



ENGAGING MEN AND DADS AT WIC TOOLKIT

Why engage men and Dads at WIC? Research shows that children and families do better when fathers are involved. Kids exhibit better school performance, increased self-esteem and improved relationships with peers, while parents feel less stress when they support each other and co-parent.

TESTED TOOLS

This toolkit is based on a programmatic review of fatherhood involvement efforts in early childhood programs and is a collection of many tangible steps your WIC site can take to become more inclusive of men and Dads.

Research indicates that having a commitment to including men and Dads and creating a strategy to do so may be the most important thing and actually more important than what the strategy is. There is not one “right way” of implementing any of these practices. Rather, this toolkit will provide you with options and recommendations from previous program success.

DEFINING DAD

Many times in this toolkit the word Dad will be used, but it should be noted that “Dad” can include biological fathers as well as grandfathers, uncles, mother’s partner, etc. Dads may be the single head of a household, married, cohabitating, or non-residential.

KEEP IN MIND

A focus on Dads should not stigmatize children. Be sensitive to those kids who do not have a Dad or significant male figure in their lives if you hold special events or recognition for Dads.



TOOLKIT SECTIONS:

- I. Engage and Train WIC Staff on Inclusion of Men and Dads
- II. Make the Environment Welcoming to Men and Dads
- III. Communicate Directly with Dads
- IV. Help Dads to Support Moms and Breastfeeding
- V. Encourage Moms to Include Dads
- VI. Provide Service Referrals to Dads and Build Community Partnerships

SECTION I: ENGAGE AND TRAIN WIC STAFF ON INCLUSION OF MEN AND DADS

1. Reach Out and Train Staff on Involving Dads
 - » Introducing the idea to your coworkers - improving staff’s observation and assessment skills
 - » Learning about the benefits of father involvement - ways to connect with and support fathers in their relationships with their children
 - » Ways to include and interact with Dads so that staff can develop positive, goal-oriented relationships with fathers – reflecting and examining stereotypes about fathers
2. Promote Healthy Relationships between Women and Men at WIC
 - » Discussion in your office about concerns that staff may have about working more with Dads
 - » Maintain open communication if new concerns arise
 - » Review hiring practices and advertise new positions that might attract men to the position
 - » Help female staff to become comfortable working with fathers

3. Be Sensitive to the Cultural Diversity of Dads

- » Staff should try to have positive interactions with father about raising their children – Dads from different backgrounds may have different views than staff about discipline, nurturing, sleeping arrangements; language, cultural and social barriers
- » Program directors and managers should support the staff
- » Directive from program leadership, supported by professional development which encourages staff to show inclusive attitudes and behaviors

ACTION ITEMS FOR WIC STAFF:

- » Engage staff through training about including men and Dads.
- » Examine your hiring practices to better include men.
- » Focus on how female staff can better work with men and Dads.
- » Be sensitive to staff who may have a hard time working with men and Dads and provide additional support.
- » Be aware of and sensitive to the cultural diversity of fathers.
- » Support your fellow staff in developing their cultural awareness.

SECTION II: MAKE THE ENVIRONMENT WELCOMING TO MEN AND DADS

1. Make the Office Look Welcoming to Men and Dads

- » Display positive and nurturing images of men with their children in the office – hang posters that talk about importance of fathers and fatherhood; pictures of breastfeeding where Dad is included; consider having a “Dad” bulletin board where clients can post pictures of children with their Dads; be mindful of posters about child support or domestic violence
- » Magazines in the waiting area that men would feel comfortable reading
- » Resources, booklets, and pamphlets that deal with issues Dads may face
- » WIC advertising materials that include images of Dads
- » Neutral-colored furnishings in the office
- » Chairs that are large enough for men in waiting areas and have two chairs stationed at each counseling desk

- » Offer children’s books that feature male characters in nurturing roles
- » Have men’s restroom or co-ed restroom that has diaper changing station

2. Have Men Present in the Office

- » Hire male staff
- » Male peer counselors or facilitators
- » Look for community partners for men who may be interested in being involved
- » Male board members or stakeholders
- » Dad volunteers

