



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
 - Transcript – 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>

This workbook 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
- 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

YOUNG FATHERS ACTIVITY 1

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).

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.



YOUNG FATHERS ACTIVITY 3

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.



* 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.”¹

	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	

¹ 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).