



NRFC
WEBINAR

The Importance of Co-Parenting and Relationship Skills Helping Fathers Help Their Children

1:00pm EDT | July 31st, 2019





National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse



HHS/ACF Office of Family Assistance

provides funds to support fathers and families through this Clearinghouse.

Resources are available for dads, fatherhood programs, researchers, and policy makers.



Contact

Visit the NRFC: fatherhood.gov

- fatherhood.gov/toolkit for *Responsible Fatherhood Toolkit*.
- fatherhood.gov/webinars for archives of all our webinars.

Contact us: Help@FatherhoodGov.info

Encourage fathers or practitioners to contact our national call center toll-free at:
1-877-4DAD411 (877-432-3411)

Engage with us via social media:
Facebook - /Fatherhoodgov
Twitter - @Fatherhoodgov





Today's Webinar

- An overview of strategies to help fathers overcome obstacles and work with their co-parents to improve their relationships and provide important benefits for their children.
- Presentations from:
 - **James P. McHale**
The Family Study Center, University of South Florida, St. Petersburg, FL
 - **Aaron Ivchenko**
Child Find of America and NRFC National Call Center, New Paltz, NY
 - **Carolyn and Philip Cowan**
Emeritus Professors, University of California, Berkeley, CA
 - **Marc Taylor**
TRUE Dads, It's My Community Initiative, Oklahoma City, OK
- Presenter handouts and a list of helpful resources will be available for download during the webinar.
- “Question and Answer” session with the presenters at the end of the webinar.



Relevant NRFC Resources

- NRFC Responsible Fatherhood Toolkit:
 - Resources from the Field <https://www.fatherhood.gov/toolkit> (see section on *Working with Fathers to Enhance Relationship Skills*):
 - Understanding Key Relationship Skills
 - Developing Effective Co-Parenting Skills
 - Parenting Apart – Tips for Co-Parents
- NRFC Webinar:
Integrating Healthy Marriage Skills in Fatherhood Programs (2010).
www.fatherhood.gov/webinars
- Forthcoming:
NRFC Brief on Promoting Positive Coparenting Relationships (2019).





NRFC Toolkit

Co-Parenting – Key Takeaway Points

Complex family relationships present challenges and opportunities that require negotiation, communication, boundary setting, and conflict management.

Services need to take into account the variety of household and relationship structures within which fathers, children, and mothers live.

- **Work** with non-residential fathers should help them understand the importance of developing cordial, empathetic relationships with their co-parent.
- **Focus** on developing key relationship skills, such as effective communication, active listening, and empathy.
- **Emphasize** the importance of effective co-parenting for the benefit of the child.
- **Offer** healthy parenting and communication tips to minimize the effects on children of any tension, stress, or conflict.



The Importance of Co-Parenting and Relationship Skills:
Helping Fathers Help Their Children



James P. McHale

Professor of Psychology and Director
University of South Florida, St. Petersburg
Family Study Center

July 31, 2019





Sponsors

of work described in this webinar

- National Institute of Child Health and Development (R01 HD082211)
 - *Randomized Controlled Trial of Prenatal Coparenting Intervention for African American Fragile Families*
- National Institute of Child Health and Development (KO2 HD047505)
 - *Prebirth Predictors of Early Coparenting*



Brady Education Foundation Early Childhood Grant

- *Figuring it Out for the Child: Promoting Coparenting Alliances of Expectant Unmarried African American Parents*



National Institute of Child Health and Development (R29 HD37172)

- *Coparenting and Family-Level Dynamics during Infancy and Toddlerhood*



Juvenile Welfare Board of Pinellas County

- *Promoting Coparenting Alliances of Expectant Unmarried African American Parents*



University of South Florida St. Petersburg (USFSP) Family Study Center

Established in 2003 and directed by Dr. James McHale, the Family Study Center is the home of both basic and applied research studies concerned with understanding, supporting, and advocating for families with young children.

The Center has administered grant projects supported both by the National Institutes of Health and by State-, Local-, and National Foundation-sponsorship.

All of the Center's studies examine the relationship adults share as coparents to infants and young children, and the impact of coparental functioning on the social and emotional adjustment of very young children.



Coparenting refers to the mutual, joint efforts of adults raising children for whom they share responsibility





Four Essential Features

of an effectively functioning coparenting alliance that supports children's emotional health.

(McHale and Irace, 2011)

1 Support and Solidarity
between parenting figures

2 Consistency and Predictability
in the approaches the different caregivers take in guiding the child's development

3 Security and Integrity
of the family's home base (regardless of whether that home base is a single domicile or spans multiple residences).

4 Accurate Attunement
to the young child's fears, needs, wishes and sensibilities



Quality of Coparenting

robustly affects children's socioemotional development*

Coparenting must be understood as a **triangular** construct

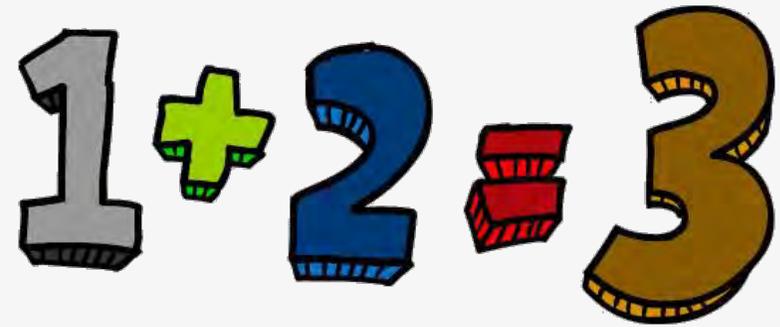


*McHale, J. & Lindahl, K. (2011). Coparenting: A conceptual and clinical examination of family systems. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association Press.



