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# PARENT LEADERSHIP AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN CPS AND FOSTER CARE



*Nancy became involved in a parent support group because her three boys were very wild. She said that she never could handle defiance and she knew how she was trying wasn't right. She started to learn more about herself through the meetings. After her sons were grown, she wanted to give back. She became a parent leader and says it is the best way to accomplish prevention goals. She believes that parent leadership improves agencies tremendously.*

*Eliza joined a parent support group because she wanted to learn more about how to help her children become good citizens. She found a haven in a support group for at-home mothers of color. Once she constructed a vision of what was possible, Eliza became involved as a parent leader. She says that parent leadership is open to any parent who comes to the table and asks for help.*

*Art adopted a child who had experienced maltreatment and wanted additional parenting support. He said attending Parents Anonymous felt great and gave him the help he needed. After he moved and had to drive an hour to attend a group, he asked why there were no groups closer to his home. The leader asked if he would help start a new group in his area. Art was successful as a parent leader. He has even gone to Washington, DC to meet with his representatives to advocate for parents.*

To learn more about these parents and other parent leaders, visit:  
<http://www.friendsnrc.org/cbcap-priority-areas/parent-leadership-and-involvement/stories-of-parent-leadership> on the FRIENDS website.

Promoting safety for children, assuring children's well-being, and achieving permanency for children are goals of those working in the child welfare system. Parent and family engagement is a strength-based approach to partnering with families in making decisions, setting goals, and achieving desired outcomes. The approach is founded on the principle of honest and open communication and encouraging involvement by motivating families and empowering them to recognize their own needs, strengths, and resources. In this approach, families assume an active role in working towards change (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2010).

Parent and family engagement is an active process that builds upon the family's resources, extended family and kinship connections, and the family's support systems. The approach highlights strengths and builds upon the family's resilience. It is a collaborative effort (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2010; Fraenkel, 2006).

When using a family engagement approach, families are viewed as experts on the nature of their challenges and on what they desire in services. Professionals adopt a stance of respectful learners. The approach involves supporting families and joining with them against the challenges they face, rather than viewing the family as a problem that needs to be solved. The approach allows meaningful participation and roles for families and provides families with diverse op-

portunities to engage in shared decision-making (Fraenkel, 2006; National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Systems of Care, 2008).

Parent leaders are parents who represent the needs and perspectives of many parents without speaking or acting in a staff role for an organization. Typically they are former or current participants in family support and/or child abuse prevention programs. These individuals serve as a "parent voice" and help shape support services. Parent leaders can be biological parents, step-parents, grandparents, foster or adoptive parents, community elders, or others who are in primary caregiving roles for children (FRIENDS National Resource Center for CBCAP, 2010).

## Family Support Principles

FRIENDS National Resource Center for CBCAP (2010) has identified key family support principles:

- \* The family is the focus of attention. The safety and well-being of all family members is considered.

- \* The purpose of the support is to strengthen the family's capacity to function effectively.

- \* Families are engaged in all aspects of service delivery including policy development, the service offerings, and the program evaluation.

- \* Families are linked with community support.

*continued on page 2*



## Parent Leadership

*continued from page 1*

### What are the Benefits?

Several articles explore the benefits of parent leadership and parent and family engagement (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2010; Chadwick Center for Children and Families, 2009; CSSP, 2011; Fraenkel, 2006; FRIENDS National Resource Center for CBCAP, 2010; Parents Anonymous, 2005). These authors discuss potential benefits, including:

#### \* **More Positive Relationships**

When family members feel respected and believe that they are being heard, the relationships with the workers and providers are strengthened. Better rapport is known to be linked to higher treatment success.

#### \* **Investment in the Treatment Process**

Families will eagerly engage in interventions when they have some control over the process, when they have contributed to the decisions, and when they are invested in the plans and objectives.

#### \* **Expanded Options**

Including fathers and extended family early in the process allows the exploration of extended family and relatives as potential placement options or other support for the children.

#### \* **Increasing Placement Stability**

Parental involvement is linked to quicker reunification or other permanency options.

#### \* **Therapeutic Benefits**

Having a voice in shaping treatment and intervention can be therapeutic. Being heard and having some input into decisions helps parents and family members feel less helpless and more in control. Parents who are in leadership roles manage stress better, maintain higher positive self-esteem, improve their sense of competence, and may develop a desire to “give back” to the community.

#### \* **New Perspectives**

Parent leaders can offer valuable, unique, and diverse perspectives, ideas, suggestions, and solutions. Sharing their life experiences can result in greater understandings of vital issues that affect troubled families.

#### \* **Parents are Able to Give to Others**

Parent leaders can be positive resources for other parents, including serving as parent mentors.

#### \***Parents Develop New Skills**

Parents develop new capabilities that they can use again and again to strengthen their families.

#### \***Benefits to Children**

Children of parent leaders begin to demonstrate leadership behaviors in their homes, schools, and community activities.

#### \* **Benefits to Staff**

Partnering with parent leaders can reduce staff burnout and increase staff satisfaction.

### What are the Challenges?

Most parents who become involved with child protective services or child welfare services are not self-referred. They have not requested services and may be resistant to the idea that services are needed. Also, the possibility of termination of parental rights can strain relationships with case workers (National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Systems of Care, 2008).

At the family level, parents who live in separate households can be especially challenging as there may be tension between the parents and/or family members. Parents who are diagnosed with substance abuse or addiction may have additional issues. Parents who remain angry about the removal of a child and who are unable to shift focus from their own hurt to the child’s needs may be more difficult to engage (National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Systems of Care, 2008).

System challenges are several. There is tension between child safety and a family-centered approach. Large caseloads can discourage workers from the task of family engagement (National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Systems of Care, 2008).

There are also practical challenges. Transportation, child care, work schedules and the need or requirement to engage in services make families in the child welfare system very pressed for time. Meetings may not be scheduled at times that are easy for parents to attend. There may be language barriers and some parents may lack the education needed to read and understand materials (Prevent Child Abuse Virginia, 2011).

### Successful Models

Several authors have described the components of successful models for family engagement (Action for Child Protection, 2008; CSSP, 2011; Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2010; Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2002; Chadwick Center for Children and Families, 2009; Prevent Child Abuse Virginia, 2011). Their ideas are summarized below:

A basic assumption of successful approaches is that all families can harness their strengths and capabilities, enter into a partnership with child welfare agencies and

courts and make decisions that protect and nurture their children. A second assumption is that child welfare practice will improve as a result of increased and authentic family involvement. The belief is that families deserve respect and that families are the experts on themselves. The family’s culture is perceived as a strength and interventions are tailored to consider the family’s unique needs. There is confidence that families can make well-informed decisions.

The parent engagement models that succeed build on strengths and do not emphasize deficits. They endorse a team approach and partnering with the parents and their support system. Families are allowed to define their own members and team membership is broadly defined.

Practical barriers to parent involvement are considered and removed. These can be as simple as transportation, language barriers, arranging child care for children, and work schedules. Potential barriers should be problem-solved so that the parent is able to participate without undue hardship.

In successful models, agency leadership endorses parent engagement. One important aspect is training for staff in how to engage families. A second agency contribution is policies and procedures for family engagement. Manageable caseloads are crucial. Monitoring and evaluating results of parent engagement efforts is also critical.

Attempts at developing effective partnerships will frequently be met with resistance. It is understandable that a parent, faced with feedback that they have been unable to assure a child’s safety and coupled with the possibility that the child may be removed and placed in foster care, may feel resistant to trying to work in partnership with persons who are being firm about the need for child safety. Being able to effectively deal with resistance requires sorting out and understanding what the resistance means. It may mean the parent is attempting to return to a state of balance or that the parent is comfortable with how the situation was prior to CPS involvement. Resistance may be a learned response to difficult situations. Resistance may divert the parent from needing to deal with painful realities or it may mean the parent is afraid of change. Acknowledging the parent or caregiver’s right to his or her feelings can avoid confrontation and allow the pursuit of common ground (Action for Child Protection, 2008).

Action for Child Protection (2008) suggests several methods for reducing resistance. Providing caregivers with information is empowering and helps to avoid mistrust and anxiety. Providing choices to caregivers whenever possible and consistently including them in decision-making is helpful. Lowering “authority” and allowing caregivers to be more active can lower resistance. Having conversations, rather than interviews, is more effective. Reinforcing

self-determination does not mean that workers can take a passive role in safety management. However, the least intrusive measures should be identified and the approach should incorporate the family's world view.

## Levels of Parent and Family Involvement

The National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Systems of Care (2008) discussed three levels of parent engagement with the child welfare system.

\* Case-level involvement. Parents and families may become involved because they are subject to investigation and either their children were removed and placed in foster care or are at risk for removal. The foundation involvement practice at this level is family group conferencing where a shared level of understanding is developed and joint decisions are made about the children's welfare.

\* Peer support. At this level, parents who have successfully negotiated the child welfare system or other parents serve as mentors, partners, and/or resource guides for parents who are new to the system.

\* System level. At this level, parents who are or were consumers serve on state-wide or local groups that are advisory councils and/or assist as trainers for CPS and foster care staff regarding consumer involvement and satisfaction with the system.

### Case-level Involvement

The Center for the Study of Social Policy (2002) has described a variety of models for successful case-level involvement. A general description of a family decision-making meeting follows. Meetings may vary depending upon the model used.

A facilitator for the meeting is designated. This person is generally not the social worker assigned to the case but someone who is neutral and could be from outside the agency. This person will typically spend about 25 hours in preparation for the initial meeting over 3 to 4 weeks of time. The facilitator will need to become familiar with the facts of the case. The facilitator will also spend time with the family to explain the meeting parameters and help the family identify who will be invited from the family to attend. The goals of the meeting, the meeting process, and the guidelines will be reviewed with all family members. The facilitator will set the meeting time, inform the parties who need to attend, and will coordinate all logistics to assist those who need to be in attendance. The facilitator will also follow up with the family after the meeting to manage any unresolved issues.

Meetings begin with a review of the purpose and scope of the meeting and describe the process and structure and guidelines.

*continued on page 4*



## UPDATE ON VIRGINIA'S TRANSFORMATION

VCPN volumes 85 and 88 contain articles describing how the Virginia Department of Social Services is transforming how children and families receive services through the child welfare system. Tamara Temoney, Ph.D., Program Manager for Family Engagement and Placement offers an update:

*Dr. Temoney relates, "Since the implementation of Family Engagement in 2010, local departments of social services have identified a number of benefits that have both created an improved partnership with families and resulted in more effective decision-making for children. Local departments have seen a decrease in the number of youth entering foster care, a reduction in placement disruptions, an increase in relative placements, and an increase in identifying community supports for families."*

## SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES FOR PARENT LEADERSHIP

Although public policies have promoted parent leadership, State and local programs have encountered obstacles and challenges to engaging parents in leadership roles. The FRIENDS National Resource Center has gathered information on successful strategies for promoting parent leadership as a part of child abuse prevention efforts. Parents can be involved in many ways. Some ideas follow but readers are encouraged to access the complete article at: <http://friendsnrc.org/cbcap-priority-areas/parent-leadership-and-involvement>

### Policy/Program Development

- **Serve on needs assessment or strategic planning groups**
- **Assist with program monitoring and evaluation**
- **Testify before policy-making bodies**

### Provide or Assist with Training

- **Speak as a trainer to staff and volunteers**
- **Provide specific knowledge and support to programs**
- **Serve as a mentor for a family**

### Administrative

- **Recruit volunteers**
- **Participate in staff hiring decisions**
- **Review handouts and audiovisual materials**
- **Fundraising**

### Organizational

- **Serve on grant-making boards or committees**
- **Serve on agency boards or councils**
- **Serve on State or local boards or councils**



## Parent Leadership

*continued from page 3*

Next is an information-sharing session. The social worker in charge of the case will review in a straight forward manner the facts of the case. Service providers will also give a summary of findings and interventions to date. The family will share their story and account of why they are involved with child welfare.

The next step is to create a plan. Some agencies allow the family to meet privately to talk and create a proposal. Some agencies have the facilitator or all team members collaborate with the family to create an intervention plan. Backup plans are encouraged. Consideration of all possibilities (e.g. “What if...?”) is also encouraged. Agreement must be reached between the parties, otherwise, a court review and judicial decision is always possible.

Once an agreement is reached, action steps are detailed. Who is responsible for each step is recorded. The “back up” plans and how potential situations are to be handled is also covered. The case worker is generally responsible to implement the intervention plan and monitor it. There can be additional formal scheduled team meetings as well.

Once the initial intervention plan is enacted, future meetings may not require the full team. For example, the caseworker, the foster parent, and the biological parent may want to meet to review aspects of visitation and joint handling of children and other team members may not be necessary. However, it is necessary to include the family in all decision-making meetings.

## Peer Support

Peer support has been an effective method for parents of children experiencing behavioral and emotional problems (see for example Ruffolo, Kuhn & Evans, 2006), for home visiting programs (Hepburn, 2004), for community development approaches for early intervention (Buysse, Wesley & Skinner, 1999), and in schools (Comer & Haynes, 1991). More recently, peer support is being offered in a more structured fashion to families involved with the child welfare system.

