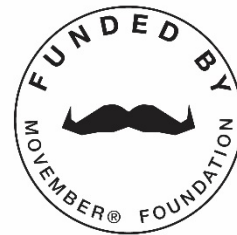


Engaging Fathers in Parenting Programs

*A National Training Program
for Practitioners*



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY



Introduction

There is little doubt that both mothers and fathers can have a unique and important impact on child outcomes. However, engaging all important members of the parenting team into parenting interventions can be a difficult task, especially given the complexity of some families. The evidence is clear that fathers in particular, tend to have low engagement rates. Further, there is evidence that outcomes for children are improved when the core parenting team, including fathers, participate. The intention of this training program called *Engaging Fathers in Parenting Programs*, is to improve the confidence, skills and strategies that practitioners have to increase the engagement of fathers into parenting interventions. While the focus of the training is on fathers, it should be noted that the strategies provided in this training can be used with all members of the parenting team, regardless of gender.

Engaging Fathers in Parenting Programs is a national, voluntary and free training program that aims to improve skills for engaging, working with, and retaining fathers in parenting interventions. It has been developed by a team of psychologists and researchers at the University of Sydney as part of the *Like Father Like Son* project and is proudly funded by the Movember Foundation. The training covers the following topics: research on father engagement, current barriers to engaging fathers, how to positively engage with fathers, how to build confidence with managing conflict and planning for future father-inclusive practice. The training does not include techniques for working with fathers with specific vulnerabilities such as domestic violence, substance use, and significant mental health issues, although the strategies presented in this training may be helpful in engaging families with a range of vulnerabilities. The resource section of this workbook includes links to additional resources and services that may address these specific vulnerabilities.

Please use this workbook while you are watching the training video. The workbook summarises each section of the video and includes activities for you to complete while watching. The video will cue you when to pause and complete the corresponding activities in the workbook. Thank you for your participation in the training program. We hope you enjoy the program and find it helpful

Prof Mark Dadds

On behalf of the Like Father Like Son Project Team



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Research Background

What do fathers say?

Factors that fathers report are important in deciding to participate:

- Understanding what is involved in the program;
- Knowing the practitioner is trained;
- Holding the program at a convenient time and location;
- Knowing the program is tested and effective.

What practitioners say?

- 90% of practitioners reported positive attitudes to engaging fathers. They reported that “fathers matter” and believe that father involvement improves treatment effectiveness;
- Practitioners were least confident in managing conflict between mothers and fathers in sessions and dealing with reluctance of fathers to attend;
- Only one quarter of all practitioners had participated in training in father engagement.

Training in engagement

- Although there are forces beyond the practitioner’s control, evidence indicates that brief training of practitioners can improve parent attendance rates and outcomes (Watt, Dadds, Best & Daviess, 2012);
- Positive engagement strategies are an important way of improving participation rates in parents.

Model of engagement

We have developed a practical model of parent engagement. In this model there are four stages:

- **Connection stage:** where and how parents find out about a service, either via a spouse, professional, friend or promotional strategy.
- **Attendance stage:** getting parents in the door or getting them to turn up to sessions.
- **Participation stage:** getting parents to actively participate in sessions.
- **Enactment stage:** the implementation and application of therapeutic strategies within the child’s environment in a consistent way.

References:

- Lundahl, B., Tollefson, D., Risser, H., & Lovejoy, C. (2008). A Meta-Analysis of Father Involvement in Parent Training. *Research on Social Work Practice, 18*, 97-106.
- Watt, B. D., Dadds, M., Best, D., & Daviess, C. (2012). Enhancing treatment participation in CAMHS among families of conduct problem children: Effectiveness study of a clinician training programme. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health, 3*, 179 – 186.



Potential Barriers

Section One: Write down what you think the father may be feeling or thinking in each of these short clips.

Video One

Teacher: “We’re having a few problems with Jaimie’s behaviour in the classroom, and we were wondering if you two as parents could do something and get some help.”

What may this father be thinking or feeling?

Thoughts	Feelings

Video Two

Mother: “You don’t seem to realise the kids are out of control. All we do is fight, we need to do something. We need help.”

What may this father be thinking or feeling?

Thoughts	Feelings

Potential Barriers

Video Three

Father walking into “Child Behaviour Clinic”.

What may this father be thinking or feeling?

Thoughts	Feelings

Section Two: Write down what you think the father is feeling or thinking and what the practitioner may be thinking or feeling in each of these short clips.

