

Engaging Men and Dads at WIC: A Toolkit



Healthy Families...Strong Communities...Bright Futures!

Who we mean when we say 'Dad'?

- ▶ This toolkit can apply to **any** significant male figure in a child's life:
 - ▶ Biological or adoptive father
 - ▶ Grandfather, uncle, older brother
 - ▶ Mother's partner
 - ▶ Family friend
- ▶ This important male figure may be:
 - ▶ A single parent
 - ▶ Living with the child
 - ▶ Living separately




Benefits of Dad Involvement

- ▶ When Dads are involved, children gain many benefits:
 - ▶ Better school performance and more likely to graduate high school
 - ▶ Increased self-esteem
 - ▶ Improved relationships with peers
 - ▶ Reduced frequency of behavioral and psychological problems
- ▶ The family benefits as well!
 - ▶ Decreased stress related to parenting
 - ▶ Dads gain self-confidence



The Toolkit

- ▶ A collection of best practices and suggested ways to enact those practices
- ▶ Suggestions come from a variety of early childhood focused programs and organizations including:
 - ▶ WIC
 - ▶ Head Start and Early Head Start
 - ▶ Pre-school Learning Alliance (U.K.)
 - ▶ Best Start Resource Centre (Canada)
- ▶ 9 modules and links to resources in each
 - ▶ Possible to implement ideas from just one module or several!



Focus on ways Dads can help

THIS SECTION INCLUDES TIPS ON:

1. Encouraging Dads to bond with their children.
2. Teaching Dads how to start bonding with their baby early in life.
3. Suggesting tasks for Dads that help them to feel involved in and responsible for child rearing.

1) Encourage Dads to Bond with their Children


WIC staff should encourage men and Dads to build relationships to support father-child relationships:

- ❖ Let Dads know the strengths you see in their relationship with their children.
- ❖ Suggest that Dads relate to their children by following during play.
- ❖ Partner with Dads to identify what their children mean of children's behavior.
- ❖ Ask questions about a Dad's perception of his child to build a common understanding about his child's behavior.
- ❖ Look for opportunities to support Dad's mastery of father-child interactions. - Adapted from Engaging Fathers

2) Teach Dads Ways to Bond with their Children

WIC staff can also offer specific suggestions of how Dads can bond with their children:

- ❖ WIC staff can explain to men that Dads can start bonding with their children even before the baby is born! Suggest that Dads can:
 - Attend prenatal doctor's appointments.
 - Listen to the baby's heartbeat and feel the baby move.
 - Talk, sing or read to the baby while s/he is still in the womb, but the baby can hear you!
 - Help Mom get ready for the baby; get things like the car seat, stroller, etc.



Help Dads to Support Mom

THIS SECTION INCLUDES TIPS ON:


1. Teaching Dad about the benefits of breastfeeding.
2. Addressing Dad's concerns related to his part in breastfeeding.
3. Encouraging Dad to support Mom during pregnancy.
4. Supporting Dad to support Mom after pregnancy and while breastfeeding.

1. Educate Dads about the Many Benefits of Breastfeeding

Dads may not have heard the many reasons to breastfeed. You may want to talk about some of the benefits of breastfeeding:

- ❖ Breastfeeding stimulates brain growth. Mom's milk is full of nutrients.
- ❖ It may mean fewer doctor visits. Mom's milk helps protect against asthma and infections.
- ❖ Breastfeeding is less expensive than formula.
- ❖ It helps Mom stay calm and bond with the baby while nursing help Mom relax.
- ❖ Breastfeeding helps Mom to lose the baby weight faster.
- ❖ It protects Mom against excessive bleeding after birth.

"Getting started breastfeeding and keeping breastfeeding going is so much easier when you have someone to encourage each other and help each other. First-time parents, especially, need to become good parents. A new mother is a new mother. Confidence comes with spending time with the baby."
- Adapted from Engaging Fathers



Communicate Directly with Dads

THIS SECTION INCLUDES TIPS ON:

1. Building relationships with Dads by talking to them and making them feel welcome.
2. Reaching out and inviting Dads to be a part of WIC activities.
3. Targeting information toward Dads.
4. Providing Dads with resources and support to learn about parenting.

