



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) 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) 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

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
- Overview of Teen Dating Violence (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) – 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>

The assessment and checklist are 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: A Workbook of Program Activities
- Serving Young Fathers: Important Things to Know and How They Make a Difference