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# **RESOURCES FOR SERVING YOUNG FATHERS**

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**June 2016**

Read individually or in sequence, the resources in this series provide a comprehensive approach for including young fathers in your program. They include:

**Serving Young Fathers: Important Things to Know and How They Make a Difference**

This factsheet describes the benefits of young fathers' positive involvement with their child and child's mother.

**Serving Young Fathers: An Assessment and Checklist for Organizations**

This assessment and checklist will help organizations identify their strengths and areas for growth in working with young fathers and provides steps to make all aspects of programs more young-father-friendly.

**Serving Young Fathers: A Workbook of Program Activities**

This workbook provides three interactive activities that will help fathers, mothers, and program staff learn more about young fathers' unique challenges and potential.

**Recruiting Young Fathers: Five Things to Know**

This tip sheet provides information about and actionable ideas for recruiting young fathers.

**Retaining Young Fathers: Five Things to Know**

This tip sheet explains why young fathers are difficult to retain in programming and what you can do to help overcome these difficulties.

These resources were created to support and inform anyone working with young fathers. The ultimate goal is to help programs reach more young fathers; influence research, practice, and policy to better address young fathers' needs; and improve the lives of young fathers and their families.

# SERVING YOUNG FATHERS

## Important Things to Know and How They Make a Difference



### Introduction

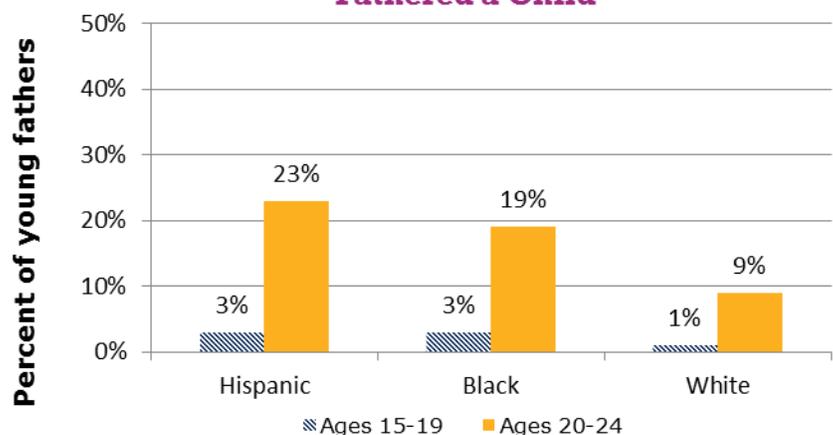
More and more programs that serve families are working to target and engage young fathers. This guide serves as a “cheat sheet” to help practitioners understand what current research says about fathers in their teens and early twenties (young fathers). This information can be used to identify fathers most in need of services, update statistics presented in program curricula, and inform policy decisions about gaps in services.

### Important Things to Know About Young Fathers

Men are more likely to become fathers between the ages of 20 and 24 than in their teens.

- About 2% of male teens (age 15-19) have fathered a child, compared to 14% of young men in their early twenties (age 20-24).<sup>1</sup>
- Hispanic and black teens are more than twice as likely to be fathers compared to their white peers (Figure 1). About 25% of Hispanic men and 20% of black men between the ages of 20 and 24 are fathers, compared to roughly 10% of their white counterparts (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 1. Percent of Young Men who Have Fathered a Child**



Source: National Survey of Family Growth, 2011-2013

**The majority of young fathers were in a relationship with the mother of their child for at least a year and a half before becoming a father.**

- On average, pregnancies involving young fathers are the result of relationships of approximately 20 months. This appears to be the case across different geographic and racial/ethnic contexts, as study findings have been consistent with young, low-income African American males in Baltimore, Maryland, and young, low-income white males in the Pacific Northwest.<sup>2,3</sup>



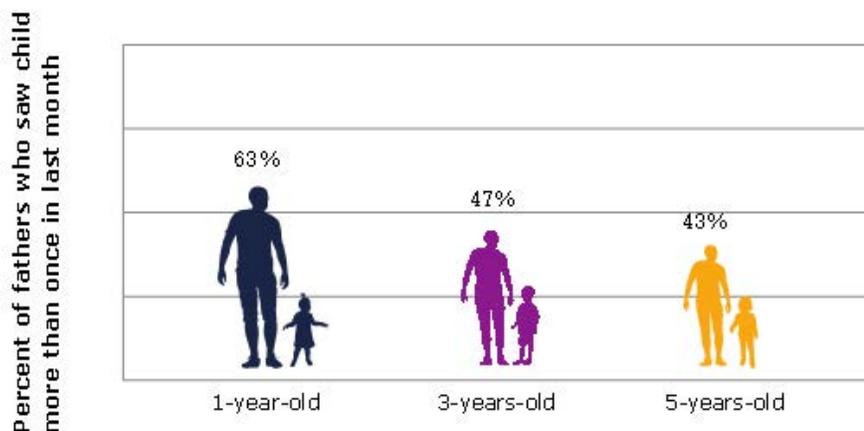
**While the majority of young fathers are romantically involved with the mother of their child around the time of the birth, many of those relationships will end by the child's first birthday.**

- Half of the couples who are dating when their child is born are no longer romantically involved one year later.<sup>4</sup>
- Fathers who are still romantically involved with their child's mother are also typically more involved in caring for their child than those no longer romantically involved with their child's mother.<sup>4</sup>

**Many young fathers are involved with their child, especially during their first year of life in a number of ways, including contact, visitation, and financial support.**

