

Father Involvement—Meeting CFSR Standards

Introduction

The benefits of father involvement in the lives of children have been well-established. However, child welfare agencies continue to struggle with implementing father involvement policies and practice.

All states are required to participate in the federal Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR) that measure outcomes in child welfare agencies. While there is no specific measure for father involvement, there are four proxies under “Outcome of Child Well-Being Outcome 1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for children's needs.”

Below is each proxy item and the number/percentage of state child welfare agencies that received a rating of “strength” during the first round of the CFSRs:

Proxy for Father Involvement in CFSR	States
Item 13: Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care	16 (30.8%)
Item 17: Needs/services of child, parents, and foster parents	1 (1.9%)
Item 18: Child/family involvement in case planning	5 (9.6%)
Item 20: Worker visits with parents	7 (13.5%)

In addition to the low ratings overall, the CFSR findings also note that the areas rated as strengths are applicable to mothers, not fathers.

The second round of the CFSRs is currently underway and reviews completed to date indicate that states are doing even worse than the first round in the area of father involvement. What can be done to help states improve their practice and outcomes?

Assessment

In order to determine what an agency needs to do to involve fathers, it must first understand its current response to fathers. Here’s how administrators can determine that:

- Conduct an *organizational* self-assessment. (See Appendix A for assessment form.)
- Ask workers to select one case, assigned at least one month previously, and to complete an assessment form on father involvement. (See Appendix B for assessment form.)
- Appoint a Task Force that includes administrators, program managers, supervisors, and workers to review the organizational and worker assessments and prepare findings/recommendations.

Motivation and Training

All administrators can anticipate that organizational and worker assessments of father-involvement will find areas that need improvement. Here are some next steps:

- Schedule a meeting with all staff to review the findings and recommendations of the Task Force and to announce that the agency is committed to increasing father involvement.

- Announce a kick-off event with a motivational fatherhood speaker. Involve and publicly commend staff who are strong supporters of father involvement.
- Within a month of the kick-off event, schedule the first training for workers and supervisors on father involvement. (see Appendix E for Resources.)

A research demonstration project conducted by the National Family Preservation Network found that motivation and training are closely followed by workers increasing efforts to identify and locate fathers and to involve them in case planning. Thus, focus and training on father involvement are key ingredients to improving practice.

Engaging Fathers

Now that workers are motivated and prepared to involve fathers, here are some ways for workers to engage fathers:

- Explain to the father that his positive involvement affects the child's emotional, behavioral, and academic development in many ways; there is no replacement for the father.
- Ask the father about his interests and what he likes to do. A friendly, non-judgmental approach can elicit information that will help connect the father to the child. Offer to meet a need of the father; for example, if he doesn't know how to take care of a small child, share with him behaviors that can be expected based on the child's age.
- Assist the father in selecting an activity to do with the child that both will enjoy. Ask for feedback from both the father and child and offer encouragement to do more activities. Observe or ask someone else to observe the father and the child interacting together in order to determine the level of bonding over a period of time. It's important that the father and child bond, both for safety reasons for the child and to build a strong, permanent relationship. The father's family may be a good resource for helping the father understand the child's developmental stage, assisting with child care, and providing back-up, support, and encouragement to the father. (See Appendix C for activities.)
- Connect the father to male-oriented programs and services whenever possible. Father support groups are especially valuable in developing self-esteem, providing role models, and developing a support network.
- Point out benefits to the mother of the father's involvement with the child. (See Appendix D, *Message for Moms*, for benefits of father involvement.)
- Enlist the child's mother in identifying appropriate activities for the father and child. Encourage and praise the child's mother for assisting the child and father to connect. Remember to thank her for everything she has done for the child on her own up to this point. When workers begin to more actively engage fathers in their children's lives, it's time to make plans to reinforce father-involvement and instill it in the agency culture.