3. Think about Dad’s Time Conflicts

- » Schedule appointments at times when the father or father figure can attend; offer flexible/extended hours; evening or weekend hours
- » Let families know of special events well in advance so Dads can schedule around them
- » When looking to change clinic hours, make sure to also ask Dads what times work for them

4. Be Creative

- » “stay and play” or “Dads time” event
- » Career corner where Dads can search for jobs
- » Open house for Dads or a Father-child event where you provide food and refreshments
- » Special orientation event for men and Dad in WIC
- » Celebrate Father’s Day and recognize fathers



CHECKLIST FOR A MEN WELCOMING OFFICE	YES	NO
Walls: Do the walls contain positive images of Dads?		
Reading Materials: Are there fliers and magazines that Dad can read?		
Chairs: Are the chairs big enough for Dad? Are there at least two chairs at every counseling desk?		
Restroom: Is there a men's restroom with a diaper changing station?		
Men: Are men present in the office in some capacity- other Dads, staff, facilitators or community partners?		
Scheduling: Do you offer flexible times so that Dads can attend appointments? Do you get Dads' input when planning special events?		

ACTION ITEMS FOR WIC STAFF:

- » Make the WIC office “Dad-Friendly by including pictures, books, and reading materials that show Dads in a positive light.
- » Make sure that the office is comfortable and accessible for Dads.
- » Encourage the presence of men at the office by hiring men or having men as facilitators and volunteers.
- » Plan around Dads' schedule when possible.
- » Be creative when reaching out to Dads and try different kinds of events.



SECTION III: COMMUNICATE DIRECTLY WITH DADS

1. Build Relationships with Men and Dads

- » Learn Dad's name
- » Engage Dad in short conversations
- » If Dad answers the phone, talk to him before asking to speak to mom
- » Encourage Dad to come to at least one office visit
- » Welcome Dads with enthusiasm
- » Make Dad feel like they are equals in the “parenting equation” - do not assume that only mothers are in charge of certain things like parent-teacher conferences, doctor visits, child care or cooking

2. Reach Out and Invite Dads to be Involved in WIC

- » Invite Dads to attend special events
- » Take advantage of social media – send email updates about scheduled, Dad-friendly events
- » Use Facebook or twitter or Instagram to remind Dads
- » With permission from mom, send copies of information to dad if he lives separately
- » Include a space for information about father/partner/father-figure on contact information forms
- » Specify Dad or father on your invites
- » What about same-sex couples? Consider adding inclusive or gender neutral language to your forms such as parent/guardians; parent 1 and parent 2; caregivers

3. Target Information to Dads

- » Focus on “opinions, ideas, techniques, and solutions” rather than “sharing concerns or feelings” or “getting help”
- » Provide leaflets and information that specifically mention and include pictures of dads
- » Suggest concrete activities and explain how the activity will benefit the child's growth. Many fathers are more comfortable participating in child development when they are given clear and defined tasks.
- » Materials targeted to Dad in regular prenatal classes

4. Encourage or Provide Opportunities for Dads to Learn about Parenting
 - » Encourage new Dads to seek out information and support related to fathering – online resources, support groups
 - » Provide peer groups or parenting classes
 - » Support men in their development as fathers or father figures.



Dads also benefit from being involved with their children! Dads gain self-confidence, have a greater sense of overall well-being and are better able to express their emotions.

(adapted from “Positive Father Involvement” by Minnesota Father & Families Network)

ACTION ITEMS FOR WIC STAFF:

- » Build positive relationships with Dads.
- » Invite Dads to be a part of WIC activities.
- » Use Dad-friendly language.
- » Tell them about how their child benefits from their involvement.
- » Provide Dads with resources to learn about parenting.
- » Encourage Dads to join parenting support groups or classes.
- » Have available Fatherhood and Family referral resources in your WIC clinics.
- » Have open-ended questions ready for Dad and use reflective listening techniques so Dad feels heard.