1. Build Relationships with Men and Dads

- ❖ Learn Dad's name. A simple "Good Morning, Michael" can go a long way in making Dad feel welcome!
- ❖ Engage Dads in short conversations. (See Conversation Starters in the sidebar.)
- ❖ If Dad answers the phone, talk to him before asking to speak to Mom.
- ❖ Encourage Dad to come to at least one office visit.
 - ❖ Engage Dad by asking if he has any questions or concerns.
 - ❖ Listen to and answer Dad's questions.
- ❖ Welcome Dads with enthusiasm,
 - ❖ But treat Dad's presence as normal, instead of something unusual.
 - ❖ Welcome Dads and Moms with the same body language and eye contact.
- ❖ Make Dads feel like they are equals in the "parenting equation."
 - ❖ Let Dad know that you see him as important to family development.
 - ❖ Control your biases when talking with Dad. He can tell when he is seen as an optional extra rather than a key part of the family and parenting team.

Did You Know?

Techniques for including men and fathers at WIC can be pretty simple and straightforward but effective at the same time!

Conversation Starters

Here are some ideas for getting dads to talk about what is important to them in their relationship with their child:

1. What has your infant/child taught you?
2. When did something really special happen between the two of you?
3. Have you changed something about yourself because of your infant/child?
4. What have you done to make things better for your infant/child?
5. What habits help you and your partner raise your infant/child together?
6. What would your partner say are your special skills that you contribute to the family?
7. When things look rough, what keeps you going?

- Adapted from Engaging Fathers in Programs for Families

Highlights from the Toolkit

- ▶ Organizations agree that getting staff engaged with including Dads is critical.
 - ▶ Staff may be unaware of their interactions with Dads or feel resistant to including them.
 - ▶ It is important to be sensitive to staff members' feelings and to have trainings and dialogue
- ▶ Small changes to the physical environment can make a big difference!
 - ▶ E.g., including an additional chair in the counseling room or providing Dad friendly reading material in waiting areas
- ▶ It is important to think about framing and to present outreach efforts in language that is appealing to Dads
 - ▶ E.g., talk about **finding solutions** and **building skills** rather than *support* and *sharing*

Reaching out & Including Dads at WIC

Some ideas from the toolkit to try:

- ▶ Build relationships with Dads by talking to them and making them feel welcome
- ▶ Reach out to individual Dads and invite them to be a part of WIC activities
- ▶ Provide Dads with resources and support to learn about parenting
- ▶ Have men present at the office as employees, volunteers, peer group leaders, etc.
- ▶ Keep in mind Dad's time and work conflicts and consider offering evening hours

Focus on Breastfeeding & Bonding

- ▶ The toolkit explores ways that WIC staff can help Dads to support Moms during breastfeeding. For example, staff can:
 - ▶ Answer Dad's questions about breastfeeding and respond to any concerns
 - ▶ Suggest ways that Dads can provide support and help out his partner
- ▶ Another module focuses on ways that Dad can be involved with the baby/child that do not interfere with breastfeeding. Dad's may be especially good at:
 - ▶ Interpreting baby behavior
 - ▶ Focusing on developing their child's brain
 - ▶ Active play



Going Even Further to Include Men and Dads

- ▶ When a father involvement project gets further underway, the toolkit has additional ideas to explore such as:
 - ▶ Peer groups for men and Dads
 - ▶ Building community partnerships
 - ▶ Increasing referrals for Dads
 - ▶ Evaluating your efforts to see what works

Opportunities in 2016

- ▶ Join the Engaging Men and Dads Learning Collaborative

Membership includes:

- ▶ A private listserve for member discussion
- ▶ Networking and sharing conference calls
- ▶ Webinars with guest speakers

- ▶ Sign up for the Summer Regional Trainings –

- ▶ July 11, Santa Ana; Aug. 2, Modesto; Aug. 25, Oakland; Sept. 21, Redding; Oct. 28, San Diego
- ▶ Info: Call CWA- 530-750-2280



References

- ▶ <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18052995>
- ▶ http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/six_obstacles_to_father_involvement_and_how_to_overcome_them
- ▶ <http://www.calwic.org/component/content/article/10-engaging-wic-families/318-engaging-men-a-dads-at-wic>
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