Reinforcement and Instilling Cultural Change

As workers gain knowledge and experience in involving fathers, administrators need to prepare to reinforce these gains and make them a permanent part of the agency culture:

- Schedule additional training 3–6 months after initial training. This training should focus more on skill building and other specific needs for training that workers identify.
- Develop a form for workers to use that documents father-involvement—it can be the same or similar to the initial assessment form that workers completed. (See Appendix B.)
- Ask supervisors to inquire about the father’s involvement in every case plan/review and parent-child visitation schedule.
- Coordinate with community fatherhood organizations and programs for referrals and to develop other needed programs to serve fathers.
- Develop agency policies that make father involvement an integral part of agency culture and expectations.

If agencies take all of these steps, how do they know that they will result in improved practice and improved compliance with CFSR requirements?

CFSR Compliance

The state of Kansas is one of the few states that received a rating of strength on areas reflecting father involvement in the first round of the CFSR. However, Kansas did not fare as well in the second round of the CFSR and included father engagement in their Performance Improvement Plan (PIP). Here’s how one state-contracted provider in Kansas addressed and achieved improvements in father-involvement:

DCCCA Quality Improvement in Services to Fathers

Each year the Council on Accreditation (COA) requires DCCCA to pursue a quality improvement project. This year DCCCA’s quality improvement goal was to improve services and case involvement with fathers in the Family Preservation Services Program. These were key areas of deficiency for the State of Kansas in the second round of the federal Children and Family Services Review (CFSR) conducted in 2007. In response to the CFSR, Kansas Social and Rehabilitation Services (SRS) developed a Performance Improvement Plan that included five strategies. The fourth strategy is “improved engagement with fathers in case planning and worker contact practices.”

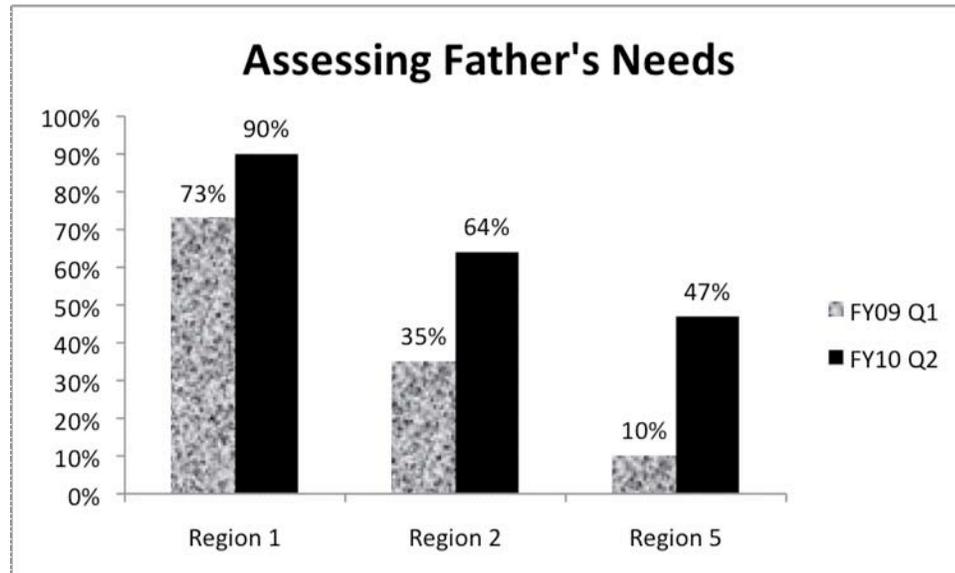
DCCCA’s goal was to improve performance on SRS on-site case audits of five key items measured in quarterly case reviews—

