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*
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.

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**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