



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
- 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
- Performance Management for TPP Programs (Office of Adolescent Health) - 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
- 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

This tip sheet 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

- Recruiting Young Fathers: Five Things to Know
- Serving Young Fathers: A Workbook of Program Activities
- Serving Young Fathers: An Assessment and Checklist for Organizations
- Serving Young Fathers: Important Things to Know and How They Make a Difference