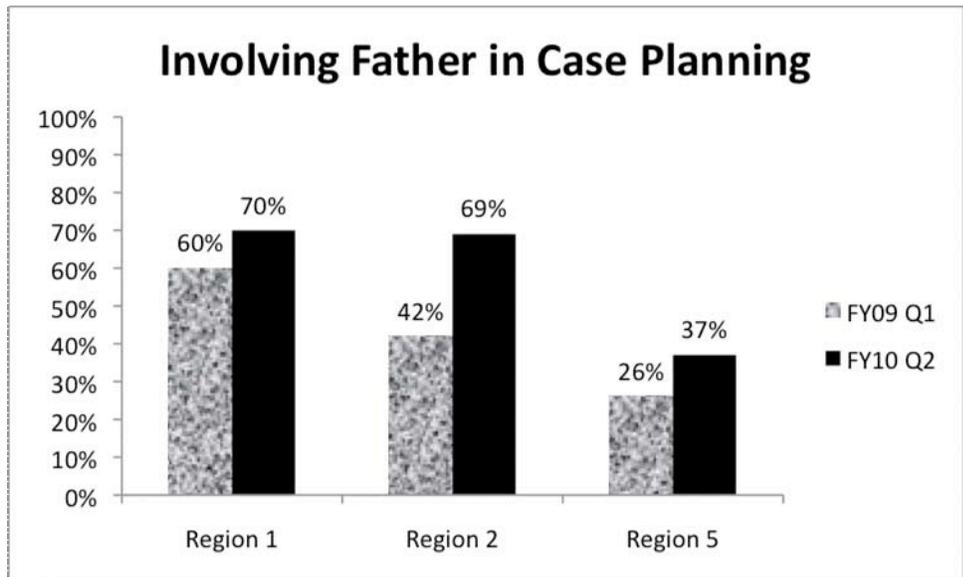
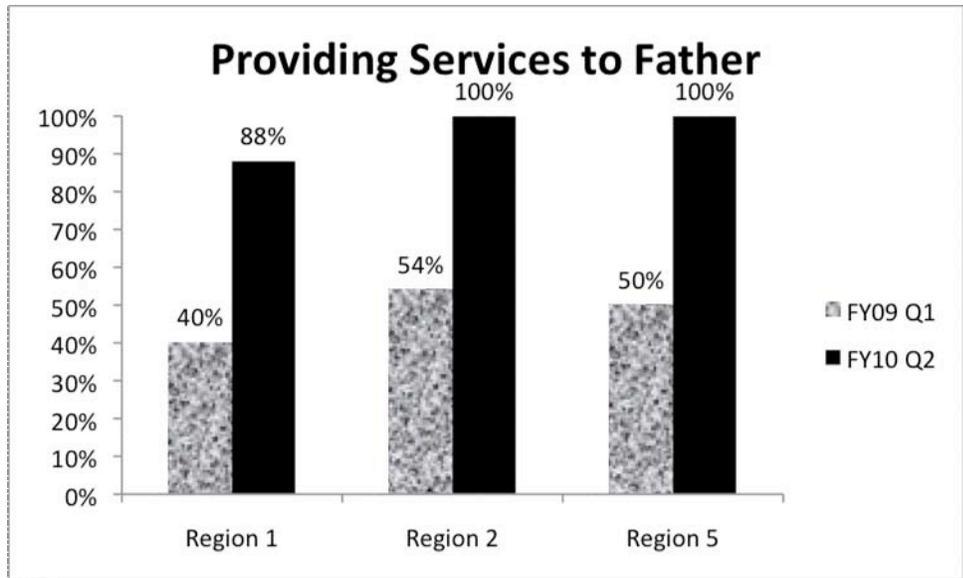
1. Initial comprehensive assessment of the father’s needs;
2. Provision of appropriate services to the father to address identified needs;
3. Active involvement by the father in the case planning process;
4. Quality of the visits between the caseworker and the father; and
5. Frequency of the visits between the caseworker and the father.