Parent Partners (sometimes called Parent Advocates) are parents who have been involved with the child welfare system and

successfully regained custody of their children. Some agencies are hiring these individuals to work with families as a support system. Parent Partners attend meetings and court with their assigned family. They offer encouragement to the family to complete their service plans. They are available to attend meetings, have additional contacts, and answer questions. Initial data suggest that families with Parent Partners are more likely to be reunified with their children and their children spend far less time in foster care than children whose parents do not use the service (Marcenko, Brown, Devoy & Conway, 2010; Rauber, no date).

Other variations of peer support are programs such as offered by Washington State. Washington State has programs that pair families with experienced foster parents who assist them. These families are also more likely to reunite with their children (Marcenko, et al., 2010).

Peer support groups, such as Parents Anonymous and Circle of Parents are also

available. (For more information about Circle of Parents, see the separate spotlight, this issue.) These groups offer non-judgmental support and caring to parents. Some groups have a professional facilitator, but all groups have parent leaders and they expect parent participation to be high. Some Parents Anonymous groups such as Parents Anonymous of Oregon (2010) offer both group support and a Parent Mentor Program. Oregon’s program focuses on parents with substance addictions. The mentor helps the parent complete treatment, builds self-esteem, helps the parent learn parenting skills, and if successful, rejoices as the parent returns to parenting clean and sober.

## System-level Engagement

Not only do families have a primary decision-making role in the care of their own children, they also have a role in the policies and procedures governing care for all children in the community (Chadwick Center for Children and Families, 2009). Increasingly, consumer input and collaboration with parents and families being served by the child welfare system is seen as desirable.

For collaborative leadership between professionals and families to be successful, both caretakers and practitioners must have the skills and tools they need to work as partners. This means training staff as well as parent training and adequate parent support. For instance, parent partners should be offered compensation to cover their expenses and should receive emotional support to function in leadership roles (FRIENDS National Resource Center for CBCAP, 2010).

Several steps are suggested in order to achieve meaningful parent partnerships at the systems level (CSSP, 2011; FRIENDS National Resource Center for CBCAP, 2010; Parents Anonymous, 2008). First, agencies should assess staff and agency readiness to engage in positive partnerships with parents. Readiness can be improved through training and through developing concrete, written plans and guidelines for partnering with parents. There must be a climate of value and respect for inclusion of parents as equal partners in policy formation. Parents and staff will need to arrive at shared values and goals for the agency or organization. Joint trainings can be helpful, but informal learning opportunities are also beneficial.

Potential parent leaders must be identified. Often these are parents who have successfully completed treatment plans and who have established positive working relationships within the agency, but the parent leaders could be grandparents, foster or adoptive parents, community parents or others who care for children. Agencies should address cultural diversity and children’s special needs in selecting parents who can represent various sectors of the population they serve. Once potential parent leaders have been

### COMPONENTS OF SUCCESSFUL PARENT ENGAGEMENT

- \* A Welcoming Environment
- \* A Focus on Strengths and Self-Empowerment
- \* A Focus on Results
- \* A Learning Approach
- \* Respect for Individual Differences
- \* Network-building and Parent Mentoring
- \* Sustained Engagement

*Source: The Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP), 2011*

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## WHAT IS PARENT ENGAGEMENT?

- \* Direct relationships with service providers
- \* Mutual support shared among parents
- \* Advocacy by parents on behalf of their families
- \* Decision-making and advisory roles in agencies
- \* Leadership in the community

Source: *The Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSPP), 2011*

identified, they must be recruited and oriented to their roles as a parent leader.

It is important that parent leaders have roles that are satisfying and where their contribution is evident and valued. Parents will not remain involved unless there is benefit to them. Parents may be reluctant to assume leadership roles because they are not certain they will have an impact or that the investment of time and effort will achieve meaningful results or they could feel intimidated acting in a leadership role. Recognizing parent contributions and celebrating successes in both formal and informal ways is crucial.

There should be organizational structures to support shared leadership strategies. Some agencies create Leadership Task Forces or Parent Leadership Teams. Regular meetings and specific goals and tasks are needed for these groups to function well. Technical assistance should also be available, if needed.

Developing a "roadmap" that highlights shared beliefs, goals, and action steps can unify the partnership. A checklist for effectiveness can keep the group focused. A successful partnership can lead to networks throughout the community.

There is considerable guidance and emerging models. Interested readers should check the Resources featured in this issue for more specific guidance. The benefits of encouraging parent engagement and parent leadership are numerous. As agencies and workers embrace a collaborative philosophy, techniques and methods will be refined. The benefits for families and agencies are considerable, but the greatest benefits will be for the children.

*References Available on the Website  
or by Request*



**Child Welfare Information Gateway**  
PROTECTING CHILDREN ■ STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

[www.childwelfare.gov](http://www.childwelfare.gov)

### ***Promising Practices in Parent and Family Involvement – Annotated Bibliography***

This document is a list of articles, reports, and resources for parents, practitioners, agencies, and community partners all discussing parent engagement and involvement with families. Among the topics discussed in these resources are: helpful tips for engaging parents; the need for an increase in parent involvement; current practices; and current research. Readers may use this list to inform their current practices, create new strategies, and better understand the relationships between children, parents and the Child Welfare System. This list is current as of 2009. For new titles that have been added to the Child Information Gateway since 2009, readers can consult: <http://basis.caliber.com/cwig/ws/library/docs/gateway/SearchForm>  
The list can be found at <http://www.friendsnrc.org/home>



**National Resource Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention**

FRIENDS National Resource Center for  
Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP)  
800 Eastowne Dr. Ste. 105  
Chapel Hill, NC 27514  
[www.friendsnrc.org](http://www.friendsnrc.org)

VA CBCAP Contact: Ann Childress  
(804) 726-7545  
[ann.childress@dss.virginia.gov](mailto:ann.childress@dss.virginia.gov)

FRIENDS is an acronym for Family Resource Information, Education, and Network Development Service. FRIENDS National Resource Center is a service provided by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau. Based in North Carolina, FRIENDS provides services through coordinating with other national organizations and initiatives to prevent child abuse and neglect and partnering with parents to provide education and support. FRIENDS focuses on primary and secondary prevention efforts such as assisting state Lead Agencies to measure and report on their outcomes in their various programming efforts. In addition, FRIENDS offers training and technical assistance in best practices in prevention programs; program planning/design; marketing programs/initiatives; parent involvement/shared leadership; program self assessment; respite services; working with diverse populations; and federal initiatives such as healthy marriage, fatherhood, positive youth development, faith-based services, and services to rural communities.



### ***Stories of Parent Leadership***, by FRIENDS National Resource Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention

This insightful resource contains excerpts from the interviews of six parents who work as parent leaders in their communities to help child abuse prevention organizations. Viewers will gain an insider's perspective on the parenting journey from leadership in the family to leadership in the community and even in some cases to national leadership. From these stories, readers can learn how to be parent leaders in their own lives and their own communities. Practitioners can also use this tool to increase public awareness and parent involvement in programs. These vignettes can accompany trainings for staff members, partners, parents, or anyone else interested in the value of parent engagement and involvement.