- However, involvement tends to decline over time (Figure 2), especially when fathers and mothers are no longer romantically linked.<sup>5</sup>
- Younger fathers tend to be less involved than older fathers of similar backgrounds and have a more dramatic drop in involvement over time than older fathers.<sup>5</sup>

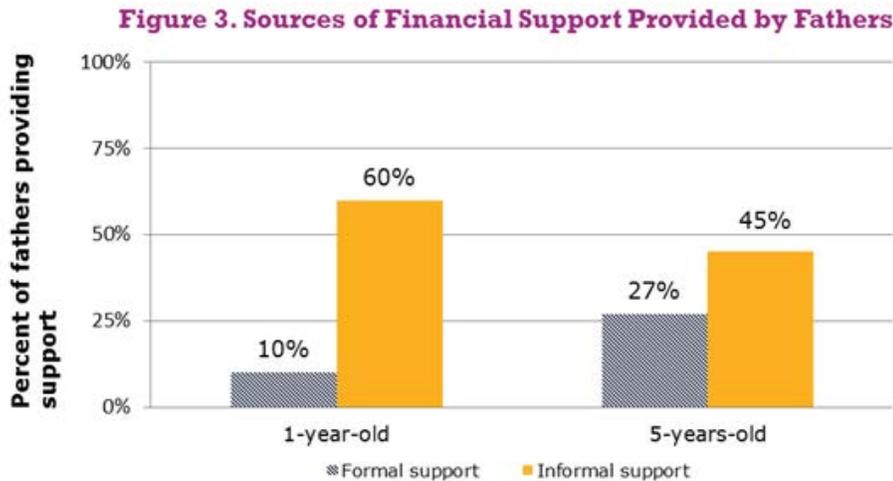
**Figure 2. Father Involvement with Child Over Time**



Source: Carlson et al. 2008; Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study

## Young fathers more often provide informal financial support than formal financial support.

- A study based on a group of urban fathers found that 1 in 10 fathers who live apart from their child make formal child support payments by their child's first birthday, but nearly 6 out of 10 provide informal financial support such as buying items for the child or providing the mother with cash or transportation (Figure 3).<sup>6</sup>



Source: Nepomnyaschy & Garfinkel 2007; Fragile Families and Child Well-Being

## How Young Fathers Can Make a Difference

### Father involvement is linked to mothers' health behaviors during pregnancy.

- When fathers are involved during pregnancy, teen mothers are more likely to receive adequate prenatal care, especially during the critical first trimester.<sup>7,8</sup>
- Teen mothers with partners involved during pregnancy are less likely to smoke than those with uninvolved partners.<sup>8</sup>
- Over half (56%) of mothers with involved partners receive adequate prenatal care compared to just over a third (35%) with uninvolved partners.<sup>7</sup>

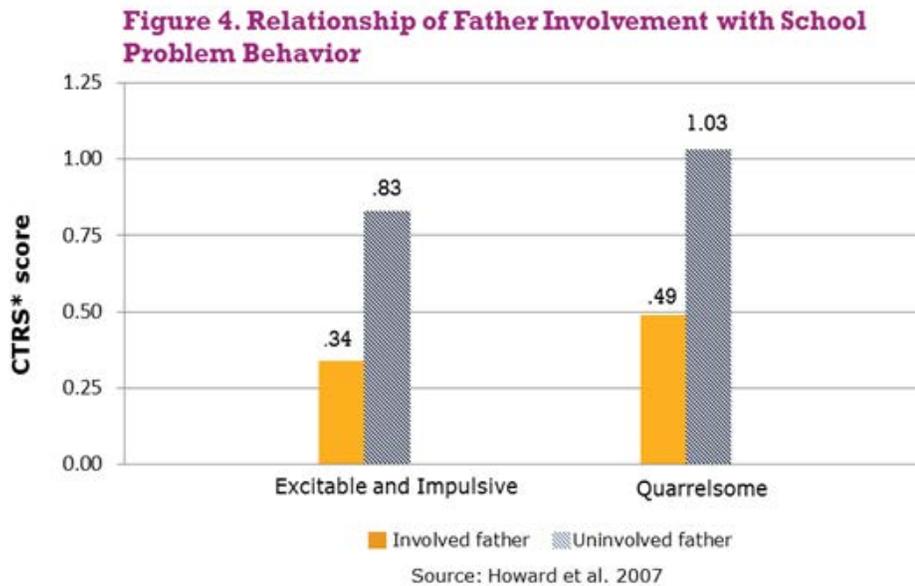


### Young mothers who feel supported by their partners also do better after the birth of their child.

- Consistently high levels of father involvement are associated with lower parenting stress for high risk teen mothers.<sup>9</sup>
- Young mothers report fewer depressive symptoms when they are satisfied with the young father's level of involvement.<sup>10</sup>

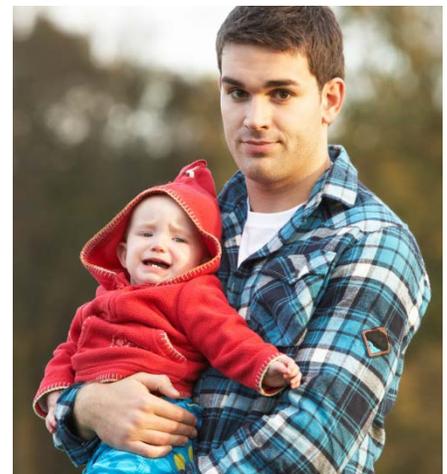
## Fathers' positive involvement matters for kids' social and academic development.