Video One (will be shown twice)

Mother: “He never sits still. I’m struggling. I don’t know what to do. I’ve tried time out. I’m just exhausted.”

What may the father be thinking or feeling?

Thoughts	Feelings

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What may the practitioner be thinking or feeling?

Thoughts	Feelings

Video Two (will be shown twice)

Practitioner: "One of the best ways to manage this problem is with a parenting program."

Father: "What? A parenting program? Why does this even involve me?"

What may the father be thinking or feeling?

Thoughts	Feelings

What may the practitioner be thinking or feeling?

Thoughts	Feelings



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Video Three

Practitioner: "I'm just getting so much resistance from him. I don't think he understands what I'm trying to do."

What may the practitioner be thinking or feeling?

Thoughts	Feelings

Father: "I don't think there's any point in going again. She's not going to care if I'm there or not."

What may the father be thinking or feeling?

Thoughts	Feelings



Barriers Worksheet

What barriers may be impacting father engagement in your service, program or personal practice?

Research has found that by making a commitment and explicitly setting an intention to change after learning something new, increases change over the long term. We will be asking you to create personal goals after each section.

Personal Goal: What goals would you like to set for yourself to address some of these barriers in your service and practice e.g. I will offer flexible hours of practice or I will be mindful of my personal beliefs about fathers and their role?





Positive Engagement Strategies

Engaging fathers through mothers

Mothers have the potential to encourage but also discourage father participation

Identify the parenting team

It's important to identify who is in the parenting team with the mother. Ask about her current partner, the child's biological father, etc. Emphasise the importance of involving the core parenting team.

Help the mother identify potential obstacles

You may come across difficulties when asking mothers about father participation. There are likely to be three key scenarios/situations where you may try to engage fathers through mothers:

- Uncertainty about father willingness to attend;
- Barriers such as work commitments, lack of time or child care issues prevent fathers attending;
- When mothers are unsure of the importance of father involvement.

Empower the mother to make decisions regarding

- Whether or not it's appropriate to include the father within the intervention;
- Whether the mother, after discussion, might feel confident to encourage the father to attend; or,
- Whether the mother would rather you directly contact the father to discuss attendance (in place of the mother).

Emphasise the importance of father participation

You can emphasise the importance of father participation by explaining that your service encourages the core parenting team to attend each session and that fathers are 'core business' for your service. By doing this, you are sending a clear message to families that this is a normal practice that is part of your service.



Positive Engagement Strategies

Inviting fathers to attend

Be flexible with your agenda and talk to the father's story

Talk to his story

It's important to listen to the father's experience during your conversation. This sounds simple but it can often go against your agenda of getting him on board. This is why we ask you to 'talk to his story' by:

- Using reflective listening (e.g. asking questions to understand the father's ideas and reflecting this understanding back to the father);
- Reflecting back difficulties with attendance;
- Expanding and exploring these difficulties to ensure you understand them.

Empower the father's role

It is essential to use language that highlights the importance of the father's role during your conversation. This strengths-based approach acknowledges how valuable the father's role and participation in the parenting team is. Practitioners can do this by verbalising that:

- He is an expert in his child;
- All parents, including fathers are considered "core business";
- All parents, including fathers can provide important information about the child and family;
- Engaging the parenting team shows better long term results.



Positive Engagement Strategies

Meeting the parents for the first time

Give each parent an equal opportunity to speak

Engage both parents

It is important to give each parent an equal opportunity to speak. Take a stance of curiosity and empathy and listen for each parent's initial agenda. Talk to each parent's story by reflecting and expanding each story via open ended questions. Remember to take a neutral path of non-judgement when exploring each person's perspective.

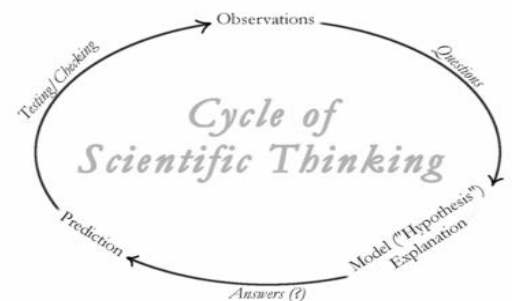
Establish a team

Establish a team including parents, practitioner and scientific method. The team involves:

- **The parenting system** as the experts in their children and the agents/enactors of change;
- **The practitioner** who has been trained in the practice and science of parenting programs and the therapy process;
- **The scientific method** of implementation, observation and re-assessment to identify whether the strategies work for their family.

