



connections



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Shifting Sands of 'Fatherhood': What it Means for Practice

By David Nicholas

The concept of fatherhood is undergoing a substantial societal shift. Earlier models of fatherhood reflected a role primarily of breadwinning and discipline. As a result, fatherhood was viewed as peripheral to daily family caregiving.

An emerging perspective on fatherhood invites discourse on the benefits and joys of father involvement with, and nurturance of, children. How is fatherhood rewarding and beneficial for children and their families? What do fathers gain or learn from fathering within their own developmental journey?

The image of fathers is shifting beyond a stoic, detached dad to an engaged, nurturing co-parent, who brings key contributions to children's well-being. How does fatherhood reflect and shape men's identities? How does masculinity shape parenting? Answers to these questions open new thinking about fatherhood, love, caregiving, the family, nurturance, and relationships.

For those working with fathers, these are exciting and challenging days—a time to explore new vistas of possibility, opportunity, and new models of fatherhood

and paternal child and family nurturance. Accordingly, we need to develop services and programs relevant to fathers.

To date, models of father-based 'caring' interventions have been limited largely by feminine-based caring. Emerging models of fatherhood invite action- or purpose-driven strategies to engage, achieve, and co-create growth, with increased relationship building between father and child, nurturance, and family accomplishment. Programs should appeal to father-based intuition, abilities, and sensitivities.

Even our **support** language may need adjustment to reflect fathers' nuanced ways of being, thinking, problem solving, and engaging in their social spheres and contexts.

A new day is upon us in terms of our knowledge about, and interest in, fatherhood. The challenge is to develop responsive and flexible models and mechanisms in which a father's love for his child (ren) can be understood, articulated, and nurtured. In this way, we will be able to foster fathers' engagement in their important role, privilege, and responsibility.



David Nicholas is the guest editorialist for this issue. He is an Associate Professor, Faculty of Social Work with the University of Calgary.

Ten Promising Practices in Teen Fatherhood Programs

By Jacinta Bronte-Tinkew,
Mary Burkhauser, and Allison Metz

For many years, teen fathers have either been overlooked or blamed for their role in teen pregnancy. However, interest in programs to reduce teen pregnancy and enhance outcomes for babies and children, as well as meet the needs of this vulnerable population, has increased in recent years.

"Model" and "promising" programs for teen fathers had these ten common features:

1. Had program staff develop one-on-one relationships with teen fathers, either in small groups, through individual case management, or through mentoring services
2. Offered a comprehensive array of services to teen fathers that went beyond only parenting information
3. Began with a theoretical program model and used theories of change or logic models that were effective with adolescent parents
4. Delivered services in engaging and interactive ways
5. Conducted needs assessments and/or used participant feedback to provide teen fathers the services they wanted
6. Hired professionals who were experienced, empathetic, enthusiastic, well-connected in the community, and carefully matched to participants
7. Incorporated teaching methods and materials that were appropriate for teen fathers and their culture and age
8. Used an incentive with teen fathers and their families
9. Mentored teen fathers
10. Partnered with community organizations and offered programs for teen mothers to recruit and engage teen fathers

"Elements of Promising Practice in Teen Fatherhood Programs: Evidence-Based and Evidence-Informed Research Findings on What Works" can be found online at <http://www.childtrends.org/index.cfm>. Click on the tab, Fathering and Parenting.

Shifting Roles of Parenting

By Sandy Shuler

The face of the family has changed significantly over the past generation with shifting parenting roles for men and women. Increasingly, fathers are committed to addressing the needs of their children and families in roles other than that of the *traditional breadwinner*. No longer are women the typical participant in parent education; more and more, dads are eager to have information and learn skills to address parenting and family matters.