- For boys of teen mothers, father involvement throughout the first 8 years of life is associated with higher reading and math scores by age 10.<sup>11</sup>
- Children with highly involved fathers and high-risk mothers (including those with emotional or behavioral problems) have fewer behavioral problems\* than their peers with high-risk mothers and less involved fathers (Figure 4).<sup>11</sup>



## Fatherhood can create more challenges for young fathers but can also serve as motivation to avoid risky behaviors.<sup>12,13</sup>

- Becoming a father at an early age is associated with problems in school and less financial stability.<sup>14</sup>
- Among current or former gang members who mostly became fathers when they were teens, the vast majority say that fatherhood served as a positive turning point in their lives and motivated them to change their own behavior to become a role model for their child.<sup>15</sup>
- Low-income, young, urban fathers of diverse ethnic backgrounds report that they feel good about themselves when they are actively involved in caring for their young child.<sup>16</sup>



\* Behavioral problems were measured with the Conners Teacher Rating Scale (CTRS), which is a widely used measure that identifies problem behavior in children and youth such as hyperactivity and defiance.

## Resources

This factsheet is part of an OAH technical assistance series on working with young fathers that includes the products listed below. To access the resources in this series, visit OAH's "Serving and Engaging Young Males and Fathers" training topic: [http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/oah-initiatives/paf\\_rc/training/young-fathers.html](http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/oah-initiatives/paf_rc/training/young-fathers.html)

- Recruiting Young Fathers: Five Things to Know
- Retaining Young Fathers: Five Things to Know
- Serving Young Fathers: A Workbook of Program Activities
- Serving Young Fathers: An Assessment and Checklist for Organizations

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# SERVING YOUNG FATHERS

## An Assessment and Checklist for Organizations



### Assessing your organization's friendliness toward young fathers

Organizations that are “young-father-friendly” ensure that young fathers feel welcomed and supported while receiving services. Using this assessment and checklist, along with the information provided in the other tools in this series, you can begin to tailor your programs, services, and facilities to better improve the lives and outcomes of young fathers and their children.

For each of the five key categories of a young-father-friendly organization, the checklist includes a series of statements, which can be answered by “Describes us well,” “Almost there,” “Getting started,” or “Does not describe us.” These answer options are inclusive of organizations at different stages of serving young fathers.

Depending on your staff's schedule and time, it may be helpful to go through the list together as a team effort, answering each statement aloud. If you are unable to complete the assessment as a group, encourage staff to review the tool together at a later staff meeting. In this process, you may find, for example, that if you are in a clinic setting, the receptionist may have some great ideas about how young fathers feel in the waiting room. If you are in a school setting, teachers, counselors, and school nurses may be able to tell you how the program is perceived by young fathers at the school. Case workers who work exclusively with young mothers may have heard from their clients about the needs and concerns of their children's fathers. The discussions included in this assessment and checklist can help you initiate any of these conversations.

#### Assessment Areas

This assessment identifies five key categories for consideration in being young-father-friendly:

- Environment/atmosphere
- Staff practices
- Programming
- Messaging
- Policies

The statements in this checklist are informed by the available research on best practices for serving young fathers. They are intended to help you assess how a young father may feel when he enters your program facility or interacts with your staff. We encourage you to walk through your physical space as you answer the statements.

In serving young parents, programs for young fathers may need to look different than those for young mothers. Whether your program has years of experience working with young fathers or is just starting to address their needs, this tool can help you gauge your program's young-father-friendliness.

### **How to use this assessment and checklist**

This tool will help your organization identify its strengths and areas for growth when it comes to helping young fathers. It provides discussion questions for you and your staff, suggestions for program improvement, and additional resources and tools.

## Environment/atmosphere

Do young fathers feel comfortable, welcomed, and represented as soon as they enter your facility? Does your space exhibit the following young-father-friendly characteristics?

Questions to assess environment/atmosphere	Describes us well	Almost there	Getting started	Does not describe us
We display positive images of young fathers and children in photos, posters, bulletin boards, and materials.				
We display materials that fathers may find useful, such as information and notices about educational opportunities, health services and insurance, social or recreational events, and job postings.				
We have space for fathers and children to interact with one another while waiting for services or assistance (for example, a play area for children).				
Our physical space is appealing to young fathers (for example, we use a gender-neutral color scheme).				

## Staff practices

Your staff is the face of your organization. How they interact with young fathers can influence or impact how comfortable a young father feels in your program. Does your staff do the following to help young fathers feel encouraged and valued?

Questions to assess staff practices	Describes us well	Almost There	Getting started	Does not describe us
We seek young fathers' input about programming related to children and parents in general, not just programs for fathers.				
We invite young fathers to participate in all activities—not just activities that target fathers—and address them directly, even if they come primarily to accompany their partner.				
We reinforce the importance of both parents working together as a co-parenting team to both young fathers and young mothers, unless there are concerns about interpersonal violence.				
We engage with young fathers about topics other than parenting skills, and refer them to relevant resources about employment, health services and insurance, and healthy relationships.				
We, as staff, are encouraged to think about our own stereotypes of young fathers and how our biases are expressed.				

## Programming

The services you offer to young fathers can be tailored to meet their unique needs and address the diverse or different concerns that they often face. Does the programming offered by your organization do the following to ensure young fathers are getting the support they need?