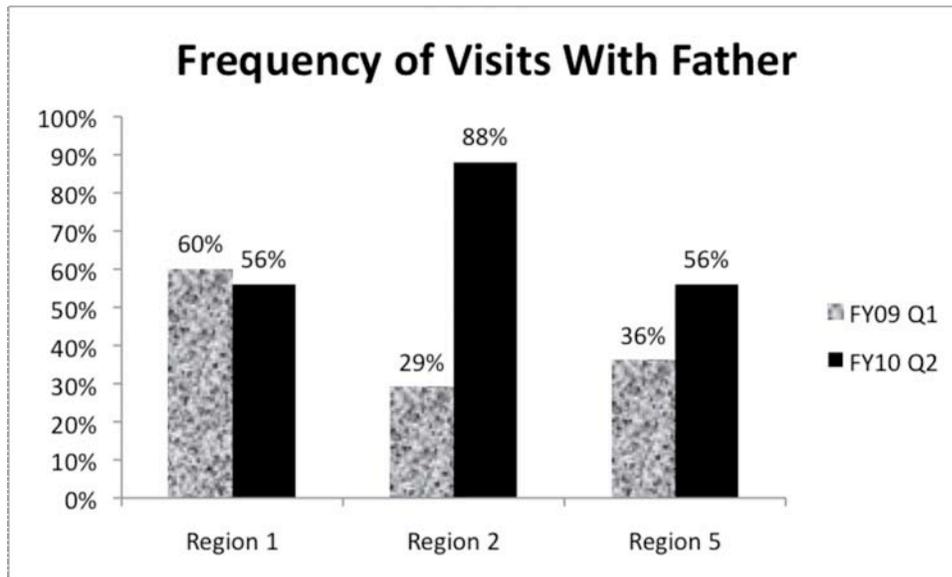
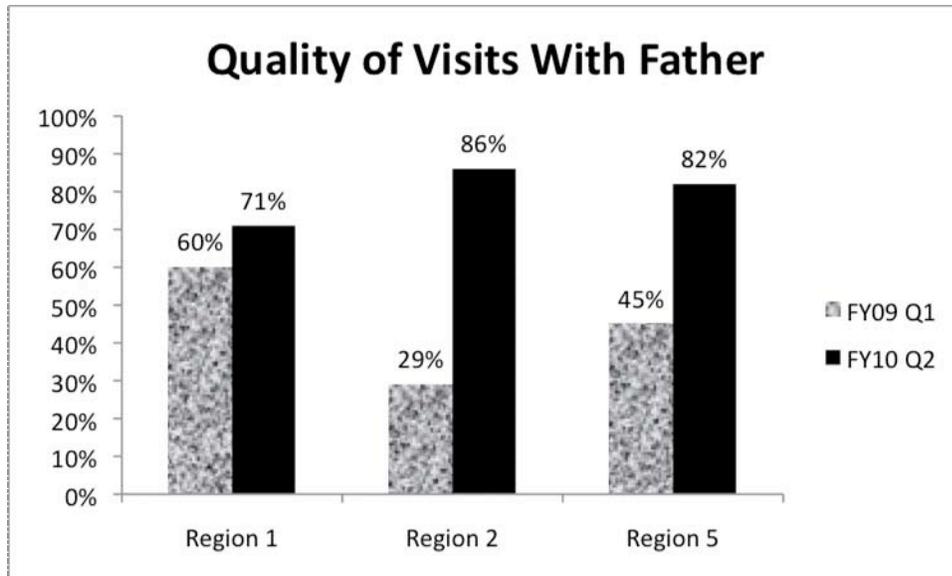
DCCCA measured improvement by comparing statewide performance levels on each item from the first quarter of FY09 to the performance level on these same items from the second quarter of FY10. Performance in all six quarters was monitored and reported to key DCCCA staff. State auditors randomly selected sample cases for review from each of DCCCA's three Family Preservation Regions. DCCCA served 2125 Family Preservation families in during the audit period. State auditors reviewed approximately 100 case files during each of the six quarterly audit reviews.

External stakeholders involved in the project included staff of SRS Children and Family Services, Quality Program Improvement division; the Kansas Child Welfare Quality Improvement Council (a federally-mandated citizen review panel) and the National Family Preservation Network (NFPN—a provider of program improvement training materials on fatherhood involvement).

Here are the results:







The graphs show dramatic improvements in 15 months time when an agency determines to improve father-involvement practice, sets and monitors benchmarks, provides training to workers, and holds itself accountable for outcomes both within the agency and to the state child welfare agency.

The quick progress of this agency raises a very important question: Can these improvements be sustained?

Sustainability

Every agency has core practice components that are conveyed to workers through administrators, supervisors, peers, and training. Losing sight of core components will result in decreased performance and eventually imperil an agency's existence. The secret to sustaining good practice in father involvement is to integrate it into an agency's core components. The painful reality is that very few agencies have done that and that is also why state child welfare agencies continually fail the CFSR in the area of father involvement.