The stories of Art, Brenda, Dawn, Eliza, Nancy, and Sam can be found at:  
<http://www.friendsnrc.org/cbcap-priority-areas/parent-leadership-and-involvement/stories-of-parent-leadership>



### ***Meaningful Parent Leadership: A Guide for Success***, by the FRIENDS National Resource Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP)

Support, education and leadership can be used to help parents develop the skills needed to grow to their full potential as a caregiver. FRIENDS offers resources on parent education and support to encourage parent engagement and leadership. One such resource is *Meaningful Parent Leadership: A Guide for Success* which discusses the benefits of parent leadership and involvement as well as how programs can achieve this goal. Some of the steps discussed include improving staff and agency readiness, working with cultural diversity, and working with parents and children with special needs. Most importantly, this guidebook covers how to help parent leaders maintain their new leadership roles and behaviors in order to ensure long-lasting family benefits. This guide serves as a valuable resource for any agency or organization planning to create or improve their own parent leadership program.

This resource can be accessed at:

[http://www.friendsnrc.org/direct-download-menuitem/doc\\_download/59-meaningful-parent-leadership-a-guide-for-success](http://www.friendsnrc.org/direct-download-menuitem/doc_download/59-meaningful-parent-leadership-a-guide-for-success)

# Circle of Parents

Fawn began attending Circle of Parents in December 2007. “A family member brought me. The kids enjoyed it, especially eating the pizza. I was going through a separation. He was incarcerated. The group was a resource. If you want to become the best parent you can be, come to Circle of Parents.”

Natalie, a parent leader, adds, “Circle means a lot to me because it is my group. Circle was there for me. I did not know anyone. None of my family lives in Virginia. They had people who I trusted to watch the children. It was comfortable. People weren’t here to praise or punish you, just to give ideas. The children always had a project to do. For me, it offered an extended family and after awhile, I could call them.”

Circle of Parents is a national network including a partnership of parent leaders and 26 state and regional organizations in 25 states. Circle of Parents began in 2000 as a federally-funded collaboration between the National Family Support Round Table and Prevent Child Abuse America (PCAA). In October of 2004, Circle of Parents launched as its own independent non-profit organization.

Circle of Parents groups meet weekly to serve those in parenting and caretaking positions for children of all ages. The groups are parent-led with the support of a trained group facilitator. These groups are designed to improve the “Four Circles of Leadership”: personal leadership; leadership in the group; leadership in the larger community; and leadership in the organization.

The central theme of every Circle of Parents group is “developing leadership on the individual, family, community, and societal levels as desired by parent participants” ([www.circleofparents.org](http://www.circleofparents.org)). Julie Rivnak-McAdam, Consultant for Circle of Parents for Prevent Child Abuse Virginia and past Executive Director of Rappahannock Area Council for Children and Parents (RACCAP), says that parent leadership and engagement in child abuse prevention is key because “we can’t bring about change unless people are engaged and committed to making that change. It’s a step-by-step process where, by helping parent leaders develop leadership skills, they in turn help other parents and develop an intertwined network of support which is very empowering.”

Donna, a participant who spoke at Virginia’s Prevention Conference in April of 2011, remarked, “Parent leadership makes people feel empowered. Everyone wins.” Rivnak-McAdam adds, “The parents take ownership. The group then belongs to the parents. We need to step back and allow parents to decide what is best for the group. This can be a real shift for both parents and practitioners.”

Circle of Parents works to strengthen fam-

ilies and communities by building protective factors and minimizing/eliminating risk factors associated with child abuse and neglect. Some objectives that relate to protective factors are: reducing isolation; building self-esteem; reinforcing positive parenting; exposing parents to other families; and improving communication and problem solving skills.

Participation in a Circle of Parents group can be a stand-alone intervention or it can be used to supplement other prevention and intervention programs. The groups are versatile; including some groups with specialty topics such as groups for parents of special needs children and post-national disaster groups.

Circle of Parents follows the PCAA and National Family Support Round Table standards to guide the groups. Some of these standards are:

- Utilize a mutual self-help support model;
- No intake required, anonymous weekly meetings with no cost;
- Free children’s care;
- Confidential and nonjudgmental responses within the limits of the law;
- Leaders and members available to each other between meeting times;
- Community resource information available to all group members.

Circle of Parents has worked to create many national products, including: National Standards and Principles for Self-Help Support Groups; group facilitator manuals; parent handbooks; tip sheets; outreach brochures in Spanish and English; parent leadership development materials; parent leadership training curricula and materials (including a video); and father engagement training curricula and materials. All resources are available at [www.circleofparents.org](http://www.circleofparents.org)

## Evidence of Effectiveness

Circle of Parents groups are effective because of the peer pressure, role modeling, and compliance with group norms. Circle of Parents has also been described as effective because it presents the opportunity for families to network and help each other; it builds connections between families and community resources; and the parent-led format prepares parents to assume leadership roles in their own families as well as at the community, state, and national levels. Rivnak-McAdam notes that Circle of Parents is effective because leaders know how to listen to and involve parents in the planning and evaluating of their program. “If we listen more to determine what the needs are, then our programs will fit everyone’s needs and we can develop more effective programming,” she says.

Program effectiveness has been demon-



strated in five different evaluation studies. The first study was an unofficial study conducted by national researchers in the fall of 2004. Several focus groups were convened which indicated that parents participating in the Circle of Parents groups felt supported and connected to other parents. Participants also reported learning how to parent across different ages, how to implement non-violent discipline, how to become aware of themselves, and how to use community resources.

The other four evaluation studies (The Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida, 2007) were conducted at the state level in four different states: Florida, Minnesota, Washington, and North Carolina. These studies were all based upon self-report of participants but had very large sample sizes. Some information was obtained about the participants in the Circle of Parents groups, why they join, and how they benefit from the groups. Researchers also examined to what degree the groups were meeting the Circle of Parents objectives. They calculated the performance measures required by the state and identified areas of the program that needed improvement.

Demographic information revealed that an overwhelming majority of the participants were female, and around a third were married. There were high rates of unemployment and low-income families. Based on information collected about previous experience with violence, it was clear that Circle of Parents was successful at attracting at-risk parents. Reasons for participating included: an interest in learning parenting tips and ideas; feeling frustrated with young children; and wanting to meet other parents in similar situations.

