

Why Engaging Fathers Matters



Safe Babies
A Program of ZERO TO THREE™

Fathers are equally as important as mothers and other family members in the lives of their babies and toddlers. Engaging and involving fathers is a crucial component of a child's early development, strengthens family engagement, and positively benefits both individuals throughout their lives.

Grounded in both research and lived experience, we can support individual providers, organizations, and policy makers in creating approaches that effectively engage fathers involved in child welfare systems. Being committed to creating that positive relationship between father and child can help foster healthy physical, mental, emotional, and social development.

Why is it important to engage fathers?

Fathers are allies in the promotion of family resilience

Fathers want to be engaged and connected parents

Fathers need support for parenting and mental health (e.g., 10% of new dads have Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders)¹

Fathers make up half of parents, yet current services and support engage less than 10% of fathers²

Fathers tend to interact differently with young kids than mothers and this promotes different aspects of child development

What are strategies for engaging fathers effectively?

- 1 Understanding self-awareness of assumptions, biases, and preferences that professionals bring to interactions with fathers
- 2 Assuming positive intent, investment in being a parent, and willingness to participate in services
- 3 Engaging fathers as people first, build relationships from a stance of curiosity and caring
- 4 Supporting family strengthening from the beginning on the importance of participation of both parents
- 5 Participating in ongoing fatherhood training (including reflective practice) and including fathers in partner groups and community development
- 6 Scheduling meetings at times that are accessible to both parents
- 7 Ensuring fathers are represented in spaces and language where meetings, appointments, visits, etc. occur (e.g., posters, intake forms)
- 8 Supporting mothers' understanding of the benefits of shared parenting approaches

¹ O'Brien, A. P., McNeil, K. A., Fletcher, R., Conrad, A., Wilson, A. J., Jones, D., & Chan, S. W. (2017). New Fathers' Perinatal Depression and Anxiety-Treatment Options: An Integrative Review. *American journal of men's health*, 11(4), 863–876. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1557988316669047>.

² *Ibid.*



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime