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

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**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.
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