The four evaluation studies measured self report about parenting skills, self management skills, quality of parent-child interaction, support system awareness, and use of community resources. Participants reported improvement in multiple areas related to healthy parenting practices and social functioning. Three of the four studies found improvement in parenting skills as well as parent-child relationships. Two of the four studies also measured satisfaction and both found over 90% of participants reported being satisfied. Specifically, Minnesota’s study found that the Circle of Parents program helped parents to become more empowered to influence others and Florida’s study found the program resulted in improved self management skills and nonviolent stress coping skills in parents.

## Future Focuses of Circle of Parents

# BRIDGING THE GAP: CONNECTING BIRTH AND FOSTER PARENTS

“Bridging the Gap is a practice model and a philosophy,” explained Claudia McDowell, LCSW, social worker with the foster care and adoption program at Fairfax County Department of Family Services. “The gap we bridge is between foster parents and birth parents so that they have communication for the benefit of the child,” she continued.

In 2004, the Program Manager went to a conference and learned about the model. Denise Goodman, from the National Resource Center (NRC) for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning, described the model. It appeared that the concept would be an effective approach for the work in Northern Virginia. Staff approached

Circle of Parents plans to continue to advance their current efforts to build evidence for the program’s effectiveness by conducting more evaluation studies. They hope to identify factors that influence parent outcomes, possibly using focus groups and more long-term follow-up. Circle of Parents will also be focusing efforts into advocating for parent involvement in program and policy development and collaborating with other family support organizations.

## For more information:

Contact the National Office at:  
Circle of Parents  
2100 South Marshall Boulevard  
Suite 305  
Chicago, IL 60623  
(773) 257-0111  
fax: (773) 277-0715  
[www.circleofparents.org](http://www.circleofparents.org)

or find your local Circle of Parents Group at <http://www.circleofparents.org/locator/index.shtml>

for Circle of Parents groups through Prevent Child Abuse Virginia:  
contact Julie Rivnak-McAdam at  
540-785-6217 or Johanna Schuchert at  
(804) 359-6166 x310

## Reference

The Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida. (2007). Building the evidence for Circle of Parents as a model for preventing child abuse and neglect: Participant characteristics, experiences and outcomes. (Issue Brief). Tallahassee, FL: The Florida Chapter of Prevent Child Abuse America.

Historically, child welfare caseworkers



the agencies that had contracts with Fairfax County Department of Family Services. Shortly, 10 private and 4 public agencies joined together in a unique collaboration. A steering committee spent considerable time in planning.

“In 2008, the planning phase was complete and we launched 20 trainings over an 8-week period. We trained both the staff and the foster parents,” notes McDowell. Training is an ongoing process as new staff and foster parents are added to the agency.

The cornerstone of the approach is the “Icebreaker” meeting that is held within a week of the child entering foster care. The meeting is a short (30 minutes), facilitated, child-focused meeting that allows the birth parents and the foster parents to meet and to share information about the needs of the child. The child may also attend the meeting at the discretion of the social worker. The caseworker arranges and facilitates the meeting and continues to remain involved in the contacts. Subsequent communication can vary along a continuum. Sometimes the biological parent will visit at the foster home. In other cases, there may be phone calls. Safety is never compromised, so if there is a dangerous, assaultive parent, there will be little or no contact with the foster parents.

There are many benefits to a climate that allows biological and foster parents to develop a relationship and work as a team. If the biological parents are respected and consulted, they may find the encouragement an

incentive to help complete their reunification plan. The biological parents know their child well and foster parents can benefit from their insights. The child needs permission to relate well to both families and regard each in a positive fashion. Having both sets of caretakers working together can ease the child’s transition out of foster care, whether the child returns home or is being adopted.

“Our program fits well with the Virginia Department of Social Services initiatives and philosophy,” said McDowell. She continues, “Some foster parents tell us that they have been collaborating with biological parents in the past on an informal basis. Even though the concept is not new, it is a public statement that we as an agency support the collaboration. The Icebreaker meeting offers a start to the working relationship and underscores our commitment to engaging parents in the foster care process.”

McDowell says that her agency is gathering data to compare placement stability under the new system to data from before the implementation. They are also interested in whether or not the bridging practices boost reunification rates.

Readers can find more information about Bridging the Gap on the web at the Children’s Bureau Express at [www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f\\_fam\\_engagement/f\\_fam\\_engagement4.cfm#virginia](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_fam_engagement/f_fam_engagement4.cfm#virginia). Claudia McDowell can be reached by e-mail at: [Claudia.McDowell@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Claudia.McDowell@fairfaxcounty.gov)



## ***Growing and Sustaining Parent Engagement: A Toolkit for Parents and Community Partners, 2010***, by The Center for the Study of Social Policy

This new resource helps staff and agencies reinforce and sustain family involvement in decision making. The toolkit is a quick and easy guide to engaging parents using three strategies to nurture and grow current work in parent engagement. The three strategies are creating a Parent Engagement 1) Roadmap, 2) Checklist and 3) Support Network. Leading readers through the steps to build and sustain parent engagement, the toolkit includes examples and helpful questions. There is a plethora of information to help parents and community partners work together to create their own engagement strategies. The toolkit includes an entire section of resources for the reader, including source documents and recommended tools.

This toolkit is available at: <http://www.cssp.org/publications/growingandsustainingparentengagementtoolkit.pdf>

# PROMOTING FATHER ENGAGEMENT



have interacted with mothers of children and less often with their fathers (Jenkins, 2009; O'Donnell, 1999; Raichel, 2009; Velazquez, Edwards, Vincent & Reynolds, 2009). More recently, there has been an emphasis on involving fathers in child welfare.

## Why the Lack of Father Involvement?

The reasons for lack of father involvement are understandable. Fathers may not be present in the home. According to US Census Bureau data, over 24 million American children (33%) live without their biological father. Nearly 2 of 3 (64%) African-American children, one in three (34%) Hispanic children and one of four (25%) white children live with single mothers (www.fatherhood.org/, 2011).

The statistics for the Commonwealth of Virginia are similar to national statistics. According to the Voices for Virginia's Children 2009 data set, 70% of the child population in Virginia lives in a two-parent household. However, of the remaining 30%, 27% are growing up with no involved father or stepfather. Single mothers are raising 23% of these children while grandparents are raising the remaining 4% (Voices for Virginia's Children, 2009).

Marital status is linked to living with a biological father. While 70% of all fathers between 15 and 54 lived with at least one child in 2004, less than half of the never-married fathers lived with any biological child (Emens & Dye, 2007). Births to unmarried women are increasing, according to data from the U.S. Census Bureau (2011). Births to unmarried women in 1980 were 18.4% of all births and the percentages have increased to 40.6% in 2008.