Before undertaking a father involvement initiative, an agency should consider whether or not this is a one-time effort or a core component of agency practice. Agencies need to incorporate assessment, motivation and training, administrative and supervisory support, benchmarks, data collection, and evaluation into their policies and practice if they are to sustain improvements in father involvement.

Appendix A: Father-Friendliness Organizational Self-Assessment

How much support is there in your organization for providing services to fathers/father figures?

- The organization's documented mission is inclusive of serving fathers.
- The board of directors, policy council, and policy committee are committed to serving fathers/father figures.
- The board of directors, council, and/or committees have members who are fathers with children in the program.
- Literature and publicity about the organization reflect a commitment to serving fathers.
- Funding for serving fathers is consistent and ongoing.

1. Position and Reputation in the Community

How does the community view the organization with respect to serving fathers/father figures?

- The organization is recognized by community partners as a good source for fathers.
- The organization participates in community partnerships and collaborations concerned with providing services to fathers and families.
- Fathers in the community view the organization as a place they can come to for assistance.
- The organization is called on by the media or others for information about fathers.

2. Agency Policies and Procedures

Are the organization's policies and procedures uniformly inclusive of fathers?

- Agency procedures have been assessed to determine if the interests of fathers are uniformly represented.
- Intake and other data collection methods are standardized for both parents rather than just modified from the forms for mothers.
- Program hours are scheduled to accommodate the time constraints of working fathers.
- Policies that make it harder for fathers to be involved in the agency have been changed.
- Policies have been instituted to facilitate male involvement—for example, instead of simply encouraging father involvement, the agency establishes a clear expectation that fathers of children should and will participate.
- Agency policy allows services to be provided to both parents regardless of how the other parent feels about that involvement (except in cases of domestic violence).
- Personnel policies are friendly to both parents (e.g., paternity leave and medical leave to care for sick children).

3. Staffing/Human Resources

How prepared are staff to provide services to fathers?

GENERAL STAFF:

- The entire staff has received training on the issue of working with men in general and on fatherhood specifically.
- Staff time and resources have been allocated for recruitment and outreach to fathers.
- Staff are aware of issues faced by low-income fathers.
- The majority of frontline program staff are open and receptive to the idea of providing services to fathers.
- Staff working with fathers are fully integrated into the overall agency (e.g., staff meetings, communication, decision making, and socializing).
- The ability to provide services to fathers is included on performance appraisals of all key staff.
- Staff meet with other organizations serving fathers on a regular basis to enable cross learning about the most effective strategies for engaging and retraining fathers in parent involvement programs.

SPECIFIC STAFF:

- Specific staff have been designated to work with fathers and they fully understand their roles and responsibilities.
- Men are represented on the staff (paid and/or unpaid) at all levels.
- Male staff feel comfortable and respected within the agency.
- Female and male staff work as a team.
- Female staff (case managers/counselors/group facilitators) are comfortable working with fathers.
- Fathers of children in the center serve as volunteers in the program.

4. Program Services

Has a program for fathers been clearly articulated?

APPROACHES TO MOTHERS:

- Family goal setting activities are inclusive of fathers.
- Counseling with mothers includes a consistent focus on encouraging her to work cooperatively with the father of her child(ren).
- When mothers don't want the fathers of their children involved, efforts are still made to gain her support and to work with that father (except in domestic violence and abusive situations).

SERVICES TO FATHERS:

- Fathers have opportunities to help design/feel ownership of the services being provided to them.
- A needs and assets assessment has been completed in order to plan programs for fathers.
- Program services that are clearly tied to outcomes have been planned and implemented specifically for

fathers. The program is more than just incorporating fathers into existing services for mothers.

- Parenting groups for fathers have been designed with male psychological issues in mind. The group focuses on empowering men by helping them grasp their essential role in their children's healthy development. Groups attend to beliefs and emotional issues that are barriers to active parenting. Groups address the development of key skills (listening, anger management, and positive discipline) and help fathers understand the specific needs of boys and girls at different developmental phases.
- Information about community services for fathers (legal assistance, education and employment assistance, batterers programs, etc.) has been collected. Relationships have been forged with key people in these agencies.
- A relationship has been forged with the local child support enforcement agency.
- Staff make or are prepared to make referrals for fathers to other agencies (domestic violence, substance abuse, employment/training, etc.).