BENEFITS TO CHILDREN WITH INVOLVED DADS

SOCIAL BENEFITS:

- » Greater empathy
- » Healthier relationships with peers
- » Higher self-esteem
- » More self-control and less impulsive behavior
- » More generous

INTELLECTUAL BENEFITS:

- » Increased curiosity and less fear in new situations
- » Greater tolerance for stress and frustration
- » Higher verbal skills
- » Better school performance



SECTION IV: HELP DADS TO SUPPORT MOMS AND BREASTFEEDING

1. Educate Dads about the many Benefits of Breastfeeding
2. Listen to and Address Dad's Concerns about Breastfeeding
3. Encourage Dad to Support Mom before the Baby is Born
 - » Attend prenatal and breastfeeding classes
 - » Pack hospital bag
 - » Getting crib, car seat, stroller
 - » Care for mom by doing work around the house
4. Help Dad to Support Mom while she is Breastfeeding
 - » Encourage mom to breastfeed
 - » Be part of the feeding team
 - » Take other baby care duties so that mom can rest
 - » Help out with household chores
 - » Join a peer Dad group to learn more on how to support mom
5. If Mom has to return to work, encourage Dad to be supportive.
 - » help in cleaning and packing breast pump equipment
 - » organize breast milk storage
 - » If baby goes to daycare, have Dad pack the baby bag with pumped breast milk and bottles



DAD'S CONCERN ABOUT BREASTFEEDING	
Feeling left out	Dad's support is so important while Mom is breastfeeding, and there are lots of ways he can help. There are also many ways dad can bond with his baby that don't involve feeding, such as soothing, bathing, playing, etc.
Pain that his partner may experience	In general, there should be little or no pain with breastfeeding. If Mom and baby are having a hard time, Dad can take Mom to WIC or her doctor for help.
Not making enough milk	In most cases, eating a balanced meal, drinking adequate fluid, having adequate rest and sleep while breastfeeding often will help mom produce what baby needs.
May interfere with his relationship or sex life with his partner	Having a baby changes your sex life regardless of whether the baby is given Mom's milk or formula. The first 6 weeks are tiring for Mom. Her body needs time to heal from the trauma of birth. Both of you will need to adjust to the big change in your home life. You will need to plan for time alone with each other.
It will ruin his partner's breasts	Breastfeeding does not damage Mom's breasts! Any changes in her breast appearance is caused by pregnancy itself.
Will be too difficult for Mom	Dad can make things easier on Mom by providing support.



TIPS ON HOW “DAD CAN HELP, TOO”

- » Limit visitors and visiting time, especially at the hospital when mom and baby are learning to breastfeed.
- » Get to know normal baby behavior, especially for crying and sleeping.
- » Encourage mom with words of support; things will get easier after about 6 weeks.
- » Speak up for mom’s wishes.
- » Take mom to get breastfeeding help, if she needs it.
- » Ask other family members to pick the kids up from school or ask a friend to bring over a meal.
- » Help with cleaning, laundry and other chores.
- » Help make healthy meals.
- » Play with or care for the baby while mom gets some rest.

ACTION ITEMS FOR WIC STAFF:

- » Listen to and acknowledge Dad’s concerns around breastfeeding.
- » Educate and/or reassure Dads about the benefits of breastfeeding.
- » Provide suggestions of how Dad can support Mom during pregnancy
- » Provide suggestions of how Dad can support Mom after the baby is born and while she is breastfeeding.

SECTION V: ENCOURAGE MOMS TO INCLUDE DADS

1. Address the Barriers to Mom Including Dad

- » Talk to mom about the importance and benefits of Dad’s involvement
- » Encourage mom to share and discuss with Dad the information she learns at WIC
- » Ask mom to schedule her next office visit for a time when Dad can come in too.
- » Remind mom that Dad can also take the child to the appointments if needed

2. Be Sensitive to Mom’s Feelings and Concerns

- » Ask for mom’s advice and input on father involvement
- » Get Mom’s permission before sharing information to Dad if needed

3. When Appropriate, Focus on Co-Parenting

- » Both are “on the same page” when it comes to parenting
- » Consider the feelings of both parents when making a suggestion
- » Affirming each parent’s knowledge and understanding of their child

POTENTIAL GUIDE FOR WIC STAFF TO ENCOURAGE CO-PARENTING

- » Schedule Mom and Dad for an office visit at a time that works for the both of them.
- » Let Mom and Dad know that you see them as a team and that you want to work with both of them on their family’s health goals.
- » Politely explore both parents’ feelings about parenthood and how they each see their role in the family.
- » Remember to actively engage Dad in the office visit by asking him if he has any questions or concerns. Ask him about his opinions or beliefs about his child or about parenting in general.
- » Always use open-ended questions and be sure to make eye contact with both parents when giving information.