Some absent fathers are in prison. In 2007, there were 1.7 million children in America with a parent in prison. Of these incarcerated parents, 92% (744,200) were fathers. Half of all incarcerated men are parents (Schimer,

Nellis & Mauer, 2011). A study by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services collected data from 1,958 cases in four states- Arizona; Massachusetts; Minnesota; and Tennessee. They found that 31% of the absent fathers were incarcerated. A study by O'Donnell (1999) of 74 fathers whose children were in foster care in Chicago found 16% were incarcerated or involved with the legal system.

Fathers may be uninvolved because of lack of awareness of the status of their children. Especially if there is a conflicted relationship with the mother of the child, the father may have had little contact with his children. The majority of children in foster care (50 to 80%) are removed from a single mother or unmarried couple families (U.S. DHHS, 2006).

If the father is living in the home or involved with his children, employment commitments can be a factor in his degree of involvement (Bayley, Wallace & Choudhry, 2009; Green, 2003). Mothers may have objections or fears about father involvement. These may be realistic, such as in cases of domestic violence, abuse of the children and/or substance addiction (Green, 2003; Raichel, 2009; Waller & Swisher, 2006). Mothers may also want to control the father's access to the children and fathers may feel angry and used (Cherry & Brown, 2009).

Caseworker bias and attitudes of staff can be an issue (Bayley et al., 2009; Cherry & Brown, 2009; Green, 2003; Raichel, 2009). A caseworker may have preconceptions about fathers based on a combination of their own past history, cultural stereotypes, or past experiences with trying to engage with fathers. A caseworker who is unwelcoming to fathers will receive little response and limited father engagement.

Finances can be an issue when trying to engage fathers. Fathers are aware that caseworkers are required to report their location to child support enforcement. If they have little income, other children to support, or

are unemployed, fathers might want to avoid being located or may be wary of interaction with the caseworker (Raichel, 2009). Some fathers are trapped in a perpetual cycle of jail, release, and then further imprisonment due to problems with support enforcement (Cherry & Brown, 2009).

Some men may lack positive role modeling for fathering and simply may not know how to be involved. For example, they may have the idea that being a good parent means buying things for children. The lack of skills and practice, coupled with low self-esteem, can be internal motivators to avoid engagement (Cherry & Brown, 2009; Circle of Parents, 2011; Pruett, Cowan, Cowan & Pruett, 2009; Raichel, 2009).

Shelia Bazemore, M.Ed. is a Family Involvement Specialist for the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. She presented a workshop, "Ties that Bind: Are Dads a Vital Link?" at Virginia's 2011 Child Abuse Prevention Conference in Richmond. She notes that child welfare services are typically considered to be "women's services" and may even be listed in that fashion in telephone books and brochures. Child service agencies need to find a "new identity" and welcome both parents. Bazemore also notes that many fathers "come with multiple issues and are already overwhelmed." Multiple stresses can interfere with father engagement.

## Benefits of Father Involvement

There is general agreement that positive father involvement has many benefits for children. Among the numerous research findings are that children with involved fathers have: better cognitive and intellectual development; higher self-esteem; better social competence; fewer signs of depression; deeper and better friendship patterns; and better self-control and emotional management (Circle of Parents, 2011).

Societal norms may consign the father to being a secondary caregiver, but research shows that infants are able to form their primary relationship with a father rather than the mother. Fathers' influences can be long-term. Later in life, psychological disorders such as substance abuse and depression are found to correlate more to the father's behavior and engagement than to the mother's (Parke, 2004; Roelofs et al., 2006; Veneziano, 2003). Also, fathers have been shown to be more influential than mothers in the child's level of healthy peer group involvement (Updegraff, McHale, Crouter, & Kupanoff; 2001).

General father involvement appears to provide protective factors against tobacco use and behavior problems, as well as leading to better educational outcomes and better social functioning in both childhood and adulthood. In adulthood, those with engaged fathers showed a greater capacity for empathy and more internal locus of control (Sarkadi, Kristiansson, Oberklaid, & Bremberg; 2008).

General father involvement can be divided into three different aspects: *accessibility* – the father's presence and availability; *engagement* – direct contact such as playing with or reading to the child; and *responsibility* – participation in decisions for areas such as child care or health care and other practical issues (Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, & Levine; 1987). High accessibility has been shown to result in less aggressive behavior in boys and have a protective effect against involvement with the police for girls. Father engagement was shown to result in fewer behavior problems, lower incidences of delinquency in early adulthood, and had a protective effect against criminality in adulthood. Father engagement also was correlated with lower incidence of economic disadvantage in adulthood, better cognitive development, higher IQ scores, and decreased risk of psychological morbidity (Sarkadi et al., 2008).

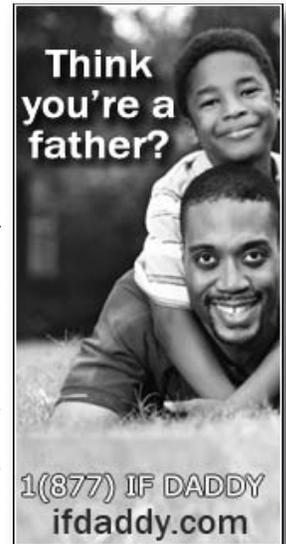
There are benefits of father engagement that are specific to child protective services and foster care as well. Not only can children benefit from a positive relationship with their father, but children with involved fathers may also experience improved outcomes. For example, Velazquez, Edwards, Vincent & Reynolds (2009) report that the median length of stay in foster care for children of married parents is consistently less than the length of stay for children of single parents. Reunification rates are also higher if the couple is married. The presence of a non-resident father may mean additional permanency options and family resources. Permanency may also be expedited by placing children with their nonresident fathers or paternal kin (U.S. DHHS, 2006).

While research is lacking on whether engaging fathers enhances the well-being or

## Virginia Putative Father Registry

Virginia Department of Social Services  
801 E. Main Street, Richmond, VA 23229  
1-877-IF DADDY (1-877-433-2339)  
email: putativefather@dss.virginia.gov

The Virginia Putative Father Registry is a confidential database designed to protect the rights of a putative father who wants to be notified in the event of a proceeding for adoption of, or termination of parental rights for a child he may have fathered. A putative father is a man who is not married to the child's mother. Further, the court has not determined that he is the child's father; he has not signed a written agreement acknowledging that he is the child's father; and he has not adopted the child. When a putative father registers with the Virginia Putative Father Registry, and when his registration information matches a request, the authorized requestor is responsible to notify the putative father of termination of parental rights and/or adoption proceedings. Authorized requestors may be the mother of the child; an attorney representing a party in a termination of parental rights or an adoption proceeding; a party to an adoption; a child-placing agency; a court or a person designated by the court; other states' putative father registries; support enforcement agencies; or any agency authorized by law. Putative fathers who fail to register waive their right to be notified regarding termination of parental right procedures or to be notified of adoption proceedings or to consent to an adoption involving a child they may have fathered. With the exception of postage when mailing the registration form, there is no cost to register with the Virginia Putative Father Registry. Registering with the Virginia Putative Father Registry does not prove that a man is the biological father of the child. Assistance with establishing paternity can be obtained from the Virginia Paternity Establishment Program at 1-866-398-4841.