5. Physical Environment

How inviting and welcoming is the physical environment for men and fathers?

- Focus groups or individual fathers (from target population) have been invited to the agency to assess father-friendliness and make suggestions for making the space more welcoming to them.
- The physical environment has a general feel that is inviting to men/fathers.
- Positive and diverse images of men and fathers are displayed.
- Literature available for parents to pick up and read is appealing to fathers and reflects services or programs that they might participate in.
- There is room or area in the agency that has been designated as a space for men/fathers (at least during designated weekly hours) that contains resources for them and provides a space for just socializing or participating in group activities.
- The designated program space for mothers includes positive images of men/fathers.
- Men are present in the agency and it doesn't appear like a place just for women and children.

6. Communication and Interaction

How are fathers treated and communicated with inside the agency?

INTERACTION WITH FATHERS:

- Fathers who drop off children are greeted warmly.
- Efforts are made to interact with fathers who accompany mothers to the program even when they tend to hang in the background.
- When mothers and fathers come to the agency together, communication is directed equally to both and not primarily to the mother.
- Contact information is systematically taken on the father of children regardless of the father's marital

status or living arrangements.

- Written announcements, newsletters, etc., are addressed to both parents if they live together, and if they don't, the communication is sent to both.
- Staff interact with fathers in a style that demonstrates respect, empathy, and high expectations.

STAFF ATTITUDES:

- The message is given to fathers that their role as active parents is critical to their children's development.
- Input is sought from fathers about what they want and need from the agency.
- Positive comments about men are expressed in both formal and informal settings.

This survey was developed by and grateful acknowledgment goes to:

- The National Center for Strategic Non-Profit Planning and Community Leaders
- The National Head Start Association
- The Administration for Children and Family Services, Region V
- The Illinois Division of Child Support Enforcement

Appendix B: Assessing Father Involvement

1. Has paternity been established?

Yes No

If no, what efforts have been made or are underway to establish paternity?

2. Is the father's location known?

Yes No

If no, has child support enforcement been contacted for assistance in locating the father?

Yes No

Check any of the following that apply to the father's location, if known:

- Lives in same general area as the child
- Lives too far away for frequent face-to-face contact with the child
- In jail or prison
- Deceased

3. Is the father the alleged perpetrator of abusing or neglecting the child?

Yes No

4. Does the father currently have any contact with the child?

Yes No

If yes, what is the frequency of contact?

- Daily
- Weekly
- Bi-weekly
- Monthly
- Other (please specify) _____

If the father has no current contact, has a visitation schedule been established?

Yes No

If no, what is the reason? _____

If yes, what is the frequency of visitation?

- Daily
- Weekly
- Bi-weekly
- Monthly
- Other (please specify) _____

5. **Do any of the father's extended family members have any contact with the child?**
 Yes No

If yes, list the person(s) and relationship to the father/child:

What is the frequency of contact? _____
If no contacts, what are the barriers? _____

6. **Does the father provide direct care for the child?**
 Yes No

If yes, list the type of care provided:

- Child stays at father's home on regular basis
- Father baby-sits child
- Father takes child to activities
- Other _____

7. **Does the father appropriately discipline the child?**
 Yes No Don't know

8. **Do the child's mother and father communicate regularly about the child?**
 Yes No

Describe the type of interaction between the child's mother and father:

9. **Is the father employed?**
 Yes No

If yes, list the type of employment:

- Occasional or seasonal
- Part time
- Full time

If the father has less than full time employment, has he been referred to an employment program?

- Yes No

10. **Does the father provide financial support for the child?**
 Yes No

If yes, list the type of support:

- Child support payments made on regular basis
- Occasional child support
- Occasional gifts or cash

11. Is the father involved in the child's case plan?

Yes No

If yes, are there specific requirements for the father to fulfill?