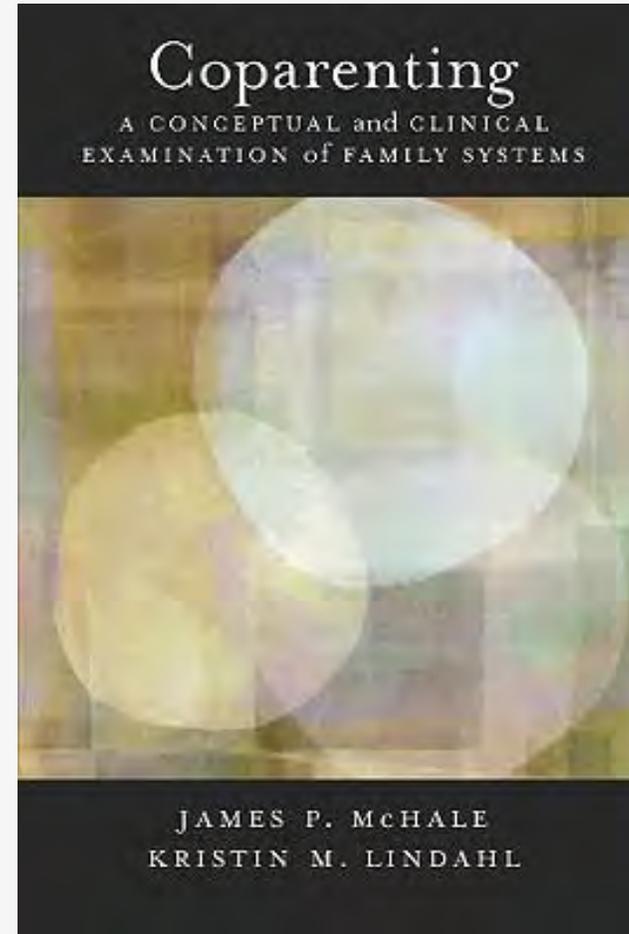
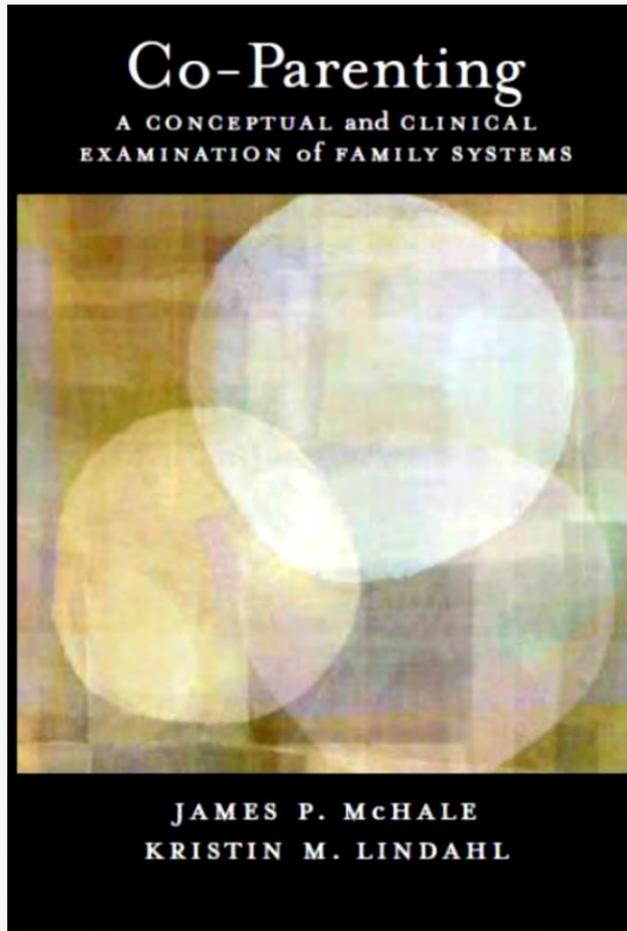
Distinctions

between triangular and 2+1 views of family





Why the Best Coparenting is Hyphenless





Coparenting in families led by unmarried parents*

- Coparenting alliances may be most important for children in these families.
 - But they are also often the most challenging.
- Unmarried parents differ greatly from one another.
 - Some have never started a relationship.
 - Others have a committed relationship.
 - Others have split up acrimoniously.
- Ways of working with these different types of families will not be the same, though some general principles for engaging and intervening may exist.

*McHale, J. (2009). *Shared Child Rearing in Nuclear, Fragile, and Kinship Family Systems: Evolution, Dilemmas, and Promise of a Coparenting Framework*.
McHale, J. & Carter, D. (2012). *Applications of Focused Coparenting Consultation with Unmarried and Divorced Families*.



Focused Coparenting Consultation (FCC):

Bringing co-parents together as coparents

3-Stage Process

1

Heightening
Consciousness

2

Selective
Skill Building

3

Guided
Enactment



Coparenting Initiatives serving unmarried African-American fathers and mothers together