Questions to assess programming	Describes us well	Almost There	Getting started	Does not describe us
We provide opportunities for young fathers to develop supportive relationships with staff and/or other mentors in one-on-one and small group settings.				
We sponsor events that appeal to young fathers and their families, including social and recreational events where young fathers can bond with their children and get to know each other.				
We provide opportunities for young fathers to enhance their relationship skills in order to form a positive co-parenting relationship, regardless of their relationship status with the mother.				
We present information in ways that match young fathers' preferred learning styles, such as using hands-on learning experiences, interactive sessions, or visually engaging materials.				
We offer incentives such as diapers, gift cards, transportation, or meals to encourage young fathers to participate in our program.				
We offer parenting classes that are accessible to fathers as well as to mothers.				

## Messaging

First impressions are important. A young father’s initial interactions with your organization, materials, and space will affect his perceptions of your program and his decision to participate in services and events. Does your organization use the following strategies to ensure your message is young-father-friendly?

Questions to assess messaging	Describes us well	Almost there	Getting started	Does not describe us
Our marketing specifically targets young fathers and uses inclusive terms like “fathers and mothers,” rather than “parents,” when advertising programs and events.				
We make an effort to know where young fathers gather. We target afterschool programming and school-sponsored events that appeal to young men. We also target locations including churches, barber shops, and recreational facilities.				
We use a variety of formats to publicize events directly to young fathers, such as social media, texting, etc.				
Our staff is encouraged to find opportunities to publicly address the important role of young fathers, including appearances on local media, posting on social media, and raising the topic at events that are likely to attract young fathers.				
We create opportunities for young fathers to become ambassadors, equipping them with the skills to advocate for themselves in their role as a father and reach out to other young fathers.				

## Policies

Your organization’s structure, staff trainings, partnerships, and planning can all play a role in making it friendlier for young fathers. Does your organization do the following to make sure young fathers’ voices are heard and input is incorporated?

Questions to assess policies	Describes us well	Almost there	Getting started	Does not describe us
We use various methods to assess the needs of young fathers regularly, through methods such as surveys, focus groups, and social media.				
We include young fathers in advisory capacities, including memberships on an advisory board, planning committee, or other group.				
We respond to voices from within the community by incorporating the service needs of young fathers into our organization’s strategic plan, making it part of our mission.				
We ensure that male staff—with a demonstrated knowledge of the communities where participants live—are available to support young fathers, especially through connections to community partners.				
All staff—not just staff who work specifically with young fathers—receive ongoing training about how to engage positively with young fathers and how to be responsive to the complex and challenging circumstances they face.				
We partner with organizations that provide relevant services for young fathers, including health services and insurance, employment services, educational opportunities, and vocational training.				

## Ways to improve your program's young-father-friendliness

Now that you have identified areas for growth and development when it comes to making your program young-father-friendly, this checklist provides immediate and long-term considerations and suggestions to ensure that young fathers feel welcomed and supported while receiving the services that they need.

### Environment/atmosphere

- Print and post flyers and materials about the positive aspects of fatherhood and young fathers.
- Provide space for fathers and children to interact with one another when waiting for services or assistance. Also, make sure there is a diaper changing area available to fathers.
- Contact schools, local recreational facilities, community colleges, school nurses, or a school-based health clinic to gather information and resources pertinent to young fathers. Offer to showcase others' materials in your facility.

#### ***Young-Father-Friendliness Tip:***

*If your facility includes space for a reading area, make sure that there are books and magazines that feature and appeal to young fathers.*

### Staff practices

- Continuously educate staff on the unique needs and challenges faced by young fathers. The Office of Adolescent Health's resources on Serving and Engaging Males and Young Fathers ([http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/oah-initiatives/paf\\_rc/training/young-fathers.html](http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/oah-initiatives/paf_rc/training/young-fathers.html)) are a great place to start.
- Invite staff from other youth-serving organizations in your community to conduct a training for your organization, ideally one that can help staff reconsider any preconceived notions about young fathers that might unconsciously influence their work.
- Take time at a staff meeting to view one of the podcasts ([http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/resources-and-publications/multimedia/podcast\\_index.html](http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/resources-and-publications/multimedia/podcast_index.html)) or webinars (<http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/resources-and-publications/webinars.html>) sponsored by the Office of Adolescent Health, or give new employees the opportunity to view them as part of their training.
- Think about the role that each staff member plays with young fathers:
  - Do staff who serve as the first point of contact for young fathers make an effort to greet them when they arrive?
  - Does the organization seek funding for programs and services for young fathers?
  - Does leadership discuss the progress young fathers are making at meetings?
  - Do staff members, even those who do not directly run programming for young fathers, recognize the role they play in the organization's overall young-father-friendliness efforts?

- Invite young fathers to attend a staff meeting and provide staff with feedback. Have a young couple speak to the staff to provide input about how the program and services differ for young fathers and mothers.
- Educate staff on the role interpersonal violence can play in the relationships between young fathers and young mothers. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's "Teen Dating Violence" spotlight has resources on this topic:  
[http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/teen\\_dating\\_violence.html](http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/teen_dating_violence.html)

### **Programming**

- Invite young fathers to play dates or family activities that are organized by the program. Sponsor an event for young fathers and children to encourage a stronger relationship with their children and with other young fathers.
- Start a support group for young fathers that allows them to connect with one another and share some of their concerns, fears, and successes. If your organization is just beginning to reach out to young fathers, have a staff or community member mentor young fathers one-on-one.
- Invite a young father from the community to share his experiences, the challenges he faces as a young father, and the things he values about fatherhood with other program participants. Leave ample time for questions.
- Make sure parenting classes are accessible to young fathers. Invite young fathers to participate in classes with young mothers, or have a separate class for young fathers. Let them know they play an important role in parenting. Make sure parenting classes address issues of interest to young fathers.
- Consider offering incentives for young fathers attending certain programs.