Yes No

12. Have services been offered to the father?

Yes No

If yes, list the services offered:

Appendix C: Activities for Fathers and Their Children

Encourage the child and father to do activities that cost little or nothing. This prevents the child from viewing the father as only a “gift-giver” and reduces friction between the father and the mother (the mother often has less income). In surveys, children frequently say they want to spend more time with their fathers, just “hanging out.” The best and most memorable activities are often the simplest: teaching a child to ride a bike, raking leaves, washing the car, watching the father shave, taking a walk, cooking a meal together, singing a favorite tune, enjoying a sunset.

1. What do you or did you used to like most about the child’s father?
2. What positive qualities does or did the child’s father have?
3. What activities does or did the father used to enjoy?
 - Sports
 - Building things
 - Drama
 - Puzzles
 - Cars
 - Fixing things
 - Music
 - Board games
 - Computers
 - Arts
 - Reading
 - Yard/garden work
 - Other _____

Next, discuss with the mother the activities that the child enjoys and try to link as closely as possible the child’s and father’s interests in planning activities. The following are suggestions for father/child activities.

Activities for Fathers and Children Who Have Little or No Face-to-Face Contact

- E-mail
- Exchange photographs
- Read to the child on tape while child looks at the book
- Make things to send to each other
- Exchange journals
- Exchange videotapes of events the child or father is involved in, the child at school, or the father at work
- Find and share information about a topic of mutual interest

Activities for Fathers and Children Who Have Face-to-Face Contact

- Read to the child, listen to the child read, take the child to the library
- Attend a church service
- Go for walks, go for a drive
- Visit local landmarks, historical places, museums, ancestral homes of family members
- Tour local industries
- Plant/harvest from a community garden or go to the local farmer’s market
- Look at tools at the hardware store
- Attend county fairs, rodeos, auto racing events
- Have a game night
- Build something together
- Toss a ball or Frisbee
- Attend a play or musical production
- Go grocery shopping
- Cook
- Do a craft
- Go to a playground

Appendix D: Message for Moms

You've put in many years nurturing and raising your child and maybe all the responsibility and work has rested on your shoulders. It's commendable that you're doing this on your own, but there may be a resource that you're overlooking. Even if he has many failings and has disappointed you in the past, perhaps your child's father could help out in some way now. There's a lot of new research about the positive effect that fathers have on children. Please take a look at some of the following ways that a father benefits the child that may also be of benefit to you.

Benefits of Involving the Father in the Child's Life

- A father who has a close relationship with his child is more likely to have positive communication with the child's mother.
- If the father and mother have a cordial relationship, fathers help sons learn to respect women and decrease the potential for boys to become violent. These fathers also show girls how to interact with men.
- A father who has a close relationship with his child is more likely to provide economic support for the child.
- Fathers and mothers contribute different things to a child. By 8 weeks of age, infants can tell the difference between a male or female interacting with them. Infants respond in different ways, thus learning to relate to both males and females.
- Children attached to their fathers at age 5 show more self-confidence and less anxiety than children who are less attached to their fathers.
- Children whose fathers play with them form closer, more trusting relationships later in life. Playing with the child is one of the most essential things that a father can do.
- Fathers encourage children to become independent but also set firm limits, thus encouraging self-control. Through "roughhousing" boys learn from fathers a balance between timidity and aggression. Girls develop greater self-esteem and self-confidence through their interaction with fathers.
- Fathers talk to children in a more brief and direct way than mothers, thus helping the child to understand and respond to different styles of communication.
- A father's positive influence continues into adulthood as expressed in the children's social networks, psychological well-being, and educational achievement.

Appendix E: Resources

Training

National Family Preservation Network: Basic Fatherhood Training Curriculum
<http://www.nfpn.org/father-involvement1/basic-training-package.html>

National Family Preservation Network: Advance Fatherhood Training Curriculum
<http://www.nfpn.org/father-involvement1/advanced-training-curriculum.html>

National Family Preservation Network: Online courses on Father-Involvement
<http://www.nfpn.org/father-involvement1/online-courses.html>

Research

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2008 Update: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/08/MoreAboutDads/index.htm>

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Links

National Family Preservation Network, <http://www.nfpn.org>

National Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System, <http://www.fatherhoodqic.org>

National Fatherhood Initiative, <http://www.fatherhood.org>

National Center for Fathering, <http://www.fathers.com>

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