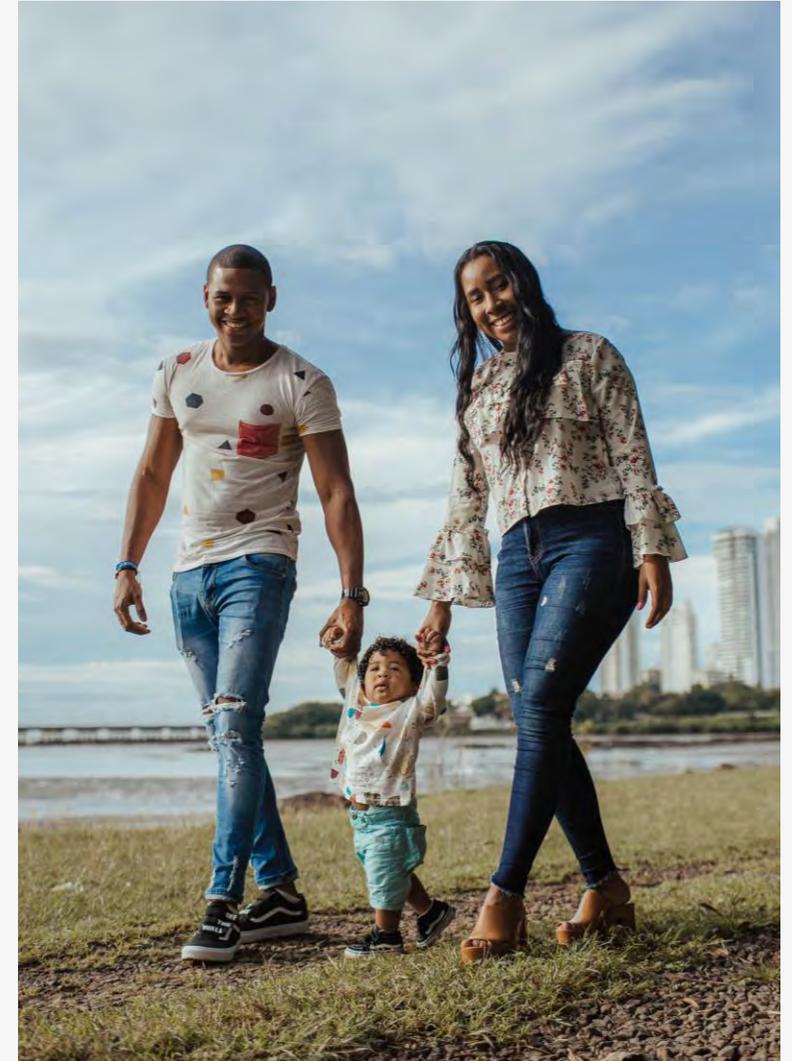
- Coparenting is a culturally syntonik and supported dynamic in African-American communities.
- Unmarried African-American fathers often maintain contact with their children and their children’s mothers.
- African-American communities and families have often had negative experiences with programs created to be “helpful and supportive.”





Coparenting Initiatives serving unmarried African-American fathers and mothers together in FCC

- African-American community leaders are crucial partners in planning, designing, and offering coparenting and family programming.
- There is a strong desire among unmarried African American parents to support their shared child or children through trustworthy programming.
- Expectant residential and nonresidential parents both show commitment to and derive substantial benefit from dyadic coparenting programming.*



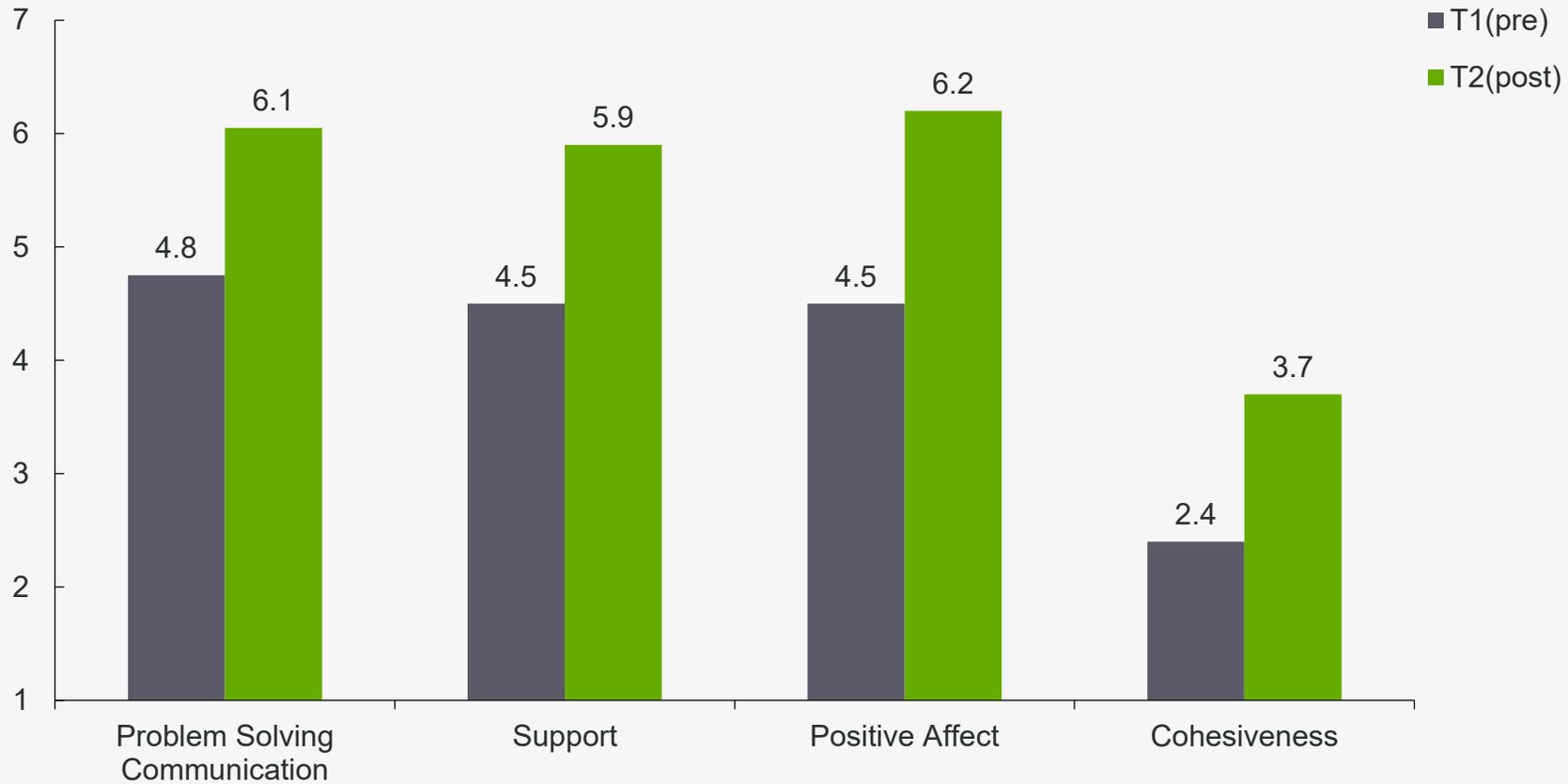
* McHale, J., Salman-Engin, S., & Covert, M. (2015). *Improvements in Unmarried African American Parents' Rapport, Communication, and Problem-Solving Following a Prenatal Coparenting Intervention.*