Father's roles and the importance of their active engagement in parenting

- In the past, research studies predominated on "mothering" as a contributing factor to children's outcomes and well-being; now "fathering" is on the radar. Studies are determining the contributions that fathering makes to children's outcomes and well-being, including the implications of the absence of father involvement.
- While family-support professionals implicitly understand the value and need for father engagement, research underscores this point. "Father's involvement has the potential to impact child development, child survival and health, and the child's emerging capacity to become an effective parent for the next generation."
[Ball, J. & Moselle, K. (2007). Fathers' Contributions to Children's Well-Being. Canadian Father Involvement Initiative, Ontario Network.]
- The current 25-year National Longitudinal Study of Children and Youth (Social Development Canada) has determined that engagement between home and school is critical to outcomes of academic success for adolescents. Highlighted in a survey of over 20,000 parents was the importance of father engagement to academic success. When fathers are involved in their children's education, including attending school meetings and volunteering at school
 - children were more likely to get As
 - enjoy school
 - participate in extracurricular activities
 - less likely to have repeated a grade.

[National Center for Education Statistics. (1997). Fathers' Involvement in Their Children's Schools. Washington DC: GPO.].

- Although mothers and fathers differ in their style of parenting, the unique ways they interact with their children make important contributions to their children's development. Mothers are in a powerful position to encourage father engagement with children. Dr. Kyle Pruett, in his book, *Fatherneed: Why Father Care Is As Essential As Mother Care For Your Child*, discusses the influence that mothers have on fathering. Instead of being "gate-keepers"—a factor that limits father involvement—mothers can help fathers reach their potential as a parent. A father's effectiveness as a parent and interaction with his children will increase, and in turn, mothers will feel more supported. The net result: effective parenting for the child and a happier household.

As professionals dedicated to supporting families and their well-being, we must champion the important role fathers play in helping to build strong, healthy, and resilient families.

Sandy Shuler is a Registered Social Worker and Certified Canadian Family Educator. Sandy is the author, developer, and facilitator of the "Effective Co-Parenting: Putting Kids First" program, who will be facilitating the professional presentation at the AHVNA network in September. Find related information at www.familylifeworks.ca.



Putting Dreams on Hold: Working With Young Dads

By Karen Caine

Terra is a centre for pregnant and parenting teens. Since 1999, we have offered support and guidance to parents, including young dads from the ages of 13 to 24, who, on learning their partner is pregnant, choose to learn about fatherhood and make life changes.

Young dads access Terra services so they can raise their child with love, guidance, time, and security – even though they may not have received these positive elements as they were growing up. They approach Terra with an open mind wanting to be involved and to be their child's positive role model. What they need is time, information, and guidance to manage these life issues and to change their behaviour.

However, still in their own stage of adolescent development, these young men often have limited skills and knowledge required to manage their new life circumstance. Some young dads come from stable homes and have good support networks; others lack positive role models and have negative peer groups. They may live in poverty or be homeless, and may be dealing with mental illness, family violence, addictions, and criminal behaviour. Young dads also often have to negotiate a new

relationship with their ex-partner to remain involved in their child's life while residing in a different home.

Many lack education, experience, and career options, and feel pressure to leave school to "provide" for their new family. They are not usually eligible for any financial support to have their child in a quality childcare centre while they obtain an education. When they look "rough" or "violent", they are judged accordingly, even though they may themselves be victims of spousal violence. When the young parents are not a couple, a young dad may be asked to stay away from his child, his absence considered better for the teen mom or her family. So, their limited resources and opportunities may result in low self-esteem, lack of confidence, and perceived restricted potential.

Regardless of socio-economic or cultural background, young dads frequently experience

- societal stigma
- judgement
- stereotyping
- discrimination.

They often feel insignificant when social support systems do not see, hear, or support them. Society does not recognize the potential of young dads, usually assigning the role of primary caregiver to women. This minimizes the importance of male involvement within the family. Young dads are frequently told they are not equipped to be a single dad regardless of what they have learned.

Children benefit from participant dads

Research shows that children who have a father (or father figure) who is engaged in their life show these positive outcomes:

- educational success
- positive peer relationships
- physical and psychological well-being
- developmental milestone achievement
- high self-esteem
- later onset of sexual activity
- career and employment success
- contributing members of society.

Fathers benefit

Research also shows fathers benefit from engagement in their child's life. Men involved with their children

- have more confidence, empathy, and connection to their feelings and emotions
- may participate in supportive interactions with their child or other family members
- experience fewer accidental and premature deaths, criminal activity, and issues with substance abuse
- are better partners, employees, and citizens
- provide a positive impact on the mother's well-being.