### **Messaging**

- Survey participants, both fathers and mothers, to assess what methods of communication will be the most effective in reaching your target population.
- Enlist the help of young fathers you are working with in outreach efforts. Their communication with their peers and assistance in creating messages can be invaluable.
- Ask young fathers in your program about relevant social media channels and use them. You may find that Instagram, Twitter, Tumblr, Snapchat, or Facebook work better for your participants than email.
- In addition to advertising your program or services, get the word out about how important young fathers are to their children using traditional and social media channels.

## Policies

- Start an advisory board of young fathers to help guide the program on its path toward being young-father-friendly. If there are not enough young fathers for a board, ask two or three young fathers to be consultants to help plan and implement additional programming and outreach.
- Consider incorporating the service needs of young fathers into your organization's strategic plan, making them a part of your mission. For example, you could include a policy of being more inclusive and diverse by hiring more male staff who are representative of the community.
- Ask young fathers and mothers in your program for recommendations about potential partner organizations. Do they know of other groups that also provide services to young fathers? Developing such partnerships can help organizations get the message out about their own services, better meet the needs of young fathers, and increase the reach of young fathers in their communities.

## Additional tips and tools

### Discussion questions

After completing the assessment, it may help to explore responses with the entire staff. Try asking one or more of the following questions:

- How are we doing? Do you think our organization is doing pretty well or do we have a way to go?
- Did anything surprise you from the checklist? Were there any questions or ideas that surfaced which we haven't considered before?
- Allow each staff member to describe how his or her unique role within the organization might help move some of the answers from "Getting started" to "Describes us well."
- Share the organization's mission statement or current goals. Where do young fathers fit within our stated mission or goals? Are there ways to better incorporate them?
- What do we know about the young fathers in our community? What are their interests and concerns? Are there people within our community who could help us connect with young fathers more effectively or educate us more about their needs?

### Take a field trip

Do you know of any programs or services in your community that are appealing to young fathers? Perhaps an after-school program, a class at a community center, or a gym has received good feedback from one of the young fathers you serve. Go visit that space and consider these questions:

- Are there ways that the physical space is set up to be particularly appealing to young fathers?
- What types of programs, services, or classes are popular with young fathers?
- How does the staff facilitate relationships with the young fathers, both as mentors and in a group setting?

Brainstorm ways your organization can adapt some of those ideas.

## Interview young fathers

Young fathers themselves are the best judges of whether a program is welcoming and supportive.

- If your organization already works with young dads, spend some time with one or two of them and ask them about their impressions of the program, the staff, and the environment.
- If you have noticed that young fathers approach the program, but do not stay for the entire program, try to follow up to see if there are any improvements you can make.
- If you aren't currently working with young fathers, but are interested in trying, ask a young mother who has a positive relationship with her child's father for a connection. He may be able to help you assess the best next steps for making your organization more young-father-friendly.

## Resources

The list below includes all of the resources provided in this checklist, along with additional resources that can be used to further gauge your program's father-friendliness:

- Adolescent Health Resources and Publications (Office of Adolescent Health) – <http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/resources-and-publications/>
- Father-Friendliness Organizational Self-Assessment and Planning Tool (National Partnership for Community Leadership and the National Head Start Association) – [http://my.nhsa.org/download/parents/org\\_self\\_assess.pdf](http://my.nhsa.org/download/parents/org_self_assess.pdf)
- Overview of Teen Dating Violence (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) – [http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/teen\\_dating\\_violence.html](http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/intimatepartnerviolence/teen_dating_violence.html)
- Print Media to Encourage Father Involvement (National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse) – <https://www.fatherhood.gov/multimedia/print>
- Responsible Fatherhood Toolkit: Resources from the Field (National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse) – <https://www.fatherhood.gov/toolkit/start/helpful-resources>

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[http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/oah-initiatives/paf\\_rc/training/young-fathers.html](http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/oah-initiatives/paf_rc/training/young-fathers.html)

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# SERVING YOUNG FATHERS

## A Workbook of Program Activities



### Introduction

Young fathers consistently report that they want to be a positive influence in the lives of their children. Yet they face many obstacles to that goal, particularly negative perceptions about their character or life situation. This workbook contains activities and lessons that can help staff, stakeholders, volunteers, community members, young mothers, and young fathers themselves move past negative stereotypes and toward a greater understanding of young fathers' unique challenges and potential. These activities were developed by an OAH-contracted researcher trained in social work and were informed by research and practice.

Most of the activities are interactive and do not require many materials. They can be facilitated by professional program staff and typically take between 30 and 60 minutes to complete. Activities will work best when your audience feels that the information is relevant to them, so feel free to include examples or topics that you think are most appropriate to the audience at hand. These activities are merely examples to get you started. It is important to draw on the unique strengths of service providers, young fathers, and their support systems and develop activities that are tailored to your community.

### Target Audiences

These activities can be adapted or modified to work with a number of different audiences but were designed with three in mind: *fathers, mothers and other caregivers, and program staff*. These groups can be extremely influential when it comes to how involved young fathers are with their children. Young fathers themselves may feel hopeless about their chances for making a meaningful contribution to their child's life. Young mothers and other caregivers often make decisions about when a father can see his child if the young couple is not living together. Finally, it is important to recognize that the staff working with young parents may hold misperceptions of young fathers that might influence their own behavior.