McHale, J. & Coates, E. (2014). *Observed coparenting and triadic dynamics in African American fragile families at 3 months' postpartum.*



Impact of the FCC Intervention

Significant Changes in Rapport, Problem-Solving & Communication





Impact of the FCC Intervention

Coordination and Cooperation in the Triangle

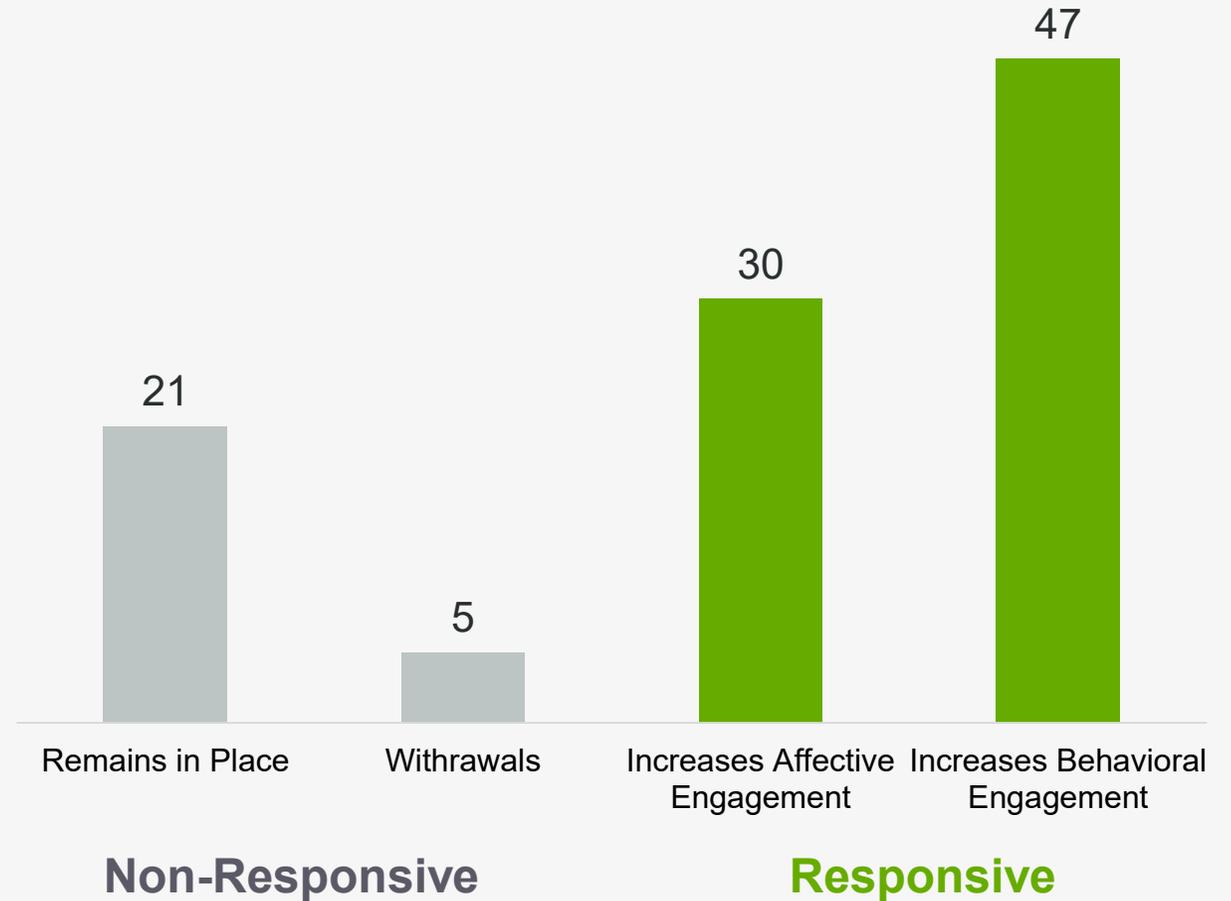
Dads responded to infant bids by becoming more involved 77% of the time (N=206)



Figure 1. Mother-father-baby Lausanne Trilogue Play interaction.

Mother-father-baby Lausanne Trilogue play interaction

Dad's Reaction to Baby's Bid





Active elements of FCC

Stage 1

- **FCC begins by raising parental consciousness and heightening empathy for the child's experience.**
 - So **both** parents can recognize and validate what children need.
- Heightening consciousness demands creativity and sensitivity by interventionists.
 - Interventionists must tread more gently with post-divorce couples.
- Parents are helped to:
 - Recognize where their parenting biases come from.
 - See how their instincts and impulses are consciously/ unconsciously motivated by good intent.
 - Distinguish areas in which they share common desires for protecting their children and helping them adjust successfully.
- **Focus is on children's family-level security.**
 - Selective skill building comes only later.