Mothers benefit

Mothers with partners who are engaged fathers are more likely to

- make healthy decisions
- have less stress and a problem-free pregnancy
- have a more positive delivery and breast-feeding experiences
- have fewer instances of postpartum depression.

How to engage young dads

- **Create a flexible, responsive entry point.** Dads engage in support services when they are in crisis or need help.
- **Hire male staff.** Dads who have a positive relationship with a male role model are more likely to stay engaged.
- **Avoid making them wait.** Dads will engage in a program that responds to their immediate needs.
- **Provide tangible resources.** Dads seek basic needs for themselves and their families (bus tickets, employment help).
- **Adapt the intake or assessment process.** Dads may need to share their story over time as the relationship develops.
- **Develop a unique program model.** Dads connect with programs and services created for their distinctive needs.
- **Create a flexible program model.** Dads need time to develop trust and choose how often they access the support.
- **Generate a “father-friendly” environment.** Use symbols, pictures, colours, and words that relate to men.
- **Build strong relationships.** Build trusting, nurturing relationships without stating dad is being nurtured.
- **Preserve their image.** Dads want to present as being strong and able; they are less likely to ask for emotional or other support at first contact.
- **Take action.** Dads need to see that workers advocate for them.
- **Use humour, fun, and activity.** Dads engage in discussions and learn when they actively participate and have fun.
- **Understand the pregnancy is abstract.** Dads do not typically connect emotionally with their child until after the birth. The full impact of fatherhood begins with caring for their child.

- **Educate the mom about the benefits of father involvement.** Moms may not know dads are important for the child's development.
- **Appreciate that dads parent differently than moms.** Dads tend to interact with children on an active and physical level.
- **Be inclusive.** Plan home visits or groups so dad can join in and both parents learn co-parenting strategies.
- **Celebrate.** Acknowledge the baby's birth, small accomplishments, milestones, and special days for the young dad.
- **Believe in their potential.** Listen and validate the dads' feelings and help them believe they can become great fathers.

Young dads can reach their potential when we let go of stereotypes about age, gender, and ideology: men as breadwinners; women as caregivers.

Young dads are very resilient. They remain optimistic about life even though they may live with abuse, hardship, and instability. They are hopeful even though society may view them with

negative attitudes, stereotypical thinking, and discrimination. They can stay positive even though they face obstacles and barriers throughout their lives. They have put some of their future plans, hopes,

and dreams on hold and chosen instead to become positive and engaged fathers. Young dads are amazing and we all benefit from supporting them to become and remain positively engaged in the lives of their children.

Karen Caine is a Senior Manager with Terra - Centre for pregnant and parenting teens.

Find more information about Terra at <http://www.terraassociation.com>.



Parenting Skills and Parenting Stress: How do Mothers and Fathers Compare?

By V. Susan Dahinten

Parenting is one of the most challenging and perhaps least understood roles of adulthood. Much attention has been devoted to understanding the impact of parenting on children's development; less on how parenting influences parents' own sense of well-being.

Research shows all parents report feeling stressed by the demands of daily parenting. Their level of satisfaction with their parenting skills may play a role in how much stress they experience.

In a recent study at UBC, Dr. Dahinten and other researchers explored this relationship using data from the BC Council for Families' Experience of Parenting survey. The survey asked 750 BC parents to share their opinions and attitudes about, challenges, and awards of parenting. Researchers asked: Did you feel adequately prepared to be parents? Are you getting adequate support? Do you feel pressured to be perfect parents, and if so where is that pressure coming from? How stressed and how satisfied are you with your day-to-day parenting skills?

Dahinten was particularly interested in exploring the parenting stress and parents' sense of satisfaction with their parenting skills, factors known to have strong links with other parenting behaviours and child development outcomes. Some of the study results have significant implications for developing and promoting parenting education and support programs that meet the diverse needs of mothers and fathers.



How do parents rate their own parenting skills?