## Resources

The National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse (<https://www.fatherhood.gov>) has a number of additional resources to support organizations as they work with fathers, including:

- Child Support, Custody, and Visitation – <https://www.fatherhood.gov/content/child-support-custody-visitation>
- Engaging Fathers podcast – [http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/resources-and-publications/multimedia/podcasts/mp3/engaging\\_fathers\\_podcast.mp3](http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/resources-and-publications/multimedia/podcasts/mp3/engaging_fathers_podcast.mp3)
  - Transcript – [http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/resources-and-publications/multimedia/podcasts/transcript/engaging\\_fathers\\_transcript.pdf](http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/resources-and-publications/multimedia/podcasts/transcript/engaging_fathers_transcript.pdf)
- Engaging Young Fathers through Support Groups video (Head Start) – <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/father-engagement/father-male-involvement/EngagingYoungFa.htm>
- Father Presence – <https://www.fatherhood.gov/content/father-presence>
- Responsible Father Toolkit – <https://www.fatherhood.gov/toolkit/home>
- Working with Dads: Encouraging and Supporting Father Involvement from Birth through Adolescence – <https://www.fatherhood.gov/webinars?combine=Working%20with%20Dads%3A%20Encouraging%20and%20Supporting%20Father%20Involvement%20from%20Birth%20through%20Adolescence>

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- Recruiting Young Fathers: Five Things to Know
- Retaining Young Fathers: Five Things to Know
- Serving Young Fathers: An Assessment and Checklist for Organizations
- Serving Young Fathers: Important Things to Know and How They Make a Difference

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# YOUNG FATHERS ACTIVITY 1

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## How Does Media Influence Young Fathers?

### Activity Breakdown

 **Purpose:** Challenge participants' perceptions of what it means to be a good father and how media's portrayal of "masculinity" influences this perception.



**Time:** Approximately 45 minutes



**Facilitator:** Professional program staff



**Audience:** Any size group of young fathers



**Materials:** Either use a white board or pieces of paper to make a continuum that says "young fathers" on one side, "young mothers" on the other side, and "both" in the middle. Use poster paper for writing participant comments.

### Introduction

- Explain to participants that they will be discussing some commonly-held misconceptions about young fathers and how the misconceptions can influence their own thoughts about what it means to be a good father.

### Activity

- Read aloud a list of words (both positive and negative) that might describe young fathers and young mothers as they are generally portrayed in media and popular culture. Some examples are: *strong, lazy, cheerful, irresponsible, provider, caretaker, tough, health-conscious, smart, patient, responsible, shows feelings, and money-maker.*
- Participants should categorize the words as describing young fathers, young mothers, or both, based on how they think media usually portrays these groups. The group leader should keep track of how the participants "voted" using the white board setup. Remind participants to make a choice based on what they see portrayed in media.
- Next, repeat the activity with words for parenting behaviors. Some examples are: *changes diapers, checks homework, plays catch, reads stories at bedtime, disciplines child, takes child to doctor appointments, teaches child to tie shoes, and feeds child.*
- Ask participants to consider how portrayals of young fathers in the media—in TV shows, social media, movies, and music—might influence their thoughts about which parent should be engaging in the behaviors on the list (e.g., some behaviors are not "manly," women are better at these behaviors than men, men only provide financial support, etc.).
- Explain that both mothers and fathers can do all of the parenting behaviors that were discussed, and stress that the more positive involvement fathers have with their child, the more their child benefits.

## Wrap-up

- Remind participants there are many ways that young fathers can help children grow up to be healthy and successful.
- Ask each young father to think of one or two additional ways he could be involved with his own child, beyond providing financial support.
- Write down the comments provided by participants on poster papers and place them on the wall where everyone can see.



# YOUNG FATHERS ACTIVITY 2

## Setting the Record Straight

### Activity Breakdown

 **Purpose:** Encourage participants to identify stereotypes about young fathers that might have influenced their thoughts and actions in the past and to question their assumptions about young fathers.



**Time:** Approximately 30 minutes



**Facilitator:** Professional program staff



**Audience:** Groups of 2-3 young mothers/family members



**Materials:** Make copies of the worksheet “Getting to Know Young Fathers” for each group, found at the end of this workbook. The information in the worksheet comes from the factsheet “Serving Young Fathers: Important Things to Know and How They Make a Difference” (on the OAH website at [http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/oah-initiatives/paf\\_rc/training/young-fathers.html](http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/oah-initiatives/paf_rc/training/young-fathers.html)).

### Introduction

- Explain that stereotypes are perceptions people have about a certain group of people. While a stereotypical characteristic may be true for a particular individual, they are rarely true for an entire group of people. For example, the stereotype that women are nurturing or men are unemotional might describe some people, but not all. Ask participants if they, or anyone they know, have ever encountered stereotypes.
- Emphasize that letting go of stereotypes can be empowering, allowing us to challenge commonly held views of certain groups of people. Keep in mind that many people are defensive about acknowledging that they might hold stereotyped views.
- Note that it’s important to be aware of your biases so you can move past them and see people as individuals.
- Explain that today they will engage in an activity to identify which statements are true versus false when it comes to young fathers.

### Activity

- Divide participants into groups of two or three (if you have a small group, you may prefer to do this as a whole group activity).
- Give the groups about five minutes to mark their statements from the “Getting to Know Young Fathers” worksheet (included at the end of this workbook) as “true” or “false.” \*

\* Answers for “Getting to Know Young Fathers” worksheet: 1. True; 2. False; 3. False; 4. True; 5. True; 6. True.