Invoke the team to make all decisions:

- Create a shared understanding of the problem and negotiate future goals;
- Establish rules and processes to achieve change;
- Plan how to manage potential obstacles to change.



Positive Engagement Strategies Worksheet

Engaging through mothers: Sam is a mother of four who has called you/your service. She states that her partner is not interested in attending your service. What questions/statements would you use to explore this situation further?

Inviting fathers to attend: Sam has asked you to contact Dean (her husband). Write down how you might introduce yourself and your service. Dean then tells you he is too stressed and busy to attend. Write down how you might 'talk to his story'.

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Creating a team: In the initial session, it's clear Sam and Dean have different perspectives. Sam feels Brady (their son) needs more encouragement and praise. Dean however, believes they need to enforce rules, stating "he walks all over us". Can you think of a statement that might introduce the rationale for a parenting program, incorporating their dissimilar goals?

Personal Goal: What personal goal would you like to set for yourself in relation to positive engagement strategies?





Building Confidence with Managing Conflict

Try to view conflict as an opportunity for change

Identifying Conflict

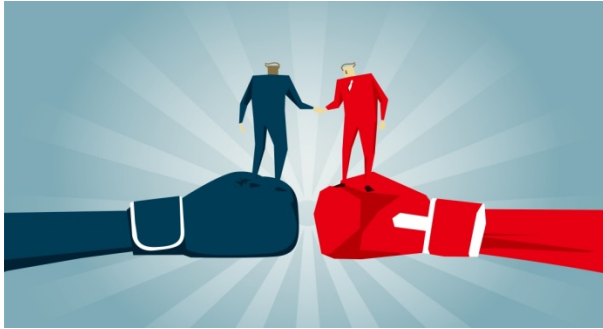
- Identify when conflict is emerging in session;
- Listen to the alarm bells going off in your head when it happens;
- Identify and be mindful of your own comfort levels in dealing with conflict and the impact conflict may have on you in session.

Anger as a secondary emotion

It is important to know that anger at others, in the form of hostility and blame, can often be a secondary emotion caused by escalated, primary feelings of fear, worry and anxiety. Remember the iceberg analogy here to identify that emotions, such as anger, are at the top of the iceberg, but we should remain curious and empathic about primary feelings below the surface.

Managing escalating conflict

- Remain neutral;
- Describe what is happening with the conflict;
- Pass on the message that conflict is a normal process in any relationship;
- 'Invoke the team' to revisit boundaries and rules that you have set up in the first session or if need be, create new rules;
- Be aware that conflict can quickly re-emerge after this discussion and be prepared to revisit this process if it does.



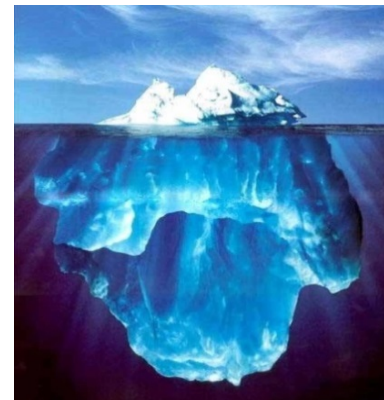
Building Confidence with Managing Conflict

Exploring underlying feelings

Ask open ended questions with curiosity to find out what may be underlying the anger.

Emotions under the surface often include:

Sadness , Anxiety, Embarrassment, Jealousy
Annoyance, Fear, Overwhelmed, Offended
Nervous, Worried, Uncomfortable, Grief
Insecure, Guilt



Introducing new skills

Skills training can include:

- Problem solving skills;
- Partner support training;
- Cognitive behavioral techniques.

Managing what to do after conflict

Finally, how you manage your own feelings and comfort levels about the conflict during and after the session is important, and may involve:

- Debriefing;
- Supervision;
- Self-care;
- Displaying/modeling repair after conflict.

Building Confidence with Managing Conflict Worksheet

Have a go at interpreting what emotions may be underlying the below “angry statements”.

“How old are you? Do you have your own children?”

“Millions of parents act like me; why do I have to sign up for this?”

“There’s nothing wrong with my son”

Think of a conflict situation from your past practice. How did you deal with anger or conflict? What did you do well and what could you have done differently? (If you are a non-clinical staff member, please feel free to use personal examples).

Imagine that you have just walked into a session and a couple start to yell and scream at each other. What can you do to manage the situation using these strategies?