Unmarried Parents, Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), and Triangles

- Conventional wisdom has been to not work dyadically with couples where IPV has been, or is, occurring at concerning levels.
- We are working to assess the safety and efficacy of the FCC intervention in a new investigation funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH)*
 - The intervention focuses on cultivating a positive and safe coparenting alliance in unmarried family systems, beginning with discussions about coparenting before the baby is born.
 - The triangular approach remains the lens, but the parents are engaged in the FCC intervention only where safe and appropriate.
 - Of 140 families enrolled to date, 120 have moved forward to randomization, and only 5 have been withdrawn.

**Randomized Controlled Trial of Prenatal Coparenting Intervention for African American Fragile Families.*



Contact Information

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The Importance of Co-Parenting and Relationship Skills: Helping Fathers Help Their Children



Aaron Ivchenko

Senior Case Manager
Child Find of America, Inc.

July 31, 2019





CHILD FIND of AMERICA

BRINGING KIDS HOME • KEEPING THEM SAFE

VISION

To help create a world in which every child thrives in a safe, healthy and legal environment.

MISSION

Child Find of America provides outstanding professional services designed to prevent and resolve child abduction and the family conflicts that can lead to abduction and abuse.

MESSAGE

BRINGING KIDS HOME • KEEPING THEM SAFE

Key Programs

LOCATION SERVICES

- FAMILY/PARENTAL ABDUCTIONS
- STRANGER ABDUCTIONS
- RUNAWAYS/THROWAWAYS

PARENT HELP

- CONFLICT MANAGEMENT
- CRISIS INTERVENTION
- SKILL BUILDING
- INFO & REFERRAL
- CO-PARENTING

PUBLIC EDUCATION

- CHILD SAFETY
- PREVENTION STRATEGIES
- DOCUPAKS & FLYERS
- WEBSITE
- SOCIAL MEDIA

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

- WORKSHOPS
- SEMINARS
- CONFERENCES
- WEBINARS



NRFC National Call Center

(1-877-4DAD-411)



National
Responsible
Fatherhood Clearinghouse

@fatherhoodgov

Dads and Moms... ...Living Apart?

We know that when dads and moms live apart, it can be hard to talk to each other about the kids, visitation disputes, parenting differences, money and child support issues. Small arguments become big battles. You end up arguing in front of the kids. Nothing ever changes. Nothing gets resolved.

1-877.4DAD411

and connect with
PARENTHelp

a partner of the National Responsible
Fatherhood Clearinghouse (NRFC)





What's going on?

Single parent home

Immigration

Social Service Systems

Kinship Caretaker

**SAFETY:
DV/IPV**

Incarceration / Criminal History

Alcohol / Substance Abuse

Medical Issues

FINANCES

(HOUSING, CHILD SUPPORT, UNEMPLOYMENT....)

Parenting Apart Conflict

Parenting Skills
Parenting Styles

Child abuse /
Child neglect

Extended family

Mental Health

Military Issues

Teen Parent

Disabilities



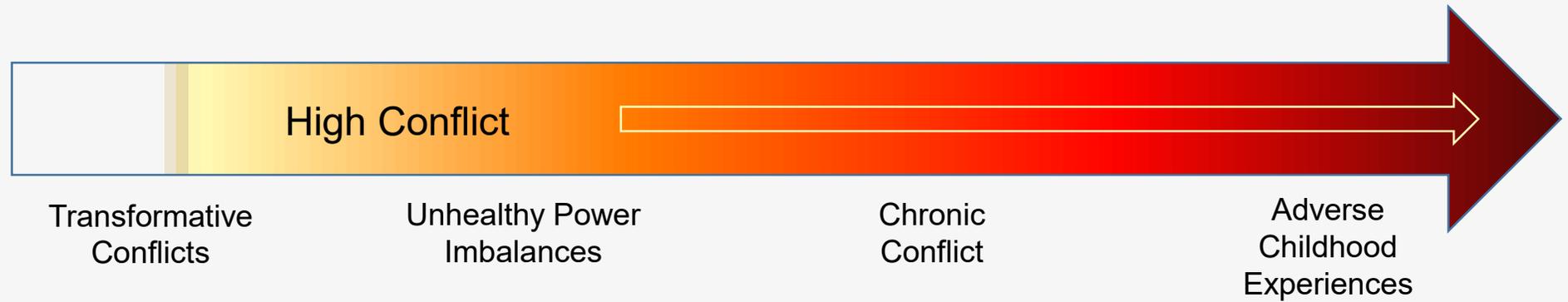
Impacts of “what’s going on”

	SEPARATION can cause...	
...Anxiety	to become	Panic
	LOSS can cause...	
...Sadness	to become	Depression
	UNFULFILLED DREAMS can cause...	
...Disappointment	to become	Betrayal
	COMPETITION can cause...	
...Interest	to become	Greed
	AN ADVERSARIAL SYSTEM can cause...	
...Suspicion	to become	Paranoia

**Divorce Induced Emotions and the Healing Paradigm by Howard Yahm*



Family Conflict Continuum



Risk of Side Effects

Parenting Arrangements

No Conflict	Occasional Conflicts	Chronic /High Conflict	Unsafe Parent/s	Unfit Parent/s
By agreementby court order....with some restrictions.....supervised.....denied				
				



What is Mediation?

- “Mediation is a process in which an impartial third party facilitates communication and negotiation, and promotes voluntary decision making by the parties to the dispute.”*
- To be effective, mediation should be:
 - Voluntary
 - Thoughtful
 - Safe
 - Respectful
 - Non-judgmental
 - Balanced
 - Impartial
 - Confidential

*2005 Model Standards of Conduct for Mediators. Collaboratively articulated by the American Arbitration Association, the American Bar Association’s Section of Dispute Resolution, and the Association for Conflict Resolution.



