Provide Dads with Opportunities for Peer Groups or Counseling

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.

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.

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
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