



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Office of Family Assistance

National
Responsible
Fatherhood Clearinghouse



NRFC Webinar Series

Strengthening Literacy and Father-Child Relationships through Reading

Response to Questions

July 15, 2015

Moderator:

- Nigel Vann, National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse (NRFC)

Opening Remarks:

- Lisa Washington-Thomas, NRFC COTR, Office of Family Assistance

Presenters:

- J. Michael Hall, President and Founder, Strong Fathers-Strong Families, Fort Worth, TX
- Allison Hyra, Fellow, ICF International, Fairfax, VA
- Glen Palm, Professor Emeritus, Child & Family Studies, St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud, MN

This document addresses questions presented, but not addressed, during this NRFC Webinar. For questions addressed during the webinar, please refer to the Webinar Transcript. For more information contact the NRFC via email at info@fatherhood.gov.

Question

How can fathers with little education, or low reading comprehension skills, engage in a post-reading session conversation with their children?

Response Provided by Glen Palm

This will depend upon the age of the child and the books that you are introducing, but there are ways that all dads can enjoy interacting with their children and give them the message that books are fun and can. With very young children, books with limited or no words can be used to help children learn the words for the pictures. One of my favorite books for young children is "Gobble, Growl, Grunt," which has pictures of various animals with the sounds that they make. It's a fun book for dads to read with their children because you can try to make the animal sounds and help the children repeat and learn them. You can also talk about other characteristics of the animals, such as colors, size, and body parts. A book I like that has no words, just pictures is "Spilt Milk." Dads can ask their children questions about what the pictures look like and make up their own stories based on the pictures. You can also ask dads about their interests and help them find books with content that matches those interests. I worked with an incarcerated father who selected to read a Richard Scarry book about cars and trucks to send to his son on a DVD. He had fun talking about the different vehicles and expanding on what they did. If you have built a relationship with a dad and know that he is struggling with reading and feels uncomfortable about reading out loud, you might ask if he is interested in learning how to improve his reading. You can talk about the advantages to his child of not only being able to read together, but also being a positive role model for

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his child by expanding his own learning. Fathers can often be motivated to make some changes and overcome some of their limitations if they see how important these may be for their children and their long-term success in school and life. Family literacy programs that include ABE and ESL classes with parent education and parent-child time can be a comfortable place for fathers to learn alongside their children.

Question

Mike talked about their program going into schools, libraries. If you're working with fathers, but want to do something reading-based like this where kids are as well, what are some ways to initially reach out to a location?

Response Provided by Glen Palm

Schools in your community and early childhood programs are very open to programs like *Fathers Reading Every Day (FRED)* or *Run and Read* for dads and young children. Talk directly to program directors, show what resources you can contribute (e.g. your time, books to share with fathers), and offer to plan a collaborative event for fathers and children. We have worked with the local public library in our community as a partner in our annual *Father's Day Celebration in the Park*. Fathers with children 0-10 and their families are invited to come to one of our community parks on the Saturday before Father's Day in June for a morning of activities. It is a free event with fishing, paddle-boat rides, craft projects, food, music, games and literacy-related events. The library has an area where they provide information about their summer programs, have a story-board path, and do music and story-telling. They have been a great partner and we have all of our planning meetings at the library building. The local United Way has sponsored "*Hook-a-Book*" where children fish for a book that they can take home with them. This event was started 20 years ago and now has a stable group of community partners who provide the materials and staff for the event.

Question

Can you talk a little about the potential of a two-generation approach to working with fathers and their children around reading?

Response Provided by Allison Hyra

The theory behind a two-generation approach is that by addressing a potential outcome both directly and indirectly, a program can increase the impact it has on that outcome. So in this case, the program would likely be focused primarily on the children's literacy and choose to address their reading skills both through direct child-focused services and indirectly through father-focused literacy support. The theory of change would likely follow these lines:

- Fathers build their reading skills and confidence in reading.
- They then model reading more frequently around their children and read more to their children.
- They continue to improve their own reading skills in order to read more complex materials and "keep up" with their children's literacy skills.
- These father behaviors will support the development of on-track child literacy skills.
- At the same time, fathers who improve their literacy levels may be better able to compete in the post-industrial economy and their increased wages, income and employment may improve child well-being.

Response Provided by Glen Palm

The two-generation approach to working with fathers has the advantage of focusing on the needs and interests of both fathers and the children. They both come to the program as learners. Fathers can focus on their own learning and also become powerful models for the importance of reading and life-long learning. Fathers with low literacy skills have a second chance to be successful learners and they can be motivated to do this for themselves and for the sake of their children. Family literacy programs have developed effective models for engaging parents and children together in learning literacy skills. Typically, programs for parents with children ages 0-7 have included the following components:

- Adult literacy time -- Adult Basic Education (ABE), English as a Second Language (ESL), job skills, and internship opportunities).

- Parent-child time -- activities for parents and children together, such as reading, circle time, songs, play time, art and crafts, and eating together.
- Early childhood education time.

The programs that I worked with met 3 times a weeks for a total of 12 hours a week. These were very intensive programs for parents and children together and were focused on the parents and children with the greatest needs. Two-generation programs can also be less intensive, but still focus on both parent and child literacy needs. The *Dads and Kids Book Club* discussed in the webinar is an example of a six week program for 1 ½ hours a week. This program for fathers of children ages 2-6 focused on helping fathers understand children’s literacy development by providing activities that promoted literacy skills, modeled reading to young children, and gave specific tips for fathers to enhance their skills in reading to their children. Children got the benefit of coming to an environment that supported their literacy development with fun activities that they engaged in with their dads. By sending the book of the week home, it gave fathers a chance to practice their reading skills and to adapt other activities to their home environment. The evaluations demonstrated that both dads and kids benefited. Dads learned about literacy development and had more fun reading to their children. The kids were more interested in reading, asked more questions, and wanted their dads to read to them more.

Question

How would you suggest we engage non-custodial fathers or fathers (youth & adults) engaged in the child welfare systems?

Response provided by Allison Hyra

Fathers involved in the child welfare system may be engaging with their children via supervised visits. One way to increase father/child reading time would be to connect with the social workers involved in the supervision. Make sure they understand the importance of time spent reading and have resources (e.g., books) on hand that can be used to facilitate father child reading.

Response Provided by Glen Palm

You can partner with your local county child welfare office to create an event for fathers and children together where literacy is a main theme and you provide some father-child activity time in conjunction with the literacy activity. The biggest challenge with engaging fathers whose children are involved in the child welfare system is that they be hard to reach if they are not living with the children. Mothers may not share information about events with them and child welfare staff may not have contact information for the dads. By working in partnership with child welfare, fatherhood programs might be able to help identify and locate fathers. Possible contact points to help with this are child support or Head Start staff who might have contact with the dads. If you can get the invitation to these fathers they will come as Mike said in the webinar. In the UK, a fatherhood group called *Dads & Lads* has organized sessions at the local soccer club to give dads and kids opportunities to play soccer together before participating in activities where they read with the children. We have done “*Run & Read*” events where parents and children are invited for “gym time with games” that is then paired with a time to sit and read to the children with books that they can bring home.