss the needs of your WIC Dads.
- Organize a peer group or counseling program that meets those needs.
- Encourage Dads to get involved with peer programs.
- Explain the benefits of peer groups and counseling.
- Use techniques to keep Dads engaged and involved with the peer program.

Resources

- [Step by Step: Engaging Fathers in Programs for Families](#) from Best Start Resource Centre
- [Dedicated to Dads: Lessons from Early Head Start](#) from Head Start
- [Las Manos de Apá: The Hands of My Father: Father's Group Lessons](#)
- [Fathers in Sure Start](#) from Sure Start (UK)
- [Head Start Father Engagement Birth to Five Programming Guide](#), Family Partnerships (Fathers' Groups, p. 34)
- [Involving Fathers](#) from National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
- [Promoting Father Involvement in Early Childhood](#) from FRIENDS National Resource Center
- [Creating Paths to Father Involvement: Lessons from Early Head Start](#)
- [Sector Analysis: Linking Fathers: Father Involvement in Early Childhood Programs](#) from Minnesota Fathers & Families Network
- [Peer Counselor Spotlight](#) from ibreastfeeding.com



Provide Service Referrals to Dads and Build Community Partnerships



THIS SECTION INCLUDES TIPS ON:

1. **Developing community partnerships.**
2. **Making the most of community partnerships to reach out to Dads.**
3. **Supporting Dads with referrals to community organizations.**

TO REMEMBER:

Programs that successfully include men and Dads focus on them as people, not just in their role as fathers. They provide support, referrals and resources for issues outside of parenting.

1) *Developing Community Partnerships*

By partnering with other organizations in the community, your WIC clinic can better provide programming for men and Dads and make more effective referrals.

- ❖ You could consider partnering with:
 - Food banks or restaurants for meals
 - Local stores for incentives and support for activities
 - Community centers and other agencies for use of space
 - Volunteer organizations or high school students for childcare
- ❖ Work to understand the needs and motivations of other agencies and so you can explain how they might benefit from a partnership with WIC.
- ❖ Use social media or contact regular media to talk about WIC and to get community partners interested.
- ❖ Invite current or potential partners to visit your program during an event.
 - Use the opportunity to explain what your WIC office is doing to engage and support fathers and talk about the importance of fathers in the lives of children.
 - This can strengthen the relationship with current partners.
- ❖ You can also use community partners, like community centers and local businesses, to spread the word that your WIC program is reaching out more to Dads and to publicize special events.



“Effective referrals begin with effective, trusting relationships between programs and parents. Get to know the fathers’ strengths, the diversity of their needs, and the tough challenges that they face. These relationships and this knowledge drive the referral process.”

-Head Start Father Engagement Birth to Five Programming Guide, Effective Referrals

2) Making the Most of Community Partnerships in order to Include Dads

If you develop community partnerships, you may have more capacity for activities that will appeal to Dads, such as:

- ❖ An evening event at your office for Dads where dinner is provided
- ❖ Special story time for Dads and their children at the local library
- ❖ Gym time at kid's gym or Daddy and Me time at a community pool
- ❖ Invite physical trainers to have a fitness clinic to encourage parents to be active with their kids at home
- ❖ Bike store that would loan bikes and trailers for a Daddy and Me bike ride
- ❖ Sponsorship for a BBQ at a local park with playground time or soccer
- ❖ Invite community partners to participate in a Father's Day Fair! The following quote is an example of how an agency used community partnerships to celebrate Dads:



"Community Action Agency (Jackson, MI) held a community festival called "Father's Fair" near Father's Day to raise awareness of the importance of fathers and to give families an opportunity to celebrate fathers. Local businesses, nonprofit organizations, and churches, as well as the Jackson Police Department and the Friend of the Court, organized informational booths. The children played on an inflatable obstacle course, slide, and ball room."

- from Dedicated to Dads: Lessons from Early Head Start

3) Support Dads with Referrals to Community Organizations

- ❖ WIC staff should learn about social and educational resources for fathers in the community.
 - Your clinic may already have information on many of these places as part of your referral process for women and children.
 - Developing community partnerships may also help you make referrals.
- ❖ After making the referral, WIC staff can help to motivate Dads to follow through on referrals and make sure the connection has been made.
- ❖ Focus on health and health services:
 - Engage Dads in discussions about their physical, mental and emotional health.
 - Remind Dads that they need to take good care of themselves to be able to take care of their children and family.

Steps for Making Effective Referrals:

1. Before referring dads to an agency, **know** the agency's process and how the father will be treated.
2. **Prepare** dads for what to expect.
3. **Check back** with fathers about whether or not referrals are helpful.
4. If the referral was less helpful: **Work** with dads to understand roadblocks they may have encountered.
5. If the referral was helpful: **Ask** dads to share their referral experience with other fathers and families.

- adapted from Community Partnerships:
Effective Referrals



❖ The following suggestions are potential community partners to refer Dads to:

<p>Health services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Local health and human services departments ○ Community clinics ○ City and county hospitals ○ University hospitals 	<p>Support for Positive Co-Parenting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mediation service providers ○ Marriage and family services ○ Family rights organizations ○ Legal aid societies ○ Anger management counselors
<p>Mental Health:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Community mental health providers ○ School-based mental health clinics (for younger Dads) ○ Substance abuse programs ○ Family violence programs ○ Hospital emergency departments (short term solution) 	<p>Education and Employment Support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ English as a Second Language classes (ESL) or GED classes (may be offered at community centers or libraries) ○ Community colleges ○ Technical schools ○ Employment agencies ○ Career centers
<p>Housing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Community development agencies ○ Housing authorities ○ Public housing ○ Community development financial institutions ○ Halfway houses and shelters 	<p>Social Support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ YMCA/YWCA ○ Community centers ○ Faith Institutions ○ Neighborhood groups ○ Parent-teacher associations ○ Community improvement groups

“Effective referrals include fathers at every step of the referral process. Fathers may have had unhappy experiences with social services agencies in the past. For example, they may have been excluded as part of the family unit. As a result, many men may be reluctant to engage with family service and support programs. By setting expectations with fathers and with community partners during the referral process, your staff can serve as both partners with and advocates for fathers... Through successful referrals, you and your community partners can help fathers expand their support network.”

-Head Start Father Engagement Birth to Five Programming Guide, Effective Referrals

Resources

- [Head Start Father Engagement Birth to Five Programming Guide](#): Community Partnerships: Effective Referrals & Community Resources (p.43-47)
- [Promoting Father Involvement in Early Childhood](#) from FRIENDS National Resource Center
- [Step by Step: Engaging Fathers in Programs for Families](#) from Best Start Resource Centre
- [Dedicated to Dads: Lessons from Early Head Start](#) from Head Start
- [Sector Analysis: Linking Fathers: Father Involvement in Early Childhood Programs](#) from Minnesota Fathers & Families Network



SUMMARY OF ACTION ITEMS FOR WIC STAFF:

- **Develop or strengthen community partnerships.**
- **Use community partnerships to reach out to Dads more.**
- **Provide referrals to Dads for issues outside of parenting and use partnerships to inform the referral process.**
- **Make sure Dads' needs are considered and check back with Dads to see if referrals are effective.**



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