Personal Goal: What goal would you like to set for yourself when dealing with conflict or anger in future sessions?





Planning for future father-inclusive practice

Self-Reflection

Self-reflection is an important process in father engagement as it is a two way relationship. Our personal views and experiences can impact on how we attempt to engage fathers from all walks of life. Regular self-reflection allows practitioners to monitor how their internal state may be influencing their ability to engage fathers, but also how the interactions in session are impacting their own internal state.

Team Reflection

Group reflection of father engagement often has to compete with other important topics and can lose its place due to a lack of time and other priorities. Here are some simple ideas to get you started on regular team reflection:

- Keep rates of attendance by parenting teams, including fathers, on the meeting agenda, for example when reviewing cases;
- As an individual practitioner, take on some responsibility for father engagement within your service. You might like to have your name next to the father engagement agenda item;
- Have regular journal club meetings where you present, discuss and evaluate new articles and information focused on father engagement;
- Encourage other practitioners and managers to participate in this father engagement training.

Organisational Approach

You can help make your organisation or team more father-inclusive via small simple changes such as:

- Suggest adding an extra question about father engagement to your intake form, or prompt those who take referrals to emphasise fathers as 'core business';
- Suggest making it standard practice for both parents to complete measures that assess parenting skills, confidence and child behaviour;
- Prompt your organisation or team to record who attends sessions so that you can assess rates of father engagement;
- Suggest making it standard practice to ask for direct feedback from fathers about service delivery;
- Send out regular research updates about new research emerging in father engagement, for example, Fatherhood Research Bulletin (ARACY and the Family Action Centre).

Planning for future father-inclusive practice worksheet

Have a look at the self-reflection worksheet at the back of this workbook (can be used for future photocopying). Think about a family that you have worked with and jot down your answers below to each of the self-reflection questions in reference to this family.

What can you do, that might work in your workplace, to facilitate team reflection (e.g. take on the volunteer role of father engagement officer in meetings)?

What suggestions could you make to your supervisor/organisation/team to facilitate continued father-inclusive practice? When and where will you make these suggestions?

Personal Goal: What goals do you have in reference to self-reflection, team reflection and organisational influence?

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Personal Goals List

For Continued Father-Inclusive Practice

Have a look back at all your personal goals/notes/intentions and put them all in one place below. Make sure the goals are measurable (i.e., are you able to assess if it's been achieved or not?) Address any obstacles in implementation, what you need to do to achieve this and the outcome.

Goal	Obstacle	Pathway	Outcome
Keep father engagement on the meeting agenda	I do not attend all meetings	Email my manager and ask how to make a topic a standing meeting agenda item	I created a standing meeting agenda item with father engagement which will be discussed at every meeting

Note: Put this goals list somewhere visible as a constant reminder (e.g. on your office wall, phone, computer).



Resources

When suggesting referrals to fathers

1. Use action language, encouraging fathers to 'take action' regarding things they want changed in their lives, rather than help-seeking language.
2. Give him a range of options for services or programs that are evidence-based, trustworthy or have personal recommendations.

Crisis Support Services

Men'sLine (1300 78 99 78): online and video counselling services are also offered

Beyond Blue (1300224636): online and email counselling services are also offered

Lifeline (131114): general phone support and crisis counselling services

Online Resources

Parentworks: Free, evidence-based, father-friendly online parenting program

www.parentworks.org.au

Australian Fatherhood Research Network: Provides free webinars on fatherhood and access to the *Fatherhood Research Bulletin*

www.aracy.org.au

Raising Children's Network: Provides several father specific resources including short video clips.

www.raisingchildren.net.au

Domestic Violence Services

Men's Referral Service (1300 766 491): Takes calls from men, victims and practitioners in Australia regarding domestic violence and can suggest services for men.

www.mrs.org.au



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Self-Reflection Worksheet

This worksheet is for you to use as part of your self-reflection tool kit. It has been placed in the appendix for future photocopying. You can use it after each initial session with a family.

Are there any barriers that may impact the engagement process with these parents?

Is there anything impacting on the mother's ability to engage the father?

What did I do well/what could I have done differently with establishing a team?

What is this father's story? How might we use this information to assist session attendance?



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What are your comfort levels when dealing with conflict with this family?

If there is anger, what might be the client's primary feelings?

What did I do well/what could I have done differently with managing conflict?

How can we use the above information to plan for future engagement strategies with this family?