- Have the entire group come back together to share how they classified the statements.
- Participants should be encouraged to discuss anything that surprised them.
- Remind group members that, while some of the “false” statements might be true for some individuals, they have been classified as false because they are not true for most young fathers, according to research.
- For some groups, it may be helpful to have a discussion about the fathers of their children and how the participants think they are affected by common misconceptions about young fathers (at school, in their families, etc.). For other groups, it might be preferable to focus the conversation on young fathers in general.

## Wrap-up

- End the activity by emphasizing that stereotypes may mistakenly be taken as fact because they are often believed by a lot of people. Encourage participants to consider who they know who might need to hear the information they learned today.



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## YOUNG FATHERS ACTIVITY 3

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### How Do Stereotypes Negatively Affect Young Fathers?

#### Activity Breakdown

 **Purpose:** Encourage participants to consider how misconceptions about young fathers can negatively influence their interactions with young fathers.

 **Time:** Approximately 45 minutes

 **Facilitator:** Professional program staff

 **Audience:** Any size group of program staff

 **Materials:** Name tags or sticky labels for each participant. Make copies of "Getting to Know Young Fathers," found at the end of this workbook.

#### Introduction

- Explain to the participants that you will be talking about how stereotypes can influence how we treat other people.

#### Activity

- On name tags or another sticky label, write words that could be used to describe a person (such as *athletic, responsible, overemotional, incompetent, irresponsible, aggressive, lazy, untrustworthy, tough, materialistic, unintelligent, forgetful, and caring*).
- Place one label on each participant so that the label is not visible to the wearer (either on their back, forehead, etc.). Make clear that these labels are being assigned randomly and have nothing to do with participants' actual attributes.
- Ask participants to circulate around the room, talking with each other about future goals (another general topic can be chosen, but this one works well in eliciting responses to the labels), treating one another according to the other person's labeled attribute.
- After 10-15 minutes, reconvene the group and ask participants to leave their labels on for a little while longer (if the room size and furniture allows, it's best to sit in a circle).
- Then ask participants to share how they felt during the exercise, how they were treated by others, and how this treatment affected them.
- Discuss questions such as: Were you able to accurately guess your label? When people stereotyped you, were you able to just disregard it? Did you try to disprove the stereotype? Did you find yourself living up to your label? If your attribute was positive, how did that feel? When stereotyping others, how easy was it to find evidence to confirm the stereotype?

- Read one statement from the “Getting to Know Young Fathers” worksheet (included at the end of this workbook) and ask participants to consider how they might treat young fathers if they believed that statement were true. \*
- Once all of the statements from the “Getting to Know Young Fathers” worksheet have been discussed, confirm which statements are true. Explain that many people may hold negative views of young fathers and such views can influence how people treat them.

## Wrap-up

- Ask participants to consider the influence negative views of young fathers can have on their interactions with fathers themselves.
- Stress that stereotypes must first be recognized before they can be questioned.
- Encourage participants to be aware of times when they might have been influenced by a negative stereotype about young fathers. Discuss how this stereotype might have influenced their interactions in a negative way and prevented them from truly helping that young man in the way he needed.



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\* Answers for “Getting to Know Young Fathers” worksheet: 1. True; 2. False; 3. False; 4. True; 5. True; 6. True.

## WORKSHEET: Getting to Know Young Fathers

Which of the statements below are true and which are false?

	True	False
1. Most young fathers have their first child in their late teens/early twenties rather than in their early teen years.		
2. Most young fathers were involved with their partner for less than six months before becoming a father.		
3. Most young fathers are not involved with their child in the first year of life.		
4. One in 10 fathers pay formal child support payments by the child's first birthday.		
5. Most young fathers were involved with their partner for at least 18 months before becoming a father.		
6. Most young fathers provide some kind of financial support, like buying clothes, diapers, etc.		

## ANSWER KEY: Getting to Know Young Fathers

This worksheet can be used with activities 2 or 3 from the Serving Young Fathers Workbook of Program Activities or stand alone. The facts come from “Serving Young Fathers: Important Things to Know and How They Make a Difference.”<sup>1</sup>

	True	False
1. Most young fathers have their first child in their late teens/early twenties rather than in their early teen years.	X	
2. Most young fathers were involved with their partner for less than six months before becoming a father.		X
3. Most young fathers are not involved with their child in the first year of life.		X
4. One in 10 fathers pay formal child support payments by the child’s first birthday.	X	
5. Most young fathers were involved with their partner for at least 18 months before becoming a father.	X	
6. Most young fathers provide some kind of financial support, like buying clothes, diapers, etc.	X	

<sup>1</sup> Serving Young Fathers: Important Things to Know and How They Make a Difference can be found on the OAH website ([http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/oah-initiatives/paf\\_rc/training/young-fathers.html](http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/oah-initiatives/paf_rc/training/young-fathers.html)).

# RECRUITING YOUNG FATHERS

## Five Things to Know



1

### Be visible

Hold regular, fun events for dads and kids, and partner with other local businesses to promote the events in the places where young fathers hang out. Young fathers might still be standoffish about fully embracing a fatherhood program, so frequent and varied promotion is important. Spread the word and stay connected through texting, social media, online videos, and personal outreach.