[Adapted from Key Concepts: Including Dad in a WIC Setting]

ACTION ITEMS FOR WIC STAFF:

- » Explain to Moms the benefits of father involvement.
- » Encourage Moms to include Dads and to facilitate their involvement in WIC.
- » Be sensitive to Moms' feelings and address Moms' concerns about including Dads.
- » Ask for Mom's input on how Dad could be involved.
- » Encourage co-parenting.
- » If possible, offer parenting groups at your WIC clinic or refer participants to parenting groups in the community.

SECTION VI: PROVIDE SERVICE REFERRALS TO DAD AND BUILD COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

1. Developing Community Partnerships – By partnering with other organizations in the community, your WIC clinic can better provide programming for men and Dads and make more effective referrals.

- » You can consider partnering with:
 - » Food banks or restaurants for meals
 - » Local stores for incentives and support for activities
 - » Community centers and other agencies for use of space
 - » Volunteer organizations or high school students for childcare
- » Work to understand the needs and motivations of other agencies so you can explain how they might benefit from a partnership with WIC.
- » Use social media or contact regular media to talk about WIC and to get community partners interested.
- » Invite current or potential partners to visit your program during an event.
 - » Use the opportunity to explain what your WIC office is doing to engage and support fathers and talk about the importance of fathers in the lives of children.
 - » This can strengthen the relationship with current partners.

- » You can also use community partners, like community centers and local businesses, to spread the word that your WIC program is reaching out more to Dads and to publicize special events.

2. Making the Most of Community Partnerships in order to Include men and Dads – If you develop community partnerships, you may have more capacity for activities that will appeal to Dads such as:

- » An evening event at your office for Dads where dinner is provided
- » Special story time for Dads and their children at the local library
- » Gym time at kid's gym or Daddy and Me time at a community pool
- » Invite physical trainers to have fitness clinic to encourage parents to be active with their kids at home
- » Bike store that would loan bikes and trailers for a Daddy and Me bike ride
- » Sponsorship for a BBQ at a local park with playground time or soccer
- » Invite community partners to participate in a Father's Day Fair!

3. Support Dads with Referrals to Community Organizations

- » WIC staff should learn about social and educational resources for fathers in the community.
 - » Your clinic may already have information on many of these places as part of your referral process for women and children.
 - » Developing community partnerships may also help you make referrals.
- » After making the referrals, WIC staff can help motivate Dads to follow through on referrals and make sure the connection has been made.
- » Focus on health and health services:
 - » Engage Dads in discussions about their physical, mental and emotional health.
 - » Remind Dads that they need to take good care of themselves to be able to take care of their children and family.

STEPS FOR MAKING EFFECTIVE REFERRALS:

1. Before referring Dads to an agency, **know** the agency's process and how the father will be treated.
2. **Prepare** Dads for what to expect.
3. **Check back** with fathers about whether or not referrals are helpful.
4. If the referral was less helpful: **Work** with Dads to understand roadblocks they may have encountered.
5. If the referral was helpful: **Ask** Dads to share their referral experience with other fathers and families.

- Adopted from Community Partnerships: Effective Referrals

The following suggestions are potential community partners to refer Dads to:

» HEALTH SERVICES:

- » Local health and human services departments
- » Community clinics
- » City and county hospitals
- » University hospitals

» SUPPORT FOR POSITIVE CO-PARENTING:

- » Meditation service providers
- » Marriage and family services
- » Family rights organizations
- » Legal aid societies
- » Anger management counselors

» MENTAL HEALTH:

- » Community mental health providers
- » School-based mental health clinics (for younger Dads)
- » Substance abuse programs
- » Family violence programs
- » Hospital emergency departments (short term solution)

» EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT:

- » English as a Second Language classes (ESL) or GED classes (may be offered at community centers or libraries)
- » Community colleges
- » Technical schools
- » Employment agencies
- » Career centers

» HOUSING:

- » Community development agencies
- » Housing authorities
- » Public housing
- » Community development financial institutions
- » Halfway houses and shelters

» SOCIAL SUPPORT:

- » YMCA/YWCA
- » Community centers
- » Faith institutions
- » Neighborhood groups
- » Parent-Teacher associations
- » Community improvement groups

ACTION ITEMS FOR WIC STAFF:

- » Develop or strengthen community partnerships.
- » Use community partnerships to reach out to Dads more.
- » Provide referrals to Dads for issues outside of parenting and use partnerships to inform the referral process.
- » Make sure Dads' needs are considered and check back with Dads to see if referrals are effective.

TESTIMONIALS FROM PARTICIPANTS AND STAFF:

"WIC HAS TAUGHT ME HOW TO BOND WITH BOTH OF MY GIRLS. THE WIC PROGRAM ENCOURAGES HEALTHIER EATING OPTIONS AND THINGS TO DO TO KEEP ADULTS AND CHILDREN ACTIVE." – WIC DAD, WISCONSIN

"WIC ENCOURAGES FAMILIES TO COOK HEALTHY MEALS TOGETHER. – WIC DAD, WISCONSIN

"A SECOND-GENERATION OWNER OF A STORE, REMARKED ABOUT WHEN SHE TOOK OVER WHEN HER DAD RETIRED 24 YEARS AGO. 'THE PROGRAM STARTED UP WHEN MY DAD OWNED THE BUSINESS. IT BECAME PART OF THE STORE. IT IS A REALLY GOOD PROGRAM.' WIC, SHE SAID, WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR INTRODUCING FRESH MILK TO PORT GRAHAM RESIDENTS BACK IN HER DAD'S DAY. 'BEFORE THAT, WE SOLD A LOT OF EVAPORATED MILK'." – WIC GROCER, ALASKA

"HONESTLY, I'M IN ACCORDANCE AND BELIEVE BREASTFEEDING IS VERY IMPORTANT, FOR THE GROWTH OF ALL CHILDREN, ESPECIALLY OUR DAUGHTERS. IN REFERENCE TO MY WIFE THAT I LOVE AND ADORE, THE FACT IS THAT SHE IS DOING A GREAT EFFORT AND SACRIFICE BY BREASTFEEDING. TO YOU ALL WHO ARE DOING A GREAT LABOR AND JOB TO THE COMMUNITY IN GENERAL, WE ARE EXTREMELY GRATEFUL. THANK YOU FROM THE BOTTOM OF OUR HEARTS." – WIC DAD, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA



Watch this video of a WIC Dad from Virginia. <https://thewichub.org/wic-father-virginia/RESOURCES>:

1. Adopted from California WIC Association: Engaging Men and Dads at WIC: A Toolkit
2. <https://cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/ocap/about-ocap/supporting-father-involvement>
3. <https://resources.beststart.org/product/j12e-engaging-fathers-programs-families-manual/>
4. <https://wicbreastfeeding.fns.usda.gov/dads>
5. Fathers Supporting Breastfeeding – brochures and posters from USDA
6. Howard County's Breastfeeding is a Family Affair Outreach Campaign – posters, fliers, Postcards, Bus Ads, Mall advertisement
7. A WIC Guide to Breastfeeding from California WIC
8. <https://childandfamilyresearch.utexas.edu/fatherhood-texas-supporting-fathers>
9. https://resources.beststart.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/J12-E-BSRC_Engaging_Fathers_2020.pdf
10. Dads: Making a Difference Brochure - Freely distributed by Windswept Isles Consulting

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11. WIC Watch: Preparing Men to be Fathers from California WIC
12. Key Concepts: Including Dads in a WIC Setting from Texas WIC
13. Using Loving Support to Grow and Glow in WIC: Breastfeeding Training for Local WIC Staff
14. Promoting Father Involvement in Early Childhood from FRIENDS National Resource Center
15. Photo source: FNS/USDA