## The American Bar Association's National Quality Improvement Center on Non-Resident Fathers and the Child Welfare System (QIC-NRF)

This project, created in 2006, came as a result of the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs) and the discovery that little meaningful engagement occurs between the child welfare system and fathers or other paternal relatives. These findings were consistent with other data throughout the nation. After conducting a national needs assessment, QIC-NRF funded four projects in four different states (Colorado, Indiana, Texas, and Washington) to determine the impact of non-resident father involvement on child welfare outcomes including child safety, permanence, and well-being. The website contains the information gained through this study. It also offers resources for parents, practitioners, and anyone involved in the child welfare system including child welfare professionals as well as attorneys and judges.

More information can be found at: <http://www.fatherhoodqic.org/>

## 24/7 Dad Training Curriculum,

National Fatherhood Initiative  
20410 Observation Drive, Suite 107  
Germantown, MD 20876  
(301) 948-0599 Fax: (301) 948-6776  
email: [info@fatherhood.org](mailto:info@fatherhood.org)  
[www.fatherhood.org](http://www.fatherhood.org)



24/7 Dad is a fatherhood training program available through the National Fatherhood Initiative. This training curriculum was developed by fathering and parenting experts. The tools, strategies, and exercises were designed to appeal to fathers of all races, religions, cultures, and backgrounds. The facilitator manual has been recently updated to include feedback and helpful tips from facilitators around the country. This recent update also includes expanded information and more relevant content with simplified, easy-to-use tools. This program is available in a more basic format: 24/7 Dad A.M., and a more in-depth version: 24/7 Dad P.M. Both curricula include 12 two-hour sessions that can be implemented in a group setting or one-on-one in a home-based program. Each curriculum kit includes a facilitator's manual, fathering handbooks for the dads, and a CD-ROM with an evaluation tool and marketing resources. Many important topics are covered in depth, including: masculinity; emotions; discipline; co-parenting; stress; anger management; communication; and work-family balance. The full curriculum kit is available for \$400 at [www.fatherhood.org](http://www.fatherhood.org)



## Father Engagement

*continued from page 10*

case outcomes for foster children, lack of father involvement means that caseworkers may never know whether a father can help his child. By engaging fathers, workers may learn important aspects of medical history or that the child has resources available such as medical insurance, survivor benefits, or child support (U.S. DHHS, 2006).

### Engaging Fathers

#### Agency Commitment

The decision to spend time, energy, and resources to locate and engage fathers competes with many other demands on caseworkers. In the past, fathers have been ignored and even discouraged from participation. While the mother's connection to the child was presumed, the father needed to demonstrate a connection before he was included (Velazquez et al., 2009). To have effective father engagement, agency policy, as well as individual workers, must recognize the father as an equal parent with the same rights and responsibilities as the mother. Agencies must invest similar efforts in locating fathers and paternal kin as is done for mothers and maternal kin. Fathers must be included equally in the decision-making (Velazquez et al.). Safety issues do need to be addressed, both for children and for case workers (U.S. DHHS, 2006). There are cases where the father's involvement is not safe.

Reyes (2009) recommends building staff commitment through total staff training. Agencies can create a long-term training plan and provide ongoing coaching and support for workers. In the U.S. DHHS study (2006), workers who had received training were more likely to locate fathers and engage with them. Caseworker attitude is crucial. During her workshop, Bazemore commented, "We must change our thinking. Father engagement is not about 'dead beat dads.' It's about improving child welfare."

#### Locating and Recruiting Fathers

Fathers can be referred or located through the courts or through family members. The mothers, girlfriends, and wives of fathers can be an asset in their location if there are positive relationships between the child's

mother and the father. Sometimes a parent can be located through the internet.

Early location is recommended. A study by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2006) found that most non-resident fathers (68%) were identified early in the case. Caseworkers reported asking the mother, the mother's relatives, the child, siblings, and other workers as well as the father's relatives to try to locate the non-resident father. Workers also consulted a number of other sources including law enforcement, public assistance records and department of motor vehicles records, and telephone books. Some workers also used the state's locator service for support enforcement. Fathers who were not located early were much more difficult to engage.

For prevention services or early intervention, it is suggested to have a father's group meet at the same time as the mother's group meeting or combine genders into a single group. Bayley et al. (2009) suggest capitalizing on mothers who are already involved in the service to advocate with the fathers. Parent help lines can sometimes be a source of referrals of stressed parents, as can churches and faith-based groups. Bayley et al. (2009) suggest advertising in pubs, sports venues, workplaces and employment agencies in order to attract the attention of a greater number of fathers.

#### The Initial Contact

The initial contact appears very important. Raichel (2009) suggests personal contact rather than a letter. The approach, tone, and degree of connection can determine whether or not the father will engage. Listening to the father's perspectives is crucial. Asking what is needed, rather than telling the father what is needed, can be effective.



#### On-going Contact

Engagement is a process and requires many contacts. The entire team is responsible to make the father feel welcome and to include him in decision-making. The father should be invited to all meetings and be expected to participate in the decision-making.

Staff training can be a factor. For example, clinicians who have greater training in family systems and who operate with flexible work hours are more effective in involving fathers in their child's therapy. Also, fathers are more likely to stay involved if staff relat-



ing to him are male (Phares, Fields, & Binitie, 2006).

Agencies can consider whether or not their atmosphere is "father-friendly." For example, are there male-oriented magazines in the waiting room? Is the furniture comfortable for males? Is the art work and other decorations chosen to appeal to both genders? (Phares et al., 2006).

Visits between the father and the children might be more productive in community locations such as playgrounds where the father and children can relate through activities. Other potential choices are the children's section of public libraries, recreation centers or a child-friendly eating location (picnic area). Involving children in life skills activities or attending a child's sporting event or school event are ways that fathers can be actively involved with their children. Fathers can also help with homework, attend school trips, and volunteer at the child's school. Letters, e-mails, and phone calls are other methods of staying connected.

Fathers may need considerable emotional support. They may also need concrete support such as help in finding employment, transportation, and ongoing services (Cherry & Brown, 2009). They may have limited parenting skills and need assistance in planning visits and other contacts with their children.

Placement with the father is not always an option. The U.S. DHHS found many obstacles to permanent placement with fathers. The major challenges were substance use and addiction, involvement with the criminal justice system, and the presence of multiple problems. Further, only 23% of the fathers who were offered services utilized them.