Helpful Resource



CHILD FIND of AMERICA PARENT HELP

Parenting Apart Packet

©2009 Child Find of America, Inc.

This packet provides you with information useful to creating a workable and thoughtful parenting plan.

- ✓ **Discussion Points for Parenting Apart:**
 - *Locally*
 - *Interstate / Long Distance*
- ✓ **Parenting Time Calendar**
- ✓ **Holiday & Special Occasion Worksheet**
 - ✓ **A Child's Fundamental Rights**
 - ✓ **Communication Skills Sheet**
 - ✓ **Values Worksheet**

Founded in 1980 to ensure that every child thrives in a safe, healthy & legal environment, Child Find's mission is to resolve and prevent cases of missing children augmented by programs and services that promote healthier family environments and strengthen parents – the key to child well-being.



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The Importance of Co-Parenting and Relationship Skills:
Helping Fathers Help Their Children



Philip A. Cowan and
Carolyn Pape Cowan
Emeritus/Emerita
University of California, Berkeley

July 31, 2019





Parenting interventions to facilitate children's development

- Parenting classes:
 - 90% moms.
- Father involvement:
 - Primarily men's groups with male leaders.
- Both of these ignore the relationship between the parents - as couples and as co-parenting teams.
 - BUT, in married, cohabiting, and divorced families, the single most important predictor of fathers' involvement with their children is the quality of the father's relationship with the child's mother. (Carlson et al, 2011; Pruett & Johnson, 2004)



Our Family Systems Model

5 Risk-Protection Domains

to enhance child and adolescent well-being

Parents as Individuals

- Health, mental health, how they manage to meet their needs.

Parent-child Relationships

- Fathers' and mothers' age-appropriate parenting strategies.

The Couple Relationship

- How parents manage conflict and disagreement with each other.

Family of Origin

- Parents' developmental histories, what is carried over from the past.

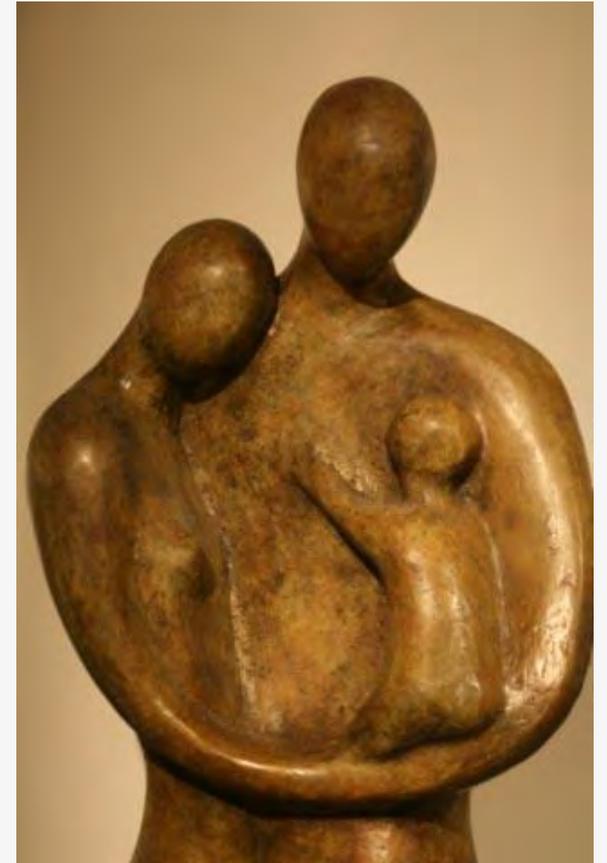
Stressors and Supports

- Parents' strategies for coping with external stressors and enlisting support from family, friends, workplaces, and social services.



Supporting Father Involvement (SFI) (2003-2012)*

- Created and evaluated by:
 - Carolyn Pape Cowan and Philip A. Cowan, University of California, Berkeley
 - Marsha Kline Pruett, Smith College
 - Kyle Pruett, Yale University
- For more information:
 - supportingfatherinvolvementsfi.com
 - Cowan et al (2009, 2014; Pruett et al (2019)).



Ruth Bloch
(Israeli, b. 1951)

*Funded by California Dept. of Social Services, Office of Child Abuse Prevention.



SFI

Phase One

- 289, mainly low-income Mexican-American and European American couples, in 4 California counties
 - 75% married
 - 66% had incomes below poverty level
- Random assignment to:
 - Single meeting (control)
 - Fathers groups
 - Couples groups



SFI Results

- Control group:
 - Fathers' involvement in their children's care did not change.
 - Children's problem behaviors increased.
 - Parents satisfaction as a couple declined.
- Fathers groups:
 - Fathers become more involved in their children's care.
 - Children's problem behaviors remained stable.
 - Parents' satisfaction as a couple declined.
- Couples groups:
 - Fathers become more involved in their children's care.
 - Children's problem behaviors remained stable.
 - Parents reported reduced parenting stress.
 - Parents' couple satisfaction remained stable.



TRUE Dads Oklahoma

(described by Marc Taylor)

A father
involvement program



with a
co-parenting format





The Importance of Co-Parenting and Relationship Skills: Helping Fathers Help Their Children



Marc Taylor
Project Director
TRUE Dads
It's My Community Initiative
Oklahoma City, OK

July 31, 2019





TRUE Dads

- A program of *It's My Community Initiative*
- **TRUE** stands for:
 - Trustworthy, **R**esponsible, **U**nited, **E**ducated
 - These are the traits we foster in our program.
- We provide services for fathers who:
 - Live in the greater Oklahoma City area
 - Are 18 years or older (emphasis on 18-24)
 - Have a child 12 years or younger (emphasis on 0-5)





TRUE Dads co-parenting focus

- Because research shows more significant impacts when fathers participate in workshops with a co-parent, we ask that all fathers have a co-parent attend with them.
 - We define the co-parent as “the other adult helping to raise the child.”
 - This is usually an intimate partner, but can also be grandmother, grandfather, or other friends/family members.
 - We call them Parenting Teams.



