Whole Family Approaches to Working with Families

What are "Whole Family" Approaches?

- Whole family approaches address the needs of, and provide opportunities for children and the adults in their lives together.[1]
- Single-generation policies and programs focus on children or parents; multi-generation, whole family approaches combine services to focus on the family as a unit.[2]
- Rather than operating in separate child-centered or parent-centered "silos," whole family programs create opportunities for families by simultaneously equipping parents and children with the tools they need to thrive while removing the obstacles in their way.[3]
- Whole family approaches were initially known as "two-generation" approaches, a term first used by the Foundation for Child Development in the early 1990s.[4] More recently, Ascend at the Aspen Institute, the Bernard van Leer Foundation, and others have emphasized multi-generation, whole family approaches to promote children's learning and healthy development while simultaneously helping their parents succeed as caregivers and breadwinners.

What is the rationale Behind Whole Family Work?

- Parents' income, educational attainment, and overall well-being have a significant impact on their children's social-emotional, physical, and economic well-being.[5]
- Children need stability combined with responsive and nurturing relationships, particularly during the first few years of their lives.[6] A child's early years are critical for both brain development and building a foundation of emotional security.[7]
- Combining intensive, high quality, adult-focused services with intensive, high-quality child focused services could amplify outcomes for parents, children, and other family members.
- Although whole family programs are "still in their infancy," research indicates that the theories behind them are "strong" and "early results are promising."[8]

What Kinds of Services Do Whole Family Programs Provide?

- Services for parents are designed to enhance parenting skills and knowledge; build social capital; improve health and well-being; and provide workforce development opportunities.
- Services for children include early childhood care and education; home visiting; and specialized services for children with special needs or children who have been exposed to trauma.

How Can Responsible Fatherhood Programs Apply Whole Family Approaches and Concepts?

- Consider combining fatherhood program services with direct child intervention services to increase program impacts and enhance outcomes for children and their families.
- Seek out community partners who can provide child or youth programming to complement the goals and services of a responsible fatherhood program.
- Talk with local Head Start, Home Visiting programs, and other early childhood programs about ways to provide services for fathers of children enrolled in their programs.
- Create opportunities for fathers and children to engage in facilitated activities together.
- Help fathers and mothers work together as co-parenting teams focused on the best interests of their children.

- When working with incarcerated fathers, provide help and support for their children or partner with other community organizations that can provide these services.

For more information, see *Applying Whole Family Approaches in Responsible Fatherhood*, a National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse discussion brief.

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