### Why Programs are Successful

There is little research to guide those who wish to increase father engagement in child welfare. Circle of Parents (2011) has summarized some reasons why successful programs were effective. They suggest that agencies "throw out the welcome mat" and embrace fathers enthusiastically. A positive staff attitude is vital. Recruiting fathers at key times (for example, at the birth of the child for an early intervention effort or at the time of removal for a foster care situation) can help. While female workers can develop gender sensitivity, the presence of male workers is reassuring and very helpful. Finally, funding sustainability is essential.

*References Available on the Website  
or by Request*

**Engaging Nonresident Fathers in Child Welfare Cases: A Guide for Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA)**, by Jessica R. Kendall and Lisa Pilnik, 2010

This guide was written to help CASA volunteers increase nonresident father engagement but it is helpful for any practitioner working with foster children and nonresident fathers. This handbook emphasizes the importance of father involvement and the common barriers that prevent it. The guide offers in-depth examination of the emotions and personal issues nonresident fathers may be experiencing to enable readers to understand how best to encourage and engage them. Tips are included for helping fathers navigate child welfare cases. Attention is given to assisting previously nonresident fathers who have just received their child as a placement and who may be inexperienced. Lastly the guide covers fathers' legal rights in child welfare cases so that the volunteer can make certain the father is properly informed. The full guide can be found at: [http://www.fatherhoodqc.org/casa\\_brief.pdf](http://www.fatherhoodqc.org/casa_brief.pdf)



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**What About the Dads?: Child Welfare Agencies' Efforts to Identify, Locate and Involve Nonresident Fathers**, by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation

Due to the growing interest in fathers' contributions to family stability and healthy child development, this report was created for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to examine the extent to which child welfare agencies involve nonresident fathers of foster children in casework and permanency planning. Other areas explored were increasing father involvement and challenges to father involvement. Almost two thousand cases were reviewed across the states of Arizona, Massachusetts, Minnesota, and Tennessee. Interviews were conducted with child welfare administrators as well as caseworkers. This report provides an extremely comprehensive list of findings for every aspect of the agency/caseworker/parent relationship.

The full report is available at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/06/cw-involve-dads/report.pdf>

**American Humane Association™**  
The nation's voice for the protection of children & animals

**The American Humane Association's National Fatherhood Initiative**

Many children are living without any paternal influence in their lives. Studies have documented the negative effects of living without a father. The American Humane Association created the National Fatherhood Initiative to support children in recapturing or developing important and long-lasting relationships with their fathers and to help fathers understand and assume their role as parents. This website serves as a central location for several resources such as trainings, tips, and literature. There are resources for fathers in all situations including resident fathers, non-resident fathers, single fathers, incarcerated fathers, and fathers struggling with substance use. Every dad should use this website to learn how to spend more quality time with their child and how to build meaningful relationships no matter what their circumstances. More information can be found at:

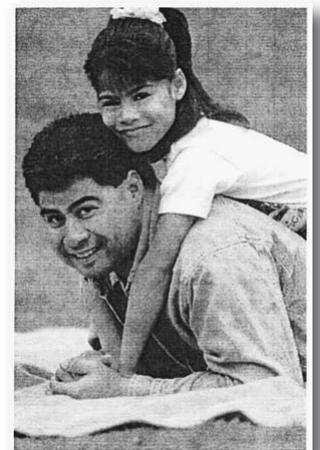
<http://www.americanhumane.org/children/programs/fatherhood-initiative/>

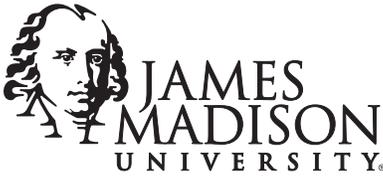
**Bringing Back the Dads: Engaging Non-Resident Fathers in the Child Welfare System**, by The American Humane Society

This informational publication is designed to educate agencies and practitioners about the father/child relationship, reasons for father absenteeism, the need for father engagement, and ways to increase father involvement. Current research on increasing father involvement in the child welfare system is discussed at length. Six different articles present a solid and well-rounded case for the need for increased paternal participation in the child welfare system. Articles discuss current research, engagement in child welfare cases, father engagement effects on child brain development, and fathers as family resources. Many useful tips for child welfare workers are included that can help make the process of engaging fathers, especially non-resident fathers, more successful.

This publication is available at:

<http://www.americanhumane.org/assets/pdfs/children/protecting-children-journal/pc-24-2.pdf>  
or at: [http://fatherhoodqc.org/17th\\_natl\\_conf\\_nrf\\_engagement\\_4\\_1\\_09.pdf](http://fatherhoodqc.org/17th_natl_conf_nrf_engagement_4_1_09.pdf)





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# FAMILY ASSESSMENT

If a family is in need of protective services, workers will need to learn more than the facts of the immediate incident causing the referral. It is important to develop an understanding of what has occurred and what will be required to prevent reoccurrence of the abuse or neglect. Assessment is the process of understanding the whole situation (Schene, 2005).

Assessment is the foundation of effective practice with children and families. Family-centered assessment focuses on the entire family, values the family's participation, and respects the family's cultural background and ethnicity. Family-centered assessment helps families identify their strengths, needs, challenges, and resources. It assists the family in developing service plans that achieve and maintain safety, permanency, and family well-being (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2010).

Assessment is an ongoing process, as risk and protective factors can change over time. Through service provision and meetings with the family, more is learned. The assessment is best completed in partnership with the family. Thus, engagement and building working relationships is important to the assessment process (Schene, 2005).

The focus should move from the incident causing CPS involvement to an understanding of behavioral patterns over time. All contributing factors (such as family history, domestic violence, substance use, mental health, chronic health problems, and poverty) should be included. Strengths and protective factors should be highlighted and resources identified.

The Friends National Resource Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention has identified five primary protective factors for families:

- \* Parental Resilience (coping and problem-solving abilities)
- \* Social Connectedness
- \* Concrete Support
- \* Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development
- \* Ability to Positively Communicate Emotions (and help their children develop positive interactions with others)

The National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning has published *Comprehensive Family Assessment Guidelines for Child Welfare*, a 58-page guidebook that addresses the components of comprehensive family assessment. It shows the linkages to service planning and provision and includes suggestions about engaging families in the assessment process. It is enhanced by a concrete case example (Schene, 2005). The Guidelines can be assessed through the Child Welfare Information Gateway at <http://www.childwelfare.gov/famcentered/ca sework/assessment.cfm>

## Go Green

If you prefer an electronic notice when VCPN is published rather than a hard copy, please e-mail your preference to Joann Grayson at [graysojh@jmu.edu](mailto:graysojh@jmu.edu)

**VCPN is on the web – Visit us at:**  
**<http://psychweb.cisat.jmu.edu/graysojh/>**