Program Components

- Core curriculum (18 hrs – 6 weeks @ 3hrs per session)
 - *TRUE Dads On My Shoulders* by PREP
 - Communication, stress, co-parenting, commitment, discipline, gratitude
- Supplemental tracks (participants choose one):
 - Parenting
 - Based on SFI curriculum (18 hrs)
 - Healthy Relationships and Marriage Education
 - PREP 8.0 curriculum (18 hrs)
 - Employment
 - WorkForward by Work Ready Oklahoma (60 hrs)
 - Fathers only





Role of Fatherhood/Employment Coach

- Meet with each participant within first two weeks
- Encourage participation (weekly reminder calls)
- Reinforce curriculum
- Support employment goals/needs of fathers
- Provide referrals for other services



Program Supports

- Remove barriers
 - Transportation (gas cards, transportation assistance)
 - Childcare (small stipends, referrals for free childcare)
- Incentives – reloadable charge cards for:
 - Completing benchmarks
 - Completing surveys



Tips for other fatherhood programs

- Remind fathers (and co-parents, when possible) to focus on the child.
- Recruit co-parents!
 - This helps ensure that fathers (and their co-parent) show up.
- Be prepared to treat fathers and their co-parent as individuals.

For example:

 - Reminder calls
 - Transportation
- Emphasize ways that fathers can communicate consistently with their child.
 - Letters, text, email, videos/pictures



Parenting Team Concept

- It's easy to feel like you're on opposing teams, especially in times of conflict. But you aren't.
 - If one loses, so does the other, and so do the children.
 - We win as a team. That's the only way it happens.
 - Kids win when parents work together, have solid jobs, and maintain good relationships with their kids.
- Three keys:
 - Keep it safe.
 - Do your part.
 - Decide, don't slide.



Contact Information

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Measurement Design

TRUE Dads

Recruited 1000+ co-parenting pairs

	Random Assignment	
	Intervention 600 co-parenting pairs	Controls 400 co-parenting pairs
Baseline	X	X
nFORM entrance and exit	X	
1-year follow-up	X	X

IMPORTANT CAVEAT

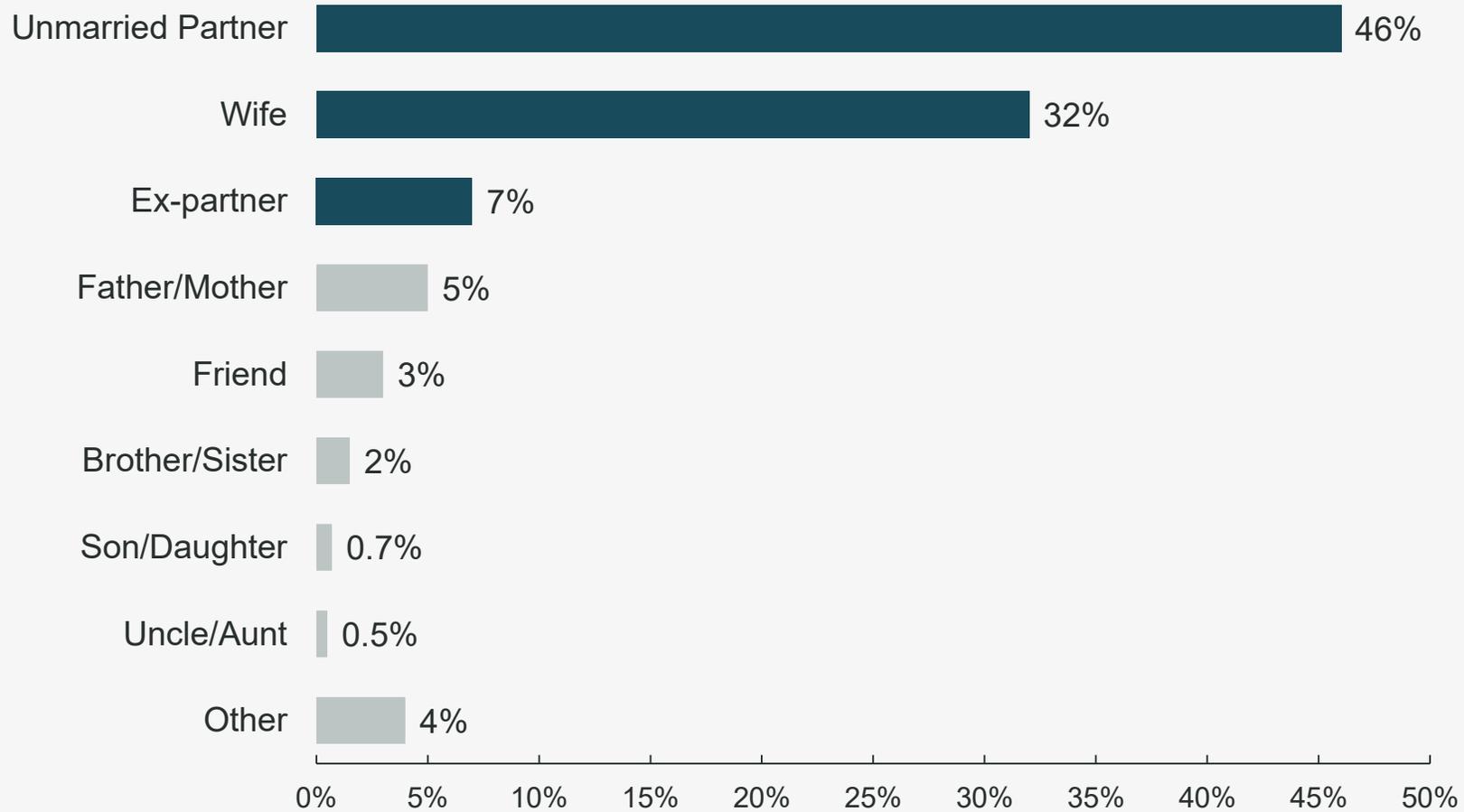
Results of these analyses represent interim findings from the first 300 couples participating in a randomized trial funded by an ongoing federal grant program and do not demonstrate program effectiveness or impact.