2

### Let young fathers lead the way

Research shows that young fathers are likely to trust the views of fellow dads when it comes to joining a community program. So let participants advocate on your behalf. Encourage them to invite friends to events and hire young fathers, particularly graduates of your program, as staff. Make sure that participants are involved in planning and promoting new initiatives—the more valued they feel, the more likely they'll continue to stay involved.

3

### Be flexible and make it worth their while

Be accessible. Make sure to schedule activities at convenient times for young fathers, particularly evenings and weekends, and find out where participants prefer to meet. Some young fathers may find it intimidating or uncomfortable to spend extra time at a school or clinic, so invite them to meet somewhere they would go on their own time, such as a skateboard park or community center. Also, incentives such as gift cards, transportation, and meals can be a big help in motivating young fathers to give your program a try.

**4**

### Show young fathers ways to improve their lives now

Being a young father can be stressful. They might ask questions about how your program will actually help meet their needs, so make sure you provide examples. Familiarize yourself with relevant local resources, especially those that can help young fathers find employment. Complete a needs assessment for the young fathers in your community so you know their biggest obstacles. And partner with other service providers to make it easier for young people to find the help they need.

**5**

### Stay positive

Successful early fatherhood programs train their staff to make all participants feel welcome, regardless of their situation. Celebrate the importance of fathers' roles in families and don't dwell on the challenges. Smile and stay positive and respectful in all your interactions. Ask young fathers about their lives and respond with genuine interest. Professional boundaries are of course essential, but all young fathers who enter your program should feel that they're entering a safe place that empowers them to be better fathers.

## Resources

- Collaboration Toolkit (Office of Adolescent Health) – <http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/resources-and-publications/learning/coll-tk/index.html>
- Connecting with Dads (National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse) – <https://www.fatherhood.gov/toolkit/build/recruitment/connecting-with-dads>
- Responsible Fatherhood Toolkit (National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse) – <https://www.fatherhood.gov/toolkit/home>
- The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children (Child Welfare Information Gateway) – <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/fatherhood.pdf>
- The Unique Needs of Teen Fathers (Healthy Teen Network) – <http://www.healthyteennetwork.org/sites/default/files/Fast%20Facts%20Unique%20Needs%20of%20Young%20Fathers.pdf>

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### 1 Model respect and positivity

Be aware of the negative stereotypes young fathers face and the cultural contexts in which they live. Take the time to learn about their personal circumstances so you can provide them with genuine, personalized encouragement, empathy, and support. Make sure your physical space accommodates them by displaying images of fathers with their children and providing access to changing tables. Present positive messages about their potential while emphasizing the importance of seeking help when needed.

### 2 Promote and provide consistency and support

Young fathers often have to perform many roles—parent, student, son, romantic partner—so your program should be free of extra stress and surprises. Holding meetings at the same time, same day, and same place means that there is something in their life that is consistent and dependable. That consistency can empower them to focus on their own goals. Work with young fathers to develop personal plans for achieving those goals, and connect them with local resources, such as employment agencies or tutoring groups, to support continued progress.

### 3 Connect young fathers with mentors

Mentors provide social support, role modeling, skills development, and advocacy. Community members and older or more experienced fathers can be a source of wisdom and inspiration for younger ones. Create opportunities for these groups to connect as well as for young fathers to support and mentor one another. These relationships take time to foster as trust must be earned. Make sure there is adequate time for them to spend together in both formal (classes, workshops) and informal settings (athletic events, family-oriented recreational activities). It's also important to ensure mentors have the necessary training and skills to build strong relationships with young fathers.

**4**

### **Communicate on their terms**

In order to stay connected with young fathers, you need to know how they prefer to communicate. Young people often rely on mobile devices like smartphones to communicate, so consider using text messages, e-mail, and social media (such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Tumblr, and Instagram). While technology is always changing, and it can be hard to keep up, young fathers are often happy to educate you about their latest preferences. Asking for their input and advice will go a long way in showing that you are interested in getting to know them.

**5**

### **Respond to young fathers' changing needs**

Young fathers' lives are in constant transition, and it's your responsibility to remain relevant as their needs change and grow alongside their children. You should regularly collect and review data on community needs and resources to help understand what will appeal to and keep young fathers engaged in your programs. Collecting data can also help you understand how effectively your programs are being implemented and what young fathers think of them. You should also consider including young fathers on your organization's advisory board, so that their perspectives will inform all of your current and future programs.

### **Resources**

- Cultural Competence Training (Office of Adolescent Health) - [http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/oah-initiatives/teen\\_pregnancy/training/cultural-competence.html](http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/oah-initiatives/teen_pregnancy/training/cultural-competence.html)
- Incorporating Strategies for Engaging Young People (Office of Adolescent Health) - [http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/oah-initiatives/teen\\_pregnancy/training/tip\\_sheets/youth-engagement-508.pdf](http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/oah-initiatives/teen_pregnancy/training/tip_sheets/youth-engagement-508.pdf)
- Performance Management for TPP Programs (Office of Adolescent Health) - [http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/oah-initiatives/teen\\_pregnancy/training/performance-management.html](http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/oah-initiatives/teen_pregnancy/training/performance-management.html)
- The Mentoring Effect: Young People's Perspectives on the Outcomes and Availability of Mentoring (The National Mentoring Partnership) - [http://www.mentoring.org/images/uploads/Report\\_TheMentoringEffect.pdf](http://www.mentoring.org/images/uploads/Report_TheMentoringEffect.pdf)
- Using Social Media to Reach Participants (Family and Youth Services Bureau) - [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/fysb/using\\_social\\_media\\_20140423.pdf](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/fysb/using_social_media_20140423.pdf)

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