Survey responses showed mothers and fathers report similar levels of satisfaction with their parenting skills. Although mothers rated themselves as having more knowledge of child development than fathers, both reported feeling equally prepared for the role of parenting. Among fathers, higher levels of self-reported parenting skills were associated with perceptions of being better prepared for the parenting role, having greater knowledge of child development, and having more time for parenting. For mothers, being younger, feeling better prepared for the parenting role, having greater knowledge of child development, and having sufficient people for day-to-day support in parenting were associated with higher levels of self-reported parenting skills.

"The inclusion of both mothers and fathers in the study sample was important because most studies about parenting focus on mothers. A noteworthy finding is that different factors may influence mothers' versus fathers' sense of parenting competence and feelings of parenting stress. This is important information for practitioners who are planning, or delivering preventive interventions to parents."

Older mothers tended to be less satisfied with their parenting skills than were younger mothers. This suggests "it is possible that mothers' sense of parenting competence decreases with age as a result of an increased understanding of the complexity of parenting responsibilities."

Dealing with parenting stress

Whether it is getting children to activities on time, convincing reluctant eaters that vegetables are really necessary, or setting and enforcing age-appropriate limits and rules, the stresses of parenting often build out of ongoing daily hassles

Studies suggest the level of parental stress is influenced by resources available to help deal with the demands of parenting: knowledge of child development, a sense of competence, and adequate support from others. Although some studies have suggested that lower income and education are associated with increased parenting stress, research results have been inconclusive.

In Dahinten's study, mothers reported higher levels of parenting stress than fathers. But mothers and fathers agreed that not having enough support contributed to their stress levels. Higher parenting stress for fathers was associated with the perception of having insufficient support and having at least one child under the age of six. Higher parenting stress for mothers was associated with the perception of having insufficient support, more frequent family conflict, being less satisfied with their parenting skills, putting pressure upon themselves to be perfect parents, and having more than one child.

Putting the pieces together

When parents feel confident about the following three factors, they are more likely to report low stress and a higher sense of competence:

1. feeling prepared to be a parent
2. having enough information and knowledge to parent effectively
3. having adequate social supports to relieve the burden of parenting.

Some of the most effective [parenting] interventions are those that can influence the way parents think about and cope with the challenges of parenting.

Implications for practitioners in helping parents:

- provide support services
- assist parents to access formal and informal resources
- assist parents to reassess their expectations of themselves and their perceptions of the stressful situation.

Implications for policy makers and program developers:

- consider how to create and foster opportunities for increased social support for parents who may be isolated from their extended family or otherwise lack adequate social support.

Originally published in the Spring 2009 Issue of Family Connections, a quarterly magazine of the BC Council for Families Vancouver BC. Visit www.bccf.bc.ca/hm/inside.php?id=45 to find Factors Associated with Mothers' and Fathers' Self-Reported Parenting Skills and Parenting Stress, a research brief prepared by V. Susan Dahinten, Jennifer E. Timer, & Rubab G. Arim of the University of British Columbia.

V. Susan Dahinten is an Associate Professor in the School of Nursing at the University of British Columbia. She received her Ph.D. from the University of British Columbia in 2001. Her research focuses on the investigation of family and neighborhood factors that influence the health and development of children and youth, and the evaluation of public health interventions for children at risk.

When Fathers are Involved, Children Thrive

By Dr. Kyle Pruett and Dr. Marsha Kline Pruett

Social and bio-behavioural research into paternal variables and influences on the lives of children and their families has corroborated the view that men who are involved and emotionally available typically parent in ways that can help children thrive. And they do this despite the slightly different non-mom wrinkles they tend to bring to the nurturing domain:

- more rough-housing
- more liberal use of humour in their communication with the kids
- teaching styles that emphasize autonomy in problem solving
- more hands-off frustration management style.

When we think of our experience with our own fathers, we know that he was—for better or worse—quintessentially different in his manner, appetites, love, behaviour, strengths and weaknesses, and often in his dreams for, and belief in, us.

Does that matter?