Demographics

True Dads

Distribution of co-parent relationships (dads' version)



85%
intimate
partners



Interim Results

TRUE Dads*

Statistically significant differences (n=302 co-parenting teams)

Compared with the control group, fathers and co-parents in the program intervention:

- Describe:
 - Themselves as less depressed, anxious, and angry.
 - Their child as less shy and withdrawn.
- Report:
 - More constructive communication & less violence in their relationship.
 - More collaborative parenting.
 - Greater job satisfaction.
 - Less harsh parenting (marginal effect).

***Results of these analyses represent interim findings from the first 300 couples participating in a randomized trial funded by an ongoing federal grant program and do not demonstrate program effectiveness or impact.**



General Conclusions

- In our evaluation work with programs for couples in intimate and/or co-parenting relationships, we have seen:
 - Program effects on parenting and the couple relationship.
 - However, a focus on parenting may not benefit the couple.
 - More successful outcomes from Couples groups and Co-parenting groups than Fathers Only groups.
- A curriculum that covers parents as individuals, three-generational issues, outside stressors, and how to enlist social support has the potential to lead to benefits for:
 - Moms and dads.
 - Their relationships as couples and with their children.
 - Their children's development.



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Before we open up to general Q&A, we have a few specific questions for the presenters

Tips for Practitioners

- Fatherhood programs that work primarily with non-residential fathers may find it hard to help dads work with their co-parent.
 - Do you have any tips for reaching out to the mother?
 - How can practitioners overcome perceptions of some mothers that the program is “taking the father’s side?”
 - If it’s possible to involve mom, what services might a fatherhood program provide (e.g., co-parenting skills training, couple counseling, formal mediation)?

Tips for Dads

- If it’s not possible to involve the co-parent in program services, what tips can be passed on to dad to help him improve the co-parenting situation?



Co-Parenting Tips for Dads

Aaron Ivchenko

See

Child Find's Parenting Apart Packet:*

- A Child's Fundamental Rights
- Communication Skills:
Choosing Words that May Help
- Values Worksheet.



CHILD FIND of AMERICA
PARENT HELP

Parenting Apart Packet

©2009 Child Find of America, Inc.

This packet provides you with information useful to creating a workable and thoughtful parenting plan.

- ✓ Discussion Points for Parenting Apart:
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Founded in 1980 to ensure that every child thrives in a safe, healthy & legal environment, Child Find's mission is to resolve and prevent cases of missing children augmented by programs and services that promote healthier family environments and strengthen parents – the key to child well-being.

*Available for download from the Downloadable Resources box.



Communication Skills

Examples from Child Find's Parenting Apart packet

- Point out what you have in common
 - *"We're both worried about [child's cursing]"*
- Ask for help
 - *"I need your input on [the cell phone] problem"*
- Admit when you get it wrong
 - *"I misunderstood what you were telling me"*
- Take responsibility
 - *"I shouldn't have said it that way"*
- Validate concerns
 - *"I understand why [you worry] when [I don't answer the phone]"*



Co-Parenting Tips for Dads*

Carolyn and Philip Cowan

General Approach to Discussions about Childrearing

- Try to find common goals before discussing how to deal with child's behavior.
- Assume good intentions on behalf of your co-parent.
- Try to see the problem from their perspective.

Communication principles that facilitate dialogue

- Agree to make short statements.
 - Arguments get out of hand when a lot of ideas are presented before a response.
- Make sure you understand the other person's argument before you speak.
 - Ask clarifying questions or state your understanding of your co-parent's statement.
- Use "I" statements that describe what you feel and believe.
 - A sentence such as "I feel that you are hostile" is not an "I" statement.

*These tips are available to download during the webinar from the Downloadable Resources box.



Co-Parenting Tips for Dads*

Carolyn and Philip Cowan

Communication principles (continued)

- As much as possible, tell the other person when you agree with any part of what they are saying.
- Acknowledge (if true) that you can see why the other person may be upset -even if you disagree with their position.
- If you think the issue you are about to raise will be upsetting, start by saying:
“I’m concerned that what I want to say now may be upsetting to you.”
- Avoid indulging in any of the “four horsemen of the apocalypse” (Gottman), any one of which interferes with positive communication:
 - Criticism, Contempt, Defensiveness, Stonewalling.
- If a disagreement starts to get heated, take a time out but agree to a specific time and place to resume the discussion.



A group activity from NRFC's *Responsible Fatherhood Toolkit*

*Your Child's Perspective: The IALAC Story**

- This short activity demonstrates the impact of parental conflict on children. The activity is designed to increase participants' motivation to work cooperatively with their child's mother and other parenting team members.
- Download it today from the *Downloadable Resources* box or at fatherhood.gov/toolkit/activities/reflection-and-awareness

*Developed by Pamela Wilson



Q&A

Please submit your questions in the Q&A box at the bottom-right of your screen.



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- **Aaron Ivchenko**
Child Find of America & NRFC call center
- **Carolyn and Philip Cowan**
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- **Marc Taylor**
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Contact Us

National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse

- Help@FatherhoodGov.info
- Comments, questions, suggestions for future webinar topics, information or resources that you recommend.

NRFCC