The science of paternal absence, which has been around longer than the science of paternal involvement, documents the potential for enduring vulnerabilities children and families suffer when fathers are absent physically (incarcerated, abandoning, deceased, sperm-donating, disappeared) or emotionally (mentally ill, substance abusing, corporate ladder climbing, maritally distressed, indifferent). Not that the heroic effects of sensitive and devoted moms can't offer some significant insulation against these stresses, but it often comes at a steep price for her. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the first years of life. Nowhere would a more enlightened attitude toward father involvement give society a bigger bang for its buck.

The first five years are a critical time for child development, but, historically, federal and local family resource programs and agencies that try to create healthy family patterns have had a blind spot when it comes to involving fathers. From home visits to parenting classes, the vast majority of programs cater almost exclusively to mothers. There is a growing body of research showing that when fathers become more involved with their children—working with mothers as co-parents and partners—you get stronger families, less depressed and anxious mothers, and healthier children. Essentially, what we need is a First Five for Fathers, or, better yet, a First Five for Parents.

What would that look like?

1. Facilitate couples' support of each other as co-parenting families. This has shown promise as a way of strengthening parental relationships and reducing parental stress, anxiety, depression, and harsh discipline of children. California's 600-plus family study of paternal engagement as a novel way to reduce abuse and neglect holds much promise as a proven strategy to engage fathers positively.

www.supportingfatherinvolvement.org

2. Encourage child-centred service agencies and institutions to evaluate and improve their father friendliness.
3. Educate childcare, kindergarten, and healthcare workers in how to engage fathers on behalf of their children while not reducing their important support of mothers.
4. Support fathers (who are not deemed a threat to the child's safety) as a resource in the most vulnerable families, where overwhelmed grandparents are often designated to take temporary or permanent care of children whose mothers are incapable of keeping their children safe.

Support for fathers' involvement in parenting is crucial to family well-being. It's time to enlighten society—the sooner, the better.

Dr. Kyle Pruett is a child psychiatrist and Dr. Marsha Kline Pruett is a clinical psychologist practicing in Connecticut. They are currently involved with the Supporting Father Involvement study in California.



Bring out the Best in Dad

by Warren Redman



Like most fathers, I learned about being a dad from my children. It seemed to work out pretty well. At least I can see that my daughters, and their sons, now young men themselves, have turned out to be wonderful people even if I can't take all the credit. Looking back, I know how helpful it would have been to me and my family if I'd known what I now understand. Over the past decade or more, I have devoted a great deal of my professional life to discovering and providing the tools for men to be great dads.

There are four vital lessons that I learned along the way—lessons that I want to share with professionals working with families.

Men want to be great dads

There may be reasons that they don't show it, but the vast majority of men want to be the best role model for their children, to feel pride in being a father and to feel proud of their children. When Dr. Warren Farrell carried out research into men's concerns about their families, he found that over 90% of men said they wished they could spend more time with their children than at work. What kept them away was the burden of financial responsibility, coupled with a fear of failure. The irony is that in the end, in Dr. Farrell's words "fathers show their love for

their children by being away from them." (*Father and Child Reunion*).

Men want to change negative role models

It has been shown consistently that patterns repeat themselves in human behaviour. In fathers, this manifests itself in the mirroring of the actions they experienced with their own fathers. Since, as a professional, you are likely to be working with families going through times of difficulty, you may come into contact with men who display inappropriate behaviours towards their families. Such men have probably had negative role models. What I have discovered is that dads invariably want to change that; they simply have little or no frame of reference or tools to change what they didn't want for themselves as boys.

Celebrate the difference

We know that men and women parent differently. Nowhere is that distinction made clearer than in Dr. Kyle Pruett's book, *Fatherhood*. The real issue is the diminishment in the eyes of the father of his parental style and the vital role he plays in the upbringing of his children. This is reinforced by societal messages, the perception of what a man is supposed to be like from his peers, and often from his wife

who may seem to dismiss dad's attempts at parenting. The last thing a man needs to hear from a professional (especially a woman) is that he is "doing it wrong". What will the man do in such circumstances? Absent himself before he can even be seen.

Dads need to be heard

This leads to the fourth discovery – and the core of my work in Emotional Fitness. Everyone wants to be heard and understood. It is especially hard for men to admit to this or to seek support. This is the biggest challenge for professionals and the biggest opportunity for them to change the way dads see themselves. Through the *Be a Great Dad* series of workshops, plus the many fathers I have coached, it is clear that once they trust that the person will really just listen, men will tell their stories, share their concerns, develop new insights for themselves, and focus on what is important for them in their relationship with their children.

Warren Redman is President of the Emotional Fitness Institute and the award-winning author of fifteen books, including *The 9 Steps to Emotional Fitness – A Tool-kit for Life in the 21st Century*. Contact him through www.EFitInstitute.com.

Coming up

The next issue of Connections will focus on Family Violence. If you would like to submit an article or resource for this topic, please contact the AHVNA office by Sept. 30, 2009.

Hearing from you

Connections is published three times per year by the Alberta Home Visitation Network Association. We welcome comments, questions, and feedback on this newsletter. Please direct any comments to Lavonne Roloff, AHVNA Provincial Director, by phone at 780-429-4784 or by email to info@ahvna.org.

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Websites and DVD Resources to Support Father Involvement

Being Dad

Interviews with pregnant and new dads about how they feel – their fears, hopes, expectations, and joys. Interspersed with factual information from experts about pregnancy, birth and baby development. Humorous and thought-provoking. (77 minutes)

Website: www.beingdadusa.com

Order from www.seedsmangroup.com

Fathers'Voices

For dads of special needs kids. Interviews, footage of a real support group of dads. Honest and powerful discussion of the experiences these fathers go through. (14 minutes)

Website: <http://www.fathersnetwork.org/>

Order from: <http://www.fathersnetwork.org/>

Hello Dad

Educational and positive – information about how fathers can find their own way to interact with their baby and stimulate language and relationships. Interviews with dads also. From Australia. (24 minutes)

Website: <http://www.dad.info/>

Order from: <http://www.dad.info/>

Toolbox for New Dads

Concrete, practical information from fathering guru Armin Brott. Shows a class of dads learning feeding, crying, relationships, post-partum depression, changing emotions. Divided into chapters so it can be watched in parts. (92 minutes)

Website: <http://www.mrdad.com/index.html>

Order from: <http://www.mrdad.com/index.html>

To be a Father

Hosted by Ray Romano. Information and discussion about many areas of fathering: from pre-natal involvement to babies to discipline. Lots of talk about how important being involved is to children's and families' well-being, with experts presenting factual information and dads talking about their experience and feelings. (30 minutes)

Website: www.parentsaaction.org

Order from: www.parentsaaction.org

Invisible Fathers: Working With Young Dads Resource Pack

DVD has interviews with young dads in Britain – good for stimulating discussion in a group. Other materials are really useful, too.

Website: <http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/>

Order from: <http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/index.php?prodDetailID=82>

Fatherhood: Indigenous Men's Journeys

On this DVD, six First Nations fathers of young children in British Columbia talk about what fatherhood means to them. They talk frankly about the necessity of healing oneself in order to become positively involved as a father.

Website: <http://www.ecdip.org/order/i=index.htm>

Order from: <http://www.ecdip.org/order/index.htm>

Useful Father Involvement Websites

www.bccf.bc.ca - Father Involvement Network of BC

www.fin-bc.typepad.com - FIN-BC Blog

<http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/> - UK thinktank on fathering issues. Good resources and information

<http://fira.ca/> - Father Involvement Research Alliance - wealth of Canadian and international research on various fathering issues

<http://fatherandchild.org.nz/> - New Zealand fathering research and resources

<http://www.youngfathers.net/> - UK site with info and networking for young dads and workers

<http://dadscan.ca> - Canadian site for fathers

<http://www.fathersnetwork.org> - Support for dads with special needs kids

<http://www.fatherhood.org> - US site with resources for dads and programs

<http://www.cfii.ca/en/page/home> - Canadian Father Involvement Initiative: Ontario site with resources and information

BC Council for Families has a number of booklets and pamphlets for fathers, that can be ordered from the catalogue at: http://www.bccf.bc.ca/catalogue/index.php?cPath=21_25.